

CHILDREN IN THE LION'S DEN

By Paul Estabrooks



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PLEASE NOTE:

Children in the Lion's Den was published in 2006, and all information correct at time of publishing.

While some statistics have since changed, worsened or improved slightly, all stories in this booklet are still relevant and truthful. It is a true depiction of the persecution that millions of Christians around the world still face today.

Please visit www.opendoors.org.za for up-to-date statistics, testimonies or more information about Christian persecution and Open Doors.

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Children are the ultimate silent majority. Though they make up nearly half of the human family, they bear far more than their share of the world's misery. Society's ills spiral downward and inflict their cruelest blows on our vulnerable little ones. In the last decade, more children have died in our global battles than soldiers. Every day, 35,000 of these precious young lives are snuffed out by preventable causes because we lack the heart and courage to fight on their behalf. Every day! Without influence, power or options, they suffer silently, their tears and fears known only to God.

**- Wesley Stafford
Compassion International**

THE FOUR-FOURTEEN WINDOW

The biggest little mission field in the world!

“Children are a gift from God; they are his reward,” the psalmist exulted. Yet around our globe today, millions of innocent children are at risk physically and spiritually. This chapter is not easy reading. Persevere through it and you will be encouraged at what follows.

Children, defined as those under the age of 15, comprise over one third of the earth’s population and over one half of the population of Asia. In China alone there are an estimated 500 million children. Every hour 3,000 babies are born in China in spite of one child per family policies. My strongest memory-image of children in that country is a little boy digging an irrigation trench with a huge man-sized shovel that is so big he can hardly manipulate it. This image is also the plight of many children in their daily living.

11-year-old Xia Hui died of cerebral shortage of oxygen when his father tied a rope around his waist and hung him from the ceiling after discovering that the boy had been playing truant from school.

Hu Dandan is a three-year-old boy from Jiangsu province, was kicked to death by his father because he could not remember a verse from a poem his father was helping him memorize.

According to one official Chinese newspaper, the majority of seven and eight-year-old Chinese children are beaten by their parents when they bring home bad grades.

The documentary, *The Dying Rooms*, was first broadcast in June 1995, exposing the horrific neglect which children in state orphanages are subjected to in the People's Republic of China. This film covered orphanages in five Chinese provinces and was the product of a covert investigation by a British film crew. The film team found baby girls tied to their chairs, legs spread over makeshift potties. Babies swaddled five to a cot were left unattended with a bottle of gruel perched precariously in their mouths.

In one orphanage, they found a baby girl about 18 months old, lying in a room by herself. She was fighting for breath, her eyes covered in mucous, her lips parched, her skin stretched tautly over her emaciated body. For several days she lay in her room, starving and in severe pain. No attempt was made to feed her or treat her for her medical condition and she died a slow painful death.

“Every baby in the orphanage was a girl,” wrote the film's director. “The only boys were mentally or physically disabled.” In some of the orphanages, death rates are as high as 20%.

China is by no means the only country where child abuse and neglect is rampant. Luz Neida Perez is a 13-year-old girl in the rural Colombian town of Planeta Rica. Her father sold her to a 61-year-old man in the community in order to buy medicine to help his ailing wife. The girl was sold into virtual slavery for, slightly more than the going rate for a mule.

Theresa is 12 years old. She can be purchased for \$50. If her fate is anything like that of tens of thousands of black Africans who have become chattel in Sudan's civil war, Theresa has been sold and bought. She is likely serving a master somewhere in northern Sudan, Libya or the Persian Gulf. If she was selected as a concubine, she will have been genitally mutilated to be acceptable in her master's culture and then she will have been bred.

In Samara, a city on the Volga in Russia, Sasha and Igor set up their stall at seven in the morning. There's stiff adult competition in the computer games end of the market, and unless they're early, they can't compete. At 14, they run their own stall and keep the profits. A few stalls along, Andrei isn't so lucky; he works for a 16-year-old who pays him 50 cents a day. But

Andrei hasn't much choice. "My mother works in a bread factory, she doesn't make enough money so I have to work as well," he said.

A recent report says that of the 28 million children in Russia, six million are not enrolled at school but are forced to work to feed themselves or their families as the country suffers the consequences of economic collapse.

As in any Russian city, by mid morning Samara's churches and cemeteries are busy - they're the traditional begging grounds for war veterans and widows. These days however the professional beggars are getting much younger.

11 and nine-year-old Masha and Misha say they have to beg since their parents are ill. 14-year-old Vlodya says "Of course my parents know I'm here. They told me to come!"

Estimates vary widely concerning the total number of children living on the streets in the Russian Federation, but most people agree that they number at least one million. In Chita, Siberia alone, where winter temperatures can sink as low as -40 degrees, there are at least 1,000 street children. They sleep under cardboard boxes in the market square, in the garbage cellars of apartment blocks, or underground on the pipes that carry heating from the centrally controlled power stations right across the city. Most of these children are "social orphans", who have run away from home because their alcoholic parents beat them, or refuse to let them into the apartments until they bring some food with them.

A candid article in the official Vietnam News said an inquiry by police and local authorities in Bac Can province, north of Hanoi, had found 82 children being used as cheap labour in 30 mines. The newspaper said teenagers aged between 13 and 17 were working in dangerous and filthy conditions, each hauling as much as four tons of rubble out of the mines every day. Many of the children were coughing blood due to the arduous work, and were locked up at night by mine owners, who feared that their cheap labour force would escape.

A young girl in rural Nepal begins her day very early by taking care of the animals before working all day in the rice paddies and then evening care of the animals. She will work over 12 of her 14 waking hours.

An estimated 250,000 children are combatants in Third World conflicts around the globe. Many are shorter than the weapons they carry. In a tribal area of Burma, 12-year-old twin brothers, Luther and John Htoo, are unquestioned leaders of a jungle military base called "God's Army." They are fighting against the Burmese government for Karen autonomy. The adults believe the boys offer divine protection.

In Cambodia, approximately 40 percent of all prostitutes are children. Even items on the Internet advertise that in Cambodia "a six-year-old is available for US\$3." Many child prostitutes are in brothels against their will. Some are even supplied by parents for badly needed money. In other cases, the children are kidnapped and then sold to brothels where they are forced to serve up to ten customers a night.

Five-year-old Andreas lives in Mozambique. Witchdoctors cured his father's illness and he decided to donate his son to them. This meant Andreas' life belonged to the witchdoctor and he would end up a witchdoctor too. As a sign of his devotion to the Amandlose (ancestors of Satan) he wears a charm around his neck.

Usually girls are donated, but if a family does not have any girls, a boy is given instead. In the case of a girl, she later becomes the wife of the witchdoctor. The boy ends up working for the witchdoctor.

The projected youngest countries of the world by the year 2010 are: Palestine, Uganda, Oman, Somalia, Niger and Yemen. Over 46% of the populations of each of these countries will likely be under the age of 15.

Countries with the largest numbers of children by the year 2010 (in descending order) are: India, China, Pakistan, Nigeria, Indonesia, USA, Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia and Iran. Over half of the world's children will live in these ten countries.

Here are some other sobering statistics about present conditions to consider:

- 40 million children are aborted every year in the world. (United Nations)
- 10.5 million children under age five die each year. Two thirds are preventable. (UNICEF)
- 5.6 million children die per year of malnutrition and starvation daily. (UNICEF)
- At least 2 million children die annually because they have not been immunized against preventable diseases. (Children At Risk [CAR])
- As of 2005, 2.3 million children are infected with the AIDS virus and an estimated 15 million have lost at least one parent because of AIDS. (UNICEF)
- South of the Sahara in Africa, AIDS has orphaned 12 million children under 15 years of age. (UNICEF)
- Over 50 million children annually are unregistered—beginning life with no identity. (UNICEF)
- At least 1.8 million children are sexually exploited—many girls as prostitutes. (UNICEF)
- 130 million girls are affected by female genital mutilation/cutting. (UNICEF)
- There are over 100 million street children. (CAR)
- 246 million children are ensnared in child labour. (UNICEF)
- More than 2 million children have been killed in wars worldwide in the past decade. Over 6 million have been disabled, maimed, blinded and brain damaged, and more than 20 million children have lost their homes in this period and more than 1 million orphaned. (UNICEF)
- The average American 13-year-old has witnessed 8,000 murders and more than 100,000 other acts of violence on TV. This is based on the average child watching three hours of television a day. (American Psychological Association)
- 750,000 British children have no contact with their fathers following the breakdown of marital relationships. (Family Policies Study Centre, Survey of Lone Parents)

BUT...

- Children are important to God. Children are mentioned 1, 957 times in the Bible.
- Children are an enormous People Group. They comprise 1.8 billion (i.e. 1/3) of the world's population. They are the largest of all People Groups.
- Children are a forgotten People Group - Mission strategists tend to only target the 10/40 Window.
- Children are a suffering People Group. In the past decade 2 million were killed in war; 4.5 million were left disabled.
- Children are a receptive People Group. 60 - 85% of Christians in North America make a decision for Christ between the ages 4 and 14 years. This age group makes up 25% of the Christian church today.

Because of this, some missiologists with a heart and burden for the world's children have coined a new term for them called **THE 4/14 WINDOW**, indicating a focus on those between the ages of four and 14 who are highly susceptible to the best and worst in today's world. In too many places, the 4/14 window is dirty, broken, and often seems painted shut. This window of opportunity is also referred to as **the biggest little mission field in the world!**

Children from families of the Suffering Church also suffer for reasons of faith—much like their parents.

In a simple village school in central Vietnam, a class of 12-year-old children were talking excitedly about a teacher who had come to their village, and with some people from a nearby church had organized the most interesting story-telling times they had ever heard. They had learned about Jesus and some of the children had decided to become Christians.

