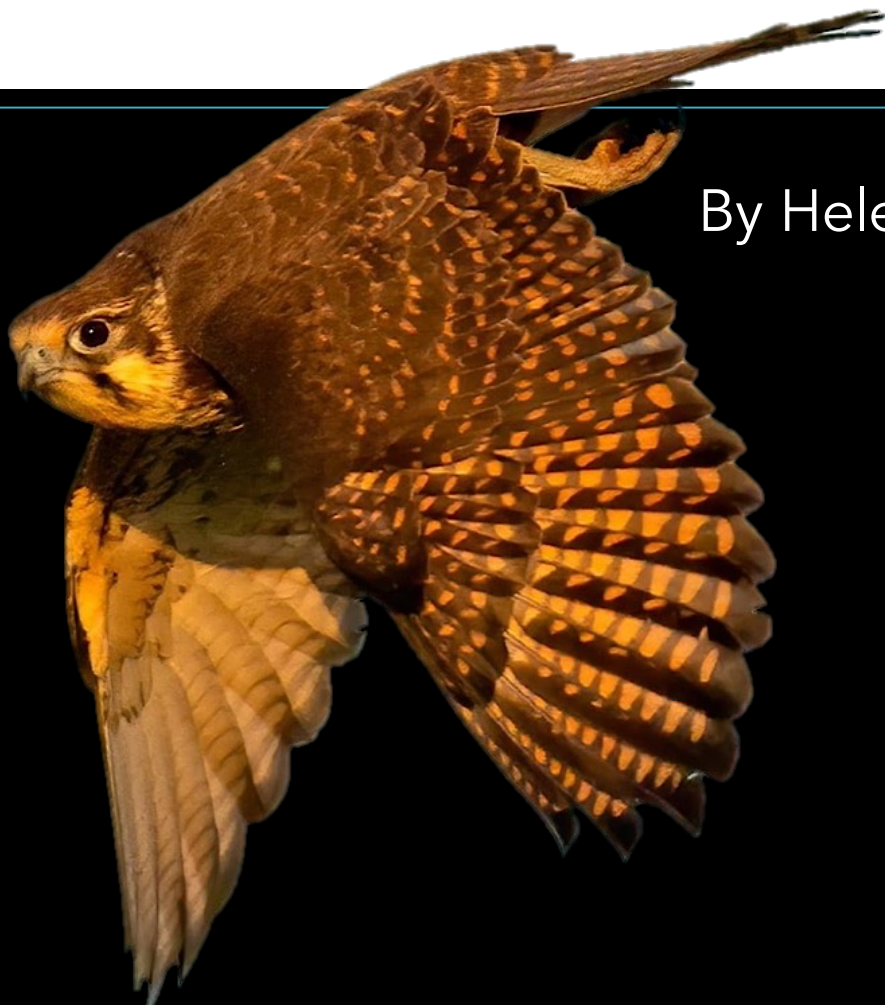




INSPIRING TRUE STORIES OF THE GOSPEL REACHING NATIONS

# Liberty Years: Through My Eyes



By Helen Blake

Cover photo by Tony Robertson

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“If your life is poured out for the hungry and afflicted, your light will arise and shine so very brightly in the darkness around you!”  
Isaiah 58:10



**Liberty Years: Through My Eyes** is about some of the overseas work and journeys of Steve and Helen Blake and their family and friends, among peoples of the South Pacific, Europe, Asia and the Mediterranean. It tells of God’s endless love and His desire to bless all people, everywhere!

The stories are presented in their approximate time sequence, but it won’t really matter if they are read in a different order. They have been written mostly to inspire younger people with the discovery that Jesus’ words in John 14:12 are meant for them, too!

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# FOREWORD

*Sometimes, faith plunges us into the deep waters! Other times we need it for finding the right stepping stones or pathway ahead.*

*Always our God is faithful! Every day is a new day, and He is always there.*



**G**od's call to take the good news of His Kingdom to people beyond our own borders has led us overseas to many places, these past thirty years! Some of our trips have led to long term commitments resulting in the need to supply such things as buildings, medical help, sponsorship, education and other community assistance programs. Other trips have been only for preaching, teaching, prayer and evangelism.

Sometimes, a vision or prophecy has preceded or accompanied our going; other times, we've simply responded to an obvious need before us.

Only days before our first journey to Eastern Europe in mid-1991, Steve was in a meeting of Church leaders who were gathered for ministry by a prophet from America. Stepping forward to the front to receive prayer, he found himself walking through a vision of the flags of many nations! At the same time, the prophet was speaking to him naming countries God would be sending him to. Inside Steve's coat pocket were the tickets he'd bought that very morning for our first flights to some of those same countries!

Another time, a preacher visiting our Church spoke over us that God would be sending us "to the blackest of the black, and the whitest of the white". She had no way of knowing that Steve had just returned from Bougainville in the Pacific, where the people's skin is as dark as the darkest, and was about to fly to White Russia in Northern Europe.

A large part of our lives has been spent simply fulfilling responsibilities associated with our work. The stories you're about to read have happened from time to time (quite often, but not every day!). Sometimes the events in them were planned; other times they completely surprised us.

When Simon Peter and his friends went out with their nets at Jesus' command into the deep waters (Luke 5:4), they didn't know that an incredible miracle was about to happen. All night long they had already been fishing in those same waters, feeling disappointed that there were no fish. But now, suddenly and unexpectedly, they found an abundance where before there had been none at all! What an amazing thing to happen. For the rest of Peter's life, that day would always be a reminder to him that a miracle might be just ahead!

I think Peter and his disciple friends would agree that our faith in Jesus is needed for both the unexpected and the everyday plans we make; the awesome and the ordinary times.

The first ten years of our work, we juggled leading a Church family in the one hand and following our vision for other places in the other. Then, in 2002 we moved countries for a season to start focusing our lives full time on the people God was calling us to work amongst overseas.

During the first decade, friends in our Church family were at the heart of all of our overseas trips, fund raising activities, administration and financial miracles. They travelled with us to the tropics and to snow covered areas; to peaceful or warring people groups. They came with us to build, carry medicines, teach, perform, or to accompany and encourage. Together we raised funds by selling chocolates, art works, Christmas puddings and snow cones. We held walkathons, dinners and garage sales; raised and sold cattle, shaved heads and bought and sold cars and tractors. A small team of us spent countless hours in the several office spaces spread through our long house; one friend worked extra hours at her office job to support children in our sponsorship program. Mothers in our Church made meals for our family and often helped care for our four children. All

of these efforts were without any thought at all of financial remuneration.

The vision and work God had begun in us gained trust and favour, and many more people from different parts of Australia volunteered their help for the needy.

Occasionally, people suggested that one of us should write about our experiences in the nations. I always dismissed the idea as being impossible, and for many years it certainly was! Then, in 2012, six weeks based in a tiny mountain village in Cyprus in the Mediterranean provided me with the surprising opportunity to write. I will always be grateful to Costas and Vasiliki for the loan of their summer house! Something about the surrounding countryside inspired me, and in between meetings in Cyprus and ministry trips to other countries nearby, this little book began.

**M**y reason for writing hasn't been to give a detailed account of all that we have done, and so

some nations Steve has journeyed to multiple times and loved are not included in these stories. I haven't mentioned most of our mission activities in Australia, even though there have been quite a few.

I have included a handful of biblical stories that have been God's Living Word to us from the very beginning, and remain today at the heart of our work. (Right here is a good place to say that the paraphrasing of Scripture verses you'll read are mostly my own, after I cross-checked each of them in many translations. I believe they convey very close to their original meaning. Also, I've used some imagination in the biblical accounts called '*Keep on Knocking*', '*The Mite*', '*Isaiah 58*' and '*Solomon*').

The occasional times people's names are included in a story, it seemed to need it; the names of some I'd like to have included couldn't be written because of where they live.

For simplicity, I haven't mentioned the names of most of our Australian friends who have worked and walked closely with us. We've shared some great adventures and seen God do amazing things!

As these events are told *through my eyes* and most of my time has been spent in our home offices, I'd especially like to thank our friends Maria, Kimberly, Joyce and Sandra who in the beginning spent many, many hours every week year after year, working efficiently in all kinds of administration tasks. Those years were my busiest, when we were also leading a Church family and providing administrative help for a handful of other mission ministries too.



*These stories are dedicated to our beloved children, their life partners and our grandchildren! You have all shared some of these events with us and have seen everything constantly happening around you through your own eyes.*

*The stories are especially for YOU, as well as for all other younger people who will read them. Your own stories can be equally as meaningful if you'll follow after Jesus, whose life was never ordinary!*



# LIBERTY YEARS Through My Eyes

## 1

### *A Pacific Islands Story...* Called to Vanuatu



HIS power at work IN US is able to do  
much more than we could ever dream of!

Ephesians 3:20



That unforgettable Friday, Steve answered a phone call that would dramatically change the rest of our lives! As I half-listened, it became clear that he was being asked to go overseas... not the following month or week, but the very next day! Somehow it felt right to me, and so I started preparing even before the conversation ended. What would he need? *Yes, clothes and a suitcase, but what else?* Travelling between countries had been very familiar to me in my childhood and youth, but that had been long ago. And anyway, back then any planning involved would have just happened around me.

The year was 1987, and in those days we didn't have passports, or money for such things as buying airplane tickets. But this was not a time to stop and consider practicalities!

We discovered we didn't have Steve's birth certificate, the essential document for processing a passport. We needed it quickly, but it could only be obtained from the State of his birthplace. Miraculously and with the help of friends in Melbourne and fax machines, by midday we knew the precious piece of paper would come through.

About then, we discovered the nearest immigration office was closed for its long lunch break. There would be just one hour remaining that afternoon for Steve to fill in his passport application, wait for it to be processed, and for his flight bookings to be arranged.

At about five o'clock I learned the final outcome from Steve: "I have the ticket and passport in my hands. Yes, I'm leaving for Vanuatu tomorrow!".



**V**anuatu is an island nation in the South Pacific with a total population of about 280,000. Its eighty three small islands roughly form a Y-shape resting in the ocean about a four hour flight northeast of Sydney.

Written history of the islands began in 1606, when Fernandez de Quiros from Spain discovered Santo in the north. Then, in 1774 the Englishman Captain James Cook sailed through and named the islands the 'New Hebrides', after the Hebrides in his native British Isles. Traders and missionaries followed in the mid 1800s. The outside world, with all of its influences both good and bad, had come to stay. Europeans and some others settled and established plantations, trade or Christian mission stations and outreaches.

In 1906, France and Britain colonised the islands and together formed a joint Government. For the next seventy four years there were French and British dual systems of education, health, security and other areas of service and development. Then, towards the end of that period an independence movement

arose under an Anglican bishop, Father Walter Lini. With Britain's help, Father Lini eventually led the formation of the Republic of Vanuatu in 1980.

So much change had happened in such a short space of time! Only a little over one hundred years earlier, each village or area in an island had been its own little kingdom. The challenge of being one nation with so many different languages and customs was complex in a myriad of ways.

Seven years after Independence, early in 1987, violent winds and rains devastated many of the islands of Vanuatu. Tropical Cyclone Uma was the worst storm to have hit Vanuatu for a very long time. Many people died, especially in the south, and everywhere houses and crops were destroyed.

Steve's introduction to Vanuatu happened just a few months after Uma. In Australia the Church we were leading was experiencing a tremendously fruitful season, but Steve's restlessness prompted us to sense that it might be time for something new.

The day of the telephone call was a day of miracle after miracle! God made possible what seemed to be impossible. The very next day, Steve suddenly found himself in a nation that only twenty four hours before he hadn't known existed!

Arriving at Port Vila's international airport, Steve caught sight of a brightly coloured flag painted onto the tail of a small airplane that was taxiing along the runway. He could hardly believe his eyes! A few months earlier at the close of a Sunday night Church service, he had seen this flag in a flash of vision: the same bold design in green, red, black and yellow. We had discussed it together after the meeting and searched unsuccessfully for a match in our old, outdated World Atlas. (In those days, not so very long ago, there was no such thing as Google or any other search engine). Now, he understood! What he had seen all those months before was the flag of the new Republic of Vanuatu! With this and the miracles of the previous day freshly in his mind, he knew there could be no doubting that God had led him to this place.

Steve met with the group of other young Australians who were waiting expectantly for him, and together they flew down to Tanna Island in the south for meetings that had been arranged for the visitors' coming. The next nights were incredible, glorious times! Under the open sky, the islanders sang into the early hours of the morning and God's presence filled the atmosphere.

A young Tannese pastor with an evangelist's and apostle's heart was in the crowd. Unbeknown to him or to Steve, he and his wife were to become and remain our good friends and co-workers through the many years to come. In 1989, Am and Helen would take their young family to the remote north of Tanna Island and begin a work with us that would bring many hundreds of Australians to the area. And some years after, our friendship would change the makeup of both of our families forever.

The miracle of Steve's first visit to Vanuatu will always be one of our favourite stories! God knew that



in the years to come, we would need such an extraordinary event to look back upon. That first trip, Steve returned home excited and enthusiastic about everything he had experienced. We had started on a path that would lead to countless visits, and to serious involvement in the nation's needs into the future.

# Keep on Knocking!

## Help for My Friend

Luke 11: 5-8 (interpretive translation)

*It's late at night, and a friend from out of town has just turned up at our house. He needs somewhere to stay and he's very hungry. Our cupboards are bare and I don't have anything to give him, and so I know I must go for help. I hurry across the street to a neighbour friend's house and rap on his door. To my dismay, he doesn't want to help! "It's late", he says, "We're already in bed and our doors are locked for the night! I can't be bothered getting up for you!"*

*I can't believe it. He doesn't want to be bothered?! I really need to get help for my hungry friend! So, what should I do now?*

*I decide to persist... to keep on knocking. Finally, all of the other neighbours wake up! That soon changes things! My neighbour friend gets up out of bed and gives me what I've come for!*

# LIBERTY YEARS Through My Eyes

## 2

*An Eastern Europe Story...*  
**First Visit to Eastern Europe**



“Just as the Father has SENT ME,  
I am SENDING YOU” – Jesus.

John 20:21



Driving through an Eastern European landscape for the first time, our eyes took in the fields of bright sunflowers stretching far into the distance on every side.

We had passed by horse-drawn gypsy wagons and carts top heavy with hay, pollution pouring from old cars and chimney stacks, and countless abandoned concrete buildings with broken windows. In the towns, we had seen shop after shop with almost nothing on the window shelves, and unkempt children harassing drivers at the traffic lights for money. We had been through jammed border check points where the waiting lasted many

hours, and where guards with guns demanded bribes of Coke or sweet biscuits.

Now, ahead of us and spanning from one side of the roadway to the other, a solid concrete structure was looming. No lettering, colour or anything else decorated it. It seemed to have no purpose at all! *“Yet another unsightly statement to the might of Communism”*, I thought to myself. Soviet power had been overthrown, but the reminders were still here. LEST WE FORGET!

The unfamiliar road signs everywhere with their different alphabet were strange to us. Which direction should we take now? I searched for clues again from the enormous Atlas on my lap and compared the map with our surroundings. The strange looking word in the Cyrillic alphabet seemed like it might be the city's name... but how could we know for certain that we were heading in the right direction?



It was mid-1991. We were in a traumatic season when the pain of loss sometimes seemed hardly bearable, but our circumstances were God's

opportunity to point us to a different path: *Go this way!* We knew that in the midst of it all He was calling us to begin pouring out our lives into other nations, and so we started out on a new journey and formed an Australian charity we named 'Liberty for the Nations'.

The new, lifelong assignment God gave us was to take His good news to people in both word and deed. It would be faith at work, a vision in action. We would follow the example of Jesus, who first went and then also sent; we would take His Kingdom to the whole person (in "word and deed"); and we would serve together with others who are following Jesus' commission in Matthew 28:18-20.

The countries we first ventured out to under our new banner had only just been freed from more than seventy years of oppressive Soviet Communist rule. A friend who had visited the area just after the Soviet collapse had given us names and addresses and arranged for Steve to preach in Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria.

Leaving our three young children behind in Australia, we flew to London and then crossed the English Channel on a passenger ferry to France, where we hired a small car. From there we set off with our giant road Atlas on the “wrong” side of the road and in heavy rain, completely oblivious to the car hire conditions which excluded travel into Eastern Europe! We had hardly any money, and so for our first trip to the European continent we slept in the car or people’s lounges or dining rooms, or in basic accommodation that cost us as little as four American dollars!

