

Preface

Hundreds of people have asked why Darrel retired at the peak of his career in international banking to be an unpaid missionary pilot over the Brazilian Amazon. Rumors circulated that he experienced a miraculous cure from cancer and decided in his remaining years to “give back to society”—a phrase I particularly dislike. Other than the occasional dermatological event, there is no truth to this rumor.

Or perhaps he was smuggling drugs from the Colombian border, across Amazonas, and eventually to contacts in his home country. And if not drugs, then gems from the rocky hills of the state of Minas Gerais. There just had to be a reason.

God placed in us a smoldering interest in missions and missionaries which, over time, became a hot coal. We prayed for years and listened with hearts and minds for the whisper of a direction. We told Him we would do anything He asked if He would please just tell us what that was.

Tiny step by tiny step, windows of understanding opened. We found inspiration in His servants who had accepted the commitment, who didn’t just step out on a limb but lived there every day.

I wanted to write the story to correct the rumors and to tell our children and grandchildren how and why we did what we did, why we spent their inheritance in the jungle, but didn’t feel I could do it right. Years passed while I fumbled with words and eventually wrote three novels.

One morning Darrel and I stood together at our back window looking at dew sparkling on the lawn and talking about a study of the four gospels of the Bible we were doing at church. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John had different ways of telling the same events, using different emphases for various population groups. As we talked, Darrel's voice faded and I felt the definite impression of inaudible words, *Now is the time. Go write the story.* I didn't have to ask which one.

I shared this with Darrel, and he reacted with enthusiasm. "Yes! We'll work together on it. First we'll outline the entire book, and then you can start writing it down."

I rushed him off to his golf game and began typing the story where it seemed our world rocked and everything changed. Nothing more has been said about outlining.

This is not so much a story about us, but about how God worked to involve us in His fantastic journey.

Lee Carver

*When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you,
Lord, and my prayer rose to you. Jonah 2:7*

Chapter One

*Jakarta, Indonesia
Month, Year*

Darrel Carver had suffered for two and a half days until the afternoon his wife, Lee, rushed him to Pondok Indah hospital. Excruciating pain emanated from his distended belly, and the medical service his company contracted had no idea what was wrong.

The illness hit suddenly at work one sunny morning at Citibank, where he held the position of Country Risk Manager and Portfolio Manager. Other bank officers mentioned that he “didn’t look so good” an hour or so before his abdomen began to stretch against his shirt. Then the internal pressure and nausea reminded him of the awful eleven days he lay in The British Hospital in Buenos Aires, Argentina, eleven months before. Near death, he had received a potent combination of antibiotics by IV drip for days and gradually healed enough to return to work.

Emory Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia, turned up no significant diagnosis in a battery of tests two months later. The American doctors only concluded that the disease wasn’t an amoebic infection, as the Argentine

doctors had diagnosed. Recovery inched along, and since his family's transfer to Jakarta, he hadn't slept well and didn't have his normal strength.

Now the same thing was happening. Fever built with the internal pressure as he crouched through the front door. "Lee, I can't go through that again." Tears welled in his eyes.

The morning Darrel came home sick, a group of forty women from The American Women's Society, simply named The Singers, were rehearsing for a charity show in her living room. She broke away to assist him up the stairs and make him as comfortable as possible in his recliner.

Sent home with a prescription from the medical clinic, he waited miserable days while tests came in with negative results. The doctor suggested he go to Pondok Indah Hospital, the only hospital in Jakarta recommended for foreigners. But when the doctor called, he was told no room was available

Darrel could bear the pain no more, and his fever was building. "Please call the clinic again. I can't stay here like this. They've got to do something."

Lee dialed and waited to speak to a physician. After giving a brief explanation, her eyes widened and her head jerked back as if she had been verbally slapped. She closed the conversation with a meek *thank you* and hung up.

"What did they say?"

"It was that Indian woman who is so rude. She told me to get you to the hospital like she said yesterday. But I haven't talked to her at all since you got sick."

With Lee's help, Darrel dressed in loose clothing and carefully descended the twenty-two marble steps to

the first floor. She shouted to the kids that they were going to the hospital and, with shaky arms, braced his walk down steps to the driveway. He reclined in the back seat of the car and prayed through the bumpy streets.

At Pondok Indah Hospital, Darrel lay on a rolling table where he endured a tormenting examination. The doctor on duty suspected a ruptured appendix. When Dr. Palendih¹ left the emergency space, Darrel turned to his wife. “Don’t let them operate on me here. Get me to Singapore.”

Misery lined the pale face of her beloved, but because of his insistence, Lee hesitated to give permission for surgery. To her knowledge, seriously ill Americans in Jakarta always went to Singapore. While this hospital was considered to be the best by Western standards, Darrel clearly wanted no part of surgery in Indonesia.

She agonized over the decision. Though she taught biology and usually made medical decisions for the family, Darrel was the strong one, the decisive and sure head of the family. His helpless condition rocked her foundation.

Dr. Palendih suggested she call the U.S. Embassy doctor.

“We’re not connected to the U.S. Embassy. We don’t have that privilege.” She didn’t even know the medical officer’s name or how to contact him.

Dr. Palendih returned in a few minutes. “Dr. Brown is on the phone. He wants to talk to you.” He motioned her to a nearby office.

¹ A fictional name.

Though she didn't recognize the name, she left Darrel's side for a moment and took the phone.

"Hello, this is Dr. Brown, with the U.S. Embassy." His voice was warm, casual, and definitely American. "I understand from Dr. Palendih that your husband probably has appendicitis. I recommend that you give him permission to operate immediately."

"But Darrel says this is exactly like what he had before, and the doctors in Argentina said it was an amoebic infection and if they cut him open it would spread and he would die." Her words rushed in a surge of panic.

"I disagree with that evaluation. Appendicitis can be very difficult to diagnose. It isn't always in the same area nor does it present with the same symptoms. Very good doctors in the States are wrong about twenty percent of the time. Your husband needs surgery now."

Assuming this man was who he claimed, she still resisted. "Darrel says he doesn't want to be operated on here. He'd rather fly to Singapore."

Dr. Brown paused a long, pregnant moment. "Excuse me, but the last plane tonight has already left for Singapore." His voice, measured and soft, carried a warning. "You can't wait. Your husband won't live that long."

Stunned by a sudden awareness of the gravity of their situation, she thanked him and took this opinion back to Darrel, repeating Dr. Brown's assessment.

"What do you want to do?"

Wordlessly, Darrel's head rolled his to one side, a dazed smile on his face. He was barely conscious.

She had to make this decision. He couldn't tell her what to do. If she signed the papers, she might be

killing her husband, within the human plane the greatest love she could even imagine. *Help me, God. I don't know whether I should sign or not.*

Dr. Palendih returned with the permission forms and summarized its Indonesian text.

With no sense of confirmation that this was the correct decision, she signed the page and kissed her beloved good-bye. His fever burned her lips.

A nurse wheeled him past swinging doors, following the quickly retreating doctor somewhere deeper into the hospital.

She had to tell the children. In these days before cell phones, she had attempted to call home many times but the phone was always busy. After explaining to a nurse, she jumped into her car.

Home was less than ten minutes away. Bursting inside, she yelled for her teenagers. "What are you doing on the phone? I've been trying to call for an hour. Your father could have died and you—"

"What? Dad died?" Their sixteen-year-old son, Quinn, dropped the receiver, his alarm matching her own.

"No. He didn't die." They were shouting at each other, and that wasn't called for. She took a deep breath and struggled for control. "They're operating on him now. But I couldn't call you. I wanted you to know what was happening. I wanted you to pray."

Their daughter Kelly, two and a half years younger, emerged from her room into the anxious scene.

"People keep calling," Quinn explained. "Everyone is asking how Dad is. I don't know what to tell them." Word of his illness had spread through the tight-knit American community, thanks especially to the forty

Singers who had practiced in their living room.

“I’ve got to get back to the hospital. Y’all pray.”
Lee left the children alone in the huge house, knowing the maid and cook were in their quarters behind and a guard played cards at the front gate. She again thrust herself into the year-round heat and humidity and gunned the car down twisted streets. But they did not lead her to the hospital. Nothing looked familiar. Lost in the dark, she prayed fervently. *God, please help me. I know it isn’t far.*

A triangular garden gave her a bearing, then she recognized a house. By the time she arrived, her hands trembled erratically.

In kindness typical of the Indonesian people, a nurse showed her to a surgery waiting room.

Tense hours passed, relieved only by Pastor Gerald Pinkston and his wife, Florence, who prayed with her and then kept up light conversation. Never learning how they knew to come, she appreciated their effort to calm and distract her.

Near midnight, Dr. Palendih called to Lee from a pair of swinging doors, his sober face visible through a small, round window. She approached, and he motioned her inside.

The blood-stained doctor held out an internal body part the size of a large sausage, chartreuse green on one end. “We removed his appendix, but he had gangrene.”

Whatever else he said was lost. In this part of the world, car mechanics were expected to show broken parts removed as proof of their labor. Apparently, Indonesian surgeons did the same.

“Mr. Carver is in recovery. You may go sleep in his hospital room, and he will be brought there.”

The doctor's long face caused her concern. "Will he live, doctor?"

The surgeon paused. "We certainly hope so." His manner left no hook for her hope.

Lee bade the pastor couple good night and followed a nurse to the empty room. A chair unfolded to make a bed, and a sheet and blanket were brought.

Pouring out her heart to God in the dark, she begged for her husband's life. But even if he should die, she knew she and the children were in God's hands. All four family members belonged to him and were in his loving care through life, through death, through life beyond death. An unexpected covering of peace settled over her, and she slipped into sleep until Darrel was rolled into the room.

He rested well, pumped full of antibiotics and post-op narcotics.

On Sunday she left him to attend church with Quinn and Kelly specifically to request prayer, but also to play the organ as usual for the worship service. Their friends were eager for news of his condition.

"Darrel's incision was nineteen inches long, from the breast bone down to the nether regions. With such a long cut through all the layers, he needs supernatural pain relief."

Their Christian friends assured her they would continue to pray.

"There's one other thing..." Lee felt a blush rise. "The gangrene caused paralysis of his intestines. The doctor is hoping he won't have to go back in and cut out a section."

The Sunday school class members nodded, their brows somber and troubled.

Lee searched for the words to express his delicate condition. “The nurse says they are waiting for signs that his system is functioning.”

The friends nodded, some appearing puzzled.

She took a breath and barged ahead. “He must not have any food until he has passed gas five times.”

There. She said it. Whoever heard of such a prayer request?

In the remarkable days which followed, Darrel’s strength returned, and he experienced almost no pain. He asked the nurse for a meal.

“But remember, first you must pass gas five times,” she countered.

Darrel and Lee laughed together.

“I passed gas fifty-five times.” He motioned to his wife. “We both counted.”

The nurse looked confused. “You...poof?” She made a cute little backward motion with her hands at her hips. “*Lima Kali?*” Five times?

He grinned wide, his face warm with a blush. “*Lima puluh lima kali*. Fifty-five times.”

God had an amazing sense of humor.

He received a lunch tray and ate without difficulty.

The vigor he had missed for a year was returning, and he asked to walk in the hospital hall.

A group of serious surgeons huddled over his bed, examined him, and mumbled in Indonesian. They did not share his delight, and he didn’t know why. He spoke rudimentary Indonesian, but he and his wife understood nothing of the doctors’ bedside conference, nor was any explanation offered. They gave him permission to walk, provided he wear a long girdle with many drawstring

ties around the entire abdomen. They cautioned him to move with care.

The surgeons returned frequently, never appearing happy at his rapid progress. After a week, he was released to continue healing at home.

The family had a pair of sulfur-crested cockatoos, bought at the public market as compensation to Kelly because she had to leave her cockatiel when they had moved from Argentina. The birds were quite wild, though, and had bitten Darrel several times, sometimes causing infections on his fingers. A large cage in the home's upper level restrained the birds.

Soon after Darrel's return from the hospital, the female Wanita—Indonesian for *woman*—was found dead on her back in the cage. The male, Charlie, was very sick. Lee took the dead bird to a veterinarian and got an antibiotic for Charlie.

Charlie and Darrel took weeks to recover together. Charlie lay on Darrel's chest, his long wings spread wide. Only Darrel could relax the bird tummy-up in the V of his legs to take the bitter medicine. Darrel patiently dropped water off his fingertip into Charlie's mouth. The beautiful bird lived, and from that time forward was bonded to Darrel.

He lounged in his recliner over those weeks, stroked the outstretched bird's feathers, and thanked God for both their recoveries. He had become a serious student of the Bible in Atlanta, some twenty-five years after his teenage conversion. He had wandered far from his beliefs before developing a personal relationship with God, but now he served as a lay council leader and treasurer in his church.

Unable to return to his position with Citibank, he

spent days in Bible study and prayer. Already walking with God, he felt an urge to some greater purpose. The call tantalized him, just out of reach. Unable to determine what God had in mind, he and his wife prayed together, voicing their dedication to whatever that calling might be.

When able to return to the job, they set the alarm early enough to pray together before rising for the day. The buzzer sounded, he punched it off and extended his arm to her. She rolled onto his shoulder, and they talked to God together, sometimes piously dozing. Nothing in their twenty years of marriage bonded them like this. The practice of morning prayer together was a growth experience unlike any other.

Their gradual return to normalcy, working at Citibank, and Saturday golf left Darrel unsatisfied in only one respect. Even though he had lost sixteen pounds during his illness, his soft abdomen pushed over his belt. He set the clock even earlier and performed various exercises in the bedroom before prayer, but his abs continued to be soft. They might even be getting worse.

On such a morning, Lee rose in bed with a cross expression on her face just as he curled into a sit-up. His belly was distended vertically as if a loaf of bread sat on top.

She pointed to his misshapen abdomen. “What’s that?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “It does that every time I exercise.”

The choir had a pot luck dinner at their house that evening, including a young doctor who sang tenor.

Lee cornered the young man and then ordered

Flying for Jesus
Darrel & Lee Carver

Darrel to do a sit-up right there in the living room.

“Aw, honey, not here. Not right now.”

“Please. Just do it.” She pointed to the floor next to the doctor and commanded him in her motherly obey-me-right-now voice.

Darrel lay on the carpet and curled into a sit-up as ordered.

The young man’s eyes popped. “There’s such a thing as an incisional hernia.”

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Isaiah 41:10

Chapter Two

Jakarta, Indonesia
Month, Year

Darrel found it easier not to argue when Lee was this determined. Besides, he was at least curious about his condition and maybe concerned.

Her voice trembling with tension, she urged him to call his secretary at the first moment of the business day.

“Good morning, Harmi. This is Darrel. Please cancel all my appointments this morning. Then call Pondok Indah Hospital and make an urgent appointment with the surgeon who performed my appendectomy.”

Harmi called shortly with an immediate appointment, and his driver delivered him to the doctor’s office at the hospital before work.

A nurse directed Darrel to lie on the examination table in the assisting surgeon’s office, since Dr. Palendih wasn’t available. When the doctor entered, he placed his hand on Darrel’s abdomen, looked directly into his eyes, and said, “I’m sorry. I’m so very, very

sorry.” He knew what had happened before asking a single question.

Nearly the whole nineteen-inch incision of the muscle wall had separated, and only skin held him together.

“Routinely after a badly-infected abdominal cavity and gangrenous, ruptured appendix, we must re-open the body in further surgeries and wash out infection several times.” The surgeon explained patiently in his Indonesian-Dutch accent. “Most regrettably, the patient may die if the infection reaches the brain through the bloodstream. Antibiotics cannot breach the brain’s barriers in sufficient quantity.”

No wonder the surgeons hadn’t been happy to see him recover after the appendectomy. They hadn’t properly sewn up his muscle layers because they expected to re-open the incision repeatedly. And, well, if he died, it wasn’t going to matter on a cadaver anyway. The patient would slip from his agony into the arms of death.

After learning of the surgical misjudgment, Darrel politely refused to be re-sewn in Jakarta. Instead, he requested his medical records and made plans for the repair in Singapore. He and his secretary nagged the hospital and surgeons for two weeks. Eventually he received one page, generated that day, saying only that he had an appendectomy on the correct date.

Lee had never left their children overnight besides one weekend ten years before, and that had not gone well. “I’m pulled in both directions. I want to be with you during the surgery, and you especially need me when you leave the hospital and fly back to Jakarta.”

“They will be fine, sweetheart. They’re plenty old

enough. I'm sure you can arrange with parents of their friends to let them stay somewhere else.”

With only two phone calls, Lee received an invitation for Quinn to stay with a family who had two sons his age, and Kelly moved into the home for missionary kids where one of her best friends lived.

With the teenagers in the care of good people, Darrel and Lee went to Singapore for two weeks. The bank helped with arrangements for a highly recommended surgeon and booked Lee into a luxurious hotel suite with a garden setting.

Following the surgery, the doctor explained that he had done an overlapped, double seam. “You’ll have a ridge-front like a bird breast for a while. You must not lift more than five pounds for six months, and you have to give up golf during that time. If this incision tears loose, it may be irreparable.”

Though reconnecting his abdominal muscles caused discomfort, he had no fever or current infection, so his healing proceeded quickly. He began to find hospital food boring.

Lee entered his room one day loaded with two shopping bags emitting delightful aromas. Laughing, she held them up, and he read the brilliant orange print.

“Carlos’s Mexican Restaurant. Where did you find that?”

She put down the bags and lifted take-out boxes of tacos, tamales, enchiladas, beans and rice. “I searched through tourist guides and yellow pages until I found this restaurant on the second floor of a shop building. I phoned in an order and picked it up by taxi. The trick was getting it past the nurses’ desk that faces the elevator. When they challenged me, I put on a sad face

and said, 'It's his native food.' They didn't stop me."

Darrel laughed and dug into the salsa. He was ready for food with flavor.

Days recuperating in the hotel's garden suite were spent under the glow of relief and gratitude to God. This led to long discussions with Lee about a sense of God's calling to something more. That specific calling eluded them, just out of reach like a dream chased away by morning's light. Darrel was quite sure, though, that he should remain with Citibank for now.

Having healed enough to fly back to Jakarta, Darrel and Lee were picked up at the hotel by a bank car and delivered to the airport. On the rear window ledge rested two pounds of Oreos, Darrel's favorite store-bought treat, from the South Asian Division Head. In a visit to the garden retreat, his boss had learned Darrel missed them and couldn't buy Oreos in Indonesia. A nice touch.

As the sun rose over the Pondok Indah Golf Course six months later, Darrel and a few good friends met and played nine holes before going to work. Quinn graduated from Jakarta International School that evening. Life was good.

The sprawling city of Jakarta was a regional center to many evangelical and medical groups reaching the rest of Java and the other 13,500 islands of Indonesia. Jakarta provided the perfect hospitality setting for his Alabama wife. The bank had leased for them an unnecessarily large home, and Indonesian household help preferred to live on the property and work in groups. With such ease of entertaining, the Carvers enjoyed the visits of missionaries of various organizations.

Their dear pastor, Gerald Pinkston, was forced to leave due to new government visa restrictions. A series of ministers on three-month visitor visas filled the vacuum. During this time, Darrel and Lee's hospitality opportunities expanded both their mission horizons and their personal boundaries. Darrel, always a *very private person*, learned the pleasure of hosting strangers.

Missionaries often attended this church as they made weekend connections through the international airport. Of these, some were pilots with stories of extending God's salvation and healing to primitive islands. Darrel had been a U.S. Navy pilot for over eight years before studying for the Masters of International Management. He graduated from the American Graduate School of International Management in Arizona, better known as Thunderbird University. At times he still missed flying, and every buzz of a plane overhead drew a wistful glance.

Darrel and Lee had stashed small monthly amounts into a mutual fund since before Quinn and Kelly were born. As the balance grew, he talked about the desire for a small plane in retirement.

"We could buy a house on a lake which would support floatplane take-offs and landings. Maybe in the Carolinas." That area was a romantic setting for them, since they had met and married at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

During a summer furlough, they checked out some properties on South Carolina lakes, but floatplanes would not be legal on most of them. The idea simmered on a back burner for several years as his career progressed and the mutual fund grew.

Lee wanted to settle in the southeast. With their

parents living in the distant states of Alabama and Texas, considerations for retiring near one family or the other created a conundrum.

With increasing frequency, Darrel began receiving offers to transfer to other countries. The career pattern of moves every two or three years was common for officers of his corporation. His family had been in Indonesia for over three years, and he had declined all solicitations to move anywhere that their children could not live with them and attend a quality high school.

Once Quinn left for Penn State and its varsity swim team, a club with an Olympic swimming pool was no longer a firm requirement. Kelly's academic and sports needs remained uppermost for another term.

Darrel brought home word of an appealing new offer. Kelly, already an international kid who thrived through readjustments, had one more year of high school. Darrel and Lee weren't sure this was a good time to move. The proposed transfer back to South America came with a promotion and a new type of job. He was definitely interested.

Kelly entered from school and he asked her to sit down in the living room.

"Hon, we've been thinking about something." Darrel tried to pose the question gently while she fidgeted. "I've got an offer to move to another country."

"Yes!" Kelly jumped off the sofa with a squeal.

Darrel's jaw dropped. "Don't you want to know where it is?"

She laughed and bounced on her toes. "I want to go. Where is it?"

"Brazil." Again he paused for her response, and again she whooped.

Lee's amazement matched her husband's. "I thought you wouldn't want to move. You have so many friends, especially Lisa and Purnima."

"I love them and I'll miss them, but I'm ready to move." Kelly had gone through transitions all her life. As a seven year old, her passport already had extension pages. Born in California, she had lived in Arizona, New York City, Greece, Saudi Arabia, Atlanta, Argentina, and now Indonesia. "I want to live in just one more country before college." She was ready for another adventure.

As pre-packing revved up, Quinn returned from college for the summer. The family planned a marvelous scuba vacation in the Truk islands, diving sunken World War II ships in crystal water. Then they would spend a couple of weeks on vacation in the U.S. between their families in Texas and Alabama. Quinn would return to Penn State and Kelly would move for her high school senior year in Brazil.

Nothing went right. The move to Brazil was the most difficult transfer the family ever made. Lee's mother suddenly died just weeks before they were to leave Indonesia. They all returned to Alabama for the funeral, a voyage of a day and a half.

Kelly missed the Junior-Senior Prom, for which she already had a date and a dress. She even missed final exams but was granted a pass due to her excellent grades. Quinn and Kelly stayed with their Texas grandparents while Darrel and Lee returned to pack out of Indonesia.

Unexpected trouble brewed. The Country Corporate Officer of Indonesia refused to release Darrel, and seniors above them would not interfere. The house was

packed up and put into storage. Lee and Darrel moved into a suite at the Hilton at the bank's expense. Darrel still went to work every day, awaiting release for their transfer to Brazil.

As the start date for Kelly's school loomed, Lee left for the U.S. expecting Darrel to follow on the weekend.

Lee visited both families and then flew with Kelly to São Paulo in time to enroll her in Escola Graduada de São Paulo, an international, English-based school. She requested that they be met by someone she would recognize. Chris Olson, a Citibank officer they had known first in Argentina, met them, supplied them with some Brazilian cash, and delivered them to a furnished apartment arranged by the bank.

Kelly started her senior year in high school. Lee began Portuguese lessons, toured apartments for lease, and waited. They didn't have e-mail or Skype. Telephone calls were expensive and the twelve hour difference in time complicated reaching each other. Though Lee had always trusted Darrel's faithfulness, she now harbored awful imaginations that Darrel wasn't going to follow her. Leaving Indonesia without him was a bad idea. Women sharpened their fingernails every day to sink them into the flesh of well-employed American men.

A sticky legal issue loomed. Lee and Kelly were dependent on Darrel's Brazilian work permit. Their right to be in Brazil hinged on his being there. They had exactly one month for Darrel to arrive or for them to either leave or be arrested.

Kelly's adjustment to Brazil did not come easily. Lee should have told the bank's personnel officer that

Kelly showered in cold water early every morning because the manager turned off the heater overnight. Or that the apartment had biting bugs that flew in circles in the centers of the rooms. Or that the linens were ragged and towels often not supplied at all.

On an afternoon that Kelly cried for the friends she had left, she poured out her misery. “If I’m friends with the Brazilians, the other South Americans don’t like me.” One of her girlfriends from Argentina now went to this school. It wasn’t fair to have to choose.

