

*Pioneer  
In  
Guatemala*

The Personal History of  
*John Forres O'Donnal*

Including the  
History of  
The Church  
of Jesus Christ  
of Latter-day Saints  
In Guatemala

# Pioneer In Guatemala

To Asner & Farrell Farnsworth  
with love and best wishes.  
We hope you enjoy reading  
what has been written, and  
that it will bring back many  
fond memories.

Love,

John Farnsworth  
4-17-98



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*Dedicated to my charming and loving wife, Carmen, in whose veins flows, strongly, the blood of Father Lehi, a choice and very special daughter in Zion, who with conviction and courage was the first to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints among her people in Central America, in this dispensation; and who has been a shining example of faithfulness, service and charity to her people and the Church.--And to the descendants of Father Lehi who are a remnant of the House of Israel, whom I dearly love, and which includes all of my posterity through my beloved wife; that they may know that the promises made to their fathers are being fulfilled in them.*



*“...for I have given unto him power to build up my church among the Lamanites.”*

*D&C 30:6*



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# *Contents*

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	Preface .....	xi
1	My Beginnings .....	1
2	My Career -- Pioneering The Rubber Industry In Guatemala .....	17
3	Courtship, Marriage and Family .....	31
4	Guatemala's Political History .....	45
5	Beginning Of The Church In Central America .....	55
6	End Of A Successful Career .....	93
7	Calling As Mission President -- Guatemala Guatemala City Mission.....	107
8	Earthquake In Guatemala--February 4, 1976 .....	119
9	Taking The Gospel To The Lamanites .....	145

10	Historical Background Of The Maya-Ke'kchi Indian Kingdom .....	163
11	Experiences In Taking the Gospel To The Lamanites ....	169
12	Elder Lost On Volcano -- A Lesson Learned .....	203
13	Guatemala Area Conference--February 1977 .....	213
14	President Of The Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission ...	219
15	Dedication Of Small Chapels and Reconstructed Patzicía Chapel .....	241
16	Completing Our Mission -- Calling As Regional Representative .....	273
17	Mexico City Temple -- Calling To The Presidency .....	283
18	Guatemala City Temple--Calling As Temple President ..	301
19	Miraculous Healing .....	339
20	Peru Missionary Training Center--Calling As President	345
21	Update On The Growth and Progress Of The Church In Guatemala .....	361
22	Testimonies and Tributes .....	377
23	Time Line Of The Church In Guatemala.....	385

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## *Preface*

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**F**or several years I have been encouraged by Elders Boyd K. Packer, Thomas S. Monson, G. Homer Durham and many other friends to record the events of the unfolding of the Lord's work in Guatemala and throughout Latin America, as I have lived and seen them. I was told that I should be the one to write this history "as only you can tell it, having been instrumental in the initiation of the missionary work and having held leadership positions continually over the many years." I know of the importance of correctly recording the information of the unfolding of this great work of the Lord; and I am humbled in doing so, to the best of my ability. As Nephi stated, "neither am I mighty in writing," (II Nephi 33:1) but I acknowledge the help of the Spirit as I have gathered and compiled this information.

In writing this history I do not wish to draw attention to myself, but to simply record the work of the Lord as it opened up and then flourished among His chosen people, the Lamanites, in fulfillment of the many promised blessings to them; and for the spiritual benefit and uplifting of those who read my words in helping them to come unto Christ. I feel as did Ammon: "I do not boast in my own strength, nor in my own wisdom; but behold, my joy is full, yea, my heart is brim with joy, and I will rejoice in my God. Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his

strength I can do all things; yea, behold, many mighty miracles we have wrought in this land, for which we will praise his name forever.” (Alma 26:11-12)

This work would not have been completed without the untiring help of our daughter, Patsy Huber, who from her busy schedule has spent many, many hours organizing, entering data into the computer, and doing the preliminary editing of the manuscript. Words cannot express my gratitude to her. I am also grateful to our long-time friend, De Lamar Jensen, professor of History at Brigham Young University, one of the first missionaries assigned to Guatemala and the first branch president in Guatemala City, for also editing the manuscript. My wife, Carmen has given her complete support and has made many contributions and useful suggestions.

I am grateful to those who have encouraged me to write this history. I also extend my appreciation to those who have generously written tributes, testimonies and experiences which have greatly enhanced this writing.

In gathering information for this history, I have encountered misinformation, missing information and erroneous dates, even in official records. Therefore there will be some discrepancies with my account and other records. What I have written is taken from my personal journals and original documents in my possession.

Some have sought information from me so they could write their own versions, for whatever purposes. Others may criticize this work, claiming I have spent too much time on some subjects, such as my own personal history, or that I did not include or sufficiently expand on other subjects or persons. Yes, I can even say as did Moroni in Ether 12:23-26: “Lord, the Gentiles will mock at these things, because of our weakness in writing; for Lord thou hast made us mighty in word by faith, but thou hast not made us mighty in writing; ...and thou hast made us that we could write but little, ... Behold, thou hast not made us mighty in writing like unto the brother of Jared, for thou madest him that the things which he wrote were mighty even as thou art, unto the overpowering of man to read them.” I am personally responsible for what I have written, and assume full responsibility for the content of this account.

## Preface

My love for our brethren the Lamanites knows no bounds, I have lived among them most of my life. Never have I found a more loving, compassionate, caring, unselfish, humble and spiritual people. I have wept with them in their material poverty and downtrodden state. Most of them are illiterate, and for generations have not been legally married and don't know who their parents were. Many have borne ten or more children of which only two or three survived; and of those that died, many never received a name nor was their birth or death recorded and the dates forgotten.

These people have accepted the gospel in true faith and were baptized and received the gift of the Holy Ghost which has directed their lives in obeying the Lord's commandments. I have rejoiced in their purity, but often wondered how they can be saved in their ignorance. Yet, they are not ignorant concerning spiritual things nor gospel truths of revealed religion. Through a study of the scriptures I have learned, with great joy and happiness, that these beautiful people will be saved in the kingdom of our Heavenly Father. Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Quorum of the Twelve, expounded upon this principle much more eloquently in *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*:

*Salvation is not found in much learning. It has little to do with educational degrees and intellectual power. The truths that save are gospel truths whose source is revelation, revelation to spiritual people who may or may not also be intellectual.*

(Vol. III pp. 111-112)

Elder McConkie also explains,

*There is no salvation in intellectuality standing alone. "The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." But through spirituality the door is open to the saints to progress until they inherit all things--literally, all things--including all the intellectuality known in the world and more. Those who seek the Lord, who find him, who keep his commandments, who grow in the things of the Spirit, shall gain the fullness of the kingdom of the Father. They gain exaltation; they become Gods. They inherit all things--literally. And the Lord, in latter-day revelation, makes the same presentation. Speaking of those who gain exaltation he says: "All things are theirs, whether life or death, or*

*things present, or things to come, all are theirs and they are Christ's, and Christ is God's. And they shall overcome all things. Wherefore, let no man glory in man, but rather let him glory in God, who shall subdue all enemies under his feet." (D&C 76:59-61)*

*(Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Vol. II, pp. 327-328)*

Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve, in an address at the April 1974 General Conference, gives further consolation concerning this principle:

*It is when a lifetime is quietly committed with sincerity and humility that one can know for sure.... A testimony of them, however, can come very quickly. Do not belittle the possibility that many humble folk, young and old, possess such a testimony. Many possess a testimony that transcends the knowledge to be gained in academic and scientific fields. When a humble man bears testimony based on spiritual inquiry and righteous living, be careful before you repudiate his witness because he is otherwise unlearned.*

*(Ensign, May 1974, p. 95)*

Truly, a promise, among others pronounced upon me in my patriarchal blessing, received under the hands of Patriarch Joseph C. Bentley while living in Colonia Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico, on November 17, 1935, has literally been fulfilled: "You shall live to see great progress in the work of the Lord, in this land, among the people by whom you are surrounded and among all the natives in the nations south of us. Cultivate a spirit of love and charity for this people, for they are of the House of Israel and our Heavenly Father will open their eyes and cause many of them to receive the truth and be saved in His Kingdom. And if you will cultivate a spirit of love and charity for them, our Heavenly Father will magnify you among them and make you the instrument in His hands of doing a great and glorious work to His divine acceptance and to your joy and happiness. You shall win their love and confidence because of your faithfulness before the Lord; and you shall see mighty faith manifested among this people." Only I can know the fullness of my joy and happiness.

As is always the case when the Lord begins to shed light and a work commences to come forth in any area, the forces of evil become

## Preface

evident in many ways. This has certainly been the case in my life experiences, especially as my efforts were directed towards going South after completing my studies at the University of Arizona in 1941. I was unaware of the true reason for the opposition, until after I had talked with President George Albert Smith, requesting that missionaries be sent to Guatemala, and these were promised by the First Presidency. My family and I have experienced much opposition, even to the point of peril to our lives, just as many of the missionaries who have served in Guatemala and in other areas of the world.

In writing this history I have recalled many events and mentioned a number of people, including my own family, who have contributed to the making of history, particularly in Guatemala. However, I have not expressed my profound feelings of love and appreciation for my wonderful wife and our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They are my greatest joy and eternal happiness. My supreme hope and desire is that my wife and I and every member of our family may be recipients of the unconditional blessings of eternal life and co-heirs with Jesus Christ in the Kingdom of our Heavenly Father. That having first believed and accepted the gospel through baptism, and by the laying on of hands received the Holy Ghost, and in keeping all the commandments we may become perfect in Jesus Christ.

Fully realizing that some children may be lost to influences beyond our control as parents, having agency to choose for themselves, it is my conviction that through our faithfulness and service in the Lord's work, those wicked influences will some day be overruled.

I receive great comfort from the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith as related by Elder Orson F. Whitney, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, in the General Conference of April 1929:

*The Prophet Joseph Smith declared, and he never taught more comforting doctrine, that the eternal feelings of faithful parents and the divine promises made to them for valiant service in the course of truth would save not only themselves but likewise their posterity.*

*"Though some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of divine*

*providence, reaching out after them and drawing them back to the fold. Either in this life or in the life to come they will return.*

*“They will have to pay their debt to justice. They will suffer for their sins and may tread a thorny path, but if it leads them at last like the penitent prodigal to a loving and forgiving Father’s heart and home, the painful experience will not have been in vain. Pray for your careless and disobedient children. Hold on to them with your faith. Hope on, trust on, until you see the salvation of God.”*

*This supports the concept of enduring. We should never give up on anyone.*

(Conference Report, April 1929, p. 110)

I also believe in the words spoken by Elder Henry B. Eyring, of the Quorum of the Twelve, at the April 1996 General Conference:

*As we offer the legacy of testimony to our families some may not receive it. It may even seem to skip over generations. But God will reach out to offer the legacy again and again. More than we can imagine, our faithful effort to offer to our family the testimony we have of the truth will be multiplied in power and extended in time.*

As Elder Eyring, I too have witnessed that “Heavenly Father honors his promises to families,” and that “God has kept his promises to reach out to Lehi’s covenant children and that he will reach out to ours” as well.

And now, with this work as my legacy, I wish to leave for my posterity my personal testimony of the truthfulness of this great work. I know beyond any doubt that my efforts in aiding in bringing the gospel to the descendants of Father Lehi have been divinely guided. My contribution, however small, has been a mighty blessing in my life, for which I am eternally thankful. I know that God lives and that He loves us, that he knows each of us personally; that Jesus Christ is His only begotten Son in whom He is well pleased, and that He is our Savior and our Redeemer, who suffered and died for the sins of the world; that through obedience to His gospel we can return to our Heavenly Home and dwell again with our Heavenly Father and Mother in eternal happiness. I know that Joseph Smith Jr. was chosen to be the prophet of the restoration of the gospel to

*Preface*

the earth, with power and authority from God; and that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the only true and living church upon the earth today. I also know that the Book of Mormon is the word of God given through his holy prophets on this the American Continent, and was translated by the young prophet, Joseph Smith Jr. by the gift and power of God. These truths have been revealed to me by the Holy Spirit. To this I can testify as did Alma, "And this is not all. Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself? Behold, I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true. And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety? Behold, I say unto you they are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days, that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me." (Alma 5:45-46)

JOHN FORRES O'DONNAL

Mesa, Arizona  
September 1996



## Chapter One

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### *My Beginnings*

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I, JOHN FORRES O'DONNAL, am the offspring of two very special family lines, as demonstrated by the abundant blessings and the love extended to them by the Lord through the years. I am the seventh of fourteen children born to John Christopher Franklin O'Donnal and Sarah Ann Cluff.

My father was a convert to the church in his youth and was instrumental in bringing the Mormon missionaries into his home when he was only ten years old. He was born on November 4, 1882, in Demotte, Jasper County, Indiana, the second son of William Henry O'Donnal and Amelia Magdalena Duenner.

About three years after my father joined the Church, the family was advised by the elders to move to Zion, considered then to be Salt Lake City, Utah. In obedience to the call, the farm and home were sold, and in company with three other families, left in wagons for Salt Lake City. While yet in Texas, they were overtaken by the elders and advised to go to Mexico to help colonize there.

Due to the bitter persecution of Church leaders and members practicing the doctrine of plural marriage, commonly known as "polygamy," by the enemies of the Church and the U.S. Government, the First Presidency made an effort to obtain a place of refuge under a foreign government to which those who were being

persecuted could flee. In 1886, land was purchased in the states of Chihuahua and Sonora, Mexico, where the Saints were able to colonize, fulfilling the desires of the leaders of the Church. My father's family obeyed the call to go to Mexico and settled in Colonia García, Chihuahua, Mexico.

My mother was born into one of the largest and most prominent, pioneer families in the Church, on July 10, 1889, in Pima, Graham County, Arizona--the third child and first daughter of Heber Manasseh Cluff and Sarah Ann Weech. Her family moved from Pima, Arizona, to Colonia Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico, in August of 1890, when she was eight years old; and a year later they moved to Colonia García, where she and my father met. They were married, in the Cluff home in Colonia Garcia, by Bishop J. T. Whetten, on March 4, 1907.

As a result of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, when members of the Church and other Americans fled to the United States after having been driven out of the Mormon colonies in Mexico, I was born in La Madera, New Mexico. My father had taken a job in a logging camp near La Madera and had built a little log cabin there for his family. It was in this log cabin that I was born on April 1, 1917.

For the fourth and last time since the exodus of 1912, in October 1921, Daddy packed the family and our belongings in two covered wagons and set out for Mexico from Summit, Utah, where we were living at the time, arriving in Colonia García once again. Although only four years old, I vividly recall the events of the adventurous trip, especially the crossing of the Colorado River at Lee's Ferry. I have fond memories of my early years in Colonia García, enjoying immensely, a typical pioneer childhood. I went barefoot much of the time, wearing shoes only during the winter months and when attending school. I was ten years old when I first saw an automobile and a crystal set radio which could be heard only with earphones.

From the very beginning, the hand of the Lord has been evident in guiding and directing my life, and also in preserving it. Since early childhood my life has been spared several times--twice from lightning strikes. The first time occurred at a children's party and dance. I was dancing with my sister Della near the big iron

stove in the center of the hall, which was used for heating. Two of Bishop Lester Farnsworth's children were also dancing together near the stove. A storm with lightning and thunder arose as we were dancing. Lightning came down the smoke pipe, blowing up the stove, killing the little Farnsworth girl, burning me and knocking me unconscious. The second time was on a rainy afternoon after milking the cows and carrying in wood for the kitchen stove. I sat in the wood box next to the stove to get warm and to dry my clothes. Outside there was a lightning storm. Our clothesline ran from a post in the yard to the house, under the kitchen chimney. Lightning struck the clothesline post in the yard and sent an electric bolt down the chimney, through the stove, and knocked me out.

On another occasion I was spared when a shotgun being cleaned by my father and brother, Melvin, accidentally went off, just missing my head. Twice I narrowly escaped rattlesnake bites while fishing. Also, when with an Aaronic Priesthood group on a return trip from an excursion to the Arizona Temple, we were thrown from a stake-bed truck into a cotton field, and again when thrown from the top of a stack of apple boxes in a wagon, while helping my father pick apples. Later I will relate other experiences where my life was spared. Surely, the Lord had a work for me to perform and the adversary did not want me to live to fulfill it.

During my youth, I had to fight against bashfulness and a lack of self-esteem, although I was good at all I undertook to do, except studying--I would rather have been outside in the open. I had poorly prepared teachers for the first three years of school in Colonia García and had not learned to read well nor to concentrate. I especially disliked mathematics.

When I was about seven, mother taught me a lesson in honesty I have never forgotten. Although we had a relatively well-balanced diet, we very seldom had store candy, other than *piloncillo* or crackers. We never had an orange or a banana. As kids we knew the general store would receive eggs as cash, and being hungry for soda crackers, my cousin Van Bingham and I stole some eggs from his mother, Aunt Pearl, and exchanged them at the store for some crackers. My heart about jumped out of my throat when I saw that my brother Melvin saw us at the store. He did not say a thing to me but told Mother. We took the crackers into the plumb bushes at the

lower end of the Bingham's lot so no one would see us, and ate part of them, then hid the rest for the next day. Mother said nothing to me until after supper when we were all sitting around the fireplace. Then she asked me what I had done with the crackers I had purchased with Van. I said I hadn't bought any crackers, but when Melvin said he had seen us, I confessed. Although it was night, and I think she had already discussed this with Aunt Pearl, she took me to her home and had Van and me explain what we had done and beg her forgiveness. Early the next morning we got the remaining crackers and gave them to Aunt Pearl.

There were no employment opportunities in the small community of Colonia García, making it difficult for the men living there to support their families. Things were no different for my father who was struggling to support his large family. He obtained employment as a sawyer with a sawmill in the mountains which caused him to be away for extended periods of time.

Daddy could not be home for my eighth birthday, April 1, 1925, so Mother asked Richard Farnsworth to baptize me. This ordinance was performed in the García Creek. I was confirmed a member of the church the following Sunday, April 5, 1925, by A. L. Farnsworth. My baptism day was a very happy day for me. Shortly thereafter our family moved to Colonia Dublán.

I could hardly wait until I was ordained a deacon and could be a Boy Scout. The Aaronic Priesthood was conferred upon me and I was ordained a deacon by Bishop Anson B. Call in 1929. The deacons of the Colonia Dublán Ward, were assigned to collect the fast offerings which consisted of flour, beans, corn, wheat, sugar, salt, etc., and were gathered in a wheelbarrow, with one or two deacons pulling by means of a rope tied to the front of the wheelbarrow and one lifting up the back with the two bars so the legs would clear the ground. The deacons were given a sack for each of the commodities donated. These offerings were delivered to the bishop for distribution to the poor. I do not recall any cash donations during these times.

On the fifth of February, 1933, I was ordained a Teacher by my father--one year and ten months after I should have been ordained to this office, or only two months before I should have been ordained a Priest. I do not know if this was because of negligence or

because the bishopric considered me unworthy. This hurt me, but I continued faithful in my deacon's quorum and never expressed my feelings of disappointment. Shortly after my ordination as a Teacher, I was called to teach the Trail Builders in Primary, a calling I faithfully fulfilled. One day Sister Mary Farnsworth told me to always be a good young man, honest and faithful, because her small son considered me his ideal, and because she admired and loved me. This impressed me greatly and had a great impact on my life. I have often recalled this experience.

I attended high school at the Juárez Stake Academy, graduating in 1936. My father was having financial difficulties, so I stayed out of school my sophomore year to work. I was employed in a cheese factory in Colonia Dublán making wooden boxes for the processed cheese. I took great pride in my work and became very efficient. Still, I was very happy to return to the Academy in the fall of 1933, as a sophomore, one year behind most of my old crowd. In order to attend the Academy my junior and senior years, I had to rent a room from my Aunt Lillie and Uncle Bert Whetten and "batch it."

The years I attended the Juárez Stake Academy were happy and memorable, full of social activities, that were supervised for the most part, by good, active, church leaders. I remember well the hayrides, the hikes, the plays and musical productions and participating in sports.

We had a very active M.I.A. in which I enjoyed participating. I also faithfully attended my quorum activities. Again, for some reason I was not advanced to the office of a Priest until a year and eight months after I should have been ordained. I said nothing until the bishop interviewed me. The only indication of any doubt about my conduct came in a previous interview with Bishop Anthony Bentley, at which time he indicated to me that he had been told that I was gaining entrance to the M.I.A. activities using someone else's activity card. I told him this was not true. The fact that I had been held back almost two years before being ordained a Teacher, and now a year and eight months before receiving the office of Priest because of a falsehood, caused a great consternation within me, and I had to contend with myself against rebelling. I accepted the ordination on November 4, 1934, at the hands of my friend and

member of the bishopric, Velan D. Call. I fulfilled my priesthood duties and rejoiced in doing so. A little over six years later, when I was attending the Bringhampton Ward while at the University of Arizona, on January 19, 1941, I had the Melchizedek Priesthood conferred upon me, and was ordained an Elder by L.A. Reneer.

Another important event in my life, was receiving my patriarchal blessing on November 17, 1935, from Joseph C. Bentley, patriarch of the Juárez Stake. At the time, I did not realize the importance of this blessing, wherein the Lord comforted me, and told me of a great and important work I would perform in my life among the people by whom we were surrounded and in the nations south of us, through my faithfulness--things I could not comprehend at that time, nor would I, until years later. How important they were, only the Lord knew, but these promises would be fulfilled. The following text is part of my blessing relating to these promises.

*...You shall live to see great progress and the power of the Lord made manifest in the accomplishments of His Holy Purposes in these the latter-days. Through your faithfulness you shall be called to important positions in the Holy Priesthood. The Lord will give you wisdom and will magnify you in the eyes of your brothers and sisters and you shall be the instrument in his hands in assisting in the accomplishments of His Holy Purposes in these the latter-days...*

*You shall live to see great progress in the work of the Lord, in this land, among the people by whom we are surrounded and among all the natives in the nations south of us. Cultivate a spirit of love and charity for this people, for they are of the House of Israel and our Heavenly Father will open their eyes and cause many of them to receive the truth and be saved in His Kingdom. And if you will cultivate a spirit of love and charity for them, Our Heavenly Father will magnify you among them and make you the instrument in his hands of doing a great and glorious work to his divine acceptance and to your joy and happiness. You shall win their love and confidence because of your faithfulness before the Lord; and you shall see mighty faith manifested among this people...*

*You shall be called into important councils among your brethren of the Holy Priesthood and shall witness the power of the Lord made manifest in the accomplishment of His Holy Purposes. Do not give way to discouragement nor to any evil power nor temptation, but seek diligently unto the Lord for His Holy Spirit and for power and*

## *My Beginnings*

*determination to resist every evil with which you may come in contact, and labor faithfully to his divine acceptance and to your glory and exaltation in His Celestial Kingdom. Be comforted dear brother, for the Lord loves your soul and he will greatly bless you and give you power to accomplish that for which you are here upon the earth, to his divine acceptance.*

I can truly say that my life from then on was as if it had been outlined by this patriarchal blessing, without my knowing it.

My Senior year at the Juárez Stake Academy was a very active year for me--full of extra curricular activities which reflected somewhat in my grades. I needed financial aid, so I worked as a janitor at the academy. I was chosen to run for student body president but lost the election, then was elected senior class president. The Senior Class numbered only twenty-three, and we had a great time together as a group.

Harold Brown was one of our group. His life and mine have had a parallel over the years, especially concerning our activity in the Church. Both he and I were born in the United States, courtesy of the Mexican Revolution. Our families both returned to the colonies--his to Chuichupa and mine to García. Our families moved to Colonia Dublán at about the same time and we both attended grade school there. We both stayed out of school our sophomore year, and were close friends during the next three years at the Juárez Stake Academy. After graduation he went to Benson, Arizona to work, then on a mission to Argentina.

It had always been my desire to serve a full-time mission, and soon after my graduation and arrival in Colonia Dublán, Bishop Anson B. Call asked me if I would like to go on a mission. I readily told him I would, but my physical examination detected a heart murmur, so my priesthood leaders decided I should not run the risk and did not approve my going. They then called my brother, Valden. It was not in the Lord's plan that I go on a mission at that time.

Disappointed, I went to El Paso and started working for Leland Jackson as I had done the previous summer. My future did

not appear very bright. I was not happy where I was, and there was little prospects of a better job. The country was still in a depression.

Later that fall, I received a letter from my brother Valden who was then in Safford, Arizona, working with Jess Taylor attending his service station, store and auto court. In the letter he told me of his mission call and asked if I would like to come to Safford and take over his job, which paid considerably more than I was then earning. Since I could not go on a mission, I decided to go to Safford. I am sure, the Lord was opening the way for my future.

Jess Taylor sold Texaco products and Firestone tires at his gasoline station. I spent the winter of 1936 on this job. It was while working at Jess Taylor's that I first met Spencer W. Kimball, then President of the Mt. Graham Stake.

My brother, Melvin, was working with the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), having graduated from Gila College, a two-year college in Thatcher, Arizona. He was always afraid of being laid off from his job because he did not have a four-year degree. He encouraged me to go to the University of Arizona and obtain a Bachelor's degree. I had little hopes of going to a university because of my financial situation, and there was no one to assist me in this respect.

Again, the Lord opened a way. Every two or three months, a Firestone representative out of Tucson visited Jess Taylor's store in Safford to take tire orders. After one of these visits in the early summer of 1937, I heard Chet Vasey, the Firestone representative, ask Jess if he knew of a young man who might be interested in attending the University of Arizona in Tucson, and working part-time in the Firestone Service Store. This information penetrated my mind as I recalled Melvin's advice, and there arose in me a strong desire to go to the university. Now I felt there was hope. I drove to Tucson, was interviewed and given the job, which required that I commence immediately.

I decided to enter the College of Agriculture at the University of Arizona. My immediate concern of finding affordable housing was resolved by some of the professors at the university. I was given the opportunity to participate in a pilot project to assist students who had little resources. After a cooperative was organized, a building was rented and renovated to accommodate

25-30 students who would do their own management and work. We called our organization the "Aggie House." We drew up a constitution and by-laws, elected officers, and were accepted into the inter-collegiate fraternity organization. We hired a male Chinese cook and ate very well. After one year, our organization proved a great success, and at a cost of only \$25.00 a month per person. I lived at the Aggie House throughout my years at the university serving as an officer every year, and as president my senior year.

When I entered the University of Arizona, the Church had just completed an Institute building adjacent to the campus. Although my work allowed me very little time to participate at the Institute of Religion, I did arrange time to assist with the hard labor of preparing the ground and landscaping. Lowell Benion was Institute Director. We enjoyed many activities, but I had no time to attend any of the regular institute classes. I made many friends and some lasting friendships, including Willard I. Skousen and Ruth Nielson. Willard was older than I and had served a mission in Argentina, returning to the university to finish his studies in Dairy Industry. Ruth lived with her parents on the Indian Reservation at San Xavier Mission. Willard was courting Ruth and they were married when they finished college. Then I lost contact with them for thirteen years.

During my first two years at the university, I admired the upper classmen who were working with the different departments to help them with their financing. Especially I envied those working in the cotton laboratory. I hoped that some day I could work in this lab. During the summer months after my sophomore year, I was offered a job in the dairy department, working in the field, then with the agronomy department, in the cotton field, selfing cotton by wrapping the flowers with a fine copper wire before they opened, preventing them from opening, thus assuring self-pollination. When I accepted these jobs, I left Firestone and began to enjoy attending university activities and Sunday services at the Institute.

As a junior, my much desired opportunity became a reality--I was given the head job in the cotton laboratory, where I worked during the winter months. I combined this lab work with my field work, in the summer. I worked with Dr. Bryant and Professor Presley. Professor Presley had invented a machine for testing

cotton fiber strength; and I did the testing. I also combed cotton on the seed, for measuring staple length. I compiled data on the various experiments and prepared them for analysis. During the years I worked with the cotton project at the University of Arizona, cotton varieties were developed for commercial production. Among these was Delta Pine, a long-staple cross of Egyptian and Acala cottons. The knowledge I gained from this experience proved very valuable in later years.

The University of Arizona is a land grant university, and partly, for this reason, the College of Agriculture is the largest college on the campus. Also, the university was required to maintain a two-year training course in ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps), for all male students; therefore I was required to take this training. In 1941, my senior year, Hitler's army had already marched into most of Europe and all those countries were engaged in war. The United States was rapidly becoming involved, and we could see there was small chance of us staying out of direct involvement in the war. Considering this fact, I felt certain I would be inducted into the armed services, and decided it would be better for me if I went in as a commissioned officer. So I made application for advanced training towards a commission of second lieutenant in the Air Force. I took the required physical exam and was rejected because of a double hernia. Again the Lord's influence was manifested, as this was not the course my life was supposed to take.

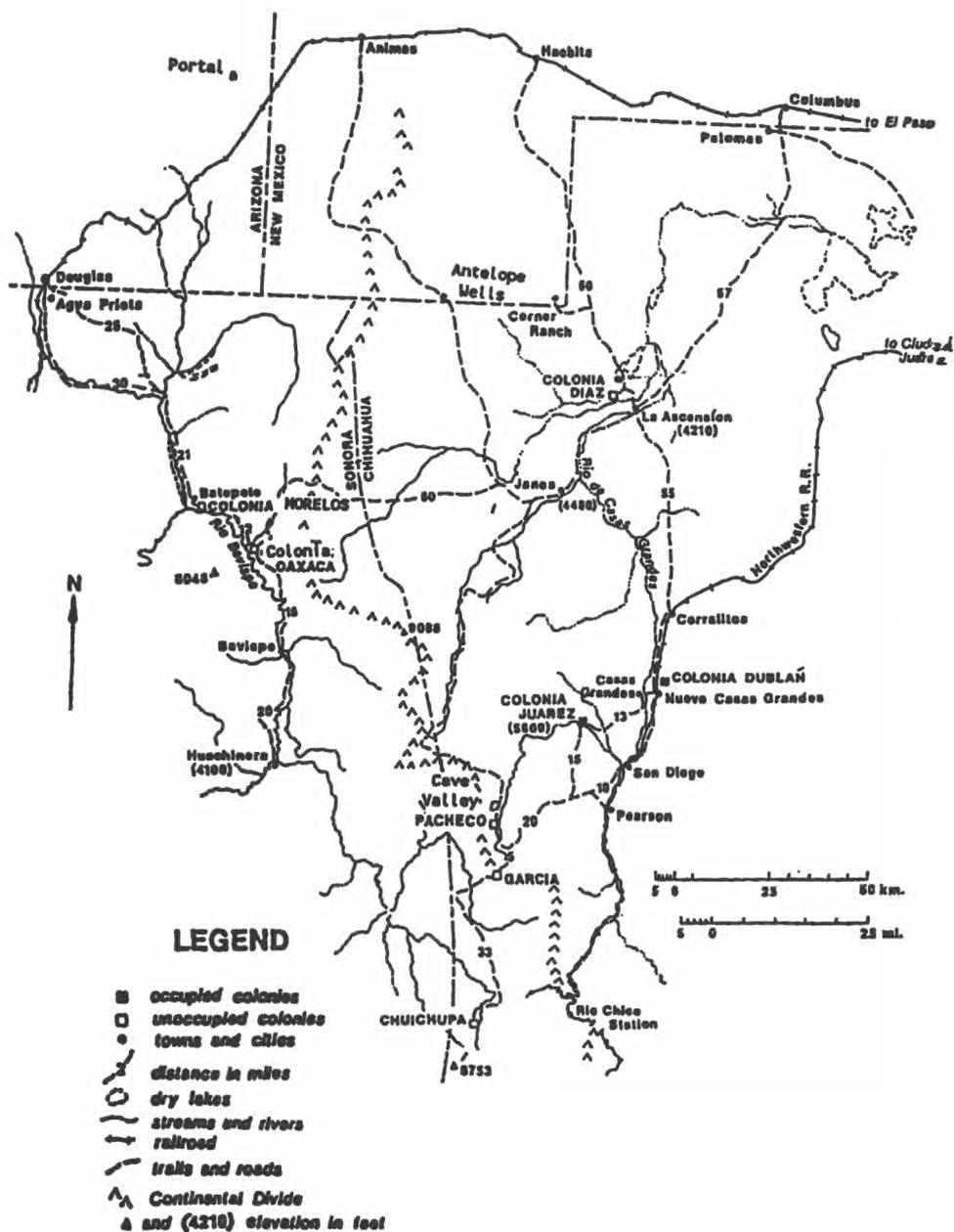
I completed my credits for a Bachelor of Science degree in Agronomy during the first summer term of 1941, and was scheduled to graduate in the class of 1941. However, I had to take classes during the summer, so I was not permitted to graduate until 1942.

I now entered a new phase of my life, not yet realizing what the Lord had in store for me. I am certain that my birth in the United States, growing up in the colonies in Mexico, and all the experiences in my early life were part of the Lord's plan in preparing me for the work He had for me to do.

*My Beginnings*



*John Christopher Franklin O'Donnal & Sarah Ann Cluff O'Donnal*



Mormon Colonies in Mexico

*My Beginnings*



*Log cabin in La Madera, New Mexico, where John Forres O'Donnal was born.  
O'DONNAL FAMILY (Left to right): Della, Sarah Ann (Annie), Vivian, Valden,  
Melvin, John Christopher Franklin (Frank) holding Vildred*



*Elementary school and church house in Colonia Dublán, Mexico,  
where Forres attended school from September 1928 to May 1929*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*O'Donnal Family passport picture taken at Columbus, New Mexico, July 1921*  
*FRONT: Della holding Forres (age 4), Frank holding Ila, Annie holding Crenna. BACK: Vivian, Melvin, Della*

*My Beginnings*

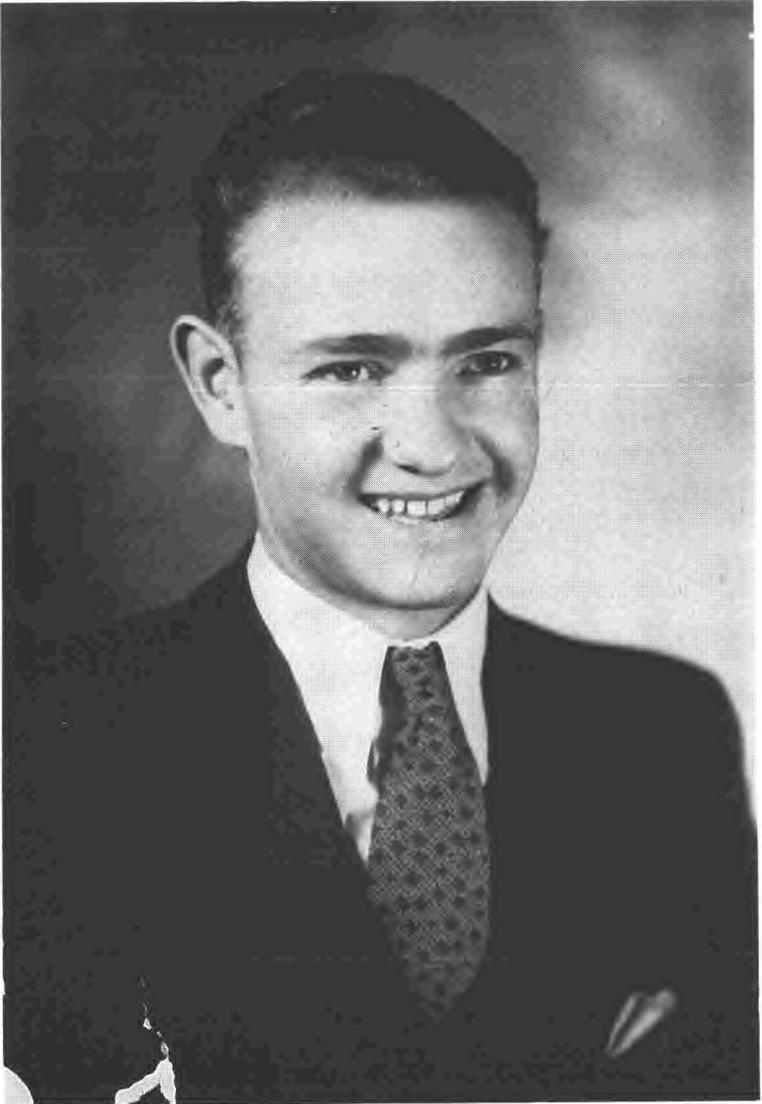


*Juárez Stake Academy Graduating Class of 1936*



*John Forres O'Donnal & Harold Brown  
Graduation Day 1936, Juárez Stake Academy*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*John Forres O'Donnal 1937 -- age 20*

## Chapter Two

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# *My Career -- Pioneering The Rubber Industry In Guatemala*

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My desire upon graduation from college had been to find employment with a company or with the U.S. Government, in Latin America. I had discussed this issue with my professors, so they knew of my interest in working in Latin America. I know this urge was inspired. With the United States rapidly becoming directly involved in the war, there was little chance of my finding employment, since it was almost certain I would be called into the armed services. So I went back to the Firestone service store and worked as shipping clerk at \$90.00 per month.