These children were telling others about their discovery with such enthusiasm that it attracted attention. One of the teachers reported this "dangerous" activity to the local security police. The police arrived at the school, gathered the offending children together and told them that they must cease and desist from talking about this "foreign superstition".

Subdued for a couple of days, the children soon resumed their "Jesus" talk. It wasn't long before the police again showed up at school and picked out the three "ringleaders." These children were taken to a police camp and held incommunicado for an entire week! Pleas by their very concerned parents fell on deaf ears!

When the children eventually were released, they told harrowing stories of their treatment. For being enthusiastic in their talk about their new faith, they were interrogated for hours about the identity of the teacher who had told them the stories, and lectured to about the stupidity of the "superstitions" they had believed. They were deprived of food and water for long periods of time. The 12-year-old boy who was the strongest and most resistant to the questioning was taken into the bathroom where his head was held under water until he almost drowned.

Though unsatisfied with the limited amount of information they got from the children, the police eventually released them to their families and told them that because they persisted in the religious faith, they would never be permitted to attend the public school again.

In Pakistan, Khushi Masih and his wife lost their three daughters ages 11 to 15. The family's Muslim landlords forcibly took the three sisters from their one-room rented home in Rawalpindi. When Khushi Masih tried to register a case with the police to recover his daughters, he was told they had converted to Islam and could no longer stay with their Christian parents. Masih's lawyer said, "Probably the abductors wanted these girls for illicit relations but they are using religion just to get custody."

And children are also included in that great company of Christian martyrs. In early 1999, Christians on the spice island of Ambon, Indonesia were holding a children's camp. An extremist Muslim mob approached the camp with their machetes waving.

The entire camp was made to stand out in the playground. One 15-year-old boy, Roy Pontoh, was singled out. The Muslim extremists asked him, "Who are you?" He replied, to gasps of amazement from all who watched, "I am a soldier of Jesus Christ." His left arm was then chopped off in a single stroke of a machete.

His continuing responses of love and devotion to Jesus enraged the mob further, who sliced his stomach so that his intestines gushed out. A third time they asked him, "Who are you?" and he gasped his final words on earth, "I am a soldier of Jesus Christ." At that he was beheaded, and his body thrown into a gutter. His younger brother witnessed the martyrdom, and ran away.

In the face of these horrifying and harrowing experiences, there are many faith-building stories that come from Christian children who suffer for their faith. Some great examples of witnessing to the faith as well! This is the focus of this little booklet along with how we can minister effectively to these little ones in restricted areas.

Sometimes a thunderbolt will shoot from a clear sky; and sometimes, into the midst of a peaceful family – without warning of gathered storm above or slightest tremble of earthquake beneath – will fall a terrible fact, and from that moment everything is changed. The air is thick with cloud, and cannot weep itself clear. There may come a gorgeous sunset, though.

- George Macdonald

STORY ONE: BORN AGAIN

Manut Malang of Southern Sudan

Twelve-year-old Manut's sleep was restless. As he tried to roll over he automatically clutched at his stomach to try and relieve the pain. He quickly came awake and wondered which was worse, the pain from the bruises and open sores all over his beaten body or those constant gnawing hunger pangs. He could never get used to the ankle shackles, but he no longer noticed the horrible odour of the latrines he and his fellow-slaves were forced to sleep beside.

"Oh God, I want to go home. Please! Please help me. And please take care of my sister Akuac wherever she is."

In the darkness a horse suddenly whinnied. Manut's pulse began to gallop as fear coursed through his hurting and bruised body. Every time he heard the sound of a horse, he was forced to relive his most terrible nightmare.

He lay perspiring in the darkness looking up at the stars. The God whom he loved and served seemed so far away – just like those twinkling stars. As his pulse returned to normal, his mind could not help continuing to race.

The sound of galloping horses' hooves filled his memory and the fear returned. He remembered so clearly flinging down his primitive hoe and running at full speed with his older sister and younger brothers as at least 300 horses raced through their village of Tuic in the Bahr el Ghazal region of southern Sudan.

That fateful day was now four long years ago. The Arab riders dressed in military uniforms seemed to be shooting at every man in the village. Manut turned and watched in horror as his own father fell to the ground and immediately died from a gunshot wound to the head.

He ran even harder and faster. His heart was thumping like it would jump right out of his chest. Again came the sound of pounding horses' hooves. This time as he turned his head, he saw four horses and they were gaining on him quickly.

Manut screamed as he felt a rope go around his neck and lift him right off his feet. When he regained consciousness he was strapped and tied to the back of one of those horses now trotting back through the village. The way the Arab rider was yelling at him, he was sure they would kill him as they had his father.

Suddenly his stomach sickened as he saw bodies hanging from the few trees in the village. They had no arms and no legs. His eyes frantically searched to find his mother but he did not see her anywhere. What he did see was his older sister Akuac tied in a human chain with the other young girls. They were being led away by another horseman. Manut began to cry but no sound came from his mouth – just tears coursing down his young black face. A sharp pain penetrated his veins right to his brain!

Again the rider of his horse cursed at him and slapped him with an order to dismount. Manut slowly slid down the back of the horse, as the ropes were untied around him. But immediately someone else roughly grabbed him and pushed him into the line of other boys from the village and tied his wrists to their chain rope. They were forced to walk.

Manut knew the route they were taking to the north but after one day of walking, everything was strange and new. His stomach ached from lack of food. Although his bare feet were strong and trained for the hard dry ground, today they were fiery with pain from the long distance and several wounds. But the journey did not stop. He walked for what seemed an eternity. Only later would he learn that this forced march lasted eight days – eight exhausting days.

Manut could not help but cry whenever he remembered his parents, especially his father. He would never forget the love and faith his dad exhibited in their family. He had been a Christian since a young boy himself, like most of the men in their village. His Dad was the one who prayed with Manut to receive Jesus into his heart earlier that year. He taught Manut to pray regularly and always tell the Lord what was on his heart.

“Lord be with Mama right now and help her I pray. And please protect my brothers and especially Akuac. Help her to trust you wherever she is right now. And Lord, please move the hearts of my captors to give me some food and rest...or take away my hunger pains and the aches in my feet.”

It was as if the Arab slave traders had heard him. Hours before sunset on this day five of the journey, they benevolently stopped and set up camp early. That night he was given a light meal of leftover beans and corn. Manut thanked God silently.

The horse neighed again and awoke Manut from his trance-like memories. This time his master’s three dogs began barking.

“Lord, why am I treated far worse than those dogs?”

His face was wet with tears. And he prayed silently – again!

“Mohammed, wake up! It’s prayer time! Santino, Festus, Hussein, you too!” a demanding voice called into the darkness. Manut hated his new name and the enforced rules of Islam placed upon him. But he obediently got up with the others, threw on his red jallabia, a one-piece cloth identifying slaves, and walked toward the mud prayer house. The first day his new owner demanded he join in Muslim prayers. But he had objected and refused. The resultant beating he received was so severe it was three days before he could walk again. He still had the scars to show for it.

The men and boys bowed on the prayer mats and repeated together their memorized Koranic prayers. Manut joined them but in his heart he was pleading with God to forgive him for this outward complicity and to help him bear another day of pain and hunger – but most of all, to somehow escape! He was thankful to the Lord, however, that unlike some of his village friends, he was not forced to train for military service.

After a small breakfast of just dried root crops, he was herded off to the fields again where he and the other 700 or so slave boys cultivated the fields and cared for the large herds of cattle. But the cattle were not faring well at the moment because of the serious drought conditions.

That morning turned out to be very different. As they finished their early morning work, 200 of the slave boys were taken back to the main camp centre. Manut was among them. Soon he realized that they were setting off on another trek, southwards this time to find some water for the cattle. Manut’s spirits rose as he thought of the southlands again.

On night five of the cattle drive south, he made his calculated move. When the night watchman was sleeping, Manut slipped out of his rope shackles and quietly stole out of the camp. He hobbled through the darkness on his weak, skinny legs with the help of his walking stick as fast as he could in a southeastern direction. Even though his stomach still ached, the hope of finding his mother and family was enough to drive him forward. During the day he rested in the bush and each night he trekked farther and farther south. As he hobbled along, he told himself over and over, *“I am NOT Mohammed. I am Manut. I belong to Jesus!”*

When at last he finally reached his village he was shocked. Every home had been burned to the ground and no one was around anywhere. The whole community had been razed. His heart sank in desperation.

“Oh Lord! Help me find my mother if she is still alive.”

Manut sat on the ground near his childhood home and again tears flowed freely from his eyes as he relived the last memory of his father and mother and brothers and older sister.

“Where would Mother go?”

Like a loud voice from the sky came the thundering directive to his mind, *“Go to your Uncle Await’s home in Aweil!”*

Manut grimaced as he thought of another three-day trek to the west. What if he ran into the cattle drive of his slave owner? They would surely be looking for him.

Knowing his village, he at least salvaged some hidden root crops to help keep the hunger pangs at bay. With a prayer he set off westward.

On the third night he saw the smoke of the cooking fire billowing above the village of Aweil. His heart was pounding again as he approached the hut of his Uncle Await.

A scream of delight pierced the air. It was his mother running toward him and behind her were his three younger brothers. Manut also began to run. The reunion was a teary but joyful one.

But one surprise was the little three-year-old girl trailing behind his brothers.

“One of the soldiers forced himself on me the day you were abducted,” she haltingly muttered. “I named her after your older sister, Akuac.” Tears came to his mother’s eyes as she stammered on, “I miss her so much!”

After telling his long story of captivity and escape, the discussion quickly turned to his older sister Akuac. No one had heard anything from her or about her, but his mother, Abuong, still prayed for her every day. She mentioned to him that about once a month North Sudan Arab traders were bringing back to the marketplace some of their slaves originally captured from the south. The going rate for a young girl to be redeemed was five cows.