Those were revolutionary years when the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife had been executed in Targoviste; when the Wall dividing East and West Berlin had been torn down; and when Gorbachev was leading Russia towards ‘glasnost’ (openness) and ‘perestroika’ (restructuring). It was while we were driving through Hungary that Gorbachev, the last leader of the Soviet Union, was placed under house arrest by political hardliners who disapproved of his reforms. Monumental shifts and changes were happening in the region which would have a big impact on the world.

For foreigners like us visiting from overseas, everything in Eastern Europe in those days was so cheap because the countries' economies had collapsed. Shops were empty, or sometimes they displayed a few items such as two or three pairs of shoes and a shelf-full of vodka. Petrol and food were in short supply, and always at the service stations there were dozens of people lined up for hours, waiting for just a few litres of fuel or a loaf of bread. Thousands upon thousands of unemployed men, women and youths wandered the streets aimlessly, confused and without any sense of future or personal value. The city squares, parks and shopping areas were crowded with people sitting around drinking cheap coffee and enjoying the sense of freedom the sunny outdoors gave them.

**W**hen finally we arrived in our little car at the city of Debrecen in Hungary, we were met by a Hungarian pastor and his family who had been expecting us. Over the next days, this brave pastor told us how during the Communist Godless years he had taken numerous journeys across the border into



Romania, smuggling illegal Bibles and other supplies in and people out. God had always protected the journeys. Sometimes the border guards were distracted by something else happening, and sometimes they simply didn't see what was right before their eyes!

Steve preached in Debrecen and in neighbouring towns to meetings filled with young people wanting to know about truth, and about life in the outside world. Hearing that God was for them, He loved them and His mighty power was able to work in them was a very releasing revelation for them. They wanted the Holy Spirit in their lives! It was a time of great openness, searching, and opportunity for the Gospel to reach them.

After an extended weekend of meetings, we drove out of Hungary feeling certain that we would return. The country had definitely thrown off the old and come into the new; I was willing to even move our family there, if God would only call us!

**B**efore leaving Australia, we had been given the telephone number of an American living in Romania. We'd been assured that this young man would appreciate visitors who could speak his native language, and so when we arrived in Romania, Steve dialled his number. A friendly voice answered. *Hello, Richard here... You say you're from Australia? I spent some time there a while back. What part are you from?... Did you say country New South Wales?... The city of Maitland?! What did you say your name is?... Steve Blake?! Steve, it's me, Richard! Do you remember me?!*

In the late 1980s, Richard had served time in a prison not far from the Church we were leading at the time. He had attended Bible studies being held in the prison by Steve and other men from our Church, and had even been baptised in one of the bath tubs. His good behaviour had led to the authorities granting him day release so that he could attend a Bible college in Newcastle. Now, a few years later, Richard was here in Eastern Europe! Amazed, we drove on to meet him and his young

Romanian wife and her family in the beautiful old Germanic city of Brasov.

The family was a busy one, involved in all kinds of ways with helping people in need. Richard's wife was setting up a child adoption agency for adoptions into America. Her father regularly filled his van with blankets, shoes and other valuable supplies from Germany for desperate families across the border in Moldova. Street work with the homeless, help in their Church, orphanage work and Bible studies in their home filled their time.

On one of our days in Romania, we accompanied Richard in a car loaded with children's books, games and sweets on a long drive up into the mountains. We arrived at an orphanage and were greeted by cheeky smiles and noisy, excited chatter. These children's American friend was obviously a favourite. He had come again with his humorous antics and gifts from Christians in Western Europe!

The main orphanage building had only recently been renovated by Richard's Christian friends from the West. Now, the young residents were able to

have warm showers and flushing toilets, and windows and doors could close properly to keep the freezing winter air out. Now, the meals could be eaten at tables, and each child could sleep on their own bed instead of sharing it with one or two or three others.

Around that time, the West was learning about Ceausescu's shocking scientific experiments that had been happening in some of Romania's children's orphanages. We learned from talking with Richard that oppressive, self-serving rulership and corruption go hand in hand. He estimated that eighty percent of aid coming regularly into the country in truck convoys or people's vans, caravans or car boots, was syphoned off to officials or people with any degree of power. If a hot water service, generator or furniture was donated to an orphanage it would later be found installed in the manager's or a relative's residence. Toys and cans or packets of food given for the children on one day would find their way to the street markets to be sold for profit on the next day. Everyone accepted this as normal because it seemed that nothing could be done about it.

From Romania we headed south into Bulgaria.

At first we felt an unmistakable tension in the air that we hadn't noticed in Hungary and Romania. The locals in the cheap border hotel we stayed at on our first night were unfriendly and suspicious, and we found ourselves avoiding unnecessary eye contact. That we weren't so welcome was understandable, though! After all, what good reason could people from a faraway place called Australia possibly have for being in their country, in the wake of all the social tumult and upheaval?

The first Church meeting we attended in Bulgaria was in the city of Bourgas on the Black Sea coast. Steve preached there to the city's largest congregation, a thriving group of six hundred people. The young pastor and his wife were very gifted musically, and the meeting was enthusiastic and joyful. God was making things new here!

After the meeting we learned a little about what life had been like for the pastor and his wife when they were growing up. At school they and their young friends from other Christian families had been

treated differently from the others. They'd been excluded from special events, rewards and other opportunities, and often questioned about their families' and friends' activities. But their faith had been strong in the midst of the persecution. Now, with their country's new-found freedoms, as adults they were concerned about the influence the new ease would have on their own children. Would life really be better, ultimately? We'd heard these same thoughts of worry from others too, during our journey. Would the children of those who'd remained faithful to God during the years of persecution follow their parents' examples?

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellite States, evangelists had come in to Bulgaria from the outside world. Their meetings outdoors in the parks had attracted huge crowds, and thousands of people had responded to the Gospel's liberating message. But the visitors had come and gone and a sobering challenge had soon become apparent. Where were the ones who could nurture these newborn Christians? In the vacuum, many of them drifted away.

While in Bourgas we were staying with a lady in one of the mazes of apartment blocks near the city centre. Planinka spoke English fluently, and so she was able to tell us some of her own story. Under the Soviet socialist government, her work as a qualified architect was worth no more than an unskilled labourer. In the heavily controlled environment, intellectuals, people in the arts or anyone else who might think and express themselves independently had been treated as a national threat. Friends and her work colleagues had suddenly disappeared. Professionals like herself who had been able to stay and survive had lost husbands or wives, relatives, possessions, and most of their livelihood.

It was during our first visit to Bulgaria that we became aware of the existence and plight of gypsies in that part of the world. Some of the meetings where Steve preached were outreaches from the Church into Turkish gypsy Muslim neighbourhoods. Something about these people drew us to them. Little did we know that years later we would sense and follow a strong call to Turkey and its people.

In the years following our first visit to Eastern Europe, we met many men and women who came to volunteer their time and other resources to help the needy and to build Jesus' Church. They came from as near as Germany, Switzerland, England or Sweden and from as far away as Tasmania in Australia. They drove vehicles filled with supplies across many borders, some of which took a day or two to cross over. They repaired hospitals and orphanages, led summer camps for children and teenagers, and worked with Churches running Gospel outreaches, leadership or marriage seminars. Some even moved from their own homelands for a season.

They were examples of Christians who throughout the world are being Jesus' hands and feet to people, ministering help and hope and bringing them out from their places of hopelessness and poverty.



# LIBERTY YEARS Through My Eyes

## 3

*An Australia Story (mostly!)...*

**Aid for Overseas**



“I was poorly clothed and you helped ME” – Jesus.

Matthew 25:36



“Over here please!” Someone was shouting for more cartons and packaging tape. Hands and feet were moving quickly in the huge warehouse we were all working in. Our backs were feeling sore from the long days of carrying, bending and stretching. Our feet had criss-crossed the floor so many times and now we were hurrying, because we wanted so much to be finished!

It was sometime in 1999, and our largest aid shipment effort up to that time was underway. The big shed that had been temporarily donated for our use was filled with makeshift tables laden with shirts, skirts and shorts, pullovers, uniforms, rolls of

fabric, linen and blankets, sets of Encyclopaedia and general reading books piled high. Medical equipment ranging from boxes of sterile water ampoules and bandages to heart monitors, a steriliser, X-ray machine and stainless steel birthing table were stored in one corner of the building. Scores of hospital beds, theatre trolleys and stackable furniture bound for bush hospitals in Uganda and Papua New Guinea were lined up in their categories, stretching far to the back of the big shed. Every now and then, a song would break out: *"In this place, Lord, be glorified today!"*. It was good to be singing together while we were working, responding to Jesus and to the needs of others!

Our eyes were constantly searching, looking for the right shape or type of item. The system was well-established: fill the carton from the corners and around the edges first, keeping the height level as you go; close and tape up the slightly over-filled cartons; label, wrap and stack; repeat. The sound of taping up and plastic wrap coming off the roll was so familiar and even now, so many years later, it's very easy for me to recall!

Our medical doctor friend arrived. We needed someone to record how to set up and use some of the electronic equipment. Without the essential information, these valuable machines that had been requested would become a useless waste of space in some storage area, or rusting pieces of junk in a back yard.



Aid shipments have played a major role in our help for the needy since the early 1990s. When we first began, the house we'd newly moved into had two double-sized garages and a double carport: plenty of room for storage and packing supplies for overseas! At the time, our three children were re-adjusting again to another home, school and different friends. They liked living in the big house and the weekly gatherings we were holding in the spacious room downstairs. For prayer, fellowship and planning, the meetings had been nicknamed 'EMU Meetings' for *Elders and Missionaries Union* by our daughter Cathy!

About the same time, a friend's overseas aid work captured my attention. Lesley's well organised, methodical packing inside a shipping container that would eventually be bound for Mozambique was an inspiring example of what could be done. She and her team were washing, ironing and packing tonnes

of clothing, handling each item with care and love. I learned quickly from her how to lay every item flat and to the corners so that every pocket of space was filled.

Our first aid shipment was small and simple: just six tea chests of clothing for Jewish immigrant families in Israel. A group in Queensland had heard we might be interested to help. After packing the chests carefully, we sent them by rail to Brisbane.

From then, our rented home became a centre for collecting, storing, sorting and packaging mountains of every type of clothing for all ages, linen, blankets and other things. People in the area heard about what we were doing and helped us find supplies from a wide variety of sources. One lady regularly came to our doorstep with brightly coloured new garments she had sewn for children in communities we were helping. Women's craft groups donated knitted toys and blankets. Local schools donated stationery and socks. A used clothing outlet brought us huge wool bales of clothing that had to be sorted for rags or usable clothes. Later, businesses donated equipment and storage facilities.

We learned quickly about shipping schedules, export and import systems and regulations, stevedoring, and managing transport, storage and distribution at the places of destination.

In the years to come, we would respond to dozens of requests for help from Uganda, Papua New Guinea, Bougainville, Vanuatu and the Philippines. In one two-year period alone, after Vanuatu's Tropical Cyclone Pam, we would fill and sent thirty one shipping containers to that nation.

I remember well the summer of 1999, when we responded to requests for help from mission centres in two different parts of the world. An Aids Hospice being built in Uganda had asked for equipment and furniture, and a medical centre in the Papua New Guinea Highlands had many needs. At the same time, a hospital near us was undergoing a major refurbishment. One of our friends managed their storage area and was able to arrange for the donation of valuable furniture and equipment. A group of us worked together for weeks in the huge,

unused warehouse which someone had temporarily made available, until finally we sent off two filled 40-foot shipping containers.

Sending aid overseas has opened wonderful doors of opportunity! Time and again the work has provided help to multiple thousands of people in critical need. When we have what others need, Jesus asks that we be willing to walk extra miles, or be awoken at midnight so that it reaches them. As our example to follow, He gave us Himself.

# LIBERTY YEARS Through My Eyes

## 4

*An Australia Story (mostly!)...*  
**Our Family's New Addition**





YOU have received the spirit of fully belonging.  
So now, YOU can call Him “our beloved Daddy”.

Romans 8:15



Our friend Margaret was the senior midwife at Vila Central Hospital in Vanuatu. One day early in 1991, she phoned us in Australia to speak to Steve and me. I hurried down the outdoors stairway of our coastal home to the office we’d created underneath, and wondered what the call might be about.

Steve’s expression was unfathomable as he handed me the phone. It seemed this might be something more than a casual greeting. I listened to the voice at the other end of the line: *“We have a baby girl for you. Yes, she’s here with us. When can you*

*come for her? Oh, you don't know? That's okay, our family will look after her until you're able to come."*

Margaret wanted to know what we'd like to name the two-month-old baby. I pondered for a few moments before responding, "Her name will be Sarah... Sarah Anna". Something told me it was a good name. Later, I thought about Sarah in the Bible, a Princess whose blessing extended to countless others. And I thought about Anna, the prophetess who was waiting for the coming of Jesus.



It was late April in 1991, some months since our latest trip to Vanuatu when we had talked with Margaret about the idea of adopting a baby. The overseas phone call came unexpectedly, but there was no hesitating! Steve and I simply nodded to each other in agreement, as if it were already done.

That day, the long and detailed process of an overseas adoption began. There was no official

arrangement between Vanuatu and Australia, and so I knew it would be up to me to create the pathway.

I discovered they had spelled her name Serah, on her birth certificate. I liked it, because it reminded me of the Hebrew word 'Selah', which in the English most often means *pause and reflect on that*. To me, it seemed that Serah's coming to us was symbolic of the new direction God had been giving us at the very same time.

Eight months later, after countless phone calls, faxes, letters, forms to fill out and visits to and from the New South Wales overseas adoptions authorities, our family was on its way to Vanuatu to meet Serah! She was ten months old by then, and the children were fourteen, eleven and eight. It was Christmas school holidays and everyone was excited. Would she like us... would we like her? How well would each of us bond with her (carefully, because in six weeks' time we'd have to leave her when we returned to Australia)?

Cathy, Jonathan and Matthew loved Serah from their very first introduction! The next weeks with her

were surreal. Steve and I were to become her parents, and we would all, together, become her new family.

Halfway through our visit, we left our baby behind in Port Vila and flew north to Epi Island for two weeks. There, between long hikes through the jungle and village evangelism meetings, our family of five experienced our first tropical cyclone. Hiding together in a little corrugated iron hut, we waited for two long days for the howling, crashing sounds, roof shaking and darkness to stop. It was impossible to sleep at night, as coconut trees fell all around us and the wind and rain whipped wildly.

Back in Port Vila again, we enjoyed more time with Serah. The children played with her, sat her in their laps, and placed on her head a paper crown they'd made: *Princess Serah*. Then, late in January, we had no choice but to return to Australia without her.

The following year in June, when all of the Australian requirements were finally fulfilled, I flew alone to Vanuatu for the final stage of the adoption

process. I wondered if Serah had forgotten me and the others, after so many months apart? She had been shown a photo of our family regularly, but would she remember? I hoped and prayed it would be only a few days before I could carry her away to her new home in Australia.

Amazingly, just a week later her passport and official papers were completed. Now, she would be allowed in to Australia with me. At the airport as I said goodbye to our friends in Port Vila, I knew that Serah would be leaving behind everything familiar to her: people, sights, smells, sounds, food and feelings.

When we arrived at the airport in Sydney, her new siblings, daddy and maternal grandparents were waiting excitedly for us. Our little girl's eyes lit up when she saw them all through the framed glass that separated us. *"It's like they're in the photo"*, I thought to myself. *"She seems to remember them."*

Serah joined the Blake family that day, and later became a citizen of Australia. Her life has been shaped by being with us and now, as I write, she

would not trade it for what might have been, for anything!

LIBERTY YEARS Through My Eyes

# 5

*A Pacific Islands Story...*  
**A Sea and Land Adventure**



Open up these entrance gates!  
Let the glorious King in!

Psalm 24:7-10



Before God called us to inhabit Loanpakel Bay in Tanna's remote north to transform it into a place of blessing, it was known locally as *taboo* land. Evil spirits lived in the shallow caves of the cliffs and in some parts of the bush and only special, chosen men were allowed to venture there to appease and please them.

