



Returning to Lystra

by Brad and Ruth Hill

copyright 2010

All Rights Reserved

Table of Contents

Introduction

Prologue: Stoning The Gods

Part One On the Beach 1

Up The Proverbial Creek

Delirium

And Doncha Come Back No Mo

by Brad and Ruth Hill

Rule Over Every Living Thing

Fear Of The Dark

Out Of Alignment

I Scream For Ice Cream

The Spittle Of Righteousness

Part Two: I Told You So

Over The Bridge

Lower The Lady

The Sorcerer's Advisory

The Island

A New Book Of Worship

Buzz Saw

Clean On The Outside

Part Three: A Safe Landing

The Graces Of Healing

The Spec In Your Eye

Snake Eyes

Bruising The Heel

Hacking Living Stones

The Twisting Path Towards The

Morning Star

When Four-Wheel-Drive Isn't Enough

Virtual Suffering

Remember Your TP

Homeward Bound

Conclusions: The Viper On Your Hand

Introduction

This is the third volume of a series. The first book, *Soul Graft* (1988, Covenant Publications), deals primarily with incarnation as a model for missions. The stories address and illustrate the humor and the horror of "being sent" as Jesus. The second volume, *Slivers From the Cross* (1990, Covenant Publications) describes "cross bearing" as a metonym for filling up the afflictions of Christ in the missional arenas of His calling.

Returning to Lystra explores how the "love of God constrains us" and how mission reveals to us just how much we really love our lives "even unto death." The stories span a number of years, from the 1986 to 2004. A lot of time has passed since the first two books. The Congo is just now emerging from a period of warfare that has devastated her people and infrastructure. The very nature of doing mission has changed, and so have missionaries.

For reasons of privacy and security, details may have been changed. Several stories are composite, a blending of several events. All faithfully depict the truth as we have experienced it. Here are some of the stories.

Prologue: Stoning The Gods

In Lystra (Acts 14) Paul was mistaken for a god and initially honored. Shortly thereafter the "Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and having won over the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead" (vs. 19). The fortunes of the missionary can change very quickly! In chapter 28 he was first thought to be a murderer deserving of death, then honored as a god!

Perhaps the greatest single missionary verse in the whole book of Acts is this: "While the disciples stood around him, he arose and entered the city" (vs. 20). He did not struggle to his feet, pronounce a curse on Lystra, shake the dust off his feet and move on. *He went back to the city that had just stoned him and left him for dead.* He truly counted all things as loss for the sake of Christ (Phil.3:7ff). Paul wanted to know Jesus, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings.

Returning to Lystra means our life is subordinate to His.

Returning to Lystra means that we do not make our discipleship contingent on assurances of health and safety.

Returning to Lystra means the love of God constrains us and what greater love is there than to lay down our lives?

Returning to Lystra means we give up our small ambitions, surrender our strategies, relinquish our goals and instead seek to keep in step with the Spirit.

Lystra is the test for us all whether we "love our lives even to death" (Rev. 12:11).

Part One: On The Beach

"They kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem...And after kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another" (Acts 21:4,5). Paul is heading towards another "Lystra." The Spirit revealed to the good folks of Tyre something of what lay ahead for Paul in Jerusalem. They had supernatural insight into the dangers. They pled with Paul not to go. "Go somewhere else! Go to China, they have never heard. Go back to Antioch, lots of work yet to do there!" They were working on the assumption that the certainty of mortal danger is an obvious sign from God saying "Hey, detour here!"

Shortly after this he came to Caesarea and his old friend the prophet Agabus, who had accurately prophesied a great famine (Acts 11:28), arrived and in rather dramatic fashion took Paul's belt and bound himself hand and

foot and said, "In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles" (21:11). The residents there also begged him not to go. How could Paul go on? The same thing was confirmed. The Spirit, the prophet, the people all concurred. Even Daniel didn't volunteer for the lion's den! Everyone and everything seemed to be saying, "Your life is too valuable to throw away like this. Why else would God warn you, except that He wants you to turn aside?"

Here is Paul's answer. "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord!" (vs. 13).

Is this not the same attitude as our Lord Jesus Christ, who knew the hour, knew the awful death that awaited him, was surrounded by those who would deter him, yet in the end said, "Not my will but Yours"? When the people saw that Paul would not be persuaded, they said, "The will of the Lord be done!"

It is often easier to pray "Thy will be done" when we don't know what it is. When we do know what it is we often pray "take this cup from me!"

There is nothing quite so persuasive as a life already laid down for the name of Jesus Christ.

Up The Proverbial Creek

The first venture up the Dua River was excruciatingly slow. The "up river" Christians had felled a huge tree a kilometer from the river's edge. For the next month they had burned it, adzed it and chipped it into the shape of a canoe. Then the real work started. Foot by foot they hacked their way through the jungle, pushing and pulling this giant "Forty-man" canoe. I was assured that in the old days forty warriors would squat in this boat on their way to battle. A month later the canoe, now dubbed "l'Evangéliste" bobbed in the water. We were notified that they would float it down river to a certain meeting place.

Three missionaries loaded their Toyota and left to meet l'Evangéliste. A day later the truck was parked near the river's edge with l'Evangéliste snugged onto the shore. The Christian craftsmen and jungle hackers and canoe porters were all on hand to celebrate. Then they noticed our saw.

One of the missionaries was a carpenter who proceeded to cut the rear of the canoe off. Murmurs of alarm and consternation rose around us. He then firmly attached a transom and clamped the 30hp long-shaft outboard on the back. "Anybody for a trial run?" None of us had ever tried to maneuver anything like this before. Nobody volunteered. We just kind of stood there and wondered how it had finally come to this moment.

Since it had been my idea, I felt compelled to volunteer. A few brave folks who assured us they could swim got in. We started the motor and shoved off into the strong current. Immediately we were sideways, then going downstream in a hurry. I set my jaw and engaged the prop. Turning this baby around was going to be a chore. It dipped alarmingly to the right and everybody threw themselves to the left, water poured in. Pasteur Mbangiye shouted, "Sit down! Sit down! Don't move." I assume that 's what he said anyway. We finally got it turned around and headed back past our starting point, waving wildly at the party on the shore. They just silently watched us go by.

The river has many hairpin turns. Heading into the first corner, we swung too wide and buried the bow in the shore. We cut it too fine on the next bend and buried the bow in the grass on the inside. Finally I got the hang of it and headed back, feeling more like Don Richardson by the moment.

With all the gas and oil and missionary stuff loaded, we only had room for eight more people. I knew it wasn't a forty-man boat. The trip up river to Edungu, our destination, took another eight hours.

As we snaked our way along, I began to imagine ways to improve the efficiency of river evangelism. This "prototype" left a lot to be desired. In rainy season, we could never even hope to get the truck to the rendezvous point. But to board the canoe closer to the Mission would mean at least a 14 or 15-hour trip up river. And my, how much gas it used!

And so one day a year later the inflatable Zodiac appeared. It was the usual kind of mission project. A committee approved it, an appeal went out, money was raised, an inflatable Zodiac riverboat was purchased and shipped and eventually found its way to the Mission. It was sleek and sexy, could probably hold three people plus gas and gear. Now we were talking.

We took it down to the river and inflated it, mounted the new short-shaft 35 hp Evinrude, and took it for a trial spin up river. I twisted the throttle and the whole boat came out of the water like a hydroplane. It raced down the river with only the prop in the water, we must have been doing 30 mph when we came to the first corner. I turned the motor slightly but the boat ignored me. There was no keel to speak of, the Zodiac just slipped sideways and as we opened our mouths to scream, it ploughed into the grassy cushion along the shore. A log or even a sharp stick would have erased the sign of that

Zodiac! We finally got untangled and tried it again, slower is better. Cruising up the river rooster-tail following with wind in our face was definitely The Way to Do It!

The trip to Edungu took about two and half hours. We even saw l'Evangéliste moored at the former rendezvous.

My, how we saved time! Zip up, do the classes with the deacons, come back the next day. No longer did we have spend hours in the truck with each other, or waste time together sitting by the shore waiting for the boat. We could do with three people what used to take ten or twelve. Less time in the boat with these same folks, less time in the village. I managed to do the class in quarter of the "old time." I finally set a record of two hours up, faster than Miss Budweiser.

Then I thought, perhaps an ultra-light aircraft could get us there in 30 minutes, the river had way too many twists and turns. A short little airstrip would be nice....

"Reverend Hill," said one of the local evangelists, "We would like to evangelize and start a church at Wakanga (which was up another river). Could you get a Zodiac for us?"

"Well, how could you maintain it and pay for the gas?"

Crestfallen, they left. Apparently Wakanga could just not be reached. I almost called out after them, "You could fell a tree and cut out a canoe..."

Delirium

Dr. John and his wife were relatively new missionaries. It was a pleasure to watch them rapidly learn the language and adapt with relative ease. Missionaries and nationals alike loved them. Both were competent, patient, and personable. They soon became involved in various local ministries outside the hospital. I, of course, could not just let this be.

"John, how would you like to make a trip upriver to Edungu?" This was in the days of the old Evangéliste. The Dua River and the Ebola river (hence Ebola Virus) ran close together and did merge at one point. It would be an adventure, a chance to see first hand what life was like in the "outback." No doctor could resist the opportunity.

"No thanks."

Eventually, though, his sense of duty, calling, obligation, curiosity and adventure made him go. Real men always are drawn in to the heart of the unknown.

The long trip upriver was uneventful. It was a great opportunity to sit next to someone for hours on end and shout conversation over the roar of the motor, share life, share food, share sunscreen. The news that a medical doctor was coming somehow traveled upriver faster than we did. L'Évangéliste rounded the last corner to the cheers of a sizeable crowd. People from nearby villages began to stream in. Some only asked for an aspirin. Others had more serious problems...No, he could not operate there. Many were referred to the hospital, but many received just the care they needed. John was overwhelmed.

Dr. John wanted to take the boat up to the next village, and so off he went. The next day he came back laying on the bottom. He looked dreadful, face ashen, then white, then effused, then green. He was a kaleidoscope of colors. He wretched, he...well, you get the idea. He was losing fluids in every way possible. He was hot, he was cold, he shook, he sweated. He was not, however, bleeding out of the ears. I took that as a good sign. Seeing John in this state may have been my first prompting to order a Zodiac. We decided to leave early the next morning, but it would not be until late the next night that we would actually be back at the Mission where he could get some help.

Periodically John would summon his strength and say something. "Brad, help me take this pill." I would say, "John, you are not supposed to self-medicate." And he would say, "Shut up Brad." He shook one out. The shaking was natural. He couldn't keep the pill down. He was in serious trouble.

You can't exactly race a huge war canoe down a serpentine river, but we tried. John lay in the bottom talking to angels. He slipped in and out of delirium. Once he sat bolt upright and said, "Linda, where's Linda?" He looked wildly around, then slumped back. Linda, dear reader, just so you know, was his wife. Still is in fact.

We pulled up to the truck just as night fell. Three guys helped John into the passenger seat of the Hi-Lux and strapped him in. His head tended to loll to one side, what he needed was a helmet for the next few hours. I tried to keep him braced up with one hand, finally he laid his head on my lap. This was fine as long as I was in third gear, which was in fact the main gear one used. The rapid down shift into second as we approached a huge hole loosened his two front teeth. He groaned and sat back up. It must have brought him around. He smiled at me and said hopefully, "Linda?" He was sick.

"No, John, not yet. We are almost there." Which we weren't, of course.

About midnight we pulled into the Mission and I drove straight to his house. A lamp was still burning. Getting him out of the truck was no easy task, but I got his one arm around me and we started to stagger to the house. It reminded me of Rifleman, where Chuck Connors carries his wounded and bleeding friend to the doorstep of their cabin, and the wife opens the door and screams. I got to the door and knocked on it. It took a long time for Linda to come. She finally opened the door and did not scream. Her eyes widened and he looked at John then at me like "What did you do to him?" I smiled and said like Chuck Connors, "I brung your man home." She didn't laugh. I thought it was a pretty good line. We dragged him into the living room and the last thing I saw was him lying there on the cement floor groaning.

He made full recovery. Sometime later Linda actually smiled at me.

And Doncha Come Back No Moh No Moh

It was close to 10 pm when someone went to fetch the "Représentant Missionnaire." The church council had been meeting all day, and now they had come to the place on the agenda where they needed to talk things over

with the "Représentant." The Rep knew what was coming and dreaded it. He walked slowly over to the church. If he had a Rosary, he would have fingered it. Worry beads. Cross himself.

The lamps were lit and threw rectangular squares of yellow out of the windows. It was one of those silent nights, where there seemed to be no noise, no wind, no frogs, but it would not be a holy night. As he approached he could hear the murmur of voices from inside. He prayed the traditional missionary prayer at times like this, "Beam me outta here."

The gathered pastors greeted him respectfully. He shook hands with all. Then sat down. A mug of coffee, milky and sweet and very strong was placed in front of him. No matter, he would not sleep this night.

They all looked so very somber. He took a sip. And waited.

The Council President, Rev. Gwako, cleared his throat. "Thank you for coming, we appreciate all you do..." and he slid sideways into the very tough topic, with politeness and a little ambiguity...but finally he could avoid the matter at hand no longer. He slid a handwritten list of names over to the Rep.

"We are partners with the American Church, fraternal workers, together we can continue to make progress...." and again he artfully used his words to paint inoffensive pastel colors around the subject as the Rep looked at the list. The words were not insincere, they genuinely did not want to offend, they truly did appreciate the partnership with the Mission. This was hard for everybody.

The Rep studied the list. At the top were names of missionaries currently on Home Assignment that would, Lord willing, return the next year. Under that was the same list, minus two names, entitled "Those Invited to Return." The unspoken third category would have been "Those Not Invited to Return." Two names.

The "Convention" between the Mission and the national church stated that missionaries could only come to serve upon invitation. Rarely were missionaries NOT asked to return. This was one of those times.

The Rep looked at those two names. These were husbands and wives with children. One couple, the Walters, had served two terms. The Pinnocks has served one. Both, he knew, felt called of the Lord to serve in Congo. They had sacrificed to be missionaries. They had uprooted their families and gone through orientation and language school. They had a huge investment in being missionaries. How would they ever write their last prayer letter..."Dear Prayer Partners, we are heart broken to have to tell you that the Church did not invite us back...." Then the questions would begin. How did you fail? What did you do wrong? What is the matter with you? What is the matter with the Mission? They were only a couple of months away from returning. The kids were excited to come back to the Academy. Why?

The one man was no surprise. There had been discussions about him before. He was difficult to work with and strongly opinionated. He seemed arrogant and prideful, but the Rep suspected that his direction and focus just made him insensitive. He was a genius at what he did, an expert in his field. He knew what needed to be done and how to do it and by golly he got the job done. The Job was Number One, and that was the problem. He had no tolerance for cultural differences, and in ignorance trampled on the interpersonal relations that were at the top of the African list. Efficiency, effectiveness, economy composed the trinity of his values. Apparently the church had had enough. Not invited.

The second man was a complete surprise to the Rep. There had been no history of reprimand or even the subtle gentle criticisms that sometimes bubbled up. He was sincere, relatively good at languages, competent but not expert, kind of the all around average-Joe missionary.

The Rep looked up at the Council. "Thank you for taking time to consider each of these missionaries, for staying up late at night..." and he spent a few minutes expressing his gratitude and that of the Mission for the

spirit of cooperation they enjoyed, and making reference to how the church was growing under this new leadership. But finally, he too, ran out of pastel colors to paint. He felt he had to be the defense attorney for these missionaries, no one else was there to argue their cause.

"The Walters..." he sighed and dove in. "The Walters, I know, have been hard to live with." He went on to agree with what he supposed was their assessment of them. He saw heads nodding around the table. "And let us not forget the enormous contributions he has made to the work here in the Congo..." and he elaborated on this. Some heads still nodded. Then he took a gamble. "Some of the pastors, and indeed some of you, are not always liked by others, you have had conflicts, yet you work them out, you do not dismiss a pastor for the kinds of things you are holding against Mr. Walter...yet because he is a missionary you seem not to want to accord him the same grace you do each other."

Then he held his breath and took a sip of coffee. Silence. Not a head was nodding. "If you will give him one more chance, I will bring these serious concerns to him, or if you wish we can go as a delegation to him when he comes..." A single head nodded. "He will listen, I know, you just have to get his attention." A smile. Two more nods. Maybe he had won the jury.

"As for Monsieur Pinnock...I simply don't understand. Can you tell me why he is not invited to return?"

"Ah, it is not Monsieur that we speak of, but his wife."

"His wife?"

"Mais oui. Monsieur is fine, we all get along with him, he works hard, but his wife..." He gave the African equivalent of the Gallic shrug. "You have been so unobservant that you have seen nothing?"

The Rep kicked himself for his latent sexism. His whole focus had been on the man, he had not even thought about the woman. Both were missionaries, both were called. He thought back. Christine Pinnock...early-thirties, two children, medium height, good shape, well, great shape if he admitted noticing such things, and he didn't. What was the problem? Clearly they expected him to see it. She helped around the mission, did hostessing, ran the radio sometimes, helped at the Academy. Played piano at the missionary service. True, even after four years her grasp of the language was rudimentary. Just the other day she had mixed up the verb for to urinate with the verb to speak...with hilarious results. She didn't know why everybody was convulsed with laughter. But he the Rep had made worse mistakes, like when he had confused "eat together" with "eat each other."

He shook his head. "You are right, I am unobservant. Can you tell me what you see?"

Rev. Gwako said, "There are three things. She berates her husband and ridicules him. Secondly, she doesn't like us, avoids us, has no contact with us, certainly no ministry. Thirdly, she dresses like a 'mwasi libre' a 'free woman.'"

Well, that was clear enough.

"How do you know what she says to her husband? I didn't know your English was that good!" he joked, but nobody laughed. It is a Western thing to laugh to reduce tension. "And who is listening at their door?" And he knew the answer before he finished his question. The "domestique", or cook was there. He had served missionaries for twenty years and spoke English quite well, understood it even better. Those who helped around the house were also the village reporters. Nothing was done in that house that was not also the subject around the campfires that night. Having missionaries around was high entertainment.

"We cannot say how we know, but we know."

And as he thought about it, it was true, her only contact with the African community was the cook.

Dress? Shorts, halter tops, short skirts. She could better have gone topless than exposed so much leg. Now the Rep understood why he had tried not to notice her. Why did they wait so long to speak about it? And why hadn't he or other missionaries, especially the veteran women, corrected her on this?