“Lord, please look after my sister Akuac. If possible, let me redeem her.”

Manut prayed and worked hard. His whole family did! With help from his Uncle Await, and his cow-herding skills developed under slavery in the north, he soon was able to develop a small herd of his own. But the first cows had to be sold for materials to build his mother and brothers their own hut. In one year’s time Manut was proudly living in his own home with mother and brothers. They all continued to work very hard.

By the time another year rolled around, Manut had five cows. Every month he would go to market and watch from a distance the slave traders selling their slaves. His greatest fear was being abducted again.

On the fifth month of going to market, Manut saw a larger number of slave girls. He strained to see if he could recognize his sister but he realized it had been six years since he saw her last. She was a small girl at that time.

One of the slave girls impressed him though. She was tall but seemed to have the same spirit as Akuac. His hopes were dashed as he saw a very young boy clinging to her hand.

But something drove him to get closer. Soon he could see the straight square teeth he remembered about her so well.

“Akuac?”

The girl smiled and waved.

“Manut?”

He rushed to the slave trader completely forgetting the personal risk he was taking.

“How much for that girl? She’s my sister!” he yelled.

“Five cows,” the trader answered with a smirk. “But you need three more cows for her son!”

“So that’s it. He is her son. Then I’m an uncle!”

“OK, wait for me to get them,” Manut replied. And he rushed off home. Eight cows were all they had including Uncle Await’s. It was worth the loss of them all to have his sister back.

“Mother! Mother,” he yelled excitedly. “Akuac is at the market!”

Abuong rushed to the market with tears flowing down her cheeks. In just a matter of minutes the transaction was completed and the family members were joyfully reunited.

Akuac quickly shared the horrors of her six years away as they walked home. She was sold to a northern Arab who made her wash clothes, haul water, fetch firewood, and help with cooking. She survived on table scraps and slept in the kitchen. She was very badly treated. Manut felt the pain as his own as he watched her reveal the scars.

“He gave me a Muslim name and forced me to take part in Muslim rituals, even though I am a Christian,” she continued. “When I refused, I was harshly beaten. And when my master’s wife went to market or left the home for any reason, he...” Akuac lowered her eyes.

“What is my grandson’s name?” asked Abuong.

“I named him Manut,” Akuac smilingly replied.

That night after their meagre meal, Abuong still sobbing with joy said to her two older children Akuac and Manut, **“It’s like you both have been born again!”**

* This story of Manut and Akuac is a “composite” story with all details being true experiences but of several different Sudanese children.

STORY TWO: THE ULTIMATUM

Ah Yee of China

Teacher Wang was getting angrier and angrier. Her class of thirteen-year-olds held their breath when Miss Wang went into one of her tirades. Ah Yee looked at the floor and prayed that this would soon pass without another confrontation.

“And I’ve learned that some of you are regularly attending Christian meetings,” Miss Wang screamed. “You will have a bleak future if you continue to be Christians! Anyway, there is no God!”

“You all know it is illegal to be instructed in religion in this country until you are eighteen. And you know that if you are found out, the school will close its doors on you. When you grow up you will never get a good job if you are a Christian!”

“Ming Su. Are you still attending these Christian children’s meetings?” Her voice was cracking with animosity.

“Yes, teacher Wang,” Ming Su answered boldly. “I am a Christian and I always will follow the ways of Jesus!”

In a fit of rage, she grabbed him by his hair and flung him against the wall. He fell in a crumpled heap to the floor. Everyone gasped.

“I warn you all,” teacher Wang continued screaming, “If you do not stop attending these Bible classes, you will meet the same fate and be expelled from this school. And you won’t be able to go to any other school!”

Fear filled Ah Yee’s heart as she accidentally made eye contact with Miss Wong.

“Ah Yee, are you prepared for the math exam tomorrow? And don’t forget it’s your turn to lead the class field trip to the city zoo next week. Are you working on your lecture about the development of the human species?”

Ah Yee nodded without smiling. Her heart sank as she thought about explaining the signs outside the monkey cages in the zoo that state: “*Humankind is descended from species similar to these!*”

As the bell rang, Miss Wong concluded, “Tomorrow I want to know who of you are continuing to go to Christian meetings. You are going to have to choose between these Bible classes or expulsion from school.”

Ah Yee breathed a sigh of relief and sent a quick prayer of thanks to the Lord that she had at least one more day before having a confrontation with teacher Wong.

The class all helped Ming Su get himself together off the floor and they slowly headed to their homes.

At dinner Ah Yee told her parents what had happened in school that day. Her mother was a long-time Bible Woman leading the house fellowship where some of the local Christians worshipped and where the children’s Sunday school classes were held.

Her mother asked, “Ah Yee, did you study your math after school?”

Ah Yee nodded. “But I didn’t have any time to hand copy any song sheets for tonight’s meeting.”

“That’s fine. Let’s pray that you’ll do excellently in the math exam tomorrow and that maybe Miss Wong will forget her ultimatum.”

They bowed and talked passionately to the Lord of Heaven and Earth for wisdom. Ah Yee pleaded with her Heavenly Father that He would help her get good grades so her teacher could

not blame Bible classes for her poor performance. But she added that if it came to a decision, she wanted strength to follow Jesus.

After dinner they went to the nearby home where tonight's fellowship meeting was held. Ah Yee played in the front yard with the other Christian children in order to alert their parents, as usual, should a policeman or stranger approach. Then their parents would immediately stop worshipping.

Inside the meeting room she could hear the adults discussing together the altercation at school that day. Some, fearing that their children would lose the only opportunity to study, felt they should stop the children's Bible classes and just do the usual private tutoring at home. Ming Su's parents agreed. There was much animated discussion.

The next day began like most school days. When the bell rang, the children all gathered in the playground and stood in serried rank. For a good 15 minutes they chanted the words: "I love the Communist Party! I love the Communist Party!" over and over again.

Ah Yee was rarely enthused by these daily exercises but today her mind was only on that math exam. When the moment arrived, she answered the first four questions without any problem. But her mind suddenly drew a blank when she arrived at the fifth question. She closed her eyes and silently pleaded for God's help. When she opened her eyes, the answer seemed so simple.

But even though Ah Yee achieved a high grade in the exam, teacher Wong still demanded that she stop going to the Bible classes.

After school an angry Miss Wong gave her the ultimatum. "Ah Yee, you must choose between quitting Sunday school classes or leaving school!"

Ah Yee quickly prayed for wisdom. Finally, she decided that she would cease her studies and quietly said her good-byes to teacher Wong.

Later while she and her mother attended an Open Doors' training seminar, Ah Yee explained, **"I am going to spend the rest of my life teaching children in China about Jesus Christ."**

STORY THREE: SONGS IN THE NIGHT

Miguel Sanchez of Cuba

Nine-year-old Miguel woke up suddenly. In his heart he knew something was wrong. It was still dark. What was going on? He could hear boots walking on the floor outside the bedroom he shared with his younger brother Manuel. As they passed by his door, he counted, one, two, three, four, five, six...six pairs of boots tromped past.

“Don’t wake up the children,” he heard a demanding masculine voice bark at his mother. “We’re just taking him for questioning. He may be back tonight...or,” the voice continued haltingly, “you may never see him again!”

In addition to that sudden fear came pain to Miguel’s heart. Now he could hear his normally strong mother weeping outside his room. In a few short seconds the two boys were out of bed and in the hall hugging their mother, joining in her tears.

“Why are they taking Daddy away?” Miguel asked rhetorically. In his heart he knew why. For years his father, Pastor Eusebio had warned his family that the Bible says, “We are not only given the joy of believing in Jesus, but also the joy of suffering for him.”

Pastor Eusebio had already served the Lord for fifteen years in his native land of Cuba. But many things had changed over these years. The regime of Fidel Castro soon declared its loyalty to Marxism-Leninism. From this point in Cuba’s history, the churches and pastors on the island knew that the future would be a time of suffering if they would not join the socio-political and spiritual agenda of the revolutionary leaders. One by one evangelical pastors were interrogated and many sent to prison for extended sentences.

The ringing of the telephone broke up the emotional huddle of mother and sons. Miguel stared at his mother’s face to watch for any reaction as she listened to the voice on the other end of the line. He soon knew the message was not encouraging.

“Other pastors were also arrested last night and are being detained,” his mother reported after finishing the call. Again the tears rolled down her soft face. This event was the first time Miguel had ever seen his mother cry. His own heart felt like it was breaking in half. Neither he nor Manuel planned to go to school today.

Some government agents were still in the house searching for any clues that they could use against Pastor Eusebio. Their frantic search continued until noon when they finally gave up and left.

Mother quickly organized an early afternoon prayer meeting with some Christian friends and neighbours. As they prayed and sang, everyone’s spirits were lifted.

“They did say he might be back tonight,” she reminded the boys. Miguel prayed all day with great faith and expectation that his daddy would come home that night. This kept him buoyed for the rest of the day with a great sense of hope. But as the night hours rolled around again, there was no word or sound of his father. Miguel fell asleep on the kitchen table waiting.

He was so distraught he could not attend school for the rest of the week. Miguel impatiently counted the days as they slowly crawled by. One, two three, four days! No word from or about his father!

“Lord, please take good care of my daddy. And please bring him safely home!” he prayed repeatedly. He shuddered as he recalled the voices out in the hall that dreadful night. “You may never see him again!” But Miguel remembered the many times he had prayed with his parents for bread – even pencils for school – and how God had answered.

Sunday morning arrived and the boys prepared to attend church with their mother who would lead the service in father's absence. The majority of the morning service was another prayer time for the pastor.

"God keep him safe," they prayed. "And give him the right words to speak when questioned as well as many opportunities to witness to your goodness and love!" Some of the congregation had already been in prison for their faith and others had relatives currently in the Cuban jail system. But above all they prayed for the release and safe return of their beloved Pastor Eusebio. Miguel joined in the singing, as usual, only this time the lyrics penetrated his being as never before: "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him."