The school had students from far corners of the world. “If I sit at lunch with the Chinese, the Japanese won’t talk to me. The South Koreans don’t talk to the other Asians. And my best new Brazilian friend has a Chinese father and Japanese mother. What can I do?”

Lee prayed for wisdom. “Keep being who you are, Kelly. Keep being friends of all of them. They’ll see you won’t choose.”

Another thought formed which Lee could not claim as her own. The words flowed and she heard them for the first time herself. “You’ve been thinking that your mom and dad moved you here, and you had no choice. They prayed about it, and God told them to move and dragged you along. But what if God moved *you* here and dragged *us* along? What if the whole purpose was to transfer *you* to Brazil?”

Kelly continued making friendships across all lines. In due time, the mixed-national, mixed-racial group laughed together, shared meals and fun times. Students who had rejected them observed their crazy, multicultural circle with longing in their eyes. Gradual changes occurred in the senior class that year, initiated by one student who refused to discriminate against

others.

Two young men among those new friends, a Brazilian-Ecuadorian and the half-Chinese-half-Japanese-all-Brazilian, gave a testimony in church a year later. Before being baptized, they revealed to the congregation that Kelly had pulled them into the church. She would not quit inviting them to the youth group and services. They eventually gave in and met Jesus Christ there.

Returning to that first month Lee and Kelly waited for Darrel in Brazil, Lee moped about and often cried with loneliness and uncertainty. Struggling through antiquated systems in both countries, she placed a call to her husband one night.

The thousands of miles of sea and land caused difficulty in hearing his voice, but its deep rumble brought his blue eyes to her mind and warmth to her heart. “My boss is using every possibly delaying tactic to keep me here. He says I can’t leave until my replacement arrives, yet he refuses to even interview a replacement.” His frustration crackled through the line. “The Asian head sends him résumés from people who are willing to move here, and he rejects them all without an interview.”

“But you have a job in São Paulo. The CEO of your new division called me in for a conference and asked me why you haven’t moved.”

“If I leave here without my boss’ release, I won’t have a job anywhere. There’s one thing I’ve been thinking about though. My Indonesian visa expires in two weeks, and I have to renew it in Singapore. If I fly there, I’m not returning. I’ll go to the States and hunt for a job.”

Lee and Kelly would have to leave Brazil, and all of these flights would be at their personal expense. Impatience was compounded with uncertainty.

Darrel called his prospective boss in Brazil, seniors in New York City, and every acceptable channel available. He delivered an ultimatum to his future boss, the South American division head. “Get me out of here now, or I’m leaving the bank.”

For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Jeremiah 29:11

Chapter Three

São Paulo, Brazil
Late 1990

Darrel maintained calm as he claimed his luggage in the massive São Paulo airport. Lugging the suitcases through the passport check, he joined the lines for a customs inspection. He glanced at his watch, wondering if his wife found the correct terminal beyond the barriers.

Having proven that he hid no drugs nor smuggled an illegal amount of cash, his heartbeat picked up a notch as he pushed his belongings down the long, white corridor to the milling crowd behind a yellow, plastic rope. In the churning confusion, his wife waited for him, alternately laughing and crying for joy. His feet hit Brazilian soil on the last day before Lee and Kelly had to leave or be arrested.

With his work permit activated, the family ordered their household goods out of storage in Indonesia and across the sea to Brazil. Lee had already approved the bank architect’s recommended apartment, the whole

floor of a secure building only two blocks from the bank. With Darrel physically in country, work permit in hand, he signed the lease. Their life in Brazil finally had begun.

The family launched the next order of business, finding a church, on the following Sunday. Three churches held services in English. Lee and Kelly visited each one before Darrel's arrival and planned to move him through the possibilities.

He was impatient to settle down. "Don't give me the real estate agent plan of showing the worst first and the best last. Just cut to the chase."

Calvary International Church became their spiritual home. During previous transfers, each worshipping community had boosted the family's growth in God. Calvary pushed this process further. It fostered Bible study, missions emphasis, and worship so dynamic it blew their ears back.

The pastor's wife, Mary Fawcett, invited Lee to play piano one Sunday when the bench was bare at time for the music to start.

Lee was amazed. "How did you know I play?"

"I've just seen the way you look at the pianist and observe the organist and singers. You do play, don't you?"

So began her love-hate relationship with the church's grinding little organ, limited to one octave of foot pedals. But the music at Calvary opened her to a new level of worship. Reared in a conservative Baptist family in a small town, she was unsure she could participate with the motley crew of instrumentalists playing choruses during the hymn part of the service.

A conversation with Pastor Bill Fawcett set in

motion a change of view. “We sing hymns also. We haven’t given up traditional music.” Pastor Bill’s slow and low Oklahoma drawl had a calming effect. “You notice that the words of the modern choruses we use are mostly Bible scripture. We don’t sing anything we don’t believe.”

Calvary was a hugging, folksy congregation. In past years, past cities, Darrel had expressed discomfort with outgoing, back-slapping church members. Lee feared that she had dragged him into a situation for which he had little tolerance. That is, until she glanced up from her organ prelude to see him serving as official greeter at the main door. He pumped handshakes and patted backs as if he had done this all his life. Lee bit back a laugh and kept playing.

Darrel eventually became a deacon. The other deacons were missionaries with postings in São Paulo. Working and praying with them led him closer to God and gave him a vision of outreach to *the fields white unto harvest*. An amazing thirty-two percent of offerings to the church went to support a carefully selected portfolio of missions and missionaries. The recipients spoke and presented audio-visual programs frequently, creating an energy within the congregation for spreading the gospel, especially in primitive areas.

As Darrel’s work and travel throughout South America and Mexico became grueling, he again reminisced about retiring to the States with a plane. “We could move to a house near an airstrip. Or buy a floatplane and live on a lake.”

The vision was perplexing to his wife. “Why have a plane? I mean, I know you loved flying, but where would you go in your plane?”

“Just fly. We’d visit our families, take trips, maybe join an air club. Maybe help people through the Civil Air Patrol or Angel Flights.”

“But the U.S. has lots of transportation options. People who need medical help have highways, buses, trains, and commercial aviation.”

Lee nurtured thoughts she dared not share with her husband. If Darrel wanted to fly light planes, he should be part of the aid to unreached or difficult-to-reach areas. He should be a missionary. But it wasn’t a wife’s place to call her husband to be a missionary. That was God’s prerogative.

Her secret conflict grew as she considered the approach of retirement. She was frustrated by not knowing what missionary possibilities existed in Brazil. If God called them to serious mission involvement, Asia was out of the question. Her extreme sensitivity to monosodium glutamate (MSG) prevented her ever living again where cooks added this chemical by the spoonful. Even a few drops of soy sauce caused days and nights of migraine.

As continuing Portuguese instruction shed increasing light on Brazil and its culture, Lee raised an antenna toward all mission endeavors. With more than three years in the country, they might be transferred any week.

A further complication in the quandary arose: in those years, permanent visas were not given to missionaries unless they married a Brazilian or gave birth to a child in Brazil. Lee’s family was past the point of having a *visa baby*.

Besides the work permit, Darrel also was required

to have a residence visa, good for two years at the time. After the first visa expired, Citibank applied for and received a renewal.

As the completion of four years of residency loomed, the world's most proficient Personnel Manager, Conceição Ercolano, phoned Darrel. "How much longer do you expect to stay in Brazil?"

"I don't know. Three months, maybe six. Why?"

"Because your second residence visa is expiring soon."

"Then please request a renewal." His transfer to another foreign posting, which already brewed in the boiling pots of the bank, required a few more months.

"That can't be done. After two years, you have to request a permanent visa."

Fireworks went off in his head. A permanent visa. Missionaries couldn't get one, but bankers could. "If I were granted a permanent visa, would it be allotted to the bank and canceled when I moved, or would it be mine personally?"

She took a few days to check. Her answer was everything he hoped for. "The permanent visa would belong to you personally. If you moved, you would have to return every two years to keep it active, or cancel the process, or just let it lapse."

"Then please apply for it."

Darrel and Lee signed forms, gave a new set of fingerprints, and had their photos made even as an offer to move to Spain loomed.

Hearing of his prospective transfer, the efficient Conceição called again. "Shall I cancel the process when you move away?"

“No, keep it going. We’ll fly back from Spain to complete the visa.”

Excitement ran high. Both Darrel and Lee felt God’s special plans for them were in Brazil. Lee had heard there was a missionary flight group quite a long way from São Paulo, though no one seemed to know where it was and most spoke of it as if *you can’t get there from here*.

A Baptist regional missionary, Diane Bechtel, unearthed a name, a town, and a phone number. Missionary Aviation Fellowship, founded after World War II to use flight for God’s purposes, had established MAF Brazil as its second foreign base of operations after Mexico. That branch became *Asas de Socorro*, Wings of Help, which was based in Anápolis, in the State of Goiás. The capitol city, Brasília, had been established not far from there.

Long-distance calling to a stranger in Portuguese made Lee’s hands sweat. She dialed the number of the Asas de Socorro office with a prayer. “My husband and I would like to come to Anápolis and talk with you about the work of your mission.”

Naturally, they invited Lee and Darrel over, and plans were set for the following weekend. Lee then booked a hotel in Anápolis and flights to Goiânia, the nearest town with a commercial airport, which necessitated a rental car. André Adem, the best travel agent in South America—maybe the whole world—assisted in the arrangements. Still, she felt she had just booked their 1995 Thanksgiving weekend on the edge of civilization.

They arrived with barely three hours of sleep due to an event the night before and became terribly lost

following verbal directions from an Asas de Socorro pilot. Personal GPS devices were not yet in use. They found the hotel first, which they took as a sign to nap before any serious conference with the mission group.

Throughout the weekend, Darrel and Lee sensed a special aura of God's blessing, like the fragrance of gardenia on a summer evening. It was as if a heavenly cloud of God's glory surrounded them and blessed the entire weekend. They breathed in this cloud, they slept in it, and the palpable sense of blessing moved with them.

Darrel and Lee shared a small book, *Destined for the Throne* by Paul E. Billheimer, loaned by a missionary friend. For a couple of weeks each one kept a bookmark and snatched turns reading. In Anapólis, they discussed the author's ideas of God's leadership and the way He directs and cares for His people as a result of their communion in prayer. In this heart-baring talk, Darrel brought to light something that had bothered him for a long time. Something that kept mission possibilities behind a high and wide barrier.

"I don't feel I can volunteer for a foreign mission because my career has transferred you all over the world. Our moves to Third World countries has caused illness, separation from our parents and families, and especially this awful MSG reaction and your debilitating migraines."

Lee saw their nearly twenty years of travel as an exciting adventure, although with difficulties. "I've enjoyed our life together. We've seen so much. The children had an education that can't be bought. Some of the countries were harder, like Saudi Arabia, but it was all good."

“I can’t ask you to retire to a hardship post,” he said. “You deserve an easier life in America.”

Lee was amazed when the windows opened to the inner workings of his mind. “But sweetheart, all this time you’ve considered living in the States with a plane in the back yard, I was convinced you should be flying for the Lord. I just knew He was calling you to be a missionary pilot.”

With this new understanding uniting them and with the certainty of God’s call, they met with the leaders of Asas de Socorro. Switching between Portuguese and English, Darrel brought them up to his present conviction that God was directing him to mission involvement in Brazil’s hard-to-reach areas. “I was a U.S. Navy pilot, trained in Pensacola, Florida, and Corpus Christi, Texas, where I was farmed back into the program as an instructor. Then we moved to California’s VP-50 Squadron, where I flew the P-3C, a four-engine propeller aircraft, over the seas of the west coast, Alaska, Guam, and Japan.

“I haven’t flown during my career with Citibank. My intention after retirement is to renew my pilot’s license, purchase a light plane for Asas de Socorro, and volunteer to fly it for missions. If I cannot qualify for re-certification, Asas can keep the plane.”

Asas seniors saw this as a no-lose proposition, though they admitted years later that they had little confidence this would happen. Others had offered grand schemes and free planes which evaporated in the steam of the tropics. Leaving banking at the peak of his career to become a volunteer pilot made no sense to them.

“We need your financial management and investment skills.” The Asas de Socorro President

proposed something different. “We’d like to offer you the position of Treasurer. You could start Monday.”

The last thing Darrel wanted was to *fly a desk*. He felt certain that God’s call was to be a pilot. “I’m obligated to transfer to Madrid next month with Citibank, and I can’t renege on that. I’m confident that I’m supposed to complete my career and retire. The Bank has just released an offer of full retirement with pension at age fifty-five. That should give me about ten years as a missionary pilot.

“My intention is to return to the U.S. to refresh as a pilot and bring all my documents up to date. If I can’t do that—if I’m no longer a safe pilot—Asas de Socorro can keep the plane and I’ll retire in America.”

The men shook hands, prayed together, and didn’t see each other again for two years.

The Carvers moved to Spain on New Year’s Day, 1996. Only a few months had passed when Conceição’s Citimail from Brazil informed Darrel that his permanent residence visa application required his signature within a certain number of days.

In his European position, Darrel worked for an excellent leader who gave him a lot of leeway. Country Corporate Officers, however, are not known for their eagerness to share employees with other domains.

Darrel asked permission of his new boss to return and conclude the process, which stimulated curiosity about the purpose of investing in a Brazilian visa.

Darrel knew this very cosmopolitan Spaniard had retirement plans which involved homes in three countries. His brief answer was shaped by that knowledge. “Relates to future retirement plans.”

His boss nodded and gave approval.

He and Lee flew to Brazil twice during the two and a half years in Spain, once to conclude the Brazilian visa and the second time for its automatic renewal simply by having it stamped in their passports.

Meeting Paulo Block, retiring CEO of Asas de Socorro, was the highlight of this second visit. Paulo wrapped up a congenial hour by standing and grabbing his hat. “Let’s go flying.”

Adrenalin hit Darrel’s system and lit his eyes. “I haven’t flown in twenty-two years. I always felt flying unsafe if you don’t keep up the study and practice.”

Paulo knew from their conversation that Darrel had about two thousand flight hours during his Navy years though. “I’m a licensed flight instructor. We can do this. Let’s go.”

They drove just down the dirt road to the Asas hangar and airstrip and checked out a Cessna 206. Lee climbed into the back seat and received a set of earphones, but kept very quiet in what Darrel recognized as an attitude of prayer.

As Paulo coached from the right seat, Darrel’s heart took flight. He did a smooth take-off, cruised around at five hundred meters over the green, rolling hills and grazing cattle. With Paulo’s calm direction on airspeed and altitude, he put the plane gently down on the airstrip. No amount of meetings so united him with the dream of mission flight as those few minutes in the air.

On these two visa trips, they also flew farther west to visit mission groups in Cuiabá. For decades, this rough pioneer-flavored town sat at the edge of wilderness that obscured many primitive indigenous tribes. Wycliff Bible Translators and Youth with a

Mission (YWAM) had flight support bases there. The missionaries of both organizations were warm and inviting, sharing their vision for Brazil.

However, both groups retired their pilots or gave them desk jobs at age fifty-five. This was also true of Asas de Socorro's parent, Missionary Aviation Fellowship (MAF), which had the largest worldwide network. All these missions welcomed him to join them, flying that desk Darrel wanted to avoid.

Asas de Socorro began as MAF Brazil, formed and directed by Americans. However a wind of suspicion and intrigue blew over Brazil. Newspaper headlines warned that the United States secretly flew over the Amazon jungles, mapping areas for conquest. Stories about smuggling of gems made the front page, and many people believed the Protestant missionaries were CIA spies. Customs agents often obstructed the importation of airplane parts for the American-made Cessnas, and all documentation choked and sometimes died.

In 1985, this national suspicion of foreign pilots over Brazil made it necessary to reorganize Asas de Socorro as an entirely Brazilian entity. The Board of Directors and all senior officers were Brazilian and the language was firmly Portuguese. As an independent mission, they did not require their pilots to cease flying at a certain age. Once again, the combination of God's direction and man's establishment funneled Darrel toward flying in Brazil for Asas de Socorro.

Darrel held this ambition close during the next few years. When seniors of the bank spoke of retirement policy, he gave no hint of his plans. Such information would surely restrict his career options. As a new hire

right out of graduate school, he had achieved the rank of vice president in only four years. Citibank had designated him Corporate Property and considered him a water-walker. He didn't want his choices squeezed and made sure his gregarious wife understood the seriousness of this issue.

“Lee, when the Division Head starts fishing for my intentions, I just pray, ‘Lord, I’m not going to lie to them. So if you don’t want them to know, don’t let them ask.’”

The plan, once conceived, had to grow in its dark, secret place, awaiting birth like an unnaturally long pregnancy.

“Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign
Lord comes escape from death.”

Psalm 68:20

Chapter Four

*Madrid, Spain
Spring, 1997*

Darrel stood at the front of the Sunday School class, expounding on the lesson for adults. A two-hundred-pound chunk of concrete crashed down through the plaster ceiling and lodged there, suspended directly above his head. People rushed from other classes to see what had caused the reverberating boom. Shock played on the faces of the students. They froze, jaws hanging open.

He took two paces to the side, surmised that his death had been postponed, and suggested the class continue outside under the trees.

The flat roof of the church consisted of asphalt-coated concrete over a thick layer of construction sand which, having absorbed leaks for years, weighed several tons. Rather than condemn the building, the membership sought to restore it. Just getting the building permit took two years. The Protestant church in a Catholic nation found every step tangled in difficulty. All worship during the summer was held outdoors.

A strip of classrooms ran at the back of the main building. As cool weather set in, all the dividing walls were pounded out to create a long, narrow sanctuary.

Darrel and other members, especially Johnson Hughes, a Liberian professional boxer, performed this grueling labor. The life and functions of the fellowship never paused.

The church constituted so much of Darrel's life outside his workplace. A congregation of about seventeen nationalities worshipping in English, it had already suffered the loss of its Southern Baptist missionary pastor and now struggled as an independent—but still Baptist—church. These people and God's kingdom in Spain bound Darrel and Lee so tightly that they couldn't conceive of leaving before completing the building and re-establishing joyful worship within its walls.

For several years, the political and economic base of Europe had rocked on its foundation. The European Economic Community (EEC) developed from a long-argued idea to firm plans and dates. Citibank reorganized their European market to prepare for a united currency, and it appeared that Darrel's job might be moving from Spain to London. Neither he nor his wife wanted to leave sunny Spain to live in that cloudy, crowded, expensive city.

Lee, formerly a teacher of biology and chemistry, had never cared for the study of history before coming to Spain. Now in the Madrid area she delighted in the ancient castles, Roman aqueducts, art museums, and gardens. She enjoyed day trips with Darrel and the American Women's Association to the walled cities of Avila, Segovia, Cuenca, and Toledo. These were often repeated with their frequent houseguests, including their parents and Quinn and Kelly, now college

graduates, married, and sprouting families.

History colored the landscape. Downtown Madrid had streets, homes, and restaurants older than the United States. The four-hundred-year-old home of Cervantes, author of *Don Quixote* and contemporary of Shakespeare, could be seen in the oldest section of the city. The enormous, multi-floor Prado Museum of Art set on the royal 320-acre Retiro Park called the world to its doors, and Lee accepted its free invitation.

On Saturdays she played golf with Darrel and on Sundays after church they frequently drove into the countryside to some quaint stone town for clay-oven-roasted leg of lamb. Life was good, and she saw no need to change.

Not all her thoughts were selfish. As volunteer music leader and choir director of their church, Lee and pianist Jan Albright enjoyed a close friendship. When Lee moved, breaking their working partnership would place greater responsibility on Jan, who also assisted with the young people.

Lee never doubted God could bring people into the church tomorrow to serve Him, but not seeing them galloping up on the horizon caused her considerable anxiety. For a while she denied they were leaving, but reality insisted. No matter how many times she explained to God that they had to stay in Madrid at least through the church reconstruction, a transfer would soon pry them loose.

She and Darrel made the 1997 summer pilgrimage to their families with no hard information to plan on. Normally, she purchased in America the shoes and clothing appropriate to the country in which they lived. This summer she knew they were moving but had no

idea whether it was back to the tropics, perhaps to the Southern Hemisphere where seasons are reversed, to a cold country or a hot one. She felt homeless and at a loss to plan. For a veteran planner, this equated to living in a vacuum.

As they traveled from Alabama to Texas to New York City, home office of Citibank, phone calls bearing various offers chased them. One of these requested a bank officer of Darrel's rank and experience who spoke Spanish and Portuguese and knew the Central and South American market. This proposal had Darrel's name all over it.

For several weeks since first hearing of this job, she and her husband had discussed the position, its implications, and where it would take them. No one in Citibank knew their secret, that Darrel planned to retire at fifty-five, a mere two and a half years away. No one could know. Not their best friends, not in the last country or the next.

Serious talks began, but the official offer hadn't yet been made.

Darrel summarized the job offer to Lee, admitting he was interested.

She saw the lights going out in their beautiful home in the Madrid suburbs. Moving was not an option. Where they moved was an option so large she could barely comprehend the possibilities.

Group Head Francis Da Souza phoned Darrel after he had returned to Spain from vacation and set up talks in London. There, Mr. Da Souza made his offer. "Citibank is creating a new division for the middle commercial market, starting in Mexico and four South

American countries. You'll set up the department, hire the staff, and institute bank services to companies which gross up to twenty-five million dollars per annum."

"Where would we live?"

"You could live in Mexico, any major city in South America, in Miami, or even New York or London, though that would require a long commute to your territory."

Excitement burned in Darrel's chest. The challenge of a new position always ignited his after-burners and sent his professional imagination flying high. "We expect it will take you three years to set up the division and start making a profit," Da Souza continued.

"Two thirds of the market will be in Brazil," he told Da Souza. "I'll accept the position and base the new division out of São Paulo." They were off on a new adventure.

He knew his wife had an image of kicking and screaming as the bank dragged her out of Spain. But with this transfer, Citibank was doing all the hard work involved in setting them up for life as missionaries in Brazil.

Cruising up to the electric gate in his Audi, he surveyed the home leased for them. Built by a Spanish movie producer, its dramatic beauty on the edge of La Moraleja Golf Course could not be replaced in the center of one of the largest cities of the world. He took a deep breath and lined up his rationale as he rolled into the garage.

After dinner on the patio, they pulled their chairs together and talked into the night.

"Our Brazilian permanent residence visas will

continue without any more of these expensive trips to São Paulo. The bank will move our household goods back, which would've cost us a fortune. We've always had to sell our car and buy a new one in the next country. This time, we'll buy a car in São Paulo which we'll simply drive to wherever our missionary assignment begins. What's more, we'll have our Technicolor, plastic-coated driver's licenses, complements of the bank."

Emotions played on Lee's face as he outlined the advantages of a final posting in Brazil. "All this time I've been thinking God just *had* to leave us in Spain, He was setting us up for the next part of His plan."

Darrel surveyed the sunset from the high perch of their home, visualizing what was to come. "You know, there are times when you look back on your life and see how He has been working things out."

"Um hmm."

"But this time, it was like—wham! I knew what was happening. We're watching God orchestrate the whole thing. Getting us back to Brazil, set up and ready for retirement right there. His hand is all over this."

"I see what you mean. I just didn't think God would have us transferred yet." Lee still didn't sound happy.

"Sweetheart, this isn't about us. Two new couples have moved into the church at the time they're needed most. Maybe they are the ones to guide the congregation through reconstruction. Let it go."

He read the clouds on her face though. Leaving Europe for life again in a South American developing country wasn't an easy pill to swallow.

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 2 Corinthians 9:6

Chapter Five

Madrid to São Paulo
November, 1998

Lee had never transferred back into a foreign country where they had lived before. In fact, she never even visited Greece, Saudi Arabia, or Indonesia since her family's residences there. Moving the second time to Brazil bore none of the difficulties of the first. Once again she preceded Darrel, though only by a few days, as he went to Turkey on a Citibank task, and she flew directly from Madrid to São Paulo.

Empty nesters, they only housed, fed, and provided for themselves. They were now grandparents of Kelly and Scott's daughters, Jordyn and Piper, and Quinn and Sue's first son, Benjamin.