"Hmmm, well, yes, I do see what you mean. You know, I am glad you pointed this out to me, now we can take action to try to correct it."

"Why didn't you before this?"

"Well," he thought, then paused. Why not go for it? "Because we are Americans and don't always see things like you do...even though we should if we thought about it. On the other hand, it was not very brave of you to wait until they went home and while they were safely out of the way to refuse them re-entry. Why didn't you bring this up the first year they were here? Then we could have tried together to find a solution."

A couple of heads nodded, even one smiled.

They spent some more time talking about these and other issues, then the Rep went home. The next day he got a copy of the "P.V." or the minutes of the meeting. All of the missionaries were invited to return. The more the Rep thought about it, the more he realized that they had wanted him to defend those missionaries. Yes, they wanted to point out the missionary defects and highlight the areas of offense, but in truth they did not want to refuse them an invitation. There was no tougher prosecutor than the Council, they looked mercilessly at the missionaries, and talked frankly about their shortcomings and sometimes marveled that these folks with their arrogance and short skirts somehow managed to convey the Gospel at all. But neither was there any greater court of mercy and grace than the Council. The judgment was "Condemned", the sentence was "Mercy."

"Rule Over Every Living Thing..."

The most famous missionary pet is of course the parrot featured in *Slivers From the Cross* (Covenant Publications, 1990) that quickly learned to mimic everything from airplanes to toilets flushing. He was succeeded by another African Grey that we affectionately called "Dahlbird". We were living in a house not too far from "Service Technique." Service Technique employed a number of workers. Each morning they assembled to sing La Zairoise while the flag was hoisted. For a month Dahlbird attentively listened. Then one morning we heard Dahlbird sing "Zairois dans le pays retrouvé, peuple libre, nous sommes Zairois..." more or less to the right melody. Then it stopped. A few days later he did it again with a few more words added. The news of our patriotic parrot soon spread. People would stop by the back porch and sing a few words to him, trying to prime the pump. He would cock his head and stare at them. Others would whistle and he would bob his head but keep mum. When all was quiet and he didn't see anybody, he would burst out in song. As soon as he saw somebody, he would stop. But he got progressively bolder, and worse. It was as if the smooth line of his learning curve suddenly hit a prism and refracted in all directions. The words got jumbled, the melody line ended up sounding like Honky-Tonk Man. Eventually he would only sing when people came around. People would laugh so hard they had to sit down. It was better than having Nickelodeon.

One day one of the workers from Service Technique came over and listened for a moment.

"Monsieur," he said. "the bird is no longer amusing."

Apparently Dahlbird was not PC. He was a mockery of the Party. An anarchist.

My undergraduate degree was in psychology, in fact, I focused on behavior psychology and operant

conditioning. Now after all these years I had a use for it.

I would come out the door and Dahlbird would start to sing. I picked up a stick and whacked the top of the cage to make him stop. He flew around the cage like a crazed feathered dirt devil, then settled on the perch and looked at me. He would start again, and we would repeat the cycle. My operant conditioning scheme trained him perfectly. Before long as soon as he saw me coming, he would say the first two words "Zairoise dans..." and then fly crazy like around the cage before I ever hit it.

Joey was our pet monkey. He was small and greenish and very impish. He was sold to us at the door for a T-shirt and some salt. Who could resist a cute little monkey? Evidently lots of people could, but not me. I fashioned a body collar and connected it to a clothesline. He could run back and forth. Ideal.

Lunch was shattered by the most pathetic squealing of some animal in terminal pain I have ever heard. We all jumped up and went outside. Joey was strangulating himself on the clothesline, somehow impossibly twisted up, hanging by his neck. He was more than willing to bite anybody that tried to help him. Finally, wearing thick gloves, I got him free.

The next attempt was to tie him to a log. He could move the log around a bit even though it was heavy. I knew that this too was doomed from the start. The log would get caught. It would roll over Joey. Something would happen. However, we tried. Joey was amazingly strong.

Screaming children shattered lunch. I lent an ear. Not my kids. English? Lingala? Mostly English screaming. It sounded like "Uncle Brad, grab your monkey!" So I pushed away from the table and went outside. Joey had lugged the log across the yard and had cornered two little missionary kids. He was jumping back and forth and chattering at them ferociously. I donned my gloves and went over. I grabbed the corner of the log and pulled it back across the yard. Joey was pulling the other way, and it was not easy. When he realized that he was going to loose, he turned and sprang at me, no doubt wanting some cuddling. I was not in the mood, so just sprang away myself. He sat on the log now half way between the houses and kept vigil for the two MKs.

Once in a while we would let him loose in the house. For the most part he was nice to have around. He would walk around, look at things, pick them up, and then smash them down or drop them. He might curl up for a nap on the sofa. But mostly he would like to grab on to a leg and just move around the house with you. He had definitely been weaned way too early.

But if he didn't want to be caught, there was simply no catching him. He would race up the curtains, across the bar, over the table, behind the sofa, under the bed. He was just way too quick. But we were quick learners too, psychology and all that. When we wanted to catch him, we would sit down quietly and not move. Pretty soon he would look around the corner asking, "Where are you? This is no fun!" Then he would creep out, just out of reach, ready to resume the game. He would edge closer. His reflexes were way faster than mine, I could never just grab him. So we would wait. He would come to my feet, jump up beside me, then get on my lap. Then slowly I could enfold him...and he bought the lie. Once I had him, I could then slip the halter over him with no protest whatsoever.

Quietly, gently, no sudden moves. It works for us all.

Sniffy was our pangolin, or little scaly anteater. He was about two feet from nose to end of tail, half of him being tail. If he stuck his tongue out, he became three feet. The tongue was amazing. Watching it work was like watching a pink spring-loaded yoyo. Out it would go, zap, snap, and back in it would come. He would wander around inside the house like a little Bug Buster, nose down, tongue in and out, devouring all kinds of critters. I wondered if I needed to empty the bag once in a while.

He thought he was cute and cuddly. He was cute, but definitely not cuddly. He too would want some lap time

and crawl up onto us, curl up and snooze. Cuddling with him was like cuddling with an armadillo, I think. You could pet him only one direction, try it the other way and the scales would cut your fingers. I would thump his "shell" with my finger, even drum on it. I am sure he liked that because his tongue would go in and out. The other thing he liked was to hang upside down from Rachel, our oldest daughter's arm. Rachel would then take him and go outside to play.

He didn't like to be outside. Since our whole yard was crawling with one thing or another, we thought he would think he was in hog heaven, but evidently we didn't know how a pangolin thought. We would plop him down in the yard and he would literally run for the door. He was quick, faster than an armadillo, I am sure.

When evening came, the screen door would be covered with moths and mosquitoes. The interior light summoned them like flies to an outhouse, more or less. This was the one time Sniffy liked to go out. We would crack open the door and push him out. He would turn slowly and look up at the screen door in total awe, like a kid in a candy shop studying rows and rows of every kind of candy, hardly knowing where to start. Sniffy would yo-yo out his tongue and take off a foot worth of bugs, then rise up on his little stubby feet and do it again, trying to reach higher. Then he would begin to climb up the screen door. Every time. He would get higher and higher, scarfing bugs until he got almost to the top. Then because the screen was fastened to the wooden frame, his front paws would find no purchase and he would fall all the way back to the cement floor with a phuumpch that sounds like a pumpkin falling onto pavement from great height. At first we would wince, thinking that he had broken his shell and pangolin stuff would be oozing out all over. But he would shake it off, like boxer having taken a punch, then look up at the screen door once again, in awe that there were still bugs there he had missed, and start the climb all over again.

The hyrax was our pet too, from a distance.

On the first night at our new station we were jolted out of bed by a terrifying scream straight from the shower scene in Psycho.

Another responding scream came from our bedroom. "Wasat? Help! Do something! Get a light on! I don't want to live here anymore!"

"Calm down, dear," said Ruth.

We listened. It was coming closer to the house...it was coming...down? Down? The screamer was coming down a tree near our house. I tried to imagine this... animal. Hideous, bloodshot eyes, fangs, drooling, its bloodsucking proboscis quivering as it sought human flesh.

Then it stopped.

I asked around the next day. Nobody had paid it any attention. "Oh, it's probably just a hyrax." Helpful.

The next night, down it came again. This was not going to work for the both of us. I thought of hiring one of the village hunters, but couldn't quite figure out how to convince Ruth that having a shotgun go off in the night next to our bedroom was a good idea. Finally hired some kids to catch him.

A few days later they came shyly to the porch with some little critter in a box. They opened the top. Inside was a little bunny, no...a little weasel... sort of a cross between a guinea pig and an otter, I decided. Sort of. Cute, though. I paid them and thanked them for catching it.

So we slept peacefully for a few nights. Then once again my heart went into arrhythmia when the screaming began again. I called my exterminators and they got on the job. A few days later they came with a hyrax in a box. It looked so much the same as the other one. But then again, they would all look pretty much the same. I

paid them for their time and effort.

We slept in peace for three nights. Then the nightmarish scream of a tortured soul again descended towards us. He too was captured and the captors paid off. The blessed sounds of silence ensued...for two nights. Again it was captured, this time I kept it, and ah, let it loose elsewhere shall we say. My friends were out of a job. The sounds of silence reigned.

Fear Of The Dark

It is never really dark in America. There are always street lights, or lights from houses, car lights, airplane lights, search lights going up from new auto dealer openings or down from police helicopters following a suspect. We have night-lights in our homes, and our alarm clocks and watches glow in the dark. Adding to the luminescence are the moon and stars...sometimes.

There is no darker place than the jungle on a moonless cloudy night. Maybe a firefly will flit by and for a nanosecond you can imagine seeing something. I visited Carlsbad Cavern as a kid. The guide at one point turned off all the lights. Of course the hand in front of the face was invisible. It could be that dark only a few feet from our home.

Because of ants, scorpions and snakes, we would never wander out at night without a flashlight. The locally purchased flashlights and batteries were of notoriously bad quality. A week after purchase, one would have to shake it to get it to go on. Two weeks later, one would have to pound it. Then we would lick the batteries and scrape the connections after three weeks. So we imported expensive rechargeable flashlights. They were great for a year, then the batteries held their charge for a diminishing time, and they would fade suddenly. No warning, just zirooop, and it would be gone. Maybe it was the 50-cycle electricity.

I had to go "kill the light plant" one night. Because the generator was on, some ambient light from the library and homes helped illuminate my way. I knew my flashlight battery was on its last legs, but I also knew I could squeeze in one more short sortie before it gave up. The light plant spun down and suddenly the darkness of Carlsbad engulfed me. I was not afraid. I switched on my powerful American flashlight and started back.

Suddenly it went out. I shook it, it came on, then went out. Then nothing could persuade it, not shaking, not pounding, not even licking. The battery fell out, and I stooped to pick it up, couldn't find it, and I got turned around. I knew I was turned around, so I turned around around to point the right way, but was it? It seemed absurd to me that I could be lost only a hundred yards from my home. I heard about homesteaders in Alaska going outside to their barn in a blizzard never to return. Except that it was over a hundred degrees, that was how I felt.

I figured I could feel the edge of the road. Even if I were going the wrong way, sooner or later it would lead me to something, to a light or a ditch. I crept along, but roads being as they were, I wasn't sure where the edge was. Soon I was into the grass and not sure where the road or anything else was.

I considered yelling, but that was not manly. Real men don't yell that they are lost in their own driveway.

Something crawled up my leg. I was wearing only sandals and short pants, so it was an easy hop from the road to my foot to my leg. I brushed it off. What was it? I put another foot out, feeling for the road. I stepped on something. Did it move? Was it a snake? I retracted my foot. It wasn't a snake or I would have felt the fangs. I tried again, and inched along. A bat whirred by my head, then several. They had located me and were angry about the time I whacked one of their brothers with a tennis racket. I thought it was funny then, but regretted it now.

Then something really long did crawl up onto my foot. It could be a millipede. These things leave itchy painful tracks on you when all thousand feet march across unprotected skin. I reached down and felt for it, then flicked it off. But now where was it? It was nearby and it was mad.

This was getting ridiculous. I was just about ready to swallow my pride, my standing in the missionary clan, and yell when I saw a lantern coming towards me. It was the watchman. When he came alongside, I saw I was only a foot off the road and actually headed the right way.

"Likambo nini, patron (what is going on boss)?" he asked.

"Oh, just getting some air. Why don't you walk on up the hill with me, I have something for you." I'd find something for sure when I got there.

Out Of Alignment

The chauffeur saw it and didn't care. Or he saw it but couldn't miss it because of his speed. Or he just didn't see it at all. Which of these is the best point of view? Regardless, the result was the same. The Land Rover's right front wheel whammed into a deep hole. The whole vehicle shuddered like it was hit with a Scud missile. Even though I had seen it coming and had braced myself, my head whacked against the windshield then against the metal side. The blow would have eviscerated lesser vehicles, but the Land Rover ploughed on, the wheel popped up and out, throwing my head back and giving my neck a new stretching exercise. I tensed for the rear wheel. In it went, the truck lurched, front wheels spinning, and out it came. The driver never even glanced over, never said "Oh my gosh, I am so sorry...are you all right? I had better slow down and pay attention!"

A few miles later we came to a long stretch of washboard. The conventional wisdom is that you either go over it very slowly at about 10 miles per hour, or very quickly at about 40 mph. The theory is that the speed would keep the tires only skimming the tops. The chauffeur added the two numbers and divided by two. We roared into the washboard at 25 mph, the optimally bad speed. Our teeth chattered involuntarily as the wheels found a bobbing rhythm of their own. It felt like Tarzan beating MY chest. The lack of traction caused the Land Rover to fishtail left, then with over correction, right, then more left and more right, soon we would be sideways in the road. Mercifully it ended.

We were not far now.

One more trial before arrival. The Split Road. Soon enough it was before us. The right side of the road was about three feet higher than the left, and neither side was wide enough for the entire vehicle. The Land Rover eased into it and tilted more and more to the left. We all leaned to the right like they do on racing sailboats to keep them from tipping over. Just as we approached the knife-edge of balance, we stabilized. Ever see stunt drivers put one tire on a ramp and tip sideways then ride along on two tires? That was us. The left tires must have been folded in two. Then suddenly the sides reversed and we all leaned the other way. Then we were out.

Up ahead was the pavement, yes pavement. It ran for a few miles into town. It was the Eighth Wonder Of The World. One moment you were on roads that would eat Monster Trucks, the next cruising down Route 66. So out of the jungle we popped and up onto the asphalt. The speedometer needle inched around to uncharted territory. At about 40 a giant hand came out of the sky and began to worry the Rover like a dog shaking a bone. At 50 the Rover was threatening to shake the remaining two windows out. Rivets were about to pop.

The wheels were out of alignment. And so we would shake rattle and roll into town.

As long as we were going slowly, battling through mud and sand, grinding our way out of pits, and inching our way across log bridges, the alignment was unimportant, not even necessary. But the brutality of travel was

taking its toll. The constant torque and repeated crashes into holes had caused the wheels to choose somewhat different paths. The washboard had shaken loose the tie rods. Only when the road smoothed out and we were not emulating the Baja road race did it matter. Only with speed would the alignment be noticeable. Survival driving obscured the matter of proper alignment.

So does survival living. The battering of life can knock us out of alignment with God. Focusing on just getting through the day obscures how much we may have set our lives on a course not of God. Sometimes it takes a period, no matter how brief, of quiet and silence to realize how many windows and rivets we have lost, and show us the real state of our vessel.

I Scream For Ice Cream

The town of Gbado Lite at its peak was a Destination Stop for missionaries. It offered a variety of amenities that appealed to the starving hedonist in us all. The main hotel offered a restaurant and a pool. Its cabanas were air-conditioned. The stores were often stocked with supplies.

The pool was often too slimy or too empty. But the missionary grapevine worked wonderfully. One of the missionaries would return from Gbado Lite and make The Report over the radio network, "The pool is full and clean..." and the next day or so dozens of missionaries would find that their food pantry was low and they needed to make this trek. And so they came from near and far.

The restaurant was very nice. However the acoustics were such that every whisper was magnified as though one were speaking into a microphone. Hotel guests sat hunched over their tables whispering to each other or leaning back trying to eavesdrop on other whisperers. The menu was extensive, offering a variety of poultry, beef, fowl, wild game, and fish. An amazing assortment of fruit and vegetables were also listed. Soups. French sounding desserts like "Touffle bougoise au cherise champagne" or some such. Wines, beers, liqueurs, aperitifs were also on the menus, but we studiously ignored them.

What was on the menu however was not always what was available de jour. We would make our many choices from the menu and all place our orders. The uniformed, towel-on-arm waiter would laboriously write it all down then disappear. After ten to fifteen minutes would begin the Dance of the Revisions.

He would approach one of us and whisper in the ear, "Je regrette, your filet mignon is not available at this time. Would you care for something else?" And so an alternate order would be placed. Yet another "garcon" would approach the table, bend over to another patron and whisper the same thing. His alternate order would be placed, and so on until we all had made our revisions, the first revisions that is. This could go on for some time. One of us might hit a lucky choice and their food would be brought out, while the others were still ordering plan D, F, or even G. With time and experience however we learned that when we were handed the menus to ignore them completely and ask, "What do you have today?" What they had might not even be on the menu, such as "lapin à l'orange avec fraise" (orange rabbit with strawberries) or the like.

One day walking down the main street we glanced into a shop window. It was a new shop, just opened. A few people were in there ordering something at a counter. We stopped and looked in the window. We stared. No, it couldn't be...it was an ice cream machine with a picture of an ice cream cone on the front. A lady walked out licking a tall cold ice cream cone. It would melt in a matter of seconds as the temperature was around a hundred degrees, but who cared!

We crashed open the doors and hurried inside. It was a large room. Against one wall was a broken bus seat. At the opposite end was the Machine. The air conditioning blasted away chilling us instantly. It was heaven.

"Oui?" said the clerk.

I suddenly realized I had no idea how to say ice cream cone in French. I looked around at the sign hoping there would be some French word there. I didn't want to end up with orange rabbit. Finally I pointed to the machine and said "Glace, s'il vous plait." Then I made a cone shape and said "conique", which probably meant dunce cap.

I think she asked me what flavor. I said chocolate. I think she said they only had vanilla. So I said vanilla. Finally she swirled it into the cone higher and higher. Effortlessly she piled it up until it began to teeter, then she handed it to me.

One by one we got our cones.