In mid September I received a telephone call from the head of the Horticulture Department at the university, advising me that he had a letter that might interest me. The letter was from Dr. Crooks, former head of the Botany Department at the University of Arizona, who had taken a position with the United States Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C. In his letter, Dr. Crooks spoke of Dr. Walter E. Brandes and Dr. Robert D. Rands, of a new agency of the Department of Agriculture, the Office Of Rubber Plant Investigation. Learning that Dr. Crooks was from Arizona, they asked him if he was acquainted with or knew of any young man,

graduate in agriculture, who knew Spanish, and might be interested in accepting a position with their program which was just opening in Central and South America. When I read this letter I knew this was what I wanted and had been wishing for, and although I did not realize it at the time, I am certain it came to me through divine intervention, six years after receiving my patriarchal blessing. I answered the letter expressing my interest in the position. Within a week I received a cable from Washington, confirming my employment with Rubber Investigations, requesting I report in Washington, D.C. on November 1, 1941, with documents for obtaining a passport. My travel orders were by Pullman train, from Albuquerque, New Mexico, to Washington, D.C. This was an eventful day in my life. I could not believe what had happened during the previous few weeks, nor did I know what the future held for me.

My assignment would be to Honduras, with a 30-day orientation and instruction period in the Washington, D.C. office. I had heard of British Honduras, but did not recall having studied about Honduras. Not even my supervisors in Washington knew that within six months, I would be in Guatemala, and would remain there more than fifty years. I believe Guatemala is where the Lord wanted me to be. I had no way of knowing that my arrival in Guatemala, and what I did there under the inspiration of the Lord, would change the lives of hundreds of thousands, many of them not yet born.

I arrived in Washington, D.C. at about eight o'clock in the morning. Naturally, I was quite apprehensive, being in the big city and on my own. Phoenix, Arizona was the largest city I had known, and I had never been east of El Paso, Texas. A new world was opening up to me. My orientation began at the Bureau of Plant Industry, Department of Agriculture, where I met Dr. Walter E. Brandes, the head of the Rubber Investigation Program and other personnel of the department.

At the office, I proceeded to get the necessary immunizations and visa to go to Honduras. Still, my draft board in Tucson, Arizona would not extend me a release to leave the United States until I had a physical examination and received a draft classification. Arrangements were made for me to receive the physical in Washington, D.C., and I was classified as 1-A,

notwithstanding my being rejected at the University of Arizona for advanced officer's training because of a double hernia. This classification, of course, complicated the situation, and my draft board would only extend me a six month deferment. I refused to go for only six months, nor would the Rubber office send me for such a short time. So a dialogue was initiated between the office and my draft board. The office explained the urgency and strategic nature of the rubber program, but the draft board was still reluctant to extend more than a six month deferment. Then came Pearl Harbor! With the declaration of war and my 1-A classification, my draft board became even more reluctant to permit me to leave the United States; but the Rubber Office was persistent and finally convinced the board of the urgency of the rubber program. Now that the supply of natural rubber was certain to be cut off by the Japanese, the Rubber Investigation Office took on more importance and all rubber projects were channeled to this office, so I was finally extended a one year release to go to Central America.

My work in Washington, D.C. continued through the first week of February 1942, and arrangements were made for my departure to Lancitilla, Honduras. Travel accommodations were difficult to obtain at this time, and the office requested space on a United Fruit Company's Great White Fleet banana steamer, from New Orleans to Tela, Honduras. At about this time the German U-boats were sinking the United Fruit Company's and other ships off the coast of Louisiana, and I refused to go by boat. Finally I obtained passage on a sleeper plane out of Washington, D.C., on February 12, 1942, to Brownsville, Texas. This was my first plane flight, and the first and only sleeper plane in which I have flown.

On February 13, I flew on Pan American Airways from Brownsville, to Tegucigalpa, Honduras, through Guatemala City. I recall, as we approached Guatemala City, that I was very much impressed with the deep canyons. Although they were not rocky, they had sheer walls on both sides, as though just having been formed by erosion. I immediately loved Guatemala. We remained in Guatemala City overnight, and took rooms in the Palace Hotel, the best in town. I did not know then, that within three months, I would be living in that hotel for about a year. We were entertained by a Marimba orchestra in the lovely lobby of the hotel. I grew to

love marimba music, both for listening and for dancing. Here I met the hotel manager, a Norwegian, Peter Laugerud, who became a great friend, and whose son, years later, became president of Guatemala.

The next morning, February 14, we flew to Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, where I met Dr. Wilson Poponoe, a famous tropical agriculturist, then employed by the United Fruit Company. I spent several hours talking with him. Years earlier he had spent much time traveling to all the tropical areas of the world. He had collected many tropical fruits and exotic ornamental trees and shrubs, and had established a beautiful tropical garden for the United Fruit Company at Lancitilla, Honduras, where I was to be stationed, working with Edward T. Stanwood. At Lancitilla, Dr. Poponoe had established several hundred seedlings of Hevea rubber trees, which was one reason for the Office of Rubber Investigations establishing a rubber station there. This was our principal source of seeds for nurseries used as rootstock for budgrafting high-yielding, rubber clones.

By this time, the United States was well into World War II and we were rapidly losing ground in the Far East, including most of the rubber-producing areas. To develop a successful rubber program in the Western Hemisphere, we needed the high-yielding clones developed in the Far East. The rubber plantation companies were cooperating with the U.S. Government in helping obtain plants of the high-yielding clones for our program. The program depended on this. Goodyear had large plantations in Sumatra and Java, but these were taken over by the Japanese. They also had a plantation in the Philippines, and just before the islands were invaded, they were able to send out on the last ships, a shipment of "budded stumps" of these high-yielding clones. The ships carrying these stumps took over three months to arrive in Panama. From there, the boxes were shipped to Tela, where we received them and immediately transplanted the budded stumps in a garden. The rubber plant has a large tap root, and seedlings 3/4" to 1 1/2" thick are patch-budded and cut off after the bud has taken. This is the "budded stump" and is about 18" long. These stumps were packed with moist sawdust in boxes, and had survived the long voyage from the Philippines. These clones were the basis of our program. As

these developed budwood, they were budded on seedlings from our nursery, for distribution to the other Latin American countries where there was a rubber program. It was my responsibility to supervise this work.

After three months at Lancitilla I was asked to go to Guatemala for a month, to check on some rubber nurseries that had been established there the previous year by Ed Stanwood, in different areas along the Pacific Coast. I was also to advise on the project of initiating a planting program on a commercial basis in Guatemala. I arrived in Guatemala City in the evening of May 21, 1942. I visited a Mr. Palmer, who had been helpful to the rubber survey party members and especially to Raymond Stadleman and Ed Stanwood.

My first order of business was to set up an appointment with the Minister of Agriculture. At the time the rubber survey was made in Guatemala, a cooperative agreement was drawn up and signed by the U.S. Government and the Guatemalan Government, in which both countries agreed to work jointly and cooperate in fomenting a natural rubber program involving both scientific investigations and development. I met with the minister, General Roderico Anzueto, in his office. He was very cordial and offered full support to our program, and assigned an employee of the Ministry, Antonio Toruño, to accompany me on my survey. Antonio was assigned to make all travel arrangements and contacts. A year before Ed Stanwood had established small rubber nurseries at two of General Anzueto's farms, one of President Jorge Ubico's, and at several other farms owned by what were called "cooperators."

This inspection tour took us to Retalhuleu, a coastal plain town of about 6,000 inhabitants, the fifth largest city in Guatemala, arriving there on June 13, 1942. We took a room in the Astor Hotel, and worked out from there. Little did I know when I arrived in Retalhuleu, what the future held for me there. This is where I would meet, fall in love with, and marry, my beautiful wife, Carmen.

All of the rubber nurseries were growing excellently, and I determined there were thousands of acres on the Pacific coastal plain, between the elevations of 600 and 2,500 feet, where rubber could be cultivated successfully. I reported this to Ed Stanwood and

to the Washington office, suggesting that someone be permanently stationed in Guatemala, to establish a station and a distribution and development program. I received word that since I was already in Guatemala, I should remain there to direct the program.

The principal contact and cooperator of the rubber program in Guatemala, was León Lind Petersen, a wealthy, Norwegian, coffee plantation owner, and Norwegian Consul in Guatemala. He owned a large coffee and quinine plantation on the Pacific slopes of the volcano, Fuego. He was intelligent, courteous and congenial, and we immediately became close friends. Very anxious to cooperate, he offered to rent, for \$1.00 a year, 125 acres of fine land on the upper end of Hacienda Trapiche Grande, below Cuyotenango, for establishing a rubber station.

Don León, as Mr. Petersen was known, continued his cooperation in a way that made possible the establishment and operation of the new station. He permitted us to cut timber and palm leaves for building fifteen, temporary, labor houses. He sold us brick and lumber produced on the farm, for building permanent houses. The land was cleared of bush and prepared for a rubber nursery and budwood garden. Boxes of budded stumps of the high-yielding, Eastern clones received from the Philippines, were sent to me from Lancitilla, and a large budwood garden was established. Seeds for nurseries were collected, boxed and shipped by Raymond Stadleman from El Palmar, Veracruz, Mexico, which were then supplied to our cooperators and other farmers who wished to plant rubber. Budded plants from the station were supplied to these farmers also, for producing a supply of budwood on each farm, for budding their nurseries. The budded plants were transplanted to the fields.

Three months after my arrival in Guatemala, on August 8, 1942, Dr. Robert D. Rands, the number two man of the Washington office came to Guatemala to appraise the situation, meet Mr. Petersen, and negotiate the establishment of a rubber station on his property at Trapiche Grande. Upon approval from Washington, a contract was drawn up and signed. After a survey of the property, we had to present a report to the Guatemala Government, outlining our program in Guatemala.

I established myself in the Astor Hotel in Retalhuleu, and set up an office in the same building with the U.S. Army engineer, Tolly Bond, charged with the construction of, what was then termed, a “Military Emergency Route,” from the Mexican border through Guatemala, which would later become the Pan American Highway. I assisted in selecting the route for this highway and was consulted during its construction.

In succeeding years, I had the opportunity of participating in many other important, new and emerging programs and events, and was requested to cooperate closely with the U.S. Embassy and Consulate. I was asked to assist U.S. Army Intelligence in the construction of, or amplification, of a large airport in Guatemala City for the use of the U.S. Air Force. I was also asked to participate in the preliminary discussions leading to the establishment of a good American school.

As World War II continued, natural rubber became more important for the progress of the allied forces around the world and a very strategic item in the war effort. Primarily, for this reason, my draft board in Tucson, Arizona, continued to extend me deferments from the armed services, which continued through September 1945.

We made slow progress with the rubber program through the 1940s. Little interest was shown for planting rubber, as long as excellent prices were being paid for coffee (the principal crop), bananas, cotton, and an emerging, essential oil, lemon grass or citronella. We were instructed by the Washington office to direct our efforts towards the establishment of a small farm, rubber program, based on the fact that more than 60% of the rubber produced in the Far East comes from small farms. However, it became evident by 1950, that before there would be a small-farm program, there first must be a large-farm program to stimulate the small farmers; and that low interest rate loan financing was necessary to bring about the development of natural rubber plantations.

There was much official interest in this rubber program in the U.S. and throughout Latin America, both from a short-term and a long-term perspective. The United States was interested in establishing a closer source of natural rubber, and the cooperating countries were interested in having a local supply of rubber,

avoiding the need to import, and even to export this product. It proved to be a major challenge convincing local farmers that there was a good future in this new crop. They were skeptical, and the program did not set roots and become established as an accepted cash crop and a partial solution to agricultural diversification, nor as an important export commodity, until about twenty years later, when, after much effort, we were finally successful in obtaining funds for development of plantations.

The rubber program faced many setbacks over the years, with bitter fights in Washington to obtain continued appropriations for funding the program. As one official stated, "this program blows hot and cold." This was especially true in Guatemala following World War II, after the overthrow of the dictator, General Jorge Ubico, and after the popular election the following year of President Juan José Arévalo, whose liberal ideology became evident soon after his election.

All this political activity, naturally, had a great effect on the United States Government programs, some of which had been necessarily discontinued because of Arévalo's influence. The program I headed was no exception. Being caught in all this political upheaval, I was charged with the responsibility of keeping the rubber program alive and saving what had been accomplished over the years. I realized this danger early in the administration of Arévalo and geared our activities towards continuing this important work, and directed our efforts towards a holding status.

As the lease on the land where the rubber station was established was scheduled to terminate within a few years, I felt impressed to attempt the transfer of the station to Government-owned land in Guatemala, and in time, to establish the experimental plots and plantings, at this new station. This plan was approved in Washington, so I petitioned President Arévalo, through the Ministry of Agriculture, to turn over to the rubber program, 300 acres of land near the existing station, which had been taken from the Germans during World War II. Before leaving office, President Arévalo approved the project and the land was made available to us. I then directed my efforts to selling the program to the new, Arbenz government. It was not easy, since I was a U.S. citizen heading a U.S. government program, although it was really a cooperative

program of both governments by signed agreement. The rubber program was ideal for their agrarian plans. As stated, 60% of the world's natural rubber is produced in small, family-size farms. Recognizing this, I was given full official support for the program, although all funding came from the United States. Every courtesy was extended to me, also official credentials for conducting our work and requesting cooperation from local officials. This was not always respected, especially by the local labor and agrarian leaders. It became increasingly dangerous for myself, my U.S. assistant, and our families, but the program continued.

The years 1953 and 1954 were very turbulent in Washington, D.C., concerning the continuation of the rubber program in Latin America and the appropriation of funds for its operation. Dr. Marion W. Parker had replaced Dr. Robert D. Rands as head of the rubber program, and the title of the program had been changed to United States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, Field Crops Research Branch, Section of Rubber Plant Investigations. Dr. Parker, on his first visit to the programs in Latin America, visited our station in Guatemala for a few days, then asked me to accompany him to Costa Rica. During our flight, he asked me if I would return with him to Washington, to be his assistant there. He told me to think about this and let him know before he returned. I was very much surprised at his request, especially since there were others in the program with more experience and higher positions, all of them with Ph.D. degrees. This would mean a prestigious position in Washington, D.C., and a much higher salary. I carefully considered the offer, discussed it with my wife, Carmen, and prayed about it. I felt strongly that I should remain in Guatemala. I expressed my feelings to Dr. Parker, who was disappointed, but accepted my decision.

Elder Ezra Taft Benson was, at the time, Secretary of Agriculture. In defense of our important program, I mailed information to him which he never received. At the suggestion of President David O. McKay, who visited Guatemala in January 1954, I wrote to Secretary Benson through Elder Spencer W. Kimball and Stake President, J. Willard Marriott, in Washington, D.C. The controversy involved the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, State, Foreign Operations Administration, Office of

Defense Mobilization, Representatives of the Rubber Manufacturers Association and Representatives of all the U.S. Tire Manufacturers. Several high level meetings took place during February 1954, and I submitted information to Secretary Benson for these meetings. On March 5, 1955, Secretary Ezra Taft Benson made a six-hour visit to Guatemala City. As we had not been advised of his coming, there was no one to meet him. I was very disappointed that I did not have the opportunity of speaking with him in person.

On May 7, 1954, another high level meeting was held to discuss the future of the Western Hemisphere rubber program that had been under the direction of the United States Department of Agriculture since 1939. It was decided that the rubber program was desirable and should be continued, that the Department of Agriculture should assume full responsibility for the program during Fiscal Year 1956, and that field staff should remain as employees of that department through this interim period. However, in another meeting in September, the battle was lost and the Department of Agriculture lost control of the program, which was then placed under the Department of State. This brought many changes in policy, including the termination of research and the rotation of personnel after three years. I had already been in Guatemala on the rubber program since 1942, almost 13 years. I knew my time was running out.

Research on a tree crop is a life-time job. In an effort to save the rubber program which had progressed marvelously in Guatemala, with world-wide significance, I commenced working much closer with the Guatemalan government who wanted the program continued. It was just then taking root with the farmers and had prospects of becoming an important crop in Guatemala. I combined the rubber work with a cacao program, involving the Mexican Department of Agriculture. I requested that the 300 acres of land on the government farm, "Los Brillantes," previously authorized by President Arévalo, be turned over to the program. This was accomplished, and plans were immediately formulated and carried out for construction of residence buildings for personnel, an office, warehouses, and rubber processing and cacao plant propagation. Also, plants were propagated for transferring all the existing rubber experimental plots, to the new station. I requested

and received additional Guatemalan technical personnel and equipment.

During this period (1945-1954), all natural rubber programs in Latin America were discontinued, except in Brazil, Mexico and Guatemala. Guatemala is the only country that has developed into an important natural rubber producing country. It is self-sustaining and supplies the needs of Central America, northern South America and a substantial amount of Mexico's needs. This also is not just a coincidence, nor is my involvement in the program. My career was the vehicle the Lord used to place me where He wanted me to be, to do the work He needed me to do.



*John Forres O'Donnal, June 1942, in Guatemala*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*John Forres O'Donnal -- "Rubber Man of Guatemala"*



*John Forres O'Donnal at the farm residence of the President of Guatemala, General Jorge Ubico*



*Tapping a rubber tree at the USDA rubber station in Cuyotenango, Guatemala*



*Tapping a rubber tree*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*Tapped rubber tree -- latex running into a cup*



*León Lind Petersen at Finca "Trapiche Grande,"  
Guatemala -- 1942*

## Chapter Three

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# *Courtship, Marriage And Family*

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As previously mentioned, when I arrived in Guatemala in 1942, as a young man only 25 years old, I established myself in Retalhuleu. I selected this town because the people were much more friendly and sociable than in the other towns I had visited, but I am now convinced that the Lord had another important purpose for my residing there.

Not long after my arrival, privileges were extended to me in the highly-respected, local, social club in Retalhuleu. In the afternoons when in town, I would usually meet there with friends to read the paper, listen to the war news, and chart the progress on maps. Alfredo Quezada, who had volunteered his services as my secretary when I needed him, and Alfonzo Kech, an American in the lumber business, who had lived many years in Guatemala, would usually meet with me. It was here, on one of these occasions, that I met a lovely young lady who was to become my eternal companion.

In September 1942, as I was having a soft drink with Alfredo Quezada at the club, his wife, Sara, entered with Carmen Gálvez, with whom I was not acquainted. They commenced playing table tennis, and the ball was accidentally directed near the table where

we were seated. I picked it up and took it back to them, then asked Alfredo who this beautiful girl was, as I had not seen her before. He called to her saying, "Carmen, this *Gringo* would like to meet you." She replied, "Since when does a lady have to go to meet a gentleman? If he wants to meet me he will have to come over here to me." She did not know I understood Spanish, but we went over and Alfredo introduced us. I then invited them to have ice cream next door. I told Carmen I had been around Retalhuleu about three months and had not seen her. To this she replied that she did not often come out on the streets but did her visiting at home. I asked if I could visit her at home and she told me I could. This was the beginning of a beautiful, eternal love affair.

Carmen's family consisted of an older brother, Carlos, and two younger sisters, Elvira and Teresa. Her mother is Carlota Elvira Anguiano Escobar, and her father, Manuel Gálvez Fuentes. Her father was an auditor working with the Guatemalan government auditing the farms taken from the Germans during World War II. He was usually home only on weekends. I had met her sister, Elvira, and she had introduced me to the local priest, who was very sociable and friendly. There were very few automobiles in Retalhuleu, and at times the priest, Augusto Herrera, would ask me to drive him to some town or farm to pick up a sick person or to do other errands. Elvira sometimes accompanied us. After one of these trips, on a rainy night, she invited us into her home to have refreshments. After this, and after meeting Carmen, I was a regular visitor at the Gálvez home.

By the first of November, Carmen and I knew we were in love. Carmen's family, especially her mother, although she liked me as a person, did not want her to marry outside the Catholic Church nor to a *Gringo* of whom they knew little. I knew my family would not approve either. We had also been taught not to marry outside the Church. But there was a strong, unseen influence urging us on, and at the time I did not understand why this should be.

Our courtship became more serious and was progressing well with everyone's encouragement, except her mother's and some of her aunts' and uncles' who related false tales about the Mormons. There was also an unseen force of opposition at work, and events happened in December which almost terminated our relationship. It

was through our friend Alfredo Quezada, and especially the Catholic priest, that all was again put in order.

In January 1943 we decided to get married. We very openly considered the problems of family, religion, customs, etc., before making the final decision. We first wanted to talk to her parents, but her father was working on a farm about two hours drive from Retalhuleu. So, with her mother, we drove to the farm. Don Meme, as Carmen's father was called, was out in the field so I typed a note advising him that we were there to talk with him about our desires to be married.

He talked with us very open-mindedly and related the problems he considered we would experience concerning culture, communication, religion, etc. Both he and Doña Elvira, Carmen's mother, then gave their full consent and blessing.

There were no objections to our marriage in Washington either, and we wanted to be married in April, so I commenced obtaining all the legal authorizations, including taking out residence in Guatemala, but soon discovered that there were many complications. One by one I met the requirements and overcame the many stumbling blocks. With legal matters in order, we set the wedding date for June 19 and arrangements were made to use the social club in Retalhuleu for this event.

On June 19, 1943, guests gathered at the Hotel Astor, and after a heavy rain, at 6:00 p.m., we all walked to the mayor's office where the civil wedding ceremony was performed. From the mayor's office we walked to the social club, where the priest, Augusto Herrera, performed the religious, "mixed wedding" (the marriage of a Catholic to one of another religion). After the ceremony, the priest came to me and said he was so emotional he could hardly talk, and he did not know why, as he had performed many weddings. I told him I knew why--his spirit had recognized the presence of the genuine priesthood (a topic we had discussed previously).

Our wedding was the biggest social event in Retalhuleu for years. The hall was filled with flowers. We had no planned honeymoon, but I took Carmen with me to all the farms I was working with and to those of mutual friends, who treated us royally.

I felt badly that I did not tell my family until after we were married. I still feel bad, but actually I believe it was for the best.

Two years later, when I took Carmen to the United States, she immediately won the hearts of all of the family, being such a wonderful person. I have a firm testimony that this was to be, and that together we had an important mission to fulfill among her people. Yet, the succeeding five years were difficult ones, with the two great forces of good and evil being strongly manifest. Satan would not let up, and I was nearly drawn entirely into his camp. I became slack in some of the gospel principles, as the social pressures were great. I glory in the teachings I received as a boy in my home and in church, and the examples of my parents, brothers and sisters and church leaders. The forces of good did triumph. Like the two thousand stripling Lamanite warriors who valiantly fought under Helaman, I had been taught to keep the commandments of God and to walk uprightly before Him.

As a boy living in the Mormon colonies in Chihuahua, Mexico, in the Juárez Stake, when a general authority visited our quarterly stake conferences, it was most often Apostle Melvin J. Ballard. I rejoiced in listening to his sermons and in hearing him sing--he would nearly always sing my favorite hymns. On one occasion at a special meeting in the Dublán Ward chapel, while speaking to us on the apostasy and the restoration, he prophesied that, "your young people here today will live to see a thousand of Father Lehi's children come into the church for every one of them being converted now." At that time, the Spirit bore witness to my soul that he was a prophet of God, and I received a testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ--a testimony I have never lost. And in a very real way, I received "mine errand from the Lord," (Jacob 1:17). This was confirmed nine years later when I received my patriarchal blessing.

Carmen and I were happy, but things were not easy for her either, with all the pressures and with the adversary constantly harassing her. My work kept me away some nights and other times I came home late. At times, on the nights when I was away, she would hear strange sounds. This would never happen when I was at home. There was also the constant threat of my being called into active duty in the armed forces, and having to leave Carmen alone, knowing it would be almost impossible for her to go to the United

States to live, not being a U.S. citizen and not knowing any of my family.

During the first year and a half of our marriage, a period of considerable adjustment, I had decided we should not start a family because of the uncertain, worldwide situation and the likely possibility of my being inducted into the armed services. When the international situation improved, we decided to start our family, and by the end of 1944, we knew Carmen was pregnant, which made us very happy.

Because of the war I had not had a vacation since being employed in November 1941. My draft board in Tucson had continued my occupational deferment until this time; however, it was receiving pressure to discontinue my deferment to meet the quota. Also, with the development of synthetic rubber and the recapture of some of the rubber producing countries, the natural rubber supply was not so critical. In June 1945, when Carmen was seven months pregnant, I was granted a three-month home leave.

Our big concern was Carmen's condition and determining where the baby would be delivered. Hospital facilities were scarce. However, Sister Polly Sloan from the colonies in Mexico, operated a small maternity home in Mesa, Arizona, working with Dr. Philip Hartman, so we decided to go there. Also my parents were living in Mesa at the time. This was in the heat of July and one can imagine how Carmen suffered. She grew up in a hot, tropical climate, but that was nothing compared to the desert's summer heat.

On August 13, 1945, our first child, a baby girl, was born. We named her Carmen Jeanette. As I drove home from the hospital that night, I turned on the car radio and listened to a special news broadcast. President Harry S. Truman announced that the Japanese had surrendered and declared August 13, 1945, VJ-Day. The draft was immediately discontinued. Carmen commented that, perhaps we should have named the baby Victoria, because she was born on VJ-Day.

My parents were happy to receive the news of Jeanette's arrival. Then Daddy told me there was a telegram for me from Guatemala, advising me that my deferment had been terminated and I should report to my draft board for an induction physical examination. I had been saved by the president's executive order. I

drove to Tucson to check with my draft board, and when I walked in, the officer whom I knew just shook his head and said I was a lucky man. I requested a release to return to Guatemala, which he immediately extended to me. There was still work for me to do in Guatemala, both in the rubber program and in the Church. This was really only the beginning.

Upon our return to Guatemala, in October 1945, we took up residence in Guatemala City. I worked all week at the rubber station in Cuyotenango and returned to spend the weekends in The City, traveling mostly by train.

Carmen became pregnant again in September 1946, and as we had decided that all our children should be born in the United States to assure their U.S. citizenship, in December 1946, we went to El Paso, Texas, where my sister, Della, lived, to await the birth of our second child. We found the situation extremely difficult, regarding hospital facilities and medical attention. The hospitals were overflowing with victims of the recent Second World War.

Carmen wanted very badly to return to Guatemala and have the baby there. We returned to Guatemala, and on April 13, 1947, our second, beautiful, little daughter was born, at the American Hospital in Guatemala City. We named her Patricia, but have always called her Patsy.

For some time the Department of Rubber Investigations had wanted me to live at the rubber station, so I drew up plans for a 4-bedroom house made of very fine hardwoods, to be constructed there for my family. We moved to the rubber station in 1951, when the house was completed.

John Frank, our third child was born on October 1, 1952, also in Guatemala City. We were happy to have a son. Elder Spencer W. Kimball was assigned to visit Guatemala and organize the Central American Mission in November, so we requested he bless John at that time. Elder Kimball asked Carmen why we wanted him to bless our son, as I held the same priesthood and it was my privilege. Carmen told him John was the first fruits of the gospel in Guatemala, and it would be a blessing for us if he would do it. John was blessed November 16, 1952, by Elder Spencer W. Kimball, assisted by Bruce R. McConkie and myself.

During the summer of 1954, we again took home leave. Carmen was expecting our fourth child in September, and we wanted this child to be born in the United States. We went to Mesa, Arizona for this special event. Dr. Hartman again assisted Carmen, and on September 20, 1954, Bruce Lynn, our fourth and last child, was born.

We were pleasantly surprised to find that my good friend from the University of Arizona, Willard Skousen was working with Dr. Hartman. Here we renewed what has become a life-long friendship.

Carmen had desired to take out United States citizenship and we decided to accomplish this also, during our leave. My being a U.S. citizen working for the U.S. government, facilitated the process, requiring no time delay. Upon application and taking an examination at the Office of Immigration and Naturalization, she was sworn in as a naturalized citizen of the United States on November 11, 1954, in Phoenix, Arizona, seven weeks after Bruce was born.

The rubber station in Guatemala was so isolated, it had no medical or hospital facilities available, so Carmen and I attended to our family's medical needs as much as possible, going to the doctor only for checkups or emergencies, in Guatemala City or Mazatenango, the nearest town. We also took care of the medical needs of the people living on the station and vicinity, administering vaccination, inoculations, minor surgery, and assisting child births, etc.

Jeanette and Patsy attended grade school at "Colegio Lincoln," in Mazatenango, Guatemala. This school was established primarily for children of the United Fruit Company's employees, but they allowed our daughters to attend. For seven years Carmen drove the girls to school in Mazatenango almost every morning, and picked them up in the evening. The road was not paved and some of the streams flooded six months out of the year during the rainy season. Much of the time Carmen had to drive a Jeep and use the winch many times to cross some mud holes or high rivers. John and Bruce started school in Retalhuleu, Guatemala, at Graciela Alejos' private school, and later attended "Colegio D'Antoni," also in Retalhuleu.

Adequate and proper education for our children was of great concern to us. Where we lived, there were no schools beyond grade school that met our standards, and there were no extra-curricular or athletic activities at the schools. The Church was new and struggling in this area and we did not have the complete programs of the church in which we wished our children to participate. As the girls entered their teenage years, it was our desire that they associate with other young people who had the same standards, to date members of the church and, hopefully, someday to marry in the temple. For this reason, in 1958, we decided to send our girls to Mesa, Arizona, to attend school, knowing that we would miss them very much and that this would also be a sacrifice, both for them and for us. My sister Vivian kindly offered to take the girls into her home. Although they spoke little English at that time, Jeanette started in ninth grade and Patsy in seventh. They returned to Guatemala during their summer vacations each year, until they graduated from high school. The first two years the girls lived with my sister, Vivian, and then one year with my brother Marvin and his wife, Helen.

John Frank and Bruce were doing well in school in Retalhuleu. Jeanette and Patsy were doing well in school in Mesa, but it was difficult for the girls living away from home during these critical years. Carmen and I decided to sacrifice by being separated, so she could be with the children in Mesa during the school year. I would remain on the job in Guatemala, spending Christmas with the family, and Carmen would come to Guatemala for a couple of weeks every March. So in July 1961, I moved the family to Mesa, Arizona, where we purchased a home.

Living alone in the United States with the children, speaking and understanding very little English at the time, was very difficult for Carmen, but because of her strength and devotion, she carried the load most admirably. She learned much there, gained valuable experience that was very helpful to her in the future, and improved her English significantly. It wasn't easy for me to live alone in Guatemala, either. Each night, with few exceptions, before retiring I would sit at the typewriter in our bedroom, enjoying the sweet aroma of the Ilan Ilan tree outside and listening to the gurgling water flowing under my window, and type a letter to the family, relating

the experiences of the day and offering encouragement and advice, and affirming my love.

Jeanette graduated from Mesa High School in 1961, and later attended Arizona State University, Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, and beauty school in Mesa, Arizona.

Patsy graduated from Mesa High School in May 1964, after a very active and happy three years. She gave up a scholarship to Brigham Young University when she decided to marry. Patsy and Ernest Clark Huber were married on August 15, 1964, in the Arizona Temple. They became the parents of seven children.

With Jeanette in college at BYU and Patsy married, we decided to have Carmen and the boys return to Guatemala with me. The boys attended "Colegio La Patria," in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, for a few years. We rented a house there, and again a partial separation was necessary. Carmen was in Quetzaltenango all week with the boys and I drove up on Wednesdays, spending the afternoon and evening with them. They spent the weekends and holidays with me. Later the boys returned to Mesa, and graduated from Mesa High School also--John in 1970 and Bruce in 1972. Bruce continued his education at Mesa Community College, BYU, University of Oregon, and Arizona State University, graduating from A.S.U. in 1980, with a BA Degree.

After graduation from beauty school, Jeanette worked at a beauty salon where she met and began dating Gordon Peil. They were married on April 7, 1968, and had a family of five girls and one little boy.

John Frank married his high school sweetheart, Linda Gail Wilson, on September 1, 1970. A year later they were sealed in the Arizona Temple. They had eight children. The first two--twin boys-- lived only a few minutes after birth.

Bruce married Elena Isabel Vonesh on September 7, 1978. Elena is the daughter of Mike and Conchita Vonesh, our friends in Guatemala who are very devout Catholic. Elena had been in love with Bruce since she was a little girl. A few months before their marriage she joined the Church, incurring much opposition from her family. It was a blessing for me to perform their sealing in the Arizona Temple on September 25, 1982. They now have five children.

*Pioneer In Guatemala*

Today our posterity numbers four children, twenty-six grandchildren and twenty-two great-grand children. They are a great joy and blessing in our life.



*Carmen Gálvez O'Donnal -- 1943*



*Pablo Manuel Gálvez & Carlota Elvira Anguiano de Gálvez*



*Carmen with her parents at coffee farm, "Santa Clara,"  
where Forres asked for consent to marry Carmen*



*Carmen Gálvez and John Forres O'Donnal  
wedding picture, June 19, 1942*

*Courtship, Marriage And Family*



*Carmen with her parents and daughters, Jeanette and Patsy*



*John Forres O'Donnal family home at the USDA rubber station  
in Cuyotenango, Guatemala*



*John Forres O'Donnal family in 1963  
Forres, Carmen, Jeanette, Patsy, Bruce and John Frank*

## Chapter Four

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# *Guatemala's Political History*

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I am including a brief historical account of what transpired politically in Guatemala from the time of my arrival, as it had a considerable effect on my personal life, some aspects of the activities of the Church, and also on the rubber program in which I was engaged. Most of the information comes from my personal knowledge, some was obtained from editorials in the local, daily newspaper, *Prensa Libre*.

Since my arrival in Guatemala on May 12, 1942, to July 1996, a period of 54 years, there have been 27 governments in this beautiful, but politically unstable country. General Jorge Ubico had been a dictatorial president for twelve years when I arrived. At that time there were many dictators in Latin America. Under Ubico, Guatemala was a lovely place to live; there was little or no corruption within the government, people felt secure, except perhaps those who opposed General Ubico. There was little crime and the cities and towns were very clean. Through his political organization, President Ubico controlled everything. He received, daily, a list of persons leaving or entering the country, as well as a list of those who traveled on the roads, which were few at the time. Upon arrival in Guatemala, Ubico's friends and acquaintances often

received a telephone call from him. Of this I have personal knowledge.

Political adversaries were persecuted, as were opposition news organizations. No opposing public manifestations or group gatherings were allowed. A friend of mine, Alejandro Córdova, the publisher of the principal newspaper, *El Imparcial*, was murdered for printing derogatory articles against the government. In addition, a university student was killed during a student demonstration.

Public unrest increased. An unarmed, audacious, and uncontrollable, popular rebellion, initiated in March 1944, forced the resignation of General Ubico. On July 1, a military *Junta* composed of three generals, assumed control of the government. Four days later one of these generals, Ponce Vaides, was declared Provisional President by the National Assembly inherited from Ubico.

On October 20, 1944, a revolution was lead by Major Francisco Javier Arana, Captain Jacobo Arbenz and Jorge Toriello. This triumvirate governed until, in a sweeping election in March 1945, Juan José Arévalo was elected president. All became ministers in Arévalo's cabinet.

Juan José Arévalo became the first constitutionally elected president in the new era. President Arévalo proved no friend to the United States. As one of his first official acts, he discontinued the excellent, educational programs sponsored by the United States Government. Congress then passed a new Labor Law, and a National Social Security Program.

As Arévalo's term advanced, Javier Arana and Jacobo Arbenz, now Colonels, became interested in campaigning for the presidency. Colonel Arana was an honest and good man with deep, democratic convictions. Arbenz, was Arévalo's choice. As Arana's popularity increased, the chances of Arbenz winning the election decreased. However, Arana was assassinated prior to the elections. Arévalo had control of the situation, and Arbenz was elected president on March 3, 1951.

Labor unions were sponsored by Arbenz' government and an Agrarian Reform Law was passed. Although Guatemala had available hundreds of thousands of acres of nationally-controlled, suitable, farm land, many private farms were taken over under the

new agrarian law, and divided among peasants. Highly productive farms soon became progressively less productive. Crops, farm buildings, and equipment were burned. The railroad company which had purchased modern diesel locomotives, was prohibited from putting them into operation, claiming that these would put some employees out of work. The United Fruit Company was partially paralyzed in their operations through labor and other problems. This situation, naturally, brought on much contention and created movements attempting to overthrow the government.