Lee and Darrel had learned a peculiar brand of Spanish when they transferred to Argentina. With that base, the move to Brazilian Portuguese, or *Fala Brazil*, came with less effort. Then absolutely perfect Castillian *Español* of Madrid presented its challenge. With the resumption of Portuguese, the sum of lessons and mistakes produced a combination which ex-pats referred to as *Portañol*. Sinking into language lessons

became routine after living in six foreign countries and studying three languages before these.

Just knowing how to drive in São Paulo, a city of twenty million people, simplified the transfer. She breezed on foot past the apartment's armed guards with her rolling shopping cart to the supermarket two blocks away and Friday's open-air *feira* of fresh fruits, vegetables, and flowers. Of all her friends, only she never had a car radio stolen, a home invasion, or street robbery. Most important, after the snobbish city of Madrid, she felt at home with the warmth of the Brazilian people.

Their much-loved church continued strong, and many of their Brazilian and international friends remained in São Paulo. Other people had taken over the organ bench and leadership in the major international women's club. Free to travel with Darrel—although at their own expense—she traveled with him to Mexico, Venezuela, Argentina, and Colombia. When his work took him to several countries on one trip, she stayed home because of the flight costs.

She had found an interest in writing during their previous posting in São Paulo, and took a series of courses taught by Sandy Cuza, former creative writing professor at UCLA. Sandy's new husband brought her to Brazil where she added a welcome dimension to expat life. Eventually a critique group of short story writers put together two books which sold well to English-speakers in Brazil. Now she rejoined the writing circle.

Whether traveling with a laptop computer or playing with words at home, Lee began a collection of anecdotes of international life. This developed into a

self-published book illustrated by Quinn.

Darrel worked nonstop and traveled frequently, often gone for a week or more. Never one to mope in loneliness, Lee filled the days with friends and activities. Wordsmithing developed into a new intellectual game with infinite solutions and led to publication of short stories and nonfiction articles. She often questioned whether God had a purpose to all this effort. Perhaps it just filled the hours, since the walls really didn't need any more framed needlepoint art.

When Darrel wasn't pouring over Citibank paperwork, he continued plotting his own investments, projected retirement benefits, and savings. At the bottom of the stack of graphs and charts lay the old gray back of a writing tablet which recorded those first mutual fund investments of seventy-five dollars a month. Now over twenty-five years old, that fund amounted to forty thousand dollars. The children had graduated from college and married without his having to cash it out, but that pot wasn't big enough to buy a plane.

When he first offered to be a pilot for Asas de Socorro and purchase an airplane, the mission mainly used Cessna 206's. The single-engine craft with a pilot and three to five passengers transported a limited weight of medicines and materials. Asas de Socorro used one such plane on floats in the Amazon, owned by the Assembly of God church, and several on wheels near home base in Anápolis and other mission centers. A used Cessna 206 cost about \$165,000.

Brazil, however, had many treacherous bureaucratic traps concerning used airplanes, making their

importation almost impossible. Darrel searched for a new plane, but knew that all US small aircraft manufacturing had ceased in the mid-1980's due to a surge in litigation against manufacturers for liability in crashes. That whole segment of production stopped cold until the mid-1990's.

He turned again to the numbers. He also made monthly contributions to a mutual fund portfolio currently valued at five hundred thousand dollars. To make good on his promise, he earmarked this fund, though he had not yet determined what plane Asas wanted or how he would import it. The small, single-engine Cessna 206, workhorse of many missions, appeared the most likely choice.

In September, 1999, the Asas de Socorro CEO, Rocindes Corr ea, and managing board invited Darrel and Lee to their meeting in An polis. Eager to talk with them, he reviewed his personal folder on the Cessna 206. Production of light planes had resumed in America, creating the sense that God looked over his shoulder and orchestrated the timing.

With a seven- to nine-month waiting period and his plans to retire in nine months, Darrel needed to know how Asas wanted to equip their plane. The buyer had to specifically order everything from avionics to seat upholstery.

Before making the quick weekend flight, he and Lee cleared their schedules and mentioned to Pastor Fawcett that they wouldn't be in church Sunday.

"May I give you a bit of advice?" The pastor's soft-spoken manner encouraged their attention. "Remember that you'll be talking to a group of Brazilians. Don't go in with the typical American mindset, telling them what

you think they should be doing or how they should be doing it.”

Darrel normally dealt with people in a tactful, low-key way. He agreed and thanked Pastor Bill.

A commercial flight of several hours delivered Darrel and Lee to Goiânia, in the State of Goiás. A rented car waited for them at the airport for the forty-five minute drive to Anápolis.

There they met a past president of Asas, Ebe (“Abe”) Berberian who, with his brother, owned an aviation mechanics shop. Some thirty years before, Ebe had been a Presbyterian missionary pilot. He had flown a volunteer from Texas, named June, on a summer mission. They fell in love and married. Instrumental in directing and supporting the early years of MAF-Brazil, he aided the transition to Asas de Socorro. A warm and encouraging man, he spoke English fluently, which helped Darrel communicate with the others at the meeting. Comforting, even after years of residence in Brazil. Some things are too important—and expensive—to get wrong.

The office, crowded with secretarial equipment and metal desks, afforded little space for their circle of folding chairs. No polished mahogany table dignified the occasion. After prayer, the Brazilians briefed them on the current mission efforts of Asas de Socorro, arriving at their interest in having Darrel as a pilot and welcoming his offer of an airplane.

Darrel made frequent glances to his wife to ensure that she kept up with the roomful of men discussing airplanes, their flight characteristics, and maintenance. This must be her mission, too. God would not call only one of them to serve.

He and his wife were in accord about the substantial contribution. His graphs and tables indicated that they could make this donation without threatening their ability to retire following some ten years of volunteer service. Still, he needed assurance she stood firm on this venture. Only the concentration to understand Portuguese played on her face.

The conversation turned to outreach in the huge Amazon Basin, nearly half the size of the United States. Their mission thrust extended along the Amazon River and its several tributaries—each larger than the Mississippi. The lack of landing strips in a world of water handicapped work among the hard-to-reach population.

Darrel had never been to the Amazon or done business in its major city, Manaus. But already having an interest in seaplanes, a question came to mind. “Have you considered buying a plane on floats for use in the Amazon?”

The men dropped their heads as if on a sudden command, and no one spoke.

Sure that he had said something very wrong, he froze. *Uh-oh. This is exactly what Pastor Bill warned me not to do. They think I’m coming in here giving them advice about how to run their mission.*

But when the men raised their faces, he saw only fervent desire. Ebe spoke first, his eyes glistening. “Brother, we’ve been praying for a seaplane in the Amazon. That has been our desire and our vision.”

Darrel had discovered their dream. “What kind of plane are you thinking of?”

No one spoke for a moment. Ebe and Rocindes looked at each other. They muttered something, their

Portuguese indecipherable to Darrel and Lee.

Ebe then turned to Darrel. “We’ve prayed eight years for a Caravan.”

“What’s a Caravan?”

“The Cessna-208,” Ebe continued in English. “It’s a single-engine turboprop. Carries the pilot and nine people. The 208 has enough range to cover any corner of the Amazon from the city of Manaus. It could transport a large payload and multipurpose mission teams of doctors, dentists, and evangelists.”

“The Caravan doesn’t use avgas, the regular aviation gasoline of most light planes. It flies on jet fuel, which is more prevalent at regional airports.” Rocindes, a retired Brazilian Air Force colonel, contributed further reasons in Portuguese. “The government restricts aviation fuel in these smaller towns in an attempt to control smugglers and drug-runners.”

Ebe, the master airplane mechanic, nodded sadly to that reality in his country. “Besides, the Caravan’s turboprop engine has greater reliability of operation. It’s quiet and relatively comfortable.”

Darrel cautiously considered these revelations. *Turboprop. Much larger fuselage, hauls more payload.* “How much does a 208 cost?”

“About a million and a half.”

No one breathed. The only motion came from a fly buzzing the ceiling light.

Darrel’s thoughtful squint met Ebe’s passionately prayerful eyes. He scanned the faces of Rocindes and the other silent men. “We’ll pray about it.”

“But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.

1 Chronicles 29:14

Chapter Six

*São Paulo, Brazil
October, 1999*

Darrel didn't see any way he could buy a Cessna-208 Caravan for Asas de Socorro. He and Lee prayed about their donation, and somehow didn't feel the matter was closed.

Over many years of his Citibank investiture, he received stock options in his incentive bonus package as a result of his annual performance reviews. If the company grew, the options would be worth exercising in the future. Some years the stock did so poorly that he wondered if they would ever have real worth.

Citigroup merged with Travelers Group during the weeks he was talking with Asas de Socorro about the purchase of a plane. The merger triggered a series of stock splits and a significant five-year price increase in Citigroup common stock. As he and Lee prayed about whether they could purchase the Caravan, a stock option statement arrived which expanded his imagination of the possible.

At home that evening, he rose from dinner to pull out his weathered charts and graphs of personal net worth, retirement savings, stock holdings, and mutual funds. Rough calculations on the options and cost of exercising certain groups of them, in consideration of current Citigroup stock prices, filled him with awe. Though never one to bubble with excitement, he noted a tremble in the pages as he returned to the living room.

Lee poured steaming coffee into their favorite mugs. Sweetener for her, milk in his. She carried them to the sofa, seeing him emerge from the office with the gray cardboard backing of the old notepad. Stacked with this were pages of calculations and various statements. He also carried the folder which he pulled out every few months before pronouncing that their savings were on track, and they could retire as planned.

Tonight he seemed more animated than usual. “Hon, come sit down with me for a few minutes. Take a look at this.”

She appreciated his responsible stewardship of income and investments and his generosity well above the biblical tithe over the years, but this was really his thing. They chose not to buy extravagant cars or a vacation home. Even with their extensive travel, Darrel earned enough for their needs and to share. He kept her informed with these periodic sessions over the numbers, and she politely didn’t yawn. Her intellectual excitement for biology and chemistry didn’t extend to investment portfolios.

Running his finger along the lines and down the columns, he spouted fiduciary wisdom, tapped figures into a hand-held calculator, and scribbled results in the

margins of statements.

And then she recognized the resulting number. If you add this and this and subtract the stock purchase price, what you have is equal to the cost of a new Cessna Caravan mounted on WipAire amphibious floats.

“I never depended on these stock options to be worth anything.” Darrel’s controlled amazement sounded as if he had discovered a source of great awe.

She remembered previous financial discussions which ended, “And then there are the stock options, but you never know about those.”

They were worth a Caravan on floats. Tonight she witnessed a miracle.

Darrel rested the papers on his lap and slipped an arm around her shoulders. “Let’s pray about this. If you want to use Citigroup stock for the plane, I’ll call Asas and tell them they can buy the Caravan.”

Memories of their years paying back college loans crouched on her shoulders. Stretching dollars and guarding savings had fostered a financial discipline, always with the idea that someday they would have enough. Tonight they seriously considered donating a million, seven hundred fifty thousand dollars for an airplane. Remarkable, unimaginable that this seemed like a good idea. How could they both feel so detached, as if the money were already God’s and giving this amount incited no emotional crisis?

Lee and Darrel came from stable, Christian families of hard-working people, but neither family had an extra dime when the children were in school. Both sets of parents suffered certain hard years, though they always found ways of supplying necessities.

Lee had been reared with the Baptist teaching of giving at least ten percent of one's earnings, as did Darrel's family in the United Methodist Church. She tithed her high school teacher's income when they married, and he gave something of his Navy income. With college debts and no safety cushion, any offering was a sacrifice.

When Lee stopped teaching to have the children, their offering amounts waffled. They moved from Corpus Christi, Texas, to San Jose, California, with newborn son Quinn. Two and a half years later, they welcomed daughter Kelly. Money was tight.

An annual pledge campaign in their California church back in 1973 brought out their joint decision to return to tithing. Lee strongly encouraged this, knowing that she had to make the numbers work while he deployed to the Western Pacific with Navy Squadron VP-50. He was away from home six months out of eighteen. His Navy salary was barely adequate, and travel per diem was so low that it didn't even cover the cost of his overnight stays in a Base Officers' Quarters and meals in the Officer's Mess. Every time he left home, they subsidized the Navy.

With this in mind, Darrel filled out their pledge card at the appointed time during the morning worship service. As she looked over his shoulder, he wrote in a number higher than the tithe—about eleven percent of his salary.

Did he not know exactly how much he earned? Near panic gripped her heart with the thought of how hard this commitment would be. Written in pencil, the number could still be changed. Yet this silent church service was hardly the time and place to have a budget

discussion. She leaned close, needing to say something, searching for words.

Instead Darrel whispered, “I just wanted to make sure I’m not holding anything back.”

A peace came over her, knowing that when God has a man by the wallet, he really has him. Walls crumbled and fell that day, walls separating what belonged to them and what belonged to God. This singular event launched their spiritual flight into a new orbit and prepared them, through many steps, for the eventual donation of years of their lives and the Cessna Caravan.

She and Darrel prayed for a couple of days before making the call to Asas de Socorro, but the decision caused no angst. God provided the money for the plane, and they had a sense of riding on His almighty coattails.

Darrel called Ebe Berberian, then Chairman of the Board of Asas de Socorro. “We’ve considered our resources for buying the plane. Our savings aren’t enough, but I’ve taken a look at my stock options and find they’ll finance the purchase of a Caravan with amphibious floats.”

“What a blessing, Brother Darrel.” Ebe’s response addressed Darrel with typical warmth.

“We’ve prayed, and we’re at peace about it.” In simple terms he expressed the miracle of knowing he acted under the will and direction of the Almighty.

“We’re so excited to hear your response for opening up the Amazon in a special way. People we’ve never been able to reach before will hear the gospel. I’ll call Rocindes with this news, and we’ll be in touch with you.”

“Thanks. I’ll be waiting to hear from Anápolis

about details of the plane's configuration. We'll need to begin making contractual commitments with Cessna, WipAire, and other equipment suppliers right away. We have to conclude details of equipage, avionics, and mission configuration as quickly as possible to get a plane into assembly.”

Having reached the momentous decision to donate a Cessna-208, Darrel expected to pass the ball to Asas de Socorro. Hundreds of choices in navigation and communication equipment, radios, and versatile cabin interior outfitting determined the cost.

Bobby Gibbs, who visited Calvary International Church when he was in São Paulo, was Marketing Director in Latin America for Cessna's Propeller Division. Bobby, a Missionary Kid (MK) reared in Brazil, spoke the language like a native, married a lovely Brazilian woman, and had contacts everywhere.

Several times over six weeks, Darrel mentioned to Bobby that he was trying to get a fix on details, but no one from Asas returned his calls. Baffled to the point of frustration, Darrel didn't understand what part of this deal caused the block.

Also puzzled by the lack of response from Asas, Bobby made some calls to get the process moving. Meanwhile, he gave Darrel an offer sheet with all the options and prices.

The Araras AeroExpo of March, 2000, about an hour's drive from São Paulo, was a couple of weeks away. Ebe Berberian's company, Quick Aviation, had a large showing there every year. Bobby set up a 2 p.m. appointment for Darrel to meet with Ebe at the Cessna sales pavilion.

Darrel and Lee arrived in the small town overrun

with aviation enthusiasts, paid to park in a rough field, and searched for the Cessna sales area.

Bobby greeted them with a big smile, snacks, and cold sodas. “I’ll go tell Ebe you’re here. His display is in an aluminum building nearby.”

But he returned without Ebe, who was wrapped up with his customers. Small talk became impatient. Bobby waved toward an air-conditioned conference room. “Why don’t we just have a seat in here and go over some of the items on the options list?”

For a business venue of only a few days, the glass structure provided a high level of prefab comfort. Darrel, Lee, and Bobby spread folders and lists on the table.

The first group of basic items were no-brainers. Darrel drew out a pen and placed check marks in the squares down the left margin, moving from theory to decision. Some choices needed explanation. The men worked down the columns of components.

Ebe broke free from his clients and arrived at the Cessna pavilion at four o’clock. He pumped the men’s hands and gave back-slaps then greeted Lee with a gentler version of handshake. “So sorry I couldn’t get away sooner. I had to talk to a fellow . . .”

“That’s all right,” Darrel said. “Bobby and I have just been going over the offer sheet and checking off a few things.” He showed Ebe the tri-fold order page and motioned him to a chair at the head of the table.

Ebe, though Brazilian, was made of the same fabric as Darrel: calm, logical, not given to emotional outbursts. The moment seemed to take his breath away. Then he picked up from that point and entered the deliberation.

Certain options invited debate, such as the number and type of radios. Darrel reflected on the quality and range of each one. “We need back-ups for every essential system.” Radio systems in the Amazon differed from his experience as a Navy pilot, so he depended on their advice.

They discussed weather radar and a particular sophisticated device called a Stormscope. Bobby enumerated the advantages of combining these elements, and Darrel checked them on the list.

“I suppose we need air-conditioning since the plane will operate near the Equator.”

Ebe frowned. “The air conditioner weighs a hundred and forty-three pounds. That reduces your payload for every flight. Besides, the cabin is always cool at altitude. I don’t think you need it.”

Darrel took his recommendation. “Barometer altimeter settings in remote areas over several days can give you dangerous errors in marginal conditions. Especially flying unknown jungle landing areas. The radar altimeter was highly valued in our low altitude Navy flying.”

The other two men nodded, and Darrel checked the order form.

Ebe and Darrel marked the boxes, making each choice on its own merit.

Darrel envisioned flight in a place he’d never seen. He reviewed the list. “They’ll need every one of these items in the Amazon.”

“All that would be good to have.” Ebe sat almost motionless with lines crowding his brow. “But what does it cost?”

Bobby added the numbers. “About ninety thousand

dollars for everything.”

“Let’s get it all. We want the plane to be safe in all flying conditions in the Amazon.” Darrel’s firm answer expressed his desire for systems that would keep missionary pilots out of danger.

Lee sat silently at the far end of the table, her eyes bouncing from one man to the next.

Bobby took the options sheet and ran a total. “I’m pretty sure I can get a Latin American promotional discount of \$75,000. That offer supposedly ended a few days ago, but I’ll make a call to Wichita. I think, based on our specific discussions leading to this sale over the past several weeks, they’ll okay it.”

Darrel appreciated any reduction in the price. “Every little bit counts.” They all chuckled. “How long will it take to assemble the plane?”

“Currently about nine months. There’s one more thing.” Bobby stood and reached for his phone. “Cessna had a cancelation on an order for a Caravan. The basic airframe has already been constructed. If you can make a down payment of \$75,000 today, you can take that plane in the assembly process and have it finished in five months.”

Darrel pondered that commitment in the room which suddenly became silent. Save money and get the airplane sooner. They’d just sold their house in Atlanta and the money was sitting in a savings account.

He looked at Lee. “Did you bring the checkbook?”

She nodded and reached for her purse. “Seventy-five thousand? We need a couple of days to transfer funds.”

Bobby could close the deal this afternoon. “If you can give me the check today, I’ll hold it until after the

transfer.”

Lee wrote in a room so quiet that its loudest noise was the movement of her pen. She tore out the check and passed it to Bobby. All four breathed deeply, dissipating tension. The plan was coming together.

Ebe bent his head and muttered something in Portuguese, and Bobby laughed.

Darrel hadn't caught the comment. “Excuse me?”

Ebe raised his head, a trembling smile on his face and a glint in his eyes. “I said, ‘Rocindes is going to fall off his horse.’”

*You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. 2
Corinthians 9:10-12*

Chapter Seven

*São Paulo, Brazil
May, 2000*

Cinco de Mayo approached, Darrel's fifty-fifth birthday, signaling his eligibility to retire from Citibank with full pension and health benefits. Hired on June 30th, he rounded off twenty-four years of employment. He confidentially informed his seniors he would need to be replaced. They implored him not to retire, but he shared his plans to be a missionary pilot in Brazil. His Citibank assignment, expected to require at least three years and make a profit within five, he had completed in two with a profit. He recommended someone to take over, and after a thorough search that person was offered and accepted the position. He had wrapped up the job and tied it with a bow.

Citigroup stock surged in value to a historic high the week he sold the block to buy the Caravan. Soon the stock price slid and, a few years later, fell catastrophically. Again, he was convinced God had orchestrated the plane's purchase. If he had waited even one year, the cost would have been so much more dear.

Organizing household goods, two days with professional packers, farewell parties and last dinners with friends occupied their days and evenings. As customary, co-workers presented gifts and gave highly complementary speeches at the corporate banquet. One of Lee's favorites was, "If there ever was a piano to be moved, Darrel never went for the stool." Seniors spoke of his stamina, professional wisdom, and calm under fire.

Darrel saved one e-mail from his Sector Head who didn't take his retirement well. Finally convinced Darrel was actually going to retire at the peak of his career, he sent a Citimail, "If I heard you were leaving to take a job with another bank, I would be really p####ed, but what the h***, I can't compete with God."

Pastor Bill and the church's deacons offered to serve as the sending church for Darrel and Lee as a missionary couple. Darrel had been a deacon since the first time they lived in Brazil, continuing for the church in Spain and during the second Brazilian residence. What Calvary International Church suggested now was a dedication ceremony, prayer with the congregation, and a laying on of hands in blessing.

Lee and Darrel knelt on the dais, surrounded by pastor and deacons. Others came to the huddle as space allowed. Their overwhelming love, joined with the Spirit of God, created a lifetime memory. They breathed the air infused by His holiness. This worshipful commitment ceremony infused them with humility that they had been chosen and sent to aid in spreading the good news of God's love to the Amazon villages.

With the apartment packed, Darrel and Lee moved into a hotel, played a last game of golf on Saturday, and

attended Calvary International Church on Sunday. Starting Monday, they drove west for two days to Anápolis. On the Fourth of July, feeling immense freedom and the excitement of a new adventure, they met with the Asas de Socorro CEO, Rocindes Correa and several other department heads.

When Darrel and Lee arrived for the meeting, held in Portuguese, they understood from several comments that a service of thanksgiving would take place the same evening.

Thanksgiving? Brazilians gave limited lip service to a *Dia de Acto de Graças* at the same time as American Thanksgiving.

After the meeting was mentioned several times, Darrel sensed he was missing something. “What is the thanksgiving service for?”

“The Caravan, of course.” Rocindes gave a wide smile.

“Oh.” During the weeks of conferences concerning the plane, he never pictured its reception into the whole, happy family of Asas.

“We want you both to say a few words, give your testimony at the hangar tonight.” Rocindes said this without any apparent awareness of how difficult it would be for them to speak in Portuguese of their spiritual journey.

Darrel and Lee didn’t know how many would be present, but assumed the board meant about a dozen people sitting in a circle in one of the hangar offices. They had attended a Monday morning prayer meeting like that on one of the earlier trips.

Darrel had one concern. “I would like for our donation of the plane to be treated as privileged

information shared on a need to know basis.” He had talked about this with Lee before. Neither wanted to reveal who gave the funds. This gift was for God’s glory, not their own.

Lee, who usually remained silent at these meetings, had lines of anxiety on her face. “People can think some hermit living in the woods bought the plane. I just don’t want the group to be aware it came from us.”

The assembled men shifted in their chairs, a couple of them ducked their heads, but they verbally agreed.

At the afternoon conference, they met missionary pilot Wilson Kannenberg. Five years earlier, Wilson, a German-Brazilian Lutheran, had packed his American wife Lori and their three children off to northern Brazil. Assured of God’s call to the Amazon, he accepted an offer from the Assembly of God Church to fly their floatplane based in Manaus.

The Church’s previous Cessna-206 had crashed, killing the pilot. They commissioned Wilson to go to the States and Canada, buy a plane on floats, and return with it to pilot their missions as well as those of Asas de Socorro. A new base of operations for Asas centered around that small beginning.

Wilson was not alone in his belief that Asas should go into this jungle frontier. The amphibious Caravan had been purchased specifically to continue the outreach of Asas in that watery land. In conjunction with Wilson, the Asas leaders asked if Darrel would be interested in serving in Manaus.

Darrel never indicated that he expected to pilot the Caravan during his first year or two with Asas. A surge of excitement coursed through him. His agreement with Asas was only to give them the 208, and he would

dedicate five years or more if he remained in good health and his return to flying went well. Until this moment, he assumed he and Lee would live and work at the home base and receive training until approved and sent somewhere else in the Brazilian mission field.