We sat on the bus seat and snarked them down in a few huge gulps then held our heads as the cold-front hit our lobes. It was exquisite.

We opened the door into the heat once again and walked down the sidewalk. The memory was already fading.

"You know, Ruth," I said, "This ice cream parlor probably won't be here next time we come...." With that we turned and dashed back to the door and ordered another round.

Sure enough, the next time we came to Gbado Lite, the store was there but the machine was not working. Out of supplies. Then the next time the shop itself was closed. The radio reports continued for several weeks, "No ice cream" as missionaries came and went. Then the reports stopped. It was over.

The Spittle Of Righteousness

The Lord provided me with a litmus test to check for the acid of self-righteousness. Her name was Dorotea. She was an elderly, blind woman that came to beg quite frequently from the missionaries at the Goyongo seminary. Her relatives did not seem to be caring for her. In fact, they were stealing from her, so she carried all her possessions on her back, tied on with a rag. At all times she lugged around her cooking pot, her extra shirt, her knife, her bit of thread, and a few other odds and ends. At night, she turned the bundle around to her front and hugged it while she slept. Children, willingly conscripted in hopes of sharing in whatever she might receive, led her by the metal rod she used as a cane.

To Dorotea, time did not exist, she could talk for hours. She also had a very unique greeting. After giving the traditional Mbote she would spit on your head! Sometimes more than once. This was supposed to be some kind of blessing, kind of like the Greeks spitting at the bride during the Big Fat Wedding. My kids would do anything to avoid this Ceremony of the Spittle.

The children would lead her up the hill to our house where she would settle in on the porch. Somehow, Brad never seemed to be around for these visits. It didn't matter if I were teaching or cooking. She'd just wait, knowing that sooner or later I would come out on the porch to talk to her. After all, I was the noble, self-sacrificing missionary, wasn't I? And so we would sit on my porch and talk, Rather, I'd listen because Dorotea just wanted to talk. Saying hello to her was like hitting the Play button. Her Lingala was mixed with Ngombe, so it was hard to follow. I was tempted to read a book while she talked...but didn't. Her stomach was always empty, and to prove it, she'd pull her raggedy shirt way up and her skirt way down to show me. The stark, up close evidence was far more jolting than my picturing of a starving kid on a Feed The Hungry ad. So we'd feed her of course, give her some tea and sugar to take home, maybe a little money, and some clothes from time to time.

When I saw Dorotea coming, I wanted to run and hide. I hated her spitting on my head. I felt exploited with her whining and begging. I couldn't stand to sit there so long listening to her prattle on and on. I didn't want to look again at her sagging belly! I just didn't have the time...or the inclination.

The litmus test would turn up red: acidic. I would think, "Some missionary you are, Mama Luta! Some trainer of Christian leaders! Some model of Christ-like love!" And the corker? Before she left each time, she would ask to pray for me. For me, not me for her, but her for me! The roles were reversed. She would pray long and hard, beautiful prayers, unending prayers. And then she would spit again. I always sank into a depression when I saw the children leading her away by the road down the hill. Who am I really? Why am I so graceless?

"When you did it for the least of them..." said Jesus. In the eyes of the world, Dorotea was one of the "least." In time began to welcome her visits because she challenged me to see myself for what I was: a sinner needing God's grace. Jesus loved her just as much as He loved me. She'll be standing way towards the front of the line in heaven, so far in front I may not even see her up there.

I thank God for giving me Dorotea to check on my self-righteousness. "Lord, I learned the lesson, please don't send another!" Amen.

Part Two: I Told You So!

Don't you love it when someone says that to you? Paul said it to a desperate crew that had abandoned all hope of being saved.

Paul is now a prisoner headed for Rome where he would make his appeal to Caesar. The journey is not what the sea captain or the centurion thought. It was to be for them far more of a spiritual journey than a delivery of prisoners.

First, the journey is harder and slower than expected. "They sailed slowly for a good many days....the wind did not permit us to go farther....with difficulty sailing past....considerable time passed...the voyage was now dangerous..." (Acts 27: 7-9). Oh, how that is true for our journeys. We have time-tables and hopes for a quick arrival. Supposing that we can achieve, conquer, conclude, complete as we determine, we set out only to find it is longer, harder, and riskier than supposed.

Second, we continue to rely solely upon experience and logic. The pilot and the captain knew the waters, knew the winds, they understood the weather patterns and were the best judges of what was wise, prudent, and possible. They ignored Paul's warning (vs. 10) and continued on. Logic demands we don't go back to Lystra. Experience says that what happened before will happen again. The walk of faith will take us beyond both to God who defies the merely logical and takes us into the realm of the unexpected.

Third, we find ourselves hunkering down, trying to ride it out. We throw out the sea anchor to slow our movement, we jettison cargo to lighten the load. We fight for life itself and when we are stripped bare with neither sun nor stars to guide us, we gradually lose hope. It is at that point somebody might say, "I told you so!" (vs. 21)

Fourth, the Word of God speaks hope into our situation. It is not the solution we sought, we might hear "we must run aground..." It is not as quick as we want, "when the fourteenth night had come..." All we can do is hang on, trust, and wish for daylight (vs. 29).

And so we might describe our voyage of faith. Longer, harder, darker than we had thought when we set sail. We learn the limits of our wisdom. We learn to listen to the Word of God. We find hope in Him and not in our mastery of the elements.

Over The Bridge

Fern and I had just finished an exhilarating but grueling weekend with all the leaders in women's ministries. We were the last to leave the village. Fern had driven us there, and she was at the wheel for the return - until

we came to a two-log bridge extending across a deep ravine and a river. "Ruth," she said, "I'm just too exhausted to drive across that. You drive and I'll guide you." I took one look at that bridge and the river and felt like saying, "Oh oh, I have a terrible migraine, you drive!" But feeling sorry for her, I said, "Sure." After all, all the other trucks had made it. I glanced down, way down into the rushing river. No trucks piled up. But from behind the wheel the two logs of the bridge looked like two pencils. Never before in all my driving had I needed to navigate a bridge like that.

I put the truck in gear and inched forward until my front wheels were on the logs. Fern was nodding and motioning me forward. She looked about four miles away! I got all four wheels onto the bridge and froze. "I can't do this! I'm going to fall into the gully! I will die, I will never see Brad or the girls again, and worse yet I'll be known forever around the campfires as the only one who trashed a mission truck getting across this bridge!" But there was Fern, still waving me forward.

It must have been easier coming the other way. Sure, she could do the left/right hand motions and the thumbs up and the victory sign, her life was not at risk. Funny how faith seems to grow the farther one is away from real risk. I inched along and got the back wheels up and aligned with the toothpicks. Just to be sure, I cracked the door and looked down. All I could see were the foaming rocks below. I couldn't get out now if I wanted to. Out of options, I went ahead.

I kept the corner of the hood lined up with the edge of the plank. I inched ahead some more. But Fern was indicating that I should move a little left. Left? No! Left was wrong, left was out. Left was death. Left was the way to campfire infamy. That would SURELY put me in the gully. Or was I wrong? Against all my instincts, I moved left. Fern nodded approvingly, gave me the finger-and-thumb 0-sign, and waved me on some more. I again inched forward. Now she said to the right! Everything in me said she was wrong! My instincts said to continue what I was doing. Left, right, I wished she would make up her mind. Right was wrong before, but now right was right. But I went right. And Fern nodded approval, gave me the thumbs up sign. Then just as the front wheels grabbed blessed earth, the rear wheels began to slip between the logs. The four-wheel drive saved me and up onto the road we climbed.

Together we got the truck across. I suppose it was like flying a plane in the fog by instruments. We can be so sure of ourselves that we condemn ourselves to crash and burn. The truck didn't fall off the bridge. Fighting my judgment all the way I had crawled across that bridge obeying Fern's every motion. And I made it. Alive. Truck intact.

I could follow my own thinking or trust Fern's guidance. I chose to obey Fern. Why? She had the whole picture. All I had was a gut feeling - it felt right. On our journey we will continually be making decisions. Do we really want to follow God's plans, to let Him guide us? Do we choose to submit to God's leading, even when it goes contrary to our own thinking, because He has the whole picture? Do we respond to Him just because He is the sovereign Almighty God?

Lower The Lady

I had to avert my eyes. For my sake and hers. I wanted deniability, so did she. The middle-aged, well-coifed, well-educated, well-dressed, well-spoken woman was suspended over the side of the riverboat, skirt hiked way up. African hands were holding her from above, African hands were reaching for her from the wildly bobbing canoe below, a thousand eyes from the shore were watching every move, and one pair of American eyes were tearing up in, well, absolute mirth. I would have rolled over and doubled up in appendix-busting hilarity had I not been standing in the canoe and had I still an appendix.

How did this happen?

Occasionally visiting pastors and spouses come out from the States. They can be real encouragements to the

missionary community, and it is The Hope that they will go back as real encouragers to their missions committees and become Mission Advocates. So we try to give them a good time, show them around, you know.

Rev. Jim and Jean Johnson were one such couple. They were both well known and respected in the Denomination for successful ministries. Though they had known hardships and endured difficult trials in their lives, they were, still, after all, Americans. Water comes from bottles or filters. You don't have to climb trees for your bananas or dig for your potatoes. Meat comes wrapped from the Meat Section of the store. You don't have to hunt it, kill it, bleed it out, clean it, hack it up.... well, you get the idea. As for most Americans, perspiration stains are an embarrassment, as are unbrushed teeth or hair that sticks out. Adventure comes from the Discovery Channel. And for middle-class, middle-aged, middle-of-the-road Evangelicals, modesty is as important as sobriety.

So we took them on a tour of some of the stations, including one port town along the Congo River. The riverboats would stop there on their way from Kinshasa to Kisangani and returning. A docking riverboat hits the town with the impact of a meteor. As it approaches, people pour out, vendors line up. Carts of produce and livestock of all kind queue up along the shore. Huge trucks piled high with merchandise to export to Kin line up and wait. The boat is the lifeline and everyone wants to hang on for the ride.

It is not only the boat that pulls into town. The riverboat is surrounded by a flotilla of lesser craft, mostly canoes, many lashed together. These canoes have followed the riverboat up and down, selling fish and even crocodiles to the passengers. They are like the little birds that make a living pecking who knows what from who knows where on the Rhino.

Pushed and pulled by the riverboat are barges that carry most of the merchandise of lumber, sometimes coal, always barrels of palm oil. People with the cheap tickets live out on the tops of the barges, braving the elements. Passengers with the expensive tickets suffocate inside of metal ovens.

The riverboat itself is a combination of casino, brothel, shanty-town, bar, disco, grill, and dental office. Boom boxes vibrate the rusty walls, the shouting of the Sauk-type bartering rises above it all. People cover the hull from the pointy end to the other.

We all thought the Johnsons really ought to go on board and get a good first hand look.

Getting on board was the first hurdle. One gangplank was down. Sweating, gasping porters with neck-straining loads were slogging their way up the slippery gangplank, others dashing back down it for another load. There was no "excuse me, let me by, hey, buddy watch where you are going...." You just saw a gap and jumped in, kind of like entering the Dan Ryan Expressway in Chicago about 5 PM. Don't signal or they will never let you in. Just do it. Don't look back. Don't make eye contact.

We were led on board by Pasteur Bokanga. He jumped into a porter-gap and signaled us to do the same. Ruth - in, me - in. Jim - in. Jean...well...not in. We were on board looking back, signaling her to try. "You can do it, come on!" She kind of swayed towards the line up, then back with a smooth swaying motion as she timed the gap. She was summoning up her old jump roping skills from school, the rope went around and around and you kind of got the body going just right, then schwazoop, you were in and jumping. She timed it right and started across the Moat.

"Don't look down at that hideous slimy croc infested water!" I shouted at her- or rather almost did.

Finally she made it across the Moat. Ready for the adventure to really begin.

The folks on the deck were not tourists, but whole families. They had their spaces protected. Stuff was

smoking on the pans, and other stuff boiling away in the pots. Everything smelled like when you burn the fish sticks and the house fills up with that burnt catfish smell, that combined with when your sewer backs up and the possum dies under your deck. These folks had not left nice isles to walk in. So we made our way across the deck stepping over sleeping bodies and crying babies and around bubbling cauldrons. Conversation tended to die out as we got near, then increase at a much higher volume after we passed. Celebrities.

The walkways were just as crowded. Along one side vendors had set up skinny shops, selling half bars of soap and half cigarettes. Dried fish on sticks was very popular. Scarves, ointments for every place on the body, beer, Johnny Walker Black Label (believe it or not- it said so right on the label) heady perfume, long machetes, fishing lines and nets, parrots, eels, monkeys- it was all for sale between your room and the Head. "Honey, I think I'll just step out for a monkey and a banana beer, be right back." "OK, dear. Bring me back an eel-on-a-stick, I'm starved."

We made our way up to the Bridge. I could tell it was the bridge because the wheel was there. So were some maps and a compass, and a bunch of shiny levers. The Captain was not there, but his assistant was. "Are you going with us to Kin?" he asked. I looked horrified, then confused. "Kin? Oh no, we must be on the wrong boat. Come on, dear!" He laughed.

From there we went down below into Dante's Inferno. The heat and humidity were intolerable. The pulsating base emanating from the disco bar echoed around the steel bulkheads and used our brains for timpani. It was packed. Some people were into a desultory kind of dance, most just stood around and drank and looked at us. One big fellow with blood shot eyes waved us over, holding up his beer. I shook my head no. He shouted something at us. Jean looked uncertain.

"He asked if you would like to dance. It would be impolite to turn him down," I said. Not. I am so restrained sometimes. "He said you'll never get off the boat alive." Not. Oh well, when can I ever say the things I think?

We beat a hasty retreat back outside. We decided to aim for the rear of the boat, which seemed less crowded. The steps were slippery- from what I don't even want to guess- and so we went down carefully. Poor Jean. Each of us stepped over the trussed up pig lying at the foot of the stairs, except Jean. She was doomed to step on it. It just couldn't be otherwise, and we knew that and we all accepted the karma, except her. The pig flopped and tried to squeal, but as the snout was tied shut, it sounded for all the world like when you turn the ignition on the car when it is already running. Screaezzch! She screamed, also a given. But she recovered nicely.

"A pig!" she commented breathlessly. Yes indeed.

The back of the boat was full of critters, some dead, some alive: a basket-full of baby crocs, a python, piles of dead monkeys, chickens suspended upside down by their feet hanging from railings like ornaments, tubs of fishy things.

"Well, you've seen the boat. Want to see more?"

"We haven't explored the engine room...." said Jim. "Ah, but we don't need to, it is time to go." He had caught the Signal from his wife, the universal knife-across-the-throat gesture. We all turned and looked at the way we had come. The gangplank seemed a mile away.

Pasteur Bokanga also figured out the Signal and sized up the situation. "We don't have to go back that way, we can get off here directly."

"What did he say?" asked Jean.

"We all have to buy a baby croc before they will let us off." Ruth kicked me before I could say that. How did she know? Ruth told her and she was relieved. Prematurely.

Pasteur Bokanga stood by the railing and whistled an ear-splitting whistle that would have done the NBA refs proud. He gestured at two canoes by the shore and waved them over. We all approached the railing and looked down. The boats bobbed about six feet below us. Pasteur Bokanga climbed over the rail, turned around and lowered himself over the side. He was short, so they reached up and helped him in. No problem. Jim went next, easy as pie. Ruth in a skirt ducked under the railing, did her turn, and being tall, could almost step into the boat with a long stretch, but even she needed help. I, being six and a half feet, had no problem either. That left Jean.

We were all in the canoe now looking up at Jean silhouetted against the sky, a brave figure, hair streaming in the wind, facing her fate without a blindfold. She couldn't go over the top railing, and couldn't get so low as to go under the bottom one, so she stepped in between and managed to get herself on the outer edge of the boat facing us, she just couldn't turn around. But to her credit, she did not panic. She was rather cool about it. She sized it all up and realized that she had to do this. There really was no going back. A crazed pig guarded the stairway, now subsiding to a cat-in-the-garbage disposal kind of sound. She inched her way down and managed to sit on the edge, still hanging on to the bottom railing and began to slide over the edge. And that is where we began this story.

Later I began to feel really bad about this. We should not have taken them on board and subjected them to such indignities. But I got over it. Of course they needed to take home a great story. We were just helping.

Jean had been very quiet since we stepped foot on the shore. Nobody said anything about anything. We arrived at the airstrip and the Cessna was there. Things were still very quiet. The pilot asked, "How was the Riverboat? I hear that is really a trip." Lots of comments came to mind, but I didn't need any Universal Signal from my wife to shut up already.

I was in front with the pilot, Ruth and Jean sat together behind me. The Cessna took off and banked over the riverboat. We all looked down. Soon it would embark for Kinshasa.

A half hour later I heard stifled laughter behind me. Then it burst out. I turned around. Jean and Ruth were really hooting. That was a good sign. Ruth had been writing a note to our daughters away at school about this trip and had put in a little sketch of the Last Episode. Jean caught sight of it, and demanded that Ruth show her. Reluctantly she did. Jean contemplated the cartoon of her suspended over the railing for a moment, then she convulsed in laughter. Another Missions Advocate born before my eyes.

The Sorcerer's Advisory

Using the Jesus Film as an evangelistic tool is like using a sledgehammer to pound a nail into plasterboard—way too powerful! It is apt to drive the nail clear through the wall and leave a huge gaping hole. The Jesus Film is a two-hour film based on the book of Luke and now translated into many languages, including the principle language of our mission field in Congo, Lingala.

This film has been presented hundreds of times in our area. It is projected onto bed sheets raised on bamboo poles. People can see the movie from each side. When the team comes to a village, everyone comes out to see it. These folks are not media sophisticated, they have not grown up with TV or videos or movies, many have never seen a projected image. So when they show Jesus walking and teaching it is astounding. When they drive the nails into Jesus' hands and feet the crowd wails and cries, throws dirt and really grieves. One man asked me, "I didn't know they had cameras back then." Another man laughed at his naiveté and said, "Shows what you know....these were just actors...." Then he asked me, "How much did they have to pay this actor to be nailed to a cross?" It was very, very real to them. The responses at first were so overwhelming, virtually

everyone came forward at the altar call, that we decided not to make a call for conversion then but at a later time when they cooled off a bit.