Miguel will never forget how his emotions changed that afternoon. As if in direct answer to the prayers of that morning service, Pastor Eusebio walked in the door of their small home. Although their dad was unkempt and foul smelling, he still had his trademark constant smile. The boys hugged him with great joy and sat quietly for the rest of the day to hear the report of God's answer to prayer during five days of difficult and cruel interrogation.

As Miguel lay in bed that night thanking God for the safe return of his father, a thought kept returning over and over. "*When and how will I suffer for Jesus someday?*"

This question was a driving force for the next three years of Miguel's young life. He realized that memorizing scripture and gospel songs and hymns would prepare him for that possibility.

At the end of sixth grade came an opportunity most Cuban children are ecstatic about – two weeks of summer camp at the beach. Miguel was not anticipating this at all because he knew it was a communist youth league camp. No doubt he would be asked many questions about his faith. He was right.

"Do your parents force you to go to church?" was the most repeated question asked everyday.

"No, I go because I want to," Miguel boldly replied each time. "I love to sing and worship Jesus, my Lord!"

Every morning the campers were subjected to sessions where they viewed scenarios of USA soldiers killing innocent people in Vietnam, Korea and the Middle East. For the first time in his life, Miguel felt a sense of helplessness. This was the first occasion when Mom and Dad weren't around to help him make judgements and Christian responses to the events that filled his young life.

Repeatedly he said to himself, "*I don't like what is going on here. I shouldn't be here!*"

Miguel had never felt so sad and unhappy. The first night he cried himself to sleep. He prayed, "*Lord Jesus. I really want to go home!*"

But he also knew that when he was unhappy, Christian music could lift his spirits. The next day, he began humming and singing his favorite songs. One was "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him." Another was "I never feel lonely." Gradually Miguel's sadness lifted as the sense of angelic presence flooded his heart.

A few days later at siesta time, one of his fellow campers yelled, "Heh Miguel! Get out of your bunk. Your grandma is comin' down the street!"

Miguel could not believe his eyes. It was his grandmother indeed! She had sensed in her spirit that he was not happy and came to visit on the worker's bus. What a joy her visit brought! A familiar face from home!

After observing the camp setting and the propaganda to which the children were subjected, Grandmother went back and told Miguel's parents to go and bring him home.

What a relief for Miguel to see his parents again. And after just one week of camp, his prayer was answered. He was allowed to leave and return home.

Today Miguel continues to sing. His favorite song is: “**When trials and problems come, lift your hands and sing ‘Allelujah’!**”

STORY FOUR: WHO IS MY REAL FATHER?

Salwa and Fatima from the Middle East

Twelve-year-old Salwa ran as fast as her legs could move. “Hurry, we must go faster,” burst out her mother seemingly in a state of panic. Salwa had a tight grip on her mother’s left hand. On the other side, her half sister, Fatima, was hanging on to mother’s right hand. The three ran as though an angry crowd was chasing them through the streets of the city. That was not the case, yet the three knew they could be in grave danger.

Salwa’s legs felt like they would fall off and her breathing was now coming only in gasps. Looking back over her shoulder Mother shouted, “Just a little further girls.”

“But mother, I can’t breathe anymore,” Salwa wheezed. She broke into a major coughing spell. Sensing that danger may not be so imminent, the mother pulled the girls around the next corner and the three hid in a small alleyway. When they could easily talk again, mother said, “We must hurry. I don’t want to ever be separated from you again.”

Lack of proper nutrition and exercise had weaken the two girls so much their mother realized it would be months before their little bodies would be normal—not to speak of their emotions.

“I don’t ever want to be separated from you again either, Mother,” said Salwa softly. “Why is father so cruel? Why does he hate us?”

“Your father doesn’t hate you,” her mother gently replied. “He just thinks that women have no value.”

“But why Mother?”

Salwa’s mother, Shaza, ignored the direct question but internally began to relive her personal experiences as they hurried along together. She had married the girl’s Muslim father, Muhammad, as his only wife—at least that’s what he promised. But soon he had added Serena as wife number two and then later a very young lady as wife number three.

Serena was the first to produce a child but Muhammad was very disappointed because it was a girl. They named her Fatima. Two years later Shaza delivered her first born—again a girl they named Salwa.

The big change came when Shaza was invited to a home of friends she had met at the market when shopping. She loved their buoyant, joyful outlook on life and their optimistic spirit. So she did not hesitate to accept their hospitable invitation. What surprised her was the fact they openly admitted to being followers of the prophet Isa (Jesus). They gave her an Injil (New Testament) to read which she did very secretly at home. She knew Muhammad would be extremely angry if he knew what she was doing. But she was so drawn to Isa. Her love for him grew stronger and stronger as she read the Injil and resonated with his teachings. The big issue though was that he repeatedly claimed in the Injil to be the Son of God and the only way to God. How could this be?

As her friends gently explained the gospel to her, it found fertile soil. She responded wholeheartedly and very soon requested to be baptized. The difference in her life at home prompted Serena to begin questioning what had changed her. Shaza also took Serena with her to the house fellowship meetings and Serena too gave her life to Jesus and was baptized.

Wife number three was neither interested nor cooperative. She suspected that the other two wives were involved in something of which Muhammad would not approve.

Shaza shuddered as she remembered the day of confrontation. Muhammad had discovered an Injil in the house—tipped off by envious wife number three who was still barren. By this time Salwa was four years old and Fatima was six.

Shaza tried to block from her memory the screaming of Muhammad when he discovered two of his wives were secret Christians! “I divorce you, I divorce you, I divorce you” he yelled at the top of his lungs. In the heat of his anger he physically threw their personal belongings out on the street in front of the house. Tears flowed down her cheeks as she remembered the disgrace this brought on them—not to mention the difficult challenge for the two women to find adequate housing that night.

Mohammad was going to make sure that Fatima and Salwa would have no more contact with their mothers so he locked them in their bedroom. Days turned into months. Months turned into years. Their food was very inadequate and poor. They were never allowed to leave the room to play with other children or go to school. They were just girls whose mothers had become apostate. Many nights the sisters cried themselves to sleep.

Eight long years passed before Shaza saw her opportunity for a daring rescue. And now she was whisking the two girls through the city to the small, humble home she shared with Serena.

That night after a healthy, nutritious dinner, Shaza took a deep breath and began to answer the girls’ penetrating questions. *Why is father so cruel? Why does he hate us?*

“We must be very careful, girls, when we go outside. Fortunately we can cover ourselves with our *shadors*. I suggest you always cover your face as much as possible too. Your father does not really hate you. He is angry with your mothers because we are now followers of Isa. From now on God will be your father. He loves you very much. He will never mistreat you. He loves us so much he sent his Son, Isa, to earth to die for our sin. God is your *real* father!

After months of good food and friends, Salwa and Fatima began to blossom. Both of them became committed followers of Jesus. Their earthly father never did try and find them. Though they did not begin school until they were fourteen and twelve, seven years later they were both university students.

Salwa and Fatima know their heavenly father sincerely loves them and they are blossoming in his love. They worship him with their mothers in a secret house church fellowship in their home.

The names of this story have been changed for security reasons.

STORY FIVE: ONE SINGLE NIGHT OF TERROR

Octavia Mendez Diaz of Southern Mexico

Fourteen-year-old Octavia and her two young sisters peered out the window at the other children playing outside. Their mother and father, Veronica and Miguel Mendez were nearby talking to their close friends Miguel and Rosa Lopez.

Nearly two months had passed since these families and over 500 other indigenous believers had returned to the area from which they had been violently expelled the year before. They had been driven from their homes in the San Juan Chamula region of Chiapas, Mexico simply because they were evangelical Christians – and thus different from the others.

They now lived in humiliation as refugees, temporarily housed in the Bureau of Indigenous Affairs in San Cristobal de las Casas. They patiently waited in exile for the authorities to enforce justice on their behalf. They had experienced 30 years of ruthless persecution as indigenous believers. Over 30,000 Christians had been expelled from their lands.

Tired of the empty promises of the government to resolve their situation, the whole group organized themselves and then decided to return to their communities. The threats of the landowners (caciques) to stay away no longer intimidated them.

During their forced absence, their little houses and crops had been destroyed, their livestock stolen by the caciques and their thugs. After a year of absolute neglect, the barrenness they found was devastating. But with hardly any means at all they began the rebuilding process very diligently.

Using CB radios, the Christian community kept in touch daily to confirm everyone's welfare. This was designed to also alert and assist one another in the event of new attacks. But the Lopez and Mendez families were too poor to buy radios, yet they returned anyway with the smallest group to their remote village of Icalumtic.

They worked hard that first day to clean up their rundown properties next door to each other. As evening approached, the prospect of a restful night of sleep was very welcome indeed.

That night with no warning at all, a horde of about 300 deranged and drunken caciques unleashed hell's fury upon the innocent inhabitants of the little houses. Using sticks and stones they beat up anyone they could get a hold of. The children ran around in terror, hoping to find a place to hide in the nearby bushes and hills. Some managed to escape. Octavia did not.

Their parents did not know whether to fight back, protect themselves or just protect their little ones. And the shooting began. Octavia's parents were the first to fall prey to the trigger-happy murderers.

But the flying bullets did not hit Octavia. That in a gruesome sort of way would have been preferable to the atrocious treatment she was about to experience. She watched the mob strike her parent's lifeless bodies with sticks and rocks until they were a bloody mass. She was savagely beaten herself and gang-raped by four of the crazed caciques. All this in front of her two little sisters!