“Do you want to go back with Wilson to see Manaus before you leave for the States?” Rocindes proposed what ex-pats call a *look-see* trip.

Darrel and Lee quickly agreed. They definitely wanted to scope out Manaus and determine if God was directing them there. Unlike Citibank look-see trips, the cost was all theirs. No secretary made the reservations, and no one sent in receipts for reimbursement. They jumped off without a safety net.

Earlier in the meeting, Darrel had been asked more than once, “Where are you going to leave your car?”

Thinking they meant where the car would be kept while he was in the U.S. bringing his commercial pilot’s license back into current status, he answered, “It’s going to be used by Pastor Bill Fawcett in São Paulo while we’re gone. It will be parked at his house.”

Now it became apparent that the leadership of Asas had planned on his moving to Manaus all along. Since no highways existed to the Amazon, they were concerned about whether he would sell his car or arrange transportation north. This was an early lesson in the lack of communication within the organization—and many other incidents followed.

Lee fought panic. She and Darrel, guests of Ebe and June, spent the afternoon alone in their home looking up Portuguese verbs and writing out their brief testimonies. She enjoyed public speaking and normally

felt confident before an audience, but not in a foreign language. Her statement must be spoken, though, and not read.

Together they practiced, planning for Darrel to be presented first. She listened to him so she wouldn't say the same thing. When they had their speeches down pat, they freshened up and drove to the hangar.

No one told them this was the annual meeting of Asas de Socorro, and two hundred people had come from all six bases of operation in several Brazilian states, including its Board of Directors and many others with local Christian connections. Strong ceiling lights beamed onto the hangar floor, cleared of all planes and filled with rows of folding chairs. Children ran and called to each other while their parents visited with co-workers they only saw once a year. On one entire end of the building, behind the podium and microphone, a detailed drawing of the Caravan stretched nearly actual size.

A worship and praise time began with prayer and the singing of choruses full of passion and fervor.

Rocindes called her and Darrel to the front. "It's my pleasure to introduce Brother Darrel and Sister Lee, the newest missionaries of Asas de Socorro." The crowd applauded with enthusiasm. "We are so grateful to them for providing the Caravan for the service of the Lord in Brazil." With one arm he waved to the enormous drawing, and with the other he handed the microphone to Darrel.

Shock hit her system. This wasn't supposed to happen. What about the promise of confidentiality? She glanced at Darrel, whose face had gone blank with surprise.

He received the mike as the applause died down. She read the loss of his warm smile as a struggle to remember his words. He gave a conglomerate of his speech and hers. Now what was she going to say?

She told of how she had accepted Jesus as her Savior at the age of five and had never doubted that commitment. As she grew to adulthood she had not always felt close to God, but she knew who had moved.

That line found its way into the sermon which followed. The evangelist closed his message with prayer and then invited everyone to enjoy refreshments.

The missionary families greeted them, extending their friendship and acceptance into the organization. Amid the confusion of laughing children, sleepy babies, and the cacophony of men folding up two hundred chairs, she struggled to understand the language and respond appropriately.

A young father sought her out. "I was interested in what you said about accepting Jesus so young. Our son has only five years and he says he wants to be baptized. My wife and I don't know if he can understand what this means. We don't know what to do."

"Don't be afraid." Lee remembered her parents' doubts. They and the pastor talked with her, and at their request she waited until she had become six before making her public profession and being baptized. "He understands as a five year old, not as an adult. He can accept Jesus now, and with your rearing and his education in the church, he will grow up in the Lord. With every stage, being a child of God means more."

The young father thanked her, shook her hand again, and moved away smiling.

Beneath all the happiness and light, however, Lee

nursed an anger. The ostensible reason to keep private that they were the plane's donor was, of course, humility and the concept of giving in secret and not for praise of man. Below that, however, lay the danger in Brazil of being known as people who had that kind of wealth. The committee who prayed with them this afternoon had betrayed their confidence.

She confided her feelings to a familiar Brazilian missionary in the churning group of Kool Aide drinkers.

"It's important that people know." The man motioned with a store-bought cookie. "Brazilians don't have the idea of giving sacrificially. The economy goes up, goes down, no one knows what will happen next. We think we should save our money, hide it away. The government of Brazil, like in Argentina, sometimes will nationalize all the people's savings accounts. Everything is gone overnight. We don't have faith in the government or the economy. Inflation is terrible. We learn to hoard what we have. You and Brother Darrel are examples to us of how to give to the Lord."

She hadn't considered that possibility.

The families thinned out, parting with handshakes and *beijos*. Unable to conjugate another verb, she scanned the groups of people chatting and found her husband. They broke away and drove back to Ebe and June's house. Tomorrow they would fly to Manaus for four days with Wilson.

Though exhaustion draped her shoulders, sleep came hard. Moving the household always meant six months of readjustment. This transfer was to a city she knew nothing about except that it was hot and humid year-round. Every time she had ever heard its name,

Flying for Jesus
Darrel & Lee Carver

from her first year in the country, a tingle traveled her body and raised goose bumps on her arms. That might have been a warning, or it might have been intended to entice her. She was convinced it was not normal, and not a coincidence.

*Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach
the righteous and they will add to their learning.
Proverbs 9:8-10*

Chapter Eight

Lee, Darrel, and Wilson arrived at the Manaus Airport in the wee hours of the morning. She stepped from air-conditioned chill into a wall of humid heat thick enough to swim through. A drizzle fell, hazing the lights and contributing to an other-worldly sense.

Wilson fetched his truck and helped load their suitcases, packed for four days. He drove his visitors down Airport Boulevard past all-night fruit stands lit by bare bulbs glowing in the rain. At three-thirty a.m., they tip-toed into Wilson's house and gratefully crashed on his daughters' twin beds.

After breakfast, Wilson took his wife, Lori, Darrel, and Lee out to the plot of land on which he endeavored to build a hangar. Far out of town on an inlet just a few yards from a lake which flowed into the Amazon River, the land languished with the red tape of a disputed title. With this acreage perfect for the operation of floatplanes, Wilson dreamed of a mission base with plenty of space for plane maintenance and office rooms.

"Would you like to fly a bit over the area? We can take the Cessna-206." Wilson received Darrel's eager nod and turned his smile to Lee.

"Yes, I'd love to go up." Lee welcomed the

unexpected treat.

Lori seemed less than delighted, but climbed in the back seat with Lee anyway. Her hands trembled. “I really don’t like to fly. I get so nervous. Don’t you?”

“Not at all.” Lee’s wide smile through the turbulence showed her excitement as Wilson taxied out on the inlet, made the turn, and gently lifted off. She craned to view the sprawling city, lush green fields dotted by cows, and the famed “meeting of the waters.”

Wilson served as pilot and tour guide. “Although many world maps show the Amazon River from its first trickle of snow melt out of the Peruvian mountains, Brazilians designate the union of the dark Rio Negro and the yellow Rio Solimões as the beginning. The waters flow side-by-side for miles before the two colors curl and blend. This area is a major tourist site. Boats bring people every day, but the best view is from the air.”

Amazed at the phenomenon and the beauty of this art happening, Lee felt the power and wonder of the world’s largest river.

As well as elucidating the physical setup, the look-see trip introduced Darrel and Lee to overlapping mission endeavors among different religious groups.

Wilson, a Lutheran all his life, became a full participant in the Assembly of God church because he piloted their plane for their missions and those of Asas de Socorro. Lee and Darrel went with the Kannenbergs one evening to their church. Wilson also introduced them to the pastors of the Presbyterian Church, which operated six boats for river village missions. Then he took them to the First Baptist Church to meet with its pastor, Norton Lages. On Sunday morning, Lee and

Darrel attended worship services there.

On another adventure, they visited the city market for fruits, vegetables, and fish. It ranged the length of several blocks along the river, in the heart of old Manaus. Fish mongers hawked parañas, tucunaré, tambaquí, the three-hundred pound pirarucú and every size and type between. Next along the street red, orange, and purple fruits unknown in the rest of the world were sold next to vast color and shape varieties of tomatoes and mangoes. The market then morphed into sheds of some thirty types of bananas of every size and shape, where a whole stalk of good-eating bananas sold for the equivalent of two dollars.

On the last day in town, Lee's ideas of life in Manaus jumbled together. Wilson and Lori's house was well planned and built because Wilson had given constant supervision to its construction. Without a custom construction, what would she and Darrel find to live in?

Wilson contacted an agent, who searched out houses on the market. Lee and Darrel avoided any commitment to a purchase, but they needed to get a feel for what might be available. The agent led them through crowded shambles with water damage, a sprawling, modern house with a tennis court, brick, stucco, wood, and lots of tile construction. Inferior workmanship and materials resulted in lower prices than in the U.S., but in general, the quality of construction assured Lee that she could make a home in this place.

Moreover, she sensed the Lord's explicit guidance to provide hospitality for visitors to Asas de Socorro. No guest facility existed for the pilots, mechanics,

volunteer doctors, nurses, and dentists who went on missions into the villages. She shared with Darrel that the home they bought would be like a free bed and breakfast, lunch and dinner for traveling missionaries. While she felt led in that direction, she pushed her husband further out of his comfort zone.

Darrel and Lee returned to Central Brazil, drove their car back to São Paulo, and then made the long flight to Texas via Miami. His parents hugged them warmly and fed them well. Although he expected to rent a condo somewhere in Fort Worth, they insisted he and Lee stay in their home during the training phase.

They scarcely had their suitcases inside when his father, Royce, lifted a note propped near the telephone. "A fellow named Dale Magee wants you to call him."

"Dale called here? That's great. He was my copilot in the Navy. Became Pilot and Mission Commander when I resigned to go to grad school. We still swap Christmas cards and see each other when I'm in town. He lives in Duncanville, south of Dallas. What did he want?"

"Don't know. He just said to call."

Darrel dialed the number, ready to beam a smile through the lines. After the jubilant howdies, he asked what was on his friend's mind.

"I got the letter you sent out about your retirement and missionary pilot plans and that you need to get current again. I sold the tire business, and I'm a flight instructor now. Thought I'd offer to knock some of the rust off your wings."

"Man, what a relief." Darrel could hardly believe his good fortune. "I had a few ideas but really didn't

know how I was going to get back in the air.”

“I’m in a flying club with a bunch of friends.”

Dale’s drawl, born in Louisiana and polished in Texas, rolled on. “We’ve got a Cherokee 140. I said to myself when I bought it, I don’t know why I’m doing this. Well, now I know. We’re going to need another plane for you to train in.”

Darrel first took his wife and parents on a two week vacation in Hawaii to celebrate his retirement, and then he worked every day but Sunday flying and studying flight. Dale and the other club members took turns flying with him and charged him nothing for the instruction. Darrel bought the gas. They flew all morning to some airstrip which had a barbeque restaurant nearby, or the best hamburgers in Texas, or maybe fried chicken or catfish. Darrel paid for lunch and they flew some more. For a pilot ending a twenty-four year fast, this was heaven.

Within four weeks he was current again and had passed the FAA medical exam. He was ready to go to Wichita, Kansas, the home of Cessna, for training specific to the Caravan. Wilson joined him from Brazil, and the Caravan pilot partnership was sealed in camaraderie.

The WipAire factory in Minnesota removed the standard wheels and attached the amphibious floats. He received training in water landings, performed on the Mississippi River.

Darrel and Lee’s daughter Kelly and her husband Scott, now with two precious daughters, hosted her parents and Wilson. Dave Rask, former MAF missionary pilot in Indonesia, joined the men for floatplane certification and lodged with Kelly’s next-

door neighbor. When Dave and Wilson flew the Caravan back to Wichita, Darrel and Lee drove down for Darrel's Flight Safety International Maintenance Training specific to the Caravan and its PT-6 engine.

Having completed that week of training, Lee took the wheel through snow and ice for two days while Darrel studied flight manuals in the right seat. Moody operated a missionary flight school in Elizabethton, Tennessee, to thoroughly prepare and produce qualified pilots and mechanics for missionary flight operations in difficult areas. He requested and was granted admission there under the wing of Ron Royce, Moody's Flight Training Director. Ron, a veteran missionary and flight instructor, cleared hours every day for one-to-one ground and flight training.

The amphibious Caravan would be the first plane of its type in Brazil. No one in Asas de Socorro knew its flight characteristics and capabilities. The mission needed a flight instructor certified in the Caravan in order to pass instruction to other Asas pilots. Though paperwork accumulated on Ron's desk, he extended his tutelage for Darrel to complete the Flight Instructor course.

Darrel passed the check flight in mid-December, 2000. Confident he had successfully made the transition from banker back to pilot, he floated in relief. The plan was working. He turned the car north for Christmas with Quinn, daughter-in-law Susan, and their baby son Benjamin.

Feeling relieved and ready to leave the cold and be missionaries, they were unprepared for what came next.

*He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.
Matthew 8:17*

Chapter Nine

A joyous reunion awaited Lee and Darrel in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. They particularly relished these days with their young, animated grandson Ben. With the family scattered into distant states, visits like this provided essential glue to their relationships.

After a couple of days, the need to do laundry intruded on their visit time. Lee opened the basement door and flipped on the light over rickety stairs to the washer and dryer. A narrow strip of wood provided little support on the right side only. Descending, she looked to the left and listened for the status of the machines. In that distracted moment, she misstepped and went into a hopeless tumble. She knew in midair that this was going to be bad. She screamed as loud as possible, hoping to call the family to her aid.

In overwhelming pain, she retched and almost passed out. Her left leg was strung out behind her on upper stairs. Darrel, Quinn, and Susan came running. The men descended to her side while Susan watched in horror from the top step.

Lee reached back and, with both arms, lifted her leg and placed it on the lower step beside the other. The leg wobbled in her hands, and loose, broken bones ground against each other. Unbearable pain throbbled from hip

to foot.

Darrel and Quinn appealed to the Lord for help, resting their hands gently on her shoulders. After the *amen*, Darrel surveyed their position on the stairs. “Let’s call an ambulance.”

Lee could hardly imagine how paramedics might maneuver her up. Darrel and Quinn discussed how best to get her upstairs. They found no safe options.

Lee, still trembling, glanced toward the light at the top. “Wait, let me see what I can do.”

Pulling against the weak rail on the right side, using her uninjured right leg as much as possible, she was able to stand. It didn’t hurt as bad as she expected. She turned around with Darrel and Quinn’s help, and looked up all those steps. What would happen if she put weight on the left leg?

It held. Unbelievable. Slowly, she climbed with the good leg and braced with the other. Gaining the top, she hobbled to the car with assistance.

At the hospital, the doctor illuminated X-rays against the light box. There were no breaks, no fractures. Not one. Tears of joy slid down her face. She knew they were looking at a miracle.

God intended them to go to Brazil. And He intended for her leg to go with them.

Lee checked flight plans for her return with Darrel to begin their new life as missionaries in the Brazilian Amazon. Tickets, Brazilian Permanent Residence Visa, American passport validity—everything in order. One more thing on the list: a routine mammography.

The radiology clinic called the next day and asked her to come in for a repeat. In polite phrases carefully

recited not to alarm, the stranger's voice indicated they wanted to check out an anomaly.

Darrel went along, and together they viewed the film against the lightbox.

The radiologist pointed to an area off to one side which looked for all the world like a child's line drawing of daisy petals arranged in a circle without a center. "It's probably just some glands, nothing dangerous, but we'd like to do more tests."

What woman in her fifties does not fear breast cancer? For several hours, she felt as if she couldn't breathe deeply. She prayed a constant loop in her mind. *Please, Lord, don't let this be cancer. Let us serve You in Brazil.*

A sonogram and an upper-body X-ray was done. The radiologist called with good news. "It's nothing dangerous. Just keep an eye on that area. Repeat the mammography every year. I'll send a full report to your primary care physician."

Two days later, she received a surprising call from her PCP's office. He requested that she come in to talk with him, and offered an appointment that afternoon. With her heart again in her throat, she rushed to his office.

Darrel was flying with Dale. She waited alone in the small examination room, willing her faith to calm her fear.

Dr. Readinger entered with the X-ray report. "The chest X-ray is good. Nothing to worry about there. But it was aimed a little low, and they found a mass growing on top of your kidney. I'd like to have you do an MRI and a couple of tests for renal and adrenal function."

Though the physician's soft-spoken manner seemed calculated to allay fear, Lee and Darrel again wondered if cancer or a big, bad surgery loomed in their future. They prayed for deliverance, and watched the clock. Lost in a quandary, they considered whether to postpone their flights. Would they have to cancel and forego the dream for which they had prepared for years? All the flight training, the certifications, the donation of the Cessna Caravan. Was the plan coming to a screeching halt?

Lee and Darrel met with the doctor again as results began to come in. "We don't know exactly what the mass is. The function tests are good. If you suddenly can't sleep and become very nervous, we need to look at the adrenal function. But you have no symptoms at this time."

Lee tried to understand what he said, and what he wasn't saying. "You know we plan to fly to Brazil in two days. Do you think we should stay?"

The physician cautiously reviewed the results but clearly avoided making the decision for her.

Lee and Darrel thanked the doctor and exited with a handshake. They drove to the senior Carvers' home, where their suitcases and boxes of medicines and airplane parts consumed all the living room space. One glance at his mother told them she had not ceased to pray all morning. After repeating the medical opinion in a way to allay fear—both hers and theirs—they separated for prayer and pondering.

As the aroma of roast beef, vegetables, and hot bread filled the home in preparation for one of their last suppers before traveling, Lee and Darrel reached a decision. They reaffirmed their plan to serve as

missionaries. God was in charge, and they believed He had not led them this far only to crush their hopes and good intentions.

Lee surveyed the mess they'd spread throughout the house—suitcases and plastic tubs to haul to the airport in Dad's truck. Extra baggage fees galore. Her heart swelled with excitement. They really were going to Brazil!

Cessna made an offer to Darrel to lease the plane for a gracious sum, enough to operate it in Brazil for several months. When he communicated this to Asas de Socorro, all agreed the company's contract constituted a tremendous gift. Instead of Darrel and Wilson piloting the Caravan to Brazil, a daunting task in itself, Cessna pilots would fly the plane down and use it for ninety days. Outfitted with the amphibious floats, it would be a sales model in Mexico and several Latin American countries. Most important, Cessna undertook completion of all the extensive documents for importation and its service in Brazil. At the end of the lease, Wilson and Darrel found the Caravan cleaned and prepared for Asas de Socorro's acceptance. More or less. But that was another story.

This also freed Darrel to re-enter the country with Lee and their vast amount of luggage. They landed in São Paulo and reclaimed their car from Pastor Bill. "I only drove it twice in the seven months you were gone."

Darrel's mouth dropped open. "But why? We thought you would use it as a personal vehicle."

"I was afraid to drive it in and out of the gate and, of course, couldn't leave it on the street. Wouldn't be

safe there.” He waved toward the high, metal fence surrounding his home. “The gate is barely wider than the car. Even with someone outside watching, I was so afraid I would scrape the sides.”

So much for that good idea.

Darrel and Lee drove a day and a half to Anápolis for a final visit with the people of Asas de Socorro. He arranged for the car to be driven roughly six hundred fifty miles from there to Porto Velho and then shipped by barge about five hundred miles on the Madeira River to Manaus. They would fly commercially.

Even after procuring a shipper recommended by a close friend, they were rooked, cheated, and received the car in poor condition. Furthermore, importing the car to the state of Amazonas required heavy documentation, legal fees, and dock parking fees which accumulated while they searched for a mechanic who could get it running again. Real life closed in.

Asas de Socorro used a small house in Manaus for its base of operations. The Kannenbergs had lived there—had, in fact, made it livable—before building a better home for their family. Ester Camilo, a missionary nurse, occupied the house and operated the Asas office. Lee and Darrel moved into the spare bedroom while searching for a home to buy.

Wilson assisted in the search for weeks, supplying his truck and vast knowledge of the city. The best possible house lacked completion, so they remained with Ester even longer.

During this time, the Caravan finished its sales promo tour, and Cessna performed final checks and documentation. Darrel and Wilson flew down to São Paulo to bring it home, taking the opportunity to

celebrate the plane's arrival at Congonhas, the intown airport, with Pastor Bill and members of Calvary International Church.

Lee, waiting in Manaus, had a terrible sinus infection with fever. Esther called a pharmacy for an antibiotic prescription, brought by a boy on a bicycle. The medicine seemed to help for a day or so, and then she felt even worse.

Sensing the burning skin of a fever, she checked her face in a small mirror on the dining room wall. Her cheeks glowed red and her eyes swam with fluid. Seeing Esther behind her, she remarked, "I thought I would feel better by now. I'm actually sicker today." One baby step away from bawling, she pushed the collar of her blouse away to examine a red splotch on her neck.

Esther laughed and pointed. "Dingue!"

"Huh?" If this was a joke, Lee didn't find it funny at all.

"You have dingue fever. See the patches? That's dingue."

Lee had heard of the disease while living in Indonesia. Also known as break-bone fever due to severe muscular pain, or hemorrhagic fever because of capillary breaking, the potentially fatal virus was borne by mosquitoes. It was quite dangerous to the very young and old.

Thus began ten days of nausea, diarrhea, weakness, and the extreme muscular pain, especially in the legs, like that of broken bones. Nothing stopped the severe headaches. At least two of those days passed without memory except for the headaches and restless leg

aching.

Ester instructed her not to tell Darrel. She expected Lee to obey the firm axiom that one didn't relay bad news from home to a pilot, lest he be distracted while flying.

When he called to chat, he knew she was sick. "But it's just a virus, right? You'll be better in a couple of days?"

"Esther is taking care of me. There's really nothing to do but wait it out."

When Darrel returned with the Caravan, elation radiated from his smile. He coaxed her into walking around the neighborhood. They discovered the house was situated a block from one of the open drainage canals through the city, a breeding place for mosquitos.

After a couple of blocks, she couldn't continue. The weakness, headaches, and leg cramps came as a surprise to him. Full recovery required six months.

At last their lovely home was complete enough for them to move in and order their household goods shipped from storage in São Paulo. Meanwhile, they slept on twin beds and had air conditioners installed in the four bedrooms.

The home, chosen to accommodate guests, had four bedrooms of various sizes and shapes, each with its own bathroom. The totally inadequate kitchen lacked spaces for modern appliances. After substantial changes, a large marble bar separating kitchen from dining area became the social center. The foreman of the original building crew, Pedro, undertook this and other modifications.

The unique construction plan—if indeed there ever was one—produced a rambling house on two levels,

encircled by a high wooden fence, with a wide porch down one side overlooking a garden and pool. The stone driveway descended sharply from the main gate to a carport beneath the residence. After trying several furniture arrangements, the large back area served as the living room, and the main entry to the house off the porch was at the kitchen and dining room area.

Unusual, but it worked.

Rarely did missionaries family have access to a pool, so Darrel had keys made to the “people gate” and distributed to all the families. They were instructed to come over at any time to swim and play, and they did. The narrow garden filled with laughter and splashes, and the cabaña often hosted birthday parties and Manaus sector family nights as many more missionaries moved to Manaus.

Finding a church was relatively easy. Darrel and Lee visited several of their denomination until they found Primeira Igreja Batista, First Baptist Church, whose pastor preached fervently from the Bible in understandable Portuguese. The pastor, Norton Lages, graduated from the seminary in Fort Worth and married Alice, an American reared as a missionary kid in Amazonas. The spiritual maturity of this church provided a firm network of worship and personal support.

The dream and plans were coming to fruition in the Amazon. As Lee established the home, Darrel began to fly missions. Their greatest adventure lay ahead.

Flying for Jesus
Darrel & Lee Carver

Part Two

Stories of Flying for Jesus
in the
Brazilian Amazon

Freely you have received, freely give. Matthew 10:8

Chapter Ten—Manaus Start-up

“My first mission is coming up Wednesday.” Darrel grinned his delight as he entered the dining room where Lee opened boxes and sorted their contents. “We’ll be going to four villages in three days with a doctor, a dentist, two nurses, and a pastor. I’ll be back Friday afternoon.”

“That’s great, hon.” She sneezed again. Dust and packing materials covered every working surface.

“Will you be all right while I’m gone?” It bothered him that her battle with dengue fever lingered, causing fatigue and headaches.