We were traveling, showing this film from village to village, and the next day we were to come to a village called Kara Gbambo. Pastor Mbeka, who was the head evangelist, received a message from the medicine man or what we might call a sorcerer or witch doctor of Kara Gbambo which said, "Don't come to our village. You will not show the film here." Well, Rev. Mbeka is not a man to be deterred, so we went anyway. The letter was the red flag waved in from of the bull. It was like blood to a shark. We arrived at the village and set up the equipment, a few people began to show up and and started to roll the film.

Then it began to rain. No big deal. We took everything inside. The rain stopped, we went back out, set it up, a few people came, and the rain began again. We realized that we were in a spiritual battle for Kara Gbambo, this was no accident. We took the equipment inside and prayed. The rain stopped, we went back out, set up and a wind came up and blew the screen down. Rain kept up all night. We had other commitments, so we had to keep on going the next day, but we left feeling like we had been defeated. You know how it is, you put God on the spot. "OK God, your power has been challenged, show yourself, stop the rain, let us show the film... You showed up Baal on Mt. Carmel and Dagon fell down and broke... Do it like that, Lord, show them your power, Lord!" We prayed such things as we are more than conquerors, we can do all things through him who strengthens us, that faith is the victory. I was disappointed in God and was embarrassed as we slunk out of town. The power of the medicine man had been enhanced. The door was closed to us.

But God takes the long view of when and how to topple Dagon. Paul says to devote ourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it. That is not just a quick arrow prayer. Constant, incessant, unceasing, unrelenting prayer is what he has in mind. Pastor Mbeka now had the bit in his teeth. If we had simply shown the film and moved on, this village would have received just the normal amount of attention. The Sorcerer should have let us show the film. Pastor Mbeka began to pray about this village, about this medicine man, and got others to pray with him. He organized an onslaught. He sent lay village preachers to hold services there. Bible School students went there to evangelize. The invasion of the Strong Man's household had begun.

Our family returned to the States before the last chapter on Kara Gbambo was written. Two years after we left I received a letter from Pastor Mbeka: "Nsango ya liboso mpo na koyebisa yo ezali..." Wonderful! It said that he had news about building a new church at Kara Gbambo, that it was finished and we now had over 160 Christians there and the man who ruined our film was now also a Christian. This is what devotion to prayer for open doors can do! A church is now there with a solid Christian core and the witch doctor himself is now one of the brothers in Christ. Praise God!

I Cor. 16:9 says "A wide door for effective service has opened to me AND there are many adversaries..." God opens the door and we can expect adversaries. God opens the door as we pray. Let us pray for boldness to go through when we see that it is opened in the face of opposition. In Acts 14 Paul was dragged out of Lystra and stoned, later he preaches to his home church at Antioch how God had opened a door of faith to the gentiles. Some door! Paul was in jail once when the Lord sent an earthquake and his chains came off and the doors to the jail were opened. Now there is a door of opportunity...to flee, right? No, to stay and witness, and the jailer and his family were converted. But this came after his beating and imprisonment. Paul says that every circumstance turned out for the furtherance of the Gospel. It will for us too as we devote ourselves to prayer for it to happen.

The Island

AD 2000 marked the rise of "reality shows." One of the first and most popular was Survivor. Fifty-five million people watched the final episode. Survivor Island is just a dot on the world map. The photographs from the airplane show a beautiful tropical island with gorgeous beaches.

The producers dropped Pitcarin's Island, Gilligan's Island, Lord of the Flies and Blue Lagoon into an Osterizer and out came "Survivor." This idyllic south-seas island would be the scene of a 39-day human drama. It was immediately apparent that two strong tendencies were at work in the Tribe. Several people sought friendships, tried to "bond" and were making an effort to care for each other. They showed interest in the others. The image of God within, however marred, was seeking the good. They wanted community. The opposing tendency was to adopt a pragmatic "end justifies the means" approach and to do whatever it took to win the million dollars. Manipulation, deceit, and shifting alliances finally produced a winner. Or a loser.

What a different dynamic would have appeared had the objective been this: "A million dollars to each one who survives 39 days if you all survive." Community would have been formed. The weakest person would have received the most care, not a vote to leave.

Survivor Island was divided by gender, by age, and by alliance. What could possibly unite such a group? Only sharing a common purpose.

What looks good from a distance often looks much worse closer up. The map tells very little about what really matters.

Your map might also show islands in the Congo River. They too look so peaceful and idyllic from five thousand feet. The gentle river splits and flows around each island in a warm embrace. Canoes are beached along the sandy shores. You can see men mending the nets and children playing at the waters edge. Just above the shoreline, women pound corn and dry the fish in the yards of the simple homes. Fishing, mending, playing, cooking...what a life.

When we first stepped out of the boat, nothing seemed to contradict that birds-eye view. But we soon discovered that life was hard and harsh there too. As the sun set, the mosquitoes settled on us like a thick fog. The nets sagged under their weight! A measles epidemic had recently killed a dozen children, a crocodile had snatched another. The river was not for swimming! The rising river had flooded them out the year before and they had to "emigrate" to the shore for several long weeks, losing everything. The church building had been swept away.

But the real problem was something else all together.

Two years prior to this, a young man had made his way from this island to eastern Congo where he had encountered Islam. He converted and made his way back to the Island. Soon most of his clan had embraced Islam as well. The island was thereby divided between the Protestants on one end and the Muslims on the other. For the most part they tolerated each other. They could cooperate in fishing and planting and getting things to market. However the heart-issues of human life could not so easily be resolved. They had married back and forth across the clan lines for generations, now that came to a halt. Where were they to find spouses? When a Christian died, the Muslims would not come to the funeral...and the Christians returned the favor. When a child was born, the same invisible wall kept the whole island from rejoicing. The Muslims accused the Christians of idolatry, worshiping three gods, and of distorting the Word of God, which was clearly the Koran. The Christians accused the Muslims of "works righteousness" and fatalism. The Muslim men of course could have several wives and this tempted the Christian men to convert. The Christians could drink alcoholic beverages and eat pork, which tempted the Muslims. So it was better to just draw a line across the island and create a sort of religious DMZ.

The arrival of a group of evangelists with the Jesus Film began to make the DMZ more of a "semi-permeable membrane." Our canoes slid onto the beach and disgorged a number of men, projector, generator, electrical cords and other gear. The Christians had long anticipated our arrival, in fact they had prepared a great feast - for the day before. But unexpected delays are only to be expected. There is no way to telephone ahead and explain. But their eagerness was unabated. The meat was very well done and the coffee twice as strong. Each

of us was shown to the host's home for the evening. And as the sun began to set, we set up the screen and the drums began to beat. The beating of the drums was quite unnecessary. The Island was perhaps less than a mile long. Everybody knew about everything almost instantly.

The evangelists had set up the screen just outside the church. A few of the elders watched this and conferred among themselves, then went over and spoke with the evangelists. Soon the screen was taken down and moved to the DMZ. They figured their Muslim kin could thereby watch the film without having to cross the line. And indeed a number of men, women, and children watched from what they considered "their" side."

And, as usual, praise God, the Holy Spirit anointed the film with power and at the end those on the Protestant side moved forward, some for new birth, others for renewal. At first the Muslim watchers hesitated. Who would want to be first? What if nobody followed? But one or two went, then several came behind them. Most of those who had viewed the film eventually came forward for prayer.

Two acts of courage helped make this possible. First, the men who decided not to put up any unnecessary barrier to their Muslim neighbors. "Move it to where they can watch safely." The good news was not meant to be kept at their end of the island, hoarded for themselves. And how often do we not throw up all kinds of unnecessary barriers to our unbelieving watchers? Second, the first Muslim to cross the line was risking much. What if nobody else followed? What would the others think of him? How would he be treated? Would he have to move to the other end of the Island? He was a pioneer of faith, and because the first one took the first step in faith, risking much, the windows of heaven were opened.

Recent reports say that several Muslim families still live on one end of the Island, most have become Christians. One pastor said they actually met together for Good Friday, since both faiths esteem the death of Jesus. Perhaps future reports will say they all met on Easter.

A New Book Of Worship

The African lifecycle requires particular religious observances. The peripherals seem very different than their Western counterparts, yet the driving needs are the same.

"Prof, please come out to my village this Sunday. We want you to help bless the tools."

So I went. I was acutely aware that neither my seminary education nor pastoral experience had taught me anything about blessing tools. Ruth grew up on a Dutch farm and they never had a "bless the tractor" ceremony, or "consecrate the manure spreader" liturgy. Somehow the idea of blessing tools smacked of superstition. Maybe even heresy. Maybe this was insipient Sabellianism.

We arrived in a light shower. The believers were excited as this portended great things. The planting season was right on schedule, maybe even a bit early. We had to hurry. The faithful gathered, the choirs sang and finally we came to the Blessing of the Tools. The village catechist called everyone up front with their tools. Hoes. Machetes. Axes. Adzes. Shovels. Pick Axes. Huge iron bars. And rifles.

"Ah, rifles are not garden tools," I pointed out to my student. He looked surprised. "Prof," he said slowly. My students thought speaking slowly to me would help. "When we begin to cultivate the fields and cut down the trees and burn the grass, alors...you never know what will run out...or at whom."

Everyone knelt. We stood. Nothing happened. My student nudged me with his elbow. "Bulisa yango!" he whispered a bit fiercely. "Make them holy!"

I grabbed a hoe with one hand and a rifle butt with the other and thanked the Lord that He had given us intelligence to make tools and make the work easier, well, easier than doing it by hand. That was a

complicated bit of Lingala. I thanked Him for strong bodies to work the fields as I looked down at a little girl holding her trowel. She was staring up at me with a big smile. I asked the Lord of the Harvest to make fruitful the work these tools would do. Then I paused. I couldn't think of anything else.

"No injuries," I was prompted.

"And that none of these instruments injure their users or be used in any bad ways..." I couldn't think of another way to say "inappropriate." I paused.

"That they don't break."

"And that they do not break during the weeks of hard work ahead, and if they do..." a sharp elbow detoured that faithless caveat I was about to build into the prayer. "...they can be repaired and little time lost. Amen." Amen should bring things to an end.

All stood up and they sang a song and went out, a farmer's army brandishing its deadly weapons, ready to do battle with the earth.

A month later my student again found me on the path on the way home from class. "Prof, would you come help us pray for rain?" Indeed, it had not rained since we had made the tools holy. The first shower was a feint to throw us off, to raise our hopes only to dash them more savagely. If rain did not come soon, the first planting would be lost.

I looked through the Covenant Book of Worship, knowing that there were no ceremonies in there for rain-praying. What did the Swedish farmers of yesteryear-and last year for that matter- do in the face of draught? Did they not pray? Why were all the liturgies so "spiritual"? The Book of Worship had helps for commissioning missionaries and ordaining pastors and building church buildings, for marriage and baptism and death, but where was the Rain Litany and the Locust Swarm Responsive Reading? When Solomon dedicated the Temple, didn't he say that in times of draught to pray towards the Temple and the Lord would hear? Didn't Elijah pray and either stopped the rain or started it again?

The believers were gathered. The drums beat, the choirs sang. And this time I knew that I would be called upon to do the honors. I had come prepared. When we bowed and I was asked to pray, I was ready. Together we acknowledged that all of our life is lived only by the grace of God, God sends the early and the late rains (Jeremiah 5:24). All good gifts come down from the Father of lights above. Glancing at my list of various Psalms, I prayed regarding green pastures and luscious sweet rain, the moistening dew, mists, and hand shaped clouds that grew on the horizon, rivers of water and gardens planted near them. I prayed on and on. I was getting choked up as I contemplated the dusty hard ground transformed into nutritive loam.

People were beginning to stir. I paused.

"Amen!" said my student before I could go on. They all said "Amen!" and stiffly stood up.

And, actually, a few days later it did rain.

"Prof?" said my student some time later.

"WHAT!?" I said a bit fearfully.

"Will you come on out to my village and pray for...."

"For WHAT?"

"For....a raising of the dead?"

He let a moment go by as he watched my face change colors and shapes. Then he laughed, "You were really worried weren't you?"

Anthropologists say you are finally adapted to the culture when you can roll with the humor. I wasn't there yet.

Out of these and other encounters the pastors in the Ubangi formed a committee and step by step they fashioned a new book of worship called *Motindo Na Kokamba Losambo*, or "The Way To Lead Worship." Right there along with Communion and Baptism is "A Service For Bringing A New Baby Out Of The House," and right after Ordaining A Pastor is "A Service For Welcoming Back Backsliders." And of course it includes "A Service To Bless The Garden Work Tools" and "A Service To Pray For Rain." Amen.

BUZZ SAW

Word came that some villagers had made the sawmill operators stop. The Pasteur Responsable (the "PR") and a few others trekked a couple clicks out into the jungle to see what was what. What they saw was this: a dozen or so villagers sitting on the giant tree that had been felled. The giant blade was lined up on the log ready to slice out planks of lumber.

The portable saw was a remarkable machine. It could be carried out into the forest to the selected tree. It allowed selective harvesting of trees, one here and one there, and so posed no threat to the ecology. It could cut boards of just about any kind, in hard wood or soft. Transporting the cut lumber was done in several ways: men could come and simply carry off a board, one at a time. A vehicle could wind its way to the site and load up. Lumber was in high demand. Villagers wanted it for furniture, doorframes, a few even tried to build wooden houses. Much of it was cut for roof trusses. The appetite for lumber in the towns and cities was insatiable. Prices were going up.

This machine belonged to the church. Or rather it would when the \$15,000 was paid off. The way it was paid was quite insightful. A share of all the lumber cut went to the Mission and the value of it was deducted from the outstanding debt. The church could use or sell the rest of it for its own financial needs. Some was saved to buy parts for the saw. The church would contract with someone who owned trees. The tree-owner would get some, the church would get some, the Mission would get some to buy more sawmills.

However, from time to time difficulties arose.

The PR appraised the situation rapidly. There was no threat of violence, though the act of stopping the saw was certainly threatening. Nobody had come to him to talk about a problem, they had just shut down the operation. The saw operators were off to one side. They were paid in lumber too and so had incentive to work. But they were not going to push their neighbors who outnumbered them.

After exchanging the bare minimum of formalities, the PR asked them what the problem was.

"You cut down my tree. It is on my land," spoke a man with streak of white hair running perfectly from front to back of his head. Someone said that a bullet had grazed him and this was how his hair grew back.

"Oui." The PR looked puzzled. Where else would the tree be?

"You had no right."

"S'il vous plait," said the chief saw operator. "Pasteur, we don't know for sure who actually owns this tree. Two men claim this land as theirs."

"Two might claim it, but it belongs to me!" shouted White Streak. "This was my grandfather's land, and my father's after that. This is my garden!" He gestured expansively.

"I am sorry, I guess we were misled."

"Sorry! Well, just give us the lumber from the tree and that will conclude matters."

The PR shrugged. "We can't afford to give it all away. We have to pay our workers, parts, gas, pay off the debt...."

"Well, nobody moves then."

The PR noticed a few more men coming through the foliage from another direction. This was the original claimant. He was the Chef de Groupement, a traditional chief that had some influence over several villages. They all made way for him.

"Why did you stop cutting?" he asked disingenuously.

White Streak spoke up. "You gave them permission to cut my tree?"

"This is NOT your tree! It belongs to the Groupement. All land belongs to the Party. Did you plant this tree? Did your ancestor plant it? No. It is no man's...." Turning to the PR he said, "Resume cutting."

"Hmm, well, we do have men sitting in front of the saw...."

"I will have the 'police' remove them...."

The PR didn't like that idea. "And how can we guard the saw and my men and the lumber if they threaten us?"

Chef shrugged. "They won't...." There was some threat in his voice.

White Streak and his men were by now grumbling and muttering. They outnumbered the Chef and his men three to one, but to harm him meant trouble from the State. Their resolve however was clear. No deal. No cutting. Voices were raised. White Streak approached the Chef. One of the Chef's men pushed White Steak back. The villagers surged forward.

"There is enough lumber for all!" shouted the PR over the melee. "We can cut this one and another for you, and more for the Groupement, look around at the trees!" They all looked around, trees there were aplenty. The momentum towards violence was halted.

Chef shouted back at the PR. "We did not get our third from the last trees you cut."

"What do you mean? Of course you did!"

"It was bad wood, soft wood, you took most of the good wood."

The PR was getting exasperated. "But your men divided it up! I got what they designated!"

"But they belong to your church! What did you expect them to do!"

Suddenly one of White Streaks friends took a hefty whack at the saw blade with his ax. A ringing like a giant tuning fork reverberated through the woods. A piece of the tooth zinged by his head.

Everyone got very quiet.

The PR sat down on a log and sighed. Nobody would get wood now. The blades were costly. He hadn't paid for the last one yet. He still hadn't paid the Mission its share. The price of gasoline was going up up up, inflation's fangs were ripping big holes in the church account. He was having trouble paying the sawers. If he didn't pay something to the Mission soon, they would stop sending parts. Sooner or later they would take it back or move it to another region.

And now he had Christians in his church ready to fight over the lumber. The profits would have gone to pay some pastors, mount an evangelism campaign, pay for the tuition of their ministerial students away at the seminary.

It was so close to working...wrong tree, chipped tooth, and it threatened to collapse. Other regions were working well, showing profits. Not his.

He sighed again. Everybody was still quiet, wondering what would happen now that the saw was broken. "Listen, if I can have all the lumber we cut, we can persuade them to send us a new blade...then we will cut the whole forest down if that's what you want, there is more than enough, don't fight over one tree."

The PR started to walk back to the road. For a moment he thought he might have won the day. But then the words reached him on the air. "Sure, take all the wood, it is all mine, take it all from me so you can cut his wood, why not take some of his wood..." and the angry reply, "It is not yours...." The voices faded as he moved farther away. They were all "in his church." He sighed deeply and wondered what difference that really made.

Clean On The Outside

Missionaries come from a culture of hygiene, which we shall call a Hygiene-A Culture. We wash behind the ears. We use Listerine and Right Guard and Head and Shoulders. We spray the rooms with disinfectants. We clean the toilets with blue "bowl cleanser," we scrub away dirt with Mr. Clean, and our counters with "soft soap with bleach." We brush our teeth and clean under the nails. If it drops on the floor we toss it or wash it. The floor is officially a "dirty place" and so therefore is anything that comes in contact with it (guilt by association). We scrub our floors and our windows and must wash before we eat and after we "use the facilities." We boil water and use hot water and soap to wash dishes. We spray bleach on mold and put antibiotic ointment on cuts. We wear a shirt and then wash it. We are afraid to have an accident while wearing dirty underwear, lest it be discovered. We do these things for a reason, because of...bacteria. I personally have never seen a bacterium, but I have seen pictures of them in biology books. I believe they exist. I believe in this particular dogma of modern science. I want my surgeon to wear rubber gloves and not sneeze.