With the aid of the United States government, opposition soon became organized. There was much clandestine activity and undercover movement of arms, especially on the south coastal and southeast areas bordering Honduras and El Salvador. A clandestine radio station, *La Vos de la Liberación* (The Voice of Liberation) was set up somewhere in the Caribbean. The propaganda and programs transmitted by this radio station gave hope and encouragement to the democratic element in the country. However, I do not think they were the majority, since the government's leftist propaganda and programs had won over labor, peasants, many educators, and government employees, not to mention the Army.

The Liberation movement commenced on July 18, 1949, the day Colonel Francisco Javier Arana was assassinated. This movement generalized popular unrest. Those who sympathized with Colonel Arana had gathered around him because he had identified himself as a genuine anti-Communist. Several anti-Communist groups were organized and soon were active throughout the country. Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas took up the anti-Communist banner in answer to popular clamor and initiated the clandestine effort. He made a suicide attack on the military base, La Aurora, which did not succeed because of the treachery of one military official involved. Castillo Armas was wounded and thought dead, but a doctor noticed he was still alive and took him to the hospital in the penitentiary, where he was held prisoner. Outside, Lic. Mario Sandoval Alarcón, with others, helped him escape through a tunnel dug under the back wall of the penitentiary. He fled to Honduras, where the National Liberation Movement of 1954 was organized and armed insurrection into Guatemala was initiated.

All this took place during Eisenhower's administration, whose stated policy was to curtail communism's advance internationally. The United States government, through the ambassador and the CIA, searched for a leader to head the opposition forces. After contacting a number of unwilling candidates, they eventually discovered their leader in Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, then residing in Honduras.

Soon an invasion force of about 300 men was assembled and trained in Honduras, and successfully entered Guatemala. Their leaders agreed to talk to Arbenz, requesting that he resign, but Arbenz would not. The Liberation Forces had much popular support and also the backing of the United States who supplied them with fighter planes. I was aware of much of this activity through my meetings with the U.S. ambassador.

All that was happening made the situation at the rubber station where I lived, difficult. I had problems daily with labor, spending much time in the labor court and in discussions with leftist labor leaders. Articles against me and the rubber program appeared in the newspapers and I was continually threatened. Three men in our rubber station's labor force were active, leftist leaders, anxious to get rid of me and my assistant, Jeffrey E. Shrum, and to take over our houses and the station. The situation became critically dangerous for us and our families, especially for Carmen who drove the girls to school in Mazatenango each morning and picked them up each afternoon.

On one occasion, the principal leftist leader at the station and his entire family became deathly ill from food poisoning. The man had passed out in the bushes near his house. Carmen was called by his wife. Although she knew who he was and that he had threatened my life, Carmen put the man and his family in the Jeep and drove them to the hospital in Mazatenango, at night. There they were treated and they recovered. This act of compassion helped to save our lives against those who wanted to dispose of us.

In mid-June 1954, during a regular visit with the Ambassador, I explained our precarious situation, and requested we be permitted to move our families to Guatemala City, to which he agreed. We then took our families to the city and rented apartments on the second floor of *Pension San Francisco*, on the corner of 6th Avenue

and 13th Street, just one short block from the police station. The ambassador then requested I take my assistant and return to the station, and await his instructions to return to the city. At about this time, the resistance forces in Honduras, with the aid of several fighter planes, attacked the government forces in the Zacapa area where there was a military base, and there was heavy fighting. My assistant and I arrived at the station at about three o'clock in the afternoon. About an hour later the mailman brought a telegram from the ambassador, which read, "Proceed immediately to Guatemala City, repeat, immediately." We threw a few things into the suitcases we had just unpacked, gassed up the Jeep station wagon, and headed back to Guatemala City.

It was about 5:00 p.m. when we left the station and, normally, it was a 4 1/2 hour drive over dirt road to Guatemala City. Bands of local militia and peasants had been ordered to check and curtail all travel on the road. About every two to five kilometers we encountered a band of 20 to 30 men, armed with old shotguns, clubs, machetes, hand guns, etc., who stopped and searched us. We had documents and passes issued by the Guatemala government, stating that we were cooperating with the government and requesting we be given assistance in our work and travels.

These documents got us through, until about half way to the city at the national farm, San Julian, just above the town of Patulul, where we encountered about 50 men, all Indians, except a school teacher and his assistant. I told my assistant not to get out of the vehicle and, if necessary, I would put the gears in 4-wheel drive, and plow through them. But this was futile, and we were forced out of the vehicle at gun point. The Indian leader could not speak Spanish, so the teacher translated. The documents we had were taken, and we were told they were counterfeit and that we were only spies and enemies from the United Fruit Company. We were told that we would be hanged, then and there, on a large tree at the side of the road. We were seized by several men and the ropes were brought. At that moment, a Jeep drove up from the direction of Guatemala City, with government officials who stopped the hanging, carrying with them orders to disband all groups from the road. They immediately told us to go on our way, which we did without delay.

We encountered no more bands, and arrived in Guatemala City at about 2:30 a.m. Again my life was spared.

A 50 mm. machine gun manned by four soldiers was placed on the roof of the apartment building in which we were staying in Guatemala City. As the fighter planes flew overhead bombing military installations, the soldiers fired on the planes. We were unaware at the time that our daughters, Jeanette and Patsy went up on the roof to talk and take food to the soldiers, and to collect empty shells. When the planes flew over, they would hide under the *pila* (a concrete water tank for washing clothes) or under the tin, lean-to shelter used by the soldiers for protection.

Because of the danger, we moved to the fifth floor of the Engle building, on 6th Avenue and 11th Street, in the apartment facing 6th Avenue. Little did I know that by moving there, we were jumping from the frying pan into the fire. The building was full of leftist leaders, both local and foreign. Often there were blackouts in the city, and planes bombing the military installations were very accurate.

When the Arbenz government saw that they were losing on the front, and afraid of the fighter planes in the city, Arbenz tried to negotiate with the U.S. Ambassador. Because of my contact with the embassy, I was aware that Arbenz had agreed to step down, but wanted to leave several of his top military officers in control. The ambassador accepted none of this. Only a complete surrendering of the government to Castillo Armas and his Liberation forces was acceptable. On July 2, 1954, Arbenz gave up, and he, along with his family and many of the top officials in his government, took asylum in the Mexican Embassy across the street from the presidential residence and national palace. Castillo Armas flew in from Zacapa on a DC-3 aircraft, to a triumphal entry, and drove in a motorcade from the airport, down 6th Avenue to the national palace. There were government vehicles abandoned on the streets, and the apartment building where we lived was practically evacuated, as were many others.

The young lady managing this building, began searching all the abandoned apartments. In one apartment she found a chest of drawers full of dynamite sticks, enough to blow up half a city block or more. I called authorities in the Liberation forces, who

immediately came and removed the explosives. After the celebration and the situation calmed down, and most of the opposition leaders were rounded up, we returned to our home at the rubber station.

Before abandoning the presidential palace, Arbenz named Colonel Carlos Enrique Díaz as president, who 24 hours later was replaced by military rule--three colonels whose government lasted only four days. A second military *Junta* took over and lasted only six days.

With the triumph of the Liberation movement, a military *Junta* was formed, composed of five colonels headed by Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas. On September first this *Junta* was reduced to three, but still headed by Castillo Armas. In September, as a result of a plebiscite promoted by the *Junta* which was sanctioned by the National Constituent Assembly, Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas was proclaimed President of the Republic. In less than 90 days, including Arbenz's government, from June to September 1954, there were seven different governments in Guatemala.

After Col. Castillo Armas organized his government, initiating reform programs and highway construction with aid from the United States, we were able to normalize operations at the rubber station. On May 25, 1955, I began training the first rubber tappers for private, commercial plantations. This was the beginning of what would later become an important export crop for Guatemala.

Initiated by President Carlos Castillo Armas, the long-awaited desire for a democratic government, offering economic and social reform and giving promise for a better future, with aid from the United States, was moving along smoothly, with the majority of the people content with his government. These hopes suddenly vanished with his assassination on July 26, 1957. Once again progress in this choice nation was curtailed. This has been the pattern of Guatemala's political history. Certainly the adversary continues to exercise his influence, demonstrated many times, not only in government, but in my own personal life.

With the assassination of President Carlos Castillo Armas, attorney Luis Arturo González became provisional president of Guatemala. On October 24, 1957, González called for an election in which attorney Miguel Ortiz Pasarelli was elected in a clean

election. However, hopes for a peaceful and progressive democracy, free of corruption, never materialized during the next 38 years.

Politically, the 1960s were trying, difficult, and sad times. Sad especially, as some members of the church associated themselves with leftist, subversive, or guerrilla groups.

Crime and vandalism continued at an increasing rate, causing general unrest and labor problems. Guerrillas operating in the Retalhuleu area announced over the local radio station, a list of persons they intended to kidnap or liquidate, constantly adding names to the list. This situation caused some panic among the local residents. The first person on the list was picked up after a movie, and his wife was brutally beaten because she notified the police.

On one occasion, while we were in Guatemala City, Carmen was personally contacted by a member of the armed, rebel forces and instructed to advise me, that if at any time I was confronted by their forces, to make sure I stopped and gave no resistance, and identified myself so no harm would be done to me, otherwise I would be shot. She was also told, that I should constantly have my personal documents in order so I could leave the country upon notice, because soon the situation would become so difficult that a "sighted *gringo* would be a dead *gringo*." I went about my business cautiously, although I frequently received threatening letters. Our constant prayers asking for protection were answered for neither my wife nor I nor our children were ever harmed.

The U.S. Ambassador requested I meet with him each time I was in Guatemala City. At one of these meetings, I showed him a threatening letter I had received and asked his advice as to what I should do. He asked me to come back in a couple of hours and he would give me the name of an officer in the Guatemalan government, with whom I should speak. Upon my return he personally typed a name on a small piece of paper and told me to discuss my problem with this man, and return and give him a report. This person's office was in an annex to the police building. I was directed to his office and immediately recognized him as one of the leaders in Jacobo Arbenz' Government. He did not recognize me, and I did not discuss my problem with him nor show him the letter. I did return to the Ambassador's office and reported to him. I told him who the officer was, and suggested that he be careful with his

own life. About two weeks later the ambassador was assassinated on the Avenida Reforma, about a mile from the Embassy residence and only two blocks from where we had an apartment.

A series of military and civil governments followed. Of the 27 governments mentioned, 20 were military and only seven were civilian. Some of these governments had more progressive programs and policies, beneficial to the country and to the Church, than others. It was on March 25, 1958, shortly after Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes became president, that the law prohibiting churches from owning property was repealed. And, on June 29, 1966, during the administration of President Julio Cesar Mendez Montenegro that the Church was recognized by the Guatemalan Government and received legal status.

For 35 years, the guerrilla movement, sponsored by various leftist organizations, was also active. In January 1996, the former mayor of Guatemala City, Alvaro Arzú, was elected president. Arzú is truly democratic and has brought much hope of peace and prosperity. In the first six months of his presidency, he has attempted to curtail crime and corruption, is building roads, and bringing some stability to the country, with real possibilities of negotiating a peace treaty with the guerrilla forces by the end of the year.

I was personally acquainted with several of Guatemala's presidents and heads of state, from General Jorge Ubico to Alvaro Arzú.



*Finca "San Julián," Patulul, Guatemala -- tree where John Forres O'Donnal  
and Jeffrey Shrum were about to be hanged -- June 1952*

## Chapter Five

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# *Beginning Of The Church In Central America*

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Soon after my arrival in Guatemala, a great hunger arose within me to study the scriptures and other Church literature. I contacted the Mexican Mission, the only mission in Mexico at the time, and after my request for literature I received pamphlets and tracts. Mother had given me a book written by Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History*, which I read and studied, especially during my trips to and from the rubber station and other places. I also read the *Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants* and *Pearl of Great Price*. The life of Joseph Smith and Church history were especially appealing to me.

Arwell L. Pierce, of El Paso, Texas, was the president of the Mexican Mission. After we had made contact, he received instructions from the First Presidency of the Church to visit Central America. We were very excited when President and Sister Pierce visited us in September, 1946.

On our trip to the United States in December 1946, we desired to visit with the First Presidency in Salt Lake City and request that missionaries be sent to Guatemala. I met with Brother Oscar Kirkham, a member of the Council of Seventy, whom I had met

previously, and in whom I had great confidence. He took me to visit with President George Albert Smith, whom I found to be a kind man, full of love and compassion, especially for the Lamanite people. He asked many questions about Guatemala and Central America, and about the people. He listened with great interest to what I had to say, and to my plea that missionary work be initiated in these lands, which I was certain were ready. He requested that I write him a letter explaining what I had expressed to him and that my request would be considered by the First Presidency, and I would be advised soon of their decision.

I consider my visit with President Smith one of the highlights of my life. The Spirit witnessed to me then, that great and important events were about to unfold. I believe that President George Albert Smith was the prophet instrumental in ushering in the Day of the Lamanite. President Smith called Apostle Spencer W. Kimball to direct the Church Lamanite program.

Before leaving Salt Lake City Elder Kirkham of the Counsel of the Seventy assisted me in writing the following letter to President George Albert Smith, dated December 31, 1946:

*Dear President Smith:*

*Following the recommendation you gave me during my visit with you and Brother Kirkham this morning, I am writing you regarding the possibility of commencing active missionary work in Guatemala, Central America, in hopes that at least two Elders may be sent into that country to labor.*

*I have lived in Guatemala for four and one-half years and have seen much progress made there. I know that many people will accept the gospel. Until we are able to obtain a building of our own, I feel certain that we shall be invited to use the buildings of the Protestant churches. Because of my many acquaintances, I shall be able to assist the missionaries in meeting many influential government officials and in establishing our work in Guatemala.*

*I see no reason why the missionaries cannot live as cheaply in Guatemala as in Mexico. I estimate that they can get along on, from \$50 to \$60 a month. The missionaries are welcome to live in our home in Guatemala City for a minimum cost, as long as they desire to do so or until better arrangements can be made. We make this offer to be helpful in starting the work.*

*Beginning Of The Church In Central America*

*President Pierce also recommended that I talk with you regarding this missionary work which we have already discussed together.*

*There is another item which I should draw to your attention, relative to the type of people living in Guatemala. The higher class people are Spanish and other European blood, but the major part of the people are Mayan Indians. There are some Negroes in Guatemala, not to exceed three to five percent, found mostly on the coastal areas with the United Fruit Company. My personal impressions are that there are thousands of the blood of Lehi who are anxious to hear the gospel message.*

*Your early consideration will be greatly appreciated, and if I can be of further assistance I shall gladly do so.*

*Sincerely your brother,*

*J. Forres O'Donnal*

The First Presidency lost no time in considering my request for missionaries, and I received the following answer to my letter before leaving El Paso to return to Guatemala, on January 7, 1947:

*Dear Brother O'Donnal:*

*Referring to your letter of December 31, addressed to President Smith, the First Presidency has given the matter careful consideration and we are able to advise you as follows:*

*With reference to your suggestion that missionaries be sent into Guatemala, we are pleased to tell you that we shall try to arrange to supply some missionaries to you as soon as we are able to do so. We are not sure as to when this can be done, but we trust in the reasonably near future.*

*Praying the Lord to bless you in your labors, we are,*

*Faithfully yours,*

*George Albert Smith*

*J. Reuben Clark Jr.*

*David O. McKay*

*The First Presidency*

I had discussed the gospel many times with Carmen, but she was encountering much opposition from family, friends and most of all from the adversary. I anxiously awaited news concerning the arrival of missionaries.

In July, 1947, Central America--Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama--and Colombia, were made part of the Mexican Mission, and on September 4, 1947, President Pierce and his counselors, Moroni Abegg and H. Clark Fails, arrived with the first four missionaries--Elders Seth Mattice, Earl Hansen, David Linguard and Robert Miller. The following two days were spent visiting Guatemala City and two members of the Guatemalan President's cabinet--Sub-Secretary of Foreign Relations, Señor Arturo Herbruger, and Señor Francisco Villagrán, Minister of Interior--to whom were presented copies of the Book of Mormon. The first church meeting was held in our home with Vitelio and Gloria Acuña, and Isabel Gálvez, Carmen's half sister.

On August 24, 1947, I had my first introduction to the area of Vista Hermosa, in Guatemala City. A close friend, Guillermo Aguirre, and I looked over the property with interest in purchasing part of it. For some reason, this purchase never matured, but in future years it was revealed to me that this is a very special and sacred area to the Lord.

On Sunday, September 7, 1947, the Mission Presidency, along with the four missionaries and I, drove on a new road then under construction, on the mountain southeast overlooking the city, to that special area of Vista Hermosa, where we blessed and partook of the sacrament for the first time in Guatemala, and President Pierce dedicated the land for the preaching of the gospel. Dark clouds covered the entire valley, especially over the city, and it began to rain. We all crowded into the car and bore our testimonies. As we did so, the clouds parted directly over the city, and brilliant rays of sunlight burst through, enveloping the city. What a glorious sight to behold! I was then set apart as a local missionary. That night in our home, President Pierce blessed our little daughter, Patsy. A second meeting was held on the night of the eighth, with the Acuñas in attendance.

The Mission Presidency with two elders, David Linguard and Robert B. Miller, left for San José, Costa Rica. Elders Seth Mattice

and Earl Haisen remained with us in Guatemala City. The Lord had again blessed us by opening the way that we might live in Guatemala City as these important events in the opening up of His work in Central America were beginning to roll forth.

In December, Elder Seth Mattice returned to Mexico City to undergo surgery for appendicitis, and Elder C. Clark Welling arrived in his place. In March of 1948, Elders David Linguard and Robert Miller, returned to Guatemala to escape the revolution in Costa Rica, headed by José “Pepe” Figueres. Elder Miller was replaced in July by Elder Melvin E. Olsen. Soon, a building in the downtown area was rented from Freddy Keonesberg, who was a prominent participant in the 1944 revolution. Thirteen benches were constructed at the rubber station by the elders and our carpenter there. Carmen’s sister, Elvira, also worked with the elders on this project. The fine, hardwood lumber was donated by my good friend, Guillermo Aguirre.

On August 21, 1948, President Pierce and President Abegg and their wives returned to Guatemala, and on the twenty-second the first conference was held, with 66 persons in attendance. At that time I was set apart as District President of the Guatemala District. Before leaving Guatemala with President Pierce and the others, we visited the site on the mountain where we had partaken of the sacrament and dedicated the land for missionary work the previous year. President Abegg offered a prayer of thanks and supplication that no laws would be enacted to curtail missionary work.

The first formal meeting with investigators was held in our home, with my wife, Carmen, her sister Teresa, Parmenio Bonilla, Consuelo Morales (my secretary) and Roberto Monzón (my office boy). All of these people, later, were baptized. Carmen was the first member baptized in Central America, and Roberto Monzón was called as the first local, Lamanite missionary in Central America.

As I recall, the first General Authority to visit Guatemala, was Apostle Albert E. Bowen. On his first visit, in a meeting with the missionaries, he said, “Well, elders, we’re beginning here. It’s not going to be easy. But the work is going to go forward, and as you go forth and baptize these people and organize branches, you’re going to have to pick up some pretty sorry sticks to carry the work,

but it will go forth." I've always remembered him saying, "You'll have to pick up some pretty sorry sticks to carry the work."

As part of my work in the rubber program, it was necessary for me to travel to Honduras on occasion. While on these trips away from home, I would write Carmen and explain to her the gospel. In the summer of 1948, while in Lancitilla, walking through the beautiful tropical garden, I was impressed to locate a secluded place and pray. I selected a lovely tree with heavy foliage that skirted the ground, hiding the trunk of the tree. I parted the foliage and approached the trunk where I could not be seen. There were many mosquitoes in the area, but they did not bother me, which was unusual. Here I knelt down and poured out my soul to my Heavenly Father, begging forgiveness for my sins and shortcomings and beseeching his blessings, especially for my wife and family. Since I met Carmen, there had been much opposition, as Satan had tried to destroy us spiritually and physically. Carmen had been studying the gospel but had not, as yet, accepted it. Although she had never been a devout Catholic and had questioned much of their doctrine, she was still struggling against many odds--family, friends, tradition, etc. I had again written her during this trip and asked her to kneel down and ask God if this was not the true church, that Joseph Smith was a true prophet and that the Book of Mormon was truly the word of God, and that when I returned we would kneel together and pray for confirmation. I prayed that she would receive a confirmation to her prayers. I do not know how long I prayed, but I knew that my prayer would be answered.

When I returned home, Carmen told me she had received my letter, and that night after putting the little girls to bed, she knelt down and commenced praying. Immediately she was tormented by the powers of darkness and unable to continue, try as she may, and with her eyes closed, she sensed that the room was full of spirits laughing at her. Being afraid, she stood up and went in search of the missionaries who were living with us in the upstairs bedroom, and knocked on their door. Elders Hansen and Welling gave her a blessing which calmed her. But she took our two little daughters to bed with her and was finally able to sleep. After this experience we always prayed together. A few months later she was ready for baptism.

November 13, 1948 was a beautiful sunny day, a very special day for us, and a historic day for the Church in Central America. Previous arrangements had been made with friends to use their small, private, swimming pool for our first baptisms. The pool was down the embankment behind the Military Tribunal of Campo de Marte, on the Vista Hermosa property, where there was a small creek. After prayer and a short service, I entered the water with my beloved wife, our two little daughters observing, and baptized her--the first baptism in Central America in this dispensation. Following Carmen's baptism, her sister, Lidia Teresa, was baptized by Elder C. Clark Welling; Sister Manuela Cáceres and Luis González Batres were baptized by Elder Melvin Olsen. The confirmations were performed during sacrament meeting the following day. This was a joyous day for me and the beginning of a great opening of the Lord's work, not only in Guatemala, but throughout all of Latin America.

President Pierce had promised to send us two of the best sister missionaries in the mission. True to his word, on November 20, 1948, the first sister missionaries to serve in Central America--Sister Mary White and Sister Arlene Bean, arrived. Their presence made a tremendous impact on the work in Guatemala. The Relief Society and Primary were organized and music was emphasized. Proselyting was also enhanced as they were able to gain entrance into homes where the elders were not admitted. They were also a great influence in introducing my wife, Carmen, into church activity and leadership.

During our stay in Mesa, Arizona, in 1945, Carmen and I had visited the Arizona Temple grounds several times. Even though I had not yet received my endowments, I explained to Carmen the purpose of temples and the Lord's Plan of Salvation, and that some day we would be permitted to enter the temple and be sealed for time and for all eternity. Since Carmen's baptism in November 1948, it had been our fervent desire to receive our endowments and sealing and have our two daughters sealed to us during our home leave in 1949. We also wanted to visit all the temples in the United States and Canada during our vacation. We requested an interview with President Pierce, and he extended us our recommends. At that time, a separate recommend was issued for each temple, and there were

nine temples, including the Hawaii Temple. Although Carmen had not been a member for one year, President David O. McKay authorized her to enter the temple, three months short of a year. This was in consideration of the distance, the fact that it would be two years before she could return to the United States, and also to permit us to enter other temples. On August 23, 1949, we entered the Salt Lake Temple and received our endowments and were sealed, and had Jeanette and Patsy sealed to us. This was the happiest day of our lives! Carmen did not know English, but was assisted by Sister Mary White, who interpreted for her. Her mind and understanding were opened and her life was changed, as was mine.

As suggested by the Missionary Department, the missionaries no longer lived in our home. And on January 2, 1950, Elders Fahy S. Robinson and Ralph G. Brown were sent to Quetzaltenango to open that area. On June 11, 1950, President Lucian M. Mecham who replaced President Pierce as president of the Mexican Mission, held the first branch conference there, with 35 investigators in attendance.

Elder Joseph Fielding Smith and his wife Jesse Evans Smith, with President and Sister Arwell Pierce and President Moroni Abegg and their wives, visited Guatemala on February 12, 1950, and held a two-day conference and missionary meetings. The Smiths stayed in our home, which was a blessing for us. We became personally acquainted with them then, and learned to love them. He was not the stern, straight-laced man many members believe him to be; although to some, he gave that impression. President Smith was interested in the native Indians of Guatemala, their customs and language. We had several spiritual experiences with them during this visit.

On June 12, 1950, the first branch in Guatemala City was organized, with Elder De Lamar Jensen as President, Luis González Batrés and Marcial Cabrera as Counselors, and Raúl Rodríguez as clerk.

In the summer of 1950, President Smith and Sister Smith returned to Guatemala, accompanied by his son-in-law, Bruce R. McConkie and his wife. This was our introduction to Elder and Sister McConkie and the beginning of a long, warm and cordial friendship. President Smith approved the purchase of the first

property in Guatemala City, for the construction of a chapel. This was in a residential area some distance from the center of the city on *3a Avenida, Zona 9*. In 1873, when Justo Rufino Barrios was president of Guatemala, he passed a law nationalizing all the property of the Catholic Church and prohibiting any church from owning property; therefore, on August 22, 1950, the property--a half city block--was purchased for the Church in my name, from Señora María Invernizzio Alvarez de Hodgson.

In 1951 I was again eligible for home leave--the second in nine years. While in the United States I again took the opportunity of discussing with the Church authorities, plans for the first chapel and Mission home, and the opening of the Central American Mission. Carmen's sister Elvira and Sister Clemencia Pivaral Alconero and her son Rodrigo accompanied us on our trip. In December Sister Alconero was called to serve a full-time mission. She was the first native Guatemalan sister missionary.

The Lord's work was going forward and it was exciting to be involved in it. Missionary activity was increased throughout Central America, and more and more missionaries were assigned there. In mid-November of 1952, Elder Spencer W. Kimball and Bruce R. McConkie were assigned to open the new Central American Mission, and arrived in Guatemala with President Gordon M. Romney, who was to preside over the new mission, and his wife, Elizabeth, and son, Gordy. I was called as first counselor to President Romney, with Elder Ross Haws as second counselor. We were set apart in Quetzaltenango.

On Saturday, November 16, 1952, a meeting was held in Guatemala City, where Elder Spencer W. Kimball offered a prayer in Spanish, as he dedicated the land of Central America to the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Following is the English translation of this dedicatory prayer:

*O God the Eternal Father, we ask Thee in the name of Thy son Jesus Christ to hear our special prayer this day, and to speedily fulfill the great promises made by Thy holy prophets concerning Thy long distressed and deprived people.*

*Holy Father, we stand this day on the land of Zion, the promised land made sacred by the works, the movements and the activities of the*

*righteous saints and prophets of earlier times and especially sanctified by the repeated visits of Thy Beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the land which was also later desecrated and cursed by the follies, sins and unrighteousness of the descendants of Thy chosen ones.*

*Our Father, we remember with bleeding hearts, the sad afflictions of these children of Lehi in the centuries following their discovery by the Gentiles from across the many waters. We are mindful of their ceaseless wanderings, their untold sufferings and their constant battles for survival. We see them driven from their rivers of fish, their forests with game, from their fertile acres lush with crops and from their homes and their belongings.*

*We see them scattered, intimidated and pushed. We see them as sheep without a shepherd, dispossessed, enslaved, branded and massacred. We see them hungry, sore, sick and finally reservationed. We see them spiritually bound down by superstition and blinded by the doctrines of men and we cry unto Thee: How long, O Lord, must they suffer? How long must the sins of the parents be visited upon the heads of the children? How long before they may be emancipated? How long before the rich promises for them may be fulfilled? How long before they may rise in majesty and strength and power to their ultimate destiny?*

*We come at this time, Heavenly Father, to this part of Zion, even to Central America, assigned by Thy prophet, his counselors and the Twelve to set the boundaries thereof and to implement the work so that here may be preached with increased power the glorious doctrines of salvation to Thy people so long bound by the chains of darkness. Our hearts go to Thee in gratitude, dear Father, that the great truths of Thy everlasting Gospel have been established on this land through Thy Son Jesus Christ in person, and that they have been given to men by restoration through the Prophet Joseph Smith; that the heavens so long closed and locked by the disbelief and wickedness of Thy rebellious children have again been opened; that the Priesthood so long withheld from unworthy and unbelieving souls has been entrusted now to Thy sons upon the earth; that Thy kingdom has again been given to men with all its abilities, agencies and powers, and that exaltation has again been made available to all souls who will comply with Thy commandments.*

*Gracious Father, we thank Thee for the repeated assurance through Thy prophets that these scattered remnants of Israel on this continent, the choicest of all lands, would be brought to the knowledge of Thee and Thy program and be permitted to hear the gospel, bear the Holy Priesthood and become a blessed people through their righteousness and we express gratitude to Thee that that day has come*

*and that truth has literally sprung from the ground and that ancient voices have literally spoken from the dust; that the angel Moroni has directed the footsteps of the Prophet Joseph Smith to the long hidden records; that those sacred plates have been faithfully translated by Thy gift and by Thy power revealing to all men and especially to the seed of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, the second and compelling witness of the life, ministry, death, resurrection, total triumph and glory of Thy Beloved Son, Jesus Christ.*

*We are grateful that Thy servants were led to discover this fruitful land with its chosen gospel; that other faithful ones were directed to our American Zion to colonize the land and bring their witness, the Bible with them and that strong men were inspired to plan for and secure independence for that part of the promised land which was to be the birthplace of Thy restored kingdom when freedom of religious belief had been firmly established. We are grateful that the devastating persecution and promised and inevitable scattering has ceased or been reduced and that the gathering and blossoming has begun.*

*We are grateful, kind Father, that Thy spirit has touched these Central American countries and for the measure of peace, tranquillity and religious liberty and freedom which exists here. We praise Thy Holy Name that Thou has made possible the proselyting of Thy people here and we ask Thee to bless and inspire the presidents of these nations, with all their associates in power, that their hearts may be touched and that they may become nursing fathers and mothers to their people and that they may receive us as Thy true servants and messengers, and that the way may be opened for free, undisturbed and unlimited missionary work among their citizens.*

*Father in Heaven, grant that peace may come to the world; that Thy many sons may be released from military duty to serve in teaching righteousness to the frustrated people of the earth. Bless, we pray Thee, the missionary work in all the world but today we ask Thy special blessings upon the Lamanite cause and ask that the seed of Lehi in these Central American countries and the gentiles among them may see and hear and understand and have the courage and fortitude to accept and live the exalting program of Thy divine gospel. Let stony hearts be turned into hearts of flesh. Let repentance come in great measure. Let them accept the revealed word as parched and thirsty lands drink in the rains of heaven. Bless the missionaries and the Saints that great power be given them, that their devotion may increase, that their labors may be fruitful, their testimonies convincing, that this great people may be converted and be healed.*

*Be pleased, Holy Father, to stay the powers of evil, bind the hands of those who would frustrate Thy work here, raise up friends to Thy cause and let Thy work flourish and prosper among this people.*

*Now, our Father, let Thy ceaseless revelations flow to Thy prophets, seers and revelators and particularly to Thy chosen prophet, President David O. McKay who stands at the head of the church, that the work of emancipation of these millions of Thy chosen people be prospered and Thine oft repeated covenants to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob be fulfilled. Smile upon the serious attempts of Thy humble servants and consecrate all their efforts to the good of this people.*

*Let peace reign here in Central America and in all the world, give success and accomplishment to the new presidency of this mission with all their associates, let conversion come to many and let Thy kingdom be established here as in other parts of Thy vineyard.*

*And now, Holy Father, we pray that when these, the seed of ancient prophets shall have paid the uttermost farthing, the penalty of rebellion and disobedience, when they shall have hungered enough, and wept enough, and agonized enough and repented sufficiently, let them blossom as the rose upon the mountains, and let them be converted "a nation in a day" and let Thy work be glorified and Thy people receive the promised blessings. This we pray for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen*

*(Church News, December 13, 1952, p. 5)*

On November 30, 1952, Parmenio Bonilla was called as Branch President of the Guatemala City Branch in the new Central American Mission--the first Guatemalan to be called as a branch president. Up until this time there had been 89 baptisms in Guatemala City and 14 in Quetzaltenango. In my personal records I noted the following:

### **BAPTISMS GUATEMALA BRANCH**

November 13, 1948:

- |                                           |                          |
|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. María del Carmen Gálvez<br>de O'Donnal | 3. Manuela v. de Cáceres |
| 2. Lidia Teresa Gálvez                    | 4. Luís González B.      |

*Beginning Of The Church In Central America*

February 5, 1949:

5. Antonia Morales
6. Eder Rafael Pérez
7. Alicia Cáceres

May 7, 1949:

8. Dolores H. Ruhbe v. de Rosáles
9. Gloria Díaz
10. Elia María Paz de López
11. José Antonio Olivares
12. Marcial Cabrera

July 30, 1949:

13. Fidelina Irungaray
14. Ruth López
15. Norma Baldizón

September 17, 1949:

16. Miguel Angel Maldonado
17. Elsira Molina Rios
18. Romelia de Alvarado
19. Mario Rubén Lara
20. Carlos Lara
21. Virginia de López
22. Rudy López
23. José Gilberto López
24. Jesús S. de López

September 23, 1949:

25. Gilberto López

October 25, 1949:

26. Enriqueta López
27. Lydia López

November 5, 1949:

28. Cipriano Alvarado
29. Hita Alvarado
30. María Eugenia Samayoa
31. Edith Gómez
32. Hilda Baldizón
33. Bartolomé Díaz
34. Lily Gómez

December 3, 1949:

35. Juan Angel Del Valle

December 31, 1949:

36. Adán Raúl Rodríguez
37. Estela Ruano
38. Solomón Muñoz
39. Amalia de Muñoz
40. Fidelina de Del Valle
41. Laura Imeri
42. Carmen Victoria Leiva
43. Angel Parmenio Bonilla
44. Marta Raquel de Bonilla
45. Berta Lidia Bonilla
46. Soila de Castellanos
47. Everilda García Fuentes
48. Rodolfo A. Cabrera

June 12, 1950:

49. Clemencia P. v. de Alconero

June 17, 1950:

50. Jorge Rodríguez
51. María Bonifaz
52. Carlos Rubén Rodríguez
53. Roberto Monzón
54. Alfredo Mata Amado
55. Berta Elisa Gálvez de Mata
56. Oscar Alfaro
57. Jorge Mario López
58. Norma Elsa Muñoz
59. Rutilia Elizabeth Castellanos
60. Alfredo Castellanos

March 15, 1951:

61. Rodrigo Arturo Alconero
62. Juan Alfredo Mata
63. Miguel Maldonado
64. Marta Olga Navas

April 22, 1951:

65. Segunda F. v. de Batres
66. Jorge Castro-Conde

June 16, 1951:

67. Pedro Alfozo Iriarte Orantes

November 11, 1951:

68. Valerio Boj Cojulún

December 8, 1951:

69. Roberto Enrique Mata

December 22, 1951:

70. Victor Manuel Bonilla
71. Marta Julia Bonilla
72. Ester Bonilla
73. Marta Consuelo Bonilla
74. Leticia Graciela Baldizón

April 26, 1952:

75. Nazario de la Roca Sarmiento

August 9, 1952:

76. Sandra Pineda Ramos
77. Blanca Rosa Ramos
78. José Efraim Monterroso
79. Josefa Irene López Paz
80. David Parmenio Bonilla
81. María Felipa Paiz Martínez

September 3, 1952:

82. Hortencia Torres M.

September 13, 1952:

83. Aura Angelica Del Valle
84. Lionel Castellanos

November 29, 1952:

85. Samuel Bonilla
86. Rosa Oliva Tejeda
87. Marta Castro de Cáceres
88. Eugenia Gaitán
89. Dagoberto Cáceres Aragón

## BAPTISMS QUETZALTENANGO BRANCH

July 1, 1950:

1. Eduardo Castellanos
2. Carmen Humbertina  
Martines

April 19, 1952:

9. Elda Lemus de Avila
10. Isabel Calderón  
Mazariegos (male)

April 1, 1951:

3. Clemencia Calderón

May 26, 1952:

11. Heroína Ovando Meza
12. Olga Edith de León

October 6, 1951:

4. Berta López de Meza
5. Aroldo Jorge Meza
6. Edwin Roberto Meza
7. Julio Francisco Benitez
8. Lesbia Angelica Benitez

October 11, 1952:

13. Arturo Alfonso Barrios  
Martinez
14. Olga Domínguez de  
Loarca

On January 8, 1953, Roberto Monzón was ordained an Elder and set apart as the first, full-time, Lamanite missionary in Central America. I picked up Roberto off the street in Retalhuleu, in 1944, to work as office boy and to run errands. He continued to work with me, studying the Book of Mormon in his leisure time, mostly when I was away on trips. He also attended night school. I baptized him on June 17, 1950. Later, he was branch president for several years in Santa Elena, Petén, during which time a lovely chapel was built. His wife died before they were sealed, but I performed the vicarious sealing in the Guatemala City Temple, in 1986.