“I’m over the worst now. I’m usually okay if I nap in the afternoon.” She lay the linens on the table, turned toward him, and gave him a hug. “I’m excited for you. This is what we dreamed of.”

Her arms around him felt good despite the day’s tropical steam. “Would you like me to fold back these doors so you can catch a breeze off the patio?”

“Thanks. The fan would help, too. If I can find it.”

Darrel pushed the heavy wooden doors back, accordion style. They slid hard and often jumped their metal tracks. Little security resided in their rickety construction. “This reminds me. I still need to find a company to put a motor on that massive car gate. Not

just to save work, but for security when we're coming and going." After years in a heavily guarded city apartment, security considerations ranked high.

He pitched in on the unpacking. Together they decided the best use of rooms and closets. "What are we going to do with the single room downstairs? I can't figure out what it's for."

Lee cut open another box. "Yeah, it's painted, with two ceiling lights and several electrical plugs. Too nice for a storage room. Maybe the metal grill is to prevent robbery of equipment. But who'd want a storage room with only an open grill on the garden side? It's open to the outside humidity with no cross-ventilation."

Just a few steps from the pool, its showers and bathroom, the mystery room had no connection to the main floor upstairs.

"We'd get drenched trying to access it by the 'snail' stairway." The living room on the main floor also had a smoky glass wall with a door to the metal stairs outside. Darrel pondered the architectural puzzle. "Maybe Pedro can open a hole in the living room floor directly above and build steps inside to develop a useful office." The manager for construction of the house remained on site for completion of details.

"Meanwhile, do you have the clean clothes you need for the mission trip?"

"Yes, I'm wearing long pants and those long-sleeved shirts with sun protection we brought from the States."

"You'll be awfully hot."

"Better than skin cancer and mosquito bites." He ran his hand over his forearm. His head and arms, unprotected during his youth, had to be monitored and

treated regularly.

Long before dawn Thursday morning, Darrel prepared to leave. Lee, bless her heart, got up and made him a hot breakfast just like she had when he flew in the Navy. Darrel often took a “breakfast sandwich” to the other pilot as well. Most wives didn’t cook at 3:30 am.

After prayer for the mission and a kiss goodbye, he hopped in his new, brilliant red double-cab pickup and drove to Aeroclub Flores.

Out on the asphalt ramp, the Cessna Caravan stood proudly on wheels protruding from its floats. Darrel admired its sleek lines emphasized by a fine custom paint job. Simply a graceful stroke of the Brazilian flag’s green and yellow, the design culminated in the Asas de Socorro logo high on the tail: a map of Brazil in the background of an open Bible with wings on both sides.

Wilson already had the team organized to haul medicines, supplies, and personal bags from his truck. The cargo went from hand to hand up and into the plane’s cabin and storage bins on the floats. Darrel chuckled with pure joy and joined the loading.

After a preflight and prayer, they received clearance to taxi and then for the takeoff. Accelerating smoothly down the runway, the Caravan leapt into the sunrise and adjusted its course to villages waiting an hour and twenty-five minutes away on the Rio Uniní.

The mission team arrived in early morning light at the first of four villages. They flew low over the river to check for boats, logs, or other obstructions. Making sure they had a safe and sufficiently long “runway”

both now and to take off after the mission, they kissed the river with the floats. Skimming then settling and gradually slowing, they extended the water rudders, turned and taxied to a suitable shore area at the base of a steep bank.

Children of all ages and sizes scrambled down and ran to be the first to meet the plane. Barely containing their excitement, they offered to help.

Wilson passed them several light items. “Call your fathers. We have some heavy things to take up.” Two folding dental chairs, the generator and gasoline-powered air compressor for his drill, and drums of medicine required serious manpower.

The train of equipment led to an open-sided, thatched-roofed pavillion. About four feet off the hard-packed, red earth, the all-purpose room served for school, parties, politics, and church. The dental chairs went up the steps followed by the heavy power source. On the same platform, a simple desk and a few chairs created an instant doctor’s office.

The Asas de Socorro nurse and main organizer of medical/evangelical missions, Estér Camilo, became dental assistant to her brother-in-law, Dr. Omar Daoadir. Dr. Omar had flown from his practice in Anápolis, Brazil, to participate in this mission.

One strong, young man had an extra set of large canines, earning him the village nickname “Dracula.” He approached the dentist. “Please, Dr. Omar, take them out. I don’t want to be Dracula anymore.”

Dr. Omar examined the duplicate teeth, which were healthy. Removing them would not be easy. With Novocain, skill, and patience, he transformed the youth. On future visits, that man became the dentist’s assistant

and smooth-talker to nervous patients.

While treatments continued, a volunteer gave each child a toothbrush and taught them how to use it. Dental hygiene was a foreign concept. The villagers didn't own toothbrushes, and they couldn't afford toothpaste. Nor could Asas afford to supply it or haul it to them by air. The limited cargo weight had to be used for essential items.

Most of the people, old and young, had a mouth full of black teeth. They lived with constant tooth pain, and many died due to dental abscesses which led to septicemia. Their diet was mainly fish, wild game, and starch, especially manioc root products. Except for carbohydrate, manioc is nutritionally worthless by the time the poison has been washed away. Worse, the hard granules of manioc lodged in the teeth and caused them to rot.

Darrel pointed to a satellite signal receiver near the community platform. "What's that for?"

Wilson laughed. "That's their link to the outside world. Radio, emergency help, and even a few programs. A lot of these communities have no school except by satellite television. Others teach through fourth grade, and attend *segunda grau*, the second level, by satellite."

A thick cord led from the receiver to a wood box large enough to house a generator. "So they have power? Maybe we didn't need to bring that forty-pound generator with us."

"Not all the villages have a generator. And usually the village only receives one barrel of diesel fuel from the county to burn for several months."

The pilots, removed from their principle duty, hand-

pumped river water through filters to provide potable water for the team. Someone took names of patients on cards, recording complaints and treatments, a novel idea for this village.

A woman of about thirty, dressed in a faded orange skirt and shapeless knit blouse, sat on the community room steps. She had just completed dental treatment. Noticing her bent head and shaking shoulders, Darrel was sure she was crying.

He approached and sat beside her. “Senhora, are you okay?”

Sobbing, she nodded and lifted her hands high. Tears streamed down her face. “I’m so thankful to God. And I’m thankful to you for coming in His name.” She wiped her face and eyes with a ragged cloth, her smile twisted by emotions. “My tooth hurt so bad for so long. Praise God, I’m no longer in pain.”

God could not have given Darrel a better first mission. In this initial week, the boundless joy of helping the helpless repaid everything required to arrive at this point. After the months of living out on a limb, he knew he was in the right place.

*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.
Matthew 7:7*

Chapter Eleven—Miriam

*Uariní, Amazonas, Brazil
21-24 July, 2001*

Darrel expected the mission to be routine: fly five Southern Baptist missionaries and their guide to Uariní, on the other side of Tefé. Manaus was the only large city in the State of Amazonas with its nearly two million people. Tefé claimed second place with about sixty thousand. Uariní, farther and smaller yet, lay two hours and fifteen minutes by air from Manaus.

After Friday's arrival and dispersion of the missionaries, Darrel stood in the middle of the main street of Uariní with a large video camera, outdated even in 2001. He slowly rotated to capture the village setting on a lazy Friday afternoon.

A man working in a shop nearby noticed him filming and came storming out, raving in Portuguese. "This isn't the United States. You can't just film people without their permission. You have no right to film me." He raised fists, ready to pummel Darrel and knock the camera into the dusty street.

"I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to offend anyone. I won't take any more footage." Darrel hoped neither he

nor the camera would be injured by the burly, overheated man.

“You’re *not* pardoned. You can’t do this!”

Darrel dropped his shoulders to effect a non-confrontational pose, angling the camera behind him. He took the verbal abuse without arguing. “I promise I won’t film anymore.”

The man’s colorful diatribe questioned Darrel’s parentage and cursed his nation. Receiving no protest from Darrel, he eventually wound down and stomped off without violence.

No one realized at the time that the mayor of Uarini watched silently from an open-air *barzinho*, a small bar and coffee house.

Enjoying a calmer afternoon, the mission team hardly noticed a small motorboat draw up to the river bank. A young couple carried their daughter up to the village center. She lay limp in her father’s arms, unnaturally white-faced, not even opening her eyes. The child, about nine months old, wore her Sunday best, a white dress and cap trimmed in red ribbon.

The couple and the baby’s grandmother had come to the village clinic for medical help. The father held his daughter out to the nurse. “Her name is Miriam. Please help us. She had dysentery for four days before she fell asleep like this. We can’t wake her up.”

“I’m sorry, but I have no medicines. I don’t know what to do for her.” The nurse touched Miriam’s lacy socks and tiny white shoes. “The doctor will arrive Monday morning. You may queue up for an appointment then.”

Miriam’s father nodded stoically. She might be dead

by Monday.

Learning of the visiting missionaries and special church services that night, the anxious parents decided to attend. Being believers and participants in a mission of this church some three hours away by motorboat, they also convinced the grandmother, who wasn't Christian, to go with them.

Approaching Darrel at church Friday evening, the mayor apologized for the angry man who had threatened and insulted him when he wanted to video the town. "You may take all the photos and film you wish. That man is not from our village. He moved up here from São Paulo a few months ago, and he's always causing trouble."

When he mayor told the local policeman about the incident, he decided to act on it. A few hours later, the policeman reported to the mission team. "Don't be concerned. I've put that man in jail until you take off for Manaus."

Miriam's family arrived at the Friday evening service with her still comatose in her father's arms. A woman in the fellowship greeted them warmly. "We have a special program tonight. Some of the teenagers are presenting three skits."

In the final act, a couple stepped onto the dais acting worried over a doll in the *mother's* arms. "My child is burning with fever. Please pray for her so she will get well." They kneeled while a youth, playing the part of a missionary, prayed.

The teenage actors rejoiced when their doll was immediately healed.

Miriam's parents and grandmother remained after the service. In the calm of the near-empty church, they brought her forward to the pastor and visiting missionaries. "Would you please pray for God to heal our daughter like in the play? She is very sick."

Receiving this test of faith, the pastor motioned them closer. "Yes, of course we will pray. Please kneel right here at the altar."



The pastor, Darrel, and visiting missionaries placed their hands lightly on the baby. As they prayed for her life, Miriam's eyelids fluttered. She stirred. The hope of life was there!

Comforting their whimpering, feverish baby, the joyful family retired to a rented room in a simple *losman*, the most basic form of hotel.

A knock sounded on Darrel's door early Saturday morning. He stirred from his cot, pulled on pants, and opened the door to find the young couple with Miriam sitting up on her father's arm.

"We wanted you to see how well our daughter is. The fever is gone. She's taking food and crawling around."

Amazed and thrilled, they praised God together.

Filled with gratitude, the grandmother also accepted the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Flying for Jesus
Darrel & Lee Carver



While the bully's video challenge and Miriam's story played out, the missionaries also dealt with resistance from the town's other religious order, established in Brazil since the earliest Portuguese colonial times. The missionaries were asked not to preach or hold meetings on the main street, which ran in front of their church and along the waterfront. The

Baptists needed a large outdoor area to show the movie *Jesus*, based on the New Testament book of Luke. The main street stopped at the plaza, the perfect place for the film on Saturday, their second night in town.

As the Lord would have it, the mayor offered the plaza as the venue for showing the video on Saturday night. So they set up a projector, screen, and computer to play the DVD there. The city turned off the street lights for better viewing and were helpful in the process, rounding up over one hundred feet of extension cords.

It then became evident to the visitors just why the Lord allowed the confrontation between the villager and Darrel. By Saturday evening, the grapevine had telegraphed the dramatic incident throughout the town. Local interest was keenly aroused about the Baptists, the planned screening of the *Jesus* movie, and the mayor's invitation to use the plaza for the showing. The argument in the center of town resulted in the most effective publicity possible for the event.

Three hundred were in attendance when the film began. As darkness descended and faces couldn't be easily recognized by priests of the opposing church, people streamed to the plaza from side streets. About fifteen hundred people watched the story of Jesus. When the movie closed, the missionary invited villagers to come forward if they wished to pray with the team to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. Over twenty people professed their faith in Him.

Continuing the Lord's work in the village on Sunday, day and night services were held in the church. Miriam's family attended, showing off her improving health.

Early Monday the doctor did see Miriam and prescribed medicine for her. By that time, she had regained strength and appeared quite normal.

As the group loaded into the airplane to return to Manaus, the relieved parents brought her down the bank to wave bye-bye.

Postscript: Darrel was back in Uariní a month later, and recognized Miriam's father in town. He said that she was in good health and had no further problems. Darrel asked if they ever filled the doctor's prescription, and the father said they couldn't. The medicine wasn't available in the village, and they didn't have the money anyway. Darrel and the mission team praised God for His divine restoration of this precious child.

The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Matthew 9:37

Chapter Twelve

Vampires in the Jungle

Uniní
May, 2002

A team flown in by Asas de Socorro visited six small villages on the Uniní River in only three days. That's a lot of times the gear was loaded on and off the Caravan. The villages consisted of just a few houses each, though families all around the area arrived by canoe when they saw the plane land on the river. The team stayed only a half day in each village and treated every person's concern. The pilots, pastor, and professionals made time for evangelism and personal contact with the people, changing lives for all eternity.

Dentist Marco Manzano had given up his private practice in Anápolis, Brazil, to move with his family to Manaus and serve as a missionary dentist and mission coordinator with Asas de Socorro. His wife, Eleyna, a Brazilian registered nurse, frequently went on missions but stayed home with the children this time.

Another dentist, Dr.



Joel, traveled on this mission and many others. When Joel wasn't pulling or filling teeth or showing villagers how to use a toothbrush, he might be found artfully playing harmonica and guitar simultaneously. His jovial nature made him a favorite of the children. He used songs to teach them Bible verses. A single man, short and rotund, his laughter and warmth brought many people to the love of God.

Darrel filtered water to drink while the other pilot, Wilson Kannenberg, took on the ground job of registering patients and keeping dental records of teeth pulled and treated for each patient.

Most villages received some medical help from the government. Free Brazilian medical school came with the obligation to treat people wherever the newly-graduated doctor was sent. In our experience, government treatment was infrequent and often poor to the point of being dangerous. The doctors doing obligatory service rarely kept records on the patients, while Asas de Socorro volunteers always did. Some day that information may be turned over to government doctors as that service improves.

Villagers often declined treatment by doctors and dentists unless in extreme pain—or someone else went first. Dentists had been known to pass through with dull tools carried about in an open, rusted coffee can, leaving suffering and death in their wake.

When Asas de Socorro came for the first time into these villages of the Uniní River, some brave soul stepped forward to be the first patient. A crowd looked on from the open-sided, thatched-roof community room. As the missionary dentist prepared a Novocain injection and proceeded to practice painless dentistry,

the spectators lined up to be next. Many had lived through tooth extraction or the grinding of a cavity without anesthetic, and few cared to repeat the experience.

Darrel, missionary pilot and chief dental tool scrubber, enjoyed moments with the children of dental patients to quell their fears. Separated from their mother while she reclined in a folding treatment chair with a drill whirring in her open mouth, they often screamed in terror. Darrel's talents as a grandfather came into play, calming many a situation.

Wilson ambled over to Darrel, who had a kid on each knee. "These are about the ages of your grandchildren, aren't they?"

"Yes. This is Cristiane on my left, and her younger brother Yuliane on my right." Darrel had brought a big, white cowboy hat from his home state of Texas which gave protection from the tropical sun. The children loved to play with it. "I distract them while their parents are being treated."

Wilson nodded at a boy no more than seven years old who descended the steps from the treatment area. "He just had two rotten teeth pulled. These kids have been eating manioc since they were weaned, and the carbohydrate ruins their teeth. Especially the hard *farofa* grains that catch between them."

Darrel balanced the hat on Yuliane's head. "I've never seen children so young with a mouth full of black primary teeth."

"That's what happens when the parents have never heard of toothbrushes."

Darrel thought of how Quinn and Kelly learned from an early age to brush and floss. They also chewed

tiny fluoride tablets for dental strength every day.

Wilson motioned to the activity up in the community room. “Marco has to pull the rotten primary stubs out so the secondaries won’t come in diseased.”

Christiane giggled and took the hat away from her brother.

“I figured out something about treating the kids.” Darrel dodged to avoid having the brim hit him in the eye. “I like to talk to the first kid being treated each morning about being brave. If he doesn’t cry, the rest of them won’t. But if they see him cry, they all start bawling.”

In the afternoon, children ran to the riverbank and slid down the red mud into the water. Older boys cannon-balled from the roof of a boat. By the time they were called to supper, they were approximately clean, cooled off, and wound down.

As the sun waned, Dr. Marco strapped a flashlight on his head and kept working. A half day per village kept him pulling teeth until his arms ached. First visits to a village were always this way. He’d treat simple cavities on subsequent trips.

Food, dishes, clothes, and people were washed in the same river. This village had no privy. The team took its own water filter, but ate food provided by the villages, supplemented by bags of rice and beans from the mission group. During the trip, Darrel and others were afflicted by some intestinal infection. Fortunately, the doctor and medicines were readily available to treat the missionaries as well as those with whom they came to share the gospel.



Short, rotund Pastor João José, descended from indigenous Brazilians with almost no necks, preached in evening services. Dentist Joel played the guitar for worship.

The exhausted team crawled into their hammocks tied to trees. Just past midnight, Pastor João José awoke feeling liquid running down his leg. He

discovered a vampire bat hovering over his foot, lapping up blood released by its bite on his toes. An anticoagulant in the bat's saliva caused blood to flow freely as it flapped in place like a grotesque hummingbird.

Pastor João José yelped and jerked back his foot, frightening the bat away and waking up the whole team. Dra. Aldeleine worked an hour and a half to control the bleeding. After that night, the entire team adorned their hammocks with mosquito netting.

In good-natured joking the next morning, the pastoral victim conceded that the vampire bat couldn't have bitten him on the neck, because he didn't have

one.

In another village, another trip on the same river, Dra. Aldeleine found that a small boy had severe anemia. The parents explained that a vampire bat attacked him occasionally, as if this made the situation understandable. He lived in fear of going to sleep at night.

The simple house, like most on the river, had an open space for a window. No shutter, no screens. The boy slept in a hammock, and the bat bit his back through the fabric. The mission team gave him one of their full-drape, ceiling-to-floor mosquito nets and set it up for him before they left.

The first priority of Asas de Socorro was the salvation of souls. Every mission to treat bodies carried out the example of Jesus, who showed through healing that God cares for and loves all people.

One of the six villages on this trip, Terra Nova, received the clinic team for the first time. A worship service was held outdoors. Without the ambiance of stained-glass windows and soft organ music, Pastor João José made an altar call, and eighteen people accepted Jesus as Lord. A total of twenty-two people made that commitment during the entire mission. And that, for the Asas de Socorro team, made the effort worthwhile.

My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity.
Proverbs 3: 1-2

Chapter Thirteen

Juruá

6-10 May, 2003

Juruá, a town just experiencing evangelism among its 5,000 people, surprised the missionaries, doctors, and dentists of Asas de Socorro. The team expected the town would be further advanced than small river villages in some of the identifying marks of civilization—education, health and sanitary practices, and social structure. Found, instead, was a case study of what happened when a colony of humans grew up without God.

The mission team, organized and conducted jointly with Southern Baptist missionaries Mildred Verbeck and Lynn Olmstead, arrived on a bare landing strip in the middle of a field of red mud. Dr. Otinara, Dentist Iluska, Dr. Flavio Ribas, and his sister, Dentista Monalisa Ribas Longhi, accompanied our own Asas de Socorro dentist and organizer, Dr. Marco Manzano and missionary pilots Wilson Kannenberg and Darrel Carver. Marco's very young daughter Giovana also went along, getting early indoctrination into missionary

life.

New dental equipment purchased by the donation of three thousand dollars from Aldersgate United Methodist Church of Chesapeake, Virginia, went on its third voyage. Solar panels recharged a battery for the dental drill. Dentists never ran out of power with this efficient system, a problem in earlier missions. The spray and suction features offered further advantages over the old system. These parts all packed away neatly into easily carried satchels and one well-organized roller bag. The savings in cargo roughly equaled the body weight of one Brazilian nurse.

Dr. Flavio worked twelve to fifteen hours in the tropical heat. Though a state clinic operated in the town, the citizens exhibited abysmal health. Most of the women had multiple venereal diseases due to child and adult prostitution and rampant immorality.

When Dr. Flavio returned to the Carvers' home after the mission, Lee had to pull information from him.

“Did you find AIDS in the community?”

“No, but if it should enter this town, it would spread like wildfire and decimate the population.”

“Did any particular type of disease occur more frequently than usual?”

Dr. Flavio shuddered and dropped his head. “Skin.” He left to her imagination what he had seen.

The clinic occupied two rooms of the public school, just across the street from the state hospital, which had so many empty rooms that the team slept there in airconditioned patient rooms. The sick were everywhere, but they weren't being treated by the government. Some theorized that trust in the state clinic ran low.

Expecting the dental health of the people to be better than in the jungle river villages, the team found it worse. Children of age three already had a mouth full of rotten teeth. The people not only ate the pure starch manioc and didn't brush their teeth, but they also had candies and snacks in Juruá. Adults had such poor teeth that the dentists had to limit the number they pulled to the very worst.

The Baptist pastor, Albino, worked with the missionaries in evangelism and received free medical care himself. Pastor Albino had endured constant pressure from certain elements in the community for being Protestant. His landlord had been threatened and intimidated by his own church, and so had just kicked the pastor's family out of a rented house. The family temporarily moved into a single room house without electricity, water, or a bathroom. A collateral effect of the mission was to encourage this beleaguered pastor.

Lynn had inspiring words for the team, reminding them that the Gospel had only recently arrived in Juruá. A consistent observation of missionaries was that as people came to know God and experience salvation through Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they did become "new creatures." Their personal and social relationships improved, and they became cleaner and healthier. As it was, girls as young as twelve began earning money for the family as prostitutes to the river boat traffic. Correcting this one behavior would go far in improving the health of the community.

Dr. Flavio was surprised at the unusually good health of a forty-eight-year-old patient. When he commented, she motioned to her mother, age seventy-

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three, also in very good health.

Reaching that age in that area was unusual. Interested, Dr. Flavio asked the older woman, “What do you *eat* that makes you so healthy?”

With a gentle smile she responded, “We’re Christians.”

*He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed,
miracles that cannot be counted. Job 5:9*

Chapter Fourteen

*Manaquirí Clinical Mission
July 22 & 23, 2004*

Early patients arrived for the mission clinic at a small lakeside community near Manaquirí, at the site of an Assembly of God church with only a few members. The last time Darrel had been here, the water level had surged right up to the entrance door of the church. Today the area was hot and dry.

To compensate for the stifling heat, doctors set up their consultations beneath the trees. Since two doctors served on the team, Dr. Jessica treated the girls and women while American missionary Dr. Mark Thompson, from the Baptist Hospital in Santo Domingo do Iça, treated the boys and men.

A Brazilian pharmacy donated many medicines brought by the team. Sometimes medicines almost out of date—but not quite—were given by pharmaceutical groups. Since Asas had to discard all expired treatments, the narrow time range created a last-minute

tension to many missions. Others had been purchased at special prices by Asas de Socorro. As prescribed by the team doctors, they were given without cost to the patients.

Inside the church, the healers and evangelists were greeted by paper chains and banners strung along the rafters and balloons tied to the side posts. Dentists Hereri and Leonardo set up their folding patient chairs. They connected drills power cords to the solar battery chargers. Hereri and Leonardo treated over forty patients that day. Crowding rose to the maximum when a heavy tropical tempest moved over the area and the doctors and pharmacy also had to be moved inside the church.

Wilson Kannenberg, missionary pilot and Asas de Socorro's Manaus Sector chief, kept records on all the patients. If the government ever took over the care of the people, these records would be given to that service.

As Dr. Jessica processed the morning's female patients, a woman rushed her small granddaughter to the rough plank bench under the trees. Dr. Jessica rose from her small chair and table to examine the child.

"A scorpion stung her." The anguished grandmother held a cool cloth to her precious girl's forehead.

Small, about ten years old, she suffered extreme pain. The weak, pale girl leaned on her grandmother. The villagers knew such a sting hurt terribly and might even kill a child.