It is sometimes psychologically if not physiologically very hard to live in a Hygiene-B culture that shares an entirely different view of things. Some cultures believe the floor is clean and so one may sit on it and eat on it and sleep on it. Americans do all these things elevated above it on "platforms" because we believe chairs and tables and beds are cleaner. H-B cultures do not believe in bacteria. And for many of those who have seen them in microscopes, so what? Those little tiny things? Do you believe everything you see on a screen? What makes people sick are evil spirits and sorcerers. Over the decades, proper hygienic practices have taken root due to thorough and persistent public health education. Nevertheless here and there, some vestiges of "old school H-B" persist.

H-A and H-B people still need to live together. The H-A people swallow hard and shut their eyes on many occasions. They don't bolt from the host's home when they see the pan was rinsed in cold water. They may drink the beverage that was not boiled. Then they go home and take The Cure. However, in their homes they try to educate those who may serve them as to what H-A people require.

H-B people for their part try to humor the hard-to-please H-A folks. So when the H-A's are around, they go through the motions, not wanting to offend.

After church one Sunday, several of us H-A missionaries had been invited to a home in the village for dinner. The host asked a former cook for one of the missionaries to supervise the proceedings, realizing that he had a bunch of H-Aers to contend with. The cook knew how to handle H-A types.

So as we came into the hut, the table was set in Western fashion. By the table was a large basin for washing of hands. Being by now a grizzled veteran, I had made my own line in the sand about this. If I am further back in the line than fifth, I will take my chances not washing my hands. But I was fourth in the hand-washing-line and so I washed up and sat down. We were ten in number, each washing in the same basin. The idea was right, but the concept was wrong. The Japanese tend to view us Americans in the same way in regards to our bathtubs. "You mean you sit there in all that ...???"

The meal was great! Then he asked, "Anyone for coffee?" We all said yes. The cook went around the table and gathered up our water glasses to use for the coffee. At first we didn't see what was up, then all twenty eyes were riveted on the scene before us. The cook was washing each of our water glasses in the same basin of water that we had just used to wash our hands. Then he put them back, still glistening wet, at our places and began to fill them with coffee.

Five pairs of eyes met five others across the table. Nobody said a word. This was the test of faith. This was Daniel's friends saying, "Our God can deliver us...and even if not...." We knew it would come sooner or later, the unavoidable cultural trip-wire. We had danced and hopped over these wires without giving offense- until now. Incarnational ministry meant drinking that coffee. Kenotic (or "self emptying") ministry might come later. I was thinking, "Father, take this cup from me...and please not your will but mine!" But I knew what I had to do.

"Sugar?" We all eagerly agreed, postponing the inevitable. I thought that just maybe the sugar and the caffeine would kill the microbes.

Then one said, "Skol!" and took a big gulp of his coffee and looked around at us daringly. He was a Wycliff translator and knew no fear. We watched our cup-bearer for a brief moment. Then we all drank. This was a moment to remember. Of such things missionaries are made and sometimes broken.

Part 3 A Safe Landing

Desperation is often the prerequisite for obedience. Some of the sailors tried to escape (vs. 30), but were stopped. The soldiers cut the ropes to the rescue boats. Tension gripped the ship. The sailors who knew that the ship was about to flounder on the reef tried to escape. They had seen this happen to others and would have no part in it. The "old salts" knew when to cut and run. The soldiers just followed orders.

Often we simply obey the Lord in ignorance and blindness. It is easier to obey when we march into the unknown than towards a certain and known disaster.

Paul continued to encourage them. "Not a hair on your head will perish. Eat, keep up your strength." The physical battle was part of the spiritual. Eat.

God's hand swept the ship past the reef and onto the shore. God's hand stayed the soldiers who would have killed all the prisoners. God brought even those who could not swim through the reef and the surf and onto the shore. Incredibly, all were brought safely to land (vs. 44).

Have you ever been glad just to be alive? Something happens and you gain a divine perspective on all your cargo. Whenever ABC news shows a devastating house fire, they always find the owners and point the camera at them. Almost invariably someone will say, "We are alive, together, and that is all that really matters. The rest is just stuff."

Paul had wanted to launch from Rome to go to Spain. Now he is lying on the beach of some unknown island, just glad to be alive. Thank you Lord. We often have big plans of what we will do for God, then he drags us through the reef and we say "just glad to be here Lord. Whatever you say!" And then we get up and look around at the totally unexpected opportunity that God just handed us.

GRACES OF HEALING

Rachel had more than just a bad case of "Kwada ear." Lake Kwada was to the missionaries what Okinawa was to Vietnam Vets. It was the place of R&R where we could tell our stories to one another. Kwada was the place of our healing. Families swam and played Uno and reconnected. Many MK's were created in the cottage bedrooms. But the tropical lake was not particularly clean, pigs and people and parasites all shared the shoreline. The children were especially susceptible to earaches and infections. Rachel was prone to ear problems from an early age and Kwada water always aggravated her ears.

The left ear got worse and worse. The missionary docs prescribed one antibiotic, then another, but the pain only increased. It was the greenish pus that finally pushed us over the edge. This is serious! Missionaries, you will note, play down malaria and dysentery, infections, filaria and the like, but green pus tends to get even their attention. The docs concurred, Rachel needed to fly home to the States for treatment before something REALLY serious developed (burst eardrums, infections imploding into the brain...that kind of Serious).

The missionaries in Bangui arranged for the flight. In 24 hours I would leave Brad and transfer our daughters from the edge of Ituri forest to Seattle, Washington. Connections were tight but doable, especially with only carry-on baggage. Goyongo- Bangui, Bangui -Paris, Paris-Chicago, Chicago-Seattle. We crossed ten time zones and five movies.

We were praying all this time of course, but the infection only got worse. Missionaries were praying for her and we radioed to our home church to also be in prayer for Rachel. I set up an appointment with an ENT doctor in Seattle.

Jet Lag doesn't describe what it's like to cross ten time zones in 24 hours. Eyes are bloodshot and the nose runs, one's body yells "Adrian!!!" from the ring. The day after our arrival the church elders gathered to pray especially for her. They prayed and anointed her with oil. The following day Rachel saw the ENT, who in God's grace just happened to be in our college's graduating class! He took down the history, looked at the reports the mission docs had sent along, then performed a very thorough examination. He cleaned out the ear. I sat and watched, intent on his every move. When the exam was over, the Doctor came over to us

"I have some bad news and some good news...which do you want first?"

"Well, ah, the good news I guess."

"There is no infection, there is no perforation of the ear drum. I can see signs of where it was, there definitely was a serious problem, but it is gone."

I couldn't believe it. Gone? Just like that? Why did God have us fly all the way over here? Couldn't he have healed her right there in Goyongo?

"The bad news?"

"You came all this way for nothing."

"How can you explain this?"

The doctor paused a moment, then said, "I think it is a miracle of healing."

Even bad news is good news when the news is of healing. Later we thought of Naaman coming to Elijah, ready to do any great work to merit his healing, all he had to do was wash, a simple thing as the Lord ordered. It is never about doing a great thing to earn the Lord's grace, it is always about doing the thing he asks. For whatever reason, he decided this was the way. Praise God.

So I headed East at a more sedate pace. In New York Rachel said, "Mom, my ear hurts!" I thought desperately, "O my gosh, the infection is back, all this air pressure change and air conditioning has provoked this, now what do I do?" New York was between the rock and the hard place. To go back would be faithless, had He not healed her? Had not the doctor confirmed it? And there was so much momentum to go forward, tickets in place, people waiting. But to go forward would mean that I might be taking Rachel back into real health-danger.

"Lord," I prayed, "show me what to do!" And we continued on.

The ear was bothering Rachel the whole way across the Atlantic, with each whimper I felt condemned as a Bad Mother who was jeopardizing her child.

In Paris we met up with some other missionaries heading down to Africa. One of them was a nurse. I explained the problem. The nurse took Rachel aside and looked her over the best she could, then took me aside.

"Ruth, it's not the ear infection, she has chicken pox!"

"Chicken pox?"

"Yes, not very advanced, but I am sure."

"So now what?"

"Well, you don't want to be trapped in Charles DeGaul airport...just keep her collar up and face down, she will get through fine." I remembered the story of the man-without-a-country who lived in the airport for years. Couldn't go back, couldn't go forward. So up went the collar. What about infecting other people? But wherever we now went, we now posed a risk. Actually going ahead endangered fewer people than going back.

So onward we pressed. O me of little faith.

The chicken pox passed, probably because she gave it away to all the other children at the boarding school. Everyone was overjoyed to have us back.

Then it was Rebecca's turn. Who knows what afflictions and pestilences lurk out there in the jungle? Green Monkey fever? Lassa fever? Occasionally one of Them creeps out and attacks somebody at random, then

retreats. Rebecca began to come in from playing complaining of itching. No big deal. We all itch in the Congo from one thing or another. We didn't see any obvious bug bites or signs of things like poison ivy. Days would go by with no recurrence, but then it would hit again with worsening intensity. Soon she was trying to scratch herself and we had to sternly order her not to. But one night as we were sitting around the table, the Itch attacked her in our presence. She began to squirm, then claw at herself. We pulled off her shirt to watch, horrified, as huge welts began to spread all over her body. We had to pin her arms against the bed to stop her from tearing her skin to shreds. Then after about a half an hour, it subsided, and she was fine.

The next night, nothing happened, but the night after it hit again, only worse. She was sobbing and screaming as we held her down and tried to sponge her off, hoping that cool water would assuage her itch. It abated after some time.

We never knew when it would hit, it would come on suddenly then depart, skip a few days, then hit again. We lived in dread of the next episode. The docs suggested one remedy or another, but nothing seemed to help. They gave us syringes and bottles adrenaline. This reaction might threaten her air passages, and if it did, she could actually suffocate and die. We were supposed to inject this should she begin to gasp for air.

It became unbearable for us all. We could not live under the ever looming threat of her death. Rebecca could endure it no more.

Reluctantly we prepared to leave Goyongo. Maybe it was just a Lurking Affliction that would not occur at another station. But we hated the thought of leaving, Goyongo was home, monastic as it was. We loved the work, our colleagues and students.

And we had been praying, but not with focus and intensity, "striving" in prayer as Paul said. A prayer offensive was launched. Our supporting churches and families were alerted. The missionary community was praying. The Dean and faculty came to pray with for Rebecca. We prayed long and hard for her healing.

A bell should sound or a trumpet blast when healing takes place. One is not sure at first. We waited in apprehension for the spreading welts. A day came and went, then another. Then a week. Then two, then a month. Two. There never was a recurrence. The unused syringes became the symbols of testimony.

The Speck In Your Eye

We stopped the truck alongside the dusty road under a shady tree. It was lunchtime. Brad hauled the ice chest out of the back and lugged it over to the tree. The girls climbed out of the truck and began to explore their immediate environment. It took us about a half an hour to eat and get everything back together. Not one vehicle came by while we were there. It felt good to get out and stretch, we had several hours yet to travel that day. Brad was anxious to get going.

Dust always plays havoc with my contact lenses. When the wind whips up a bit I would shut my eyes until it passed. Just as we were ready to go, I got a big speck under the lens. We all waited while I went through the excruciating ritual of prying off the contact, cleaning it and putting it back in.

When the speck had been cleared out, we continued on.

I was still having trouble with my contacts. About a half hour later I finally said, "Stop, I want to put on my glasses." They waited as I pried off one contact and plopped it into its little container with the R on it. Then the other...then the moment of panic.

"Brad, can you look in my eye, I can't seem to find the left contact."

He looked, and looked some more. Then some more, as one does as desperation built. But we had done this before. We have looked in drains and on carpets, on sinks and on clothes. Only once did we ever fail.

"Honey, it must be up here. No, look to your left, now look up, look down...it must be very low, look sideways, cross your eyes...." I was making Jim Carey-like facial expressions as we ferreted it out.

It wasn't there. The consequences of the loss began to sift down on us. It would take a couple of months to send word home and get new contacts sent out. In the meantime, the glasses were of an older, weaker prescription. I almost said it first, but Brad did in fact say it first, "Let's pray about this."

It was an awkward prayer to be sure. "Lord, we lost the ah, er, left contact. It is somewhere only You know. Lord, we can't insist, but it would be great if you could help us find it. The future of missions in Zaire depends on it!" More or less.

I said, "Brad, we have to go back to where we ate lunch."

I wasn't even sure if we could find the place. It was by a tree about 30 minutes back. We started back. If a truck came towards us, it was all over. The truck would blow that contact up into the air and the currents would take it to Timbuktu. My faith was not really even strong enough to make me go back and look. Our combined faith was just barely enough.

Soon we could see the tree up ahead. And beyond that tree we saw a rooster tail of dust. A was truck coming our way. That would be the Dirt Devil.

"Step on it!" I shouted, and he did. We raced up as close as we dared to the tree, keeping an eye on the oncoming vehicle. I jumped out. We had only a minute to spare before he would be upon us. We looked around the tree. Nothing. The truck was scant yards away. We walked back towards our truck scanning the ground for a COLORLESS contact.

It was all over but the shouting when I did shout, "Here it is!" It was almost by our truck step. I snatched it up as the other vehicle roared past, dust billowing out behind. We closed our eyes until it subsided. When we opened them, I still had the contact.

Snake Eyes

Cobras are out to get me. Other snakes have scared me, but only the cobra

has set traps and chased me.

In an American school I asked the 2nd graders what they thought of when they thought of Africa. They all said lions and snakes. I never saw a lion, so we will talk about snakes.

* Our house had a nice covered porch bordered by a rockery. It was the

Palaver Hut, people would gather there to sit around and talk. Children played there right next to the rockery. They would climb on the rocks and the boys would drive their little trucks over and around the rocks.

One day I hired a student to weed it. He pulled away at the weeds, but one weed had a particularly long and tough root. He yanked on it and a few of the rocks came off the face and tumbled into the porch. He climbed down to put them back, then froze. Staring at him from a scant two feet were dozens of baby snakes. Whether they were vipers or mambas or cobras, I don't really care. But where there are babies, there are Big Snakes.

Providence.

* As we got the girls ready for bed, we read yet again The Favorite Bible

Story Book where those poor souls had their languages confused and all they could say was "fliver flaver flee"- our daughters loved that part...every time. They washed and brushed and got ready for bed. The top bunk was a stretch, so one of us had to hoist the top girl up onto the bunk. Usually, this was automatic. But for "some reason" Ruth hesitated, and got up on her tiptoes to look onto the bed. A long black line lay across the pillow. Hmm, some yarn? Something from the ceiling? Then it curled and raised its head.

Providence.

* We had come home after a week in the village, thankful for showers and

Nescafe Instant. Yes, one can learn to be glad even for that. But I had a class the next day and so that afternoon I wearily settled myself in the hot sweltering office, trying not to drip on my writing paper. The wooden wall was too warm to brace my bare feet against, so I swiveled in my chair and opened the bottom drawer to use as a footstool. I propped them up and continued to study. Sometime later I needed a manila folder down in the drawer. I swung my feet off and leaned over to fish one out. Three little green snakes stared up at me, gaily wiggling their cute little tails and bobbing their heads in eagerness. Now I am told that at least half the snakes in Congo are not poisonous. Which half? With a shout I slammed the drawer shut. Forget the folder.

Providence.

* Getting up from a siesta one day, I wandered out into the sitting area, then

over to the front door to unlatch and open it, which is the signal for all the students who need anything to come around. Sometimes I just didn't open it. I opened it a few inches and was immediately puzzled by a very long fat rope lying across the front porch. I pushed it open a bit more and was greeted by the sight of a twenty-foot long, foot-thick cobra sunning himself. Well, later upon sober reflection, I realized that maybe it was more like six feet by three inches...it was sound asleep. I could hear it snoring, no doubt twitching in its sleep as it dreamed of gulping down our pet monkey. I softly closed the door and went out the back and found a long heavy stick. I figured I could sneak up on it and whack it right on the head and, voila, supper. Snake-on-the barbie.

All went according to plan up to the point where it was supposed to die. I whacked it with enough strength to break the stick and it looked to me like I hit it square on the head, but maybe it was little off, like four or five inches, not really on the head at all. The snake seemed to spiral into the air like a puppet on a string, dancing on its tail like a sword-fish hooked on a line, then it came down apparently quite upset. It took it about .025 seconds to locate me and deduce that I was the one who had interrupted its dreams. I still expected it to run for the jungle's edge, which wasn't that far away. Instead it launched itself at me with incredible blurring speed. But it wasn't quite as incredibly blurring as my speed. I dashed down the hill as fast I could go. It followed for a ways, then, realizing it was outclassed, stopped, raised its head to yell expletives at me like, "Wait until some night when you go down to the light plant at night to turn it off, buster!" I yelled back, "Oh yeah, want to make something of it?" Students were staring at me by then, wondering what I was saying. I pointed to the snake, which had disappeared into the brush. But for the next week I had the students go down and turn off the lights.

Providence.

* Runners run, and so I have, all through my years in Congo. Grassy

airstrips, washed-out roads, zig-zagging trails that never seemed to lead anywhere. I huff in the rain, in the heat, early mornings or late afternoons. Mud. Sand. Sometimes with others, mostly alone. Rivulets of sweat running down and saturating my shorts, salt in the eyes. It was so fine and it felt so good to stop. Once in a while, though, I had to sprint.

Four PM in the afternoon, 90 degrees, 90% humidity, I was pounding along three miles from home following a narrow road that meandered through the grasslands. I was singing a refrain to myself, "Life is a Cabaret my friend, life is a Cabaret" over and over. What did you expect, the Messiah? Or Gershwyn? It was hard enough just tell my mind to tell my legs to keep on going much less divert important synaptic activity to music. My sweatband had long since become saturated and was oozing salty sweat into my eyes. My eyes were focused a few feet in front.

Something in my peripheral vision caused me to slightly raise my eyes, which I had been trying to avoid, since that involved getting more salt in them. There was something in the road. Now, remember that all my mental RAM was dedicated to the one operating program, pump those puppies again... and again. Breathe. Spit. And the like. But there was something there. Another step closer. What was it? I don't know. Another step. It looks like a can on a stick...hey, brain, it can't be a can on a stick in the middle of the road. Step. Hey, it's a cobra waving its inflated head back and forth like it came out of a basket in Calcutta. Step. Brain to body, stop! Body to brain...huh? Step. "I SAID STOP *\$%%^!" "Oh." And I skidded to a stop like in a Roadrunner cartoon where the legs go backward in reverse.