When our new Tannese friends Am and Helen Tuprick began talking about relocating their young family to the bay in 1989, people warned them of certain sickness or even death up ahead. But they ignored the fearful predictions and settled near the



mouth of the narrow river that flows into the bay. Helen had dreamed of seeing a river and white-roofed buildings from above, and they knew that this was the place.

In the earliest days, friends from Australia joined the mission and helped to build more temporary housing, secure the land lease, cut a larger clearing, begin a cattle enterprise and start a school. The territory of demons had been broken into. Their evil rule that had held too many people imprisoned for too long was coming down!



Tanna is Vanuatu's most populated island in the southernmost province of TAFEA (for Tanna, Aneityum, Futuna, Erromango and Aniwa). From the start of the new mission at Loanpakel Bay, we and our teams from Australia visited regularly and North Tanna became a primary focus of our prayers, planning and activities. Then, early in 1995 we committed to a bold plan. We would use a Christian missionary ship that was docked not far from our

home in New South Wales to transport workers and supplies to the mission! The trip would make a major difference to its future, and it would all happen quickly in only a very short space of time.

Months of busy preparations followed, as God provided us with the supplies we needed for the mission. Forty men and women from up and down the eastern coast of Australia committed to the journey and doing the work at our destination. By September we had gathered over sixty tonnes of cargo, including two tractors. Our local newspapers and television station heard about our work and covered the story. It was an exciting time for everyone, and also one of extreme activity. (My fortieth birthday happened during the final week of preparations, and my friends needed to forgive me for not turning up for the party they'd organised!).

When the day of departure arrived, all was completed and we were ready to go. Families gathered to say goodbye at the wharf, and the ship sailed out past Nobbys Headland in Newcastle to the open sea.

It had fallen to me to care for our group of passengers on board the ship. The majority of us were meeting for the first time, but by then I was familiar with their names and the kind of work they would be most suited to on the sea and in Tanna. My priority on board would be making sure everyone was happy in their roles, having a harmonious sail together and staying aware of God's presence.

After the intensity of the past months, the first evening on board I disappeared into the little cabin, unable to function. Thankfully, by the following morning the purpose of our mission voyage and team-ship had revived me. A daily routine formed quickly. Meal and meeting times were set, tasks assigned, and rules laid out by the crew. Showers were to last not more than ninety seconds, and some parts of the ship were strictly not for the use of us unseasoned passengers.

Daytimes, we all joined the crew cleaning the ship, preparing the meals, or working in the engine room. Some members of the team ran classes in preparation for our time in North Tanna. They taught

common Bislama words and phrases, prepared for children's math and English classes, and learned songs for singing in the villages. Others furthered their marine qualifications, or took turns at the ship's steering wheel just for the experience.

During mealtimes in the dining room and preparing food in the kitchen, the sea swell could be challenging. Everything on the tables and work benches would slide back and forth, precariously close to the edge. Hot dishes, sharp knives and heavy cooking pots moving about were seriously hazardous, and so being alert and quick was a necessity! There were other dangers too, as our twelve-year-old son discovered. Matthew especially loved the rough seas, and one day a crew member found him enjoying the excitement of getting soaked by the spray from the waves breaking over the bow! Matt was frantically hauled inside, and given a stern talking to!

Despite the rough seas and sickness most of the passengers and crew experienced, a sense of shared expectation and fellowship lasted during the voyage. At night when it was time to sleep, it seemed to me

that the ship's hull was God's upturned hand undergirding us, carrying us safely through the waters. We were so far from anywhere, and outside the black starry nights displaying His majesty were a silent reminder that His presence is everywhere.

Our team and the ship's crew met regularly for worship, prayer, teaching and sharing what we felt God was saying to us. On the fourth day of our voyage when we were nearing Port Vila for immigration, three of us from different parts of Australia heard Him speaking the same verse in a song or Scripture. *Lift up your heads, oh gates! Be lifted up, oh ancient doors, that the King of Glory may come in! (Swing the ancient gates wide open! Let the victorious, glorious King in!) – Psalm 24:7-10.*

On our arrival at the harbour in Port Vila, we offloaded the two tractors and picked up Steve, four-year-old Serah and a handful of others for the final leg of our journey. They had flown over from Australia, and so Steve was unaware of what God had been saying to the team on the ship. That evening, at sea and bound for North Tanna, we heard the same words repeated again as he prayed

that the ancient gates would open up to make way for the King! Clearly, God was communicating a powerful message to us. In the years to come this prophetic Scripture would always remain with us and would eventually cause us to name the mission 'NorthGate'.

Our fifth day after leaving Australia, after a brief detour at dark of night for a sudden medical emergency, we anchored just out to sea from Loanpakel Bay. The bay was just a tiny dent in the island's north eastern coastline on the ship's charts, but the captain had succeeded in finding it during the early morning hours. We had arrived, and now the reason for our journey could begin.

After we all breakfasted, the crew and team of passengers began the careful, methodical work of offloading the tonnes of concrete blocks, timbers, roofing and other building materials and equipment, water tanks, agricultural supplies, medical aid, clothes, books and so many other things. The two tractors we had left in Port Vila would arrive a little

later on a trader ship that was shaped to sail right into the bay and deposit its cargo in very shallow waters.

For two long days, everything we had brought from Australia was safely transferred from the ship into a little punt, then carried onto the coral beach and up the hill for storing under temporary covers. Standing watching from the ship's upper deck, I knew without a doubt that angels were present on assignment, overseeing all of the activity!

On our second day, the two tractors arrived. Manoeuvring them both from the trader ship over the clumps of reef and onto the beach would demand some ingenuity. There was much clapping, back-slapping and congratulating when they were successfully driven onto the shore! It confirmed to the onlookers that the planks and rocks had been laid in just the right places.

The building and various outreach activities began in earnest. Every day, the busy little punt ran scheduled trips conveying everyone from the ship to the shore and back again, and carting food and drink

for the lunches. At day's end we all returned to the ship for the evening meal, a quick shower and well-earned sleep.

Just eight days of coordinated construction work by the team and local men accomplished a three-bedroom house and the beginnings of another, a large machinery shed, and a long multipurpose building for meetings, school education, aid distribution and a medical dispensary. Water tanks, a powerful generator and a well-designed solar power system were installed. Some of us visited nearby villages, held outdoor school classes for children, distributed pre-used clothing, ran first aid clinics, or worked on the ship. Youths, married couples and older men and women worked side by side, shovelling dirt and concrete, sweating, hammering, drilling, pulling and carrying timbers, connecting pipes and running cables, sorting clothes, treating sores and cooking and serving meals. When we tired of the work, the seventy-two-year-old on our team spurred us on with his enthusiastic determination to finish every task he had set for himself.



Our last afternoon in North Tanna was a joyful celebration of completed work. We feasted, received gifts from the villagers, sang with them, opened the buildings ceremonially, and exchanged farewells. It was all over far too quickly! Finally, we hurried down to the beach. Word had reached us that the ship's captain was waiting a little anxiously for us. For the first time since our arrival, the sea's swell was becoming dangerous for our transfers. Soon it would be too difficult for us to step up from the punt's rising and falling frame into the ship. Everyone gathered as quickly as we could, and formed ourselves into groups to be taken speedily load by load out to our floating accommodation.

The ocean journey back home to Australia gave us time to reflect on the incredible two weeks we had all experienced together. So much had been achieved in such a short time. God had blessed our months of preparations and prayers so abundantly, and the mission had received a major boost.

It all ended on an overcast, cool September afternoon when we sailed back in to Newcastle. Forty pairs of eyes scanned the approaching wharf, searching among the people for loved ones awaiting our return. There he is... there she is... there they are! The little missionary ship berthed to cheers and clapping. Shouts and laughter were exchanged back and forth as we scrambled ashore. A group of young people from New Zealand were among the welcomers and performed the Maori Haka, a fascinating ceremonial combination of symbolic sounds, facial expressions and dance.

Last minute photos of the crewmen and fellow passengers were taken. Some of us were meditative and others were hugging, teary eyed, already missing each other and the special bond we had shared on our extraordinary Pacific adventure!

# Only a Mite

## The Widow's Gift

Mark 12:41-44 (interpretive translation)

*Listen here! The story I'm about to tell you happened on a day when Jesus was in the temple courtyard.*

*There he is, sitting looking across to where everyone is filing past the usual place for giving offerings. Plenty of rich people are throwing in large amounts... but it's a widow who catches Jesus' attention. It's obvious she's poor because of how she's dressed. She drops in two tiny discs; just a couple of copper coins. Now, you might be thinking the same as I did at first: "She needed those for herself! Anyway, compared to all the big money going in, those coins won't achieve a thing!"*

*But then, here's the punch! Jesus says to us who are there with him: "This is what I think about the real value of all those offerings: The widow has given a more meaningful, more generous offering than any of the wealthy people. The reason is, they've given from their surplus, but she has given truly sacrificially. The ones with plenty didn't need what they've given. They can easily do without it. They won't even notice it's gone. Her contribution is worth inestimably more to me, because she needed it for herself, but still she gave it"*

*So... what do you think about that? What do you think it means for you and me?*

# LIBERTY YEARS Through My Eyes

## 6

*A Northern Europe Story...*  
**Belarus (White Russia)**



They looked in hope TO HIM and were radiant.

Psalm 34:5



The village church building we had come to out in the middle of the potato fields was slowly filling with adults. It was midweek during the summer harvest, and so the evening meeting was beginning later than we were accustomed to. From my seat alongside Steve and the others on the stage, I looked down at the growing congregation. Had it been my choice, we wouldn't be up on the platform separated from everyone else. But here it seemed to be expected, and so for the entire meeting we would sit facing the listeners.

Women were quietly seating themselves on one side of the building, and men in their dark-shaded suits on the other. Most

were the ages of parents and grandparents, with their hands all brown-stained and weathered-looking from working in the soil. Every woman's hair had been pulled back from her face and wrapped inside a scarf. These were a serious, faithful people.

The meeting began with an invitation to sing, and voices were gladly lifted to the One who had only been whispered to until very recently. Through all the long, forbidden years, the congregation had dared to meet secretly from house to house, or in the forest. Solid and hymn-like, the sound of their songs now carried a feeling of thankfulness and the comfort of togetherness. These children of God had suffered and endured in ways we could never know! Some of their traditional ways seemed quaint and restrained to us, but we knew for certain that they were devoted to their Lord and He wanted to reveal His love for them that evening.

Before Steve's preaching, we introduced ourselves through an interpreter and shared about our children, and a little about life in Australia. Steve and I told how some stories of suffering Christians living "behind the Iron Curtain" had reached us during the '60s and '70s in Australia. In our teens, we had both attended prayer meetings for our brothers and sisters in these lands. And well before my teenage years I had already read about the persecuted Church in the newly released books 'Tortured for His Faith' and 'Jesus to the Communist World'. Those books and others like them shaped my thinking so that

whenever faced with questions of Christian faith or fellowship or survival, I still can't help but include the examples of the suffering Church in my searching for answers.

As we shared with the people, their expressions showed gratefulness that we were here visiting with them. The whole of their lives, the country's population had been completely isolated. Unbelievably, as in other towns and villages we had been to in Belarus, no-one from the outside world had EVER COME to them until our arrival in 1995!



Steve's introduction to Belarus in northern Europe was about fifteen years after the collapse of the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), and nine years after the catastrophic explosion of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in neighbouring Ukraine.

That day in April 1986 and the days following, the winds from Chernobyl had been blowing north over the border into Belarus, carrying the deadly poison of radioactivity into the atmosphere, soil,



crops and water sources. Now, nine years later, the country was still experiencing the tragic consequences. Children were still dying from thyroid cancer and other illnesses caused by the nuclear fallout. Young couples were afraid to start a family, because the contamination had led to so many babies being born with deformities. Hospitals had no medicines at all, and people were suffering without any relief. Every year, the country's population was decreasing by 60,000 from people dying of illness or escaping to America.

By then, the world had mostly forgotten about the disaster... but not so for one of our friends of Belarusian heritage! His nephew, a medical doctor in Belarus, was desperate for supplies and had asked his Uncle Leon for help. And so a collection began and a plan was hatched for three men from our Church to take medicines to the doctor, minister in Churches, and also be introduced to key Church leaders in Belarus.

Soon, about 180 kilograms of medical supplies were ready to go. Documents were prepared, and permissions for the extra luggage were granted by

the airline. Everything was set for carrying the precious supplies over by airplane.

Landing in Minsk and being processed through the military-like airport arrivals area was confronting, but the country made its way into Steve's heart. The doctor and other hospital staff received the valuable supplies so gratefully; now they could offer help to some of their most ill patients. The three Australians were taken to meetings night after night, and many healing miracles happened. They met wonderful men of God leading the re-formed Protestant Evangelical movement that provided official registration for the hundreds of congregations springing up everywhere. The Churches were flourishing in this season. Some had emerged after their decades in hiding; others were brand new.

In the years following his first visit to Belarus Steve returned many times, normally with a small team. The two times I was able to go, I could understand his love for the people and for what God was doing there. In some of the Church meetings there were amazing miracles! One I remember well down near the border to Poland was when a young

woman was healed of almost total blindness. She ran in a circle around the building waving her arms in the air shouting, "I can see! I can see the clock! I can see!"

One larger Church Steve became very connected to in Belarus was an especially active one in an industrial city in the central south. Its name translates into English as something similar to *Saltville*, and it seemed to be prophetic. The Church was truly being salt in the city. New believers were being baptised regularly; government officials were being saved; the congregation was supporting other smaller Churches in the region; the children's program included concerts for the disabled; a team worked with rehabilitating drug addicts. God was doing amazing things in this city!

The history of Belarus includes the murder of about a quarter of a million Jews during the Holocaust. A Church in Minsk we loved to visit was right where a Jewish Concentration Camp had been during World War Two. New life and a wonderful

freedom were springing up where years ago there had been so much anguish, cruelty and death.

The country's government was (and still is) closely linked to the age-old Russian Orthodox Church, and it resisted the new Christian groups that were starting up everywhere. *To be Byelorussian, one must be Orthodox*, is the normal way of thinking. Slanderous, ridiculously false reports were being spread across the country in the news. Ever-increasingly restrictive laws were being created. Just a few years since it had become legal to believe in God and worship Him openly again, it became illegal to gather for worship without the official registration of a minimum number of people and the ownership of a building. Freedoms were being taken away again.

A solution to some of the dilemma was born with the realisation that houses could be bought and converted for meetings. A house in the countryside large enough for twenty or thirty people could be bought for just three to five thousand American dollars. With our help and help from other Christians overseas, this became God's answer for the villages and smaller towns. In Australia, we sent out a call for

help and were able to buy a handful of houses for Christians in Belarus to meet in.

There was terrible poverty in some places we went to. One trip when I was with Steve, a pastor took us on a journey out of town. It was late at night after a Church meeting that had ended with a long prayer line and supper. As the pastor was driving us out of town, he told us the story of a young lady who had been viciously doused with petrol and then set alight by her boyfriend. Her mother was looking after her and had asked that we visit, and so now we were on our way to pray with them. For the past three months, the woman's poor daughter had suffered the unimaginably excruciating agony of third degree burns over most of her body.

When we arrived at the cottage, the three of us were ushered through the doorway into a hushed atmosphere. The mother led us tiptoeing into a dimly-lit room, and I will never forget what we came to! There in a cot mostly covered by a light sheet lay a little person in a shrunken, blackened body. One or

two soft groans came from her as we stood in shock beside the cot. Scarcely surviving, the poor young lady had lain there day after day, week after week without the help of even mild painkillers. The despairing mother had done her best to care well for her, but she had no money to buy pills even as basic as Panadol or Aspirin.

Faced with such a situation, what could we do? Anything less than a miracle seemed pitifully insufficient! Feeling helpless in ourselves in the face of the trial they had to endure, we summoned our faith, filled the room with singing and prayed to our Heavenly Father who can do all things! We knew the mother needed encouragement and prayer herself and it was obvious that she desperately needed money for medicines. And so as we left we gave her enough money for a good supply, trusting that God would do what only He can do.