The clinic team prayed for her a few yards away.



Without anti-venom, the doctor had little to offer except analgesic pain relief. The girl returned

to her cabin to rest. Later that afternoon, she ran and played with the other girls as if nothing had happened. The team gave praise to God for yet another supernatural healing.

Darrel and Lee had no doubt even before their missionary years that God was still in the miracle business. Both had frequent evidence of His acting in real time to assist, protect, and further the purposes of His kingdom in ways that can only be understood as supernatural. They would never know all the times they benefitted from His special defenses, but sometimes an event occurred that had His fingerprints all over it.

When the Cessna brought the Caravan to South America and leased it for ninety days as a sales demo (see Chapter 10), the deal included their clearing the plane through Brazilian customs, having it registered, and performing any maintenance necessary to restore it to like-new condition.

The airport for aircraft nationalization in Campinas lay a short hop from São Paulo. The plane sat on the ramp in tropical weather for two months until it was cleared. Wilson and Darrel flew commercially from Manaus to fetch the Caravan. In the preflight, they spotted a hydraulic leak around the front “gear,” where the wheels protruded from the floats for landing on the ground.

To prevent an emergency in case the wheels wouldn’t come back down, they left them extended for the forty minute flight to the big city. TAM mechanics repaired the leak with the plane in their hangar, then towed the Caravan outside to the ramp in front. They didn’t tie the plane down as they should have, but only chocked the wheels.

That night an enormous tropical storm came through and collapsed the hangar, wrecking every aircraft inside. Only God's plane was spared. The heavy load of water which had collected in the floats prevented it from blowing away, and no wind-blown debris hit its delicate skin.

Darrel was unloading the Caravan on land in too great a hurry one day. Into the plane's midsection he went, down three steps to the floats, handing the cargo to someone about four feet below on the ground, and inside again for the next load.

As he backed out, his foot slipped on the rung. Arms flailing, he tried to regain balance. A fall from that height could be dangerous. His leg went through the ladder, and his tailbone landed full force on the rung.

All work stopped with a gasp. Darrel grabbed hold of the metal structure. For a moment he had no sensation below the waist and feared spinal damage.

Wilson rushed to help. "Are you okay? Here, let me help you."

"Just give me a minute." The fall had stunned his lower body.

"Does it hurt?" Standing by on the float, Wilson didn't rush him to move.

"My coccyx has started to tingle. It doesn't hurt, but I'm not sure Give me a hand."

Darrel extracted himself from the ladder. He tested his legs and they held. Beginning to move more freely, he moved about as feeling returned.

Wilson laughed. "Someday we're going to meet our guardian angels in heaven, and they're going to be all

beat up, with broken wings and their halos hanging to the side.”

Feeling especially blessed, Darrel shook off the numbness and resumed the job.

At home that night, he related the experience to Lee and asked her to check for scrapes or bruises. No evidence of the accident appeared. No red marks, no bruises.

They praised God for intervening.

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Mark 16:15

Chapter Fifteen

April 5-8, 2006

The village of Lazaro, Township of Novo Airão

On the Rio Jaú, State of Amazonas, Brazil

The mission to several villages of the Rio Jaú united the best efforts of the Central Presbyterian Church of Manaus, Amazonas, and Asas de Socorro. Asas had never done a mission to this river area before.

Combining personnel, medicines, medical machinery, the Presbyterian boat and its crew, the Asas plane and pilots, and massive quantities of prayer, the team was inserted into the village of Lazaro on April 5th for a harrowing adventure.

A half dozen thatched houses on stilts formed a line over the hard-packed earth. The community room in the middle, also thatched and stilted, had no walls. The team set up a medical and dental clinic there with overtones of Vacation Bible School.

Mara Dantas, an Asas de Socorro missionary social

worker, organized and ran the pharmacy. Pastor Raimundo circulated among the villagers by day and preached at night. Dr. Sofia and Dr. Mario went to work on teeth, using the ultra-light equipment recently donated from the United States. They also gave toothbrushing lessons to the whole village with the assistance of a dynamic missionary, Ivanete, who recorded the fun on video.



On the first day in Lazaro, Darrel noticed a single wild duckling (*pato da mata*) wandering about aimlessly. He picked

it up and petted it while chatting with local children. From that moment, Darrel was the duckling's mother. It followed him everywhere he went.



Word was out that free medical help had come to the settlement. Three thatch-roofed boats, roped together, approached the bank. A pregnant woman needed medical

treatment and received it in the name of Jesus. This family group were harvesters of Brazil nuts, which spread over the floor of the shallow, flat-bottomed boat.

Starting normally enough from the village of Lazaro, the team set up a typical medical, dental, and evangelical clinic. After a masterful water landing on the river Jaú, the pilots had to leave the plane at that settlement. The waterway twisted too much for it to land and take off farther upriver. The clinic continued to the rest of the villages by boat. All the equipment, medicines, and personnel went off into the night on one relatively small vessel with the baby duck forlornly left behind.

Asunta and Jair, at the helm, worked with their adult sons Jailson and Jaime, who followed God's calling right in their wake. Asunta had also been on many missions in the Caravan from Darrel's earliest days with Asas. This dedicated missionary family shared the hope of Christ up and down the Rio Negro.

As night fell, missionaries stretched out in hammocks strung across the deck. No room existed for modesty. Side by side, they swung against each other as a fierce storm built up and the boat rocked and chugged up the river.

Various times during the night, the rudder bogged in river plants and debris and had to be freed. Men hopped into the dark water to pull the twisted mess away, careful always not to cut themselves in the process. Voracious piranhas, attracted by the slightest presence of blood, would attack by the hundreds and thousands and consume a body in minutes. Lookouts scanned the surface with lights to reveal reflective eyes of jacaré, the Amazon crocodile, but no one knew how many

swam with the snakes below.

At one point during the exhausting night, the steering chain broke, causing the boat to run into the bank. The well-prepared crew replaced it and climbed aboard to continue the journey.

Being high water season with whole trees underwater, the propeller fouled in submerged treetops. The crew struggled for over an hour in the storm to free the vessel, amid lightning bolts and peals of thunder. The boat tossed in the river and knocked against the shore in the darkest night. At last, the waterlogged and fatigued crew pulled her loose and continued upriver to Tambor.

Dr. Wilma went ashore there and examined all who came for free care. The dental clinic remained on the boat, now cleared of the hammocks, so that the heavy equipment would not have to be carried up the long, slippery stairs.

Pilots Darrel Carver and Paul Bachmann found various ways to assist that didn't require wings. They filtered drinking water, sterilized dental instruments, set up and took down dental equipment, and served as beasts of burden.

Breakfast in Tambor was a regal event: hot coffee with lots of milk and sugar, stacks of something like a jungle granola bar called *pé de moleca*, simple homemade cake, rolls and dry crackers (which had to be bought from a trade boat), various fruits and fruit juices, sautéed bananas, and manioc in at least four forms.

As the clinics continued to villages along the river, so did the rain. Brilliant orange plastic tarps were flipped down on the boat's sides, and the dentists turned

on their miner's headlamps for light enough to continue drilling and pulling teeth.

A steep climb on steps made of wet limbs to a no-name village proved perilous to the team. Walking down, carrying a load of equipment back to the boat, Darrel fell hard but didn't break anything. He finished tired, stiff, and sore, but with the excitement he always had after God let him in on a really special adventure.

The boat plied the water, inquiring at every population group whether anyone needed medical or dental treatment. In driving rain, the team stopped at a single house where a neighbor said someone was sick. They made a friend, gave witness to God, prayed with the patient, and the boat continued through the night on its return toward Lazaro.

Another nameless village centered around one unusually attractive, two-level home. The owner invited the entire clinic to move in—Dr. Wilma's medical practice, both dentists, and the pharmacy. Sick people flowed out of the jungle growth for treatment.

When the boat returned to Lazaro and the weary team climbed up the bank, the duckling recognized Darrel and continued to follow him through the village. Darrel rewarded his feathered friend with more cuddling and gentle strokes on his soft baby feathers.

The following morning, the Asas de Socorro team bid farewell to the Presbyterian boat family. Darrel and Paul directed the loading, pre-flighted, and called the team on board. The last item on the check list was prayer.

After taxiing out to the end of the water runway, the plane built up speed, spraying water up both sides until the moment of take-off. Five days distant by boat, the

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jungle world of Lazaro and the Jaú River lay an hour and fifteen minutes from Manaus by Caravan. Home to hot showers and ice water before lunch, the team would sleep in beds that night.

1. [Luke 5:4](#)

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep **water**, and let down the nets for a catch.”

Chapter Sixteen

March, 2006
Rio Negro



In 2003, Gary Crawford, pastor of Westside Baptist Church in Gainesville, Florida, Navy Commander (ret.) Derek George, and businessman Joe Fincher came to Manaus and bought a luxury bass fishing boat. They converted it into an evangelical mission boat to ply the waters of Amazonia with the Good News of Jesus

Christ. This boat, the *Marco Polo*, embodies Amazon Vision Ministries.

Teams—mostly Americans—conducted evangelism, discipleship, children’s activities, as well as providing medical and dental services. These volunteers flew down at personal expense on regular airlines to work in the Amazon River Basin. Brazilian professionals were an integral part of the team, especially because an American doctor without a Brazilian license to practice must act as the assistant to a Brazilian doctor or nurse. Lee Carver was privileged to serve as a translator on one such voyage.

American cardiologist Dr. Dave put in a week of family medicine on this trip. Technically, he was assisting the Brazilian nurse Elionaia, or “Naia,” a registered nurse from an area directly across the Amazon River from Manaus.

Derek brought a box of EvangeCubes from the States as an evangelistic tool. These colorful cubes open to illustrations of the need for Jesus Christ and the steps to accept Him as Lord. As the ship got underway from Manaus on the way to its mission target area, Derek reviewed the use of an EvangeCube with several people in the dining room. Naia listened through a translator. The final step was to encourage the person receiving the plan of salvation to pray to receive Christ. When she asked if she could pray this prayer, Derek did a double back flip! He assumed she was already a believer. The planner of this mission trip, however, had reached out in desperation for any Brazilian nurse who would, for pay, come on the voyage. Otherwise, Dr. Dave couldn’t practice medicine.

From the moment of Naia's confession of faith until nearly midnight, Derek and others talked through translators to begin the process of helping her unload old religious baggage. Reared in a church with many non-biblical, hypercritical teachings, she had rejected church participation as a teenager.

As the Marco Polo's powerful engines pushed the team to its first village stop, word passed along the decks that the mission already had its first convert. Naia was Lee's roommate that week, so they had a great bonding and discipling experience together. The friendship continued after their return to Manaus, as Naia led her sweetheart to God.

Rarely do the American volunteers speak much Portuguese, so Amazon Vision Ministries had to secure four or five paid translators for the whole team's activities. Nadyr and her daughter Livia were Brazilian translators who worked closely with Dr. Dave, since he spoke no Portuguese. Lee was free. But then, you get what you pay for. And she was in for the ride of a lifetime.

Always air conditioned, the one large socializing space was the dining room, which had a cold water dispenser and hot coffee standing ready. Meals were a delight. In the galley below, a full-time cook prepared food bought in Manaus. Though not exactly a Viking Cruise, the travelers were served and cleaned up after.

Seventeen air conditioned staterooms, with two or three bunk beds each, had their own miniature bathrooms. Volunteers retreated to the ship for lunch and might pass the heat of the afternoon with a short nap. The schedule also allowed a supper break of about two hours before the evening service on land.

Compared to the kind of missions Darrel did and the food he ate, participants lived in the very lap of luxury.

As the *Marco Polo* churned toward the first village, travelers counted and bagged up children's vitamins, brought down by the team, to issue during the clinics. The vitamins were not commercially available in Manaus, probably not in Brazil. Lee often returned from furlough in the States with vitamins for the children of household employees.

The *Marco Polo* continued from village to village, giving Lee an intimate view of the life of the river people, *riberinhos*. Washing of clothes, bathing, and swimming, and fish cleaning happened off the same pier. One fortunate settlement had a pump to deliver river water for drinking. That didn't make it safe.

Houses varied between villages, but one style dominated in each settlement. They might be wood plank, usually bare of paint or decoration, with tin or thatched roofs. At one stop, the houses had thatched walls and roofs. A line of homes on stilts faced the water with little space between, and some sort of un-walled community room or school perched in the row. Rickety stairs ran down a steep bank to the river, which swelled and fell up to sixty feet every year. Rainy season or less-rainy season, it was always hot.

One day a strong, young man came to the clinic, held in a two-room schoolhouse, with his hand in a towel. He grimaced as he unwrapped his trembling fingers. Two days before, he had been stacking and carrying wood when a heavy piece fell on his finger and took off the end down to the bone. The large, open wound was severely infected. Kim, an American RN, tediously and carefully cleaned the area while Livia

assisted and translated. Fortunately, the traveling pharmacy had Novocain.

She and Dr. Dave gave follow-up treatment the next day, administered antibiotics, and instructed the patient in the cleaning and care of the damaged finger. The *Marco Polo* had docked at his village in time to save his finger and probably his life.

The sole doctor for so many patients, Dr. Dave continued through the heat. In one village, Dr. Dave had a small air conditioned room. Electricity was usually quite limited. Privacy, too. A far better medical translator than Lee, Livia proved to be quick and effective in both languages. Though she grew up in Manaus, she was a college student in Florida.

Dr. Mario, a dedicated Christian dentist, joined the voyage in Novo Airão. He lived in Manaus, alternating two weeks with his family and two weeks practicing in river villages. June, a dental hygienist from Florida, assisted him and did a tremendous job of deep cleaning teeth that had rarely seen a toothbrush. Though Dr. Mario spoke little English and June spoke no Portuguese, they worked well together, rarely needing translation.

When the *Marco Polo* arrived at a new village area, team members typically went by motorboat to scattered houses to tell residents we were there with free medical and dental services, evening worship, and fun classes for children all day.

Lee was on a search and tell trip that found an eighty-five-year-old man working in his fields on a particularly hot day. A Christian believer, he was proud he had never been to a doctor in his life. But he agreed to come to the service the next day if we would take a

picture of him with his grandson and give him a print when he came. Lee took the photo, Derek made the print on the ship, and the fellow and his grandson did come for the worship service.

A powerful drama wordlessly presented Christ's sacrifice and the redemption of man. No one missed the point. Sadly, one of the actors got sick during the week and the next village didn't get to see the presentation.

Activities similar to Vacation Bible School were offered most afternoons in the villages. American young people shared games, balls, beads, activities, Bible story coloring books, and endless energy. Oh, yes, and animal crackers, which brought over a crowd of older siblings.

About two thirds of any village was children, and they loved the attention given by the lovely college students. Lee translated for those activities a couple of days, but often no translation was needed.

Kids everywhere loved face painting. Then the kids wanted to paint the teachers, and the activity spread through the settlement for a couple of hours, not limited to faces.

Jim, a grandfather from Florida, enjoyed making friends with the little ones. Again, love needed no translation. He made a photo collection of beautiful *riberinho* children.

Boxes of used eyeglasses and several dozen "readers" rode among the boat's donated materials. Discovering this, Lee gave eyeglass tests. Not eye tests. "Try to read this." She held up a page of print.

Adults often replied, "I can't read."

"Well, do the lines look clearer?"

An elderly woman came up with a better test. She ran home, just a couple of houses away, and got a needle and thread. Unable to read, she needed to be able to thread her needle and sew. She threaded her needle until she found the best glasses for her own vision. Then she loaned her eyeglass testers—needle and thread—to other women, though men refused that method. The glasses were given free to all who found a helpful pair.

As a translator, whenever Lee didn't have a specific job, she went anywhere she could converse with villagers, especially adults. That was usually on a schoolroom porch or bench waiting to see a doctor or dentist. She typically took an EvangeCube as a picture device to talk to people about salvation through Jesus.

She had been talking to three young women, not especially aware of the twelve-year-old girl at the far end of the porch. The women all assured her that they had salvation in Jesus. Two were evangelicals, one Catholic, and all confident of their faith. Nevertheless, they listened to her presentation of the gospel. Curious about the colorful cube, they followed the steps.

When Lee came to the part about how salvation through Jesus is a free gift and yet it must be accepted by each individual, she saw great anxiety on the face of the young girl. Lee asked her if she had ever accepted that gift, and she said she had not. Lee asked her if she wanted to accept Jesus' gift of salvation for herself today, and she nodded yes.

Crossing to her side, Lee asked her name.
“Angelinha.”

Lee talked with her quietly to be sure she was understanding and not being pushed. Right there on the

porch, she prayed a simple prayer recognizing that she was a sinner in need of God's forgiveness and salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. She asked God to come into her life.

A few chairs away sat the Presbyterian pastor of that village. Angelinha sometimes went to his church. Lee took comfort in turning the girl over to him for further care and spiritual growth, knowing that the boat would leave the next day and she would probably never see her again.

At the end of the week, the team returned to America with a week's worth of stories, photos, and memorable events. Lee went home feeling blessed beyond measure. And the *Marco Polo* continued to ply the dark waters, fulfilling its motto, "Bringing the hope of Christ to the Amazon Basin."

Would you like to go on a trip like this one? All the contact information is at www.AmazonVisionMinistries.com .

See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. Matthew 18:10

Chapter Seventeen: Quesia

Darrel and Wilson co-piloted a mission team to Beirurí, a village of some two hundred houses on the Purus River. A cardiologist from Florida, Dr. Jay Fricker, a guest in Darrel's home following a week on the *Marco Polo*, served the *riverinhos* from this airplane-based outreach.

As the medical and evangelistic programs waged into the morning, a man paddled up to the river pier with a woman and child. With a wave toward the distant jungle, he said he had come from their tiny settlement across the river and farther up a creek.

The woman, Lydia, was seven months pregnant with their thirteenth child. Clinging to her was a frail, underdeveloped daughter. "This is Quesia. She was born with a heart problem. We took her to a government clinic when she was newborn. The doctor said she needed surgery, but not until she was two years old. Her

second birthday is today, so I've brought her for treatment."

Quesia cried weakly as Dr. Fricker coerced her from her mother's arms. Her limbs were like skin-covered twigs with knobs for joints. She weighed so little and wasn't able to stand alone, but her large, dark eyes took in everything.

With nothing more sophisticated than a stethoscope, he listened to her heart and lungs. As gently as possible, he recommended to the parents through a translator that Quesia have surgery right away.

He located the pilots. "Quesia's situation is critical. Her congenital condition, Tetralogy of Fallot, means that the heart is deformed, certain blood vessels are routed incorrectly, and blood circulation to her lungs is completely inadequate. The lungs are underdeveloped and ineffective in oxygenating the body. In the U.S. we would have performed corrective surgery at birth. Certainly before the age of two. I'm surprised she lived this long."

The concern of the pilots, both tender-hearted fathers, played on their faces as they considered options.

Wilson's perpetual smile dimmed. "What do you suggest?"

Dr. Fricker could do nothing for her in a camp-style clinic. "Can we take Quesia and one of her parents back to Manaus with us?"

Wilson nodded. "All medical care is free to Brazilians. Sometimes you have to wait a long time to get it, though." He proposed the trip to Quesia's parents.

The father, Antonio, took the situation in stride. “Her mother should go with her. We have eleven children at home. The older ones will care for the rest of the family. I must stay because I have a job.”

“Yes? What do you do?” Wilson knew few villagers worked other than hunting and fishing.

“I take children to school in the next village, out and back five days a week.” As in most back-water settlements, students had to go elsewhere for education above the fourth grade. “I have a *rabeta*.” He smiled and puffed his chest. The one-cylinder diesel engine mounted on his canoe beat rowing any day. Its long shaft, which angled out to the water behind the boat, gave the motor the name “tail.”

At one side, Darrel considered where he would take the Lydia and Quesia, and their need for hospitality and transportation. Dr. Fricker would be flying to Florida in a day or so, which freed a bedroom in their home. Lee could drive the mother and child to medical services. From there on the river, he had no way of telling her he was bringing a seriously ill child and her mother to be houseguests.

Lee received Darrel’s call from the airport on Saturday after the team returned to Manaus with Lydia and Quesia. Accustomed to offering hospitality to



Americans and modern Brazilians, she had less than an

hour to plan for the needs of the mother and child from a primitive village.

The only available bedroom, beyond luxurious for Lydia, included a private bathroom and window air conditioner. Simple electric lights and wood floors would be novel for them.

She greeted her husband and guests, including Dr. Dave, Quesia, and her mother.

Dr. Dave and Derek George took the once-a-week flight home to Florida on Sunday. The house calmed enough that she turned to the specific needs of her visitors from the jungle. "What would you like to eat?"

"Anything. Rice, beans. Quesia eats milk biscuits."

"But you probably eat a lot of fish, don't you?" Lee couldn't provide the wild animals of the tropical forest, the *mata*, nor did she have any interest in doing so. They seemed uninterested in beef or pork. She persisted in questioning about their preferences, unaware that the family rarely enjoyed even a wild-ranging chicken.

Lydia's dropped shoulders and avoidance of eye contact communicated her humility and even discomfort in this situation. "When we catch fish, we eat fish. When we don't..." She shrugged. Tired lines on her thin face and a worried brow reminded Lee of the burden this mother had borne every day for two years.

Lee put fish on the shopping list for Monday. But first she had to get Quesia to the public children's hospital. Unfolding a map of the meandering megalopolis of two million people, she located the address in Cachoeirinha. In these days before GPS for city driving, her heart rate jumped just thinking about navigating to that area. Darrel would be working at the

hangar on the far edge of town. The job was hers to perform. They had already prayed together before rising that morning, and again in asking a blessing on their breakfast. This was different. “Lord, please show me the way and deliver us safely. Provide the words in Portuguese for me and the medical help Quesia needs.”

Bouncing along with the map folded to show segments from her home to the hospital, Lee discovered the hospital in less than an hour. Ducking about the rough streets, they found a parking place on a rocky side road and walked to the main entry.

Parents waited with children on molded plastic chairs in the crowded room. Sick children with pitiful cries lined the walls. No receptionist attended, but a window with a round hole gave hope that someone might register patients. Lee, with typical American impatience, attempted to attract the attention of a nurse. Despite her bulldog tenacity and absolute refusal to be ignored, the trio was passed about, left sitting, and finally repeated their plea for immediate treatment to a harried nurse who wrote some details on a form.

Being the squeakiest wheel in their morning, she eventually was directed to a tiny office with too many filing cabinets and one woman who was somehow part of the administration of the hospital. Again Lee motioned to Quesia, clinging to her pregnant mother. In her best attempt to explain the deadly medical condition in Portuguese, she begged for help.

The assistant, no doubt giving Lee an audience because she was a well-dressed American—that is, her clothing was not torn or faded—started the application process. Sitting behind a worn metal desk, she asked for Quesia’s address and phone number.

Lydia spoke of a settlement with no name, up a creek which appeared on no maps. She had no phone. In fact, she had no electricity.

The assistant shifted on her squeaky chair. “What is the postal code?”

“We don’t get mail. It’s possible if we take the canoe to a town, but ... Usually the mayor holds mail until we hear there’s a letter. We don’t have a postal code.”

The director huffed and rattled the papers. She spoke to Lee, who perched on the edge of a plastic shell chair. “I can’t admit her to the hospital if she doesn’t have an address.” Her grating voice and piercing gaze conveyed a dead end to the child’s treatment.

After the search through heavy traffic for the clinic and a long wait, Lee’s hands trembled not just with impatience, but with anger. “Do you mean to tell me this child could die for lack of a zip code?”

Standing to her full height of maybe five feet, the admissions assistant inhaled until she looked as if she might inflate and explode. Lee knew she had gone too far, had raised her voice to the wrong person, and they could be escorted away by the hospital’s equivalent of a bouncer.

“That’s exactly what the problem is!” The woman slapped the admission forms with her free hand. “I’ve been working in the public health system for fifteen years, and I’m so tired of trying to rationalize our policies and struggle to get patients treated. This must change. The patient is more important than the paperwork.”

In a sudden reversal, Lee recognized the frustration of this caring, over-burdened social service worker. Stymied by the system, she exploded against it.

The assistant took the kind of breath during which a person counts to ten and wills herself to be calm. She sat down with the paperwork again and picked up her ball point pen. “Is Quesia living at your house?”