Neighbours Miguel Lopez and his wife Rosa and their ten children also suffered a similar fate at the hands of the same throng of assassins. While Miguel was instantly killed by gunfire, Rosa was battered without mercy and a bullet left her unconscious. That is what actually saved her life. The killers, believing she was dead, left her alone. Even her children thought she was dead until she revived at dawn. They managed to get her to a hospital.

Octavia and her sisters spent almost the whole night and the following day next to their dead parents, until the authorities came to retrieve the dead bodies.

The funeral services of those martyred were a huge demonstration of the solidarity of all evangelicals, indigenous and otherwise. Yet the feelings of hopelessness and frustration are high at the apathy of the government to punish the perpetrators.

Octavia's life was forever changed, her innocence and trust destroyed. Her countenance reflects a sorrow too deep for words. She is now left to take care of her two little sisters, Leonicia, 4, and Marta, 2. Since Mexico doesn't have a welfare program, the only aid she'll receive is the one that comes from fellow believers moved by her plight.

Next door, Rosa, the widow, did survive the ordeal. The bullet still remains in her body as a silent witness of the acute suffering that some believers have to endure for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Though she is glad to be alive, her 10 children, as well as Rosa herself, will always be marked by the severe trauma of one single night of terror. But she says, "Though my husband's death has brought immense grief to us, God in his mercy has, through the blood of the martyrs, raised up a strong church in San Juan Chamula."

Meanwhile, Octavia says, **"I lost my parents and I am now taking care of my two younger sisters. But I haven't lost my faith in God. He will see me through as I strive to raise my sisters. And someday, if we remain faithful, we will see God face to face and my parents as well."**

Footnote: Through an international campaign, Octavia and Rosa have received tons of mail as well as emotional and spiritual support. They have also received funds to build houses in the safety of a Christian refugee village called Getsemani – a community founded and inhabited by exiled indigenous believers.

STORY SIX: A CHILD LEFT BEHIND

Mei-Li of China

Mei-Li is an ordinary eight-year-old Chinese girl. She enjoys singing and dancing and smiles easily. Yet even at her young age, Mei-Li already understands the difficulties of being a house church Christian in China.

In late 1993, local Public Security Bureau (PSB) officials interrogated her father. The police had long suspected him of being involved in illegal house church activities.

After a time of intense questioning, Mei-Li's father realized that the PSB officials were steadily building a case against him. If they were able to gather enough evidence to arrest and convict him, he knew he would almost certainly be spending the next few years in a prison labour camp. He and his wife saw no alternative but to flee the area before being arrested. Mei-Li, they decided, would have to be left with her grandmother.

Once the decision was made, the parents quickly left their home. They carried only a small sack containing photographs of the family, including baby pictures of Mei-Li.

For many months, Mei-Li did not know where her parents had gone or why she was left with her grandmother. It wasn't like them to leave without saying where they were going or when they would be back. She began to worry that she had been abandoned because she was a girl, a common practice in China.

One evening, several PSB officials knocked on the door. They asked Mei-Li's grandmother where the parents were hiding. Longing to know herself, Mei-Li stood quietly around the corner, secretly listening to their conversation. Though her grandmother refused to disclose their whereabouts, Mei-Li began to realize her parents had not abandoned her, but were forced to flee because of their Christian work.

As the months dragged on, she would sometimes hear her grandmother speaking on the phone to someone she suspected was her mother. She always listened intently, but didn't dare ask where they had gone. Mei-Li had learned at an early age not to talk about the things that happened around her. Such talk, she was told, could put people in danger.

Finally, Mei-Li's grandmother announced that they would soon be taking a long train ride to see her parents. Mei-Li could hardly contain her excitement, yet she knew she must. Her grandmother had strictly warned her not to breathe a word about their trip to anyone.

After 36 hours on the train, friends took Mei-Li and her grandmother to the house where her parents had secretly resettled. Tears filled her eyes as she embraced her mother for the first time in 11 months. While they spoke, the young girl could not resist touching her mother's face or holding her father's hand.

Mei-Li was able to spend several months with her parents that summer, but then reluctantly returned to her grandmother's home to resume schooling.

The parents remain in hiding and continue to face possible arrest. However, despite the hardships, they have carried on the work of building up and encouraging China's house church Christians.

While Mei-Li longs for her family to be reunited, she now understands why it was necessary for her parents to leave. Please pray that she will continue to have courage, faith, and hope while she is separated from her mother and father.

Remember China's persecuted church includes not only men and women of faith but also eight-year-old girls like Mei-Li.

STORY SEVEN: RESTORED INNOCENCE

Linder Santiago of Peru

Life in the central jungles of Peru was a joyful time for little four-year-old Linder. His mother and father loved him and there was plenty of time for fun and games with his many friends.

His father was an itinerant preacher who traveled with a passion from village to village sharing God's love and teaching the Word of God to his fellow indigenous people. In these remote areas, preachers and Bible teachers were few and far between.

The constant travels of Linder's father caught the eye of over-zealous military personnel stationed in the area. Without even bothering to run a background check on him, they suspected him of guerrilla activity.

As they discussed him together, it was not long before they believed he was indeed a terrorist and, as such, should die. But they needed a confession from him. Something that would incriminate him and thus justify their actions.

When questioned, he would simply reply, "I am NOT a terrorist. I am just a simple preacher of the gospel. I travel only to teach my people God's Word."

Angered by his refusal to confess his involvement with the guerrillas, they decided to go a step further. They grabbed four-year-old Linder and laid his head down on a flat rock. Showing no mercy, they heartlessly proceeded to chop off Linder's ear lobes with a bayonet. First one side and then the other.

Linder's screams of pain was more than his father could handle. Frantic with concern for his little boy, the preacher yelled at the top of his lungs, "OK. OK. I'm a terrorist. Whatever you say I am. Just leave my little boy alone!"

Pleased with his personal 'confession', the soldiers then riddled him with bullets right before the terrorized eyes of young Linder, soaked in his own blood. Linder lost not only his ear lobes, but also his beloved daddy.

The savagery of such an act killed not only the father, but also the childhood innocence of this little indigenous Indian boy. In an instant he was transformed into a four-year-old man, full of wrath and vengeance. Right then and there Linder vowed to himself that nothing was ever going to hurt him again.

Two years later, extreme poverty forced his mother to send him to the nation's capital to an orphanage run by a Christian ministry. She had heard that it was geared toward jungle children who had lost their parents to violence.

Awed by the comforts of the big city, like a real bed, electricity and running water, little Linder adjusted easily to his new surroundings. Moved by his situation, the ministry leaders began the proceedings to try and repair Linder's deformed ears. By means of reconstructive surgery, portions of pigskin could be grafted onto his own skin. However, it would take a series of operations before this silent testimony to brutality could be erased.

Linder's reserved nature and his vow of not ever letting anyone or anything hurt him again, hindered his ability to connect with and submit to the leaders of the home. The little man-boy would try to avoid them altogether or would remain as withdrawn as he could. Neither words nor treats could entice him to be part of the group whenever the leaders were around.

When Pastor Guillermo and his wife took over the leadership of the orphanage, they became more and more intrigued by little Linder's determination to avoid any kind of personal contact with them, other than the casual ones mandated by the chores and routines of the home.

Pastor Guillermo reviewed his file and began to understand Linder's reaction to him and other authority figures he perceived to be members of the military. Guillermo commented, "He ran away from me, he rejected me. He didn't want to get close to me for any reason and would not allow me to minister God's Word to him."

Guillermo began to pray for God to give him wisdom to know how to reach out to Linder and bring healing to his deep wounds.

One day, Guillermo held Linder firmly by the arms and looked deep into his eyes. The pastor could feel his attempts and desire to break free and run away. He held him tight. He could see this little boy had given way to a grown man the day he witnessed his father's brutal murder.

Realizing there was no use in fighting the pastor's grip, Linder defiantly fixed his eyes on Guillermo's. His steely stare clearly indicated that no one was ever going to hurt him again. A tear began to form in one of his eyes, but even that, Linder managed to control.

Firmly, but lovingly, Guillermo said to him, "Linder, I want you to remember the soldier who killed your father. Picture his face right now!"

The tension in Linder's tiny body increased as hatred filled his whole being and spewed out of his eyes. Knowing he could not break the pastor's grip, he conveyed the message of his heart with every member of his body. He loathed anything that represented authority. Tears again began to fill his eyes but he fought hard to hold them back.

Guillermo did not relent in spite of his awareness that this was causing intense pain for Linder. Again he said, "Is the face of that soldier clear in your mind?" A thin streak of tears finally rolled down Linder's cheeks as he quietly nodded his head.

"Now," Guillermo continued, "I want you to place that face on mine!"

If the pastor's grip had not been so strong at that point, without a doubt Linder's acute hatred would have gained the upper hand. The tears now flowed freely as the little boy fought with every muscle in his body to get loose and unleash the wrath of his soul.

But Guillermo held him tighter. "Linder," he pleaded, "Forgive me. Forgive me. Please forgive me!"

In an instant the curse was broken. His stiff muscles relaxed and a long-contained cry of pain escaped from his innermost being. He wept uncontrollably, but these were cleansing tears. His little arms hard as steel a few seconds before, now clung to the pastor's neck. With mixed desperation and hope he begged, "Pastor, please don't leave me. Please don't ever leave me!"

Years of pain, anger, vengeance and fear were gone in a second thanks to the wonderful mercy of the Lord. Linder regained the childhood that four years earlier had been so cruelly snatched from him. The little man became anew the little boy he was supposed to be. Again he was a playful little boy just like the other eight-year-olds, full of dreams and hopes, a little boy with uncommon maturity for one his age.

Pastor Guillermo says, "He is always with me, helping me with everything... 'Pastor,' he tells me when he knows I'm concerned about something, 'Don't worry about it. I am praying for you.'...He has shown me that he now loves me like the father he once lost right before his eyes."