As a counselor, I was assigned to visit the branches of the mission. On December 1, 1953, with Carmen and John Frank, I took the plane directly to Panama, where we met with the members of the Canal Zone Branch. I then flew with Elders Guthrie and Parker to the San Blas Islands of Panama, located in the Bay of Panama. We spent the night on the Island of Aligandi and spoke to many of the San Blas Indians there.

The San Blas Islands were first visited on September 21, 1953, by Huish Yates and two missionaries. A chief on one of the islands was not surprised to see them. He told them that, as he lay

in his hammock, a voice came to him saying, that white men from the north would come with a book containing the history of his people. He was reluctant to see them leave, and clung to their hands.

Many of the young men from the San Blas Islands worked in the Canal Zone where they had been contacted by the missionaries. There were about 30 of these young men on Aligandi who were attempting to construct a hall in which to study the Book of Mormon, which they called their history. They were being taught by Abel Coleman, son of the chief, who had been taught and baptized in the Canal Zone. In talking with these beautiful people we felt a special spirit. They were anxious to hear our message, and were especially interested in the message of the Book of Mormon. They were a visionary people. I would have liked very much to have spent more time with them, and promised them that they would be visited by the missionaries and taught the true gospel of Jesus Christ, especially as it is recorded in the Book of Mormon.

On December 8, 1953, we flew to San José, Costa Rica, where we held meetings with the elders, and later with the members of the branch. This branch was being torn apart by apostasy. An Elder's Court was held and one of the members was excommunicated for immoral conduct.

On December 14, we opened Managua, Nicaragua for missionary work. Manuel Arias was ordained an Elder and set apart as a missionary in the Central American Mission, to serve in Managua with Elder Archie R. Mortensen. The first baptism in Managua, on December 15, was Brother José de Guzmán.

I don't recall the exact date, but sometime after 1955, I received a cable from Elder Spencer W. Kimball, from New York City, asking if he and Sister Kimball could come again to Guatemala and spend a week with us, to rest. He spent much time studying the scriptures and writing. He would explain the scriptures to me. I especially recall his expounding the epistles of the Apostle Paul to the early saints. This helped me to more clearly understand the profound doctrine and basic principles of the gospel as written by Paul. What a blessing to be taught by this great servant of the Lord, and to have him and Sister Kimball in our home. While there, a meeting of the members in the branch was called, which was

dedicated to testimony bearing. As all desired to do so, they were requested to take only one minute each. This was a highly spiritual meeting.

We toured with Elder and Sister Kimball to the city of Antigua and into the highlands of Guatemala. While in Antigua I showed them a coffee planting and explained how coffee was grown under shade. There were ripe, red berries on the coffee bushes which Elder Kimball wished to photograph. He walked up to the live-plant fence to take the picture through the branches, and before I could warn him that these plants were a giant species of stinging nettle used to protect the coffee plantings, both his hands touched the stinging nettle, causing severe pain. Fortunately his face did not touch the plants.

While still part of the Mexican Mission, President Lucian M. Mecham and I had drawn up plans for the first chapel, patterned after the Eleventh and Thirteenth Ward building, on Broadway and LeSueur, in Mesa, Arizona, which has an inside patio. The chapel in Mesa had been constructed while President Mecham was bishop of that ward. These plans which I had discussed with the Church Building Committee and Financial Committee during my visit to Salt Lake City in October 1951, were authorized. When President Gordon M. Romney was called as president of the Central American Mission he was given specific instructions by President David O. McKay to build the chapel and mission home in Guatemala.

During the final phases of construction, on February 13, 1954, President David O. McKay and Sister McKay, with their son, Robert, visited Guatemala. A conference was held in the Masonic Lodge, where members and many investigators attended. Carmen and I were privileged to take President and Sister McKay on a tour of Antigua, Guatemala, where we climbed over the old, Catholic Church ruins. They enjoyed the tour and the beauty of this choice land. What a blessing for us to spend this precious time with this great prophet and his wife.

On January 9, 1955, the chapel in Guatemala City was completed. Elder LeGrand Richards, of the Council of The Twelve Apostles, dedicated the chapel. I was privileged to translate his talk and the dedicatory prayer. In my talk I told the people that very

soon this chapel, with capacity for 1,500 people, would be too small. This proved to be true as membership steadily increased.

Elder LeGrand Richards toured the Central American Mission and I was invited to accompany the group throughout Guatemala. Again, I was blessed to be in the presence of another beloved apostle of the Lord, especially as we toured the highlands, including the ruins of Zaculeu in Huehuetenango. It was my privilege to share the same hotel room with Elder Richards, where I was taught by this great teacher, and where we prayed together on behalf of the work of the Lord in this land.

Edgar L. Wagner was called to preside over the Central American Mission, replacing President Gordon M. Romney. I had known him in Colonia Dublán since I was a small boy. President Wagner and his wife, Gladys Lenora, arrived in Guatemala on October 5, 1955. He made his first visit to the Mazatenango Branch, on February 1, 1956, accompanied by Elder Milton R. Hunter. They spent the night with us at the rubber station. On July 22, 1956, President Wagner and Elder Henry D. Moyle, visited us and held a missionary conference at our home.

During President Wagner's tenure, on December 15, 1956, the first *Cakchikel* Indian language area was opened to missionary work in the town of Patzicia in the department of Chimaltenango, Guatemala.

By act of the Guatemala Congress, the old law prohibiting churches from owning property was abolished; consequently, on March 25, 1958, the title of the property purchased in 1952 for the construction of the first chapel and mission headquarters, was changed from the name of John Forres O'Donnal to that of the Corporation of the Presiding Bishopric of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The Lord had President Wagner call me to serve as District President of the Mazatenango District, on November 12, 1958. In late January, prior to President Wagner's release, Elder Milton R. Hunter and his wife, Fern, toured the mission again with the Wagners. Elder Hunter wrote the following for the *Church News*, February 14, 1959:

### ***Elder Hunter Notes Changes In Lives Of Indian Converts***

*"The greatest transformation I have ever seen," was Elder Milton R. Hunter's comment on the change that had come into the lives of the Indian converts in the Central American Mission.*

*Elder Hunter, a member of the First Council of the Seventy, and Mrs. Hunter returned last week from a tour of the mission which includes Guatemala, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador. They were accompanied on the tour by mission president and Mrs. Edgar L. Wagner.*

*"Having visited the mission three years ago I was able to observe the remarkable change that has come over the members of the Church there," Elder Hunter said. He explained that 60 percent of the Guatemalans are Indian and that a large number of these people are joining the Church.*

*Elder Hunter noted during his recent tour that the large number of Indian converts were neat and clean in their dress. They took greater pride in their personal appearance than they formerly had done, he said. They have overcome their extreme shyness and are taking part in Church activities such as leading the singing and speaking in meetings, he indicated.*

*"Nearly every branch now has a choir," Elder Hunter said.*

*"I think there will be thousands join the Church there," he declared. "They have many traditions similar to the Book of Mormon teachings. The Indian people are intelligent, but lack education," Elder Hunter explained.*

*He noted a great increase in the Church membership throughout the mission. "We held a meeting in each of the 14 districts and had an attendance of 3,329 people," he said. "At least a third of these were investigators," he estimated.*

*In the Chimaltenango District in Guatemala, 425 people attended the conference though there are only 141 members of the Church there, he said. The district is two years old and all of the members are Indian, Elder Hunter pointed out. One of the members is the former mayor of Patzún.*

*"The 85 missionaries are doing a wonderful job," he said. Their responsibilities are many, for they must not only teach the Gospel to the non-member contacts but must man the branch organizations and instruct the members, Elder Hunter explained.*

*He also praised the work of President and Mrs. Wagner who will complete their mission in March. "They are diligent workers," he said,*

*"giving excellent supervision to the missionaries and members who hold them in high esteem."*

*Progress of the mission is seen in the five chapels owned by the mission, Elder Hunter pointed out. "They have purchased seven additional sites," he said. [Included was the property on which the temple was later constructed.]*

*Elder Hunter estimated that he and Mrs. Hunter traveled 10,000 miles during the tour.*

*He pointed out that missionary work was first begun in Central America in 1948. It was part of the Mexican Mission until 1952, when the Central American Mission was organized.*

On March 1, 1959, the first branch was organized in Caracas, Venezuela, through the Central American Mission. James Ansel Wilson was called as Branch President, with Elbert Lumis Heaton and Howard E. Law as counselors. There was no mission nor any proselyting missionaries in Venezuela at that time.

Several General Authorities visited the mission, including Hugh B. Brown in 1958, and Elder Spencer W. Kimball and his wife on March 31, 1959. We met the Kimballs at the airport, and held a meeting with them in the VIP room of the airport for about 30 minutes. Elder Harold B. Lee and his wife, also spent some time in Central America in November 1959. It was during this visit that we first met Elder and Sister Lee. I conducted at a conference in Guatemala City on November 15, 1959, with Elder Lee presiding.

President Edgar Wagner finished his mission on March 23, 1959, and Victor L. Hancock became the new president. I was called to organize the first Sunday School Mission Board, and on February 21, 1960, I was set apart as Chairman, with Alfredo Matta Amado as first assistant and Luis A. Lucas as secretary. Berta Lydia Bonilla was called as coordinator of music and special programs. Elder Luis M. Bastian was set apart as coordinator of literature and publications. The following were called to serve as district supervisors: John Vernon Tipton, District President of the Panama District, to supervise the Panama and Venezuela Districts; Charles B. Merrell to represent the Honduras District; Alberto Mayorga to represent the Zacapa District, and Emilio Martínez the Mazatenango District. Carmen was called to organize the Mission Relief Society Board, and on July 5, 1960, was set apart as

Chairman, with Sisters Hortencia Torres, Nellie June Olsen and Lottie Ermine Burt, to assist her.

Elder Joseph Fielding Smith and his wife, Jessie Evans Smith, again visited Guatemala and Central America, and were met on December 31, 1960, in Panama, by Elder A. Theodore Tuttle and President and Sister Hancock. They visited the other Central American countries before arriving in Guatemala City on January 7, 1961.

Notwithstanding repeated political problems, the Church moved forward in Central America under the direction of Victor C. Hancock. He did much, particularly in moving forward the mission auxiliary organizations, establishing the different mission boards. He and Sister Hancock finished their mission on June 15, 1962. Leslie O. Brewer became the new president, with his wife Nina. I had known President Brewer when I was at the University of Arizona. He was a music instructor at Tucson High School for several years.

President Brewer brought much stability to the missionary work, and the missionaries loved him and Sister Brewer. They celebrated the tenth anniversary of the opening of the Central American Mission, and set a goal of 10,000 members by the anniversary date. I wrote the following article for the members, in October 1962:

(English Translation)

*On this, the tenth anniversary of the organization of the Central American Mission, I sense profound gratitude and thankfulness to my Heavenly Father for having given me this great privilege to have participated humbly in His work, in this promised land among the people I love with all my heart. The joy and happiness I feel cannot be expressed in words, and only one who has experienced working among this people, loving them and helping them understand the gospel and the wonderful blessings that come through obedience to its principles, and feeling their rich spirit and testimonies, can understand what I sense. My satisfaction and greatest joy has been to observe the transformation of the lives of thousands of my brothers and sisters; from lives of uncertainty, fear and darkness, to lives full of the light of the gospel, understanding and progress--a progress towards their exaltation*

*in the Celestial Glory. My joy is even greater for it had its beginning in the change in the life of my wonderful wife, whom I had the privilege of baptizing as the first member of the Church in Central America, in this dispensation.*

*Membership has increased greatly in these first ten years, the goal being 10,000 members by the end of the year. I have seen too many members fall away and take paths leading away from the Church. This saddens us greatly, but we must know that we are partly to blame for not stretching out our arms to help them in their time of need.*

*This is just the beginning. These ten years have given us much experience. They have served to help us begin to understand our responsibilities as members of the Church of Jesus Christ. Until now, the full-time missionaries have served as leaders and teachers in the districts and branches of the mission, helping and attempting to teach the members their responsibilities; and in many districts they are yet filling positions of leadership the members should hold.*

*There is much I could relate concerning the great and marvelous things that have transpired throughout the mission since September 4, 1947, when the first missionaries arrived in Central America; but I would rather, on this occasion, note that which I believe is your duty to do, to further the work now that you have had some experience. Naturally you still lack experience and make some mistakes, but this is why we of the mission office are here to help you and to teach you. But above all, remember that you have the guidance of the Lord if you ask in faith and humility. It is your right as faithful leaders and teachers to receive the inspiration to guide you in your responsibilities. The scriptures confirm this: "For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fullness and be glorified in me as I am in the Father; therefore, I say unto you, you shall receive grace for grace." D&C 93:20, and, "And now these sons of Mosiah were with Alma at the time the angel first appeared unto him; therefore Alma did rejoice exceedingly to see his brethren; and what added more to his joy, they were still his brethren in the Lord; yea, and they had waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth; for they were men of a sound understanding and they had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God. But this is not all; they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting; therefore they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and when they taught, they taught with power and authority of God." Alma 17:2-3. We must develop leaders for the future among our youth in the Church.*

*It is the responsibility of every member of the Church to watch over our brothers and sisters, and especially the members of the mission*

*should fulfill the obligation to reactivate all those members who are less active; and to receive with a warm embrace all the new members, inviting them to participate and offering them positions in the various auxiliary organizations. A member without a responsibility is a potential victim of the adversary.*

*Now is the time to begin with vigor, searching for information about our ancestors. We cannot be saved without them, and the Prophet Joseph Smith has told us that this is one of our most important duties in these last days--to search out our genealogy and perform the vicarious work for them in the Temples of God. Great and rich blessings await those who are diligent in performing this work. There are thousands of members who give testimony of how the Lord has opened the way to find the information of their ancestors.*

*It is my prayer that every member put his or her life in order, fulfilling their callings and teaching their children by word and deed, the right way, and in this way receive the many and great blessings the Lord has in store for his faithful children. May we be doers of the word not hearers only. Our only hope that this Promised Land be saved from terrible destruction which now threatens us, is to be faithful and live the word of God as is taught in 2 Nephi: "Wherefore, I, Lehi, prophecy according to the workings of the Spirit which is in me, that there shall none come into this land save they shall be brought by the hand of the Lord. Wherefore, this land is consecrated unto him whom he shall bring. And if it so be that they shall serve him according to the commandments which he hath given, it shall be a land of liberty unto them; wherefore, they shall never be brought down into captivity; if so, it shall be because of iniquity; for if iniquity shall abound, cursed shall be the land for their sakes, but unto the righteous it shall be blessed forever." 2 Nephi 1:6-7. As members of the Church of Jesus Christ let us not fail in this responsibility.*

The fourth change in mission presidents took effect in early July 1964, when President Leslie O. Brewer was released and Terrence Leslie Hansen assumed the responsibility of President of the Central American Mission. He was joined by his wife Glenna and their four children.

One year later, on August 1, 1965, the Central American Mission was divided. Guatemala and El Salvador formed the new Guatemala-El Salvador Mission which consisted of 32 branches and 14,000 member, with President Terrence L. Hansen as mission

president. President Ted Eugene Brewerton became the president of the Central American Mission, with headquarters in San José, Costa Rica. This mission included Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama, also covering the San Blas Islands and Colombia, consisting of 8 branches and 3,000 members.

On January 29, 1966, I was set apart as District President of the Quetzaltenango District, and on October 15, 1967, I was set apart as counselor to President Hansen, by Elder Sterling W. Sill.

By June 1966, six chapels had been erected in Guatemala. On June 29, 1966, the Church was recognized by the Guatemalan Government and received legal status. The President of Guatemala at that time was Lic. Julio Cesar Montenegro. President Hansen and Sister Hansen with their children, together with Brother Rafael Castillo who was then a member of the Guatemalan Congress, visited President Montenegro in his office for the official signing.

On May 21, 1967, the first stake was organized in Guatemala City by Elder Marion G. Romney, of the Quorum of the Twelve, who was accompanied by Elder A. Theodore Tuttle, of the First Quorum of Seventy. Brother Udine Falabella was called as the first stake president, with Enrique Rittscher and Erwin Afre as his counselors. Brother Marcelo Pineda was called and ordained patriarch for the new stake. At that time there were 170 missionaries in the Guatemala-El Salvador Mission and 17,500 members.

There was much progress in the new Guatemala-El Salvador Mission, opening new areas to proselyting, building new chapels and organizing new branches as baptisms increased and new stakes were organized. The seminary program also began at this time. There was a high level of spirituality among the missionaries and the members, a reflection of the fine leadership of President Terrence L. Hansen. His period of leadership in the mission ended with his release in July 1967, and the assignment of David G. Clark, as the new mission president. I was again set apart as counselor to President Clark, with Carl Jacobs as the other counselor. Accompanying President Clark was Sister Clark, his wife, two daughters, an adopted son, and another son who was the only child from this marriage.

President Clark was a fine and accomplished man, a successful architect by profession, and as all new mission presidents, brought with him many new ideas and a desire to be successful. Like missionaries, all new presidents learn and grow. One of his goals was to increase baptisms in the mission. With the firm encouragement of Elder Delbert L. Stapley, of the Quorum of the Twelve and general supervisor of the Central America Area, baptisms were greatly increased--this mission becoming number one in baptisms in the Church.

President David G. Clark completed his mission and Harvey S. Glade assumed the presidency of the Guatemala-El Salvador Mission. He arrived early in July 1970, accompanied by his four children--Scott, Bryant, Gary and Allyson--and his mother-in-law. His wife, Jean, arrived later as she was convalescing from surgery. President Glade requested that Jorge H. Pérez and I be his counselors. President Glade brought stability to the mission, and baptism of well-prepared converts and sound interviews of both prospective baptisms and missionaries. For us, it was the beginning of a life-long friendship. He was released on July 1, 1973.

Robert B. Arnold and his wife, Gwenda, were called to succeed the Glades in presiding over the Guatemala-El Salvador Mission. Bob had lived in Guatemala for several years working with the Church Education Department, and was supervisor of Institutes and Seminaries in Central America. We had become such close friends with the Arnolds, they were as members of our own family. He would stay with us each time he visited the Retalhuleu and Mazatenango areas. When President Glade was released, I was also released, and having been an advisor and counselor to all the previous mission presidents for over 20 years, I felt I very much needed a rest and had desired that Bob look elsewhere for his counselors. However, one morning I met him on the highway, on his way to our home, to ask me to be his counselor. I accepted and considered this an honor. Upon requesting I be set apart, President Spencer W. Kimball told President Arnold that I had been set apart so many times, it was not necessary. Jorge H. Pérez was called and set apart as the second counselor.

These were wonderful years of service, laboring so closely with the missionaries and the districts, and observing the growth of

## Pioneer In Guatemala

the church and the strengthening of the members; many would later become the leaders of the church. In future years the seminary students would become the strength of the missionary force and later the ward, stake and mission leaders. My wife always held a leadership position in the mission and also accompanied me on all my assignments. She was, and is, a great leader and example. The only sad times were when, after arising early and driving three or four hours to visit and instruct the leaders in the districts, only one or two would show up for the scheduled meetings or would arrive late.

There had been much progress in the work of the Lord in the Latin American nations. In 1940, Elder Marion G. Romney, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, stated that the "Day of the Lamanite" was here, he himself having been born in the Mormon colonies in Chihuahua. While talking to the members of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir in Mexico City, on August 28, 1972, it was he who first mentioned the building of a temple in that area. He told them of the progress of the Church in Mexico, "and that new consideration must be given to the building of a temple for the members in this area." At that time there were over 90,000 members in Mexico, and over 35,000 members in Central America, with seven stakes in Mexico and one in Guatemala. On December 1, 1961, President Marion G. Romney, then in the First Presidency, had also organized the first Spanish-speaking stake in Mexico City, with my good friend, Harold Brown, as the Stake President.

Each year in October, the stakes in Guatemala organized an excursion by bus to the Arizona Temple in Mesa. An excursion from the Quetzaltenango Stake left for Mesa in November 1975. In northern Mexico, near the town of Magdalena, Sonora, the bus suffered a serious accident in which several persons were seriously injured and the baby of a Brother and Sister Meoño, was killed; and Sister Meoño, who was 6-7 months pregnant with their second child, had broken her hip and had other serious injuries. The injured members were taken to the Tucson Medical Center for medical attention; and as they were able to leave the hospital, they were taken to Mesa to stay with members there until they were well enough to travel back to Guatemala. The body of the Meoño's baby was returned to Guatemala City on November 9, and transported to

San Marcos, where it was interred. Carmen was Stake Relief Society President and I was serving as high counselor and patriarch of the newly organized Quetzaltenango Stake at the time. The Meoño's remained in Arizona. After several weeks at the Tucson Medical Center, Sister Meoño could be released but needed to be under careful observation a little longer. When she was able to travel, Patsy and her husband, Clark, went to Tucson to get her and took them into their home for almost two months. Before the Meoños returned to Guatemala they were sealed in the Arizona Temple and had their baby who was killed in the accident, sealed to them. Patsy was proxy for the baby and Clark was a witness to the sealing. They had a very special, spiritual experience in the temple.

Another important historical event occurred on October 25, 1975, when the Quetzaltenango Stake was organized by Elder Bruce R. McConkie, of the Quorum of the Twelve, accompanied by Elders J. Thomas Fyans and Angel Abrea, of the Quorum of Seventy. Jorge Pérez was called and set apart as stake president. His father, Ricardo Pérez Coyoy, and I were called as Stake Patriarchs. Elder Bruce R. McConkie ordained me a High Priest and Patriarch. I was also called as senior High Councilman in the Stake High Council. This was a very joyful day for me. These callings, of course, necessitated my release as counselor in the Guatemala-El Salvador Mission.

I have been so very blessed throughout my life and in all my labors. I love these people and love to labor among them. They are very special children of our Heavenly Father. This is a blessed land and I know much of the history recorded in the Book of Mormon took place here among this people.

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*Mexican Mission President, Arwell L. Pierce, and his wife, Mary, with the O'Donnals at their home in Guatemala City -- 1946*



*Vista Hermosa, Guatemala, September 7, 1947  
Where President Arwell L. Pierce, president of the Mexican Mission, dedicated the land of Guatemala for the preaching of the gospel  
J.F. O'Donnal, President Pierce and his counselor H. Clark Flails;  
Elders Robert Miller, Earl Hansen and Seth Mattice,  
(Elder David Lingard taking the picture)*

*Beginning Of The Church In Central America*



*Mexican Mission President Arwell L. Pierce  
with missionaries serving in Guatemala in early 1949*



*August 22, 1948 -- Guatemala District organized with  
John Forres O'Donnal as District President  
SEATED: Moroni L. Abegg, President Arwell L. Pierce, J. F. O'Donnal  
STANDING: Elders C. Clark Welling, David Lingard, Earl Hansen  
and Melvin E. Olsen*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*Carmen with Jeanette and Patsy and Elders Earl Hansen and Seth Mattice  
September 1947*



*Chalet "Los Angeles," Guatemala -- Home of the O'Donnals  
where first Church meeting was held on August 12, 1947*

*Beginning Of The Church In Central America*



*First baptism in Central America -- Carmen G. O'Donnal  
baptized by her husband John Forres O'Donnal  
November 13, 1948, in Guatemala City*



*November 13, 1948 -- First baptismal service in Central America  
in this dispensation, held in Guatemala City.  
Baptized: Carmen G. O'Donnal, Teresa Gálvez, Manuela Cáceres  
and Luis Gonzalez Batres*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*Sister Mary White and Sister Arlene Bean  
First Sister missionaries in Guatemala*



*Visit of Elder Joseph Fielding Smith and his wife Jessie Evans Smith  
to Guatemala, February 1950 FRONT ROW: John and Carmen O'Donnal  
SEATED: Rinda Abegg, Moroni Abegg (Counselor in Mexican Mission  
Presidency), Jessie Evans Smith, Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, Arwell L. Pierce  
(President of the Mexican Mission) and his wife Mary Pierce*

*Beginning Of The Church In Central America*



*Elder Joseph Fielding Smith and Sister Smith with Mexican Mission Presidency and their wives, John F. O'Donnal, and missionaries serving in Guatemala in February 1950*



*House where first branch in Guatemala met  
Guatemala City Branch-- organized June 12, 1950*



*November 16, 1952--Central American Mission organized,  
with Gordon M. Romney, president.*

*PICTURED: President Lucian M. Mecham (Mexican Mission President),  
Bruce R. McConkie, Sister Mecham, Elder Spencer W. Kimball,  
Sister Kimball, Sister Romney, Carmen O'Donnal, John F. O'Donnal,  
President Gordon M. Romney and son Gordon W. Romney*



*First Central American Mission Presidency--Gordon M. Romney, president  
(Left) John F. O'Donnal and (Right) Ross Haws, counselors*

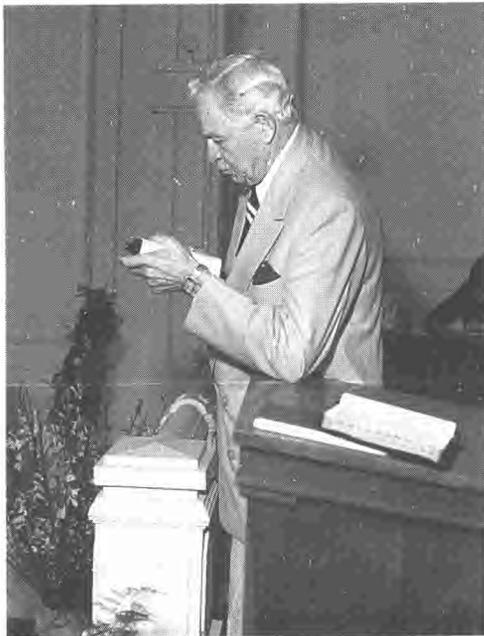


*Members and missionaries in Guatemala City at conference November 16, 1952  
when Central American Mission was organized by Elder Spencer W. Kimball*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*President and Sister Lucian M. Meham  
President Mexican Mission 1950*



*President David O. McKay at a conference in Guatemala  
February 13, 1954*

*Beginning Of The Church In Central America*



*President and Sister Edgar L. Wagner  
Central American Mission 1955*



*President and Sister Leslie O. Brewer  
President Central American Mission 1962*



*President and Sister Terrence L. Hansen  
President Central American Mission 1964  
Guatemala-El Salvador Mission 1965*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*President Harvey S. Glade and family  
President Guatemala-El Salvador Mission 1970*



*President Robert B. Arnold and family  
President Guatemala-El Salvador Mission 1973*

## Chapter Six

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### *End Of A Successful Career*

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While the Church was growing and progressing in Guatemala and Central America, conditions in my work were becoming increasingly difficult, and it was doubtful that I could remain in Guatemala much longer.

With the continued administration of the rubber program by the Office of Foreign Agriculture Relation, and the many changes in policy regarding personnel, no employee could remain in any one assignment, on any program, more than three years, unless given extended duty, which was not common. Pressure increased for me to be transferred to some other post. I was asked to change positions with Charles Townsend in Brazil, and in May 1956, I was requested to go to Brazil to look over the program there. Arrangements were made for my trip by the Guatemala City office. I left my passport with them, and late in the afternoon of May 12, I headed for home to prepare for the trip to Brazil.

There was a heavy, tropical rainstorm on the Pacific coast, and at Cocal, Esquintla, I encountered a detour for crossing the river because the highway bridge over the Madre Vieja river had been damaged. On the detour, it was necessary to cross the railroad tracks twice. The rain was heavy and the wipers were not sufficient to clear the windshield of the Wyllis station wagon I was driving,

and the windows were steamed over. It was late, about 5:30 p.m., and I did not stop at one of the railroad crossings. The train whistle was not blown and I didn't see the freight train engine until my front wheels were on the track. The engine hit the right front side of the car, turning it over and off the track. When I regained consciousness, I was out of the vehicle, being held up by two men. My wallet had been removed by railroad personnel seeking identification, and they were communicating with their central office in Guatemala City. I then conversed with them, explaining who I was and where I lived, and requested my supervisors in Guatemala City be advised of the accident.

I had stopped by the embassy commissary before leaving the city, and had a considerable amount of groceries in the car. A kind gentleman returning to the city, offered to take me to the United Fruit Co. hospital in Tiquisate, about 10 miles South. I accepted and we gathered up my groceries and bags. Many travelers had stopped to help, including an acquaintance and neighbor with whom I sent a note to Carmen explaining what had happened. I was taken to the hospital, where the doctors were acquaintances of mine--Drs. Aguilar, husband and wife. X-rays were taken which indicated that I had a separated clavicle. I also had several cuts and bruises. I was admitted into the hospital, placed in a room and given tranquilizers.

Upon receiving my note, Carmen, with my assistant, John Rogers, prepared to drive to Tiquisate. By that time, word had reached the town of Cuyotenango, only 3 miles from the station, and several people went to the station to tell Carmen I had been killed in an accident. Fortunately she had my note. She and John Rogers arrived at the hospital about midnight, after an eventful ride in the storm, and were happy to see that I was alive and in good spirits. They stayed with me a few hours then took the groceries and returned home, as they had left the children with the servants. By morning the storm had cleared and personnel from the Office of Foreign Agriculture Relations in Guatemala City flew to Tiquisate in a small, private plane. Carmen also returned and we consulted with the doctors, who said I would need surgery. I decided to have this done in Guatemala City by our good friend and orthopedic

surgeon, Mario de la Cerda, who scheduled the surgery for the morning of May 18, 1956.

After recovering from the surgery I was taken to my hospital room, where I was alone with Carmen. At 9:45 a.m. my mind and understanding were opened to a heavenly vision, and I asked Carmen to record what I would tell her. On a piece of paper she recorded the following, which are only the important parts, not all, of what was shown to me:

(English Translation)

*18 May 1956--9:45 a.m.-- Dictated by John Forres O'Donnal to his wife, Carmen, seated beside his hospital bed; he having been unconscious after surgery resulting from an accident in his car, with a train.*

*"My mind is very clear, I can hardly speak as my tongue feels like cotton, but it is a vision. Our Lord will come, and at His coming many great and wonderful things will come to pass. For many, many years His servants have been preparing the people; and my mission here is not finished. This I know, and it is a reality--this is a vision. Listen well. Am I telling you this or am I seeing it only in my mind? There will be a temple built here in Guatemala, a beautiful temple, so that the promises of the prophets will be fulfilled. Many poor, barefoot, dirty, ragged and dark-skinned will enter the temple; and as they come forth from the temple they will appear white and pure, happy to have covenanted with God.*

*"I feel my life has been spared, conditionally, that I must take good care of myself, for my life is not my own. My mission here is not finished, there is much left to do. It is amazing to see God's blessings--how He protects us. I know this is why I was spared in the accident. I have yet more to accomplish here on earth. Our children are spirits sent especially to labor in the Lord's work.*

*"As you leave from 'La Aurora', on the right there are several hills whose foundation are of volcanic sand. But among them is one of solid rock, and there our temple will be erected! I can now see it with its imposing splendor, and to it will go the just and faithful, to receive their blessings and the Lord's commandments."*

My life had been spared again, and I was told it was no longer my own, that there were many things yet for me to do. The accident had been the will of the Lord. I was not to leave Guatemala. I did not go to Brazil nor to any other country.

I was permitted to remain with the U.S. Government rubber program through 1956, and until the end of the fiscal year, June 30, 1957, to complete the transfer and establishment of the rubber station on the Guatemalan national property at Finca "Los Brillantes." However, my superiors had insisted I must leave Guatemala, and accept a transfer to another station. I was offered a choice of any post, anywhere in the world I wished to go. The three-year tour of duty policy was still in effect. I had spent 15 years on an important program with rubber trees. The work I was doing is a lifetime program. I considered there was very little I could accomplish during a three-year tour, and to transfer me and my family every three years, would cost the taxpayers about \$30,000, each time. This was contrary to my nature. I refused to be transferred and asked to be terminated, as of June 30, 1957. I knew I must remain in Guatemala.

When I knew I would be leaving the U.S. Government service, and after the new rubber station was planned and established at Los Brillantes, it had been my desire, and I might say, I had received a strong spiritual impression to own the 125 acres at "Entre Rios" on which the original rubber station was established, and where I had lived several years with my family. There were important experiments established on the property, under observation, and from which important data, seeds and plant propagating materials were being collected. If not attended, all this would be lost. Although these experiments were duplicated, in the most part, at the new station, it would be at least seven years before experimental data could be obtained. I was anxious that these experiments be preserved and data continue to be collected. Much of this material was not available anywhere else in the world. Few people outside the natural rubber world had grasped the importance of these experiments and the data and material available. It was well they were preserved, for later they became the basis for an important part of the commercial development of the rubber industry in Guatemala, as well as new material for important experiments in other parts of

the world--Africa, Brazil and the Far East. The trees in the experiments were being tapped and after experimental data was obtained, the rubber was sold.

Mr. León Lind Peterson had agreed to sell me the property for Q25,000 Quetzalez (\$25,000 then). But because of conflict of interest problems, I could not purchase the property at that time. I arranged with Mr. Peterson, to sell the property to Manuel Ralda, a mutual friend, and I agreed to buy it from Don Manuel later. On May 30, 1960, I made the final payment to Manuel Ralda, and the property was transferred to my name. The property carried the name, Unclesam, given it by Mr. Petersen, since he had leased the land to the U.S. Government in 1942. I later formed a corporation, which we named, "Compañía Hulera Unclesam, S.A." This property has been a great blessing to me and my family all these years, and continues to be so.

For a number of years, as far back as the 1940 s, Mr. Walter Klippert, head of the Goodyear Rubber Plantations Company, had encouraged the company to develop a plantation in Guatemala, and he had been looking for a suitable property to purchase. I had been authorized to assist Mr. Klippert in his search for land. My experience over 15 years had proven to me that the ideal elevation for the successful planting of Hevea rubber on the Pacific coastal area of Guatemala, was between 800 and 2500 feet. Elevations between 600 and 800 feet were marginal because of low rainfall and soil conditions. We selected several properties of from 1,500 to 3,000 acres--one of them, "Las Delicias"--laying at between 600 and 800 feet elevation, several kilometers south of Retalhuleu. Ignoring the marginal elevation, and considering only the lower cost of the land, the board of directors of Goodyear Company approved the purchase of Las Delicias. Las Delicias was a cattle farm with a sugar cane and a banana plantation under contract with Standard Fruit Company. There was no suitable housing on the farm, only an old, two-story, lumber, hacienda building, and a dilapidated cane mill and office, with about 60 workers living in a labor camp in horrible, dirt-floor, thatched-roofed shacks.

Mr. Klippert, learning of my decision to terminate my employment with the United States government and to remain in Guatemala, offered me a position with Goodyear, to develop the

rubber plantation at Las Delicias. I accepted, but agreed to continue to manage the rubber station at Los Brillantes until another technician could be brought in to replace me. From June through September 1957, I managed both the rubber station and the Goodyear operations at Las Delicias. Charles Townsend was then brought from Brazil to replace me. From the July-August seed crop, I established rubber seed nurseries at both Los Brillantes and Las Delicias.

Again the Lord had provided a way for me to remain in Guatemala. On September 29, 1957, we moved out of the rubber station, La Hulera, and rented a home in Retalhuleu, where we lived until a house was built for me and my family at Las Delicias.

In October 1960, Mr. Walter Klippert and I, with our attorney spent considerable time drawing up a proposed law to present to the Guatemalan Congress which would encourage the planting of rubber by extending exoneration of all taxes whatsoever, for a period of ten years from the time of initiation of production, with an extended, additional ten-year exoneration on any new plantings during the initial ten years. This proposed law was presented to and discussed with the Agricultural Committee of Congress. The committee presented the bill which was voted upon favorably and signed into law as Decree No. 1396, on November 9, 1960. This law gave great encouragement to the planting of rubber.

Prior to my leaving the U. S. rubber program, my efforts were directed towards obtaining financing for rubber plantations through the AID Development Loan Fund, which I knew would give impetus to large-scale planting of rubber in Guatemala. This was realized in 1959, when the AID Development Loan Fund granted a loan of five million dollars to the Bank of Guatemala, specifically for the growing of rubber. The banks then extended credit to rubber growers, at interest rates of 4.5%.

For twenty-five years I had ardently encouraged farmers to plant rubber. Now, with the continued favorable, world rubber market, with available, high-yielding clones, and also technical assistance, coupled with the dire need for crop diversification, the planting of rubber had at last come into its own. Many took advantage of the loan funds. The new rubber law was an additional incentive.

Another accomplishment in the rubber development program, which I had encouraged and worked hard for, was the organization of the Rubber Growers Guild (GREMIAL de Productores de Hule), on February 18, 1963. With the increased number of farmers growing rubber, we found it advisable to organize into a rubber growers association to benefit all concerned.