One time Steve visited a countryside Church in Belarus, he met a dear old man who had lost most of his fingers. He was one of those who'd survived

many punishments for following Jesus during the Communist years. Countless other Christian men and women had been shot or died in prisons or cruel work camps from the freezing temperatures, starvation and tortures. It touched the old man to find out that we and other believers in Australia had prayed for them. God had not forgotten His children, and they had not been forgotten by their brothers and sisters in the outside world.

# LIBERTY YEARS Through My Eyes

## 7

*A Northern Europe Story...*

**Estonia**





How beautiful are the feet of those  
Who COME bearing good news!

Isaiah 52:7



Across the still water ahead of us and drawing closer by the minute was Estonia's Port of Tallinn, its big jetties and terminal buildings filling the capital's old harbour. Behind the port were glimpses of the Old Town's beautiful orange terracotta roofs, turrets and church spires that felt so familiar to us now. We were almost there! It had been a long journey from our home in Australia to this little country we'd come to love.

The ocean ferry that had carried us across the gulf from Finland docked, and together with hundreds of other passengers we disembarked with our suitcases to join one of the long lines

for foreigners. Our hearts were expectant about what God would do during this visit!

It seemed to me that the people we had come to again were mostly subdued and reticent. They had learned to live with and not resist the oppressor. After centuries of domination by other nations, more recently Estonians had endured decades of Soviet Communist rule. Creativity, vision, a positive outlook and personal motivation had all died, and depression had become everyone's shared illness. As in the other countries we had visited in Northern and Eastern Europe, so too here there had been too many years of compulsory conformity; too many decades when expressing individuality had been dangerous; too long a time when debate or considering an alternative way had been unthinkable. Trust among friends and within families was rare, because betrayals and suspicion had been normal for so long.

Most men's lives had long since sunk under the control of alcohol addiction. Strong vodka was their constant companion, because it dulled their senses and made their lives seem a little more bearable. Young boys roamed the streets too, drunk and aimless.

All of this was the legacy of a way of life that had cast anxiety over an entire population. A cloud of helplessness dwelt in most homes, all-pervasive.



**W**e first went to Estonia to assist the work of Australian missionaries. Harry and Jackie had come with big vision and a wealth of experience and talent, aiming to reignite an old fellowship of Churches and plant new ones. An Estonian by heritage, Harry had quickly felt right at home. He and Jackie had plunged themselves into a variety of projects including the conversion of a former Soviet naval base into a Bible College! Other Australians had joined their team, and Steve and I were invited to help in the exciting work.

Our visits were in the early 1990s, just after the years of the country's nonviolent resistance known as 'The Singing Revolution', and the political change that followed. With the new openness, the way to a miraculous freedom had come! For the people who were hearing and responding to the Gospel, it was like a slowly dawning sunrise bringing a hesitant desire and hope for bravery and better days. God's

children were learning a new idea: Faith in Him and His promises! Men, women, youths and children were experiencing transformation and learning to believe Him and be joyful. It was amazing to see God's Spirit changing and glorifying them. Truly, His words are Spirit and life! (John 6:63).

Our first visit, we arrived at the newly converted Bible College carrying babies' clothes and blankets in our suitcases and a box of wonderful children's Bible stories someone had donated to us. We learned by the students' happy responses that caring gestures, no matter how small, were valued for their love.

Steve's days were filled with lectures and preaching. His teachings about the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts and other topics quickly became popular and the college's principal often took time out from her busy workload to interpret the sessions, because they helped her faith so much. Some evenings if we weren't out for other meetings, we met with the students for worship and prayer. They

were vibrant times of learning how to welcome and host and listen to the Holy Spirit in the gathering!

The college faculty and students faced many challenges that exercised their faith. One year, we arrived late in the afternoon to the news that everyone living onsite had been fasting for several days, because there was no food in the building. Coincidentally, when we arrived God's provision came too. Word of the miracle travelled through the passageways and into the rooms, bringing great relief! Over bowls of warm soup in the dining room that evening, we joined everyone in thanksgiving for God's faithfulness.

Most weekday evenings and on weekends, one of the Australian missionaries drove us long distances through the flat countryside so that Steve could minister in the newly planted congregations. Some of the gatherings were tiny, but it didn't matter to us. The people needed the personal encouragement of a visit, as well as the preaching and prayer. Many of them had suffered the loss of loved ones to work camps in Siberia or Russia. They all needed to experience God's nearness and power!

Wherever we went, an interpreter accompanied us. Occasionally, if the town or village was near the Russian border the preaching had to be interpreted twice: first to Estonian and then to Russian. In those border towns, there were no jobs or social welfare. Families squatted in abandoned old apartment blocks and lit open fires inside for warmth in the winter and for cooking their meals.

**D**uring the years we visited Estonia, we made friends with a retired Christian couple from England who'd come to set up centres for cottage industries and pre-used clothing shops. Other visitors came from overseas to minister to prisoners, drug addicts, youths and children and to run seminars and camps. These practical ministries helped the local Churches reach out to the poor communities they lived in.

We became friends with a young Russian artist named Sergey, who lived in one of the towns bordering Russia. He had a vision for a home for men who wanted to be set free from addictions. His vision took hold of us and we encouraged him to believe

God for the right property. Before we left Estonia on that visit, he took us to a house not far from town with fruit trees and well established vegetable gardens. It seemed to be just right.

Later, when we were back in Australia, Sergey emailed us cheerfully with the news that he had raised some money towards buying the property. People from his Church had worked enthusiastically for a full day, selling apples by the roadside. By day's end, they had raised the equivalent of four Australian dollars. For certain, help from outside of Estonia would be needed if the good vision was ever to be fulfilled!

Only weeks later, God provided us with the money to purchase the property just outside of Sillamae. Then we and our Australian friends in Estonia partnered to raise more support and make it suitable for the extreme winters.

*'Capernaum'* (house of consolation) still serves the rehabilitation of former addicts, ex-prisoners or other men who come for help and into the abundant life of God's everlasting family.

LIBERTY YEARS Through My Eyes

# 8

*A Pacific Islands Story...*  
**The Gospel at Work in North Tanna**





How great is YOUR FAITHFULNESS, oh Lord!  
It extends to every generation!

Psalm 119:90



It was midnight in North Tanna, and I wondered at the unusual brightness outdoors! The moon above was round and so white, and the atmosphere was bathed in a soft tropical mist that seemed to have pulled the sky down to where it could be touched. All around me, groups of young people lay sleeping soundly, wrapped in blankets and curled up on their mats on the freshly mown grass.

The wide coral paths connecting the houses we had built had become a brilliant white, so that there was no need of a torch that night. The familiar green landscape spread outwards to the coastline and dropped over the edge of the cliff to the open sea and the little bay below. The full moonlight revealed the

bay's beach and the loose line of tiny waves folding close to its shore. All was peaceful, and the lapping of the waves as they came in was the only sound to be heard. Beyond, out on the calm open sea, silver shimmers danced and flickered.

Just to my left, a garden had been freshly planted with colourful flowers. It was bordered by large coral pieces that had once been the remnants of a wall. About knee height and very broken in places, it was a reminder of the little home that had stood there long ago. The rectangular shape had been re-discovered while we cleared the trees and stubborn, resistant roots and vines tangled in the jungle's density. A European missionary family had lived and worked among the people of the island until sickness and the impossible challenges had overcome them. Now, a century or so later, we were continuing the long-abandoned work.



**F**rom the time the NorthGate mission began until about twenty years later, we and the Tuprick family served the local villages there with Gospel outreach, school education, healthcare, a Bible

School, clothing and blankets, food during cyclones, and in many other ways.

Located on two separate properties in the Loanpakel Bay area, the mission's buildings by the bay were for accommodation, meetings, medical work, and storage and distribution. A twenty minute walk uphill were the school classrooms, dormitories and staff housing.

For visitors, the ocean journey from the airport in Tanna was sometimes smooth and truly glorious, but other times it was rough and certainly not for the faint hearted! If the rains hadn't been too heavy, there was a way by road which passed through villages and across a beach.

**H**undreds of people came to NorthGate in those years to work in their areas of interest, skills and professions. Visiting nurses, electricians, plumbers, carpenters, mechanics, agriculturalists, school teachers, preachers, musicians, scientists, youth workers, children's workers, doctors, singers

and other artists had plenty to do. Many of them returned again because of the uniqueness, the people, and the many opportunities that were so different from their normal lives back home. They were able to experience a small taste of Pacific Island missionary life in a beautiful location, only a few hours from home.

Over the years, a number of Australians lived at Northgate. Some stayed for months and some for years. Our son Jon and his wife Abi lived there in the first few years of their marriage, and during that time others from Australia joined them.

A good friend who had studied in an agricultural college stayed with his wife and their young child for a year, to introduce new food varieties and teach farming practices. Coffee seedlings were planted under a big shade house to help fund the work in the future. We imported chickens from New Zealand to join the herd of cattle, and shipped chick peas (for the chickens), citrus trees and other plants and food sources from Port Vila.

A young family stayed for almost three years to

build, and to be missionaries amongst the people in the villages around NorthGate. The opening of the large primary and secondary school classroom built during that time was an exciting event, with a Government official from Port Vila and visitors from Australia attending too. The little stained glass windows with their tropical scenes fixed into the walls were a beautiful reminder of the countless loving efforts by our friends, for the people of North Tanna. The students and teachers were so blessed to have such a place of learning in the middle of the jungle!

For two years, a young married couple joined the team to lead a Christian leaders' training program, work in the school and mentor young leaders. Another young family stayed for a few months to do medical and maintenance work.

Communication with the outside world was difficult and expensive until a Christian radio ministry in Queensland came alongside with help. Most of their work was with yachts, but they extended their

ministry to include some remote locations where they had contacts in Vanuatu. The equipment the men installed for us enabled regular interaction between NorthGate and Australia. From our home in New South Wales, we could call by landline and even email to the radio in Tanna. We learned by trial and error and from others who were more experienced, to schedule our conversations according to the solar activity. (These days, mobile phones have found their way to most of the island. In the north, if you stand on the right hill you'll have a signal!).

Some interesting events were hosted in NorthGate that made good use of the facilities. Early one morning when Steve and I were visiting, excited chatter broke out from down at the beach. "White man! White skin!", someone was yelling. A small boat had come in to the bay. We weren't expecting anyone, and so I wondered who might have arrived unannounced. A group of seven young Japanese men and women soon became visible, making their way up the path from the beach. They introduced themselves as two doctors, a professor and four

doctors-in-training from Tokyo. They had come to Vanuatu to study malaria, and the Health Department in the south of the island had sent them to us. Our facilities would be perfect for a one-day clinic for the community!

The next day was immensely enjoyable. In quick time we transformed the multipurpose building into a centre for malaria checks, treatment and community health records. The word had gone out, and everyone from the villages nearby filed through one by one. Our school was closed for the day, and some of the students experienced for the first time the excitement of seeing blood cells and parasites through a microscope.

Some evenings at NorthGate, we set up an outdoors movie theatre using a big sheet on a frame and an old reel-to-reel movie projector to show Christian music, nature or science shows. Watching anointed worship was popular, and mums and dads and their children were fascinated by new things they were learning from the nature or science shows: *This is a giraffe; this is a helicopter; those are rockets – they can get to the moon up there!*

One weekend at about the turn of the century, we learned about a strong cyclone heading directly towards NorthGate. We radioed Jon in time for windows to be shuttered and the other preparations always needed before a cyclone. In the early morning hours the wind howled through, stripping the coastline bare of trees. The wild rain and sea surge gouged deep into the edge of the cliff near our housing and altered the bay's beach so that the river became cut off from the sea. People's homes, especially up on the hills, were simply blown away. Vegetable gardens, banana and pawpaw trees were destroyed.

From Australia, I contacted friends and Government offices in Port Vila until we had secured more than twenty tonnes of rice to be shipped immediately to Tanna. For the next three months, every family in the north received rice from NorthGate to help them survive the cyclone's aftermath. Our time with the Kosovar asylum seekers in Australia not long before had given us good experience in distributing to crowds of people. A couple from Australia who'd worked overseas in aid



distribution went to help too. Our simple but effective program began with inviting everyone who lived in the northern villages to come. As each family was given a large bag of rice, the names of everyone in their household were written on their bag and again on a list. Then, when they returned on the days scheduled for rice distribution their emptied bag would be checked against the list. The method served as a good census update of the area as well!

**N**orth Tanna will always hold a special place in my heart. One time, news came to us that the young people were experiencing a spiritual revival. During the nights, they had been treading and stomping their way through the bush singing and praying and shouting together that Jesus is the King! This was our dream: that the ones we were serving would become Kingdom builders; preparers of the Way; spiritual Gatekeepers.

There are many more stories that could be written about the mission at NorthGate. For now, history has been repeated and once again God's

work of blessing has been abandoned. Sadly, disputes between chiefs and other men in the area have interrupted the lives of the people again. Wherever jealousy operates as a stronghold, it is difficult for any particular village or area to make progress peaceably. Regardless of laws of the land, if those who hold the controls love themselves and their status more than the people around them, the women, children and young people suffer the consequences. As happens wherever hearts have not been softened and transformed by our Maker, the fruits of fallen human nature reign.

And so this story is an unfinished one, waiting for a time when once again the way for God's people to help and serve will be re-opened. Only Heaven knows who or from where the new comers will be!

# LIBERTY YEARS Through My Eyes

## 9

*A Pacific Islands Story...*  
**Bougainville (1997-2000)**



I have HEARD my people's cries and SEEN their distress  
and have COME to deliver them.

Exodus 3:7-9



Jet-black faces beamed, and the thousands of bodies danced and spun in jubilation. They were singing and celebrating their liberty, and binding themselves again to the One who had bought it for them! Colourful cloth and branches waving high, they were worshipping and honouring Jesus! Yes, it was good to praise their Freedom-Fighter, their Warrior-Deliverer! Love had come again, Love had won!

There is no other sound quite like islanders singing in harmony! The first night of the Praise Festival in Bougainville's Buka Island, a large crowd gathered outdoors for an extravagant

celebration. It was a baptism in relief and joy! The ceasefire and end of the nine-year total blockade were still very recent, and the people were unrestrained in their jubilant praise to God for it! Some had brought their children in wheelbarrows, because they knew the night would be long. Men, women, youths and children danced and waved hibiscus branches as they sang. Some linked arms and ran together, like a long ribbon weaving in and out of the crowd. God had freed them from the warring and from the personal and social turmoil it had brought.

Later, God's presence descended and rested like a light dew over the crowd, bringing a gentle, deeply healing sense of peace.



**N**ot many people go to Bougainville or have even heard of it. It's quite difficult to get there, and costly. Out in the Pacific Ocean, it sits east of Papua New Guinea and just northwest of the Solomon Islands. Its main island, Bougainville Island, is surrounded by waters in beautiful shades of blue. Its

coastal lowlands are mostly coconut plantations, dotted with bare patches from frequent lightning strikes. At its centre, the dense jungle climbs upwards through the mountains to a crater lake and a sleeping volcano.

Bougainville is two islands running approximately north and south (Buka and Bougainville) and some other little islands and atolls nearby. The main and by far the largest island, Bougainville, is separated at its northern tip from Buka by a very narrow but deep channel. At the channel's southern inlet is tiny Sohano Island, which at different times in the twentieth century held an Australian Government outpost and a World War Two Japanese military base. Other tiny islands once held white settlers' copra plantations, livestock, and mission and other stations.

The islands of Bougainville are havens for WW2 enthusiasts. There are many airplane relics and other leftovers of war, hidden through the tropical bush. There are bomb holes, concrete bunkers, memorials to the brave, and incredible stories of the local and Australian WW2 coast-watchers.

The men and women of Bougainville are generally strong-minded and resourceful; one might almost say they are gifted as born leaders. Some of the societal values and traditions are unique in much of the world: women are genuinely respected and make important decisions. In most parts, they inherit the custodianship of their family land; traditionally, land is passed from mother to daughter.

In the 1960s an Australian mining company in partnership with the Papua New Guinea Government began mining for copper in the mountainous interior of Bougainville's south. The massive mine became highly lucrative and for a time the people believed in its benefits, but by the 1980s it had become a thing of major contention. The tumultuous years that resulted are known as *The Bougainville Conflict*. Almost a decade of internal warring between the south and north, and a total blockade imposed by Papua New Guinea and supported internationally, consumed the little country.