When visitors came to the orphanage, Linder said to them: **"When I grow up, I'm going to be an evangelist like my Daddy!"**

After receiving many letters from Open Doors supporters, Linder, now nine years old, also wrote one in response. Its translation to English reads:

Please let me share with you that I was very glad and happy when I received all the letters you sent me. Thank you also for the toys you sent. It made me very happy, and I think that in this, God heard my prayer...

I understand that God moved the hearts of people and they became interested in my situation. I am very grateful and was able to share the toys with my other brothers in Christ here in the home. I would like to ask you to continue to...pray for us.

Today Linder has returned to the jungle homestead to live with his mother again. They are a four-hour boat ride from the nearest telephone communication. Pray for them and that Linder's future ministry dreams will become a reality.

STORY EIGHT: THE GREAT PROTECTOR

Jaasiel Salazar of Southern Philippines

Jaasiel walked slowly down the path beside the meandering muddy river. Its current was swift today as the rainy season weather had also swelled its level to a record high. But there was no rain today. The Philippine sun burned down on her thirteen-year-old head and neck and she wished she'd remembered her umbrella. No *dalaga* (young unmarried lady) in her country wanted to be any darker than they were already created. Sunning was something only *Americanos* seemed to want to do. Puberty was developing in her a greater concern about her appearance.

A noisy outboard *banca* sped past heading downstream on the river. It was loaded with rubber slippers for the market.

"*I wonder if mom and dad are home yet?*" she thought as she slowly plodded along. School was out for the day and there was probably no reason to rush. Even her baby brother, Jose, was no doubt sleeping while swinging from mother's backpack as she swept the city streets.

Jaasiel loved her family but she shook her head in amazement as she thought back over the events of recent years. What a roller coaster experience! Father was so changed now. As the sign over their door read: Pastor of Peace. All he seems to want to do is preach wherever possible and otherwise talk to people about the Lord in the little religious lending library attached to the side of their humble nipa hut.

It wasn't always that way. Her father, Hussein Salazar, was the son of a well-known Maranaw Muslim Imam in Mindanao, southern Philippines. He became a great disappointment to his parents when he joined a gang and lived a life of crime and terrorism. Before long he had committed murder and was sentenced to life imprisonment. Jaasiel was just a small nursing baby when all this happened.

Her father was dramatically changed in prison. Through a missionary worker in the prison, he came to a strong faith in Jesus Christ. After twelve years of good behaviour he was released early on parole and returned to live with his family.

As an ex-convict, the only job he could get was sweeping the streets. But he did it faithfully and was able to provide the simple basics for his family. All the while, his passion was sharing his faith with people of Muslim background on the island.

Jaasiel smiled to herself as she remembered how much her mother also sacrificed for the family. And how much she loved to listen to reports from her husband of Muslim neighbours committing their lives to Jesus Christ. She would never forget the day her mother announced, "Hussein, you need to spend all your time evangelizing! I will sweep the streets each day so you can work full-time for the Lord."

The smile disappeared as she also recalled the many threatening letters and comments her father regularly received from Muslim extremists because of his effective evangelism and discipling ministry. She worried for her Dad every time he went on one of his itinerant meeting tours.

Another *banca* was slowly making its way up the river fighting the rushing current.

Her heart warmed as she recalled the gentleness and concern of her loving daddy.

"Oh God, please protect my father today - wherever he is - as he shares your love with others."

Suddenly Jaasiel was lifted off her feet. She struggled to unleash the grip that someone had on her throat and back. She could not turn her head to see who was holding her.

“Is this a prank of some large friend like Jun-Jun?”

The pain was excruciating and as suddenly as it had started her world went dark...and she felt nothing. Least of all did she hear the roar of the *banca* engine as her limp body was quickly transported down the river.

Hussein Salazar walked briskly down the dusty trail beside Salonga Street toward the river and his modest nipa hut. He could see Jose running to meet him and his heart jumped for joy.

“How you have blessed my life, Lord! May Jaasiel and Jose grow up to love and serve you too.”

He tossed little Jose into the air and carried him home on his shoulders.

“I’m home, *Inday*,” he called to his wife.

She answered with a quick greeting from the riverbank where she was cutting up the *calabasa* for dinner to add to their usual rice and fish.

“Did you see Jaasiel? She’s nowhere around yet!”

“Maybe she’s at her friend Jun-Jun’s place. She seems to like to spend a lot of time with him.”

Hussein and his wife did not begin to worry until it turned dark. Then he walked over to Jun-Jun’s but no one there had seen his daughter since school hours.

The Salazar family spent much time in prayer as the darkness wore on. Little sleep took place on this night. Where was their Jaasiel?

The next day, Hussein went to the police station and filled out a “missing persons” report on his daughter. Two days later when nothing was reported, he went to the newspaper office with a picture of his daughter clutched in his hand. The copy editor helped him compose a notice for the next day’s paper. Beside her photo the copy read:

MISSING

She is Miss Jaasiel Salazar, 14 years old and daughter of Pastor and Mrs. Hussein Salazar. Since last December 1st up to the present, she has been missing. And her parents are worried. Anyone who knows her or her whereabouts is requested to contact her parents.

Weeks went by and there was no word and no sign of Jaasiel anywhere until early one morning when Hussein found a note pinned on his front door. The logo on the paper was familiar to him – a local Muslim extremist group. He quickly read the note:

*Come to the market at noon today. Ask the *gulay tiendero* for a message about Jaasiel. He has nothing to do with her disappearance. Don’t tell anyone else about this or you will never see her again.*

Hussein's heart began to beat so fast he thought it would explode. Finally news about his dear daughter! Immediately he raced to the market but the *gulay* (vegetable) stall owner knew nothing about a note for him. Dejected he trudged home to watch the clock until noon. Prayer helped fill the time.

"Oh God, please protect my daughter today – wherever she is. May she know your love and also receive it through others!"

At noon, with a sense of foreboding Hussein approached the vegetable stall seller again.

"Pare, do you now have a message for me?"

With a look of bewilderment, the *gulay tiendero* nodded. "Just a few minutes ago, some guys I've never seen before gave me this sealed letter for you, Pastor. I don't like the looks of them. Do you owe them money or something?"

"No, it's about my missing Jaasiel," Hussein quickly responded as he tore open the envelope. The message was short and in someone's personal handwriting:

Hussein Salazar,

We have your daughter Jaasiel. You stop preaching about Jesus and return to Islam, the faith of your father, and we will return your daughter.

Leave your answer with the buco tiendera within three days.

Despondently, Hussein trudged to where his wife was sweeping the city streets and shared the note with her. Together they hugged each other and wept copious tears of sorrow.

"*Inday*, let me sweep," Hussein finally said through his tears. "I need time to pray anyway. You go home with Jose and rest. You look exhausted. Let's ask the Lord for His will in our response."

Hussein had never pleaded with the Lord for his daughter's life as he did that day. The more he prayed the faster he swept. It seemed to onlookers as an energy catharsis, but Hussein was holding on to the only hope he had and pleading with the Lord of the universe.

"Oh God, please protect my daughter today – wherever she is. May she know your love and also receive it through others!"

After two days of prayer and fasting, Hussein went early on the morning of the third day to the coconut seller and gave her his sealed letter of response:

To whom it may concern,

I love my daughter, Jaasiel, very much. Please tell her that for me. But I love Jesus even more. I will never be blackmailed into giving up my love and faith in Jesus Christ my Lord.

So I am going to pray for Jaasiel every day. And I am going to pray for you because you now are responsible before God for the care of my daughter whom I dearly love.

Hussein Salazar

“*Mare*, some men you won’t know will be here before noon today asking for this,” he instructed. “Just give it to them for me. Are you praying for my Jaasiel?”

She nodded with tears in her eyes. Everyone now seemed to be very concerned about Hussein Salazar’s daughter.

“*Maraming salamat!* (Many thanks)”

While in town, Hussein headed for the telephone company building to telephone again his friend, Pastor Reyes in Manila.

“I sent my response, *Pare*,” he started and rehearsed the essence of his letter. “Please ask your team and friends to pray for Jaasiel. And pray for me too that I may be faithful in sharing the love of Jesus with Muslims here in Mindanao.”

With a heavy heart Pastor Reyes assured Hussein that brothers and sisters all over the world would pray for Jaasiel and for him. “I’ll also ask Open Doors to share this prayer request,” he concluded.

Later Hussein was contacted again and also offered a significant amount of money as well as Jaasiel’s return if he would only go back to Islam. He replied, “I will never sell my freedom in Christ or bargain my soul in any way!”

In subsequent interviews, Hussein commented, “I hope you will not cease to pray for my daughter, knowing the terrible experience she is going through. Do continue to pray that in spite of the hardships, I will still preach Christ here. I know my life will be in danger. Some Muslims who have come to know the Lord Jesus Christ are still afraid. But I praise God who teaches me to keep on trusting Him. Therefore, I have this courage to go on and preach Christ. I am not afraid of those who seek to kill me. And despite the terrible thing they’ve done to my daughter, I fear no one but God alone. Even though I don’t have much support, I will continue to share Christ with others...especially my Muslim blood-brothers.”

After three years of continued faithful service to the Lord, Hussein Salazar received a letter in the mail postmarked from Malaysia. He tore it open and his heart leaped with joy as he recognized Jaasiel’s handwriting:

Dear Mom and Dad,

I’m sorry that I could not contact you earlier. But you will be glad to know I’m OK.

After I was kidnapped, they sold me into prostitution in East Malaysia. But God helped me to escape from those men.

A sympathetic Malaysian family took me into their home. They hid me and protected me so those men couldn’t find me.

I have fallen in love with a young man and we plan to be married. We want to meet you in a safe place.

I love you both,

Jaasiel

Hussein Salazar exulted, “Oh God, you are indeed the great protector!”

The names and places of this story have been changed for security reasons.