By 1965, the first plantings at Las Delicias were approaching tapping size and plans were made for construction of a processing factory. At that time a new processing method was being developed in Malaysia for production of what is termed, "crumb" or "block" rubber. I urged my superiors to build facilities for producing this new type of product, but they were set on production of crepe-type rubber, so we proceeded with the construction of a plant, purchasing from England equipment for this product. When all facilities were ready to commence operations, I received instructions to hold operations because my supervisors in Akron had decided to produce a new type of rubber--"crumb" or "block" rubber. The idea, naturally, now originating there. This, of course, required the adapting of our new facilities for the production of this new, improved and entirely different product.

As the new plantings came into production I also constructed a facility and purchased equipment for the production of centrifuged latex. This required two, large, latex centrifuges, and stainless steel storage tanks, laboratory and other equipment, and the training of personnel. I then commenced purchasing fresh latex from neighboring farmers for processing, thus increasing our profits.

Now with two fine products I turned to marketing in Central America, Mexico and the United States. Central America was a ready market, but Mexico and the United States were difficult to open up. Both the Mexican and Guatemalan businessmen were anxious to establish firm, commercial relations. Each had products the other needed, including natural rubber--both solid and latex. I was selected to head a group of businessmen representing the Rubber Growers Association, to go to Mexico City to meet with businessmen and government officials. In my presentation I not only explained the fine quality of our product and the advantages of a near market, but I requested a subsidy by the Mexican Government for the import of our rubber. This came as a big

surprise and was not favorably received at that time. However, after several meetings over a period of several months, we did realize a substantial subsidy through lower tariffs, which favored both the Mexican consumers and ourselves.

By the end of 1975, Las Delicias was the highest profit-earning unit of The Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, which gave me much satisfaction. I could never have accomplished this without the support of my sweet wife, who was constantly by my side and also did much entertaining over the years. She has always been the perfect hostess.

In 1976, the Pacific coastal plain boasted of having the bulk of Guatemala's 18,750 acres of mature rubber trees, and thousands more acres in emerging plantings. Guatemala was then producing 18.5 million pounds of rubber, which is a drop in the bucket, worldwide. But its average yield of 1,200 pounds per acre, compares favorably with Far Eastern countries. Guatemala is the only Central American country producing rubber in commercial quantities.

I remained with Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company until June 1976, when I took early retirement to serve a mission for the Church. We moved out and closed the gates at Las Delicias on June 12, 1976, never to look back on what had been a very successful and happy career in the history of the development of natural rubber in Latin America, and especially in Guatemala.



*John F. O'Donnal's vehicle after accident with a train  
May 12, 1956*



*"Las Delicias" Rubber Plantation*

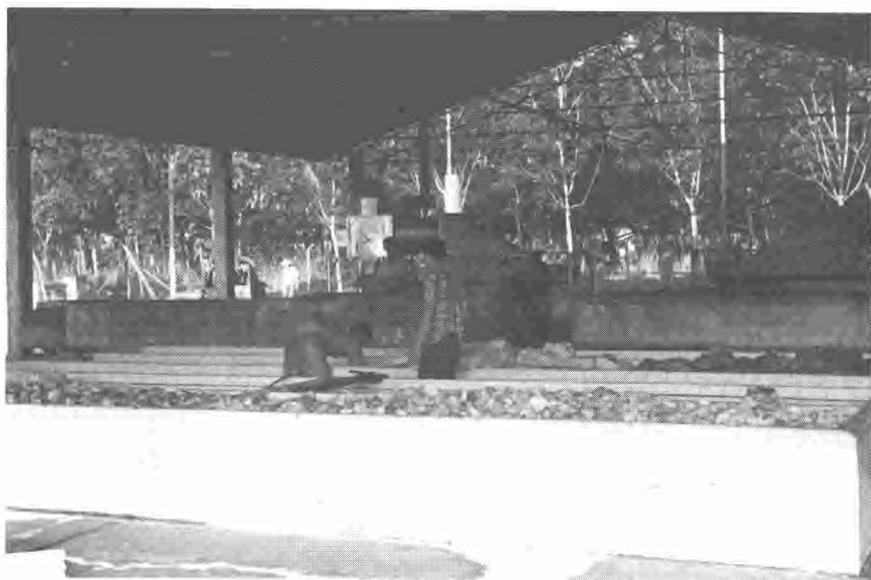
*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*Home at "Las Delicias" Rubber Plantation*



*John F. O'Donnal with CEO of Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. and Lauro Muro, President of Goodyear Tire Factory at "Las Delicias" Rubber Plantation*



*Rubber factory at "Las Delicias" Plantation*



*Centrifuged Latex--at "Las Delicias" Rubber Factory*



*"Block" or "Crumb" rubber production at "Las Delicias" Rubber Factory*



*"Block" rubber--finished product--at "Las Delicias" Rubber Factory*

*End Of A Successful Career*



*At Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company's offices in Akron, Ohio--1975  
John Forres O'Donnal with Don Ensminger, Assistant Manager Goodyear  
Rubber Plantations Co., and Jack Riddle, Manager*



*Retirement from Goodyear Rubber Plantations Co. and farewell party  
at "Las Delicias" Plantation in Guatemala -- May 1976*

# GREMHULE



*John Forres O'Donnal on the cover of GREMHULE magazine*

## Chapter Seven

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# *Calling As Mission President Guatemala-Guatemala City Mission*

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On March 11, 1974, I had received a telephone call from President N. Eldon Tanner of the First Presidency, asking if I would be available to preside over one of the missions of the Church. He inquired concerning our health, my work and my family. I told President Tanner our health was good; regarding my work, I needed to consider my earliest retirement; and concerning our family, I had two errant sons with whom I needed to work and help get their lives in order. He told me he would call the following year. On January 6, 1975, when he called me back, I advised him that I needed to reach my sixtieth birthday to take early retirement, which would be in early 1976. He asked me to call him when I was ready.

On December 4, 1975, I called President Tanner advising him that we were now ready and available. That same day, the First Presidency extended a call to me and Carmen to preside over one of the Spanish-speaking missions of the Church.

On June 8-11, 1975, Elder Boyd K. Packer had visited Guatemala to preside over a district conference in Quetzaltenango and to visit the mission. A fireside was held with Elder Packer at the mission home Sunday evening. As refreshments were served, Elder Packer asked me to sit on the floor in front of him as he wanted to talk with me. He asked about the mission, then told me that a trip to visit the ruins of Tikal had been scheduled for him, but he was not particularly interested in going. He would much rather visit with Carmen and me in our home. I told him we would be honored and happy to visit with him.

He canceled the trip to Tikal and when I finished my business in Guatemala City on Tuesday, we drove to Quetzaltenango for the conference. After the conference Elder Packer rode with me to our home at Las Delicias. As we were leaving Quetzaltenango, about an hour and a half drive to our home, Elder Packer asked, "Now, Forres, how are you?" I said, "Fine." He then said, "Why don't you take a little while now and tell me about your life." This I did for most of an hour. He just sat and listened. When I finished I said, "Well, Elder Packer, I'd like to know about your life." So he proceeded to tell me about his life--from his childhood up to date.

Carmen had not attended the conference and welcomed us with a lovely meal she had prepared. As I sat alone for about an hour with Elder Packer, he asked many questions about the Guatemalan Indians, the mission and what was being done for them, as far as the Church was concerned. He asked for any books I had concerning them. He was intensely interested in this, and requested my opinion on many matters.

Elder Packer was up early next morning and being a bird watcher, was out observing the birds. He told me he had slept little, thinking about what we had discussed. I am sure he did much thinking and received much inspiration. He said he would have to obtain some books and study what should be done. Then he asked me, "But don't you think we should establish a mission for these people?" Since I had felt this for some time, I answered, "Yes, I think that would be a good idea."

After receiving our call as mission president, Elder Packer requested that Elder Fyans return to Las Delicias and continue discussions with me regarding the Lamanites in this area. Elder

Fyans and Harold Brown, the Regional Representative in our area at the time, and their wives, arrived on January 2, 1976. We spent the following few days in discussions and touring the highland areas of Guatemala, where most of the pure Lamanites live. I was requested to prepare a letter for Elder Fyans to present to Elder Packer with my recommendations for taking the gospel to the Lamanites. My letter dated January 8, 1976, focused on several new phases that were later integrated into the church program, including the following:

- 1) Create an Indian mission.
- 2) Carry the gospel to the Indians and teach them in their own language.
- 3) Call local, Indian missionaries to teach their own people, and teach other missionaries the Indian languages.
- 4) Simplification--hold meetings in the homes.
- 5) Use welfare and educational programs.

In my letter I also enclosed maps of Guatemala indicating the different major languages and the boundaries of the Indian Mission as I visualized it, considering the Indian population of Guatemala.

In my opinion, the opening of the Quetzaltenango Mission, simplification of the missionary program, construction of small chapels, publication of the manual, *Gospel Principles* which originated in the Quetzaltenango Mission, taking the gospel to the Indians in the mountains, initiating a block meeting program, the building of a temple in Guatemala and other important programs, were all a direct result of these discussions with Elder Packer and the follow-up visit by Elder J. Thomas Fyans. I feel they changed the course of the church in Guatemala. Postponement of Elder Packer's visit to Tikal was truly inspired, as was a special assignment subsequently given to him by President Kimball which I will relate later. Truly the marvelous work of the Lord did go forward in Guatemala, and Carmen and I were very blessed to be a part of it.

As patriarch of the new Quetzaltenango Stake, I was invited to attend General Conference on April 4, 1976. I combined attending conference with a business trip to Mexico City and to

Akron, Ohio, to finalize my retirement so I would be available in June to attend the seminar for new mission presidents and assume the duties of the mission the first of July. When I was in Mexico City I met several times with Elder J. Thomas Fyans, the Executive Administrator of the Mexico, Central America Area. I arrived in Salt Lake City on April 1, 1976--my birthday. I was handed a letter at the airport by our good friend Harvey Glade, which advised me of our call to the Guatemala Guatemala City Mission, to succeed Bob and Gwenda Arnold. This was an exciting and pleasant surprise. I was also advised that the Guatemala-El Salvador Mission would be divided July 1, and the El Salvador San Salvador Mission would be created. President Eddie Barillas and his wife had been called to preside over the new El Salvador Mission. This was the first step towards organizing a new Indian mission, which was to be effective in July 1977.

Carmen and I enjoyed immensely the Mission Presidents' Seminar which we attended in Salt Lake City, beginning on June 16, 1976. We received much instruction on presiding over a mission, and what to do in many different circumstances and problems. I learned that a mission president had great autonomy in carrying out his assignment, and I also later learned that he needs it, and the inspiration and guidance of the Spirit. I had not been in the mission more than two months when I had experienced all of the circumstances related in the seminar, and more.

During our New Mission Presidents' Seminar, at a luncheon in the Church Office Building with the First Presidency and other general authorities, we were with President Kimball when he received a message from the Governor of Missouri, Christopher S. Bond, rescinding the 138-year old Executive Order of the then Governor Lilburn W. Boggs, calling for the extermination or expulsion of the Mormon's from the state of Missouri, expressed thus:

*Expressing on behalf of all of Missouri our deep regret for the injustice and undue suffering which was caused by this 1838 order, I hereby rescind Executive Order No. 44 dated October 27, 1838, issued by Governor Lilburn W. Boggs.*

In his executive order Governor Bond said, "Governor Boggs' order clearly contravened the rights of life, liberty, property and religious freedom as guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States, as well as the Constitution of the State of Missouri."

Before leaving Salt Lake City we were set apart as mission president and mission president's wife by Elder Howard W. Hunter, in his office. Placing his chair in front of us, he gave us counsel and instructions, among which was a mandate to immediately, upon our arrival in Guatemala, commence complete renovation of the mission home and office, saying, "The Guatemala City mission home is in the worst condition of any mission home in the Church." Upon arrival in Guatemala City, Elder J. Thomas Fyans, our Executive Administrator, instructed us to commence immediately with the renovation and to move into an apartment while this work was underway.

At this time the Church had set up the first Presiding Bishop's Office (PBO), Area Temporal Affairs facilities, in Mexico City, serving Mexico and Central America, it being the first in Latin America. All temporal affairs of the church were being directed by and through this office. These offices were headed by a paid Director of Temporal Affairs (DTA), who was to receive direction from the Presiding Bishop's Office and coordinate all activities with, and receive approval from the General Authority, Executive Administrator over the Area, which at that time was Elder J. Thomas Fyans. An erroneous opinion was circulated, that the DTA held equal status and authority with the Area General Authority, which brought about much confusion and difficulties, with responsibilities possibly not understood or defined. Presumably because of the additional cost, the Temporal Affairs Office countered Elder Fyans' instruction for us to move into an apartment during renovation of the mission home and office, and insisted we remain living in the home, which we did, with considerable discomfort and hardship. We shifted from room to room, many times sleeping on the floor. However, I will say that my suggestions for renovation were carried out, but not without much opposition from the Temporal Affairs Office.

Ceilings were pulled down and changed, windows were removed and modernized, gaping holes were made in walls to change electrical circuits, bathrooms were torn up and remodeled, stair railings and rugs were removed and replaced, bedrooms, kitchen and living room were completely renovated. All the doors in the home were of beautiful

mahogany wood but had been painted many times, so the paint was stripped from the doors and frames and the beautiful wood restored to its original beauty. There was a complete change of drapes and curtains throughout and lovely new carpeting, and paint inside and out. New air conditioning was installed and new furniture was purchased for the office, part of which had been used as a distribution center from the beginning. This office was completely renovated, with the distribution center turned over to the Temporal Affairs Office. Missionary quarters, with beds and closets, were improved. Shortage of water had been a constant problem at the mission home, so an inadequate, outside, water supply was increased and separated from the adjoining chapel, which had been using a major portion of the scarce supply.

This renovation project required much of our time and patience and took one year to complete, but the end results were well worth all our efforts. It was beautiful! Sadly, we were not able to enjoy it because soon after it was completed we were called to open the new Indian Mission in Quetzaltenango, which was created in July 1977.

I chose as my counselors two great men, Kenneth Goodman, then in the foreign service with the United States Embassy in Guatemala, and Israel Pérez from Quetzaltenango, whom I had worked with since he was a small boy. He had served in many mission and stake positions with me and was then serving as a member of the Quetzaltenango Stake High Council. He is a full-blooded Quiché Indian. We had visited the home of Brother Goodman in Franklin, Arizona, when he was but a boy. His brother, Dean Goodman, served as one of the first missionaries in Guatemala in 1948. The Lord gave me these counselors who were two of the finest men I have ever known. Both later served as stake presidents, regional representatives, mission presidents, and Israel Pérez has now been called as an Area Authority. We also had a group of the finest young missionaries who knew they were in the best mission in the church.

I recall when serving as counselor to different mission presidents, while in presidency meetings each president had said at some time, "I do not know what to do with the Indians, what can we do for them?" During those times I could offer no sound advice. However, as soon as we arrived in the mission the Lord blessed me to know exactly what should be done, setting the stage for the opening of an Indian mission in Guatemala. I also began to understand more fully Elder Boyd K.

Packer's concerns during his visit in June 1975, and his discussions with me at Las Delicias regarding MesoAmerica and particularly Guatemala and the Lamanites in this area.

In our first all-missionary meeting with Elder Fyans and Harold Brown, our Regional Representative, I outlined what I expected to accomplish, which included the following programs:

Each missionary must:

- 1) Become more dedicated and adhere to the approved missionary program.
- 2) Strengthen and increase efforts in strictly Spanish-speaking cities and towns through increased personal spirituality.
- 3) Increase greatly the use of the Book of Mormon in teaching; this is the greatest aid to conversion—convert by the Spirit.
- 4) Initiate, immediately, a strictly Indian program as a firm policy within the general church program:
  - a) This program must commence by learning the Indian languages, adapting to the different conditions, cultures and values, without losing their virtues.
  - b) Take the gospel to the people which will mean opening new areas.
  - c) Establish the Church permanently among the Indians, first spiritually with families, then physically, which will mean construction of many small chapels in rural and remote areas.
  - d) Establish a permanent commitment, fearlessly and with determination and perseverance.
  - e) Stand by our commitments.
  - f) All programs must be simple, unobtrusive and acceptable. The Church must come with restraint, dignity and simplicity.
  - g) The gospel must be taught simply and in the native language.
  - h) Commence immediately, simplified missionary and leadership training, which will require translations,

utilizing as much as possible Indian converts. (Helaman 6:1)

- I) Increase calls to missions of native missionaries who should be most effective. (Alma 17:11)
- j) Request additional dual-purpose missionaries—welfare and education missionaries.
- k) Learning the languages will mean these missionaries will remain in the areas of each language. There are four major Indian languages—*Cakchiquel*, *Quiché*, *Ke'kchi* and *Mam*.
- l) The Indians are spiritual people and many receive spiritual manifestations (Moroni 10:3-5). Missionaries and church priesthood leaders need to take this factor in stride, not overzealously, and with restraint. This is an important facet of the work.

Elder Fyans and Elder Brown expressed strong support for this program, and the missionaries accepted the challenge with elation and commitment. A language professor at BYU had assisted President Arnold with *Cakchiquel* language training in February 1975. In January 1976, another language class was conducted under the direction of Elders Taz Evans and Julio Salazar, where missionaries spent Monday through Thursday in the classroom and returned to their areas Friday through Sunday to continue their proselyting work and to support the branches to which they were assigned. A more intensive and firm program was what I wanted.

When I assumed the administration of the mission, Latin American missionaries from Guatemala and El Salvador represented about 25-30 per cent of the missionary force. All received 100 percent of their financial support from the Missionary Department fund. Each month their checks were received, all together, in an ordinary air mail envelope—sometimes rather tattered and torn. Fortunately none were lost. I observed that they were receiving much more than they needed to support them for all their needs. Some were sending money home to their families. Many of the rural areas required less than 50% of the amount they were receiving. I determined the costs in each of the different areas and commenced issuing funds to them in accordance with the actual costs in their areas, plus some spending money. I requested

the Missionary Department not to send the checks, but simply make a book transfer and I would issue the checks in the mission. This, the Department accepted and the procedure was initiated. This simplified accounting system was later adopted by the Missionary Department in other missions throughout the Church.

When Carmen and I assumed the responsibilities of the mission on July 1, 1976, our message to the missionaries was, "This is the beginning of a New Era." This included all the programs and changes previously explained, in addition to requiring strict observance to the mission rules by all missionaries. With few exceptions, this was received wholeheartedly by the missionaries.

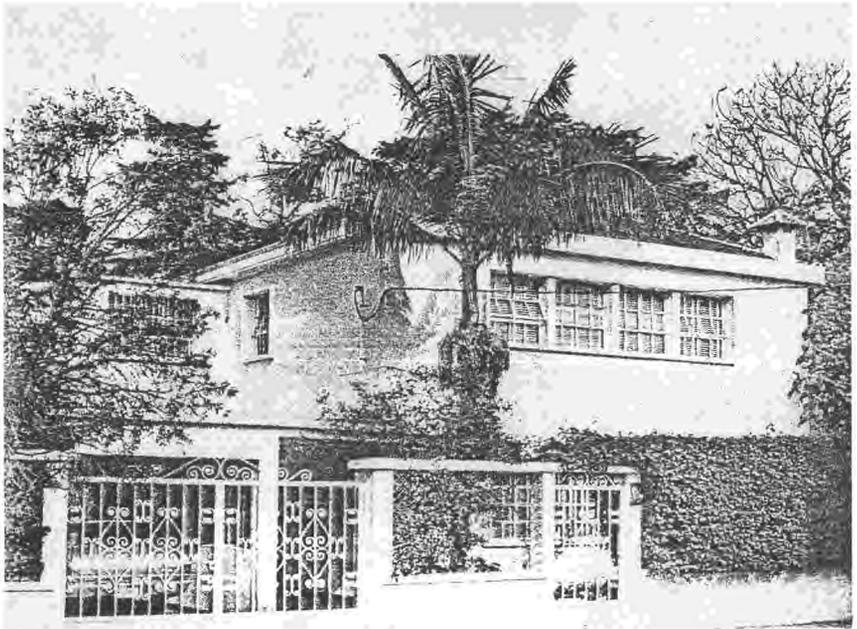


*Elder Boyd K. Packer's visit to O'Donnal's home at "Las Delicias" Rubber Plantation in Guatemala -- June 1975*  
*Robert B. Arnold (President Guatemala-El Salvador Mission), John F. O'Donnal, Elder Boyd K. Packer*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*John Forres O'Donnal and Carmen G. O'Donnal  
President Guatemala Guatemala City Mission – 1976  
President Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission – 1977*



*Guatemala Guatemala City Mission Home*

*Calling As Mission President – Guatemala Guatemala City Mission*



*Guatemala Guatemala City Mission Presidency – July 1, 1976  
Kenneth Goodman, First Counselor; John F. O'Donnal, President;  
Israel Pérez, Second Counselor*



*Elder and Sister J. Thomas Fyans with Guatemala Guatemala City Mission  
Presidency and their wives – July 1, 1976*



*Map of Guatemala indicating the boundaries of the Guatemala Guatemala City Mission and the Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission*

## Chapter Eight

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# *Earthquake In Guatemala* *February 4, 1976*

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A few months prior to our entering the mission field, on February 4, 1976, at 3:04 a.m., a severe earthquake struck Guatemala. It was devastating, with extensive damage to highways, communication facilities, electrical power, water systems and buildings. Entire cities were 80-90% destroyed, especially Guatemala City and the Indian communities in the highlands. Over 23,000 people were killed, including a number of church members.

Early, the morning of February 3, we had taken Willard and Ruth Skousen and Marion and Betty Vance, who had been visiting us, to the airport where they boarded their small plane for their return flight to Mesa, Arizona. That day also, our son Bruce and our employee, Ricardo Montiel, had taken a tractor from the rubber plantation to do some work at the little farm we had purchased on the slopes of the volcano, Agua, just a few kilometers from Patzicia, so Carmen and I drove that evening to see Bruce and the work that was being accomplished there. At about 8:00 p.m., when they were loading the tractor onto our truck and preparing to return home, strangely, the coyotes above the farm began yapping in an extraordinary way, not at all common. Since it was late, we suggested that Bruce and

Ricardo stay in the adobe house on the property and drive to the coast early the next morning. They preferred to go that night and we returned to our apartment in Guatemala City. The earthquake destroyed Patzicia and the little adobe house on the farm. Bruce and Ricardo would probably have been killed, had they slept in the building.

Having lived through several severe earthquakes in Guatemala, early the morning of February 4, I recognized the familiar rumbling, similar to that of a freight train, and nudged Carmen, exclaiming, "An earthquake!" Before the words were out of my mouth the earthquake hit with violent force, immediately jostling the bed and furniture around the room. We could hear the dishes, utensils and furniture in the other rooms being violently thrown around. Carmen jumped out of bed praying aloud, asking for God's help. The noise was horrible, and any minute I expected the building to come down upon us, as we were on the lower level of a three-story apartment building. I did not get out of bed until the horrible shaking, that lasted about 30 seconds, had stopped. I then grabbed the telephone and immediately tried, without success, to call our children in Mesa, Arizona, to tell them we were all right. Since I could not reach them and knowing that the telephone system would soon be blocked, I dialed Willard and Ruth Skousen's number. The call went through, and I asked them to notify our children. They had just arrived home from the airport. I then called Carmen's sisters in Guatemala City and President Arnold at the mission home, to find all unharmed but frightened, as we all were. Our telephone then went dead. Harold Brown, on assignment as Regional Representative, was in the mission home and had been trapped in his bedroom by shifting furniture. As soon as he was able to escape and ascertain that all were without injury there, he walked to our apartment to see how we were.

Only one missionary was hurt in the earthquake, Elder Randall Ellsworth. He and Elders Gary Larsen, Steven Schmollinger, Fred Bernhardt and Dennis Atkin were participating in the *Cakchiquel* language training program conducted by Elders Julio Salazar and Taz Evans in the town of Patzicia at the time of the earthquake. These missionaries together with Elder and Sister Bleak Powell and several devoted members rescued Elder Ellsworth from the rubble of the destroyed Patzicia chapel. Most prominent of the members helping in the rescue efforts were Pablo Choc—the branch president who had lost

his wife and two sons--and his son Serapio, also Domingo Solomán who had a broken hand, and had lost a son, and another son was seriously injured. What great faith and devotion!

In the early hours of February 4, 1976, Elders Julio Salazar and Taz Evans were awakened by the earthquake. Of this experience Elder Evans writes:

*I became aware of a great tremor that woke me abruptly. The moment the earthquake hit, we were snatched from our beds and pulled outside. There is no doubt that it was a miracle and that we were removed from the house before any danger could befall us. Outside we kneeled and had prayer, taking turns to pray aloud. We blessed the walls of our fallen room by the power of the priesthood, then crawled back to search for our flashlights and to get some clothes before running out to see what we could do. After the noise of the first shock, we could hear the shrieks and wails of the entire town, as they were frantically digging out their dead and injured loved ones. We walked over the rubble to the chapel, helping people as we went. The streets were buried by the adobe walls. It seemed like we were walking on the tops of the houses, when actually the roofs were lying on the streets, and electrical wires were hanging all over.*

*We found the chapel had collapsed--the roof had caved in. We were told that Elder Ellsworth was pinned under a large concrete beam in the chapel. He was conscious and pleading with us to get him out. The other three elders sleeping in a small adobe building near the chapel, miraculously escaped even though the building crumbled. The walls fell in such a way that their beds were pushed out of the way of the falling walls and they were not injured.*

*Because it was impossible to move the beam, I ran to the small carpenter shop on the premises to get some tools-- a small hand saw, a chisel and a hammer--to try to cut the stage floor from under Elder Ellsworth. Later we were able to get a chain saw which was of little use because it ran out of gas. Tremors were coming through regularly and it was a tremendous mental battle to stay with Elder Ellsworth for fear the roof would fall the rest of the way and crush us. We put our hands on the walls and blessed them by the power of the priesthood, as we had done at our room, that they would not fall until we could get Elder Ellsworth out.*

*Sometime later the members began arriving and started helping. There could only be two to three people working at a time, but there were many people there trying to help.*

After several hours and through the tremendous, united effort of the missionaries and the members, Elder Ellsworth was freed.

Elder Bleak Powell and his wife, Gladys, a missionary couple from Orem, Utah, were living in one of the classrooms in the Patzicia chapel when the earthquake hit. The following are excerpts from a report of their experience:

*Around three o'clock in the morning we were awakened by the shaking of our bed. The shaking become more violent—unbelievably violent! We could hear the furniture and our personal belongings being thrown about the room.... Suddenly we could hear the building breaking and crashing over us! We could feel pieces of mortar falling on us, not knowing if or when we would be crushed under it all....*

*We opened the door and staggered out into the hall. Then we saw the grotesque pile that once had been the chapel and recreational room; the whole opposite side of the church had fallen!*

*Elder Ellsworth and Elder Atkin had been sleeping on the stage floor across the hall from our room. Suddenly we heard Elder Atkin calling for help, that his companion had been hurt. We ran immediately to see about Elder Ellsworth. The huge beam seemed to be resting on his back and upper legs. He was lying on his stomach, still on his mattress. He was conscious and quite calm, though he was in great pain. He kept saying over and over again, "Please, can't you hurry?" Elder Bernhardt crawled under the massive destruction, laid his hands on Elder Ellsworth's head and gave him a special blessing. At one point Elder Ellsworth even held the candle for them while they worked to free him. He kept calling for a drink and we carried water and soda water to him to keep him from dehydrating. He never became panicky or lost consciousness.*

*When we saw the beam was on him, we decided to go for help, not realizing that the quake was so general. There were landslides and the roads were caved in, making it impossible to go in any direction. Then the terrible realization came—we were trapped!*

*As we passed the once-row of houses, all we could see were piles of rubble. An Indian woman ran out into the road crying, "Please help me, all of my children are buried under the house." I could see that the home of our next door neighbor was destroyed and I could hear the weeping of the women so I climbed over the mounds of rubble into what had been their yard. Their little eight or nine year old boy was walking around in a daze, carrying the body of his little dead sister in his arms. The mother cried that all they had was gone and they would die. I put my arms around her and tried in my feeble way to comfort her.*

*We returned to the chapel to do what we could. Bleak checked the electrical wires, etc., to make the area safe, and drew up and stored all the water from the damaged, leaking storage tank, which proved to be a life saver.*

*Finally, about nine o'clock we heard them yell, "He's free!" They carefully pulled Elder Ellsworth out, still lying on his mattress. He kept saying that his legs were so cold and wanted us to turn him over onto his back, but we didn't know the extent of his injuries and we dared not move him any more than we had to. As soon as he was out from under the building, Bleak and the Elders anointed him and blessed him. As we examined him, we saw that although his back seemed fine, he had a bad gash in his leg and that his feet and legs were cold and blue. He couldn't feel anything when we rubbed his feet and legs! We were gravely concerned about this. The Elders began massaging his feet and legs immediately and continued to do so until we reached the city several hours later.*

*As we started to leave Patzicia, Brother Domingo Solomán came to us, his eyes full of tears and his face stricken with grief and desperation. Softly, he asked, "One of my sons is dead and another is nearly dead. Would you do me the favor of taking him to the hospital with you?" We drove down a little way and stopped by a trail and a few minutes later they reappeared carrying the boy on a door. He had a head injury and his eyes were swollen shut. He appeared to be dead. We didn't have room to put him down by Elder Ellsworth and so they put the door across the top of the sideboards of the pickup.*

*When we reached Chimaltenango we found that the destruction was as bad there, and they had their hands so full with their own injured that it would be hours before they could help us. We heard that though the highway to Guatemala City was closed, there were ambulances on the other side of the landslide waiting to take the wounded to the city. All of this was rumor and we did not know how much to believe. But we went with that hope.*

*Several times we thought the Solomán boy was dead. His father kept talking to him and wiping his face, the tears streaming down his own face. As we passed the cemetery in Chimaltenango, there were already hundreds carrying the bodies of their dead to be interred. With the dead running into the thousands there were not enough coffins and crude boxes were being made. Since there is no embalming in this area, this proved to be an urgent task. The trek to the cemetery in Patzicia was a steady stream all day also. They were burying their dead in community graves. Fifteen members of the branch had been killed. President Choc's wife, two sons, the Relief Society President, Sister Cua and her baby, and Sister Ordoñez were buried in one grave.*

*One would have to see the destruction in Guatemala to believe it. The towns of Patzicia, Patzún, Tecpán, Chimaltenango and Comalapa are completely destroyed. The mission immediately sent corn, beans, rice, blankets, etc., for the members in these five towns. It has been great to see these Indian people immediately begin to work. They started that very day to make a lean-to or a shack to protect their families from the cold. Some of them were made of cornstalks, boards, tin, plastic, bedspreads—whatever they could get. They have so much strength and determination. We wish you could feel the spirit of these wonderful Indian brothers and sisters.*

*We have seen many tragedies, but we have also witnessed many miracles. The Solomán boy fully recovered and Elder Ellsworth is steadily improving. We have also witnessed the Lord literally snatch his missionaries from the jaws of death.*

President Robert B. Arnold of the Guatemala Guatemala City Mission, in a letter dated February 18, 1976, to Elder Ellsworth's parents, explained the ordeal of rescuing their son, how "the missionaries went to work trying to cut the hardwood, stage floor from under Randy, and worked feverishly even though the building continued to shake time after time with subsequent tremors. They remained in their positions, not considering their own lives but only the safety of their stricken companion. And finally after over six long hours, the exhausted missionaries were able to lower Randy from beneath the beam," place him on his mattress in the bed of a pickup truck and transport him to Guatemala City. The trip was difficult over a road covered with landslides, boulders and downed trees. They were able to get as far as just above the city of Guatemala. There they found themselves stopped by the long lines of traffic. "Providentially, Brother and Sister Boyce Lines, another agriculture missionary couple, and the Zone Leaders were headed toward Patzicia to evaluate the damage there, and they met at the critical point." One of the Zone Leaders, Elder Harmon, was able to talk the driver of a bulldozer-like truck into plowing through, down the center line on the road, in-between the lines of traffic, and Brother Powell followed it into the city.

Elder Ellsworth and the Solomán boy were rushed immediately to the Herrera Llerandi Hospital. When President Arnold visited him there he seemed in good spirits. However, because there was no electrical service, it was not possible to take X-rays until the following day

(Thursday morning). They were very concerned that his kidneys were not functioning properly. Friday morning as President Arnold saw Elder Ellsworth he was impressed very strongly that they should do all in their power to get him evacuated from Guatemala. Through the efforts of Brother Ken Goodman, the first counselor in the mission presidency and also a U.S. Embassy official, arrangements were made to evacuate Randy to Panama and subsequently to the United States.

From Panama, where he was met by his parents, Elder Ellsworth was flown to the George Washington University Hospital where he received four months of intensive physical therapy while the crushed nerves leading to his legs regenerated. "Each day," he related, "I'd walk to one more high spot, then another, using two crutches. In two weeks I went up to two blocks, and each day I tried to have a first—even if it was stepping up two stairs instead of one." In time he traded his crutches for two canes. In July 1976, supported by leg braces and canes, he requested of the Missionary Department that he be permitted to return to Guatemala to finish his mission. By this time I was the mission president, and the Missionary Department called to advise me of Elder Ellsworth's request, stating that the decision was up to me. Knowing his strong desire to return to finish his mission, I readily approved this request. I also approved that his mission be extended six months, to make up for the time lost while under treatment.

Elder Ellsworth returned to Guatemala wearing leg braces and using two canes. I learned he had constant pain in his legs and feet, which made it difficult for him to walk any distance. Knowing also that he had experienced considerable problem with amoebas previously while on his mission, I decided to keep him in the mission home and helping in the office where I could observe and control his progress. I found that when he had a problem he would not let me know, for fear I would send him home. I assured him he would be sent home only because of extreme necessity, and to stop worrying, and he would progress much faster. I did have to put him in the hospital several times during the first months, but he showed much improvement.

Elder Ellsworth was most anxious to return to the field, particularly to Chimaltenango, where he had been working prior to his injury, and where he was learning to speak the *Cakchiquel* language. I was reluctant to let him return to this area because I did not approve of the place where they were living. However, I did let him return for a

week, then brought him back to the office and had the elders find another place to live in Chimaltenango.

At this time the translation work on the discussion into the Indian languages had begun and the missionaries working on the project needed assistance in typing the translations. I assigned Elder Ellsworth to assist in this project.

Elder Ellsworth was doing an excellent job with the typing, but wanted badly to move into the field and do proselyting. Every few days I would drive to Patzicia to check on the progress of the translations and teaching. One morning while I was there, Elder Ellsworth again requested he be permitted to go out and proselyte. I asked him if he considered he was strong enough to handle the necessary walking. He told me he was, so I took his two canes and told him he would not be needing them anymore. Taken by surprise, he accepted the challenge, but he did not know what had been programmed for him. I told him to finish up what typing he had pending and come into my office the following week.

Happy and excited, Elder Ellsworth came to my office. I carefully inquired concerning the pain in his legs and feet, his general health and how he was doing without his canes. His comments were nothing but positive. His heart was set on returning to the *Cakchiquel* language program, and when told he was being assigned to the *Quiché* language program, he could not believe what he was hearing. But when I assured him that was where he was being assigned, he was angry and left my office looking for my wife in the mission home. He begged her to convince me to let him return to *Cakchiquel*. She told him that if that was where the president had assigned him, this had been done by inspiration and he should accept the assignment. Reluctantly he accepted. He was assigned to a new rural area, Pacajoc, just outside the city of Totonicapan. This being a mountainous area, there was much walking and climbing to reach the people living in the small homes on their plots of land. No transportation was available. This was a real test for Elder Ellsworth. This area had purposely been selected to help build up the muscles in his legs and give him strength, and to test further his determination. An elder, strong, both physically and spiritually, had been assigned as his companion. There were times when Elder Ellsworth had to climb the hills on his hands and knees. He progressed steadily, his attitude remained good and after two months he expressed

his joy for being in the *Quiché* program, and for the inspiration in making his assignment. He labored in several different areas as senior companion, and December 1976 found him in the beautiful Indian town of Momostenango. This is where he met the family of his future wife.

President Thomas S. Monson has related the story of Elder Ellsworth in different stake conferences and has taken special interest in Randy because of his determination to recover completely from his terrible accident, and to succeed in a medical career. Because of his interest, and my admiration for and friendship with President Monson, I wanted him to have one of Elder Ellsworth's canes. Carmen and I met with President Monson in his office on January 7, 1987, at which time I gave him the cane. He expressed his delight, accepting the cane for what it represented: It is a symbol of determination and faith. It is a reminder of courage. I intend to return the other cane to Randy.