The people in the south were the ones most affected by the presence of the mine. They resented Papua New Guinea's governance and dictates and became locked in fierce disagreements with the northern people, who were a long way from the mine and far more pro-PNG. Neighbour fought against neighbour as the tensions became ever more complex and led to different factions forming. Thousands were killed and the outside world was completely barred from helping.

**W**e became involved in Bougainville's needs towards the end of the conflict. The people were suffering from all of the destruction and lack of basic services, and too many of those who'd survived had seen and done atrocious things. Most of the fighting was over by then, and many of the people had come to accept that it was time to put the painful past to rest.

These islands were already well known to me, because in the 1960s my parents had moved our family there from Papua New Guinea to establish a



Christian mission aviation service and open airstrips in areas that were hard to access. To this day, my father is still remembered affectionally and revered as "Captain Morton" by the old and the young, and so doors were opened wide for us.

We began by making contact with men and women who had been friends of my dad and mum in Bougainville and with senior officials, and went to work sourcing medical supplies and clothing and loading them into a 20-foot shipping container. From then, for a little over two years we and our teams visited the two main islands several times. It was a significant time for Bougainville, and we knew God wanted us to play a part.

Planning trips wasn't easy, even with our good contacts. Communication was very limited, and visas had to be arranged with Port Moresby only the day before entering the country. Vehicles for carrying our teams and supplies down through the main island were few and far between. Very basic social services were only just beginning to be reestablished.

The first time Steve stood on Bougainville's soil was late in 1997. The Church there had once been strong and alive, when winds of the Holy Spirit swept through in the 1970s. Now there was a stirring happening again! News had come to us that large numbers of people were calling out to God for His answers to their country's needs. Our desire for this first trip was to understand how we could help, and be sure that we had the trust of people we would work with in the future.

God had led us so clearly with the words of Exodus 3:7-9: "I have seen the affliction of my people; I have heard their cries. I KNOW their sorrows and sufferings, and have come down to deliver them." With this conviction, Steve preached in Church meetings where there were many people including key leaders, hungry for personal change. He met with people involved in every aspect of resolving 'The Bougainville Conflict', sharing quality time with senior Church leaders, the Police Commissioner for Papua New Guinea's outer islands, Papua New Guinea's Minister for Bougainville Affairs, NGO workers and many others. Each person shared

his or her own story and insights. Among the stories were many accounts of an amazing spiritual revival happening in villages in the mountains. Some who had fled during the fighting were coming to Jesus for forgiveness and deep healing.

A highlight of the visit for Steve was being invited in person by Papua New Guinea's Minister for Bougainville Affairs, to address his meeting with local Church leaders representing all of the Christian denominations on the island. God gave a clear message of comfort and challenge to everyone present.

Another highlight was the privilege of being taken by a small group of local men to pray on the rim of the abandoned copper mine, a strictly protected no-go zone for outsiders. Looking down into the enormous basin that had been dug over many years into the earth's surface, Steve saw only destruction and dereliction on a massive scale.

**E**arly the next year, we shipped our first aid container for Bougainville from Australia. It was loaded with valuable medicines, pre-used clothing and other supplies the island's regional leaders had requested for the southern interior. We had sorted, packaged and labelled thousands of donated and low-cost medicines for specific areas that had been without any medical help for years.

After the supplies arrived in Buka, we learned from those who'd had experience that their safe arrival on schedule was quite incredible! They knew of containers that had been lost or held up for years in Rabaul or other places on the way to Bougainville! With our good and respected contacts and creative communications all the way, the cartons were able to be distributed to their specific locations and help those who had been most isolated during the conflict.

**A**t the beginning of December 1998, Steve returned to Bougainville with a team that included a

dynamic Australian evangelist we had known since our early twenties when we were leading youth groups and travelling around for music and preaching. A week of meetings had been planned for Buka Island in the north and for different locations down through the main island.

That gatherings were able to happen in the south's no-go zone where the fighting had been especially vicious, was truly a miracle. Only God could have arranged them! People came down from the mountainous interior to join the thousands of others, and many people encountered God in dramatic ways. Our evangelist friend Tim Hall's powerful messages and anointing were just right for the place and time!

While the team was away, our home in Australia was the scene of powerful prayer each night. We prayed earnestly for breakthroughs and prophesied what we sensed was happening in the meetings in Bougainville. Even without any contact or news, we knew God was there showing His mighty, life-transforming power. Some nights it was almost as if we were really there in the crowds with the team!

**T**he following June, Steve was back in Bougainville again, preaching in Churches and gatherings for community leaders. In one area on the east coast, he arrived to a scene where dozens of men and women had just returned from days of fasting, prayer and worship on a mountain top. They were singing new songs surely straight from Heaven, and were still totally immersed as if they were all in another world. Heaven was close to earth in this place! The trip was an unforgettable experience, and confirmed our conviction that God had loving purposes in His heart for the people of Bougainville.

**A** few years had passed since we'd sailed with a group of Australians on the mission ship 'MV Island Mercy' from Newcastle to Tanna Island in Vanuatu. Now, late in 1999, we were blessed again with help from another missionary ship, the 'MV Doulos'. Word had come to us that it was scheduled to dock briefly at Sydney en-route to the Solomon Islands, and could divert through Bougainville. There was space on board for more aid supplies and for our friends

Les and Georgie, who were preparing to play a key role in bringing healing and reconciliation to the people of Bougainville.

Once again, we set in motion a busy collection of supplies that would go over. On the day the ship was docked at Sydney's Circular Quay, we drove down with our cargo to deliver it and help the crew load all of the crates and boxes into the hold. There were over seven thousand 'Peace Maker' New Testaments, pallets of boxed bandages, school books, clothing, Bible teaching texts, leaflets written by my father to the people of Bougainville, and hundreds of *Forgiveness, Healing and Reconciliation* workshop manuals. The manuals were a guide through a tried and proven Christian program that had been written originally for people who'd suffered an even more terrible crisis, in another place. We had gained permission to adapt the material for Bougainville, and were planning to introduce the program in strategic areas to help the people through this important and painful post-war period.

Coordinating our next trip with the schedule of the MV Doulos, we arranged to fly to Bougainville for Steve's fourth visit. Our plan for this trip had three main aims: to introduce Church leaders to the Forgiveness, Healing and Reconciliation program in the north (Buka), the east coast, centre and south; to transport the aid supplies to Bougainville's east coast (from where they would be distributed to villages in the mountains); and to hold Praise Festival meetings in the north.

This time, I was able to be away from Australia long enough to go with Steve. When we finally arrived together at the airport in Buka, the ship had already offloaded its supplies and human cargo and sailed on to the Solomon Islands.

It had been more than twenty years since I had last been in Bougainville. Being able to grasp seeing my childhood home there in Buka, still almost identical to so many years before, eluded me. Standing up on its high stilts, it looks over the other buildings on the United Church Headquarters



property. It has floor-to-ceiling louvre windows all around, and there are outdoor stairways at the front and back. In the yard beside the house stands an airplane propeller that someone has planted there, as a remembrance.

It was overwhelming to be revisiting this place, and I needed to find a place to hide my personal grief. This was the home my older sister and I had left at the start of every year of our High School for the sake of a good education. Every January we had said goodbye to our family again, and the two of us had boarded a plane bound for Australia. (In those days, families being separated for education was normal and expected. Some of our friends had left home at much younger ages than ours! Parents and children both suffered from not being together).

And so while our first Forgiveness, Healing and Reconciliation meeting got underway, one of the honoured guests was nowhere to be seen. I'm sure that the people understood, though.

It was a solemn privilege for us Australians to see men and women waiting in line to be the next one to nail their personal accusations, bitterness and desire for revenge to the roughly-made wooden cross at the front of the Church. The ceremony was an important part of the program, and it had a deep and liberating impact. Tears flowed as God brought healing into each person's soul and spirit.

The series of meetings were repeated down through Bougainville. When we arrived in the south, we understood how privileged we were to be allowed to enter again the zone normally forbidden to anyone from outside of its boundaries. We were received warmly, but the meetings here were quite different from the others we had experienced. Les and Georgie's teaching and workshops were respectfully received, but far more hesitantly. It was clear to us that questions still weighed heavily on the people's souls. There had been no real solution to the main reasons for the fighting. We knew they would need help as they sought restoration and considered reunification with the rest of Bougainville, and so we promised that the four of us would return

the following year. Les and Georgie would stay longer, to share a few weeks of life with them as well as run the program.

**E**arly in the year 2000 Steve and I arrived in Bougainville again. We were met with the wonderful news that thousands of people had been transformed by the teaching and workshops we had brought to them! Church leaders had begun to teach the material and run workshops themselves. A pastor on the east coast told us how he had taken the manuals to former enemies across the mountain range to the west coast, where thousands had responded with weeping, forgiveness and reconciliation.

After our trip, we returned to Australia so grateful for all that God had done in this jewel in the Pacific that had captured our attention and hearts so completely for a season. Les and Georgie continued on in Bougainville with meetings for reconciliation, and saw God do more healing.

Many other events happened during our visits to Bougainville during those two years. One time, Steve was flown around in a helicopter hired by the Australian government. Only days before Australia's then Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, had flown the same flight path in the same helicopter. The news of a bird strike happening during Mr. Downer's flight and the resulting emergency landing with such an important official on board, had spread far and wide! The event helped prepare the way for meetings we would hold later, where the emergency landing had taken place.

And years later when we met the same Foreign Minister in person at the border between northern and southern Cyprus in the Mediterranean, he remembered his helicopter trip and the bird strike in Bougainville in the Pacific.

LIBERTY YEARS Through My Eyes

# 10

*An Australian Story...*  
**Asylum Seekers in Australia**



God is love... and as He is, SO ARE WE in this world.

1 John 4:16&17



In the Autumn of 1999, Australia agreed to provide temporary safe haven for thousands of victims of war from Kosovo in the Balkans. Soon after the news was first announced, we discovered that a large group of them would be sent very near to us.

*“Helen, have you heard?! Some of the refugees from Kosovo are coming here to our army barracks!”* Little did our friend Jan know the impact her phone call that day would have on me and many others! My heart said yes... of course! How could we not help?! But none of us who became involved in the early

days had any concept of the degree of commitment our decision would demand in the months ahead!



In just three weeks' time, eight hundred asylum seekers from Kosovo would arrive to be housed at an Australian Defence Force base... only a short drive from our home!

It had been some years since we had first become aware of God's heart for Muslim people while visiting Turkish villages in Bulgaria's southeast. Most Kosovars are Muslim, and their coming so close to us meant that we would be able to take God's compassionate love to them. My mind scanned quickly through the practical things they'd need: basic things like soap, shampoo and toothpaste, and all-weather clothes. They would need lessons in English, interpreters, in-camp activities and supplies for all ages, outings, familiar foods, and those from rural areas would need vegetable gardens to occupy

them. We would need funds. Might we be allowed to bring some of them to our homes or to Church meetings? Thoughts and questions filled my mind.

Days and evenings of perpetual phone calls and faxes followed: calling, receiving and sending all at the same time, finding answers for the needs. Women from our Church came and brought meals to our home. There was no time to think of cooking or eating!

Christian friends in our area were eager to help, and a list of volunteers came together quickly. They committed to running events for the children, joining the English teaching classes, working as interpreters, distributing the weekly toiletry rations for families, and taking groups on outings. A young man in our Church offered to provide and oversee the collection of bins in shopping centres and other public places. The bins began filling with colour-in books and pencils, new clothes, hair products, board games for adults and so many other things. Sportswear and makeup outlets generously donated their products. The floor of our home's large living room was perfect for laying out all of the boxes that would contain



supplies for every family. To be able to keep moving from one end of the house to the other, we created a very narrow pathway through it all!

Soon the busloads began arriving at the Army Base: families torn apart by the war and desperately in need of some consistency and a sense of normalcy. We became immediately devoted to these homeless, traumatised people who were loved by their Creator. Our children and other families became their friends, and our days and evenings were all spent for them.

It was all-consuming, working onsite together with the Government's representatives of our immigration, migrant and adult education services, NGO's and community charities. Respect and good coordination between all of the volunteer workers and paid employees was essential for keeping peace and a sense of safety.

Unforeseen needs constantly came up. There were always many gaps to be filled and all hands on

deck were needed! The ladies in one section had never used washing machines, so they needed someone to teach them. The families' huts were a long walk from the dining building, so hundreds of umbrellas were urgently needed when heavy rains came. The nights had become cold and so everyone, especially the older ones, needed warm slippers. Some families had decided to exchange rooms, and so they had missed out on receiving their weekly supply of toiletries. Someone had arranged for a busload to go out on a whole day excursion, but hadn't thought to arrange for lunches. The women's activities group was requesting thicker knitting needles. The kitchen didn't know what kind of Feta cheese these people from the Balkans liked to eat. Someone had innocently brought firecrackers into the camp for a special event and had to be told they would cause distressing flashbacks. There were countless scenarios that needed someone's assistance!

Sometimes, intervention was badly needed because of the language differences. One night when I was at the base, an incident requiring medical and security personnel caught my attention. I came

into the scene and listened to the young interpreter trying to describe what had happened. The common problem of people misusing *he* and *she* or *his* and *her* (exchanging them for the other) was happening again! The story was becoming confused, and so I interrupted to explain the problem. The medical and security personnel weren't understanding, because of a simple English language mistake that was being repeated over and over again by the interpreter.

Another time, I accompanied a woman at an important interview. The poor woman being interviewed found the immigration interviewer's English pronunciation to be so different and difficult to follow, that it was impossible to understand and respond correctly. Decisions were being made from this interview that would determine someone's future! I wondered how often this kind of scenario happened to the people.

As well as working at the base, we took some of our new friends on scenic outings, to Church, to our home, to the shops and to the beach. Whatever we were doing, we wanted them to be with us! On Sundays when we were at Church worshipping with

our Christian family, I so wanted to somehow transport the powerful presence of God we were experiencing to where our Kosovar friends were! The work was close to my heart, and it was hard to be away from the people! Jesus' compassion was for these needy families who had come to our doorstep for help. God loves us first, before we can love Him. I longed for them to know that He loved them, and that they would be eternally blessed by loving Him!

**G**radually as the weeks and months went by, with our Government's help and incentives some returned to their own country; others moved to where relatives were living.

When the last of the Kosovars finally left our area, some were transferred interstate to join family members or friends staying at another ADF base. A few weeks later while we were there visiting the group, the Australian Government converted their temporary safe haven overnight into a correctional centre. These people had overstayed their welcome. Suddenly, they had become prisoners in a country

they had come to for safe refuge. It was an emotional, difficult time for us, because we knew many of their stories and understood some of the complexities that were at play.

**W**orking with the hundreds of asylum seekers from Kosovo living near us was an experience our family will always remember. We were all involved, and we still keep in contact with some of them.

I'm definitely not a hoarder, but I still have the names and room numbers of the eight hundred people who stayed at the ADF Safe Haven near our home in 1999!

LIBERTY YEARS Through My Eyes

11

*A South East Asia Story...*  
Evangelism in the Philippines



It's for FREEDOM that Christ has MADE US FREE!

Galatians 5:1



The fragile little widow Cora embraced us one by one, as she tried to convey her thanks in her native language. Tears ran down her face, as the interpreter explained her words to us: *“I'm so happy! God has been very good to me! It's because of you that my little house has a new roof and I have a new sewing machine! Without you these things would have never happened!”*.

We had come again with an Australian team to the village of San Narciso in Mindoro Island in the Philippines. We'd been bringing teams here for a while now to work with a dynamic young evangelist and church planter, Letty Javier. Letty was a

woman with a contagious faith who would try almost anything to get the Gospel to people! She was someone who seemed to be everywhere at once, and our visits were always accompanied by exuberant action happening all around us!



Steve's first journey to Mindoro Island in the south of the Philippines was with a group of Filipinos who were enthusiastic to plant a Church there. It was late in the 1990s, and they had all been at a large annual conference for Church leaders where Steve had been the main speaker. They travelled down together from Luzon to hold evangelistic meetings in Mindoro, pray for God's direction and talk to local land owners.

The last day on the island, Steve was offered a small plot for building a mission near the rice fields that backed onto the village of San Narciso. It was time for new beginnings for Letty and Alfredo, a couple in the group who agreed to move down and



pioneer the work. From Australia we funded the buying of the plot, the buildings that went up, extra land, and an area of the adjoining rice field to help sustain the mission.