**Many things can wait.
Children cannot.
Today their bones are being formed,
their blood is being made,
their senses are being developed.
To them we cannot say "tomorrow."
Their name is today.**

- Gabriela Mistral

GOD ALSO SPEAKS THROUGH LITTLE HEARTS

The Bible is full of stories of God speaking to and using children to achieve his purposes and speak his message. The boy Samuel comes to mind immediately as well as young King Josiah. Who could forget the boy Jesus reasoning with the biblical scholars in the temple at age 12? Or the boy who sacrificed his lunch of five loaves and two fish so thousands could be fed.

In spite of much suffering in the world today, children are often the agents of revival that God still uses. For example Karabakh, part of the former Soviet Union, is experiencing a spiritual revival. In the 1930's during the fierce anti-religious campaigns of Stalin, all the clergy of Karabakh were deported or killed. Until 1990, there were no churches open to believers.

The spiritual revival in the area started with the children. In their despair, they turned to the Lord. Now they are sharing their faith with their parents and other adults. Sunday schools have sprung up all over Karabakh and the attendance of these schools is still growing. Thus it was a real privilege for Open Doors to provide thousands of Armenian Children's Bibles for this revival movement.

Similar situations have occurred in Latin America. The following report came to me from Amanda Shirley in Bogota, Colombia:

"On Sunday, we had an unusual time in our church of 1,000. In the two services, around 60 people decided to receive Christ and nobody left without having seen God's glory. The unusual elements in the services were the guest speakers: an eight-year-old boy preached in the first service, his 11-year-old sister in the second. They also led the worship together with their younger sister. It was beautiful.

"The children spoke about God in such a personal and trusting way that you could not tear yourself away. The boy spoke about Chronicles: Israel's victories during David's time, the fight against Goliath or during Gideon's time had nothing to do with the size of the population or the number of soldiers, but with the amount of trust they put in their great God.

"I think we can learn much from children: how God uses us depends on the depth of our relationship with him, not our IQ. He can use us all much better when we realize that we can't do it alone."

China has over 600 million children under 18. With the country's population growth, it is not a stretch to estimate that today there are over 500 million children under 15. In China, it is illegal to teach anyone under 18 about the Lord, yet the Christian children there continue to be an inspiration. We often hear of large prayer meetings among the children when they come together with their parents for training sessions—sometimes all night.

In Shanghai, a 12-year-old Christian girl was distraught to hear her parents often complain about her uncle who usurped the family inheritance. One day she gathered enough courage to speak to her mother. "Mother, Jesus said that if someone wants to take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. We are Christians, and even if Uncle has taken our portion we should not talk badly about him." Her mother was rebuked and said, "God has used our child to speak to us!" A year later that uncle was diagnosed as having stomach cancer. The Christian family hastened to visit him and encouraged him to allow Jesus to come into his life. As a result, both he and his family received the Lord as their Saviour.

An eight-year-old Christian boy was playing with his young neighbour when the latter unwittingly poked him in the eye with a sharp bamboo spike. The boy lost the sight in his left eye, and he and his family were so grief-stricken that they were, at first, unable to forgive their neighbour. However, through prayer they were filled with a Spirit of forgiveness and over

several weeks the boy's eyesight returned. The whole village was amazed at his unexpected recovery, and many received Jesus as Saviour all because of this testimony.

One five-year-old boy in China learned about Jesus. Like many other believers in Asia, he believed simply and whole-heartedly. He lived with his grandfather who did not believe in God. One day this little boy was overburdened by the seriousness of hell. He asked his grandfather to believe in Jesus. The old man did not pay much attention. In tears, this little boy ran up to his grandfather. He knelt down before him and held on tightly to his ankles and pleaded with him saying repeatedly, "Grandpa, please do not go to hell." The Holy Spirit worked in the life of this old man and he was gloriously saved.

One of my colleagues remembers visiting China at Christmas time and attending a house church service. He was struck by the fact that no one had a Bible except the pastor. When the time came for the scripture reading, the pastor called a four-year-old boy forward. He stood on a box, hands behind his back, eyes on the ceiling, and recited the 22 verses of Luke chapter 2.

Tony Lambert, in his excellent volume, *China's Christian Millions* (Monarch Books, 1999) shares about attending a children's Easter celebration at Pastor Lamb's famous house church in Guangzhou a few years ago:

With people sitting on the rickety wooden stairs and squashed into every nook and cranny, one could hardly breathe! First the Sunday school put on a Bible play in costume. Then the older children sang, accompanied by violins and a whole range of instruments. In the West, thousands of meetings like this take place and are unremarkable. But to see this in China was an overwhelming experience. I almost wept.

One of our Open Doors colleagues has a special copy of a Chinese hymnbook with 230 hymns. A 12-year-old Christian girl handwrote it so her pastor could have a hymnal—the only one in the whole church.

Eight-year-old Sergio grew up in a Muslim family in Mozambique. He suffered severely from an unknown disease and his parents tried everything to make their son well. They took him to their Muslim witchdoctors, to other traditional healers and medical doctors, all to no avail.

Then someone suggested they take him to church. Desperate, his parents, both devout Muslims, took him to the church in town. During the service the congregation prayed for Sergio and the Lord touched him. He recovered fully. This miracle led to Sergio's conversion as well as both his sisters, Fatima and Santha.

Fatima's husband and children also gave their hearts to the Lord because of Sergio's healing. His mother remains a Muslim and strongly resists any Christian worshipping. She has forbidden Sergio's sisters to take him to church. When they do, however, she refuses him any food.

Fatima says she knew so little about Christianity that she used to think the poor people going to church were all lost. With the Lord in their lives, her relationship with her husband has greatly improved. They used to quarrel a lot, but now the Lord has blessed their marriage. They experience His peace and love for each other.

Santha finds it very hard to follow the Lord and sometimes considers going back to Islam. Her husband has left her and she has moved back to her mother's house. There her mother refuses to speak to her or give her food as long as she remains a Christian. "At least when I go back to Islam, I would have some food," says Santha. If it wasn't for the encouragement of her sister and other Christians she probably would have returned to Islam. "Please pray for me, maybe Jesus will help me one day."

Financially they are suffering because none of them has a job. Fatima's little girl recently got malaria and they had no medicine. They prayed for her and the Lord is healing her.

And finally, a Christian Iraqi child composed and sang this hymn in which he expresses his suffering and hope:

**I cry and scream from the depth of my heart,
On my knees I pray to You, oh my Lord.
Salvage me, save me, oh my beloved Jesus.
Let your light enlighten my path,
so that I can walk through life.
Let your mercy be upon me.
Guide me, oh my beloved Jesus.
In your love I found myself.
By your pains, my pains were moved away.
I love, I adore you, oh my beloved Jesus.
Give me your hand. Give me your hand.
Rise me, rise me, rise me out of darkness.
So that I may glorify you, Oh my beloved Jesus.**

WHAT CAN I DO?

How well I remember the story that the newspapers told some years ago of the plight of a child in Mexico City. The four-year-old boy had been orphaned and severely burned in a gas explosion that took the lives of 500 people. Millions saw the story and probably forgot about it—except for one woman in New York. She was deeply moved and couldn't get the little boy off her mind.

Her concern led to efforts to find the boy. She did and followed up with two years of medical assistance, gifts, visits and finally adoption proceedings. She gave herself to this little boy in every way. In this action is exemplified the principle: **Real love will help those who have nothing to give in return.**

We can't adopt all the suffering, abandoned, neglected, handicapped, persecuted children of the world, but we can show love to them in a variety of ways. Personal contact is important because it enables love to be communicated in a very direct way. Pray for missionaries who have committed their lives to working with street children, as well as the neglected and abused. Like Guillermo working with young Linder in Peru, their motto is:

If we can change them from the inside out, we know they can be changed forever!

The least you can do is the most you can do—pray! Pray for the children mentioned in this booklet as representatives of the hurting children of our world. Acquire the Open Doors monthly prayer calendar from your national office listed in the back to receive up-to-date prayer items.

Pray for Christian workers and pastors who minister to children and their families in the Suffering Church. For example, a local pastor heard about Andreas in Mozambique and spoke to his parents about the charm around his neck. After the talk, Andreas's parents allowed him to go to church with the other children. The pastor explained to them that the charm around Andreas's neck meant he belonged to Satan and took it off. Although Andreas's father allows his son to go to church, he forbids his wife. She manages to go to church but when he is drunk, he makes it impossible for her.

The second thing you can do is join ministry trips to the areas of the Suffering Church where you can directly minister love personally to needy children...especially in Colombia. Again, your national Open Doors office will provide you information about this.

Thirdly you can assist in financing much needed Children's Bibles and Sunday School training for restricted areas of the world.

Open Doors provides Children's Bibles in virtually every region where we minister but undoubtedly the greatest need is in the People's Republic of China. There we provide Children's Bibles in the national language as well as in ethnic minority languages. One of our co-workers shared this report after taking 500 Children's Bibles to an ethnic minority area:

“When one little boy saw the book, he was immediately interested. He had never seen anything like it before. He wanted a copy. In fact, every child who has seen it is attracted to it, even when they see it from across the room.

“Wah Wah, a woman in her late thirties has a bright son, and learned the good news of Christ within the last year. As one of the newest converts among this people group, she was very excited about the book. As a mother, she understands the necessity of reaching the children while they are young. She has paid a high price for her faith already, enduring harsh

beatings from her husband. He hit her repeatedly in the face when she told him of her new faith in Christ. But even a beating is not enough to dampen her desire to make the Bible known to her people. By reading the Children's Bible, Wah Wah was better able to understand and explain the character of God.

"This ethnic group has no Christian literature published for children, and there is no Christian witness aimed specifically at them. The children in this group, and the women, have been virtually ignored. One of the keys to winning this group for Christ seems to be the children. If we can reach the children when they are young, then the whole people group can be changed."