Even though Elder Ellsworth's determination was a major factor in his recovery, he said, "In all honesty, I feel I've made a positive experience out of something that could have kept me flat on my back for the rest of my life. I attribute my recovery to faith in my Heavenly Father and a lot of hard work. If you do your part, the Lord will do his."

In his talk in the General Priesthood Session of Conference on April 1, 1989, President Thomas S. Monson again mentioned the experience of my taking the canes from Elder Ellsworth. Being in Guatemala at the time, I did not attend General Conference nor did we have the opportunity to watch the proceedings on television or hear it on radio. The following is part of President Monson's talk relating to Elder Ellsworth:

*Just a few weeks ago, in Guatemala City, Guatemala, I witnessed a modern miracle—even the result of God's guidance given to His servants and the blessing of His people.*

*At a regional conference, almost twelve thousand members filled the Estadio del Ejercito, the local soccer stadium. The sun bathed with its rays the large gathering, while the Spirit of the Lord filled every heart. This was a day of thanksgiving, marking the forty-second anniversary of the arrival of the first missionaries to that land. John Forres O'Donnal spoke to the vast throng. He it was who, in 1946, stood alone as the only member of the Church in that nation. Personally importuning then President George Albert Smith, Brother O'Donnal facilitated the entry of the first missionaries. His*

wife, Carmen Gálvez de O'Donnal, became the first convert and was baptized on November 13, 1948. This day of conference, as throughout the years of their marriage, she sat by her husband's side.

While President O'Donnal spoke, my thoughts drifted back to the many missionaries who had come to this land and the hardships they endured, the sacrifices they made, and the lives they blessed. The experience of one describes the devotion of all. While I have, on a previous occasion, mentioned the experience of this missionary, following my recent visit to Guatemala, I felt impressed to share it with you once again.

While serving in Guatemala as a missionary for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Randall Ellsworth survived a devastating earthquake, which hurled a beam down on his back, paralyzing his legs and severely damaging his kidneys. He was the only American injured in the quake, which claimed the lives of some eighteen thousand persons.

After receiving emergency medical treatment, Elder Ellsworth was flown to a large hospital near his home in Rockville, Maryland. While he was confined there, a newscaster conducted with him an interview that I witnessed through the miracle of television. The reporter asked, "Can you walk?"

The answer: "Not yet, but I will."

"Do you think you will be able to complete your mission?"

Came the reply: "Others think not, but I will.

"With the president of my church praying for me, and through the prayers of my family, my friends, and my missionary companions, I will walk and I will return to Guatemala. The Lord wanted me to preach the gospel there for two years, and that's what I intend to do."

There followed a lengthy period of therapy, punctuated by silent yet heroic courage. Little by little, the feeling began to return to the almost lifeless limbs. More therapy, more courage, more prayer.

At last Randall Ellsworth walked aboard the plane that carried him back to the mission to which he had been called, back to the people whom he loved. He left behind a trail of skeptics and a host of doubters, but also hundreds amazed at the power of God, the miracle of faith, and the reward of determination.

In Guatemala, Randall pursued his responsibilities. He walked with the use of two canes. His walk was slow and deliberate. Then one day, as he stood before his mission president, Randall Ellsworth heard him speak the almost unbelievable words, "You have been the recipient of a miracle. Your faith has been rewarded. If you have the necessary confidence, if you have abiding faith, if you have supreme courage, place those two canes on my desk—and walk."

*Slowly, Randall placed one cane and then the other on the mission president's desk, turned toward the door and toward his future--and walked.*

*Today, Randall Ellsworth is a practicing physician. He is a stalwart husband and a loving father. His mission president was none other than John Forres O'Donnal--the man who helped bring to Guatemala the word of the Lord, the leader who on Sunday, March 5, 1989, addressed the throng assembled for regional conference.*

*Forres O'Donnal visited my office not long ago and, in his modest manner, recounted his experience with Randall Ellsworth. He then said to me, "Together we have witnessed a miracle. I have kept one of the two canes placed upon my desk that day when I challenged Elder Ellsworth to walk without them. I would like you to have the other." With a friendly smile, he departed the office and returned home to Guatemala.*

*This is the cane given to me. It serves as a silent witness of our Heavenly Father's ability to hear our prayers and to bless our lives. It is a symbol of faith. It is a reminder of courage.*

*Brethren of the priesthood, like the Charles Dickens character, Philip Pirrip, we have great expectations. The goal of eternal life awaits. May we strive unflinchingly for its attainment. In the language of the young men assembled tonight, "Let's go for it!" In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.*

After the conference, President Monson wrote me the following letter:

*Dear Brother O'Donnal:*

*What a delightful experience it was for me to be with you and Sister O'Donnal at the Regional Conference in Guatemala. You are always an inspiration to me.*

*I hope you do not mind my relating in the Priesthood session of General Conference our experience with Randall Ellsworth and the story regarding the canes. Knowing that this was your birthday, I thought you might appreciate a copy of the message which I presented at the conference.*

*You are a true pioneer, personifying the definition given by Webster, "One who goes before, showing others the way to follow."*

In a letter to me, twenty-one years after his ordeal, Elder Randall Ellsworth, in his own words writes:

*Upon returning from my mission, I was asked by many to speak about my experiences during the earthquake. It was very difficult for me to relive*

*those horrible moments perhaps because I had not yet understood the great significance of that experience in my life. It was also difficult to travel while I was studying at BYU, to California, Washington and many other far away places to relate that experience. At the same time I thought this would help me better understand why this had happened to me. During that time of my mission in Patzicia I had never lived a more spiritual life. In reality it was difficult to understand why the Lord had permitted this. During the five months I was hospitalized after the earthquake, President Kimball and others of the Apostles made a recording in which the Prophet told me that I would not yet understand why this had happened to me but that some day I would come to understand why. Only now am I beginning to understand the reason why I have suffered all these years, physically as well as spiritually. With the help of the Lord, my family and my own stubbornness, I have been able to bear the pain that accompanies me daily. For many my experience was one that passed and ended. For me, the chronic pain remains and reminds me of the time that has passed since that morning in Patzicia in '76. At times I would like to leave everything aside and to escape to a place where no one knows of that experience. But then I remember my personal motto, "Failure will not be my reward for the struggle." In fact, after leaving medical school I went to the most desolate place there could be, Casper, Wyoming. My stay in Wyoming was a rejuvenation. I had been there a short time when I was called to be the Gospel Doctrine teacher. The members in Wyoming are strong and know much more of the gospel than I. I spent hours preparing my lessons and prayed that I could fulfill my assignment, and at the same time my testimony was strengthened.*

*One day, Dr. Oaks, Elder Oaks' older brother, an Ophthalmologist in Provo, Utah, for whom I have great respect, felt impressed to contact me in Wyoming, requesting that I move to Provo. But I had never wanted to work in Utah for the simple reason that the people had me on a pedestal and I knew this wasn't right. I told Dr. Oaks that my practice in Casper was growing rapidly. From many viewpoints, to leave Casper where I owned my own practice with a much higher income than the Ophthalmologists in Provo, and go to Utah to start anew as a junior partner, would be insane. But after much fasting and prayer with my wife and without knowing fully why, we were sure the Lord wanted us to go...*

*I feel I owe a great debt to the people of Guatemala and the missionaries who sacrificed so much in risking their own lives to save my life. My constant question is whether I have done enough to pay this debt to the people of Guatemala and the missionaries. I now do not ask, "Lord, why did you permit this to happen to me," but, "What can I do?" [Randy has become involved in a project to help the people of Patzicia]. I am always given the credit for what happened in the earthquake, but in reality I only*

*awakened to find that a beam had fallen on me. It was the other missionaries and the brothers of Patzicia that, being safe and sound, risked their lives crawling to where I was, sure that I was going to die regardless. When a second tremor came, without hesitation, one of them raised his arm to the square using the Melchizedek Priesthood, blessed the walls that they would not fall until I was rescued. They are the ones who deserve the credit and I do not want to betray them. For me the elders and the brothers of Patzicia are the true heroes.*

*January 12, 1997*

*Here are a few thoughts of my experience in the Guatemala Earthquake:*

*I awoke from what I thought was a horrible nightmare but it was so terribly real! The earthquake of February 4, 1976, for many Guatemalans is still a common topic, but for some 23,000 others it might as well have been a nightmare. They never woke up again.*

*My initial memories of that morning which has forever changed my life are that of fear and confusion. I did not understand why the Lord would let that happen to me. The quake registered 7.6 on the Richter scale and lasted some 45 seconds. At least 23,000 people died and I fear many other bodies were never found to be counted. Thousands of others were killed in the aftermath while trying to help their loved ones to safety.*

*Quickly, fear and confusion for me were replaced by pain. It was like someone had soaked me in gasoline and then lit the match. Today I am a practicing Ophthalmologist in Provo, Utah, and the residual pain from that morning still accompanies me. I draw from what I have learned from this chronic pain to help me empathize more with my patients and their problems. I see a lot of afflictions that may not be as dramatic as being crushed in an earthquake, but nevertheless I have been blessed a great deal by what I have learned from my patients.*

*Initially, while lying under this approximately 50 ton beam and with the weight of the roof pushing down on the beam, and realizing what kind of condition I was in, I almost welcomed a quick and easy death. Fortunately the Lord had other plans for me. While I was fervently praying and asking for the Lord's intervention to let me out from underneath the beam, I tried to rationalize my request any way I could. At one point, I remember, promising the Lord that if He would lift up the beam and let me stretch a bit, I wouldn't go anywhere. But I knew in my heart that in case that beam were lifted up I would make a fast exit to a black hole I could see in the back of the crumbled church walls. I have learned subsequently that the hard way is often times the best way.*

*The noise of the quake was deafening. A cannon could have gone off right next to my ear and I would not have heard it. The floor of the chapel's stage was rolling like the waves of the sea. And suddenly, the concrete-scaled, reinforced, back wall blew out and for a few seconds I had a beautiful view of the star-lit sky and then above the thunderous roar of the earthquake the walls and roof came crashing down leaving only that small hole in the back of the wall that I could see.*

*There are too many events to relate for the purpose of this entry, but I would like to go on record to thank the missionaries and the people of Patzicia who so valiantly risked their lives to pull me out from underneath the 50 ton beam. To Elder Atkin, for being my companion and never leaving the site despite being as afraid as I was. To Elder Bernhardt for giving me a blessing and comforting me, and even making me laugh for a moment. To Elders Larsen and Schmollinger who worked their very hardest to get me out from underneath the beam, along with the others, and to Julio Salazar and Taz Evans who blessed the walls so they wouldn't fall in until they could get me out safely. To these Elders I have a debt that I will never be able to repay, but hopefully through my efforts to help in Patzicia and other areas in Guatemala, their efforts will not go unheralded.*

*I believe I was underneath that beam for approximately six to seven hours. After the Elders had made the incredible start, more and more of the members of Patzicia began coming to help. Eventually there were so many that there was time for some of them to come and sit with me and comfort me. I cannot remember exactly who they all were but I do remember Serapio Choc and Domingo Mix. One unforgettable moment I remember is when little Domingo Mix was holding me and wiping the blood and vomit with the sleeve of his coat telling me that I was surely going to die but that he would stay right there with me. A voice from outside directed to Domingo said, "Domingo, please leave, you are going to be killed." His response was, "God is big amongst us, and if this missionary dies I will stay here with him."*

*I would like to make it very clear that waking up and having a 50 ton beam pin me to the ground did not require any faith. But the faith and courage that the Elders and brothers of Patzicia demonstrated is the real miracle that I am sometimes given credit for. Over the years and enduring an often painfully slow recuperation, my faith has been put to the test. Sometimes I have failed. But more often than not I have succeeded with the help of family, friends and church leaders. I am grateful to President O'Donnal for allowing me to go back into the Lamanite areas to continue learning some of the Mayan dialects and to be able to teach them the gospel in their own language. This is what I had been called to do while I was serving as a missionary in Patzicia. I remember begging President Arnold*

*who was my mission president at the time of the earthquake before I was sent back to the United States, to please not give away my assignment working with the Indian people of Guatemala.*

*I remember lying in a hospital bed in Washington, D.C. when a news crew arrived to interview me. I had been told that the chance of being able to walk again was very minimal, and that it was likely that I would be on a kidney machine for the rest of my life. Somehow, I chose to believe President Arnold when giving me a priesthood blessing, he promised me that one day I would stand and return to the mission field in Guatemala to continue the work that I had started. And as depressed as I may have become in my five month stay in the hospital, I would repeat to myself over and over again the Lord's promise in Doctrine and Covenants 82:10, "I the Lord am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise." The reporters asked, amongst other things, how I felt about being invited to the White House to meet President Ford. I told them that I was honored. They asked me what are you going to do now? I replied, "As honored as I was to be invited to the White House and to have received a written letter from the President of the United States, more importantly I had received a call to serve a mission in Guatemala by the prophet Spencer W. Kimball who leads our church. I am going to return to Guatemala as soon as possible to finish what I was called to do."*

*After six month of being away from Guatemala, I was given the okay to return. My kind and well-meaning doctors told me this was foolish, and that I would receive better physical therapy in the United States. But I knew that I wanted to go back. That closure for me was very important to my life, and hopefully will be for the lives of my children as well. I met the family of my beautiful wife upon my return and later I met her at BYU at the conclusion of my mission and we were married a year later.*

*[After President O'Donnal took my canes, with the help of leg braces] I learned to negotiate hills and ravines out in the rural areas of Guatemala. What better physical therapy than this? I think the real reason [I gave up the canes] was to help President O'Donnal send me back out into proselyting areas so that I could teach the gospel in the Mayan languages. This I was able to do. I never forget one of the most powerful lessons that I ever learned in my life. It was my last Sunday in Guatemala, we were having our Sunday meeting outside with a beautiful sunset, with a total of 5 people including my companion and I. One of the men attending was an investigator. At the conclusion of the meeting we sang a closing hymn. This investigator was singing very loud with us. I knew he didn't know how to read or write and that was probably why he wasn't singing the words. But nevertheless, he sang as loud as he could, and during the chorus of "We Thank Thee O God For A Prophet," he would chime in. At the conclusion of*

*the last verse, and upon starting the chorus, I gently started to close the hymn book. He would not let me. I tried to forcefully close it once again, but he was quite strong and I could not. It wasn't until we finished singing the last word that he let me close the hymn book. Afterwards he came up to me and put his arm around my waist and said in his native language of Quiché, "My son, I know that you know that I cannot read or write, but I don't close the hymn book in my other church either because it reminds me to never quit anything that I start."*

*It has been 21 years now since the earthquake so changed my life. In the beginning it inspired me to go back to Guatemala and finish my mission. In later years during medical school and residency training I tried to put it out of my mind and make believe it hadn't happened. I did not want to be known as the Elder in the Guatemala earthquake. I wanted to be known for the things I was striving to become. Now that I have been practicing as a physician for 11 years, I feel an overwhelming need to do something to pay back the love and kindness that those people showed to me so many years ago. At times I wake up at night sweating and thinking, "Am I doing enough?" With the blessing of having married a beautiful Guatemalan woman and my experiences in the Guatemala earthquake, my life has become inextricably intertwined with the people of Guatemala. It is an honor for me to be able to add a few experiences to the innumerable experiences and contributions of the O'Donnal family. They have been pioneers in Guatemala in and out of the church and somehow in the years to come in a way that I have not totally figured out, I would like to follow their example.*

During the four weeks following the earthquake, the Elders and Sisters in the Patzicia District spent time helping the members clear away the rubble that was once their homes. Elder Boyce Lines and his wife supervised this effort with the assistance of Elder Bleak Powell and his wife who were welfare missionaries.

On March 29 they were working in Patzún. This was to be the last day of their labors on the project, and that night the Lines and the Powells were to have a big dinner for the missionaries, rewarding them for their weeks of hard work on behalf of the members in the area. Daniel Choc, the son of the branch president, Pablo Choc—the first full-time, Cakchiquel missionary in the history of the Church—was one of the missionaries working on the project. Elder Choc was killed on that last day when a tremor toppled a wall they had been working on.

This was a very sad day for everyone, especially for faithful President Choc who had already lost his wife and two sons in the earthquake; but I am certain there was also rejoicing on the other side as Elder Choc was reunited with his mother and his brothers.

Immediately after the earthquake, the Church initiated a relief program for members of the Church. Efforts were channeled through the regional representatives, the mission president—President Robert B. Arnold—stake presidents, bishops and district presidents. The mission purchased rolls of plastic, shovels, beans, rice, sugar, salt and other staples to be distributed as needed to the Saints in the stricken areas. The nights are cold in the highlands in February, thus it was urgent that our people be dry and have a place of relative privacy and security during this very trying time.

About the eighth of February, Elder J. Thomas Fyans of the Quorum of the Seventy and Area Executive Administrator, visited the mission and assessed the needs of the Saints. Representatives from the Welfare Department of the Church also visited. Elder Fyans presided over a welfare council meeting held at the mission office. The council requested that the Church participate in the construction of small houses for those members of the Church that had lost their homes. Houses would be built only for those who owned their homes. The request was granted.

Time was of the essence as the rainy season begins in May in Guatemala. Construction began less than one month following the earthquake. Brother David Judd, the Church Building Supervisor for Guatemala, took charge of the construction project. He was assisted by Brother David Escobar and Martin Pendley. Engineers from BYU came to Guatemala along with some of their students to develop the plan and help get things started.

In April, Harvey Glade, Robert Flake and Bill Evans drove a dump truck, tractor/front-end loader, and trailer, from Salt Lake to Guatemala. This equipment was furnished by the Church and proved very useful in the building effort.

When I became president of the mission, I was given direct charge for carrying out the building project, with the assistance of the Church Building Department in Guatemala. Plans had been drawn up and approved for the construction of small, three-room, block houses, with a porch and a tin roof. Young prospective missionaries from

Guatemala and Salvador had been called to build these houses. Materials were purchased and a camp was set up in Patzicía, on the location of the chapel that had been destroyed. Three or four missionary couples were assigned to prepare meals and related duties, for the labor missionaries. The couples and the missionaries lived in tents. The young men started immediately making cement blocks and prefabricated rafters for the roofs. They became very proficient in this work. There were about 35 labor missionaries who were given different assignments in groups: making cement blocks, preparing rafters, leveling and trenching for foundations, laying blocks, pouring concrete and installing roofs. Over 250 houses were built during a period of nine months, primarily in Patzicía, Patzún, Tecpán, Chimaltenango, Jalapa and Guatemala City. For their labors, a fund was set aside for a full-time mission after the project was completed. Each labor missionary received \$5.25 each week, for spending money. This was a marvelous training experience, especially in discipline. Only once did we have a problem with disobedience to rules.

As the labor missionaries had received no medical or dental attention prior to entering the construction program, arrangements were made through a good friend and oral surgeon from Salt Lake City, Dr. Oscar Bluth, to have this work done. He, at that time, made frequent trips to Guatemala giving assistance to the AYUDA program in Cunen. He always visited the mission home to say hello and to offer his services. When I told him about the labor missionaries and their needs for dental work, he offered to bring a team down for a week to care for their needs. He, with five other dentists, arrived in Guatemala on September 30, 1976. The Fourth Ward chapel kitchen and class rooms were converted into a dental clinic where teeth were extracted, cleaned and filled, and where oral surgeries were performed. On some missionaries there was, under normal costs, work representing several thousands of dollars. When the dentists finished working on the group in Guatemala City, we went to Jalapa and there again set up a clinic in the chapel. The dentists all expressed their joy in doing this work. Never in their lives had they felt so good and been so happy in serving. They left on October 7.

Caring for the young men was difficult and trying for the missionary couples living under camp conditions; but they did a wonderful service. A new missionary couple arrived, Elder Albert Huber and his wife LaPreel, and they were assigned to care for the labor

missionaries until the project was finished in early 1977. Elder Huber was also requested to use his farming experience to improve the quality and per-acre production of the cash crops the members in that area were planting—potatoes, cabbages, cauliflower, onions, carrots, corn and wheat. Much success was realized as demonstrated by the increased production and the 36 pound cabbages produced. Sister Huber is a talented musician and a wonderful person. There was a great need in the mission for music, particularly piano accompaniment of the hymns. Sister Huber was assigned to develop a simplified method of teaching piano. Simultaneous programs were underway in South America, and Sister Huber, under inspiration, prepared a beautiful method which was incorporated into the Church-wide music program. She taught members to play the hymns in a short period of time. Sister Huber was also the organist for the Guatemala Area Conference with the First Presidency on February 22, 1977.

At the conclusion of the building project, the work missionaries served a full, two-year mission in our Indian Mission, and they were some of the best missionaries we had. Most of these, after their missions have become successful in their life's work and as church leaders.



*Devastation in Guatemala after the earthquake of February 4, 1976  
(picture from "La Hora Dominical" magazine)*



*Earthquake devastation  
(picture from "La Hora Dominical" magazine)*

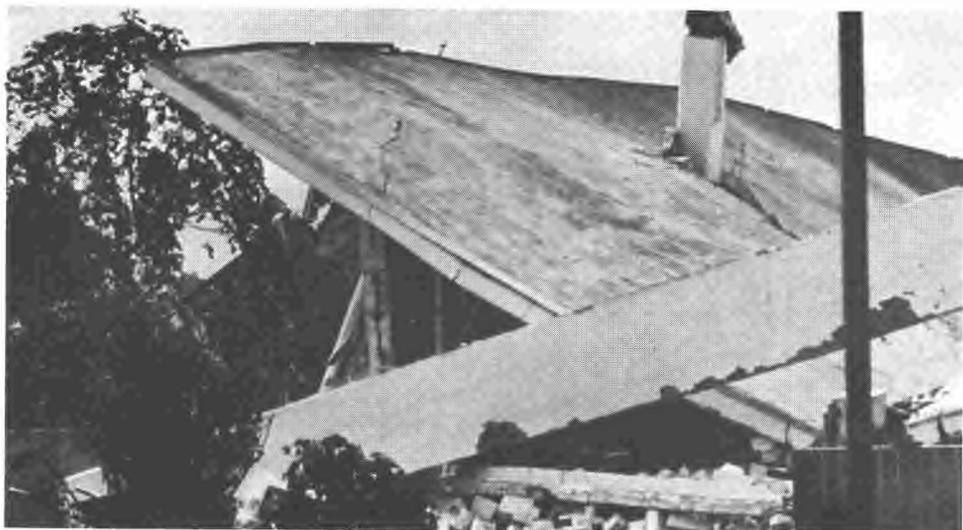


*Ruins of the Catholic church in Patzún, Guatemala,  
after the earthquake*

*Earthquake In Guatemala--February 4, 1976*



*Burying the dead after the earthquake  
(picture from "La Hora Dominical" magazine)*



*Patcizia Chapel destroyed in the earthquake  
where Elder Randall Ellsworth was pinned  
(picture used with permission from Ensign Magazine)*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*Elder Randall Ellsworth with leg braces  
exercising at Patzicia while Sister O'Donnal observes*



*Sylvia & Randall Ellsworth*

*Earthquake In Guatemala—February 4, 1976*



*Missionaries helping members clean up their properties after the earthquake*



*Clean up in the town of Patzicia after the earthquake*



*Demolition of a wall similar to the one that collapsed and killed Elder Daniel Choc, the first native Cakchiquel Indian missionary*



*Headstone at the grave of Elder Daniel Choc*

*Earthquake In Guatemala--February 4, 1976*



*Labor missionaries assigned to build homes for members who lost theirs in the earthquake*



*Labor missionaries making cement blocks for construction projects after the earthquake*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*Labor missionaries line up to eat at camp in Jalapa, Guatemala,  
during clean up after the earthquake*



*Brother and Sister Bleak Powell*

## Chapter Nine

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# *Taking The Gospel To The Lamanites*

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An incident in the village of Momostenango convinced me that we had to take the church to the good people in the mountains. We were conducting a district conference, and after the early morning Priesthood meeting, a small Indian member took his hat and *morral* (small bag), and approached me to say good-by. I asked him if he would not stay for the other two meetings, to which he replied, "I must go now because from where I live takes six hours walking to get here and six hours to get home. And I must do some shopping." I knew then, we must take the gospel to these beautiful people.

I recalled the words of President John Taylor:

*The work of the Lord among the Lamanites must not be postponed if we desire to retain the approval of God. Thus far we have been content simply to baptize them, but this must continue no longer; the same devoted effort, the same care in instructing, the same organization of priesthood must be introduced and maintained among those of Israel gathered from Gentile nations. As yet, God has been doing all, and we comparatively nothing. He has led many of them to us, and they have been baptized, and now we must*

*instruct them further, and organize them into churches with proper presidencies, attach them to stakes, organizations, etc. In one word, treat them exactly in these respects, as we would and do treat our white brethren. (Emphasis added)*

(John Taylor, *Gospel Kingdom*, Vol. I, p. 247)

President Wilford Woodruff also affirmed: "I am satisfied that, although we have done something for the Lamanites, there still remains much to be done." (G. Homer Durham, *Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, Vol. I, p. 296)

It is my firm belief and testimony that President George Albert Smith was the president who actually inaugurated the "Day of the Lamanite." In my studies I have learned that he had been especially assigned by President Heber J. Grant to work with the Lamanites. He was assigned to make extended tours of the South Pacific Islands and extended visits to the Hopi and Navajo tribes. Among leaders of the Church he was known as the Apostle to the Lamanites. Elder Spencer W. Kimball was sustained as a member of the Twelve and ordained and set apart at the October 1943 General Conference. In 1946, Elder Kimball was given a special charge by President George Albert Smith, to work with the Lamanites. A committee of General Authorities was appointed and a paid, full-time supervisor was appointed to coordinate the work among the Lamanites. The committee was formally organized on September 13, 1946 and, in addition to Elder Kimball as chairman, it included Elder Matthew Cowley and Antoine R. Ivins of the First Council of the Seventy. "I went down to the office of President George Albert Smith," reported Elder Kimball, "relative to the Indians. We talked about the Navajos in the mission. He then said, "Now I want you to look after the Indians—they have been neglected. You watch all the Indians. I want you to have charge and look after all the Indians in all the world and this includes those in the Islands also." ("Spencer W. Kimball: No Ordinary Man," Boyd K. Packer, *Ensign*, March 1974, p.12)

President George Albert Smith powerfully brought out the importance of the Church among the Indians with these simple, although dramatic, words: "Behold, the day in which the Gospel shall go to the Lamanites, and never again should we fail."

This was reaffirmed later by President David O. McKay, when he declared, emphatically, "God will hold us responsible if we fail."

These affirmations clarify without a doubt what our duty is toward the Lamanite people. Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, in revelation, we are assured the gospel is to be preached throughout the world:

*For it will come to pass in that day, that every man shall hear of the gospel in his own tongue, and in his own language, through those who are ordained unto this power, by the administration of the Comforter, shed upon them for the revelation of Jesus Christ. (D&C 90:11)*

I firmly believe that we should no longer deny to the Lamanites their promised blessings, full rights, and opportunities to receive them. Great are the promised blessings of the Lord to the Lamanites; and only we have the keys, rights and power to grant and confer these spiritual blessings upon them.

## TRANSLATION WORK—INDIAN LANGUAGES

With all that was transpiring in the mission, by September 1976 I was feeling the pressure, but the Lord is always there to give us the support we need. At this time he sent us Brother Eb Davis, ex-mission president in the Pacific Islands, and at that time Area Manager of Distribution and Translation of Latin American Indian Languages. He had learned of our efforts and had come to offer his assistance. I outlined for him what we hoped to accomplish and our dire need for simplification and translation of materials, especially in the four major Mayan languages: *Quiché*, *Cakchiquel*, *Ke'kchi* and *Mam*. He was already engaged in working with Mayan for the Yucatan Peninsula and Northern Guatemala, and with *Cuna* in San Blas, *Quichua* in Octovallo and Chimborazo, *Quechua* in Bolivia, Ayacucho and Cuzco, and *Aymara*, *Guarani* and *Araucano* in South America.

Brother Davis and I outlined our basic need for curriculum materials correlated to the simplified plan we were devising. These included the following:

1. A Gospel Principles Manual
2. Priesthood Manual
3. Women's Manual
4. Children's Manual
5. Book of Mormon Stories
6. Simplified Missionary Discussions
7. Simplified organizational guidebooks for families, groups, small branches and Priesthood leaders.

At that time I did not know that Elders LeGrand Richards and Boyd K. Packer with a committee, had launched a program for simplification of church organization for emerging and developing areas, five years earlier. It was being used in the South Dakota Rapid City Mission, and the Arizona Holbrook Mission. However, to my knowledge, none of the basic simplified curriculum materials had been written. On his subsequent visit, Brother Davis was accompanied by Brother Josiah Douglas, writer for the curriculum department. The three of us met in the *Quiché* Indian town of Momostenango, where we outlined the basic materials we needed. Brother Douglas understood our desires and told us he would return to Salt Lake City and work on their preparation. These were approved, and a schedule for preparation of manuscripts was established. The *Gospel Principles Manual* was published in English in August 1977, and the other manuals were published in January and February 1978. We then had to await the translation of these materials into Spanish and the four Indian languages. These were available prior to our release from the Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission.

Three exceptionally dedicated elders who had learned to speak *Cakchiquel* well, had been chosen to start simplifying and translating the discussions which were too lengthy and complicated for teaching the Indians. They were also asked to prepare guidebooks, and to initiate a language training course for missionaries learning to speak the Indian languages, beginning with *Cakchiquel*. These missionaries, Elder David Frischknecht, Elder Gary Larsen and Elder Larry Richmond, were nearing the end of their mission, so I requested their term be extended. The simplification, translation and training progressed without delay but these elders needed assistance in typing the translations. With Elder Randall Ellsworth doing the typing, translations progressed even faster

than we had hoped. Elder Frischknecht's mission was extended to December 16, 1976, so he could finish translations of the simplified discussions and other materials.

## LANGUAGE TRAINING—INDIAN LANGUAGES

When Elder Spencer W. Kimball was given the responsibility of supervising all the missions in South America, before departing to visit that continent in October 1965, he called on President David O. McKay to discuss his vision for the Indians of South America. Of this visit he wrote:

*He was ready and very gracious.... I took my large map of South America and laid it out on the table....and told him of the millions of Indians [on] the Altaplano of the Andes range. He asked me, "Millions?" And I said, "Yes, President McKay, there are millions and they are pure-blood Indians who speak different Indian tongues and dialects.... I explained to him that we now have linguists in the Church [who can teach the missionaries the Indian languages so] that they could hear the Gospel, every man in his own tongue....I said to him, President McKay,...I think the time of the Lamanite has come for them to hear the Gospel." And he said, "Yes, it is time and they must hear it and you are the one of the Twelve who has the vision of it.... You have my blessing." (Emphasis added)*

*(Spencer W. Kimball, p. 361)*

As mentioned earlier, it was also one of my goals when I was called as mission president that the gospel be taught to the Indians in their own language. The language training in the *Cakchiquel* language initiated by Robert B. Arnold was resumed and intensified in August 1976 in Patzicia, Chimaltenango—*Quiché* in September, 1976 in Momostenango, Totonicapan—*Ke'kchi* in December 1977 in San Pedro Carchá, Alta Verapaz—and *Mam* in January 1978 in Todos Los Santos, Huehuetenango.

Only after prayerful consideration and receiving inspiration, were dedicated elders and sister missionaries selected for this program. They needed to have learned Spanish well and been in the mission at least six months. Spanish-speaking missionaries were also selected. We were then beginning to receive native missionaries from these areas who were paired off with those learning the language. In a report I submitted in

November 1976, I innocently mentioned that our local Missionary Training Center was going forward and showing excellent results, as such it was. But it seemed that with every project we initiated, we encountered much opposition from some in Salt Lake City. Such was the case with our language training program. Eyebrows were raised in the Missionary Department and in Provo, and questions were asked. I explained that what we were doing was with the approval of the Area Executive Administrators, but without specific approval of the Missionary Department, fearing that if I requested authorization there would be a long delay. I knew what we were doing was right.

As the Missionary Training Center had been established in Provo for the training of missionaries and for teaching them the different languages in a most efficient and supervised way, many believed that this was the only place where the language training should be carried out. So on December 10, we received a visit from the president of the Provo MTC, who had come to observe what we were doing. I took him to Patzicía where our training was being conducted. The missionaries being trained were instructed in the classroom throughout the day, then in the evening they were paired off with missionaries who could speak the language or with native missionaries, for experience in teaching and conversing with the Indians in their language. He offered suggestions for improving our teaching, and was most favorably impressed, and expressed approval of our program, and congratulated us on our success. After a short period of only six weeks these missionaries were ready and could speak the language well enough to be assigned to regular proselyting.

After the MTC president returned to Provo, we received information exactly opposite of what he had expressed to us in Guatemala—that we should not continue training, but this would be carried out at the Provo MTC. We continued training, however, offering our reasons for doing so and requesting we be permitted to continue. Elder William R. Bradford, the Area Executive Administrator at the time, supported us, using his influence in an attempt to keep our program alive. But after a few months the final word came that we should discontinue the program and that training in the four languages would be done in the Provo MTC.

Our original trainers, Elders Frischknecht, Richmond and Larsen, finished their missions and returned to their homes. All of the

missionaries trained in the Indian languages were convinced the training could best be accomplished in the mission, and among themselves determined they would not assist in the training in the Provo MTC. All but Randall Ellsworth turned down offers to do so. The MTC then extended a contract on August 15, 1977, to a Cakchiquel man who also spoke some *Quiché*, and was a member of a Protestant church, arranged immigration to the United States for him, and gave him charge of teaching at the MTC. The Provo MTC started teaching *Cakchiquel* on January 15, 1978. We then received our first groups of elders who had received one month Spanish instruction and two months *Cakchiquel* instructions, but could not communicate in either language. Fifty percent of these missionaries, after six months in the mission became very disheartened; which meant that ten months after entering the Provo MTC they still were not effective missionaries and were discouraged. Most had to be taken out of the Indian program.

I then learned through our former missionaries attending Brigham Young University, that this teacher, in his training was teaching Protestant doctrine, and that he had made inappropriate remarks and improper advances to several of the sister missionaries. Elder Bradford, being advised of the situation, immediately conveyed this to the Missionary Department. This situation was confirmed and the teacher was dismissed, which made necessary the payment of his full contract and passage back to Guatemala.

## LATIN ORIENTATION CENTER

The majority of the missionaries serving in the Guatemala Guatemala City Mission were Anglo-American who had received training in the Missionary Training Center in Provo prior to arriving in the mission. However, the ever-increasing number of local, Latin-American missionaries did not have the opportunity to attend the MTC. To assist them in this respect, on June 27, 1977, we started a two-week training period as each group of Latin missionaries arrived in the mission. We called it the Latin Orientation Center. It was discontinued when we were called to open the new mission in Quetzaltenango.

## BUILDING SMALL CHAPELS

Elder William R. Bradford our Area Executive Administrator at that time, was sympathetic to our programs and wholeheartedly supported us in our efforts to accomplish what we hoped to achieve. When he believes things are right, he will put forth every effort and use his influence to accomplish these ends. This he did, particularly regarding the construction of small chapels in rural areas, and the training of selected missionaries in the Indian languages, so the gospel could be taken to them, demonstrating the stability and permanency of the Church in these areas.

After the earthquake in February 1976, many of the meeting places in the Indian villages were built with poles and corn stocks as walls, and corrugated tin roofs. Such was the meeting place in the village of Patzún, in the *Cakchiquel* area. This meeting place accommodated 90 people on rough benches. One Sunday I was asked to accompany the Church Building Supervisor to a meeting at Patzún to present plans for a new chapel to the members of the branch. I was amazed when the plans called for \$250,000 buildings to be constructed in these small towns, the first phase costing over \$100,000, and would accommodate only 90 people. The members, not understanding really what was being presented, naturally approved. After the meeting I told the supervisor there was no way I would approve the construction of a chapel of this magnitude; that what we wanted were small chapels that could be built for less than \$10,000. The member contribution on the large chapel was 5% of the total cost. The Director of Temporal Affairs said that if we did not accept this chapel, we would have no chapel. This was the beginning of a long and difficult struggle with people in Salt Lake City who could not see moving away from traditions. With Elder Bradford, we drew up plans for the building we felt most met the needs in these rural areas. This consisted of a large room with curtain dividers for classes, and on one end, an office and quarters for a missionary companionship with a bathroom. Our plans were not entirely accepted, but were modified to meet what the Church Architects considered best. Finally, \$100,000 was approved for a test project, to construct 10 small chapels.