In the beginning, the new Church was unpopular and the neighbours expressed their displeasure by throwing rocks at the building and harassing the newcomers. Soon, though, the joyful meetings and God's love in action overcame the suspicions and resistance. The people's hearts softened, many in the community were saved, and the work spread to other villages in the area.

For the next few years, we took teams from Australia to support the mission with finances, visits and encouragement. We went with the pastor and her team of ever-present young leaders out into the rice fields and seaside fishing villages to preach and pray for people. Outreach meetings were held in the soccer fields, under tarpaulin covers patched together, in Church buildings, in the local army barracks, and anywhere else a meeting could be arranged. A team of enthusiastic young Filipinos always came with us, and a crowd always gathered to

watch and listen to their exuberant performances with tambourines, guitars and colourful ribbons.

During one of our visits to Mindoro during those years, we met a woman who was home on a break from working overseas in Hong Kong. On the roadside one day, I chatted with her about her future. She was unsure about whether to stay at home or return overseas to help her husband support their two school-age children. As well, she felt responsible for the Filipino church she was leading for migrant workers in Hong Kong.

Neither of us knew that day, that years later our paths would cross again in a very different country! After finishing her work contract in Hong Kong, Mila would take employment in the island of Cyprus in the Mediterranean. There she would start another church for Filipinos, and that is how it happened that our ministry trips to Cyprus began!

LIBERTY YEARS Through My Eyes

12

*A Mediterranean Story...*  
2012 in Cyprus



YOU ARE the world's light!  
Like a city on a hill, you are a beacon for all to see.

Matthew 5:14



Our first morning in the sleepy Cypriot mountain village, I awakened to the pleasant sounds outside of little birds chirping, fluffing their feathers and tap-tapping their beaks on the roof gutters.

Wooden shutters that had kept the home in a long night were flung open, revealing the peaceful scene before me. Spring had come, and the sun had spread its golden warmth across the little valley below. Lighting on the wintered apple and almond orchards, it was nudging their early blossoms into fuller life.

Like hope and faith, the trees were waiting, patiently expecting their complete transformation. It would certainly come, and soon the fine and old branches would be laden with a glorious display of white and pink petals, for all to enjoy!

In the weeks and months ahead, the valley's fields would become greener, the limestone houses scattered among the hills in the distance would gleam white in the summer sun, and the last patches of snow on the highest peaks would be gone again, for a season.



**W**e had been visiting Cyprus once or twice a year for a few years to minister to God's people there. Then, early in 2012 the island became our base between preaching trips to other countries in the area. For six weeks, the summer house in the quiet mountain village of Perapedi provided a welcome retreat.

We loved being in Cyprus with the migrant workers and university students of many nationalities! Filipinos, Sri Lankans, Russians, Bulgarians, people from Western Europe, Africa and the Middle East, and Cypriots came to our meetings. They needed mums and dads for their personal support and guidance, and to assist the leadership of their Christian family groups. New and good things were happening across the southern part of the island, and our presence there served and strengthened the fresh growth. We understood that we were a gift from God among them, a catalyst for more new and good things from Him.

In the coastal cities and the many villages scattered through the mountains and foothills, were thousands of Filipinos. Mostly, they were women earning wages for the sake of their families back home. They lived in local households toiling six days a week, then on Sundays many of them came together in groups to celebrate the Lord's Day. Once a week, they found a place of refuge among their friends, who were God's House in this place and home away from home. Their groups were mostly

small, because transport and larger apartments were expensive and their time together was so precious.

We learned about some of the personal challenges of these migrant workers, their tested faith, and their commitment to each other. Their lives were often difficult, and I admired them for serving their employers well with humility and joyfully, despite the hardships.

One sunny Sunday, six hundred or so Filipinos and people of other nationalities converged on the coastal city of Limassol for an event they had been waiting expectantly for! That day they would celebrate the sixth anniversary of the 'Judah Ministries' Church, and Steve had been asked to preach. Led by Pastor Mila Mendaros, it was the largest Filipino group in Cyprus and a popular servant of many other Churches on the island.

We had met Mila many years before in the Philippines, and now here we were in a very different part of the world working alongside her. A woman of

vibrant faith, she was one of God's firebrands, greatly loved and respected across Cyprus by hundreds of believers and Church leaders of every nationality. A gifted gatherer and motivator, Mila was deeply devoted to what the Holy Spirit was doing in the island. Exuberance and a joyful expectation sprang spontaneously from her, constantly. Good things seemed always to be happening around Mila!

Filipinos love to be together, noisy and chaotic! Crammed inside and outside of a hotel's large and open area at street level, they chatted animatedly and excitedly took photos of each other until the anticipated meeting was underway. Then came the hours of singing, interpretive dance performances, listening to the preaching and a powerful, long time of prayer for personal needs. Afterwards, the celebration continued on with a hot meal that had been cooked and packaged through the whole of the night before. Filipinos are hard workers, and especially for the women who were hosting, it was all an extension of the busy preparations that had gone on beforehand!



By now, we'd been on many journeys travelling from country to country for many years. Now, it seemed that fields we had tilled and seeds we had sown in the past had reproduced their own fruit. The things we were observing and experiencing in Cyprus had begun in God's heart long before. Our part had begun there too; and with the tilling of our own lives.

# 13

*A South East Asia Story...*  
Home for Children and Widows



GOD DEFENDS the fatherless and the widow!

Deuteronomy 10:18



Today had been a big day for us Australians who had come to assist with the final weeks of the big house's construction. Frantic finishing touches had been done in the final moments, just in time for the important opening!

Excited chatter accompanied the procession of children making their way through the front doorway and into the wide living area with its shiny new tiles and freshly painted walls. Onward they streamed, their faces beaming as they entered the rooms they would share. Cheerful wall posters and newly carpentered beds with mattresses and colourful sheets greeted them. From today, this would be their new home!

Later in the day, dinner was served. The joyful dancing and laughter stopped for a while, as we took our places and prayed. Together, we gave thanks to God for His faithfulness to all who were gathered. The plated food being passed along to eager hands was typical for a Filipino celebration meal: rice and noodle dishes, with chicken and some tender pork added. Afterwards, to crown this evening's fare there would be a special treat for everyone: a mobile ice-cream maker had been hired for the occasion and was hiding in the kitchen!



**M**any years before we opened the beautiful new home for children and widows in Samar Island in the Philippines, Steve was speaking at an annual Church leaders' conference in Luzon Island. As usual, several hundred people from different parts of the Philippines had come to experience a time of refreshing and recharging. It was pre-monsoon season and so the days and nights were extremely hot and sticky. The conference had once again been scheduled just after Easter, a time of year when all

clothing became drenched in perspiration and it was hard to function!

At the close of one of the evening meetings, Steve prayed for a young pastor who had travelled up to the conference from Samar Island and was desperate for answers. Bent over a pool of his own tears, Ismael was weeping profusely. His father had died suddenly, leaving him as the eldest son to oversee a Church and orphanage. About the same time, overseas support for the work had stopped coming. The situation was overwhelming! How could the work possibly survive?

When Steve returned to Australia and told the story, some of our friends decided to go and investigate for themselves. That first visit, the decision was made to take action!

**W**e began our help by sponsoring the children in Samar and raising funds for improvement projects. First we established a regular sponsorship program, matching the individual children and widows living in

the orphanage with friends in Australia. Then some men went over and built new bunk beds, bought mattresses and other supplies, and did some minor renovations. The morning the Australians were leaving, the children woke up on their new beds. *"Are we rich now?"* one of them asked, thinking of how good the thin foam under him felt!

We made other improvements gradually, and more people and Churches in our area became involved. Together we purchased a caribou for ploughing, installed water pumps for drinking and irrigation and built a long flight of steps up the steep hill. A team of men built a house for widows (hot work on the iron roof during the hottest time of year!), a singer and violinist friend came with us for evangelistic meetings, a team of women visited to teach about worship, a Church took on supporting the preschool functioning on the property, and another ran youth conferences.

**E**arly in 2010 and seventeen years after the first visit, we opened a new building for the children and

widows in our sponsorship program. God had supplied us with everything we needed to build this big house with its wide verandas and decorated arches and columns. Steve's regular insistence that the design be kept simple had proved futile over the months and it had gradually become an impressive creation in the Spanish Filipino style!

Through the years, God has made it possible for us to purchase more rice fields at the mission in Samar, fund the creation of a fish pond, and build a large new building for early childhood education. 'Miracle Haven Community Learning Centre' is now a thriving ministry to the children and families in the area, sponsored by Liberty People's partners and friends.

# 14

*A Pacific Islands Story...*  
Schools in Vanuatu





In His own life-blood He has redeemed us to God  
from every tribe, language, race and nation.

Revelation 5:9



The school is a complete wonder out in the middle of the bush, so far from a town or shops or even roads!

If it weren't for our presence here in this part of the island, the children would not be experiencing school education. That some of their families have moved from their own land and built dwellings nearby to be close, tells us of their need and desire for us to be there.



**B**ack in 2002 we became residents of Vanuatu for a few years, to give more time to the needs there and step from leading a mission hearted Church in Australia into being full time missionaries.

One sunny afternoon in Port Vila, Steve stopped to talk with a bright spirited young boy who was working in our neighbour's garden. Only twelve years of age, Kenneth had already left school! He was an example of the 85% of children who at that time were leaving school at the primary level. When Steve asked him why this had happened, his response was simply "school fee". The brief conversation stayed with Steve and grew into a vision that led to us establishing a network of schools in Vanuatu.

In 2005, with the strong and enthusiastic financial support of an Australia-based Christian child sponsorship organisation, we founded Community Christian Schools Vanuatu (CCSV). Under its banner we started new schools and took under our wing some that were floundering or dying in the islands of Tanna and Efate. We knew God had challenged us to provide school education in remote areas where there were no schools, or where children couldn't attend because of the costs. For the sake of the young people's own lives and the future of their country, they needed the benefits of a strong and Christian education!

We began our work with an easily accessible, imported Christian education program and curriculum which had already made its way in to Vanuatu and adapted well in village contexts. It was relatively easy for locally educated young people, parents or other adults to teach or supervise a class and follow the program's systems. Within a very short time, hundreds of students were enrolled in our six schools.

To oversee the schools on the two islands, we invited a vivacious school principal from the Solomon Islands. He was well known in the education circles and had worked with our chosen curriculum for several years. To supervise the four schools in Tanna, we chose a school principal from the island with very similar qualifications. Both of these men and the staff at each school worked with faith and commitment in local environments that were often quite challenging.

Schools have a life of their own! They are places of endless potential for creativity, helpful involvement and continual progress, and working in the schools in Tanna and Efate was always enjoyable. Supplying resources, discovering teachers' and students' talents and interests, teaching English, mental maths or general knowledge, encouraging reading, creating and improving systems, arranging staff training days, providing medical help, creating dramas, translating songs to the local language were just a few ways to help. The school facilities were good for village community events too, and so they became centres for clothing distribution, first aid,

sports events, community entertainment, Church gatherings and official visits.

The Australian organization partnering with us thoroughly enjoyed their visits to our schools. Friends and some Churches we were closely connected with joined in the vision too. School teachers, scientists, medical doctors, children's pastors, musicians and other artists and trainers came to bless the students and staff with their skills and impartations. For ten consecutive years, one Church in our area organised annual teams for building a new classroom or other facilities we needed. Every year without exception they came, and two weeks later there would be a new building suddenly on the property, finished and painted and often even furnished!

Towards the close of the 2007-2011 global financial crisis and recovery period, our main source of financial support was sadly not able to continue funding ministries in the South Pacific. We had no choice but to hand over all of our schools but one to

their local communities, along with the financial responsibilities, leadership, facilities and supplies. Since then, some of the schools have continued on doing their best, while our focus has moved to maintaining and developing just one school just outside of Port Vila.

On the outskirts of Vanuatu's capital city there's a wonderful school called 'LifeChanger Christian College', providing education to hundreds of children and young people. God has blessed us with faithful sponsorship for the school, and so it continues to exist and develop and meet needs of families in the area.

The school and property is also the base for other work we do in Vanuatu, which you will learn about if you continue reading these stories!

LIBERTY YEARS Through My Eyes

15

*A South East Asia Story...*

**A Super Typhoon**



The LORD IS THERE for the heartbroken.  
*Jehovah Shammah*— Ezekiel 48:35.

Psalm 34:18



The news of the tragedy came to us in Australia. It was a heartbreaking story, and impossible for us to fully comprehend! How could anyone survive such a loss? All three of the couple's young children had been swept out to sea. Nothing could be done; there was no way to reach the little ones and save them. The devastated mother hadn't spoken since that terrible day.

We heard many other painful stories after the typhoon, but this one held us captive. The couple's home had been destroyed, and replacing it with a hardy one in a better location further back



from the coastline was a way we could help. And so that is what we set out to do.

By the time the building for the couple was completed in south eastern Samar, almost three months had passed since the typhoon. By then, the mother's speech was starting to return. She thanked us with tears and these humbling words: "Every morning when I awake and look up at the roof of my house, I thank God so much for it"!



In November 2013, one of the most powerful tropical cyclones ever recorded smashed into the islands of the Philippines with unbelievable force. In the hours that followed, the news emerged to us in Australia that Typhoon Haiyan (or Super Typhoon Yolanda, as it was called in the Philippines) had demolished homes, shops, streets and beaches, picked up and grounded ships, twisted huge metal structures and swept thousands of people out to sea.

The deadliest typhoon in Philippine history, Yolanda's storm surge tore husbands and wives, children and parents, grandparents and grandchildren, siblings and extended family members away from each other, permanently. Some parents lost all of their children. One couple from the staff in one of the missions we support lost eighteen members of the husband's family.

News of the devastation threw us into emergency mode. We set to work collecting information and money, and establishing good contacts in the areas worst hit. In the first weeks that followed, we took over and sent funds for immediate aid, sent scouts to meet with our key contacts and identify the main needs where we would rebuild, organised a shipping container of donated building timbers and roofing, and laid out our plans for where and in what order of priority each area project would happen.

For leading the work on the ground, we chose a Filipino friend we had known for many years. Sam held excellent employment in Manila, but his boss decided it would be a privilege for the company to send one of their senior employees to work in the

disaster zone, and so he was given a generous leave of absence.

In the face of so much need, and not being sure of how far incoming funds would stretch, our decisions about who to help in the hardest hit region weighed heavily on us. To guide our selections, we chose pastors in each area who would decide who were the most needy people under their care.

Considering land ownership was a primary factor. If the recipient didn't own the land, it would be wisest to build a simple home of the local timbers and style, rather than a house of concrete blocks. We had heard of landowners claiming back their land if a more valuable home was built on it, and so it was important to establish clearly who owned the title before each beneficiary was promised a home. (Whether of concrete or local lumber, the new house was certain to be better than they had previously lived in, anyway!).

The men on the Filipino building team Sam had brought together for the work were unfamiliar with the style of roofing we had sent in a container from Sydney, and so a small group of builder friends flew

over to teach the relevant new techniques. The ready-made, category 5 cyclone-rated roof trusses we had sent for the block buildings would speed up the work, lessening the time it would take to build each family's home.

The first group of houses and by far the most simple for us to manage were on the island of Leyte, where the typhoon had hit the hardest. An Australian missionary we knew who was well respected worked with her staff, choosing where more than one hundred homes would be built and where others would receive major renovations. Gifting new timber or concrete block homes to the people there would help to rebuild their lives, and remind them daily that they were loved by God and by His children in another part of the world! Over the next weeks and months, the work went well and was a major boost to that community's spirits. Families joined the mission's Church and people were born again as a result.

At the same time in another severely affected area not far away, our Filipino building team began constructing the concrete block homes to match the roof kit sizes we'd sent over from Australia.

Filipinos are well used to weathering natural disasters. They bounce back quickly, but this catastrophe had been so devastating. Stories of their losses were heartbreaking. The people needed their hope to be restored, and the idea of holding musical concerts in the areas we were working in took hold of me. Some of our Australian musician friends who'd travelled with us to different places over the years might like to go and share some joy to the people!

It was not easy in the Philippines, to be organising the many preparations needed for these events in the midst of all of the need and chaos. But the work gave our friends there opportunities to express their love and concern and carry a message of hope.

