

Worth Risking One's Life For

Gail Morey
June 5, 2018



Gail Morey, Missionary in Southern Africa (from 1975)

We are aware of the concept of committing ourselves to our mission at the risk of our life. This is a story of early missionaries consciously deciding to do so for a great purpose. The writer chose to withhold the name of the country in which the events she describes took place, now some 40 years ago. Many positive changes have taken place in that part of the world since that time.

The high point of my mission was the time I spent in "the bush." The decision to go out with the army took three months of deep prayer and thought; it was a drastic step, a desperate move to establish an internal

condition for our country, and it greatly endangered our lives.

We left with an armored car, two armed escorts, a radio, and a "stick" (eight to ten armed soldiers) and headed to one of the remote areas. The army base where we stayed at night had never before housed women, and the tribal people had not seen a white woman for three to four years, much less one who played the flute and slung a guitar over her shoulder. Sometimes we met hostility, but for the most part, the tribal people welcomed us. Despite the initial mistrust and misgivings, after a couple hours of talking, they were warm and appreciative, and they let us know it.

Terrorists often struck areas where we had been the night before or areas where we had planned to go. The war was supposed to be in a state of cease-fire, but because we never knew when and where attacks would break out, our situation was in some ways more dangerous than wartime. The terrorists were roaming freely, as citizens during the day—guns hidden—and at night terrorists once again, attending their all-night indoctrination meetings. In the villages we would sit under trees and I would start to play the flute. Within half an hour, 150 to 200 people would gather. Then we would speak—I in my few words of the dialect, and one member who spoke it fluently. We expressed Heavenly Father's love for them, His understanding of their suffering, and taught an extremely simplified form of Victory Over Communism lectures. We would answer their questions about communism and true democracy, both of which were quite foreign concepts. Yet, unbeknownst to the white man, these are a very wise people.

During the day we felt no fear (usually), but at night the day's tension peaked; our nerves shook as we listened to the local news broadcasts. Once we were out speaking to and comforting the villagers again, we didn't think of those details. One day we couldn't find people to talk with, and we walked from hut to hut. Our "stick" had unobtrusively surrounded the area within a mile, but our two immediate escorts had to stay five hundred yards behind so as not to intimidate the people. As we started our walk into the first village, one escort told us, "If you meet any bold young men wearing levis, leave quickly. You realize of course that you can be shot in a matter of seconds and we may arrive too late." We went off whistling the song from *The King and I*, "Whenever I Feel Afraid."

Our hearts were in our throats most of the time and tears constantly lived just behind our eyes because of the incredible suffering we saw. The situation of the people was helpless and hopeless. All day we heard stories of their suffering: the wife who was made to kill her husband. The son who was tortured and made to ax his father. Tales of the terrorists who interrogated and tortured all night, ruthlessly killing the "sell-outs." The army who followed hot on their heels, interrogating and torturing the terrorist collaborators during the day.

If the villages fed the terrorists, they were shot by the army as terrorist collaborators; however, if they refused to feed the terrorists, they were shot by them. The village folk are beautiful, beautiful people, their spirits somehow camouflaged by years of suffering. Their faces reflect their lives of suffering. A common story is that of a mother with one son who joins the army, and another son who becomes a terrorist.

People in villages had been indoctrinated for years. What they saw and heard became facts of life. There was no other way to think; they had not seen a newspaper or heard a radio broadcast, and they simply did not know the reality. No one who spoke about anything different had come for years. Busses no longer came from the main city. Church workers and medical professionals had all been killed or chased away years ago.

That is why the people could not believe their eyes to see us out there! After we spoke in one area, a woman came up to me crying in gratitude. She took my hand in both of hers and put them on her heart saying, "I heard your heart speak." Such moments made all the danger worthwhile. We received courage and encouragement from Heavenly Father. We felt Heavenly Father with us all the way, and we were proud to be on the front line of all front lines.



At night we stayed in the army camp hearing gory stories of, for example, how someone's best friend was killed by an explosion before his eyes. The talk was non-stop until all of us crawled into bed from sheer exhaustion. People accepted us as confidants and poured out their hearts. These are the times I cannot forget.

But I will also never forget the nights in the base camp. Soldiers with a beer in one hand, slightly drunk, sang Unification Church songs which we taught them. One soldier sobbed, and asked me if Jesus would hold it against him for loving to kill.

We reported our activities of the day to the officers each night. We tried to express the attitudes of the tribal people whom they lived with, but knew nothing about. We learned more about the bush people in three days than they had in ten years,

mainly because we approached the people with mutual respect and trust.

We learned of war; we learned of the fierceness of our enemy, communism. We learned that there is basic bravery and valor within people. We were nicknamed "the God-squad." On the last night of our mission in the bush, we pulled into the base camp for the final time. We were asked to attend a briefing of 300 men. On the way I prayed, "Well, this is our last chance, Heavenly Father. I want to speak the truth. I am tired of mincing words. I just want to give it straight; please let them be able to receive it!" We were taken aback, because we were not led before 300 men, but to a conference room of 20 to 25 white [African] army officers. The man in charge said, "Well, you've got the floor." I took it and preached a sermon on, "The Measure You Give is the Measure You Receive." I told them because they were in uniform, it automatically put them at a disadvantage with the people. If they wanted to speak to the people, they were wasting their time and breath unless they could manage to muster true compassion, and try for a moment to put themselves completely in the shoes of the people.

My counterpart told them if they were willing to admit they were wrong and had made mistakes, then maybe the people would listen. The men were shocked. I spoke at length on attitude and mutual respect. They felt guilty, and I think they began to understand. It was a fitting culmination to our mission and a victorious condition that Heavenly Father could use.