A scant few feet away the cobra was curled and bobbing. He was definitely trying to tell me something. By now my RAM had shifted to an entirely different program. "RUN THE OTHER WAY!" This time my body responded and I sprinted back down the road fast enough to dry all my sweat. Then I turned and looked, knowing that since I had so badly scared the critter, he would have fled into the grass. But no, he was rippling down the center of the road after me. I am not making this up. Dave Barry sometimes says that but he really is making it up, I am not. I remember reading that these snakes could run as fast as a horse. I turned and ran some more, hoping it was not Seattle Slough he could match, more like Mr. Ed was my hope.

Finally I stopped and he stopped, he was panting, out of breath, out of shape. He probably hadn't gone that far and fast for a long time. He took one last look at me and slid off the road into the grass. The grass was very low, just now coming back from being burned. I sighed with relief then started to head back home. But the Brain sent a warning. WAIT! Learning to listen to my brain, I waited. Something wasn't right. The grass should have rippled off, marking the cobra's progress, but there was no rippling. Was he still there by the road waiting for me? Or had I just missed it? I waited a few more minutes. Then just as I was ready to sprint by, the grass moved and the cobra headed away from the road.

Providence.

BRUISING THE HEAL

The circle of ladies sat quietly in the shade of the tree with their heads

bowed, praying. Each was taking turns going clockwise. It was late afternoon, just starting to cool off. The ladies had all come back from their gardens, cleaned up and dressed up to come. A few younger students were there, a couple of the nurses from the hospital. The pastor's wife was present.

Suddenly one of the students screamed and kept on screaming. She jumped to her feet, shaking her leg and screaming at the top of her lungs. The sedate circle collapsed in on itself as all jumped to their feet and moved towards her. Then just as suddenly they all backed up and began looking frantically around.

She had just cried out, "Nyoka"- snake.

Then she was sitting on the ground holding her leg. Mama Pasteur Nduku came over to her and examined the leg. A few other women joined her. They began to stroke her and calm her and finally her screaming subsided to a moan.

She pointed to her ankle. She had been bitten. The snake had come out of one of the holes under the shade tree and probably had retreated into it again.

These strong women had no trouble lifting Mabana and carrying her rapidly to the hospital. Someone ran ahead to alert the staff. Mabana was laid on one of the beds. A nurse came quickly, heard the story and then ran off to get more help. Time was passing and time was critical.

Help did come. They injected her with a polyvalent anti-venin. The family was notified and soon numerous family members arrived. Mabana was from a small nuclear family, she only had one brother.

Mabana was blessed with extraordinary good looks. She was just sixteen, tall and beautiful like her mother, and an excellent student. She was superb in English, great in sports, and was in the church choir. She was also a member of the prayer circle. This circle regrouped and began to pray for her.

The hours went by. The swollen leg became hot to the touch. It would not take long for the poison to enter her lymphatic system and then travel throughout the body. Apparently this particular snake venom was not affected by the anti-venom. Necrosis of the tissues was well advanced, massive swelling and ulcers appeared. If there was no clear reversal of fortune, something drastic would have to be done.

There was no reprieve. The surgeons came and took her leg as low as they dared, but still taking enough to be safe. The family was in shock. Pasteur Nduku gathered them around the bed where Nukola seemed barely conscious. How could such a girl suffer such an atrocity? She was a believer, was in the very act of praying to her Lord when struck. Isn't He the one who is the shade, the shield, and didn't he promise that we need not fear the pestilence that stalks by night, to fear no evil, it will not come close to you?

Pasteur Nduku had been there many times and many places. He had been there when the godly women of his parish birthed stillborns, when the children died of measles. He was there when trees fell on them in the garden, even when lightning struck them. He had been there when they had come for prayer, battered by their husbands, when they came to intercede for their daughters who were pregnant and their sons dying of what was later to be identified as AIDS. He had faced this question hundreds of times and still did not know what to say. But they expected him to say something.

"The snake and tree," he said to them, "have we heard about that before?"

A few of them nodded.

"Where?"

"In the Garden of Eden."

"Yes, and what did the snake promise?"

"Wisdom," said one. "To be like God," said another. "To know good and evil," said yet a third.

"Yes, that's right. And now we know good and evil. We see it here, the good woman, the evil snake, the approaching death. There is enmity between the woman and snake, between their seeds from that time until now." And went on to explain the best he could how with sin entered death, but that we in Christ indeed need fear no evil. Though she may die, the poison of evil had been neutralized already. Evil is what gnashes at the

soul and mauls the heart. But with the greater hope in Christ, it will not come near us.

Later, they took more of the leg, but everyone already knew that it was too late.

Nukola died.

That too is Providence.

Over these many years of church history in the Congo, missionary and national alike have died of many things: hepatitis, malaria, spinal meningitis, lightning, heart failure. A rebel's bullet. Newborns have died. Miscarriages have happened. The groaning creation awaits redemption.

HACKING THE LIVING STONES

I watched the wall of a new building go up. The mason was an old man and very skilled. He had erected a thousand walls in his lifetime. But still he methodically measured and plumbed and leveled. He was careful and precise. He reached for a hand-made brick and laid it carefully onto the mortar. With the end of his trowel he tapped it into place. Another little tap. Another. Then he looked at it. A slight tap on the side. He looked again. He held the level against the new brick and watched the bubble. Yet another tap so slight that it could not have possibility made any difference. The mason was satisfied.

Down below him sat Papa Yamba, another old man with a huge straw hat shading his head and shoulders from the sun. On his left were a few stones that he had carved. On his right a pile of uncut stones rose higher than his hat. He pulled one over closer to where he sat. He turned it over a couple of times and then picked up his machete. He took aim and hacked away at one side until it was even. Then he turned it over and did the same to the other side. He measured it, and then cut off a few inches. It was roughly square. Then he smoothed the surface with a chisel. He then laid it down by his standard brick and compared sizes. It was very close. All his stones were very similar, yet none were exactly the same. He laid it to his left and reached again to his right.

The mason spoke, and a young boy picked up a finished stone and passed it to him. The old mason again laid it up onto the mortar and studied it, tapping it here and there, measuring, assessing. Finally he grunted, "OK." Below, the machete hacked away something sending sparks into the dust. Above, the trowel tap tapped and the wall went up straight and sure.

Again the mason spoke. The stonecutter listened, took one of his finished stones and placed the machete right in the middle where he scored a line. Then he swung the machete down, and again and again, until the stone was hewn in two parts. One half lay splintered, the other was just right. The boy passed it up to the mason who tapped it into place. Now the next layer of stones was offset from the lower layer, adding strength to the wall.

Several machetes lay in a pile behind the stonecutter. After a number of rocks were sculpted into shape, he tossed the machete into the pile. That night he would sharpen them all and begin again the next day.

Living bricks, fitted into one another. Each one unique, yet each sharing the same cutter and same mason, each contributing to the strength of the wall. Some required considerable hacking. A big rock might even use one whole machete. The chips flew, the sparks danced. Pieces fell off. An occasional rock was even cut in two. But with infinite patience each one was handcrafted to fit perfectly into the wall. Each was gently but unrelentingly coaxed into its slot. Nothing less than perfect alignment was acceptable. Hack. Scrape. Tap. The sounds of God building his church.

Dad wasn't the same. We saw it immediately. When Mom and Dad Hill got off the Cessna that brought them for a visit, it was apparent that something was wrong with him. I had freeze-framed him just I had always known him. My father could do anything. He wired the Space Needle for its telephone service. I loved looking at the pictures of him eating lunch on the top with the flame-tower just behind, walking with easy balance along the wooden catwalk with nary a care. I loved his naval pictures, the dashing Petty Officer during WWII and the Korean War, the guy who typed Russian and mastered Ham-radio. Another picture shows Dad and I running together as we trained for our assault on Mt. Rainier. Our rope set a record for the summer. Dad always caught a fish and couldn't understand why I could not. He could push a thorough-bred racing horse to its max. I watched him once as he leaned forward, rising in the stirrups, fluid and sure in his control. He brought the horse to a lathering halt right in front of me. He built a boat in our garage called the IT'll DO II that took us all over Puget Sound. He could ski. He could fix anything. He could build anything. Out of tin cans and motors, he created Primex, "my" robot that won the Junior High science prize. He organized and ran the church building committee, which is far harder than wiring the Space Needle. And Dad was Head Usher at the church, knew every name. Nobody got into church without being greeted.

Mom and Dad had also come to visit us fifteen years earlier. The church was excited to meet them. Dad was a Deacon. They had had doctors and pastors come to visit, they had received agriculturalists and mechanics, but never a Deacon. All the deacons met with him and would not allow the clergy anywhere near. They wanted to know from him how things "really worked" in the U.S. church!

He stumbled on his way out of the plane, he looked frail and thin. I thought he had air sickness.

"Are you alright, Dad?" I said as I hugged him and mom. He was trembling.

"Yes, fine."

But he wasn't. They stayed with us at Goyongo for two weeks over Christmas, what a great and rich time that was. But he wasn't the Dad I remembered.

"Here, give me a hand getting this gas canister hooked up to the stove." He stood there, confused. "Hold this..." I said. He put out his hand, not sure what I meant.

Later I was fiddling with our twelve-volt electrical system and couldn't figure out how to wire it up properly. This was his domain, he was king of wiring and electricity. Asking his help on this would be like asking Bill Gates if he knew how to cut and paste.

"Dad," I said, "what do we do here?"

He picked up the wires and tried to splice them, but was unable, couldn't figure it out, couldn't make the connection. Many connections, it seemed, were out of reach.

Mom of course knew something was increasingly wrong. Parts of his brain were skipping, misfiring, ceasing to function. They would be driving home and he couldn't or wouldn't turn off on the road they had turned on for 30 years. He could not choose a parking place. He would not stop for gas. He wouldn't see the light. He would forget where everything was, what day it was, what was on the "to do" list for that day. Talking about planning for tomorrow or next week was pointless.

But ask about the War, or Enigma, or Adak...ask about the old days at ATT, the '47 bullet-nosed Studebaker, and nothing was missing.

We talked on the porch, Mom and I. The mosquitoes were out, and we swatted and waved them away as we talked. She said, "Yes, I know something is terribly wrong. I thought it was just typical old age stuff, but it

isn't, is it?"

"No, Mom." I killed one on her shoulder, leaving a big bloody spot. Whose blood was that? She was hoping somehow that I would not confirm her fears.

She cried a little bit. "What is going to happen? This is going to be so hard..."

After they returned home, the diagnosis came in, Parkinsons. With proper medication, they said, he could still live a long happy normal life. But the disease coursed through his body, steadily eroding memory, degrading emotions, shaking his hands with palsy. He cried all the time but couldn't explain it. And he knew it, that is what made the robbery so heartless. To watch your mind and emotions deteriorate and know it is happening, to be powerless in the face of it, to wish it otherwise, to know that you are causing a huge grief to your loved ones, to be unable to help with anything but knowing you should, aware that you have missed essential things in life but not sure what they are, perceiving that you are shrinking and hollowing out yet unable to cry out or to plead or to bargain with it is terrifying.

I had once been infested with larvae that became carnivorous grubs, eating me from inside the huge boils that that "housed" them. I thought at the time there was nothing so dreadful as to watch your body being eaten alive, but there is something far more dreadful, to watch your Self being devoured, to hear the fibers of your mind snapping one by one as the "maggots" of Parkinsons chomp away.

When we came home to the States in 1990 on our regular Home Assignment rotation, we planned on returning as usual in the late summer of 1991. We made our food order early on because it would take six months from ordering to delivery. We had never said farewell to our Congolese friends, just "we'll be back soon." Abientôt. And knowing that we would be in the States only a year made all things bearable. Soon we would return! Rachel was having a very difficult time in 7th grade and was eager to return home to Congo. We roughly judged the rate of the Parkinsons and decided we could "squeeze" in one more term before we were really needed.

How wrong we were.

A godly friend challenged us, "How do you know you are supposed to return?" That was easy. We just do, God called us and so that's what we do until He says otherwise...is He saying "otherwise" now? It couldn't be. What would we do if we stayed in the States?

One day Mom broke down sobbing and we realized that the issue was not just Dad, but Mom. I felt like "duh", what took me so long to see that?

And so we began to pray in earnest about our return. I was away at camp when Ruth and I began to ask the question seriously. I remember praying, "Lord, I can't stay home...I only own one suit!" The next day a friend of mine, also my size, said, "Brad, do you need some suits? My brother-in-law works for a clothiers and he sends me these suits all the time." I was amazed. I should have asked for a fleece. "Only if they are Armani!" Or, "Lord, I really need a BMW..."

We had ordered several thousand dollars worth of food and supplies, what would happen to all of that if we stayed in the States? It was only a few months before our scheduled return, it was probably already there waiting for us. I called this usually reliable supplier.

"Mr. Hill, glad you called, I don't know what happened, but somehow your order got misplaced, just now I have it on my desk and will expedite it..." "No," I said, "hold on, we'll call you back."

The elders of our church gathered to pray with us about this. We all prayed together then went home. We had

asked them to pray alone then come and tell us what they heard the Lord saying to them. Out of ten elders, nine said "stay home," the one other was not sure and his words were "the Lord will care for your Father."

And so we did. Rachel sobbed her heart out over the next months. "You mean we will never go home? I will never see my home again?" And for us too there was no closure: no proper farewells with the right amount of hugging and kissing, no giving away of our things to our friends. It was an amputation, not a closing out of a missionary career.

In the fall of 1991 the missionaries were evacuated.

The Lord put our feet on a rock, leading us into ministry in a wonderful church in Bellingham, Washington. These were sweet years, rich years, where we watched the children grow, the church grow, and my mother grow into her new role. Dad was well cared for. God is good.

Dad died in May of 2002. Peace be to his name.

When Four-Wheel Drive Ain't Enough

Once upon a time a certain missionary couple was heading back to the U.S. for Home Assignment. Their route of exit was through Kinshasa, Congo's capital city of some five million people. They had just taken a Congolese pastor and his wife out to dinner and were now bringing them home in their Trooper. This latter couple was staying in the "cite," a sprawling mixture of homes ranging from cement structures to cardboard shelters. It was an area in which Whites were seldom seen, especially at night.

The driver confidently and expertly wove his way through the maze of streets. Only a few had names posted, so the back-seat passengers gave directions to turn left and turn right. Rounding a corner, and to their surprise, a construction barrier suddenly loomed, blocking the street.

"I think we can get around it," said the driver.

"No, not a good idea," said the passenger.

"We'll just get out and walk home from here," said the back seat pastor. "It's not far from here."

"No, no, it is too far, it is late, we will get you there."

So they backed up and turned right onto a parallel, narrow, "unimproved" road. They started down this road, when, stretching from side to side across it was a huge puddle, maybe more like a small lake. The driver never hesitated...he headed straight for it.

"Brad!"

Oops. Oh well, there goes the anonymity....

"Brad!" I said. "You aren't going through it are you?!"

"Oh, sure," he said, "Ruth..." Oh well, there goes the rest of the anonymity, "We have four wheel drive, babe. We've driven through much worse than this upcountry!"

Eventually it would take 18 wheels to get us out, but I am getting ahead of myself. From that day until now, the reply, "Don't worry, we have four-wheel drive!" has become for me the slogan-symbol of male machismo! It says it all doesn't it? Faith in power, technology, driving skills, and a disregard for the obvious.

In we went, farther and farther, and suddenly, down we went. We were pushing water in front of us like a Marine landing craft, only the Trooper wasn't water tight. Brad let out a cowboy whoop. We were still moving along through the lake and for a moment I thought we might actually get to the other side. But God was watching and He knew that such a victory would have made Brad insufferably smug. The Trooper tilted alarmingly to the left as the tire fell into some hole. We came to a jolting stop. Brad shifted into reverse, but the Monster clung to our rubber, fangs sunk in deep. He gunned the Trooper back and forth, spewing water and sludge everywhere. Nada. The bottom of the left door was under the water and it began to seep in. But it wasn't water- because we weren't in a puddle. We were in a sewer. And the sewage began to creep across the carpet. The "Serpent of the Sewer" had seized us.

We drew a bigger crowd than did Mohammed Ali in his "Rumble in the Jungle."

"Hey, mondele, where are you going?" yelled someone. They all laughed good naturedly at our predicament. Silently we prayed our answer, "Anywhere!" Of course, all we could see were their knees on the shore as we were considerably lower than the street level. Our Congolese passenger rolled up his Sunday suit pants, opened the door, and got out into the sewer, climbed up onto the road.

"I'll be back," he said. Sure, I thought. Sure. "I'll go find a truck to pull us out." And he left.

We spent the time bantering with the knees around the truck. "Ever been to Goyongo?" I asked.

"Non."

So much for bantering.

"I wish trucks would stop trying to go through here," said one.

"Yeah, I'm tired of getting them out...though it is profitable." More

laughter.

Soon a big truck did poke its nose around the corner and looked at us. Then it hurriedly backed up with a snort and left. I began to wonder if I'd celebrate my 60th birthday right there...and I was only 40. They would build a monument to me, the Our Lady of the Sewer. Missionaries would put flowers on it from time to time. Men would shake their heads and say, "I just don't get it, he had four-wheel drive."

Four men offered to try and dig us out.

"How much?" Brad asked, cutting through the banter.

"How much, who knows really? We'll see...." and they left to get changed. With no fixed price, it could be bad.

Soon they were back and plunged into the muck with zeal. They worked for an hour trying to get a board under the tire. One man actually submerged completely under. We shuddered. The sewage crept across the carpet, higher and higher. Our feet were now tucked up under us.

"Mondele," he said into the window, "We are ready to put the jack under the car."

"Très bien," was all Brad could muster. But he said it with enthusiasm.

Just then the same Big Truck came grunting around the corner, turned around and backed up to the edge of the

sewer. Billows of diesel exhaust enveloped us. We learned later that the driver had gone to drop off his lady friend before he got into the job. The four heroic men-of-the-sewer stopped working and watched as the driver connected a cable to the fender.

Brad leaned over to me. "Ruth, he can't connect it there, it will pull it clear off! They need to connect it under the vehicle."

"Are you going to show him where?"

"What's a fender anyway?"