A few weeks later, after some more fund raising and communications back and forth between countries, a small team landed in the Philippines to perform at our 'Hope and Comfort' concerts in the islands of Leyte and Samar. The musical concerts they performed for were happy times bringing comforting relief to thousands of Filipinos who were

still in shock and despair. Working alongside the visiting Australians, an enthusiastic team of local young people in their bright red, printed t-shirts set up the stages, sound system and lighting at each venue and handed out sweet gifts for the children.

**M**any of the aspects of our two year response to Super Typhoon Yolanda were funded by a single donor who had taken a flight to the Philippines soon after the catastrophe. He had seen the severity and extent of the damage for himself, and so his heart was constantly pulled towards helping the people in their time of great need. With his support and the gifts and help of so many others, we were able to build hundreds of new concrete block or timber homes, and give roof iron or cash and other gifts to hundreds of families in the worst affected regions.

# Isaiah 58

## God's Kind of Fast

Isaiah 58:1-7 (interpretive translation)

*Make this loud and clear to My people: You seem eager to know Me and My ways. You ask for My decisions, as if you want to know what's right. You practise fasting, trying to show Me how righteous you are. But, your fasting is meaningless to Me when at the same time you exploit others, abusing your authority over them. You argue and fight with each other and don't actually follow My ways.*

*My way is putting aside what you want and doing what I want, every day. My way is to shake off people's chains and burdens, to release the ones who are bound! What I want is that you make sure people are being treated right. Deal with injustice and oppression, share what's yours with others who don't have what they need. Don't turn away from people who have a need and ignore them, stop mistreating and hurting others. They are flesh and blood, just like you!*

# 16

*A Pacific Islands Story...*  
Tropical Cyclone Pam





My HELP COMES from THE LORD,  
Who made Heaven and Earth.

Psalm 121:2



It was a quiet and sober atmosphere that weekend in our family's homes. A powerful tropical cyclone was heading straight to Vanuatu, gathering strength until we knew that its impact would be devastating. As the hours passed there were tears and worry. The meteorology radar imagery and weather reports were predicting severe damage from storm surge on Tanna Island. What was happening to our many loved ones there?

I have often wondered why if our trust is truly in our Heavenly Father, in such times we don't have a perfect, inner calm. Does our concern reveal a lack of faith and trust,

necessarily? The story of Jesus in Gethsemane helps me to understand. He wept in the midst of His distress, even while knowing that what was happening to Him was in His Father's Will. This was *the fullness of time* eternity had waited for, for so long. His suffering was leading to the greatest victory ever!

Jesus' humanity shown in the garden tells us that faith doesn't conflict with or exempt us from distress and concern. Faith causes us to turn to, not away from, our Father in the midst of it!



The thirteenth of March 2015 is a date forever etched in our memories! The very same day we received word from the Philippines that all of our typhoon rebuilding work had been completed, Tropical Cyclone Pam was on a destructive path to Vanuatu! On our computer screens in Australia we could see it hovering like a ferocious beast above the sea, swirling and gathering force as it moved towards the land below.

With no communication through the worst of the storm, for a day and a long night we had no idea of how family members and others were faring. But gradually good news began to emerge. The sea surge and flood waters predicted for Tanna Island hadn't eventuated, and everyone at our school and mission base in Efate was unharmed. In the end we learned that miraculously only a very few lives, about a dozen, had been lost in the whole country.

Four days later when flights were first allowed in, we sent Jon and Abi from Australia to assess damages. As their 'plane descended into Port Vila's international airport they could see the destruction below them. It was as if a giant wave had swept across the land, leaving behind floating trees and debris.

The hours and days ahead were spent looking, asking questions, and listening to stories. Families had huddled together in the darkness of their homes, praying and trusting God for His protection. The rain had lashed and the wind had roared and shrieked like the sound of many jet engines. Then, when everything had become calm enough for them

to venture outside, they'd found fallen trees all around them. That they and their neighbours had stayed safe was miraculous!

One of our friends who had lived at NorthGate in Tanna agreed to go and survey the damage there. To our relief he found that all of our buildings had survived well. But so many families on the island were without any shelter. One man who'd run from a lean-to house falling apart around him went to another that did the same. He knew of an empty shipping container nearby and ran into it, thinking it would surely be safe. The poor man learned otherwise, when it was picked up like a toy and rolled by the wind gusts! He suffered a broken leg but was very grateful to have survived. Other stories circulated about empty shipping containers being flung about and houses blowing away.

The information we gained so soon after the cyclone from trusted people who knew the communities and their leaders, helped us to decide quickly how we would respond.

For two weeks after the cyclone, our school and mission base on the outskirts of Port Vila became a refuge for about two hundred people who needed somewhere dry to sleep. All of our buildings are cyclone-resistant, and so they had survived without any structural damage apart from a break in one wall from a flying sheet of timber.

Some of the homes and belongings of our staff had been destroyed, and so they needed help. Damage to the school's resources that had been stored under desks for protection against the horizontal rains had to be recovered. Our staff worked together for days laying precious books and reams of paper out in the sun to dry, while other things had to be thrown away. The river had banked up at the bridge on the main road next to our property and overflowed, and a thick sludge had made its way into some of our buildings on that side of our land's natural gully. Removing it all was messy, smelly work.

With some strong support from Australian friends, a hired bulldozer and our local staff's hard work, only about three weeks after the cyclone all of the school buildings and supplies had been restored to working order. Then, our three hundred students were able to return to school.

While all of this was happening in Vanuatu, just a week after the cyclone our first shipping container left Australia loaded with emergency aid cargo. A friend had donated his almost-empty container to us, and another businessman had donated as many heavy, waterproof rolls of fabric as the container could carry in weight. After that, there followed a constant stream of ordering, loading and sending off shipping containers. Sometimes we sent a few at a time! In total, over the next two years we sent about seven hundred tonnes of aid supplies in thirty one containers to Vanuatu. The first were filled with large quantities of temporary shelters, linen, bath towels, blankets, clothing, pots and pans and other essentials. Then, most of them carried building materials for constructing hundreds of small houses.

One container held the amazing gift of a well drill truck that would provide hundreds of homes and villages with clean drinking water.

Once again, we had committed ourselves to an extended period of getting help to people who had lost most of their possessions. Our school facilities became a major centre for storage and distribution in the months to come. Amazingly, a container with building materials we'd sent from Australia earlier in the year had arrived at the school just before the cyclone. The timing was perfect and God's provision, because we needed more accommodation for people coming to help, immediately! With the materials there, a small team of men from Australia quickly built a small house in time for cousins who were coming for three months to help Jon lead our reconstruction work.

Small teams from Australia began coming and staying for weeks or months, to lend a hand. Some spent countless hours sorting the mounds of clothing and household things into big custom-built bins that

enabled a well-organised distribution. Others kept children occupied and happy. A major help towards our planning was receiving the funds for building a big shed that would house timbers, roof iron, tools and construction equipment, and later serve as a workshop.

We learned firsthand after Tropical Cyclone Pam, how difficult it is for the Government and community leaders of a country to negotiate their way between the many aid workers who flood in during times of national emergency. They come on behalf of their global organisations to assist with immediate relief or during the rebuilding phase. They come with admirable qualifications but from their own perspectives. It's impossible for the people who are most affected, to coordinate and direct the efforts of so many who have come together so suddenly from the outside world. The visitors' knowledge is mostly theoretical, and most of all of their experience has been in an entirely different kind of setting. Our base became a trusted centre, where foreign aid workers and local Government personnel



could come for reliable information or advice on how to interpret instructions, so that the needs in the area could be answered.

**W**hile we were still busy building small houses for hundreds of families in Tanna and Efate, Vanuatu suffered its worst drought in many years. The cyclone had uprooted fruit trees and stripped gardens bare and now with the drought, the newly planted seedlings were dying. Our emergency assistance for this new catastrophe included getting regular supplies of food from Port Vila to different parts of Tanna Island where the people were in desperate need.

During the two years following Cyclone Pam, we supplied many hundreds of families in eight of the islands with new homes, roofing, food and clean drinking water. Many people in Vanuatu live in lean-to houses made with leaf, bamboo and a hardy but thin timber. Some live in shelters made with pieces of cheap roof iron nailed over a rough frame. For them,

the homes we built were beautiful and practical, sturdy and long lasting.

Our staff who were the most involved worked tirelessly. Their loving actions offered for others was like giving to Jesus Himself! It gave them great satisfaction to be able to serve others with significant help during this time of need. Our delivery vehicles and signs accompanying the work everywhere declared to everyone that the help coming to them was from the heart of Jesus.

17

*A Story About Turkey...*  
Gallipoli and Turkey



There is plenty of grain READY for harvest...  
But not many labourers!

Luke 10:2



Steve's first visit to Turkey was in 2005 with a group of men from Australia, Bulgaria and other parts of Europe. They drove south through Bulgaria in a minivan, crossed the border and then continued towards their destinations on the Aegean Sea coast.

Late their first night on the road in Turkey, the three sleepy Australian travellers suddenly became attentive when they realised they were being driven past signs to Gallipoli. Without knowing it, they had been driving for a while along the Gallipoli Peninsula! Wide awake now, they sailed from the peninsula's

main ferry terminal across the Dardanelles to the city of Canakkale, where they planned to stop and sleep. Driving off the ferry, they found themselves heading into a straight street lined with palm trees that were lit up from below with green lights.

Similar to his call to the Pacific nation of Vanuatu years before, Steve's introduction to this very different land was accompanied by a supernatural event. Only hours ahead of the minivan driving onto the bitumen in Canakkale, he had seen in a dream the very same street the group found themselves in late that night, coming off the ferry! It was obvious that God was speaking to them, getting their attention.

Since that first trip, most years we have gone to Turkey once or twice with friends from Australia, all the while sensing a strong call from God to this historic land whose 85 million people are almost entirely without the Gospel of salvation through Jesus.

To openly follow Jesus in Turkey, a person must be willing to be shunned by family and friends, lose their employment, and possibly even lose life itself. In theory and according to the country's Constitution every adult is free to choose their own religion, but in practice it isn't so. Most of the people believe that to be Turkish, one must be Muslim. Choosing another path is taken to be a betrayal of cultural identity; a destabilising influence that will surely lead to the deterioration of all that's honourable and treasured in the society. Our Turkish friends who

have met Jesus long for everyone to know that loving Him and His ways and their country at the same time is entirely possible, and not a contradictory idea at all! The Land of the Bible where Paul the Apostle walked and where the seven churches in Revelation were all located is a country of immense spiritual need. Our work there these past many years has included partnering in planting Churches and supporting them with prayer and finances so that many more people can be freed from the curses, superstitions, reliance on spirit mediums and traditions that keep them bound.



The graves and memorials of thousands of our Australian young men and Turkish men are spread across the hills and along the coast of the Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey. Ever since 1915, that terrible year of the *Battle of Gallipoli*, the story has persisted that an unusual bond was formed between the soldiers on both sides (“unusual”, because they were on opposite sides of the war!). Whenever a temporary ceasefire was called, the men shared

snacks with their enemies and played cards or games of cricket together! As well, the Turkish soldiers felt a connection with the fine horsemanship of the Australians, because the love of horses runs deep in their history. Neither side could make sense of the year-long Battle of Gallipoli, and it became known as “the last gentlemen’s war”, because the men on both sides respected, admired and liked each other.

There must have been many Australian Christians on the battlefield who prayed not only for their own safety during the fighting, but also for the souls of the people of the land they were fighting in. God surely would have heard their prayers and be still answering them, even now.

It was March 2015, and for the past two years I had been envisioning and working towards us contributing events and making wonderful connections during the ANZAC centennial commemorations to be held in Turkey in April! Plans, prayers and possibilities for this country and its people had been constantly in my mind, heart and

daily activities. We could play a part in the 100-year commemorative events, and trust God with how He would use our efforts to bless the people!

Just across the Dardanelles strait from Gallipoli in northwest Turkey, Canakkale is where most Australians and New Zealanders base themselves when they visit Gallipoli. The ANZAC Day dawn service was to be held in Gallipoli as usual, and this year in Canakkale there would be many other special events in the days leading up to and after ANZAC Day. There would be official commemorative events led and coordinated by Australian officials in the city, and unofficial events like ours coordinated with community leaders.

In the two years leading up, I had visited and kept in contact with embassy, university, sports and other officials and community leaders in Turkey. I'd written to many people in Australia, Turkey and other countries, seeking the involvement of well-known musical and other artists and others who would be bearers of Jesus' Gospel from an heart of love and kindness to Turkish people. We had created a website and business cards, gained the respect of



people in Turkey and shared friendship and gifts from Australia with them. I'd prepared thousands of wallet cards with a message of friendship to give to them in their own language. We had brought a Turkish Christian friend to Australia and taken him to visit Churches, homes and mid-week groups for raising awareness about Turkey. We'd been to New Zealand to meet with groups there who share the same heart concern and love for the people of the Land of the Bible!

A team to go with us for our events began to form! Australian musicians and singers we knew well were preparing to go. A professional soccer player, some of her young friends, an artist, and others were preparing to go. They would perform, mix with the people, and play soccer with a team of Turkish young people at one of the universities.

Accommodation in the various cities had been arranged. A creative performing group in Turkey would meet us when we arrived and then travel together with us. They had set up the concert venues and were providing some local artists to participate. This would be an exciting and meaningful trip!

It so happened that the month before our Australian group was to go for the ANZAC centennial events, was when Tropical Cyclone Pam struck Vanuatu! With last-minute preparations still to be made for the trip to Turkey, now there was a new event that needed some very focused attention!

I immediately found myself again in the mode of finding, sourcing, connecting and the other things involved in responding to urgent need. I think it was an automatic assumption that going to Turkey would most likely be impossible for me. We would need another sound and lighting technician too, and Steve would probably need to replace me as the go-between person as well as lead the Australian team.

Somehow, sometime in the midst of all of this and Steve flying to Vanuatu with others to view the cyclone's aftermath and finding major donors for our response work there, our decisions were made. And so I continued with our Vanuatu cyclone response work thinking that perhaps I could join Steve and the Turkey team a little later.

Our group from Australia finally left for Istanbul. Their first two days, they visited some of the city's famous sites and met with the Turkey-based ministry group we'd connected with, to get to know each other and for some basic cultural orientation and sharing of information back and forth. From Istanbul they all headed roughly south to the city of Bursa and then to Canakkale, performing in concerts everywhere they went.

Our Australian team especially loved their days and nights in Canakkale! They were welcomed warmly by the city. Good friendships were made, many seeds were sown in people's hearts and minds, and many people who asked questions were linked with online or other help. The young people on the Australian team enjoyed their games of soccer at the university and spending time with the Turkish young people. One of our performers who is Turkish by ancestry had been learning the language back home in Geelong, and so he was able to greet and talk to the crowd in their own tongue. His special connection and way with the crowds resulted in a big

bunch of flowers being presented to him during one of the concerts!

From Canakkale, some of the team travelled further south for more concerts, while the others began their homeward journey back to Australia.

As it turned out, I was able to fly to Turkey after the team returned home. Two of our elderly friends were sensing God speaking to them about staying for a few months in Canakkale. They could be friends with people and pray in the city. We went together and enjoyed taking part in shows and other things that were still happening around the city for the centennial commemorations. A group from a Church we'd visited in Australia had come over, New Zealanders had come to join a conference, and other events were still happening in the city. We met up with local people who'd become our good friends and enjoyed time together again.

I didn't know then, that it would be my last visit to Turkey for some years. In my heart, I am looking

forward to being there again and sharing apple tea with our friends! Jesus' words written in Matthew 9:37 & 38 and Luke 10:2 are for them! God's heart is for the people of Turkey, and our constant prayer is that the Owner of that wide and spacious harvest field will send workers across its length and breadth to bring in its spiritual fruits, grains and everything else to the Eternal Father's household!

# 18

*A Pacific Islands Story...*  
Conventions and Carols



The islands and coastlands will LOOK TO ME  
and wait expectantly for My arm.

Isaiah 51:5



The crowd of many thousands filled the large field in Port Vila that December evening, and stretched into the distance further than the eye could see. Most of the mass of people sat in the natural amphitheatre that was lit up from our huge light towers, but thousands more were standing or sitting far out into the shadows beyond. It was our first island-wide Carols by Candlelight Spectacular, and it seemed half of the island was there!