At the insistence of the DTA, a contract was entered into with a member builder who failed to meet the terms of his contract, and over-

spent on the first chapel. The building department of the Area Office was assigned to complete the construction. After finishing five of the ten chapels it was determined that the original plans we had presented were more desirable and the remaining chapels were built using those plans. Because of the delay and over-expenditure, only nine of the ten chapels were completed with the \$100,000 budgeted.

Following is a letter I wrote expressing my feelings about the small chapels, dated February 15, 1979, addressed to Presiding Bishop Victor L. Brown:

*Dear Bishop Brown:*

*I will attempt at this time to express my feelings regarding the rural small chapel construction program initiated last year in this mission, of which five were put into use within the past few weeks and four others will soon be completed. It is difficult for me to express in words my feelings of joy and appreciation for this great blessing that is becoming a reality among these chosen people whom we have not been able to reach before with the gospel message. I am sure I also express their feelings which they have related to me.*

*Although the first of the small chapels have been in use only a few weeks, we are beginning to see the positive results we had anticipated when the request for these small chapels was made. The interest of the people in the areas where these chapels have been built has been aroused, especially with the civic leaders. These chapels are the nicest buildings in the area, and have helped in opening the doors of the important people of the communities. They have demonstrated the ability and permanency of the Church in the areas.*

*The members have great pride in belonging to the Church, and the brethren are assuming their responsibilities of leadership. In one group alone six men are being prepared for receiving the Melchizedek Priesthood this month. The members have become more interested in the missionary program and are offering many family references. Attendance has increased in most areas by 50% to 100%, and in some over 50% are investigators. Baptisms have increased. Where there was an occasional baptism, now there are weekly baptismal services. In every instance there has been a request for additional chairs. I would like to quote from the weekly letter of two sisters in Santa Ana, Momostenango:*

*"We are really excited this week because it just seems like there are so many golden investigators all over who come to church and are so good.*

*Yesterday we had 15 investigators at church and we see so much hope in many of them."*

*"I can hardly believe it. This little group is just blossoming. We have as many investigators as members. Saturday a great little family was baptized. The father is a great leader, loves his family and is greatly respected here. Nearly all the members and 12 investigators came to his baptism, including his family. He invited many people and it was the best lacing-affect I have ever seen. He had over 40 people in his house for a huge lunch and testimony meeting. It was fantastic. Next week his brother and wife should be baptized as well as the sister of Sebastian's wife. They are all fantastic people. This area is full of great, humble people. The men here are beginning to take over to direct and worry about the affairs of the Church."*

*These two sisters are teaching the people in their own language, Quiché. How can we help but be happy and thankful, with these kind of experiences. I trust that the brethren will more fully understand the importance of this inspired program.*

*May the Lord continue to bless you in your important calling.*

*Sincerely,*

*John F. O'Donnal*

*Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission*

**This was Bishop Brown's reply, dated February 27, 1979:**

*Dear President O'Donnal:*

*I did not read the letter you handed me until after I left Guatemala. I can't tell you how pleased I am and grateful to you for the sentiments expressed in your letter.*

*It seems that it takes a long time to get some things done right. As I visited some of these small buildings in the highlands, I concur with you that they are a real blessing to the people, and I anticipate that we will build many more of them. Please know that we want to support you in every way possible with the temporal needs of you and the saints.*

*Thanks for being with us at dinner in Guatemala.*

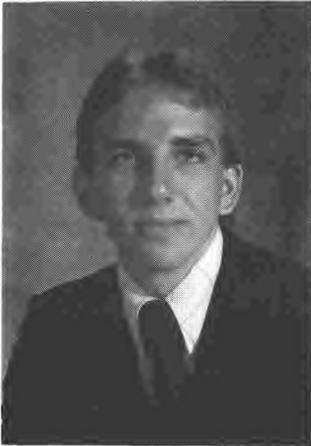
*Sincerely yours,*

*Bishop Victor L. Brown*

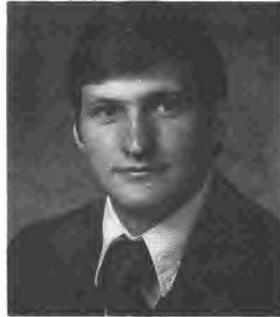
*Taking The Gospel To The Lamanites*

Taking the gospel to the Indians in the mountains of Guatemala required a change in dress standards. It was necessary for the missionaries to wear heavy clothing, work-type shoes and trousers, and to use sleeping bags. Some areas were from two to six hours walking distance from a town. Some of the small chapels were constructed in these areas. I often thought of the possibility of a serious illness or accident, but this never happened. In my opinion, the missionaries in our mission were the healthiest and happiest in the Church. With few exceptions, missionaries requested an extension to their missions. Only where this was considered of interest to the mission were these petitions granted.

In the four years following our release there were near one hundred small chapels built in the rural areas. This construction is an on-going program as the Church expands in Guatemala.



*Elder David Frischknecht*



*Elder Gary W. Larsen*



*Elder Larry Richmond*



*Language Orientation Center (LOC) in Guatemala City  
First Missionary Training Center outside of Provo, Utah*



*Small chapel built in Santa Ana, Momostenango, Guatemala – 1978*

*Taking The Gospel To The Lamanites*



*Native Cakchiquel Indian missionaries taking the gospel to their own people*



*Native Cakchiquel Indian missionary in corn field  
taking the gospel where the people are*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*Native Cakchiquel Indian missionaries teaching the people in the fields*



*Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission Presidency with their families walking in to visit Nimsituj, Totonicapán Group*

*Taking The Gospel To The Lamanites*



*Greeting native members in the mountains of Guatemala*



*Lean-to where missionaries lived in Nimsituj, Totonicapán, in October 1976*



*First baptisms in Canquixajá, Totonicapán—October 24, 1976*

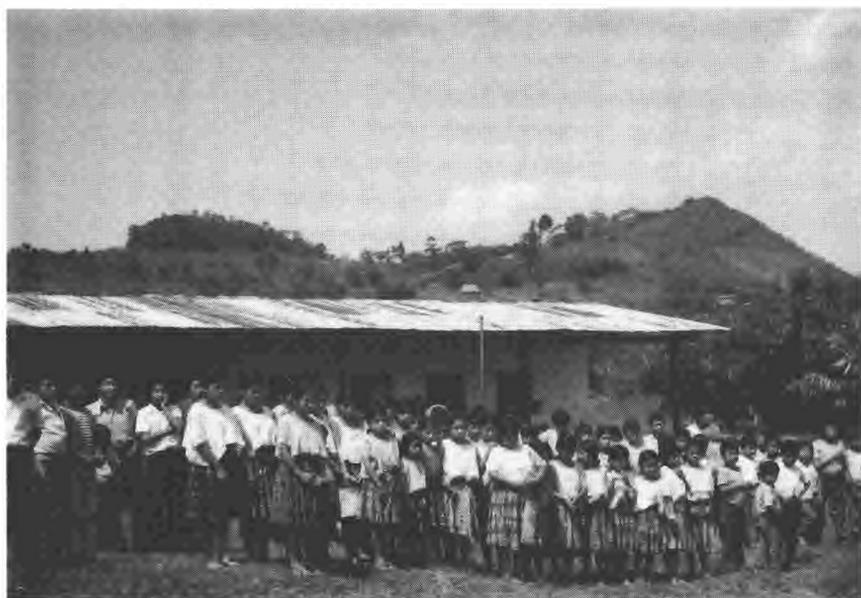


*Canquixajá, Totonicapán Branch*

*Taking The Gospel To The Lamanites*



*President and Sister O'Donnal with Elder William R. Bradford, his wife and daughter, and missionaries, walking into the Ke'kchi Indian area of Tanchi, Alta Verapaz*



*School children—some members and future members—at rural Ke'kchi Indian area of Tanchi, Alta Verapaz*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*Branch in La Grandeza, San Marcos  
Building they were meeting in when a chapel was promised to them*



*Branch in Comalapa*

## Chapter Ten

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# *Historical Background Of The Maya-Ke'kchi Indian Kingdom*

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To understand the growth of the Church among the *Ke'kchi* Indians in Guatemala, I feel that it is necessary to understand their history. My first contact with the *Ke'kchi* Indians was in late 1943, when I made a tour of the upper departments of Alta and Baja Verapaz, in connection with my work with rubber. I was very much impressed with these people. Very few at that time spoke Spanish. I felt a special spirit among them and observed that they were very humble and honest.

In the conquest of Central America the *Ke'kchi* was the only kingdom not conquered by military domination. A number of Spanish bishops and priests protested the savage treatment and atrocities committed against the Indians by the *Conquistador*, Pedro de Alvarado, and his soldiers. Among the most ardent protesters was Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, known as The Protector of the Indians. Juan de Torquemada in *Monarquía Indiana*, wrote, "Las Casas had many and powerful enemies because he spoke great truths."

The personality of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas is one of the most interesting in the history of the Sixteenth Century. His father was Don Francisco Cassaus, of French descent. In 1493, his father visited the island of La Española on Columbus' second voyage, and returned to

Spain in 1498, bringing with him an Indian boy as a valet for his 18 year old son, Bartolomé.

Bartolomé studied law at the University of Salamanca, then the most famous in the world. In 1502, after graduating with two degrees in Law, he went with the Governor, Nicolás de Ovando, to La Española and there he was ordained a priest, the first ordination of a priest in the New World. Because of his fame as learned, judicious and a Christian, Diego Velásquez, Governor of Cuba, took him to be his counselor. He was also assessor to Pacifico de Narvaez in his general tour of the island of Cuba.

The Indians loved Bartolomé de las Casas. Although he had Indians assigned to him as slaves, they loved him because of his kindness. In 1515, he and his companion, Pedro de Renteria, resolved to return to Spain and declare themselves defenders of the Indians. Bartolomé would not rest until he could get an audience with King Fernando and inform him of how his land grants were a detriment to the king's royal rents and also harming and decreasing the Indians. Before being heard, the king died.

King Fernando's heir, Prince Carlos, was in Flanders when the king died, and the regent to the throne, Cardinal Ximenez de Cisneros requested that Bartolomé, with Doctor Palacios Rubios, prepare a project for kind treatment of the Indians. As a result of this, the Order of Hieronomite Priests were assigned to initiate a governmental experiment in La Española. De las Casas obtained an order that Spain's land grants in the New World be taken away from the President and members of the Council of the Indies. He drew up the instructions given to the Hieronomite Priests, and returned with the priests to personally initiate the experiment. When the priests would not implement the project, Bartolomé returned to Spain, where he met with the Emperor Carlos I and his ministers. Carlos I promptly dismissed the Hieronomite Priests from their failed mission and sent a strict judge as resident.

The Emperor, admiring Bartolomé de las Casas' unbiased religious zeal, gave him the title of Chaplain. Bartolomé was untiring in his efforts to enhance the cause for defending the Indians and freeing them from slavery and cruelty. His discourse before Emperor Carlos I of Spain is famous. After unceasing efforts he decided to enter into the Dominican Order, and was afterwards known as Fray Bartolomé de las Casas. He spent seven years in a convent and commenced writing his

famous work: *Historia General de los Indios*. In 1529, during a general insurrection of the Indians, he was able to subdue them peacefully.

His efforts in defending the Indians took him to the Antilles, Mexico, Peru and Nicaragua. In 1534, the newly appointed First Bishop of Guatemala, Francisco Marroquín, called Bartolomé to assist him in Guatemala. Here, in company with other Dominicans, Bishop Marroquín taught them the Indian languages.

Fray Bartolomé de las Casas' book titled *De Unico Vacationis Modo* or *De la Unica Forma de Evangelizar*, condemns war against the Indians and points out that only through love is it just to subdue them. This work was received with ridicule and he was challenged to prove his *modo unico* (only way) of a peaceful conquest. His answer was the peaceful conquest of the region called *Tierra de Guerra* (Land of War), with methods as peaceful as music and the Christian doctrine. As a testimony of his triumph he named the region *Tierra de la Verapaz* (Land of True Peace), by which it is known today. This is the *Ke'kchi* region of Guatemala.

Fray Bartolomé de las Casas realized that notwithstanding the fine laws which had been enacted, "the distance of the lands and the liberty of conscience and the greediness of the Spaniards who should obey them, did not give cause for their implementation." Once more he crossed the ocean, and in 1539 appeared in Spain before the court. He advised, consulted and opposed the most superior jurist and ex-governors. He met before the Emperor, in public debate with the best minds in Spain, and had to contend with the great humanist, Ginés de Sepúlveda, whom he totally defeated. From these debates came the Ordinances of Barcelona of November 20, 1542, that guaranteed, categorically, the liberty of the Indians, abolishing all slavery and guaranteeing many rights to them as subjects to the King, equal to the Spaniards. "For no cause of war nor any other, even under pretext of war, nor ransom, nor any other cause, can the Indian be made a slave in any sense: and we want them to be treated as subjects to our Crown of Castille, for such are they." Fray Bartolomé de las Casas had won his ultimate triumph. During this time he finished another of his literary works: *La Destrucción de los Indios*, which revealed the cruelty of many conquerors.

Fray Bartolomé de las Casas was offered the office of Bishop of Cuzco, but he declined the honor. He then was offered the office of Bishop of Chiapas, which he accepted. As Bishop, in order to assure compliance to the Ordinances by the most obstinate authorities, he used his most terrible spiritual power at the time: excommunication. For him, exploitation of the Indians, or permitting their exploitation or maltreatment, was a heretical attitude. For this reason he began excommunicating many of those responsible for such acts. Among those excommunicated was the President of the Court and the Viceroy of Mexico. For this there were attempts on his life. He soon resigned as Bishop of Chiapas and abandoned the Royal City.

For the seventh time Bishop de las Casas returned to Spain and continued to defend his cause: the total liberation of the Indians. In 1562 he still continued to litigate in the courts of Madrid. At the age of 92, in 1566, he died, ending his long fight as a great defender of human rights.<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to note the methods used by Fray Bartolomé de las Casas in his "Peaceful Conquest," as related by Fray Antonio de Remesal, in his *Selección de la Historia General de los Indios Occidentales y Particular de la Gobernación de Chiapas y Guatemala*, Vol. I, p. 184. Fray Bartolomé de las Casas with three other priests who had learned the Indian language, Fray Rodrigo de Ladrada, Fray Antonio de Anulo and Fray Luís Cáncer, composed ballads, appealing to the Indians. In these ballads they told of the creation of the world, the fall of man, and his banishment from paradise to which he could not return by divine decree, only by virtue of the death of the Son of God. In order that the Indians would understand how He could die to redeem man, they put in the ballads all the life and miracles of Christ our Lord, his passion, death, resurrection, ascension into the heavens, his second coming, and the end of life, which is the punishment of the wicked and reward for the righteous.

Fray Bartolomé selected four Indian merchants who traveled several times a year among the tribes and who were well acquainted with all of them. These were converts to Christianity, and with pleasure and determination memorized the ballads. This took some time, as they were not only content with learning the words in their own language, but put these to music, using the tone and instruments of the Indians.

In addition to their regular merchandise, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas gave them additional items including scissors, knives, mirrors,

bells and rattles, which the Indians liked. They were sent to the places where the most powerful *casiques* (chiefs) lived. As there were no municipal buildings nor taverns, the traveling Indians merchants lodged at the *casiques'* homes, which was ideal for Bartolomé's purposes. In each village, the merchants were sent to the *casiques* and, as was customary, offered the Spanish merchandise as gifts, which gained their good favor. Then their stores were set up for selling to all. When the day's sales were over, the most prominent merchants remained with the *casiques*. They requested musical instruments and with the rattles they had brought, sang the ballads learned from the priests. As the *casiques* and other important leaders, and others who were present on these occasions listened to the music, they admired the harmony and the message of the ballads they had never before heard. The *casiques* would request that this ritual be repeated for several nights, with a constant increase in the number of those who attended.

One of these *casiques* requested that the merchants explain what they had been singing. To this they responded that they could say no more than what they had learned because this was not their profession. To explain this to him was the occupation of the priests who taught the people. The *casique* then asked who were these priests of which he had never heard. The merchants explained to him how they dressed, that they did not eat meat, they did not seek gold nor feathers nor cacao; that they were not married, and had no sin, since they did not seek women; that they sang and praised God day and night; and had beautiful images before which they knelt. It was they who had the profession to declare all that they had sung in the ballads and only they could do this. They explained that the priests were so good and friendly and if the *casique* desired he could send for them and they would gladly come to teach him and his people. The *casique* liked the idea and formulated a plan to send for the priests. He sent his brother with the merchants to request the priests, and to spy on them to verify what the merchants had told him. He also sent other Indians with them with gifts for the priests, as the merchants promised they would not be harmed.

The priests received with pleasure the entourage, and the gifts sent by the *casique*, which was no small prize. They resolved that only one of them would go meet the *casique* and be the ambassador, to explore the capacity of the people and the intentions of the *casique*, and to learn of the demonstrations he and his subjects gave to learning their

message. He was to observe all things, especially the problems in carrying out their project. This task fell to Fray Luis Cáncer. The priests sent many gifts to the *casique* and those close to him.

There was a big celebration in the land of the *casique* upon the arrival of Fray Cáncer. The *casique* himself met him at the entrance to the town, with great veneration and reverence, bowing and humbling before him, even refraining from looking upon his face, which was a custom with his own priests. He ordered a church be built and watched as the priest offered mass, admiring his strange dress.

The *casique* was very pleased to accept a document in the name of the King, sent to him from His Majesty the Governor of Guatemala, which certified that: no Spaniards would invade their territory, nor would they be held or placed in the service of anyone, even if they accepted the faith. With this assurance the *casique* viewed the Christian religion with more favor. The brother, envoy of the *casique*, gave an account of all he had observed, as he was requested to do; all of which was to the *casique's* liking and led to his conversion, becoming himself a preacher to his subjects. He was the first to destroy his idols, which led many of his leaders to do the same. Fray Luis Cáncer was happy for this beginning and went to other areas where he was received with great hospitality, and converted many before returning, early in 1538, to report to Fray Bartolomé de las Casas and the other priests, who were extremely happy to learn of the success of his mission.

To facilitate indoctrination and control, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas required two things: First, establish townships. Second, that the Indians be completely liberated. The first township was that of Rabinal, and at that time the town of Cobán was first visited by Fray Bartolomé de las Casas.

The work and teachings of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas and his co-workers helped prepare the descendants of these early *Ke'kchi'* and other Indians in Guatemala, to accept the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ when it was taught to them by missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, over four hundred and fifteen years later.

<sup>1</sup> *Anotaciones de la Historia Patria Centroamericana*, second edition, 17 September 1969, by José Mata Gavidia, pp. 147-153.

## Chapter Eleven

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# *Experiences In Taking The Gospel To The Lamanites*

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The town of Cobán, central to the *Ke'kcht* area, was first visited in this dispensation by an official of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, President Gordon M. Romney, the first president of the Central American Mission, on October 24, 1953, to look over the town and adjacent country with the view of opening the area to missionary work. Soon after, the first missionaries were assigned to Cobán.

In 1956, the town of Patzicia was the first in the *Cakchiquel* language area to be opened to the preaching of the gospel. The story of the opening of Patzicia is related by Elder Berkley A. Spencer, who with his companion, Elder Nello Earl Deschamps, opened the missionary work there.

*The town of Patzicia in the department of Chimaltenango, Guatemala was opened to missionary work on December 15, 1956. Elder Phil Leigh, counselor in the Central American Mission presidency accompanied Elder Nello Earl Deschamps, senior companion, and Elder Berkley Arnold Spencer to Patzicia to begin the work of teaching the Gospel of Christ to the people.*

To most effectively begin the work in Patzicla it was decided that first efforts would be among the *Ladino* people (of mixed Indian and Spanish blood) who spoke both Spanish and Cakchiquel. It was reasoned that good converts from among the *Ladinos* could then gradually help expand the missionary efforts among the Cakchiquel Indians. Consequently the first three weeks were spent in visiting evangelical churches, municipal authorities, and prominent citizens of the community, all of whom were *Ladino*.

Unknown at that time to us was the fact that Patzicla had been the site about twelve years earlier of a political conflict during the transition between the presidency of Ponce and Juan José Arévalo which led to the massacre of approximately 300 Cakchiquel men, women and children. Over a year after Patzicla had been opened, President Edgar LeRoy Wagner related the circumstances under which the decision was made to send missionaries to Patzicla. He indicated that every time he drove through Patzicla as he traveled between Guatemala City and the communities in the western highlands he felt he should send missionaries there. As he inquired of local members in Guatemala City about Patzicla he was told of the massacre and was warned that if he sent missionaries they would be returned to him in caskets. The people, he was told, were very bad.

During the first three weeks in Patzicla we encountered a great deal of interest in our message. Discussions were many and prospects for converts seemed very good. Toward the end of the second week of January, however, the first indications of serious opposition began to be manifest. We began to hear that people were saying evil things about us; even some of those who had expressed great interest in the Gospel were said to be spreading evil rumors.

On January 21, 1957, the opposition came to a head in the following event as described in my journal:

"As Elder Deschamps and I were walking one of the upper streets to a visit, some little kids ran up to us and told us that a *señor* (man) wanted to talk to us at the *jusgado* (court house). We told them to wait a minute but they said it was the *alcalde* (mayor) so we decided we had better comply. As we were walking back, we noticed they were giggling a little so we kept asking them if they were telling the truth. They swore they were, so we kept going.

"I noticed as we came into view of the *jusgado* there was quite a group of people standing around looking, and another group in the building. As we walked across the plaza the people all focused on us and we were immediately the center of attention. As we walked into the building I felt a bit uneasy, but was determined that as ambassadors of the Lord, we would

represent Him with every dignity and power which was rightfully ours. Once inside the entrance a lady met us saying that we were not wanted inside, but that the persons who wanted to talk to us were outside waiting. She was very anxious for us not to see the *alcalde* so we went right on into the secretaries office.

"While we were inside, the *alcalde* in his office adjacent, was talking to a large group of Indian people. As we stood waiting, the owner of the pharmacy, who is very Catholic, told us (upon being asked) that some people were trying to make a complaint against us. He also assured us that they had no right under the constitution to make any complaint or demonstration. As we were waiting I was certainly praying to my Father in Heaven, and I'm sure Elder Deschamps was doing the same. Finally the crowd in the mayor's office was dismissed, and we were ushered in and asked to take a seat.

"The mayor, Jorge Vela, the pharmacy man, and another man were in the office. The mayor told us that some people were trying to circulate a complaint saying that we were entering the houses and leaving our message by force. We assured him that we were only going from house to house leaving our message to those who would let us in. He, then, told us that we had every right under the constitution, and that he had called the Governor just to make sure. I then told him that he and the rest there should hear our message to know exactly what it is so that they could inform the people if we were preaching something contrary and bad. We finally left the office with the assurance that we were perfectly upheld by the constitution.

"When we got outside we were met by a group of Catholic women and men who told us that there were some men who wanted to talk to us up at the Catholic church. We told them we were very sorry but we had some visits to attend. They started trying to convince us to come up and talk for five minutes. Elder Deschamps doing the talking told them we couldn't. Finally when they saw we weren't they tried to get us to leave town. They said we were leading away the ignorant people and were causing a division in the *pueblo* (town).

"We finally just started to walk off, but there was by that time a great crowd of people around us. Strangely enough as we walked away the crowd just opened up and I noticed some man whom I hadn't seen before sort of clearing the path in front of us. Also, amazingly, as we walked away not one word of jeering or spite was said by anyone.... When we got home, Elias Salazar came and told us that he heard say that the chapel was filled with Indians with sticks, machetes, etc. He also said that from one of the Post Office men he had learned that the Governor in Chimaltenango told the *alcalde* to ... 'disperse that crowd, or he would come and do it with *balazos* (gun shots).' I know the Lord will guard us, and I know we have power over the adversary if we are but faithful."

During the month of February we continued to work with the *Ladinos*, but had very little success except with two families, the Teodoro Tecún family, and the family of Doña Seferina de la Cruz. As it became apparent that most of the *Ladinos* had very little sincere interest in the Church, we began to consider changing our strategy by working directly with the Indian people.

Two major challenges loomed large. The first, was that we could not find a suitable house to rent for a chapel. Those who had a suitable house would not rent to the Mormons. The second challenge was that the Indian people were always out working in the fields. It was extremely difficult to find the Indian men home on a consistent basis. So we decided to adjust our schedule to fit that of the people. We started getting up at 5:30 a.m., going out at 6:00 a.m., returning to eat breakfast at 9:00 a.m., going out again at 11:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m., returning for lunch and study until 5:00 p.m., then returning home for supper at 9:00 p.m. This schedule enabled us to meet with the men before they went to the fields, or at other times when some were home.

On March 15, 1957, we visited a small village, La Canoa, forming one of the *aldeas* (hamlets) of Patzicía. Several good families were found. By the end of March visits with the Indian people had grown both in number and in quality, we had discovered the importance of committing people to prepare for baptism early in the discussions, and on March 30, the first baptisms were held. Brother Teodoro Tecún, his wife, Juana Velásquez de Tecún, their son, Benigno, and Doña Seferina de la Cruz were the first members in Patzicía.

Two good Indian families who were found in April as a result of our changing our schedule were those of Daniel Mich and Luis Alonzo.

**Luis Alonzo:** The Alonzo family, the first Cakchiquel to be baptized in Patzicía, was found as we were knocking doors. One morning we came across a young Indian man working in a patch of cabbage and broccoli which lay to the side of a thatched roof, adobe home. The entire lot was surrounded by a wire fence with dried cornstalks stuck between the strands of barbed wire to form a protective barrier against stray animals. With a smile, almost too big for his face, Luis invited us in to give our message. His wife, Michaela, with their little daughter, Paula, about 18 months old, listened quietly in the background as Michaela patted out tortillas for the noon meal.

At the end of the discussion Luis told us he was evangelical and although the message was interesting and had a ring of truth, he didn't think he would be able to change his religion. After a little persuading, he, nevertheless, invited us back for an additional discussion. One discussion

led to another. We felt very optimistic that this man with his sweet family would be baptized.

On May 12 and 13, 1958, I made the following entries in my journal:

"May 12: This afternoon we visited Luis Alonzo. His buddy from the Central American (Evangelical Church) was there. Luis told us he was grateful for all we had done for him, and almost with tears in his eyes he asked us not to come back. Then humbly, but firmly, I bore my testimony and reminded him of the things he knew were true. Before I was finished he was in tears. As Elder Searcy and I were talking about it, I had a feeling that we should stop and pray for Luis. We did, and each of us offered a small prayer."

"May 13: Elder Searcy and I will not soon forget this wonderful day. This morning early we had a wonderful visit with Venancio Xico Ajsibinac and family. They want to be baptized, but realize that first they must be married. They have quit drinking coffee and are trying to save their money to be married. They will be baptized soon. This evening as we were walking along, Luis Alonzo's wife came running up the street calling to us, '**Elderes, Elderes.**' She told us that Luis wanted to talk to us. When we got up to his house he stood up and testified to us that the Gospel is true, and that he wanted to be baptized. He said that last night he couldn't sleep because of the unhappiness he felt for having told us that we should not come back. He said he really felt terrible about it and after praying and not having slept well, he told his wife in the morning that they were going to be baptized. It filled our hearts with joy to hear them say those words. After talking with them and reading from the Book of Mormon, we left. Elder Searcy suggested we go up to some quiet place and offer thanks to our Father in Heaven. We did, and had a wonderful feeling as a result."

Two days later Luis and Michaela were interviewed for baptism by Elder John Lowry, district president of the Chimaltenango District. They were baptized in Chimaltenango on June 2, 1958.

**Daniel Mich:** On several occasions, between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., the Elders had passed by the fenced lot where Daniel Mich and his family lived. Each time as they knocked at the gate and asked if the man of the house was there, a kindly little Cakchiquel woman a little over four feet tall, dressed in her typical dress, would sweep her arm toward the mountain and say, "**Ixpé pa cuyú,**" (He has gone to the mountain). One morning soon after changing our schedule we knocked at the same gate at 6:00 a.m. This time an Indian man answered the door and with a broad smile asked us to come in and sit down in the corn storage shed. He indicated he would soon

be off to the mountain to weed his corn crop but said he had been hopeful for a visit and invited us to share our message.

What started out to be a short visit turned into an hour discussion. He told us he had been rejected by the evangelical churches because he had been involved in the political uprising of 1944, and had spent eight years in prison. He asked if the "Mormon Church" would hold that against him. When we talked about the principle of repentance, the mercy of Jesus Christ, and the righteous judgment of God, he was touched and agreed to visit again on another occasion. One visit led to another, and on June 26, 1958, at 6:15 a.m., Daniel Mich, Sister Cruz de Mich and their youngest son, Clemente, were baptized.

As we got to know the Mich family better it became clear that the Lord had preserved Daniel to be an instrument in his hands to help establish the Church in Patzicia. Through Daniel many members of his extended family began to receive the Gospel message. It is estimated that over 200 friends and relatives, eventually joined the Church as a direct consequence of his testimony.

On a later occasion Daniel shared with us how he felt the Lord had protected him and his brothers during the massacre of 1944. He indicated that because he had been involved in the political activities leading up to that event, he and his family were prime candidates for reprisal by the **Ladinos**. Consequently he and his brothers fled to the mountains to the south of Patzicia. The following is an entry from my journal:

"They were hiding in the hills and each had been stationed at a different point keeping watch. Daniel fell asleep because the sun was so warm and he had been so cold and so tired during the night of their fleeing Patzicia. He had a vision like a dream. Two men dressed in white robes with long hair came to him and said, 'Wake up Daniel, here come the wolves.' 'Daniel wake up, the wolves are coming.' When he opened his eyes he could hear faint barking of dogs in the distance. With that he and his brothers fled again, and as they reached a ridge they looked back and saw about 40 armed men.

"He told us how they were traveling to Guatemala City in the back of a truck when they were stopped at a village. But the Lord protected them by hiding them. Finally, worried about his family he went back to Patzicia and there a bunch of **Ladinos** grabbed him, mistreated him and accused him of killing three people. He was tried and sentenced to be shot, but while awaiting execution his sentence was changed to 30 years in prison. After eight years President Juan José Arévalo finally pardoned him."

Daniel also indicated that while he was in prison his life was spared. He had been in prison for seven years. He had lost hope of ever being released alive, and had tried to persuade his wife to find another man to take care of his little family. Through hard work in prison he had gained the confidence of the guards and had been appointed foreman of a work crew. During a particularly despairing time he resolved to take his own life. His work crew made shoes. So his plan was to go back into the barracks during break, enter into the latrine area and stab himself with one of the razor sharp leather awls he used to work the leather. As he entered into the latrine area he said he heard someone crying. Checking, he found another inmate in the latrine intent on doing the same thing. His response to the situation was to attempt to talk the other fellow out of taking his life. He was successful, and as he did so, he also realized what a stupid thing he was about to do to himself.

After sharing these experiences he told us how grateful he was that the Lord had spared his life and preserved him to receive this wonderful Gospel.

With the baptism of the Alonzo and the Mich families the Patzicia Branch consisted of a nice core of two Indian and three **Ladino** families. It became obvious, however, that the future of the growth of the Church in Patzicia would be through missionary work among the Indian people. Thus, proselyting efforts shifted more strongly in that direction. Several good Indian families were being visited. Some of the best seemed to have serious problems which had to be solved before they could be baptized. It was not uncommon for Indian couples to live together without being married. This was so because of the excessive fees charged by the **Ladino** mayor and his associates. Since many of the Indian people did not read or write they were easily deceived and forced to pay large sums of money for what should have been essentially free services.

Faced with the fact that two or three good Indian families were being denied baptism because of common law relationships, we decided to take decisive steps to try to change the situation. First we talked to the local officials to no avail. We then went to the Governor's office in Chimaltenango where we learned from the civil judge that the law requires civil marriages to be performed with no cost except the purchase of official paper and the typing of a legally binding document. These costs were minimal. We then returned to the municipal officials of Patzicia only to receive one excuse after another. When asked to see the written laws the tone of discussion changed, but not the willingness to provide the service. Finally a telephone call from the Governor's office produced sufficient pressure that the marriages were performed with only the minimally necessary costs.

*These measures, however, produced considerable antagonism toward the missionaries and the Church from the entrenched Ladino officials who immediately stepped up their efforts to intimidate known investigators and spread lies in the community about the "Mormons." Almost simultaneously priest and ministers began to intensify their efforts to discredit the missionaries of the Church. In this environment Luis Alonzo and Daniel Mich were being prepared to be given the Aaronic priesthood with the idea that they would eventually be called as counselors in the branch presidency.*

*On July 10, 1958, a cottage meeting was held at which Daniel Mich asked to speak. He told of the visit of the Assembly of God minister who tried to convince him to leave the "Mormons" by telling lies and distortions about the Church.*

*On Sunday evening, July 14, 1958, Luis Alonzo and Daniel were interviewed to be ordained as Deacons in the Aaronic Priesthood. I made the following observation in my journal: "...for some reason I didn't feel right about something. Something told me that Luis shouldn't be ordained. So after further questioning it came out that Luis had some questions and doubts. We, therefore, postponed the ordination till a later date. After talking to Luis alone, I came to the conclusion that someone has been trying to dissuade him, and Satan has taken the opportunity to do his damage."*

*On July 18, Daniel reported to us that he had learned through a friend who works in the municipal offices, people were saying that they were going to get rid of the missionaries, i.e., somehow drive them out of town.*

*On July 19, I recorded: "Lately I have felt some dissension and difficulty among the members; especially with Luis and in the last night or two with Daniel. Tonight I went to Luis, and when we came right down to the problem, I found him almost in apostasy. We had quite a talk, and at last I felt him soften...I feel that with prayer and testimony he will come back... We also visited with Daniel, and cleared up some hazy points and doubts."*

*On July 21, I recorded: "We also visited Luis in the afternoon and gave him a very scriptural Book of Mormon lesson. He apologized for having said what he did the day before, and said that he could see that Satan was tempting him."*

***Witness after the trail of faith:** As the persecution seemed to intensify we worked even harder to find and baptize good families, and to strengthen the little flock which had already been gathered through baptism. I recorded an especially good visit with Daniel Mich:*

*"I gave him an authority lesson and then he said to me, 'You know, I had a wonderful dream last night. I dreamed I was in the campo (field) and a group of men came to me saying, 'Here, let's take this road because it will get us there quicker.' Daniel responded, 'No, I don't know that road.' In the*

*midst of all the confusion, there appeared a tall man in a dark suit who had light, almost white, hair. He said to the others, 'Now you leave this man alone, He must follow this path, and I will lead him because I am the Prophet David O. McKay.' Daniel said he felt very happy and content upon hearing that, and he was overjoyed to have the opportunity to be with the Prophet of God."*

*On August 21, sixty people, members, and investigators, attended District Conference in Chimaltenango. On September 14, a humble, stalwart family from the **aldea** of La Canoa was baptized. At this writing, this family, Sister Natalia Masariegos and her daughters María Luisa and María Alfoncina, who have since married and have families of their own, in spite of extreme poverty and the most humble of circumstances, remain strong in the Gospel. The younger of María Luisa's two sons is currently serving as a missionary in the Honduras, Tegucigalpa Mission.*

*On September 15, 1957 I was transferred to Ahuachapán, El Salvador. During the nine months since Patzicia had been opened to missionary work, 21 people had been baptized, and four men held the Aaronic Priesthood.*

When all four major Indian language areas were opened to missionary work, Spanish was the first language used in teaching the gospel. In 1975, the *Cakchiquel* nation became the first to have the gospel taught to their people in their own language.

Missionaries were assigned to Cobán and Patzicia and only a few other major towns in the Indian language areas when I became president of the Guatemala Guatemala City Mission. Because of the intensive language training program in our mission, the Indian people were soon being taught the gospel in their own tongue, and many more pure Indian areas were opened to missionary work.

When new Indian areas were opened and inspiration came as to what needed to be done for the Lamanite people, we were greatly blessed and had many, special, spiritual experiences. I will relate a few.

It was a very special and spiritual experience as mission president with my assistants, to make the assignments of missionaries to the different areas of the mission. This was especially impressive for us, as there were five different languages spoken in our mission: Spanish, *Cakchiquel*, *Quiché*, *Ke'kchi*, and *Mam*. Those assigned to the four Indian languages were selected from the Spanish-speaking areas and

remained in the Indian language areas to which they were assigned throughout the balance of their mission. Very seldom were missionaries transferred from one Indian language to another. Divine inspiration was felt by all and was especially strong in making the assignments to these Indian-speaking areas, particularly in *Ke'kchi*.