“Yes, she is this week.” Lee avoided lying, hoping to lead to treatment and not an arrest.

“Would you be willing to let her use your address for the admission forms?”

“Yes, of course, if I can do that.”

The woman restarted the process. Inserting Lee’s address and phone number, she completed the admission and soon escorted Quesia and her mother deeper into the maze of corridors.

Not allowed to follow, Lee left telephone tokens and some cash Lydia, urging her to call when she knew more.

Lee returned from the hospital and grocery shopping. Her maid put away the ironing board and passed through the kitchen as Lee began cooking dinner. “Lydia called while you were out. She’s going to stay at the hospital as long as Quesia is there. She’ll sleep on the floor in the ward, and one of the other mothers will bring her food from the cafeteria.”

“If there’s a cafeteria, why doesn’t she take a break and go eat her meals there?”

“She won’t leave Quesia. She asked if you would bring her bag and a blanket or something warm to wear. The hospital is very cold, and she doesn’t like air conditioning.”

Lee took a sandwich and fruit the following morning. The hospital administration required her to wait while they got a message to Lydia, because only relatives could go to the ward. They met in a hallway for a few moments. Fortunately, Quesia was asleep.

The mother looked like she had been dragged down forty miles of bad road. She had only slept on the cold floor or in a straight, hard chair. “The ward has ten children. They cry all night. One little boy has pneumonia. Another gets out of bed, roams around, and pulls off his oxygen tubes. A girl in the bed next to Quesia vomited for hours.”

“These children are in the ward with Quesia?” The staggering possibilities of cross-infection boggled Lee’s imagination.

“Yes, and some of them have no one to feed them or change their diapers.”

“Don’t the nurses do that?”

“One nurse sits at a desk in the next room. Sometimes she changes bandages or fixes the tubes that go into the children’s arms. They don’t change or feed the children.”

Lee happened to be at the hospital two days later when a doctor had given orders for Quesia to be sent by ambulance to another hospital. They waited two hours for transportation, which was a small paneled truck with a cot in back. Not air conditioned, without a lick of medical equipment, it carried Quesia, with Lydia bent double beside her, and a young man in dirty whites. Lee followed in her car.

Before the weekend, Lydia called. “Can you come pick us up? They are finished with the tests, and want you to call a specialist for an appointment.”

Quesia was as blue-lipped, blue-fingered, and weak as ever when Lee fetched her. Settled back into the guest room, she returned to sleeping or clinging to her mother, and eating only plain milk crackers or perhaps a spoon of white rice. Like a frail baby bird, she could do nothing for herself.

Calling the clinic of specialists, Lee was pleased to get an appointment in a few days. Yet every time she looked at the child, she feared Quesia might die before Friday.

Again she plotted on the map to a distant area of the city. She put Lydia and Quesia off at the entry, then parked and ran through a tropical downpour. The waiting room, constructed of cheap, pre-fab materials, blasted cold air on her wet shoulders.

Ushered to the pediatric cardiologist's office, the three soon reviewed the case with a tall, slender cardiologist with soft blue eyes. Unusual for a Brazilian.

He discussed Quesia's medical records in a gentle voice before asking permission to examine her by sonogram. Her mother nodded slightly, probably having no idea what the enormous white machine would do to her daughter.

The doctor not only allowed Lee to remain during the test, he spoke to her in English and seemed to appreciate that she had an emotional investment in the tiny child. He paused the test at times to make photographs and point to the monitor, explaining the shadows and what they portended for her life.

Quesia lay still, her dark eyes darting from the doctor's hands to her mother and sometimes to the

monitor's images of her heart. If she was afraid, she did not show it.

“Quesia must have open-heart surgery.” His tone was gentle but grave. “There are serious risks, but she will not live without surgery.”

Lydia nodded. She did not cry. She did not question the doctor or the process.

“Mrs. Carver, I'll prepare a written report and copies of the images by Monday. Please come get them and take them to the children's hospital. Then she will have to wait, probably a few months, maybe as long as a year, to get a slot for surgery. I don't do the surgery myself.”

Lee and Lydia thanked him, and Quesia nestled back into the place she fit against her mother's shoulder.

The doctor took a moment to discuss the case with Lee on Monday, when she returned alone for the folder of images and medical report. “I've earmarked Quesia's case as urgent. She doesn't have long Thank you for what you're doing for this child. I hope she receives the surgery in time.”

A strange bureaucracy determined how many of what type of surgery each community was allowed per year and in what municipality of the State of Amazonas they would be performed. Having the doctor's recommendation of the highest urgency helped, but Lydia was told the surgery would not be scheduled for six months to a year.

Lydia waited at Lee's home for six weeks before Asas de Socorro had another mission opportunity to take her and the child to their distant village. They simply couldn't afford to fly a free air taxi. The trip by

riverboat and canoe took at least four days, and was considered a deadly risk for the child.

Derek George, Dr. Dave, and many people attached to the Florida boat mission, AVM, prayed while Quesia's life clock ran down. Lee waited and prayed, and sometimes called the one social service number she might have heard something.

After about three months an urgent response came. They were to take Quesia to the city of Bélem for surgery as soon as possible. Belém, a city of a million people, lay much farther east on the Amazon River delta.

Lee put into operation what she had learned about reaching a jungle settlement without phones: she called a radio station which broadcast over the sea of trees and rivers. At a certain time each day, personal messages were beamed to the villages and passed from there by word of mouth. No answering message returned. She had no assurance the words reached their target.

It must have been the prayer that ordained a mission flight at exactly the time needed to bring Quesia to Manaus, because that schedule had been planned for months. Since Lydia neared delivery of her thirteenth child, Quesia's father, Antonio, brought her by canoe to the plane. They were guests at the Carvers' home for a few days before taking a commercial flight from Manaus to Bélem, this last at government expense.

Tatiana and Geraldo, who managed flight operations of Asas de Socorro in that city, met the plane. They took Quesia to the hospital for surgery and provided hospitality for her father.

Tatiana, a nurse, phoned Lee following the operation. She had talked to the surgeon and was

alarmed and confused by what he revealed. “The surgeon here did not perform the procedure recommended by the doctors in Manaus. Instead, he only provided improved arterial support to the lungs. The blood flow will still circulate inadequately oxygenated blood. He wants her to return in a year to correct the heart structure.”

Lee was aghast. All these months, all the paperwork and examinations, all the waiting and prayer, and the surgeon didn’t follow the plan. She paced and fumed and raged at the walls. Not at God. He had done his part. Everything they had prayed for came to pass except for the final decision of a surgeon in another city who opened Quesia’s tiny chest and backed out too soon.

Quesia returned to her cottage on the creek beyond the river. At first, her father passed words back to the city that her color was better. She was not so blue, and she had more energy.

Her father called Lee from the nearest village. “Quesia isn’t doing well. She’s very weak.”

“There’s nothing I can do, Seu Antonio. We can’t send the plane to pick up Quesia.” Asas de Socorro couldn’t afford a med evac flight for the child unless they knew the municipality would pay about a thousand dollars toward the flight cost. She never mentioned that saving his daughter’s life came down to the expense of the rescue.

He said nothing over the crackle of the lines.

“How is your wife? Did she have the baby?”

“Yes, the new baby is fine. It’s a boy. His heart is good.”

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“I’m so glad.” There was nothing more she could say. No hope she to extend. The mission plane couldn’t return to the village where the saga of Quesia began.

Antonio phoned again a week later. Quesia had died. Her struggle had ended. The child, born with so little chance of life on earth, now rested in the arms of God.

*Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am faint; heal me,
Lord, for my bones are in agony. Psalm 6:2*

Chapter Eighteen—Malaria

The motto of Asas de Socorro translates to “Giving wings to those who give their lives.” This was never more true than the support of Asas for two missionary women, Judy King and Cathy Abadur, who served in the indigenous Apuriná village for over thirty years. Judy, from the state of New Jersey, and Cathy, from Scotland, lived with the people, learned their language and recorded it for the first time. Over the next generation, they taught the Indians to read and write their own language and translated the entire Bible into Apuriná.

Malaria of two types devastated the population, especially after the use of DDT was discontinued. No safe and effective preventative existed, given that the best caused a wide range of side effects from permanent liver damage to temporary insanity. While short-term visitors to malarial areas usually took preventive medicines, the long-term use by missionaries was not recommended.

Judy and Cathy each suffered the disease well over forty times, often infected by both types simultaneously. Their doctors in Manaus and their home countries implored them not to return, especially after Judy developed heart disease. Driven to complete their translation and continue their ministry among the people, they dove repeatedly into those dangerous waters.

Darrel and fellow pilot Paul Bachmann had the privilege of transporting the first several hundred copies of the New Testament in the Apuriná language. They and other pilots had made frequent trips to insert and extract Judy and Cathy—with their dog and cat. Rice and beans, corrugated tin roofing for the church, clothing for the natives, and all manner of items flew with the missionaries on the Asas de Socorro plane.

A long-planned celebration accompanied the delivery of the New Testaments. Judy and Cathy packed coolers fresh beef, a rarity for the tribe, for a feast in the village. Fighting the severe alcohol problem in that area, they planned a high, holy event to praise God and thank Him for this momentous, powerful experience.

At their own expense, they purchased snacks, chips, and candy bars which jostled for space and weight allowance among the boxes of new Bibles. Brazilian Indians came as far as one hundred miles for the commemoration, taking days or weeks to arrive in canoes. Supporters from Cathy's and Judy's homes in Scotland and New Jersey boarded the Cessna Caravan for the last hop of their journey. Others had already arrived by triple-decked riverboat, the public bus system of the Amazon.

After the feast, the celebration went into the night with singing and preaching. Finally, the village slept—in hammocks, on floors, in the church, wherever they could.

Mosquitoes bit most at dawn and dusk. Although Darrel always applied repellent generously and draped a mosquito net over his hammock, he received many bites on that trip. Like other long-term Amazon residents, he wasn't taking the dangerous antimalarial

drug. He returned full of joy and missionary fervor which lasted until symptoms of an apparent virus began with high fever.

The next day the fever passed. Weakened and headachy, he fulfilled his commitment to deliver a missionary medical and dental team to a small community on the Madeira River.

On the return, Paul studied Darrel's flushed face and the way he hung against his seatbelt straps. "How do you feel?"

"I have a headache." He rubbed the top of his head. "I'm sort of hurting in my middle, but not like an upset stomach."

Paul patted from his own rib cage down to his waist. "Are you sore all around here?"

"Yes, even around on both sides."

"You better go to Tropical Hospital and get a malaria test."

Darrel arrived home tired and went to bed early after eating little supper. But the fever had lifted, and again he thought he had passed through a viral infection.

The nightmarish hours was spent in fitful sleep interspersed with fever and chills. When morning finally broke, he tossed back the sweaty sheets as Lee entered their bedroom. He barely had the energy to speak. "Lee, I need help. Please take me to a doctor."

"I've just been talking to Paul. He called to see how you were." Her voice broke, sounding as if tears were close. "I'm taking you to Tropical Hospital right now. Paul says their malaria clinic is already open, and he told me the whole process. Even where to park. Let me help you get dressed."

“I’m so relieved you have a plan. I was praying.” His weakness overwhelmed him. “I knew I had to do something, but I didn’t know what.”

He brushed his teeth and had no interest in breakfast.

She dressed quickly and skipped over her morning hair and makeup routine. “I expected you to fight me about going to the hospital.”

“I haven’t been this sick since I had appendicitis.” He allowed her to open doors for him and assist him to the car without the pretense of a manly protest.

Unsafe to drive, Darrel pointed the way through a twenty minute trip to the low, swimming-pool-green sprawl of Tropical Hospital’s buildings. They parked and followed signs to the malaria clinic receiving area. A counter ran along one end of the noisy room full of plastic chairs.

Staff at the bar glanced at Lee and Darrel and handed him a clipboard. “Have a seat, fill this out, and turn it in down there.” The woman pointed to the left end of the same counter.

He wrote answers to the most basic questions, nothing about insurance or cost or privacy. He crept back to the busy staff. The first person took his forms and the second grasped his finger and swabbed it with alcohol. The third stuck the finger and squeezed out a drop of blood onto a slide. Someone labeled the slide and gave him a green square of paper marked *157*.

“Have a seat and listen for your number.”

Occasionally, a staff member entered and called a long list of numbers. Her strident voice rattled over plastic surfaces louder than the wall-mounted TV spewing game show nonsense. She passed out cards,

other patients collected theirs and left. Within a half hour, his number was called with a dozen others.

He pushed off the chair and made his way to the front of the room.

The medical clerk said, “Positive. *Vivax*. Go outside, turn right on the walkway, into the next building, left turn, and hand this to the person at the desk.”

The card recorded the type of malaria, *Vivax*, which is less dangerous than *Parcifulus*. In the severity rating, he received only one slash of a plus mark. Three plus marks and you’re dead. If this was a light case of the less severe malaria, he didn’t want to experience a bad case.

Darrel soon discovered that his sixtieth birthday, just a few months before, gave him priority treatment. His name was called only forty-five minutes later, whereas some patients waited hours.

The doctor sat in a closet-size office at a scarred wooden desk. Barely into his twenties, he respectfully motioned Darrel and Lee to a couple of plastic molded chairs and asked the same questions Darrel had answered on the forms. After writing a prescription, he seemed interested in this American, especially after learning Darrel was a missionary pilot. He, too, was active in a church, and he voiced appreciation of Darrel’s work in Brazil.

“I have a flight scheduled later today, and I feel better now. Will I be okay to fly?”

The doctor hesitated, gathering a frown.

Lee rose, gathering her protective nature as if protect him from working. “Doctor, how sick is he going to be?”

“Well, there is the effect of the disease,” he spoke ponderously, “and then there is the effect of the medicine.”

The doctor said no more except to direct them to the hospital pharmacy. They shook hands. Darrel liked this young man and would have enjoyed talking missions with him if they met at church one Sunday. But not today. He hadn't the energy, and many sick people waited in the hall outside.

While the prescription was being filled, Lee called Paul from their only cell phone. “Hi, Paul. We got Darrel tested, and you were right. He has *Vivax*, but they caught it early. Darrel still thinks he's going on the flight with you today.” She listened for a moment and then handed the phone to him.

“Hi, Darrel. Sorry to hear about the malaria, but I'm not surprised. That's what I thought yesterday.”

“Yeah, I had kind of a bad night. I knew something was wrong. But I feel better now, so I'll see you for take-off at 10:30.”

“I may be able to get Wilson to go with me. Or just fly solo. It's a short hop.”

Darrel had never missed a flight for an illness. “But I think the fever is passing, and I'm in line to get the medicine right now. I can make the flight.”

“No, that's the way malaria is. You have cycles of fever and times when you don't feel so bad. But you need to go home, take the medicine, and rest. I'll call you tomorrow.”

His weakness became more profound, and delirium invaded his sleep. Tossing and sweating, then bundling up and shivering, a day and night passed in nausea and diarrhea. During fitful sleep, he tore a hole through the

sheet and became bound in confusion. Lee changed the sheets at least once a day, saying the pungent smell of death permeated their bedroom.

Lee attempted to research by Internet the care of a malarial patient. The tediously slow phone modem, subject to long pauses and connection drops, produced little. She found pictures of the type of mosquitos which deliver the parasite and magnifications of malarial blood slides. Characteristics of the fever pattern, liver damage, and mosquito eradication tips filled the pages, but nowhere appeared what to do if infected.

Only the most critical patients received hospitalization. If complications arose or the person became dehydrated, that option existed. Otherwise, the sick were cared for at home.

Darrel and Lee's Gideons group met early every Saturday. Lee called one of the wives and explained that she couldn't attend. She was scheduled to play piano for the morning service Sunday, however, and Darrel encouraged her to go as planned.

She returned from church, slipped into the bedroom, and spoke to him in the dark. "Cris and Manoel do Carmo and César and Regina are coming over at about two o'clock."

He groaned. "Here? I can't...."

"They want to tell me how to take care of you. They insisted."

"I don't feel like... I'll have to shave and shower."

"No, they're not coming for a social visit. You don't have to get out of bed. They say they're going to teach me what to cook for you, and everything I need to know to help you get well."

The two couples arrived with a friendly and sympathetic but downright businesslike air.

Manoel de Carmo, a lawyer and church deacon, stressed the need for water and clear fluids.

His wife Cris emphasized that when Darrel was able to eat, he must have no grease. No butter, no fat, no oil. Not for weeks. The liver wasn't able to handle much meat, either. "He needs only vegetable soups and clear liquids. Coconut water is especially good, and helps control the diarrhea and nausea."

"Above all," encouraged Regina, "Darrel needs rest. He must stay in bed and sleep."

Not a problem, thought Lee. He's barely conscious.

The first two weeks were the hardest. Friends called and prayer chains activated support by loved ones the world over. Darrel eventually was able to be out of bed for a while, though he was frustrated at the difficulty to concentrate enough to read. His jelly-soft liver area decreased in swelling over time.

At three weeks he had healed sufficiently to be restless. This being sick wasn't any fun, and he'd had enough of it.

One morning showered, shaved, and dressed for breakfast. "I'm going out to the hangar just to see what I can do for a few hours."

He came home at the end of the day, sweaty but invigorated. Against Lee's protests, he went every day that week to work with the certified mechanics in tropical heat.

Within six weeks Darrel returned to flying for Jesus.

1. [Matthew 24:35](#)

Heaven and earth **will pass away**, but **my words will never pass away**.

Chapter Nineteen—The Wai-Wai Bible

Lee and her husband rose early in Fort Worth to make their flight back to Brazil. During the night, however, she had been attacked by a fierce migraine. She took her ever-faithful pill but couldn't keep it down. She had no injections. Fighting incredible pain, she determined that nothing would make him miss piloting newly-translated Bibles to the Wai-Wai tribe, a mission scheduled for the week of their return.

At the Dallas/Fort Worth Airport check-in area hours later, after publicly vomiting away all sense of dignity, Lee gave up. Darrel reclaimed their luggage which already stood in the belly of the airliner. He loaded her into the back seat of their car and followed a friend to Baylor Hospital. It took eight hours to stabilize her condition. The flight to Manaus happened only once a week. Darrel would not be in Brazil for the flight taking the boxes of Bibles to the Wai-Wai.

Daniel Lawrence made that historic and fulfilling flight to the village of Mapuera, on Rio Mapuera, some

350 miles northeast of Manaus, almost in Venezuela and Colombia. Translation work by two brothers, Neil and Bob Hawkins, perhaps with input by others over the years, brought the Bible to this tribe in their own language.

Printed by the generosity of donors, the Bibles arrived aboard the Asas de Socorro Cessna 206 floatplane, which had a cargo capacity of nearly a half ton.

More than just neighboring tribes joined in the celebration. Some tribal groups paddled for more than a month on dangerous waters to get there. The proposed date of arrival had been communicated along the rivers and through the jungles of the Amazon. They all stood in their canoes as they made the final bend in the river, clapping and singing in unison a song created during the journey, “We have come to worship in the house of God, to hear readings from the words in His book.”

Hundreds joined in the feast prepared, the singing and preaching. Hearts filled to overflowing with the joy of the Lord as they remained and celebrated for days in a huge encampment.

Darrel and Lee anguished over his missing the grandest ceremony of the jungle, truly a majestic commemoration. The only consolation was that the honor had gone to their friend Daniel. A month later, Daniel unexpectedly transferred back to Canada, where his flight students were candidates to become missionary pilot/mechanics. This became his final mission in Brazil for many years until his recent return to fly from the Belém base of a different Christian group.

However, Darrel did fly months later to that northwest corner of Brazil on other missions. On the Rio Uaupés, in areas as close as ten miles from the Colombian and Venezuelan borders, lived the Maku Indians. Two Presbyterian couples had been inserted separately into different, fairly hostile villages some years before.

Darrel made several stops in the Maku settlements, bringing fellow missionaries and supplies. The narrow, twisted Rio Uaupés often rose and fell three or four feet overnight. On one trip the plane, tied up and floating freely near the bank when they arrived, was beached on dry ground by morning. He rounded up strong Indian males to help him push on its floats and shove the plane back into the river.

Water takeoffs required more runway distance than landings. Darrel's procedure was to locate the village by its GPS coordinates, then search for a river space long and straight enough to take off. He landed near the village and taxied to the bank, though later he had to taxi about three miles to a stretch from which he could take off.

Worship services and preaching by the Presbyterian couples was not allowed by Brazil's Indian protection agency. The missionaries were tolerated because they taught aquaculture and cultivation skills.

The indigenous tribes had killed off their fish supply over years of over-fishing and by putting plant-based poisons in the water to make it easy to catch their food. Now they were protein-starved.

The missionaries demonstrated how to create ponds by building dams. They were able to trap fish and raise

them in these ponds, gradually increasing production sufficient to feed the tribes.

Life was difficult for these Brazilian missionaries, who wore clothes and expected a certain degree of privacy. The exterior walls of their home were solid wood at the bottom with the upper half screened to the roof.

The Indian villagers liked to stand outside, faces pressed to the screen day and night, narrating the lives of the missionary couple. “They’re sitting down eating, but not with their hands. They have tools. Look, he’s drinking some of the water he pumped through the filter. Now he’s peeling fruit.”

In order to maintain a precious bit of personal space, the missionaries hung tarp partitions around their sleeping area.

Although sometimes chaffing at their life as principle actors of a live reality show, they learned to use the opportunity presented. Being on stage fulltime, they deliberately said what they wanted the villagers to hear. The more the indigenous people watched and heard, the more they learned about hygiene, safe food preparation, and about living in a relationship with God. Subtle evangelism proceeded on a personal basis. What the government intended as fatal restrictions to spreading the gospel became an effective hook.

The prohibition of preaching and proselytizing allowed one exception. If an Indian asked a question, a missionary could answer. Rarely did members of an indigenous tribe take more than a few minutes to ask, “Why have you come to us with free doctors and dentists and to teach us how to grow food when our own government doesn’t?”

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A clear answer returns. “Because there is a God who loves you, and He sent us to help you.”

It was the Lord our God himself who...
protected us on our entire journey and among all
the nations through which we traveled. Joshua
24:17

Chapter Twenty

Darrel Carver simply had to be a drug smuggler. Why else would an executive quit² his job, buy a ten-seat plane, and volunteer to fly for free in the Amazon jungles? He must be smuggling drugs from Colombia. Or if not drugs, then gems from the state of Minas Gerais. Even newspaper articles hinted that Protestant missionaries were really CIA spies.

So went the reasoning of military and government officials when he joined Asas de Socorro in 2000. Asas had been an independent Brazilian entity since 1985, having separated from Mission Aviation Fellowship for Brazilian political and legal reasons, while maintaining a close working relationship with its parent organization. Protestant missions, both Brazilian and international, found their efforts to be hard slogging as

² Darrel did not quit. He retired with benefits and pension. His missionary years required no outside support.

they imported airplane parts, mission materials, and personnel.

Rocindes Correa, president of Asas de Socorro when Darrel and the Caravan reported for duty, provided credulity to the organization because he had retired from the Brazilian Air Force as a colonel. He launched an inexpensive publicity campaign, inviting generals, state and federal senators, cabinet members, and military and law enforcement commanders to social events. In the capital city of Brasilia and Manaus, the Caravan demonstrated water take-offs and landings with dignitaries aboard.

“I’ll show those fellows a thing or two about Asas de Socorro,” Rocindes said. “They’ll listen to me. I taught some of them how to fly in the Brazilian Air Force Academy.”

And they did listen to him. Over the six years Darrel served in Manaus, several government agencies and air taxi companies bought their own Cessna Caravans. Meanwhile they hired Asas for special flights and pilot time when no missions were scheduled. Among those passengers were the governor of the state of Amazonas, the Indian protection agencies FUNAI and FUNASA, the Brazilian ecological service IBAMA, and once—only once—the Federal Police.

Wilson Kannenberg and Darrel agreed to fly “a few” military men to search for a boat. The soldiers arrived in full combat gear with heavy guns. They directed the pilots to a general area on a certain river but had no specific GPS location.

Guns on the airplane made the pilots nervous. All kinds of things could go wrong.