He climbed back into the cab, gunned the engine. We were close to asphyxiation by then. Then with a lurch and a sucking sound, he pulled us out. The fender bent ominously but held. The Trooper made it onto high dry ground and began to leak out its accumulated "moisture." The driver came over.

Brad thanked him profusely. Then, "How much?"

"Whatever you prefer."

Brad put some bills into his hand. It didn't move. Brad preferred to put out some more. Still no movement. A few more bills brought a smile and a "merci, à la prochaine"- thanks, until the next time. I don't think so.

The men-of-the-sewer also gathered around. They had been amazing, courageous, wonderful men. No amount of money could adequately thank them, but a few thousand Zaires was close enough.

We could leave! We straggled back to our place, it was way past midnight, but we couldn't sleep yet. We had to clean the Trooper. Eventually we got most of the stuff out and it looked pretty good. However the bent fender made it look like a one-tusk wart hog.

We had ignored the first warning, the barrier- or rather Brad had. He ignored the second warning, an unusual lake across the road where no lake was listed. He ignored the third warning, that of his first wife. Though he relied on his own "wisdom" and expertise to get us into the mess, we required power way beyond our own to extricate us from the Pit of Despond. When we drove into our yard, we also realized that to be liberated is not the same as smelling nice.

Virtual Suffering

The drone of the jet fighters emptied the streets and the square. The people disappeared in seconds. The warplanes circled lazily high above, then made a long slow turn and began to descend. Each jet released its bombs, banked sharply, and turned away. The bombs crashed into the town. Some hit the houses, others exploded harmlessly in the fields or forests. Others failed to detonate at all. But in this run, five members of a single family were killed. Storefronts were shattered and fires began to rage. Day after day they came, death rained from the skies while worshipers tried to celebrate Christmas. Inside the Prince of Peace was adored, outside they sang the dirges.

As soon as the planes disappeared, the people came out from the flimsy hiding places. Mud walls provided only an illusion of protection. They ran to the burning buildings and did what they could.

Others climbed out of their foxholes. The leadership of the church had initiated the idea of digging in. Once the bombings started, people began to dig frantically. Families slept near their own foxholes, women cooked between them. Children did not go far from them to play. The sound of jet engines propelled them into their sanctuaries.

We backed up the video tape a little to catch again what the Church President had said about the "foxholes." He looked at us through the camera lens and said again, "We jumped into the holes as the planes dropped their bombs...we give thanks to God. Only by prayer were we spared."

He explained how the approaching front lines of battle evacuated whole towns. Rather than be caught in a pitched battle, shot at random, pressed into service, robbed, beaten, and raped, the villagers retired to their traditional sanctuary, the jungle. The jungle had always been the refuge during the intertribal wars, or when the slavers had come, or when the "rubber barons" had come seeking ears or rubber, or when the mercenaries had passed through, or the rebels came rampaging, or the government troops hunted the enemy. The hunting huts and game trails became their cities of refuge. For long periods of time they would live off the land. The jungle is not easily harvested. These were city dwellers and farmers, not the savvy pigmies. They lived in near starvation conditions, insect-bitten, snake-bitten, ant-bitten, drinking turgid water, trying to keep smoke invisible. "We would send out the children to find a few beans," he said into the camera. "It was almost insupportable."

We sat on the davenport and digested that word "almost." What, then, was truly "insupportable"? We held our drinks and watched the President tell the story. He was not emotional about it, but once in a while he would have to take a deep breath, pause, then square his shoulders before continuing. From time to time, the gathered ex-Congo missionaries would comment to one another, or even laugh lightly at an anecdote. We were glad we were not there. We were gripped with the need to be there.

While traveling in the States, the President had told us other stories as well. The soldiers hit him in the ribs with the rifle butt. "Where is the money the Americans left?" News, or rather rumor, had traveled that the Mission had left enormous sums of money behind. Whatever had been left had long since been used up. "There is no money." An officer stepped up and put a pistol to his head. "And the radios?" "We already turned them all in." He pulled back the hammer. "Is it worth your life?" "No," came the answer, "but it is the truth." The hammer came down...slowly as he levered it down with his thumb. "Inside." He posted a guard.

There was nothing left to steal. The first wave of retreating defeated soldiers had stolen their share. Then followed opportunistic looters like one finds everywhere in the world. "Nearly 80% of it all was looted by the population...." said the President. Then the next line of advancing soldiers looted it back from them.

None of us watching the video had even been mugged. This was "almost" unimaginable. The soldier was ruler, accountable to none. Anarchy was the order of the day. "But God is good," he said to us.

Whole villages were pillaged and burned. Mission homes were ransacked, the hospital supplies were stolen. Road blocks were oases of terror where as the President said "there is nothing you can do...." Vehicles were "requisitioned." Livestock was slaughtered to feed the troops. The public health systems that had kept a restraining leash on sleeping sickness, river blindness, and AIDS frayed and broke. The diseases sprang free and themselves formed yet another even more vicious front, ultimately taking more lives than the battles could claim. Patients that did come to the hospitals were warmly received and treated by doctors and nurses that had stayed through the danger and without pay...but there was never enough resource. The families living in and around the wards kept the vigils of death. And as usual the infants, the children, the elderly were the first to succumb.

"Would you pause it for a moment?" one said, "I need a break." We all did. We stood up and stretched, got a drink, chatted, letting our subconscious deal for a brief moment with what we had just absorbed from the video. These were our friends and colleagues. We had eaten in their homes and our children had played together with theirs. We had traveled and worshiped and sung praises to God together. Sure, we had argued and had had serious disagreements. But we were all called to know the power of Christ and the fellowship of His sufferings.

We settled down again. Someone hit "Play" and the story continued.

Remember Your TP

"Remember your T.P." That was the code word for "pack your one suitcase, we are evacuating!" The sending Church had devised and revised a number of plans to evacuate its missionaries from the Congo/Zaire since work began there in the Ubangi-Mongala in 1935. The probable anticipated causes were four: 1) Rebel incursions into our area; 2) Government persecution and/or expulsion of missionaries; 3) Intolerable anarchy; 4) General uprising.

In fact, the history of evacuation made our plans seem prudent. The mission was evacuated in 1960-61 when the Congo gained its independence from Belgium. Then it was evacuated again in 64-65 when the Simbas threatened to overcome the government forces. Then 25 years of peace followed until in the aftermath of the Hutu/Tutsi massacres in Rwanda, Lawrence Kabila moved his troops across Congo in the space of several months to challenge Mobutu at the doorstep of Kinshasa. The situation called for an evacuation in 1991. Then again in 1996 as virtually the same rebel forces sought to oust President Kabila- a situation which continued until 2002 in different forms. In each of these cases there was a "clear and present danger" to the missionary community and it was decided, in collaboration with the national church, to evacuate.

The evacuation of the missionaries has far reaching consequences both for the national church and the sending agency. Even during these years of relative peace, the "pros" and "cons" of evacuation were discussed. Sometimes those missionaries who had evacuated seemed a little defensive. And those who had not seemed a bit idealistic. Each evacuation raised the same several issues.

** Issues of Trust:* Can anyone fully trust a "fair-weather friend"? Can the

national church truly be discipled by missionaries that will not stay during times of trouble? Evacuation at least raises the question of whether or not the missionaries are "hirelings" that do not lay down their lives for the sheep.

** Issues of Property:* Evacuation leaves a vacuum. In many cases the church

is not prepared to take over maintenance and accounting of the facility. Nevertheless, during the missionary absence, in some form or other, they do run the show. The return of the missionaries is awkward to say the least. Slowly but surely the mission once again settles in and resumes its programs as they were. Commitments are again made to train, educate and equip the nationals as soon as possible to run the show. The next evacuation once again reveals the true progress.

** Issues of Ownership:* The missionary presence is deemed necessary to

assure the continuing influx of funds. Money follows the missionary as surely as the tiny "nosee'em" flies follow moisture. Every "station" wants a missionary, one of the primary reasons being that with the missionary comes a support system that benefits the whole area: an airplane, vehicles, health care, radio contact, postal system, etc. Evacuation is a painful reminder of this truth. During evacuation periods, all capital-intensive (i.e., expensive!) programs falter. Only those programs that are truly replicable and meeting the felt needs of the people are sustainable in the missionary absence.

** Issues of Accountability:* The exacting standards of the mission

accounting systems are not sustainable after an evacuation. Of necessity, accounting is "entrusted" to the nationals during the missionary absence. Funds are often used by them to meet critical situations, line items ignored, receipts not always kept. Upon return, the mission must "straighten things out"- an audit is needed,

and they usually end in drawing a line and starting over.

** Issues of Re-entry:* Forced evacuation results in forced "nationalization"

of mission enterprises with mixed results. In some cases the church leadership has been more than ready for a long time to do this work, in others not. Some missionary-driven projects come to an end. Only those ministries that have an indigenous equipped leadership already committed to that particular ministry and philosophy survive. The return of the mission tends to be a return to what was. Yet things can never entirely return to "normal."

** Issues of Strategic Reallocation of Resources:* Historically, evacuations

have resulted in a redistribution of missionary resource. The evacuations of the 90's resulted in the sending Church developing ministries in several other African countries in cooperation with other national churches and sending agencies. But because these former missionaries to Congo/Zaire have now made long term commitments to other ministries, the "reopening" of the Congo missions, when it comes, will not see a stampede of missionaries just waiting in the wings. A few may return, most will not.

Evacuations, then, receive a mixed review. On the negative side of the ledger, they disrupt vital ministries (for example, health care diminishes) and the flow of materials dwindles. The nationals may feel abandoned and the missionaries regard themselves as a "refugee" people in need of relocation. On the plus side, the success or failure of the Mission to equip and train the nationals is clearly revealed. What ministries continue during missionary absence reveal the true felt needs of the church and people. And lastly, the Lord often uses evacuation to scatter his people elsewhere around the world. In effect, evacuation has much the same results as a moratorium might have. The various movements for a missionary moratorium in Africa have not been successful. Evacuations become involuntary moratoriums.

Should missionaries ever evacuate? If "yes," under what circumstances and for what reasons? A "no" answer implies a readiness to stay and die, the ultimate act of identification with the people and obedience to the Lord's call. Covenant missionaries have not all been of one mind on this subject. Some would have stayed had they not been ordered by Headquarters and the Embassy to leave. Others would go back at any time regardless of any danger in obedience to what they believe to be God's call. But the majority felt it was only prudent to leave until things were again stable, and in fact, that it was for the good of the church to do so. Who is right? Both are operating from noble motives.

The Evacuation of Thessalonica

Acts 17 describes Paul's arrival in Thessalonica. He had come there as a direct result of the "Macedonian Call" (Acts 16: 9). Clearly the Holy Spirit had prevented them from going elsewhere and had bid them come to Macedonia, which included Thessalonica. It was confirmed by open doors in Philippi. Paul was imprisoned there and beaten. When released he did not flee. Certainly Paul's concern for his physical safety is minimal. When stoned outside Lystra and left for dead, he gets up and goes back into that city. He heads directly for Jerusalem knowing that he will be arrested there. Not once in any of his recorded prayers does he pray for safety (though he does pray once that he arrive safely), only that an opportunity would be found for the Gospel. So we have the case of an absolutely clear call, confirming fruit, and a faith-filled courageous man. Yet he "evacuated" Thessalonica. Why?

Scriptures record that he was with them for three Sabbaths, that is not a very long time! He had the usual mixed results: some were persuaded and joined Paul...and others formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. Paul had been staying in the house of a certain Jason. When the mob failed to find Paul there, they seized Jason instead. They accused Paul and Company, and by implication Jason and the new believers, of disturbing the public order. Secondly, they were accused of sedition, proclaiming another king and violating the decrees

of Caesar. These are familiar historic accusations leveled against Christian missionaries.

The authorities received a pledge or a bond from Jason and "the others" and let them go. This had the effect of making Jason and the "others" liable for any damage that might occur, including damage due to riot. The lives and livelihood of the whole fledgling Christian community were in jeopardy.

The brethren then sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. In Berea the same scenario was repeated. Some believed Paul. Agitators stirred up the people and the brethren sent Paul out to sea. From there he went to Athens. Nowhere does it suggest that Paul considered his retreat to be an abandonment of the call or in any way an act of disobedience. Neither can we attribute it to cowardice.

What are we to make of this? Three principles suggest themselves as a basis for evacuation.

1) A viable Christian community had been established. How many Thessalonians believed? We are not told a number, but it must have had some size. Scriptures say "some of the Jews were persuaded" and "along with a great multitude of God fearing Greeks" and "a number of the leading women." The books of I and II Thessalonians make it clear that Paul was anxious about their continuing in the faith, but he had left them sufficient knowledge to soldier on. Again and again he repeats the phrase "as I told you" or "as you know." He rejoices in how their faith was known by all and how they had become themselves a model to be imitated (I Thess. 1: 6-7). They became missionaries themselves (vs. 8). This was a group that could be left with all likelihood of survival and even continued growth. The picture might have been different had the church been too small or too weak to survive without him. It is speculative to be sure, but would Paul have then evacuated?

In terms of modern day missions, missionaries are far more likely to evacuate when they know the church they leave behind is strong enough to stand and even prosper in their absence. Their continued presence is not a matter of spiritual life and death. The missionary presence is helpful but not critical to the continuing life and growth of the church.

2) The continuing presence of the missionaries puts the church in danger. They were the outsiders, the ones who had "upset the whole world", the ones ostensibly preaching treason and bringing anarchy. Jason & Co. were indigenous, known quantities. The strangeness of the newcomers, whose ancestry was not well known, who did not fit into the social fabric, whose accent was strange, and who were not native born was the volatile point.

Covenant missionaries, as mentioned, are, generally speaking, white, rich and Western. At times this brings blessings to the church. The Western missionary is able to bring material aid, technology and new ideas. Our very strangeness opens new vistas for many a villager. But there are times when their presence also brings danger to the church. It is a fact that American missionaries, whether we like it or not, trail behind them the odor of former colonialism and western imperialism. To the degree the national church is identified with these things, the church is vulnerable also. In fact, the rebel incursions into the Ubangi only substantiate this point, as they arrested church leaders and ransacked their homes looking for radios and wealth the missionaries must have left behind. Others are accused of spying for "the other side."

3) The believers asked the missionaries to leave. In both Thessalonica and Berea they did not volunteer to leave but were asked to leave by the brethren for both the good of the church and their own personal safety. The national church does not want to have the responsibility for safeguarding the missionaries during times of civil unrest. Great is their sense of guilt when a "foreign missionary" suffers and dies needlessly. They know how fragile Westerners are, how poorly they would fare in hiding. They also know that rumors of missionaries in hiding would spread quickly and the threatening forces would soon find them anyway. Their arrest would lead to the arrest of the church leaders. The church would be identified with the foreign interests. Paul understood this and so allowed himself to be sent on. It was as much an act of faith and courage for Paul

to leave them as it would have been for him to stay with them. His departure did not disobey the Call, but the Call only continued to move him on to new places of effective service. The Call is never static.

Missional situations are never as clear-cut as we would like. It is as easy to overestimate the situation as to underestimate it. But at least this seems to be a clear biblical model: when the new church is viable, when the missionary presence itself becomes a liability to the church, and when the nationals themselves ask the missionaries to leave in face of serious threat, it is time to "take your T.P."

Missionaries put themselves at risk for a variety of reasons and motives. Some believe the Lord is calling them to stay and possibly die, knowing that the safest place is in the center of His will. For others it is due to a faulty analysis of the situation, the tendency is to downplay the threat factor. Others, moved by compassion, just stay too long and "get caught" though they intended to leave. Dr. Paul Carlson of the Evangelical Covenant Church, is an example. He had already left the danger zone in face of the advancing Simbas, then returned to give care to his patients. He was caught and transported to Kisangani and then killed just as the paratroopers arrived for the rescue.

Danger puts stress on psychological fault lines. One might say to oneself "I must stay to prove my faith, obedience, and courage." Faith in God and love for the people must be "proved" because they themselves are uncertain of these things in their own lives. In these cases, the tendency to stay is more about the missionary and his or her needs than the church or the call.

Certainly there are times and places where the blood of the martyrs is the only way, it is what Christ indeed calls us to. Our ultimate guidance is always God's direction for our lives. It may well be that we have developed a strategy that tilts towards maximum safety and a minimum of risk taking. However, there will be times when believers, whether missionary or national say with Polycarp, "I bless Thee for counting me worthy of this day and hour..." It has been said about the slow growth of the church in Muslim North Africa that it is due in part to too few martyrs. It is also true, though, that it can be a greater act of faith, courage and obedience to go on and live for Christ than to die for him when there is no clear mandate to martyrdom either from Scripture, the church, or the circumstance.

From "Towards a Theology of Evacuation" Evangelical Missions Quarterly (July, 2000; 334-339)

Homeward Bound

We finally returned to Congo after fourteen years of living and serving churches in the States. Ruth was returning in her capacity of Executive Minister of Covenant Women Ministries, or "Mama President" to them. I was coming to teach a series of day-long seminars on the Holy Spirit to the village pastors. Our youngest twenty-three year-old daughter, Rebecca, and Rob, her husband of eight months, accompanied us. She was coming to connect her childhood to her husband - and to parts of herself.

We were engulfed the moment we stepped off the Cessna. After nearly five hours of flight in a Cessna 206 that took us from Yaounde, Cameroon, to Gemena, Democratic Republic of Congo, all we wanted was a bathroom. However the dozens of Church leaders were there, the dancers and young girls with eggs to present to Mama President were there. Dozens of soldiers also loitered about. That part seemed familiar. What was new was a radio announcer from Radio Libérté. He maintained a blow-by-blow account in Lingala: "She is getting off the plane, she is shaking hands, her husband is with her, and her daughter, and some other guy...she is receiving the eggs, ten eggs. This, my friends, is not nothing!" Then the President of the Church snapped open his cell phone and called ahead to the church to let them know we had arrived. Now that to me was "not nothing."

I looked around at the windowless, gutted and bullet-riddled airport terminal while I listened to the radio announcer and eavesdropped on the cell phone conversation. Congo was lurching back towards vibrant life,

but at an uneven gait.

We piled into the Land Cruiser and two Honda 125's provided the motorcycle escort and twin dusty-red rooster tails as we moved through town towards the church. We had lived here in 1973 when we could go to the hotel for ice cream and fill up a gas tank at a pump. A policeman had actually directed traffic at the "rond point." Now there were no other vehicles on the road at all. In fact we made a three-day trek without seeing any other vehicles. But the road-side markets were full of produce, and people were busy buying and selling. School had just been dismissed for the day and hundreds of students walked the dusty road. Bicycles carried enormous sacks of grain and jugs of palm oil. The men and women pedaling mightily through sand and up hills carrying gigantic sacks of used clothing and kitchen-ware were the red cells of commercial oxygen that supplied the town. The green always emerges through the ashes.