As darkness fell, the big stage sparkled and shone with fabulous decorations and above it, attached to the roof, two

angels looked towards the star and banner declaring Emmanuel... God with us in Jesus, the Baby born in Bethlehem and the One who still comes to us now by His Spirit!

Backstage, all was a-buzz with excitement and anticipation as the choir, band and soloist performers waited for their time. The technicians were ready and alert: sound, lighting, videos, carols lyrics, backing tracks and snow machine were ready and cued. Monitors, laptops, cables, mics and all other things needed were in their places. Fireworks were up on the roof of the stage, hidden out of sight for a surprise finale.

On the field, too, the cameras were being focused and the sound engineer roamed with his iPad. All kinds of preparations had been made, so that this night of music and song would be a wonderful and most memorable experience for families, and be a joy to the Heavens!



It has never been our plan or intention to involve members of our own family so closely in what we do, but that is what has happened and we are very glad



and grateful for it! In 2016, our son Matt joined Steve, Jon and me to work full time in our home office and overseas in the countries we have stayed most involved in.

While the heart of our mission has remained the same, I think that the shape of much of our work has always adapted to the God-given gifts in the people working with us. Matt brought with him some different gifts, to be expressed and to grow as an important part of how God was leading us into the future. His arrival on the team meant that Steve, Jon or I could be away overseas more often and for longer. It meant that we could spend our time in Australia doing a little less administrative work. He would be a valuable ministry trip team leader and speaker. Also, his coming brought a much greater emphasis on providing spiritual teaching and guidance to young Christians and potential leaders in the areas where we work.

The year Matt joined us, we held our second Miracle Crusade convention in Port Vila and our first annual island-wide Carols by Candlelight!

Our Australian evangelist friend who'd been with us in Bougainville in the late '90s joined us again for our second Miracle Crusade in Vanuatu. Tim's preaching and the singers and band from an Australian Hillsong church were very powerful and immediately popular. For the many thousands who came each night, to be worshipping and receiving from God all together was a special experience. Everyone from the various types of Churches could feel free to come, because we weren't representing a particular brand of Christian faith.

Daytime street evangelism and concerts and prayer for people in the streets and hospital too, led to hundreds more being blessed.

Many people were healed of physical conditions during those days and nights! The Miracle Crusade's effectiveness led to us planning another similar week with Tim for the following year. Also, we would add an indoors convention to the program, and invite more Australians to come and participate. We would call the convention 'Face to Face', and it would be all about God's presence. (What eventuated the

following year was one of the most powerful and transformative weeks the people had ever experienced, but that is its own story!).

Our Carols by Candlelight event in December was very likely the largest Christian event ever to be held in Vanuatu! (The estimate of eighteen thousand people was believable, because the estimator was well used to doing large Carols by Candlelight crowd counts in Australia).

The people began arriving well before dusk and sat on mats or stood waiting for the evening to begin. That something exciting was about to happen was clear, because of the music and what they could see all around them. The rows of big speakers and screens on either side of the stage looked impressive, and the stage itself was a spectacular sight.

Tents for selling coffee, local donuts, cakes and other foods soon became busy with people lining up. Tables laden with thousands of children's Bible

story books given to us from America were being guarded by teams of young people. The seven thousand candles we had bought locally were ready at the tables too, and each one had a cup for safety. The mobile medical service and security personnel in plain clothes were in sight in their places, in case they were needed.

At dark, the field became lit up with powerful lights fixed to the tops of four towers that stood like tall tripods, and the evening's program got underway. The performances, carol singing, candle lighting, gift giving, videos and readings, snow falling and fireworks were all a resounding success! The whole program communicated so powerfully the greatest story ever told, and gave honour to it so well!

I was backstage through the evening and was fortunate to be able to experience closeup the excitement of the performers. The overwhelming joy of the choir, conductors, soloists and musicians in the message they were singing, will always stand out in my memory. Its truth was a revelation happening to them right there and then, as they sang to the

crowd! It seemed to me that they were almost bursting with the wonder of Jesus' coming to Bethlehem and to us all, here and now!

There is always an immense amount of ideas and action that goes on, for such an event to come together. The fabulous stage decorations had been bought for a tiny price months before at a recycle centre near our home in Australia. They had been strung and stuck and stapled elaborately onto the stage by a team of ladies, assisted by men who had climbed up ladders and reached from the bucket of a borrowed cherry picker to attach along the roofline. The heavy black cloth used to create rooms on the stage had been donated from a warehouse in Australia. The painted and tinselled angels, star and sign attached to the roof had been created in the big machinery shed at our school property. The thousands of candle cups had all been individually sliced by a team at the school. The powerful sound speakers had been donated by another ministry in Australia, for our major events in Vanuatu. The sound and all of the technologies and building for the night were the result of days of work. The choir and conductor, soloists and band had practised for

weeks, and prepared their uniforms. The parts and song sheets for the choir songs and program and its run sheets had been written. The Australians who came to join us to sing had learned new songs for the evening, and left their busy jobs and families to fly to Vanuatu for a weekend. Not to mention the group of ladies who had cleaned the field in preparation. Then afterwards there would be all of the packing up, pulling down, re-storing and cleaning the field again.

All of the work was worthwhile one hundred times over! Had there ever been a night like this, in Vanuatu's history?!

Afterwards, some of the people came to thank us. "Tonight was our family's only Christmas celebration. THANK YOU for giving us Christmas!"

# 19

*A Pacific Islands Story...*  
The LifeChanger School



HE LIFTS the poor from the dust,  
And SETS THEM among princes.

Psalm 113:7&8



Shade from the wide-spreading mango tree provided wonderful relief for our little group that hot and humid afternoon. Here in Port Vila, the air could be so oppressively dense and still!

I tried to ignore the mosquitoes distracting me with their persistent buzzing while the school students read with me from their books. These young girls were so shy and hesitant! Their day to day experience had taught them that their lives didn't matter; because of their gender, they had little value. I knew with everything in me, though, that we must tell them the true story: I AM GOD'S CHILD, AND CREATED IN HIS LIKENESS.





Just outside of Port Vila in Vanuatu is our school called 'LifeChanger Christian College'. For children from poorer families, its five acre property has a collection of classrooms, administration offices, dormitories and houses, a nutrition centre, clinic and big machinery shed. There's a sports field, and a large outdoors stage area that's been used for student graduations, music concerts, Christmas Carols, evangelistic outreaches and other events for the school and communities nearby.

The staff are a happy, motivated family of Christian women and men who are committed to their students and to each other. The school is always developing on many fronts and right now we are planning fish ponds, a bakery, and areas for serious gardening for their nutritional value and for training opportunities for our older students.

It's the year of COVID-19, and the story going around Vanuatu is that people in the urban areas need to get back to knowing about gardening, and young people in the islands need to be trained in vocations that will help sustain their families and communities in such times. Also, new learning is needed because people's lives are different from previous generations. Now, about one third of the population are city dwellers without large areas of land all around them as in the old days. Different skills are needed, and so it's our prayer that God's wisdom will lead the school's vision so that we will participate in being an answer.

During 2017, with our disaster responses and the Gallipoli Centennial events mostly behind us, we were able to become more closely involved in the life of the school again.

One of the challenges worrying the leadership was how many of our little children were having to repeat their earliest grades. What was holding up their progress? I decided to probe, and by the end of the school year changes had been put in place that would help until we found something better and

sustainable. Too much of the imported curriculum was unsuitable for the age group, mainly because of the completely foreign and complex ideas and language. The daily long, unillustrated stories in an unfamiliar language, the alphabet sounds being introduced in complex words and other things meant that not much literacy advancement had been happening.

Also, we knew that it was high time to replace some of our older students' study topics with more relevant ones from the national curriculum. A big task on its own, it included our staff having to manage their classes in a different style, learn from new texts, and then effectively teach the students from the new material. Gradual progress has been made until now, as I write, most classes study important, locally relevant topics in addition to their core disciplines.

For the past few years, Christian schools in Australia have been sending teams of students and staff to visit as an important part of their annual programs. The young people from both countries benefit so much from these times of exchange. Our

students are brought variety and encouragement, friendship, the discovery of different ways, and much-needed supplies. In turn, the Australian students experience a new and unfamiliar environment with its different culture, people and values, and many of them return to Australia deeply affected. The staff form lasting friendships and learn to host outsiders with confidence and an increasing understanding.

More recently, Christian school teachers and others from overseas have stayed for longer periods of time, to assist the school in a variety of ways. Their involvement has enriched the lives of our staff, improved the progress of our students and enabled new opportunities for the school. The little children have a new learning program and are doing well, and our older students now have greatly improved study options for building their lives into the future.

Along with being committed to our students' advancement in their studies, our greatest desire is for them to truly know and follow Jesus, love their neighbour and mature into wise, skilled, purposeful and confident adults who will influence their families,

communities and nation to Godliness now and in the years ahead!

The LifeChanger school is located at the Vanuatu Beveridge bridge in Prima, just outside of Port Vila and quite near the airport. If you would like to be connected, one way is via its FaceBook page: *LifeChanger Christian College Vanuatu* or you might like to visit our website [www.libertypeople.com.au](http://www.libertypeople.com.au).

# Solomon

## Prayer for Wisdom

(2 Chronicles 1:6-12, interpretive translation)

*It's late, past evening. Today has been a significant day and one for the annals of our nation's history. This day will always be remembered.*

*I have become aware that God is with me. He is speaking; asking me to tell Him my heart's desires! I feel no hesitation because I already know what they are. I say to Him, "Let your promise to my father David be fulfilled. I am here now, in his place. Grant to me your wisdom and understanding to lead this great nation; these people who are yours."*

*I have spent the day up on the mountain with the people meeting with my God and re-affirming our reliance on Him. I have offered one thousand offerings to acknowledge and honour Him as our one true King. My worship has been extravagant, to express my devotion and determination that I and my people will stay dependant on Him.*

*The response to my answer that I hear from my God reaches through into the depths of my being. He, my Lord, says it to ME, SOLOMON! He says, "Because this was in your heart and you*

*haven't asked for riches, possessions, honour and glory, or the lives of your enemies, or even for long life, I am granting you wisdom and understanding. Also, I will give you riches, possessions, honour and glory like no-one who has come before you or will come after you."*

*I am completely awe-struck; overwhelmed and entirely humbled!*

LIBERTY YEARS Through My Eyes

20

*A South East Asia Story...*  
The Haha Church!





The Lord's joy is YOUR STRENGTH.

Nehemiah 8:10



There is a thriving Church we love in the Philippines that I like to call the 'Haha Church'. The name is a declaration that it's an overcoming Church! The people love God and each other wholeheartedly, and rejoice together in the incredible privilege of being heirs together with Jesus in their Father's household! They have learned to laugh at buffeting and hard knocks because their faith is anchored in the Great Deliverer; the Victorious One! They praise and worship and glorify Him with humility and understanding, in times of despair and darkness as well as in the easier times. They are passionate in their determination to love and help everyone around them: little children, the elderly, fathers and mothers and young people.

Their leader is an extraordinary woman! She knows well that whatever opposition comes from the spirituals or from other people or circumstances, there is nothing that her Lord does not see and cannot turn around. She makes it known with a shout, that Jesus is the reason for every blessing; every good thing! Her people who make up the 'Liberty Christian Centre Judah Ministries' in the town of Victoria are a bright beacon and a safe place for their local community and the villages and regions beyond!



Steve had come back home from the Philippines certain that God was speaking to him about establishing a Church in the town of Victoria, in Mindoro Island. At the same time, we knew that our good friend Pastor Mila Mendaros in Cyprus was about to leave her housekeeping employment and return home to the Philippines permanently. We had come to know Mila well as an apostolic pastor, and were confident that she would be more than able to lead the new work. Her family's home in the

Philippines was just outside of Victoria, and so we and she agreed that this was clearly God's plan! Now, the same gifts from God in her life that had been so fruitful and honoured in Cyprus would make way for His blessings to come to the people of her own island.

As we expected, the new Church in Victoria blossomed quickly. After a few months, we decided that renting buildings was too restrictive and expensive, and so Steve began communicating with the owner of an almost-vacated property by the main road in Victoria. Eventually, a year after planting the Church we were able to buy the property that had once been the base of a Baptist mission. At that time, a recognisable name became necessary for registrations and for the people, and from then the Church became known as 'Liberty Christian Centre Judah Ministries'.

The property we bought included an old building that could seat about one hundred and fifty Filipinos indoors, and its wide verandahs could provide shelter for at least as many. It was in need of repairs, but still it was a wonderful provision and from the

start the building overflowed with people every Sunday.

Then God provided us with the funds for another piece of land just behind the church property. It had a large, solid home on it and some space in the backyard. Soon the big house was undergoing a very enthusiastic conversion into a Centre for early childhood education, to serve needy families in the area. The 'Oriental Mindoro Liberty Christian Academy' is now a busy ministry to little children who come for learning and development in a Christian environment, in the first two years of their school education. Its full time staff are highly committed, hard-working young women who are devoted to giving their students an excellent, Christian education. The rooms are colourfully decorated with wall murals, posters and other wall hangings, and furnished with brightly painted desks and chairs. There is playground equipment outside, and enough space around it for ball play and other activities. The parents and children love their school, and we hear many stories of little lives and behaviours being transformed.

Our strong support from Australia for the Church and academy is necessary because most families in the community are very poor. The early childhood education teachers have no other means of income, and so they are recipients of sponsorship from our Liberty People friends. The Church's pastors and other workers, building improvements and self-support enterprises need our constant financial help too.

Teams from Australia love to come with us to Mindoro and spend time with the young people, praying with and teaching them. They love joining the noisy, jubilant congregation on Sundays and seeing God at work! They love to visit the children's academy and see the little ones singing, playing and learning happily, and to experience evangelism and miracles in the villages and the many satellite and associated Churches.

In turn, our Filipino friends love to have us come! It brings to them a sense of being acknowledged and affirmed, a sense that they are playing their

special and unique part in a wider family and cause. They are encouraged and strengthened by our presence and love, and by the Holy Spirit's gifts at work in us.

Our friends at the 'Haha Church' in Mindoro know from experience the value of these words in Jude 1:20: "Dearly loved friends, keep building up yourselves together on your most holy faith, praying constantly in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love, always having an expectation of the merciful kindness of our Lord Jesus that leads us to eternal life."

Inviting others into this family, to a place of belonging and spiritual inheritance so that they too can be as blessed, is God's daily call at the heart of the Church. It's a powerful motivation that flows from them knowing the great love of God, who gave His only Son so that anyone who puts their faith in Him will never perish, but instead have eternal life. They know that our Father and Creator has **MADE IT POSSIBLE** for all people everywhere to come into His household of Faith, where there is freedom and the kind of life that can never die!



## AFTERWORD

In many places we travel to, people's needs both immediate and ongoing are overwhelming. The desperately poor cannot help themselves; they need someone to intervene. They need us to be like the persistent friend who would not give up. They need us to give from what we personally need, not only from our surplus, and to make sure powerless people are not abused. They need us to have the same heart as King Solomon's prayer: so that from a place of greater privilege and power we will seek others' benefit, not our own.

We who are to be Jesus' anointed hands and feet are very often distracted and negligent. We excuse and rationalise our self-focussed life styles; we forget His priorities and drift quickly and further along paths that lead us away from helping the helpless. The confronting reality is that other voices in our lives are louder than His. Many calls for help go unanswered, and people we pass by are left to suffer or die as victims of their circumstances.

The world of the very poor is very small. The most destitute are unaware of anything other than the urgent necessities for life: water, food, shelter. Their ways are sometimes thankless, even selfish, untrustworthy, demanding and devious! God is not disillusioned or put off! He loves the lovely and unlovely, the deserving and undeserving, the rich and poor, the included and outcast. He expects us to pick up and heal the wounded, to live

our lives as Good Samaritans sent from the heart of our Father, to be His hands and feet. Then, He will do MUCH MORE than we could ever imagine!

YOU ARE the light in the dark. YOU ARE the salt for the dull and deteriorating. YOU ARE the one with beautiful feet bearing good news. YOU ARE the worker in the fields waiting to be harvested!



- The End -

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