“We’re looking for a large, white boat named *O Amor de Deus*,” explained their leader, pointing to a photo. “It’s suspected of smuggling drugs.” Smugglers using a boat named *The Love of God*? Would that lightning simply strike it out of the water.

The pilots approached the area and began a low-level river search. Darrel had learned to fly organized search patterns many years before in the Navy. Eventually they spotted a white ship of the right size.

“Go in low,” their leader instructed. He pulled out binoculars to read the name on the boat. The men in back shifted their loads and readied their guns.

Wilson and Darrel saw disaster coming. If bullets pierced the fuselage or floats, the plane would be out of commission for a long time. If it hit the fuel tanks in the wings, they could all go down in flames. This was not a search and rescue operation; it was a search and detain.

Circling at a safe distance, they determined the boat wasn’t a match for the photo nor was it named *O Amor de Deus*. The pilots increased altitude and left the area. They continued the pretense of searching, but the pilots secretly agreed they weren’t going to find the boat. They soon announced they had to head back to their base because of the fuel state.

They had new rules for government-related flights: no guns on the plane and no “tactical” flights.

The Amazonas state governor and other politicians frequently contracted air taxi time for official functions, campaigning and politicking. They often included the plane in their photo shoots, showing its Asas de Socorro logo, borrowing prestige from their rock star conveyance. Two brothers, one a state senator and the

other a national senator, hired the Asas planes and pilots when possible. During national elections and referenda, the plane carried voting machines and administrators to far corners of the jungle.

When payrolls went to municipality employees throughout the enormous state, large amounts of cash were entrusted to Asas at secret and unpredictable times and places. Careful coordination and guarded discretion protected the deliveries, which had often been robbed from other air taxis and riverboats. The shipments were covered in prayer by the pilots and their wives. Very few people knew they were happening. Cash shipments by Asas de Socorro were never robbed.

Flying for the government paid better than for other clients because the payment was in cash and fuel credits. Their special fuel prices passed added advantage to Asas, which, in effect, subsidized many mission partner trips that would not have otherwise occurred. To repeat, all these opportunities to fly for other groups only took place when missions activities were not scheduled.

Leaders of the Assembly of God denomination, which spread deep in the river world, promoted the endeavor to elect politicians from their church. Tired of dishonesty and graft, they hoped to raise candidates and put mature, Christian people worthy of trust in office. To this end, they requested the Caravan and pilots for countless trips as well as revival services and religious celebrations.

Darrel and Wilson also flew experts of IBAMA, the Brazilian ecological guardians concerned with Rio Jaú forest protection, fire spotting, illegal logging, poaching, and wildlife protection.

IBAMA once requested the Caravan to fetch a baby manatee whose mother had died, perhaps in fishing nets. No one knew her story, because the manatee was a protected species. But if an edible animal found itself in the nets of hungry villagers, the community received the gift of food.

With much TV and newspaper publicity, the baby manatee and its IBAMA escort arrived at the Manaus executive airport, where it was transferred by a large van to the natural science park in Manaus known as Bosque de Ciência.

During the flight, the scientists had constantly patted water over the manatee to keep its skin from dehydrating. And the baby wasn't wearing diapers. Fortunately, the interior of the Caravan had been fitted from its inception for heavy duty and sick passengers, so the pilots could scrub down the floor. A waterproof tarp under the manatee gave additional protection. They admitted to envy of commercial pilots who walk off the plane at the end of their flights without a care.

Darrel once flew FUNAI Indian Protection officials to conduct business with a tribe, and was horrified at the filth and depravation in which the community lived. The government restricted Protestant missionaries from any evangelical work with the isolated indigenous people. No free medical and dental clinics, no contact at all.

The officials cautioned him that he was allowed to speak and visit with the Indians while they conferred with tribal leaders, but he couldn't talk about religion. They endeavored to keep the tribe untainted by outside forces, isolated from influences which would change their culture. But the culture so badly needed to be

changed. Darrel left hurting for these souls who lived in disease and superstition, on the raw edge of hunger and malnutrition, prevented by their government from a healthy life above the bare subsistence level.

Asas pilots also flew a thousand baby turtles to an area which IBAMA expected would be imprinted on them as their home. Hopefully, the turtles would prosper, mature, and return to that area for laying eggs. The pilots left very early one morning to pick up the babies and fly them near a regional IBAMA base camp.

“You’re going to airlift a thousand baby turtles?” Lee’s question over breakfast sounded like a challenge to the project. “Why are they in Manaus in the first place?”

“They hatched in IBAMA’s conservation laboratory in Manaus to re-populate a certain river.”

Lee poured another cup of strong, Brazilian coffee. “Taking turtles to a jungle river sounds like taking ice to Antarctica.”

“The turtles and eggs have been poached almost to extinction in that area, despite the threat of fines and penalties.”

“Who’s paying for the flight?” Lee couldn’t see justification for the expense.

“IBAMA, not mission funds. Gotta hurry. Should be back late this afternoon.”

“But why is Asas doing a flight like this for IBAMA? I mean, why didn’t they hire a regular air taxi? What advantage is there to hiring Asas pilots?”

Darrel shouldered his nav bag, wondering why she seemed to be protesting. “I can only think of one. We pray over them when we let them out.”

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Some missionaries only wanted to fly missions. Some particularly didn't want to fly weekends, because their wives and children needed family time and transportation to church. Darrel and Lee had separate vehicles, and of course no children in the home. Flights for other groups paid the bills not only for missions out of Manaus, but helped support the entire Asas de Socorro organization. The Caravan was simultaneously the work horse and the cash cow of Asas de Socorro.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Colossians 3:12

Chapter Twenty-one—The Caravan as Ambulance

Wilson's call came to Darrel's home late on a Sunday night. He and Lee were chilling after the evening worship service, beginning to think about activities for the coming week. A friend's accident changed his plans.

Sydney and Ruth Carswell, a missionary couple from farther downstream, east of Manaus, had been to their church in the Itacoatiara area. She was driving a motor bike with him on the back when the wheels lost their traction and spilled them on a rocky road.

She hit hard on one side of her face, scraping against road rubble, imbedding trash, and damaging her eye. The swelling prevented an accurate assessment, so she didn't know if she would be able to see from that eye.

Living in a river village with a dirt landing strip, their soonest chance at a medevac was by Asas. Her

husband **Sid** pleaded for the Caravan to come and take her to a hospital in Manaus.

The Caravan couldn't safely fly to an unlighted strip. Wilson and Darrel considered the urgency and the possibilities. One of our own people was down, hurting, with the danger of severe infection.

"Let's meet at the airport before dawn, and take off at first light." Wilson's plan put action to their intentions.

Darrel and Lee prayed for the couple and set the alarm for a four o'clock wakeup.

After a flight of some forty-five minutes, the Caravan touched down on the short, red dirt runway, reversed the props and braked the wheels. A car bearing the **Carswells** rolled alongside. Darrel and Wilson secured the plane and greeted their friends. One glance at her face showed that her husband had not exaggerated her injuries.

Tears of relief coursed down **her husband's** cheek. "Thank you so much for coming. I don't know what we would do if you couldn't pick her up." The option, a long wait for the public riverboat, was too awful to consider.

Swollen and bandaged, she carefully eased her bruised and strained frame onto the plane. He assisted and joined her on the passenger seats for the quick return to the executive airport in Manaus. A pastor friend waited there and drove them to a hospital.

Her husband called with a report later that day. "She has fractures in the orbital structure, but we think the eye is going to heal. They cleaned gravel out of her skin, and she'll have antibiotics to prevent infection." His voice broke as he reined in emotions. "I felt so

helpless...seeing my wife that way. Thank you for coming. She'll be okay.”

In due time her face recovered from the scrape, the swelling went down, and, praise God, her eye was not injured.

Amazon Outreach, a mission based in Houston, Texas, was conducting a village-to-village medical and dental clinic from their boat. One of their American doctors slipped on the ladder between the upper and lower decks of the wooden vessel, and the fall broke his right hand.

The call came to Asas de Socorro's Manaus office for a medevac, but the boat crew provided no GPS coordinates. Darrel and Wilson launched and flew to the general area. After a brief, successful search, they checked the river for safe landing and take-off options and made their approach. The doctor stepped from the boat to the plane's float and entered with the pilot's assistance.

After landing in Manaus, he boarded a flight to the United States for treatment by a specialist. Amazon Outreach's mission continued on the river for another week, bringing healing of bodies and souls to villagers.

The hospital administrator in Barcelos, a town about 220 miles northwest on the Rio Negro, made an emergency call to Asas de Socorro. “A premie born here a few hours ago won't live without oxygen. We're keeping her alive with the last bottle in the hospital, and it's almost empty. Can you please send someone to fly her back to a hospital in Manaus? The municipality will reimburse you for the flight.”

The administrator, a tender-hearted woman, had called several organizations and every one had turned her down. No planes available, or their management wanted payment up front—all the answers were *no*.

Darrel and Paul Bachmann launched the Caravan to medevac the tiny, blue baby girl. The administrator waited with the premie and an orderly at the Barcelos airstrip. Not only was the hospital nearly out of oxygen, its last bottle was enormous. The heavy, green container, over six feet long, would have to travel with the child. As if that weren't enough, Barcelos had no nasal tube or fitting to deliver the precious gas to her nostrils.

A plastic water bottle—a carboy of five gallons—had been cut in half and fitted with an oxygen tube through its neck. That covered the baby with a crude but effective dome. The pilots and the accompanying nurse rigged the oxygen tank sideways, which they propped beside the child and strapped in position for the flight.

Satisfied that she was securely surrounded by the last breaths of life-sustaining oxygen, the pilots closed the back of the plane and waved goodbyes to the hospital staff.

The administrator grasped their hands with tears in her eyes. “Thank you so much, and God bless you. You’re the only ones who always come when I call.”

Needs scripture

Chapter Twenty-two—YWAM’s Helio Courier

First, a couple of definitions. Youth with a Mission, widely known by its acronym YWAM (or JOCUM in Portuguese), is far more than a youth-based summer organization. Begun in the 1960s to involve youth in global missions, it now has a volunteer staff of over 18,000, with resident missionaries, posts and equipment worldwide. Asas de Socorro had the privilege of working with YWAM missionaries Mike and Jodi Bunn in Brazil.

Mike piloted a Helio Courier, a single-engine utility aircraft manufactured in Kansas between 1954 and 1974, capable of carrying a pilot and five passengers. Brought in by YWAM under a registration in Asas de Socorro’s name, the Helio operated on rough airstrips in Indian country. Mike saw far greater potential if it were put on floats instead. The numerous isolated Indian villages were almost invariably situated along waterways.

With remarkable innovation, Mike and Asas de Socorro mechanics removed the wheels and attached a pair of donated floats, working at Flores Aeroclub in Manaus. Brazilian bureaucracy reared its red-taped head at every juncture. Any airplane modification, no matter how small, must be certified—and this certification languished in delay. Months passed after all the work was done and paperwork submitted. Mike still didn’t have permission to use the plane, which was parked outside at Flores.

Floats were not always water-tight. They had to be pumped out regularly when a floatplane was in water, day after day. The pumps were inserted in holes on the float's top surfaces, which were plugged when not in use. This ignored plane's floats gradually filled up with water while it waited off to the side of the tropical airstrip, rain seeping down around the pump-out plugs. One night an enormous storm blew through Manaus. Howling winds broke off palms and tore aluminum siding off buildings. A hangar at Flores collapsed, destroying a government helicopter inside. Equipment whooshed away in the tempest.

The Helio stood alone, weighted in place by tons of water in its floats. It suffered no damage. If not for the water weighing it down, the kite-like Helio would have blown away, flipped over, or otherwise been destroyed.

When Mike finally received all certifications and documents for the plane to fly, the conundrum that had occupied his brain for months had to be solved. The Helio no longer had wheels. It wasn't amphibious like the Cessna Caravan. And Flores Aeroclub wasn't on the water. How could he take off from a runway, fly to his home base for a water landing, and begin operations with the plane?

A platform was built at the air club, strong enough to hold the plane, with four good wheels on axles. The plane was lifted onto this dolly into a cradle for the floats, the combination was moved to the end of the runway, and the serious praying began.

As dawn broke over the Amazon, a group of missionaries and their families gathered at Flores to bless the plane and pray for Mike's safety. Mike climbed into the Helio, pre-flighted, and started the

engines. Having no brakes, he slowly increased the prop speed while other men held the dolly in place. With his heart pounding, he gradually pushed the throttle to full power and built up speed. Faster he raced at maximum takeoff power down the runway. Reaching take-off speed, he gently lifted and sailed into the morning, leaving the dolly wildly bounding behind to finally rest alongside the runway.

And there was great rejoicing by the gathered friends, whooping, clapping, and laughing.

About two hours later, Mike landed on Rio Madeira and water-taxed to his home, greeted by his wife and their five children.

He loads the clouds with moisture; he scatters his lightning through them. At his direction they swirl around over the face of the whole earth to do whatever he commands them. Job 37:11-12

Chapter Twenty-three

A violent tropical storm brewed as the Gideons and their wives approached Lee's home early on a Saturday. She met them on the walkway, giving *beijos*, little air kisses against the cheek, and leading them along the upper deck to the hard-to-find entrance.

In the garden, five towering Imperial Palm trees waved and twisted, some of their enormous fronds crashing down in the wind. Tiny purple asaf fruit showered the white concrete and brilliant pink bougainvillea blossoms swirled in the air.

She escorted her guests to the living room and made sure there were enough places to sit. A large group had come to plan and pray.

"Where's Darrel?" The president looked past her to the kitchen.

"He's flying. Someone called for a medevac."

"In this weather? That could be dangerous."

She smiled her complete confidence in his abilities and his wisdom. "The plane has radar and a Storm Scope. He can see what's happening and go around clouds."

The president seemed less sure. "We will all pray for him to return safely."

And they did. The women in their separate circle back in the master bedroom and the men in the living room made Darrel's security a major theme of petition to God.

As Darrel and Wilson lifted off from Juruá and established a course to Manaus, a solid line of heavy thunderstorm clouds stretched far to the right and left. The Storm Scope showed no break in the high wall.

The pilots prayed en route. "Lord, if you want us to get home this afternoon, show us a way." Otherwise, they'd have to put down in a safe place and wait hours, maybe overnight, for the weather to pass. A very sick woman passenger in the back urgently needed to reach a hospital in Manaus.

As they flew toward the solid clouds and considered alternatives, the storm line on the left broke and bent away, and on the right the clouds bent in the opposite curve. A door opened in the wall, and they flew straight home.

It is not always God's choice to pierce a pathway through the squall line. On a separate occasion, Darrel and Wilson flew from the north toward Manaus with six pastors onboard. They had to reach Téfé, the second largest city in Amazonas, to refuel. A large thunderstorm prevented their approach, and not enough fuel remained to fly in circles and hold the flight aloft until it passed.

One of the advantages of an amphibious floatplane in the Amazon was that water runways covered much of the land. The pilots landed on Rio Japurá, a large river which unites with the Rio Solimões some two hundred

miles upriver from Manaus. Clipped to the inside of the two floats were eight-foot-long, hardwood oars, often useful around wharfs for poling away from boats. They were essential when maneuvering in lakes and river currents.

Darrel and Wilson stepped out of the plane onto the floats, pulled the oars free, and rode the left and right floats. They floated for about an hour in the mainstream, away from snags, overhangs, and floating debris. As soon as the storm line passed, they secured the oars and took off. After buying more fuel in Téf  , they returned their saintly passengers home to Manaus safely.

On another day, Darrel and Wilson had to put down to wait out a storm. In an area of tall tree stumps along the bank, they decided to taxi over and tie up to one of them. Normally, the technique approaching land or a wharf was to taxi near enough, cut the engine, and drift to the side. One of the pilots jumped out, grabbed an oar to push against hard shoreline objects if contact came too fast, and a rope fastened by cleats on the floats to secure the plane.

Darrel, in the left seat, cut the engine and stepped onto the float. To his dismay, a powerful wind gust arrested the Caravan's forward momentum. Worse yet, the plane was being blown backwards and sideways such that the tail would be destroyed by other stumps.

With a huge jump to the muddy shoreline, he looped the last few feet of the rope around a strong trunk and pulled with all his might. Wilson sprang from his seat onto the float, grabbed an oar, and rowed hard. With seconds to spare, the two working together

stabilized the plane and Darrel tied it to the trunk, barely averting disaster.

They rested their strained muscles in the cockpit, ate their sack lunches, and chatted until safe flight was possible.

A Christian radio station was to be dedicated in Uariní, a jungle town at a lake along the south bank of the Rio Solimões. Darrel and Wilson flew a group of pastors for the inaugural celebration. From the time they took off in São Paulo de Olivença and set their heading to the village, the entire sky was covered in heavy clouds. They had a GPS reading, but with no Air Traffic Control radar and no flight tracking, wisdom dictated that the pilots not descend blindly through the goo.

“Brothers, if the sky doesn’t clear up when we get to the area, we can’t land.” Wilson broke the news to their passengers. “We’ll have to continue onward to Manaus. It’s time to pray.”

Pilots and pastors prayed for a break. They had not seen the ground for some two hundred miles.

At exactly the correct GPS reading, one hole miraculously appeared in the clouds below them. The pilots guided the plane through it and landed on the lake without difficulty. They taxied right up to the entrance of the church sanctuary to much fanfare.

Friends and family often shared their anxious thoughts about Darrel’s flying in the Amazon. They seemed uncomfortable when Lee told them the plane had a Storm Scope radar and a modern GPS air navigation

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system, or that Darrel flew by the rules rather than by the seat-of-his-pants method.

She often had to pull out her bottom-line answer. “God protects him. Besides, he’s doing what he loves. If he dies doing God’s will, he’ll arrive in heaven with a smile on his face.”

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord.+ Isaiah 55:8

Chapter Twenty-four

Wilson Kannenberg told an amazing story of ground-breaking mission work which occurred shortly before Darrel and Lee moved to Manaus. On flights over the watery Amazon world, he had spotted an uncharted village along a river. He talked to three Brazilian pastors and, after prayer, they agreed to land there and attempt to establish contact with the hope of evangelizing.

Wilson had noted the GPS coordinates during his fly-overs, so they found the village, landed the Cessna 206 floatplane, and taxied to the bank.

As they stepped off the plane, an unusually large man challenged them, speaking in understandable Portuguese. “You can’t come into my village. I’m the president, and you have to leave.”

Wilson demonstrated that they had no weapons. “We saw your village from the air, and came to find out who you are and if you know God.”

“Go away!” The man waved angrily toward the team and its plane. “We don’t want you here.”

The pilot and fellow pastors reentered the plane, closed the doors, and sat praying in the stifling heat for

four hours. They asked God for protection and for the heart of the village president to be opened to their visit.

The man returned, not exactly friendly but having dropped his openly angry posture. “You can get out. Come up to the village.”

Following him with all due caution, they accepted his permission to sit on logs in the central gathering area. With gentle voices and kind smiles, they visited with the indigenous men and gradually worked around to telling them about the Great God who loved them and sent his Son to earth to save them from their sins. Wilson usually didn’t make an evangelistic appeal on a first visit, but he sensed God’s leading in that direction.

As the fading light indicated the pilot had to leave, he invited the villagers to believe in the God he had presented and accept eternal life in Him. One man of the whole tribe, João (John), told Wilson that he believed. They had a few minutes to talk further before the men left.

As Wilson parted, he offered the president a free medical and dental clinic for the village when he returned in four weeks. His offer was accepted.

Wilson drew up to the bank four weeks later with a nurse, a dentist, and free medicines. The residents swarmed down to meet the plane and assisted the group up to the village with their materials. The whole settlement celebrated the return of Wilson’s team and greeted them as old friends. All except João.

Wilson asked the president about their only convert from the month before.

“He was fishing in his dugout canoe one day, and a *jacaré* (type of alligator) tipped him out and ate him.”

The news stunned Wilson, but the clinic proceeded all day, healing and comforting a people group who had never received such assistance. Beneath the day's activities, the team felt discouragement, thinking that the people wouldn't accept the Gospel message because if you did, you might be eaten by an alligator.

But when Wilson again spoke to the assembled village about the God of love, he asked for a show of hands of those who wished to accept salvation. Nearly every man, woman, and youth raised their hands. He thought they didn't understand, so he asked them to put their hands down.

He explained again. Still, when given the choice to trust in Christ, everyone raised their hands.

Thrilled but perplexed, Wilson asked why they were raising their hands. "I don't understand. The only person who accepted God last month was killed by a *jacaré*. And now the whole village says they believe in God?"

"João was the only here who was ready to die and face eternity," one of the men said. "We want to be ready, too."

Postlog

July, 2006
Fort Worth, Texas

For years, Darrel and Lee had prayed for the Lord to show them when they should re-retire. Most missionary services required pilots to be grounded after the age of fifty-five, usually to “fly a desk.” This was part of his decision to fly with Asas de Socorro, which did not implement that policy.

As he rounded sixty, he privately marveled at his strength and stamina to haul cargo, slog through the heat and humidity, and rise at 3:30 a.m. for flights departing at first light. He decided sixty-five would be a good retirement age. At that point, his medical insurance plan relied heavily on MediCare, totally useless in Brazil.

Thoughts of responsibility to his parents weighed on their minds. Darrel had one younger sister, who was single again and worked fulltime. Lee’s parents already had been ushered to the gates of Heaven by their loving four sons.

Darrel’s father had survived a triple bypass surgery and now had congestive heart disease accompanied by other decreasing organic functions. His mother’s mental acuity had declined from forgetfulness and odd occurrences to dementia. They maintained their home

and conducted their daily routines in a partnership developed over sixty years of loving marriage. If one parent died or had to move to assisted living care, the other could not safely remain independent.

Darrel and Lee returned to the United States in July, 2006, for a two month visit with his parents and the families of Quinn and Kelly. The first weekend they rested from the long overnight flight to be with the Carvers in Texas. It was evident that his father had become so much weaker, and his mother's dementia had progressed by leaps. They had seen enough in the household to know his parents needed constant help.

As they stretched out on the highway headed for Quinn's home in Virginia, both Darrel and Lee looked at each other at the same moment and said the same words. "It's time to come home."

For a month they traveled, enjoying the grandchildren and speaking in churches about God's work in the Amazon. They told no one of their decision, but prayer for guidance circulated in their minds at all times.

Some scriptures instruct believers to forsake home and loved ones to go out on God's mission. Others teach respect and care for the elderly, and what one gives for God does not lessen responsibility to the family. The decision required a personal directive. During that month, Darrel and Lee felt they had the answer. Their new call from God was to aid his parents at the ends of their lives. The answer was as clear as if a light had gone off in Brazil and turned on in Texas.

They returned to Brazil, made their announcement, and prepared to leave. Giving one last pool party for

Asas de Socorro families, Darrel watched the splashing children with the eyes of a grandfather.

So many times kids had seen the long scar which began south of his breastbone and ran well below the waistband of his swim trunks. “What’s that for?” they would ask.

Tracing the white welt with a finger, he would answer, “That’s the map to Manaus.”

They sold the house, car, and truck, most of the furniture, and packed the rest for shipment. Blocked by fraudulently executed official documents, taxed, and penalized at every step by red tape, government fees, and deals that fell through with potential buyers of the house and car, they struggled not to develop bitterness against the nation whose poor and sick they had served.

For the final days, they moved into the home of Rachel and Ryan Joy, so close to the age of their daughter. Seth, Nathan, and Anna Joy had been surrogate grandchildren to ease separation from their own. The sense of unity and family raised their spirits.

Farewell dinners and final meetings brought Darrel and Lee to tears many times. These beloved people they might never see again this side of heaven.

Arriving at the Manaus airport for the flights bearing them to Texas, Darrel and Lee were surprised so many families of Asas de Socorro as well as other Christian friends had come to farewell them. Before passing security barriers, they were pulled into a large circle. Holding hands, the group prayed thanksgiving for the years serving together and for protection and guidance as the Carvers’ lives restarted in America.

They still refer to their six and a half years as missionaries in Brazil as their best and hardest years.

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After a fulfilling career in seven countries, this was the
dessert of their lives.

The End

Discussion Questions:

1. Does God still work medical miracles?
2. Does being a Christian eliminate the possibility of dying of an illness?
3. What eternal advantages can you see in Darrel's near-death by appendicitis?
- 4.