Here's how the Bible changed one young Chinese child:

"My name is Mei-Huei. I am ten years old. I live in a city in southern China. I came to know the Lord through my grandfather's healing. When I was around seven, he got terribly ill. Doctors gave up hope and he was brought home to die. It was then that some believers came to pray for my grandfather. He was miraculously healed. Both my grandparents became Christians. Then my mother also was converted and she brought me to Christ. My father is not yet a believer.

"My mother began to share her testimony and our house became a meeting place. My mother preaches regularly. I love to attend Sunday school. I especially like to read the Children's Bible. I read it every day. It is written in such a way that I can read and understand it on my own. I like to read about how Jesus loves us and how he died in order to wash away our sins.

"Reading the Bible by myself is so meaningful because God speaks to me directly. I have to confess that I do have a bad habit of being stingy and not willing to share. When my schoolmates want to borrow my possessions, I refuse them fearing they may break the things they want to borrow.

"One day I was reading the story of a young boy who gladly offered his lunch of five loaves and two fish to Jesus. Jesus multiplied them to feed five thousand men. That story touched my heart deeply because I was not like that boy at all. I asked God to help me to be more generous. Ever since that day when a friend asks to borrow some of my things, I will gladly share with him or her. Sometimes they do break my things but I do not get angry with them. I just remind them to be more careful next time and let them go. **I want to continue to study the Bible and to grow to be more like Jesus.**"

In April 1995, Brother Andrew was returning to Israel after visiting Gaza with a team of colleagues. In Gaza, he met a little boy who wanted his last copy of the Arabic Children's Bible. Andrew said he would give it to the boy if he promised to have someone read it to him. He promised. As the group walked across the border, they looked back to see one of the border guards reading the Bible to the little boy!

Meanwhile, the Sunday school teacher on the eastern end of Cuba was bubbling with emotion. Only for the past few weeks were Sunday school classes allowed to function. Her problem had been the lack of any kind of visual materials for her children, but now she held in her hands an answer to prayer. An Open Doors courier had brought her a beautiful full colour Spanish Children's Bible.

Then the Lord generated a creative idea. As well as using the book in class, she could make it a motivational tool. So each Sunday, the student who says their memory verse and participates in class the best gets to take the Children's Bible home for one week. She reports it is so motivational, her greatest difficulty is to decide which child gets it.

Sunday school teachers' training is also a great need—especially in restricted countries like China. A visiting evangelist commented about the Sunday schools south of Shanghai:

“I had never seen so many children in Sunday school. Tears came to my eyes as I watched them sing, pray and study the Bible. Each of the house churches I visited had three to five Sunday school classes, and the total number of students ranged from one hundred to three hundred per house church. Praise God!”

One of our Open Doors couriers and trainers joined Sister Mei Fan at a secret Chinese Sunday school and reported:

“This church is typical of many that we supply with Children’s Bibles. It started up a Sunday school five years ago. At that time, they had no Christian material for children at all. All the teacher could do was to teach the children simple choruses and get them to memorize Bible verses.

“I sat in on one of their Sunday school classes on a freezing winter’s day. It was held in the teacher’s bedroom; the church doesn’t have its own building because it has to meet secretly. It was very cramped in the room, but the children didn’t seem to mind. There were no desks or tables for them to write on, so they turned little stools upside down and perched them on their knees.

“We started off by singing. They don’t have any songbooks for the children, so they copy the songs from a blackboard and learn them by heart. This week, they were singing three songs that they’d learned the week before. They were lively and enthusiastic.

“Then the teacher asked them to repeat the memory verses they’d also learned the previous week. One girl in particular got everything right the first time! The teacher explained that she could remember every single verse she’d ever learned at Sunday school since she started attending a year ago. I discovered that 11-year-old Sun Li comes from a non-Christian family. She lives an hour and a half away from the Sunday school. But she is so enthusiastic to learn about the Lord that she never misses a week, no matter what the weather. That day it was minus three degrees outside.

“They only have a few Children’s Bibles, so the teacher keeps the copies herself and hands them out for the children to share during the class. But she explained how she’d given Sun Li her own copy. She called Sun Li forward and explained how I represented the brothers and sisters overseas who had provided her Bible. Sun Li smiled and said, ‘thank you’ shyly.

“The teacher then read out a Bible story from the Children’s Bible as the children followed it in the copies they had shared around the class. Afterwards, she wrote out a new song on the blackboard for the children to learn, which they copied into their notebooks. This particular song was designed to help them learn the sequence of each book in the Bible.

“After the Sunday school, I stayed on and spoke with Mei Fan. She is still young herself but is committed to teaching the children about God. ‘If the authorities catch me, they will arrest me. I will certainly be in big trouble,’ she said calmly. **‘But for too long we have been guilty of neglecting our children. We must tell them about God. We have no choice.’**” (emphasis added)

WHAT CHILDREN CAN TEACH US

We are so much focused on teaching, helping and growing children that we can often neglect to look for those lessons we can learn from them. And they are many. Here are seven important lessons:

1. LOVE

Author and lecturer Leo Buscaglia shares about a contest he was asked to judge. The purpose of the contest was to find the most caring child. The winner was a four-year-old whose next door neighbor was an elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the old gentleman's yard, climbed onto his lap, and just sat there.

When the child's mother asked him what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy replied, "Nothing, I just helped him cry."

2. SIMPLICITY AND CLARITY OF FAITH

Another four-year-old was at the pediatrician for a check up. As the doctor looked down her ears with an otoscope, he asked, "Do you think I'll find Big Bird in here?"

The little girl remained silent.

Next, the doctor took a tongue depressor and looked down her throat. He asked, "Do you think I'll find the Cookie Monster down there?"

Again, the little girl was silent.

Then the doctor put a stethoscope to her chest. As he listened to her heartbeat, he asked, "Do you think I'll hear Barney in there?"

"Oh, no!" the little girl replied. "Jesus is in my heart. Barney's on my underpants."

3. HOPE

A man was driving home from work one day and stopped to watch a local Little League baseball game that was being played in a park near his home. As he sat down behind the bench on the first-base line, he asked one of the boys what the score was.

"We're behind 14 to nothing," he answered with a smile.

"Really," he countered. "I have to say you don't look very discouraged."

"Discouraged?" the boy answered with a puzzled look on his face. "Why should we be discouraged? We haven't been up to bat yet!"

4. HOW TO PRAY SINCERELY

Children pray sincerely: "Dear God, thank you for my new baby sister. But I really wanted a puppy." A six-year-old saying table grace: "God is good, God is great. Thank you for the food, and I would even thank you more if Mom gives us ice cream for dessert, and justice for all! Amen!"

"Dear God, instead of letting people die and having to make new ones, why don't you just keep the ones you got now?"

“Dear God, I bet it is very hard for you to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only 4 people in our family and I can never do it!”

5. IMPORTANT ROLES IN LIFE

Little Jamie Scott was trying out for a part in a school play. His mother knew that he'd set his heart on being in it, though she feared he would not be chosen. On the day the parts were awarded, she picked him up after school.

Jamie rushed up to her, eyes shining with pride and excitement. "Guess what Mom," he shouted, and then added words that will remain a lesson. "I've been chosen to clap and cheer."

6. ABILITY TO SEE JESUS IN OTHERS

One cold evening during the holiday season, a little boy about six or seven was standing out in front of a store window. The little child had no shoes and his clothes were mere rags. A young woman passing by saw the little boy and could read the longing in his pale blue eyes. She took the child by the hand and led him into the store. There she bought him some new shoes and a complete suit of warm clothing. They came back outside and into the street and the woman said to the child, "Now you can go home and have a very happy holiday." The little boy looked up at her and asked,

"Are you God, Ma'am?" She smiled down at him and replied, "No son, I'm just one of His children." The little boy then said, "I knew you had to be some relation."

The following poem was written by 11-year-old Summer Waters:

I saw Jesus last week.
He was wearing blue jeans and an old shirt.
He was up at the church building;
He was alone and working hard.
For just a minute he looked a little like one of our members.
But it was Jesus--I could tell by his smile.

I saw Jesus last Sunday.
He was teaching a Bible class.
He didn't talk real loud or use long words,
But you could tell he believed what he said.
For just a minute, he looked like my Bible teacher.
But it was Jesus--I could tell by his loving voice.

I saw Jesus yesterday.
He was at the hospital visiting a friend who was sick.
They prayed together quietly.
For just a minute he looked like Brother Jones.
But it was Jesus--I could tell by the tears in his eyes.

I saw Jesus this morning.

He was in my kitchen making my breakfast
And fixing me a special lunch.
For just a minute he looked like my mom.
But it was Jesus--I could feel the love from his heart.

I see Jesus everywhere,
Taking food to the sick,
Welcoming others to his home,
Being friendly to a newcomer, and for just a minute
I think he's someone I know.
But it's always Jesus--I can tell by the way he serves.

7. KNOWING GOD'S PRESENCE

Lois Olson was an 11-year-old daughter of missionaries in Afghanistan. Perhaps the most unlikely and illogical place for a Christian family to locate, but they were there to serve their Lord! After Christmas 1993, they were confined to the basement of their home for two weeks due to the fighting in their city. In response to the fighting and confinement, Lois penned this insight:

On January number two
Endless loads of bullets flew.
The news is on the BBC.
They still fought on January three.
Billows of smoke from someone's home?
How agonizing it must become!
Here we sit, we are quite safe,
When a man is mourned by his wife.
Many, many have sadly cried
Over someone that has died.
But we are safe: God protects us
And He has said He'll never leave us.

**UNLESS YOU TURN TO GOD FROM YOUR SINS AND
BECOME AS LITTLE CHILDREN, YOU WILL NEVER GET
INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD.**

- JESUS