The truck stopped out of sight from the church. Stretching over the horizon before us was a gauntlet of well-wishers. Waving palm fronds and clothes, hats and scarves, they sang their songs of welcome. Many were our former students, others colleagues with whom we had worked, but mostly they were just brothers and sisters in Christ glad for the white harbinger of returning peace.

Rebecca wrote, "In that line of people, I guess I must have shaken hands with my Nanny, for she jumped out of the crowd and threw her hands around my neck, crying with joy. After learning who she was, I cried too, even though I didn't recognize her, and I didn't know her anymore. It was not that I knew who she was, but that I felt *known*, a piece of my puzzle put together. I now realize that my trip to Congo was a lot of putting my pieces together to make sense of who I was and who I am now. I feel less like I left myself scattered all over Zaire when we left, not knowing if we would ever come back. Meeting her helped me feel more like a whole person, now able to pick up some pieces and make sense of the way I think and feel and live my life..."

We shook hands with a thousand people before finally making it to the bathroom. Then we were led to the church where 1300 people, mostly women, awaited. They had been "awaiting" since early that morning for the Mama President. Ruth had prepared her messages in Lingala and been doing daily devotions in Lingala for two months, but had no opportunity to really speak it-until she stood before the crowd with screeching microphone in hand. Now she would stand and deliver. Her message would be broadcast repeatedly over Radio Liberté. The Spirit was sweet and strong and she preached for fifty minutes on the incredible power of God at work in our lives. It is a variation on the "gift of tongues." Thank you Jesus.

We made the twelve-hour journey on to Goyongo, the Seminary where we had taught for so many years. It too had been pillaged. The students and staff had retreated into the jungle and continued classes. They moved us into our former house and our beloved cook, now ridden with arthritis, came up to take care of us. We wept for him, then laughed with him in joy as he hugged Rebecca and asked news of Rachel.

Rob was a big attraction. They named him "Bokilo" (son-in-law, of course!). Then it occurred to them that since he had married an African, a daughter of the village in fact (Rebecca was born in Congo), he had never paid for her! He owed them a goat! We sent word that we wanted to buy a goat for Rob to give away as his bride price. A good goat is expensive. We were not sure Becca was worth the entire price of a quality goat, but in the end we paid it. All the students and faculty came out for the wedding ceremony that would finally make Becca an honest woman. The Director and a faculty wife posed as Rob's family, and the rest of the cast lined up to be Becca's clan. Rob led the bleating goat forward and delivered his carefully memorized speech, "Nakabeli bino ntaba oyo mpo na mwasi na ngai." Later I told Rob that he had said, "Here is the first goat, but I would like more wives." I learned that trick from watching "My Big Fat Greek Wedding." I laughed heartily. Alone. Actually he said, "I give you this goat for my wife." Now of course he has to pay them more for each baby she has. Really.

Rebecca picks up the narrative. "Somewhere on our trip, between instinctively navigating my way through African airports and pointing at every creature along our path and saying 'I had that for a pet too!' I realized

that I have not had a normal life and I never really will. Normal, to me, is being raised in a house with a dog. Dad never got me a dog, only parrots, and monkeys, and chameleons, geckos, hyrax, miniature armadillos (pangolins), rare and exotic butterflies...and all I wanted was to be able to say to my friends 'Yeah, I had a dog, too'- at least that would be one thing that could connect me to the rest of the American world. These memories of my childhood and my transition years into the States flooded over me. More pieces of the puzzle. At least I found more pieces, though they did not all fit. I still want a dog, but I want a parrot more...

"My Mom preached for an hour. I got goose bumps and inspiration even though I couldn't understand all she was saying. I could understand her illustrations and catch the gist of it from the scripture passages, but the goose bumps mainly came from watching her preach in Lingala. When she spoke another language, I felt like another person. I was not her daughter and she was not my Mom. My mom, an African? She was more African in Africa than she is American in America. Her colors came shining through her African pores and blinded the congregation with joy, response, inspiration. I gawked at my parents, unable to understand them anymore...had fourteen years made them this foreign to me when the language came flying out from their lips?"

As we heard their stories, a single phrase was often spoken, "Ata boye." "Ata" means something like "even though": ata we have lost everything, ata the roads are bad, ata we have no means and no money, ata we are not paid, ata some of my children have died. Ata boye, even so, we still teach, we still work, we still do our jobs and God is blessing us.

Resilient joy abounded. The music in the churches was unaffected. Late at night I could hear choirs rehearsing, they never stopped. After several sweaty sticky hours in the Land Cruiser, the women in back began to sing. And they did sing. And sing. Ruth and Becca and Rob joined in, the chauffeur and aid-chauffer joined in. I tried for a while. The concert went on for three hours. "Be filled with the Spirit and speak to one another in songs and spiritual songs...singing and making melody in your heart." I stuck to the "in your heart" part. Song is the Spirit's gift to Congo.

Throughout the trip I constantly asked myself, "Can I come back here?" At the worst, when we laughingly said, "I've never been so hot and dirty and sweaty," the answer was, "No, why would I want to?" But that is not it of course. I cannot go back. First, as is said, one can never "go back." So much has changed: the country, the needs, the leaders, and me. One cannot just resume as if the intervening years were just put on "pause." Yes, I could adapt to the new reality, the new conditions. Though it is harder as I age, I know that about myself, I can adapt to just about any environment (except a cold one. Lord, please don't send me to International Falls, where it was colder there than on Mars. Really. The warmest spot on Mars was briefly warmer than the coldest day in International Falls).

I cannot go back. Perhaps it is because of the incessant demands of a hugely needy people. I cannot bear being a rich Christian in a land of poverty. I can live with it here-out of reach. I can send some money but I can't have them at my door. I cannot accept being savior and redeemer, the Great White Hope of their future plans.

I cannot go back. I found that being obviously odd, singled out, pointed at, laughed at, cursed, followed, inordinately esteemed and honored at every turn, was eventually exhausting. What would it be like as a permanent state of things?

I cannot go back. Could I enjoy the ambiguity of life as I once did, content just to be where I was at the moment? I saw this T-Shirt on an MK once, "I thrive on stress and ambiguity." At 54 at the time of this visit, I realize that I can handle it for a season of time but not as a new permanent life-style.

I cannot go back. The main reason has yet to be stated. I am unworthy. Oh, I still have the basic abilities and skills. Lingala is still fluid and functional. I can sit in a group of chatting Congolese and not have to strain to translate or interpret, I can think in it and speak it without real stress. French is a little harder, but still

adequate. Being unworthy is not the same as being unable. At Goyongo I felt like I could step into the classroom and start teaching Eschatology or History of the Church almost as if I had never stopped. No, it is not that. I see the people of the land, my friends, colleagues, and former students and know what they have endured these last years. I look at the Predicateurs (village preachers) who live by their sweat and gardens, with one change of clothes, themselves full of great faith and unfulfilled aspirations for their children ("Can you be a sponsor for my son to go to the University?"), self-denying, carrying the cross of Jesus with joy, and I am simply unworthy to teach them, to preach to them about spiritual truth that they know far better than I (I may know the data better but not the truth of it). More truth? I have always been unworthy to teach them, but now upon my return I see it more clearly.

I could go back. If the Lord called, yes, then I could. It would have to be clear. Well, it was clear the first time, wasn't it? The first time was a step of faith made in ignorance. This time it would be a step of faith made in knowledge and that is much harder. And it is not just "me" of course, it is and has been "we" for 33 years now. The Congolese Church might benefit from us as advocates and intercessors and even as an occasionally arriving inspiration, but they do not NEED us in the same way at all. The calling of Christ is upward (Phil 3:14), onward, beyond, further, greater. Except for returning to our first love, we are not called to "return and go back."

Becca commented that to her we seemed more African in Africa than American in America. That haunts me. It may be true, but I am still not African. As one Congolese pastor said, "You were born of the wrong mother." But the problem is that neither am I American. I am passing through, I belong "elsewhere" - I belong on an airplane going somewhere else. I definitely protest being "here." My citizenship is not here, despite what my voting card says.

Maybe it is fitting that with all the manioc, pondu, palm oil, fuku, plantains, and monkey I ate, with all the juice and unfiltered water I consumed, I stayed well and healthy until I got on Air France. An announcement crackled overhead. "In conformity with health regulations, we are about to spray the cabin. There is no danger, the spray will not hurt you. However, you may want to close your eyes and hold your breath..." Then they walked up and down the isles filling the cabin with pesticide.

Au revoir, my Congo.

Conclusion:

Acts 28: The Viper on Your Hand

Getting on a boat with the Apostle Paul is not a very good idea. No doubt having the boat flounder, break apart and sink under his feet was commonplace for Paul, but some of the others were experiencing their first marooning. This is actually Paul's fourth shipwreck. He writes in 2 Cor. 11 24-33 a list of his experiences. He says, "Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked..." - and that was before the one in Acts 28! Five times he was flogged. Whatever happened to "commit your way unto the Lord, trust also in him and he will make your paths straight"? Or "he will give his angels charge over you so that you not dash your foot against a stone"? Or "no evil will befall you"? Whatever else these promises mean, they do not mean absolution from hardship and suffering. The missionaries of the last century knew, as they headed to the Fever Coast of Africa, that the average life expectancy was six months. Would you go knowing that? Why not? Don't you believe in journey mercies, that God will protect you? All that we can be assured of is this: he will accomplish his purposes concerning you, he is faithful to complete it.

We once had a friend say, "I am always glad to travel with you because I believe God is with you and using you, and so I am safe when we are flying." Probably the most dangerous place in the world is next to a missionary like Paul.

Verse 1 opens with "They had had been brought safely through"- brought. Passive voice. Who did the "bringing through"? Fulfilling His word, God brought them through. That is the only way we get through anything. The soldiers did not kill the prisoners as they normally would do to stop their escape. Nobody tried to escape the sinking ship, as they would normally do as the ship floundered. Nobody drowned, not even those who couldn't swim- as normally happens. Clearly this was God at work.

Even the worst storms cannot thwart the purpose of God. And let us not forget that the storm was the context for speaking the word of God, for the giving of assurance. The storm was the context in which the Word and power of God was demonstrated. And ultimately, storms give us opportunities to serve and share. All the virtues of Christian character require hardship and suffering to highlight them. To love, there must be the unlovable. Humility demands humbling circumstances. Patience requires trial. And the demonstration of God's power and sovereignty requires risk, threat, and danger.

It is apparent that God wanted to do something on Malta. Why Malta? There are numerous other islands around there. Paul was headed for Rome - no, actually, he was aiming for someplace way beyond Rome, Spain. He never thought to stop at Malta. It wasn't part of his strategy or church planting initiative. Why stop there? Only a few people live there. What kind of strategy picks the most desolate isolated place, a place where they can't even talk to the people because they don't speak Greek? But God had a purpose and brought them safely through.

The detours of your life may seem wasteful to you. But they are not necessarily so. One dear friend of ours prepared much of her life to be a missionary, went to seminary, did language training, as soon as she got there, she was evacuated; she finally got back, and was evacuated again. She will in all probability never get there again. Is it a loss when we do it as unto the Lord, as he calls and purposes? Sometimes we know what the detours are for, sometimes not.

Paul, ever the servant, helped build a fire. Notice the unaffected unselfconscious mundane work Paul was doing. The status of Most Holy Anointed Apostle did not put him above anybody else. It had been very cold, the viper was stiff and looked like a twig, but as he warmed up, he came to life and inevitably sank his fangs into Paul. The viper would be full of venom since he had not eaten in a while.

Paul is once again at a crossroads. He will live or he will die, it is that simple. "Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's" he writes in Romans 14:8. The days of his life are in God's hands no less now that he has a viper hanging on his hand than before.

What a turn about, though. He has just seen the power of God at work in saving the whole shipload of people. A miracle. He is glad to be alive. Then this happens. There is no down time in our life as disciples. No halftime when Satan is absent, when the threats are gone, when the coast is clear. We may just struggle through some huge battle, then before we take a breath another one is upon us. Wave after wave curls over us. The devil left off tempting Jesus, it says, only until another time.

Can the man or woman who just crawled up onto shore praising God keep on praising him when the viper strikes? Paul was doing the dirty work, humble work, collecting wood, building a fire, doing good works, serving the others. Is this fair? Why not have the viper bite the soldier who wanted to chop off his head to prevent him from escaping, why not fasten a viper on his neck?

Job wrote, "Even though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (13:15). Can you? Not every viper strike is healed. Mabana died. Daniel's friends said to the king, "Even if God does not deliver us, we will not bow down" (Dan. 3:18). Believers do die in the fire.

Earlier I mentioned the snake on the bunk bed. Because she was spared, we gave a great and thankful testimony that Sunday in church. But others are not delivered. Would we still praise God, believe in him, trust

him, love him, had she died swollen from poison that night? Would you?

The viper is the crossroads. Both the viper and the shipwreck are in God's hands. In one way or another, your life will be radically changed. You will give testimony either in life or by death. What will it be?

The "natives" as the New American Standard translates it, were kind and hospitable. The translation "natives" is kind rendition of "Barbaros" in Greek, these were Barbarians in the technical sense. They did not speak Greek. They had not been "civilized," neither christianized. And yet look at the innate godly qualities they demonstrated. In the last 2000 years of Christian evangelism it has sometimes happened, well, often happened, maybe regularly happened, that the Christian missionary has arrived with a suspicious hostile posture towards the indigenous culture. That is not to say that within every culture including our own there are not satanic elements. But culture also contains much that is good. Apparently these folks knew of a god called Nemesis, or Justice, and so dealt fairly with others, even strangers. God has not left himself without witness in any culture. Though mistaken about what was justice, they had a keen sense of justice and knew that wrongdoing was divinely punished- more than we can say for much of contemporary postmodern western culture.

The missionary lives in a fishbowl. Every movement is observed. Ruth was the first Caucasian woman to ever be seen in a certain village in Congo. Groups of people just followed her around and watched her every move. She brushed her hair and the whole group gasped. Elsewhere it is not so obvious, but we are under keen and unrelenting observation. What we eat, how we treat any employees, how we speak to one another, all is observed. All our habits are commonly known in the village. Having a missionary around is much more amusing than having a TV. Perhaps one of the best ways to testify is to hire a servant, that is of course, if your testimony can bear scrutiny. Otherwise, never employ one.

And so they were watching this marooned crew and Paul in particular. When they saw the viper hanging from his hand they said, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live." And so they watched for him to bloat up and die. Given their premises, Paul was guilty. The gods had condemned him. Nobody ran over to help him or offer any native remedies, of which I am sure there were some. They no doubt thought it best not to interfere in these things.

The things that happen to us also under scrutiny. Good things mean we are blessed, bad things mean we are cursed. Our worth, merit, and goodness are judged often by our fortune. Is that how you judge yourself?

How we react to the circumstances is also observed. Paul could have shouted and cursed and danced around, clutching his hand and screaming, "I am a dead man walking! Help me!" and added a few expletives. But he just shook it off and went on. Our reaction carries as much weight as the fact of what happened.

When it became apparent that Paul wasn't going to die, their interpretation changed. The accusation of "Murderer!" changed to an acclamation that he was a god. Many factors influence how the attitude of the people changes towards us, from accusation, suspicion and rejection to that of acclamation, appreciation and love. It is of critical importance that we know who we are before God and why we are there, otherwise we can lose our identity through the ever-changing lenses of other people's opinion of us. Can you bear being viewed as a rich, arrogant, stingy, prideful capitalist? And what would make them change that opinion? Or can you bear being viewed as a burdensome useless clueless imbecile? What would change that opinion?

The same process except in reverse happened in Lystra. They began by thinking that Paul was a god, and brought him gifts and were going to make sacrifices. When he disclaimed this status, they decided to stone him as a charlatan and imposter. Sometimes we arrive well acclaimed and our ministry just goes downhill from there!

And so all of this is precursor to the next events. Publius, the mayor of the island if you will, had a father who

fell ill. The headstrong naval captain, the centurion who listened to Paul, the storm, the coincidental arrival at Malta, the viper, the healing were all superintended by God and now led to these next events. Paul was summoned to pray for Publius' father. Can the God who healed Paul from the viper also heal Publius' father? Our healing becomes the opportunity to be the healer. We have blessings, now we give them. Every benediction issues in a burden. We were the object of divine care and protection, and now we are the medium, the giver of care, the conveyer of God's grace. From object to medium. Always. We give what we receive. And it is cast in prayer, "after he prayed" he laid hands on him and he was healed.

Occasionally I read a novel that has such an expected, contrived ending I am disappointed in it. I say, "Life just isn't like that." I would have expected Luke the writer of this story to now say something like, "The rest of the people who had diseases brought them to Paul, and all were healed, and the entire population of Malta said, 'what must we do to be saved?' Being cut to the quick, they repented and believed on Jesus as savior and were filled with the Holy Spirit, and the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." It happened before, but not here. And had there been a whole Malta Movement, Luke would have reported it - count on it! But, no. They honored Paul and his group, showed them respect, gave them provision and said adios, or whatever they said in Barbarian. All this...the storm, the viper, the healings, for what? To get some respect and some provisions? Where is the glad ending, the rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repented? By golly, if I am snake bit for God, I want a convert to show for it!

Sometimes it just doesn't happen. All our sufferings, all the power encounters, all the testimony, teaching, modeling, being good in front of your employees, all the time devoted to the enterprise seem to result in nothing. Where is the fruit? "This is what I came for, a pat on the back and a 'we like you and here is a bag of grain'?" The answer to that is yes. Evangelism is moving one person one step closer to Jesus, and they were now many steps closer, but had not yet crossed over. In most cases, we will never know the end results of our efforts. We are just part of the story, one more link. At times even Paul was just one more link. We might have a few slides to show at home, a few stories to tell like "I got shipwrecked and bit by a viper..." but the only thing we care about is our Master's view of it, "well done good and faithful servant."

The Word of God is preparing you for the unexpected, for plans changing, even collapsing, diversions, shipwrecks, near-death-experiences, detours, and opportunities that seem to get lost in some maze. You will also see marvelous works of God and meet people who bear the marred image of Christ, who will love you and hate you and make you know who you are. But remember, repeat, and rehearse verse 1, "They were brought safely through."