While interviewing Elder John Royce Bringhurst, I felt very strongly that it was the Lord's will he be assigned to the *Ke'kchi* area. The same was true with Elder José Raúl Zelaya Jurados, Elder Kirk Sullivan, Elder Oscar Delgado, Elder Scott Cooley, Elder Rios Lazo, Elder Robert Reader and succeeding missionaries assigned to this area.

Whenever an effort is made to further the Lord's work, Satan exerts his influence, and the initiation of the Indian Language Training program was no exception. But the Lord had chosen strong and spiritual missionaries for this work. Elders Sullivan and Delgado were assigned to San Cristobal Verapaz and Elders Bringhurst and Zelaya to San Pedro Carchá. Elders Bringhurst and Zelaya were the first elders to start learning the *Ke'kchi* language. They purchased what books were available in *Ke'kchi*. Elder Zelaya wrote:

(English translation)

*The Ke'kchi are natives who are very humble and desirous of progressing; their humility impresses me... yes, the field is being prepared. For a long time the Protestants have been abused by fanatical Catholics who have burned their churches, robbed and persecuted them. Yes, they suffered and were martyrs so that the work of the Lord could commence in this day, even in their own language. During the past few years some individuals were instruments of the Lord in preparing the way for the arrival of us missionaries to this historic land, by writing in their language, which was, then, only spoken. From the time of the conquest these Lamanites have been prepared by teaching them to believe in God the Eternal Father, in his Son Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit. And now the Lord has sent us to teach them in their own language of his kingdom and his restored gospel, through Joseph Smith a modern prophet. They are ready, we have come, the field is white and the harvest has now begun.*

The Lord had also prepared two wonderful Ke'kchi sisters who had been baptized previously in Cobán. Just before leaving Cobán, Elder Barrios introduced these two sisters, Amalia Tomasa Cuz Rax de

Quiroa and Blanca Hortencia Isabel Cuz Rax de Ovalle, to Elders Bringham and Zelaya. These sisters assisted the elders in learning the language and translating the discussions. Elder Zelaya notes:

(English translation)

*These nice sisters have been with us each day helping with the translation of the discussions to Ke 'kchi. Truly they have worked hard at this and have strengthened their testimonies, helping in this way the Lord's work. They are pure Lamanite who speak both Ke 'kchi and Spanish perfectly, and are two wonderful Mormon sisters whose names should be written in the history of the Church. The Holy Spirit has accompanied us. I have never felt as spiritual as I do in this area, with great desires to progress in the ways of God. My companion is very special and exceptional. He has learned the discussions in Spanish and is now progressing rapidly in Ke 'kchi.*

*The meetings with our leaders have helped me a great deal, as have the visions I have witnessed—because I did have a vision in which a large congregation of Lamanites were gathered to hear God's words from a great servant, perhaps a prophet, and in the same vision I saw a temple. This is not the only vision but is the most important. This was on August 20, 1976, and is written in my journal thus:*

*"I was studying D&C 45-50. Upon finishing I began to pray fervently to the Lord, and many beautiful things I did say in my prayer and in one part I asked the Lord to shower His understanding as unrestrainable rain, over the Lamanites; then I had a vision and I saw thousands of Lamanites congregated, dressed in their finest clothes, listening to a discourse (probably of a prophet or general authority). They were gathered in an open field; and then I saw a temple among them. I was amazed at seeing such, however, I wished to see more, but could not. I continued to pray and upon finishing, related this to my companion, and both wrote this in our personal journals."*

This was the beginning of a marvelous work among these great people. Elder Bringham, a chosen servant of the Lord, related the history of the beginning of the work at Chulac, which is in the center of the Ke 'kchi area. He has done more, directly, than any other person, in initiating the work among these people, and in translation of the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants and The Pearl of Great Price and other materials, including the Temple ceremonies, into the Ke 'kchi language.

*This is the history of the progress of the Church in the area of Chulac, from the first contact until the first baptism, according to my own recollection, today being the thirteenth day of February 1978. During the first contacts, and especially during the time since the first baptism, the work in Chulac has been one of cooperation between the missionaries and the mission. I know that there are many things that could and should be done to teach the people, but I am very grateful to the Lord for the opportunity to have worked with this chosen people, and my prayer is that they continue growing in the faith and that they will blossom according to the words of the prophets.*

*Chulac is a beautiful farm whose coffee plantings and palms rest in the eastern part of the Department of Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, officially belonging to the Municipality of Senahu. But to gain entrance to the farm is accomplished passing through Panzos in the low country of the valley of the Polochic River and ascending the steep road on the mountain on one side of the valley until reaching the farm. Originally the farm had been owned by Germans, who came to exploit the land which is ideal for the planting of coffee. The laborers in the coffee plantations were Indians of the Ke'kchi, and actually there are approximately 200 workers who live on the farm, and about another 200 on the annexes. During World War II the owners were exiled from the country, and since that time the farm has remained in the possession of the Guatemalan Government. Recently the farm was transformed into a cooperative under the Institute of Agrarian Reform, with a board of directors elected from among the Indian members and a paid manager employed by the government.*

*The history of the Church in the Chulac area commenced with the visit of the directors to the home of the manager of the cooperative, Neri Ruiz, in San Cristobal Verapaz, where the elders were living. On this occasion, early in June 1977, one of the missionaries, Elder Oscar Delgado, contacted the visitors and discussed with them the history of their forefathers and the Book of Mormon, and several copies of the Book of Mormon were sold at that time. Elder Delgado was very impressed with this contact, especially when Sr. Ruiz told him that the people in Chulac were requesting they visit them, but because there were no missionaries available, it was not possible to visit them at that time.*

*Elder Delgado arrived in Cobán on July 6, 1977, where I was busy teaching classes in Ke'kchi to other missionaries, and reported that Sr. Ruiz had told him that a group of **evangelistas** had arrived in Chulac, and that Elder Delgado felt very strongly that it was imperative to visit them immediately. He also said that the district president was willing to take us*

there. We called President O'Donnal who advised that we go ahead with the visit, so we left that same Friday, July 8, arriving in Chulac late in the evening where we were received, fed and given a room to spend the night.... That evening we had a meeting with those whom they were able to contact (no less than fifty). After an introduction, hymn and prayer, they were shown a series of slides...based on the Book of Mormon as their ancient record, the history of their forefathers; citing the prophecies of Lehi regarding the curse that was to come over them because of their disobedience, relating some of today's problems among them. This caused them to believe the truth of Lehi's words. All this was translated to them in Ke'kchi by Miguel Chub who accompanied us. After this presentation I talked to them for some time, expressing my testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.... This was all well received; and after opening the meeting for questions, the only question was, "When will you return?" We arranged to return in two weeks.

On this visit I took Elder Rios Lazo and a translator, Gustavo Ramirez.... As before, we were given food and rooms, and prior to the meeting we visited the homes of several people. One hundred and fifty attended this meeting that evening.... I talked for some time about the prophets, however, with difficulty because of the noise made by the rain on the tin roof. We finished singing "I Am A Child of God" in several languages and had prayer. We all felt a good spirit with the people.

Professors of languages at BYU and others accompanied them on their next visit. Elder Bringham further related to me the following, in a letter.

This Sunday morning we attended the religious service of this small town. There were about 400 persons present. They were pushed together and some were standing. As the meeting progressed we observed that the *catequista* (catechist) was using the "stages of prayer" we had taught him. When he finished he requested we preach to them, and I talked for 45 minutes. They all listened attentively to each word. The moment was perfect, so I started with the pre-existence and explained next about the resurrection. When I finished talking I asked who wished to make a covenant with the Lord to listen to His words and to keep His commandments, to raise their hands. The request was positive. Beginning with their leaders and then the congregation, every hand was raised. We then sang the hymn "I Am A Child of God," as many had learned this song; and then we ended with prayer. Afterwards the people approached us and timidly put their arm around us, as is the custom. It was marvelous. After all had gone, the

*president of the cooperative took us to the spot he had picked to build us a chapel.*

Elder Bringhurst tells of two additional visits with his companion, in which they taught again in the Catholic church. A vote was taken to ascertain if the missionaries would be permitted to live at Chulac, which was unanimous. Still, as president of the mission, I knew that Satan was not going to stand by idly, permitting this good work to go forth without his interference. True to form, on the next and seventh visit on September 10, 1977, the first opposition was evident. Elder Bringhurst relates:

*We had a meeting that evening in which a film was shown on health and we had our Book of Mormon class.... After the prayer we invited the men to remain to talk about how we would transfer to the area and to register the names. It was at this moment that one of the men present, José Coc Pérez, stood up and told us we could not live there, making the accusation that we were going to take their land and take away their children, and other things. It appeared first, that their fears arose from the fact that several people had accompanied us on the previous visit, second, the fact that they had shown us the place where the chapel was to be built. We tried to calm their feelings, and after several had expressed their feelings, I, not knowing what to do, asked all to kneel in prayer, in which I asked God to let there be love and understanding for all. After the prayer, José left and we talked with those remaining assuring them that all would be done according to their will, and that we would not become involved in the affairs of the cooperative. Also that we would no longer attend their services in the Catholic church.*

During that week missionary assignments were made and Elder Kirk Sullivan was assigned as Elder Bringhurst's companion. Elder Sullivan who had been lodging in the home of Neri Ruiz, had the impression, having talked with Neri, that it would be possible for the missionaries to live in Chulac. As president, I discussed this situation with Colonel Jorge Mario Reyes, head of the department of government cooperatives, and a bishop in one of the wards in Guatemala City. Elder Bringhurst also discussed this with him by telephone. His advice was that they attend the general assembly at Chulac. It was agreed with Neri Ruiz that the meeting would be held in Chulac on October 4, at 4:00 p.m.

After experiencing some difficulty with transportation, the elders arrived at Chulac at 4:00 p.m., to find the assembly had been held earlier without them and without those who supported them. Naturally the decision was that the elders could not live at Chulac, and a new president was elected, José Coc Pérez. Before leaving, Elder Sullivan drew up a petition giving them permission to live on the farm, to be signed by the major part of the members, but no one dared sign. They again talked with José Coc Pérez and others, explaining their only interest was to be of service, and bearing their testimonies. José reiterated that the people did not want them there and that they could not return, and if any members accepted their teachings, they would be expelled from the farm. After consulting with the general manager, he stated that José had no authority to expel any member because of their religious beliefs, but showed little interest in doing anything about it himself.

Elder Sullivan consulted with me as to whether it was advisable they return to Chulac. Although I thought it could be dangerous to do so, I was impressed to tell him they should return to teach those whom the Lord had prepared and to prepare them for baptism; and that the Lord would protect them. So they returned on October 15, to learn that the group of "believers" had left the Catholic church and were holding their separate meetings. They were taught from the Book of Mormon, priesthood authority, pre-existence, the apostasy and the restoration of the gospel. They were learning the proper method of conducting meetings. Upon arrival the following Saturday, the elders were handed a letter from Neri Ruiz, with an attached copy of the minutes of the general assembly which prohibited them from returning to the farm. The reason given was, "the separation of the members" beginning with their visits. In his letter he reiterated that if they insisted on making visits he would have to resort to "other firm measures" so they would not return. This letter was read to the group, who stated that the accusations were unjust and false. A letter was drawn up to this effect for all to sign. Some were reluctant to sign, but after Miguel Choc, the leader of the catechists, signed, then all the men present signed. It was suggested that all the children be blessed, and after all these had been presented, they knelt and blessed the children and all those present.

The following two weeks were spent in preparing these people for baptism not only by teaching them the principles of the gospel, but in

arranging their documents—birth certificates, marriages, etc., and conducting baptismal interviews. As they had some knowledge of the Bible, once they formed the habit of regular prayer, they began to understand the doctrine. However, the most difficult was teaching them the method of worship and conducting services of the Church. Several Protestant groups had come into the area and used the guitar extensively in their services, so they had to be taught not to use this instrument in the meetings.

The first baptisms in Chulac were conducted on December 17, 1977, in which twenty people were baptized, including seven complete families. Present for this baptism were the Assistants to the President, Elders Steven West and Fazur Estrada. Elders John R. Bringham and Scott Cooley performed the baptisms in a small stream adjacent to the farm. They said each prayer, first in Spanish, then in *Ke'kchi*. Confirmations were performed the following day in a special testimony meeting where all who had been baptized, along with several investigators, bore their testimonies.

Of the experience in opening Chulac to the preaching of the gospel, Elder Kirk Sullivan adds the following, which he calls, “**The Chulac Experience: Trial by Fire.**”

*As result of the invitation to Elder Delgado to go to Chulac (who concluded his mission and was never able to go) Elders John R. Bringham and German Rios Lazo made seven trips from Cobán to Chulac.*

*I was transferred there, replacing Elder Rios Lazo, with the idea that Elder Bringham and I would take up full-time residency there. We spent Wednesday the fourteenth through Friday the sixteenth of September making preparations to that end.*

*Saturday morning, September 17, Elder Bringham and I boarded the bus for the eight hour ride that would take us as far as Panzos via Santa Cruz, Tactic, Tamahu, Tucuru, La Tinta and Teleman. Panzos is the closest major town to Chulac.*

*We arrived in Panzos late enough that we spent the night there. Sunday morning, the eighteenth, we headed out of Panzos toward the crossroads for the road that leads up to Chulac. Our intent was to hitch a ride to the crossroads but we had no such luck.*

*Because we thought we were going to Chulac to stay we were carrying much of our possessions in a **canasta** (basket) on our backs using a **mecapal** (head strap) to support the weight. We estimated our packs to*

weigh around 90 pounds; it was difficult for each of us to lift his own pack without help from the other.

The temperature on this day was about 95 degrees with a relative humidity near the same. It is 7 kilometers to the crossroads. We arrived there extremely fatigued. We had not eaten breakfast on this day and due to the bus ride the day before had only had a light meal of black beans, tortillas and a piece of chicken on that day.

At the crossroads we decided to stop and wait for a ride to the trail head to Chulac. That trail head is 10-11 kilometers up the mountain from the crossroads and runs off the rim road that passes above the Chulac valley. We waited one hour and did get a ride in a truck going that way.

The driver dropped us off at the trail head; we hoisted our packs again and started down into the valley. Chulac lies at the valley floor and the walls of the valley are very steep. I estimated them to be about 60 degrees.

This trek down was difficult for both of us but I think for Elder Bringhurst it was especially arduous. He had to spend much time immediately preceding this time, sitting, doing translation work, whereas, I had just come from an area where I was walking many miles every day. When we got to the bottom he told me he had almost fallen several times when his legs felt like they were going to collapse under the load.

We soon discovered that there would be no place for us to stay nor would land be made available to construct our own thatched roof home, which as a last resort, we had in mind to do.

The day was passing quickly which allowed us no time for resting. So, we departed Chulac and went to Sepamac, another farm, an hour hike away. A couple of sisters in Cobán that had been assisting Elder Bringhurst with the translation work, knew the superintendent at Sepamac and had given us a letter of recommendation to give to him. As fate had it, he was not there and there was no apparent place there for us to stay. We turned right around and made the hour walk back to Chulac.

It was late afternoon by the time we got back to Chulac. By the kindness of two good families, we were fed supper on this night (still Sunday) and breakfast the following morning. Both meals were beans and tortillas; we were mighty thankful for that food. We were given a place to sleep for the night.

Monday the nineteenth, we left Chulac and went to Panzos. We left our heavy *canastas* behind and took with us just our light-weight packs. We took care of a few items of business in Panzos and then went right back to Chulac. On the way back to Chulac we found ourselves standing at the crossroads, again, this time in a rainstorm that was more like standing in a waterfall.

*Saturday, September 24, we made one more trip to Chulac before the assembly was to be held on Tuesday, October 4. Actual physical obstacles presented themselves to impede our arriving in Chulac, in the form of two huge mud slides in separate locations that completely covered the road in the Polochic Valley, making it impassable by vehicle. We walked across the mud slides and transferred to different vehicles and eventually wound up in Senahu with little hope of arriving in Chulac at the time we had announced we would be there. We had cause to believe that the Lord was watching out for us however, because we had not been in Senahu long when we located a ride directly to Chulac....*

*The combination of high humidity and high temperature (98 degrees) exaggerated the difficulty of traversing the inclined, rough terrain, the weight of our packs and distance we were attempting to walk in a short time. We walked so fast it hurt, without rest, for almost two hours with no fluid replacement. We were sweating so much that we could literally wring water out of our shirts. I was feeling that sickening nauseous feeling that I hadn't felt since doing wind sprints in high school football practice....*

*We continued to go to Chulac on weekends. Each trip seemed to bring with it new challenges, too numerous to recount. Each trip was a minimum eight hour bus ride one way, just to get to Panzos, more often than not followed by a two hour walk from the crossroads. Long nights sleeping on concrete floors; many of those nights so warm that to sleep in our underclothes would have been a relief but we needed to stay wrapped in our wool blanket to be protected from the mosquitoes.*

*Feeling rejected but still determined to do what we could to gain residency in Chulac, we followed up at first on a design we formulated, to have those who were "with us" circulate a petition in an attempt to get a majority vote by petition to allow us to stay. Within a few weeks that petition was drawn up and left with Jorge Choc, intended to be signed, first by him, then by the others.*

*Until now it was Jorge who led the group of "believers" but in a show of developing leadership attributes, it was Miguel Choc who was first to sign the petition and continued to do what he knew in his heart to be right, outwardly showing little regard for the consequences.*

*It was Miguel and his family who, a short time later when Don Neri declared that we not return to Chulac or "other means" would be taken to remove us, invited us to sleep at his house and fed us of his best food.*

*Elder Bringhurst and I continued together until the middle of November. We lived in a back room of the chapel in Cobán and spent weekdays in Cobán so Elder Bringhurst could work on translations. On weekends we made the trek to Chulac, tempting Don Neri to use "other means."*

*Elder Bringham and his companion baptized 20 people in one baptismal service the following month, December 1977. Many other large groups were to follow including a group of 32 in one service a few months later.*

*Because it never became possible to actually reside in Chulac, the area of Senahu was opened up. Chulac was administered to from there by making weekly visits. I went to TanChi in November 1977 (where I advanced my language skills in Ke'kchi) and Elder Bringham went to Senahu. I replaced Elder Bringham in Senahu in March and assumed his companion, Elder Scott Cooley; this came at the time when Elder Bringham concluded his mission including an extension he had been granted.*

*Elder Cooley came to the area having first studied Cakchiquel in the LTM in Provo. We soon found ourselves teaching three separate groups in Seamai (3/4 mile from Senahu). These groups' leaders-apparent were Martin Cucul, Victoriano Choc, Alberto Coy Yaxcal, and Gilberto Cucul; each group consisted of 25-30 people.*

*Elder Cooley and I determined not to knock on doors--tract--and that we would never teach one person when we could teach two, not two when we could teach a family and not just one family if possible to teach two families. This strategy seemed to give potential converts a feeling of society and built-in support group.*

*Besides the groups we were teaching in Seamai, there were dozens of people who Elders Bringham, Herrera and Cooley had brought along to the point of being prepared for baptism in Chulac. This meant lots of leg work getting some of the couples married which meant going to various municipalities to secure birth certificates and then physically transporting the couples to the city centers to have the marriages performed.*

*The challenges of trying to conduct church meetings on each Sunday in Senahu, Chulac and Seamai was incredible. All we could do was get up earlier. [In his journal he wrote]:*

*"Saturday, March 4, 1978: Arose at 3:30 a.m. to go to Chulac. It took us 9 hours to get there. Spent the day visiting the people and administering to the sick.*

*Sunday, March 5, 1978: Over 100 in attendance at Chulac sacrament meeting--31 of these were baptized members. We gave names and blessings to three children and administrations of the sick for two others. Returned to Senahu.*

*Monday, March 6, 1978: Taught Martin Cucul's group of 30.*

*Tuesday, March 7, 1978: Victoriano, a Nazarene church leader had days before asked us to teach him. Taught him and many of his invited friends.*

Thursday, March 9, 1978: Taught Martin Cucul's group of 30. Taught Alberto Coy's group of 25. Also taught Victoriano's group. Victoriano asked, "¿Cuando sabemos que es la verdad, sera para nosotros un templo?" (When we know this is the truth, will we have a temple?) He meant a common church building not realizing how prophetic his choice of words was!

Saturday, March 11, 1978: Walked cross-country from Senahu to Chulac--6.5 hours. Went to birthday party of two year old which, with Jorge Choc leading the show, had turned into one of their old Catholic ceremonies. Lasted from 6:00-10:00 p.m.

Sunday, March 12, 1978: Talked with leaders about party the night before. Gave sermon on great apostasy--how simple changes over time caused ancient church to lose authority...

Monday, March 14, 1978: Taught Martin Cucul's and Victoriano Choc's groups. Josefa, Victoriano's spouse, was nearly in tears when talked about innocence of children--they had a child die in January.

Saturday, March 18, 1978: Slept in until 6:00 a.m., intentionally missing the 4:00 a.m. bus to Chulac to ensure our being in Senahu to hold sacrament meeting. We reconsidered, recognizing things to be done in Chulac so left for Chulac at 10:00 a.m. Got ride in army jeep. Officer in command was kind and instructed driver to drive on past their destination of Teleman to Panzos. First time military ever gave me a ride while in Guatemala. Hitched ride to crossroads, walked two hours to Chulac. Made baptismal arrangements then departed en route back to Senahu. Walked two hours back to crossroads and halfway to Panzos before got ride in cattle truck (with cattle) to Teleman. Spent night in Teleman.

Sunday, March 19, 1978: Plans for sacrament meeting at Martin Cucul's, who is a timid man but beginning to stand out as a spiritual giant. Alberto walked with us to Victoriano's house. On the way ran into Victoriano, he returned to his house with us and we held a brief sacrament meeting. They were EXTREMELY reverent as we blessed and partook of the sacrament.

Monday, March 20, 1978: Assisted with marriages of Chulac couples in Senahu.

Tuesday, March 21, 1978: Left at 3:30 a.m. to Cobán for a conference, with "Doc" (dentist friend who did my root canal).

Friday, March 31, 1978: Too busy to write in journal. Last two days conducted 27 baptismal interviews, plus 6 others last Sunday.

Saturday, April 1, 1978: Baptism of 32 at Chulac.

Sunday, April 2, 1978: Confirmation of those baptized day before. My first confirmation in Ke'kch'i."

*We continued to work with the various groups in Seamai, adding one more to those already mentioned, Miguel Cacau's group of 35. Although we had highest hopes for Victoriano or Gilberto being baptized first, they became hesitant after a time. These men all knew each other well and some even worked side by side together on the Seamai plantation, where among other things, a dairy utilizing modern equipment is operated. Because of their trust and friendship one with the other, we felt if one mustered the courage to join the church the others, as moved by the Spirit to do so, would have an easier time following suit.*

*With this anticipation, it was Alberto Coy Yaxcal, his wife and two children that began to assert themselves. He was very friendly and kindhearted but not one with natural tendencies to assert himself as a leader. However, as others became hesitant, it was he, like Miguel Choc of Chulac that stepped forward.*

*April 30, 1978 we took Alberto with us to a district conference in Cobán. There he gained valuable exposure to other church members and saw the priesthood in action. Rodolfo Choc from Chulac was at that conference and was sick. Alberto saw us give him a blessing and him recover in just a few hours. Also, he witnessed the Melchizedek Priesthood be conferred to the male members from Chulac.*

*We could see Alberto begin to understand that the church was the same everywhere and that in the not-too-distant Chulac there were members who had recently been introduced to the church, like him.*

*After the conference Elder Jack Mixa, a Zone Leader, drove Alberto and I back to Seamai where Elder Mixa interviewed Alberto Coy Yaxcal, his wife, Emilia Can, and children Arturo Coy Can and Olivia Coy Can for baptism. (Elder Cooley remained in Cobán; he and I went to Xela the next day to get a vehicle to relieve our transportation woes).*

*Saturday, May 6, 1978, we went with the Coy family and several friends to what I believe to be one of the most beautiful places on earth, Oxlaju Ha. Oxlaju means thirteen and Ha means water—the place thus named for the thirteen waterfalls that fall across the face of distant cliffs that create a backdrop to a valley of lush green grass. The falls become a waste-deep stream that winds through the grassy valley floor and by the all-white, former German-owned plantation's main house, located there.*

*Sunday, May 7, 1978, we confirmed as members of the church those baptized the day before. We held sacrament meeting and passed the sacrament to them for the first time. Gilberto and Victoriano with their families were present and also a lady I identified only as Ilma, Amory's wife and her children. It was a nice meeting.*

*Gilberto Cucul and his family and Ilma were quick to follow Alberto Coy's family's lead and were baptized Saturday, May 13. The service was held, again at Oxlaju Ha; there were 50 in attendance.*

*The next day, Sunday, May 14, we conferred the Aaronic Priesthood upon Alberto and Gilberto in sacrament meeting, and again there were about 50 in attendance.*

*My last Sunday in Senahu (Seamai) was May 21, 1978. I felt pleased with the progress we had seen there and was thrilled to witness Alberto Coy and Gilberto Cucul administer the sacrament.*

*I intended to just share a few brief, spiritual or otherwise significant experiences and soon realized that in retrospect the entire time I was in Alta Verapaz working with the Ke'kchi was just one giant, all-inclusive, spiritual experience.*

Elder Cooley wrote me the following:

*We have had some very special experiences this week in Chulac, as also in Senahu; and I feel strongly there is something very special in this group of Ke'kchi people. Saturday our mission director here in Chulac informed us that a group of persons from the next village desired to join the Church. I asked how this had happened, and he told me that on his way to his work, about a month before, he had talked with a man about the Church and the Gospel. That night the man dreamed that a mission leader, dressed in white, was directing the other members of Chulac to where he lived, and that he had a book, that an ancient man there where he lived, had commenced to write. That evening when he related his dream in priesthood meeting, I was amazed to learn that nearly all the members at Chulac had had a similar dream or manifestation to relate, which they interpreted as the progress of the work of the Lord among them.*

*This was incredible, it was as if we were working among an entire nation of prophets and in some way we had not even noticed.*

Elder Cooley's companion, Elder Rene Oliva wrote this to me, dated March 19, 1979.

(English translation)

*We were walking with my companion to get to a house of a referral family up in the mountains, the walk was about 1 1/2 hours to get there. We did not have a hand flashlight, but thought we could make the visit and return by daylight. While walking my boots began hurting my feet, first blisters then raw, bleeding sores. But regardless and with great sacrifice I*

walked at the same pace as my North American companion. After crossing mountains and valleys we arrived at the home of the family and taught them the lessons; but they wanted to know more, so we tarried and they kindly invited us to stay and have supper with them. We accepted. By the time we finished eating, the sun had gone down and darkness was setting in. We left the house and, to ease my sore feet, I gathered fresh, green leaves and wrapped my feet, then put on my socks and boots. This was much better, but still there was much pain. While walking, it came to my mind the promises made to those who keep the Word of Wisdom: "...And shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint." This gave me strength to go on, but within a few minutes it was completely dark and I could not see the treacherous trail. I then recalled the Brother of Jared and the stones the Lord had touched, and I thought, "If I had one of those stones to light up the trail," and then I began to see with clarity. I could not believe it, and repeatedly looked back to see if my companion had a light, but no, it was a light that was born of the earth and was giving light to my sore feet and the trail, and this light continued until we arrived at our room.

This caused me to meditate much. I know the Lord gives us the guidance and direction necessary to protect us—He is always there to extend His arm in our times of need. There is a saying that I like and is applicable to us missionaries: "God gives strength to our feet and duration to our shoes." And for our part, each night as we return to our rooms, we should take off our shoes with a thirst to do even more. I feel strongly the Spirit within me, I am enjoying my mission because it is a valuable time—I would like to dig a tomb and die here.

The *Ke'kchi* are a special branch of the blood of Lehi. Never before or since have I interviewed such pure people. There is a special spirit manifest among them; and when they attend the temple a special, sweet spirit is felt. Among the four major groups, the Spirit is strongly manifested, but it is strongest among the *Ke'kchi*, then the *Mam*, *Quiché* and *Cakchiquel*.

Many similar experiences and miracles were experienced in all the Indian areas—*Cakchiquel*, *Quiché* and *Mam*—as they were opened. Great missionaries were selected to work in each of these areas. My counselor, Israel Pérez, carried most of the responsibility in opening the areas in the *Cakchiquel* and *Quiché* regions, he himself being of *Quiché* descent; while I cared for the *Ke'kchi* and *Mam* areas. Following, in his own words, is one of the many special experiences Israel had:

(English translation)

### *One Of The Many Miracles Among The Lamanites*

August 15, 1976

*Under the inspiration and delegation of President John F. O'Donnal, President of the Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission, preaching the gospel in the mountains of Momostenango was begun, these being purely Lamanite areas. Only 60% of the men understood Spanish and 40% spoke only their native tongue; and only 20% of the women understood Spanish.*

*Zone Leaders Elders Fenn and Fischer and myself, President Israel Pérez, first counselor in the mission presidency, arrived at Momostenango at 5:30 in the evening where Elders Atkin and Rodriguez and Brother Gustavo Lang, president of the Momostenango branch, joined our group. From here we traveled to the area of Canquichaja where two days before Elders Ovando and Choy had arrived for the purpose of inviting the inhabitants of this and surrounding areas to an open-air meeting as there are no buildings other than the small dwellings.*

*When the meeting commenced, it began to rain heavily and the missionaries suggested we offer a prayer to ask that the rains cease. However, we felt that we should not bother the Lord with this request. We then talked to those gathered, who were not members—and there were over 100 persons—telling them they could return to their homes as the rain was too heavy; but their attitude was to cover themselves as best they could with plastic sheets, and no one left. We then felt we should offer a prayer, so with the missionaries we moved away and all kneeled around a tree and prayed to the Lord that the rains cease and that the moon come through so we could teach these children of God the Restored Gospel. When we finished our prayer the rain had stopped and the beautiful moon shown forth, and we were able to teach the people the principles of the gospel which were sealed by the testimonies of those who were not members, who testified that they knew what we had taught them was true.*

*This was a very spiritual experience and we enjoyed a very sacred feeling. Elders Ovando and Choy remained there, living in a tent next to the dwelling of Brother Alberto Ordoñez, who had also offered a room in which to hold Sunday meetings.*

*Before leaving Canquichaja Presidents Pérez and Lang together with the Elders retired to a grove of trees where kneeling President Pérez pronounced a prayer dedicating these areas for the preaching of the gospel.*

Elder Wayne R. Gelder wrote of his mission and of his experiences in the *Mam* regions:

*In the spring of 1977, I received my mission call to the Guatemala Guatemala City Mission. Shortly after I received my call, I noticed in the Church News that a new mission had been created in Guatemala (the Quetzaltenango Mission). Several weeks before entering the Language Training Mission (LTM, now the Missionary Training Center), I received a letter from President Spencer W. Kimball changing my mission assignment to the Quetzaltenango Mission. That change made all the difference in the flavor and tone of the mission I was to have.*

*As I was set apart for my mission (July 12, 1977) by F. Burton Howard (then my stake president, now a member of the First Quorum of Seventy), he pronounced upon me what I thought at the time to be a rather unusual blessing. He said I would have the privilege of preaching the gospel in multiple languages.*

*On July 14, 1977 I entered the LTM to study Spanish for two months prior to going to Guatemala. On July 19, I and 5 other missionaries were invited into the office of the LTM president, who said he had been given the go-ahead from the Brethren to ask us to be the first Elders to learn the Cakchiquel language in the LTM. This meant that we would spend 3 months, instead of 2 before going to Guatemala, since we also needed to learn Spanish.*

*When our group arrived in Guatemala, we traveled to Quetzaltenango and met President John F. O'Donnal and his lovely wife, Carmen. He interviewed the six of us prior to making area assignments. These assignments came as a bit of a shock. After three months in the LTM learning Cakchiquel, only two Elders were sent to Cakchiquel areas.*

*President O'Donnal explained that, even though we had been prepared at the LTM with training in Cakchiquel, there were greater needs in other areas. I was assigned a companion from El Salvador (Felix Joaquin Callejas), and was stationed in Nimasac, an outlying rural area of Totonicapan. My Spanish was still weak, and Elder Callejas spoke almost no English. I was among a tribe of native people whose language I had never studied.*

*It hit me just how away from home I was one night shortly after I arrived in Nimasac. Elder Callejas was the unit leader, and needed to perform an interview. So we walked one evening to the home of the member. Since it needed to be a private interview, I was asked to wait outside the home. The home was typical of the homes I would visit throughout my*

*mission. It was made of adobe, had a dirt floor, a tile roof, and had a single room perhaps 12' by 14'. I sat outside on a log chair. I had not been there long when a young native girl in her beautiful native dress and bare feet walked up to me. I'm sure my skinny 6'6" frame and blonde hair provided quite a spectacle for her.*

*She began to rattle-off to me in her native Quiché language, but I didn't understand a single word, and Elder Callejas was not there to help. My mind holds a snapshot of that little girl talking to me. There were two intense feelings that shot through my heart at that moment. First, I felt extremely homesick. I was far away from anything familiar to me, and there was no simple way to recreate, even for a moment, the previous comfort zone of my home. Second, I felt deeply saddened that I couldn't understand what this beautiful child was saying to me. I wanted more than anything to respond to her and tell her who I was, and why I was here. I had no way of doing it, so I responded in English, telling her that I wished I could understand her. She looked at me with a puzzled expression, rattled off more Quiché, then finally walked away.*

*That experience served as a powerful call-to-arms to me. I remember committing to myself that the day would come that I would be able to understand her and her people, tell them why I had come, and teach them the gospel.*

*Days turned into weeks, and I grew more accustomed to my surroundings, and more familiar with the Quiché language. Elder Callejas was possessed of a great spirit, and worked me hard. We would arise at 5:30 in the morning, and work well into the evening. Near the end of my stay in Nimasac our labors brought fruit. We tracted out and began to teach a family whose hearts were ready, and they were baptized after I was transferred away.*

*I spent a couple of months in Santa Ana, an outlying rural area of Momostenango, with Elder Fredy Martinez. This was truly remote living. Our home, which served also as the chapel, had a dirt floor, no running water or electricity, and no bathroom. We studied by candle light, and charged my electric razor in Momostenango on P-day.*

*In January 1978 came another surprise. I received word from President O'Donnal that I was to be among the first group of four Elders (John V. Bartholomew, Jorge A. Cerros, Enoc Marini S.) selected to go to Huehuetenango to learn the Mam language. If successful, we would become the first missionaries to take the gospel to the Mam people. I was thrilled at the prospect, but it was hard to say good-bye to the Quiché people whom I had known for a scant four months, but had already grown to love. I had learned the language well enough to communicate the basics, to teach the discussions, and to make some close friends.*

President O'Donnal sent us on our way to Todos Santos, Huehuetenango to learn Mam with this charge, "I can't express to you the importance of what you are about to do...I wish I were a boy 19 years old again." None of the four of us realized at the time what a challenge we were against. I think President O'Donnal knew more and better than we.

Todos Santos was as rigorous an experience as the LTM. Our teacher was an extremely gifted man from Santiago, Chimaltenango. Though he never joined the church, I have no doubt that he had been prepared for the purpose he served. He had already written a crude dictionary and grammar text of the language. For the month he was with us in Todos Santos, it was as if the Spirit came over him.

While we were in Todos Santos, we used P-day to visit prominent Mam villages in the area, with the intent of giving a recommendation of where we should be stationed after our language training was completed. I had an interesting experience with this. Elder Marini and I visited Colotenango. We were not impressed with the town because we felt that the native Mam people were too few and too scattered there. At the end of our training, Elder Fredy Martínez, then an assistant to President O'Donnal, came out to finalize the decision of where we would be stationed. I will always be grateful for Elder Martínez's insight and inspiration. He listened politely to our negative recommendation for Colotenango, then gently told us we were going there anyway. I remember grumbling a little at the time. But I soon had to eat my words, as Colotenango quickly became, and remains to this day, the hub of Mam missionary work in the area. It would have been a critical mistake to have gone anywhere else.

I love John and Carmen O'Donnal. In my opinion, no one has done more for the spiritual welfare of the people of Guatemala than they. Their lives have been an example of service, faith, and sacrifice. I felt like we really had two mission presidents. Whenever there was a zone or mission conference, there would be Sister O'Donnal at the side of her husband. President O'Donnal is a powerful speaker. His talks gave us hope, courage, and the determination to press on. Not one whit behind him was Sister O'Donnal. She spoke with such conviction that when she was done, we all felt like we could and should do three times as much as we had previously been doing.... Her voice still rings in my ears: "These are **my** people, **our** people, our Heavenly Father's children. We must sacrifice and do all within our power to bring to them the blessings of the gospel."

The missionary work in those early days was difficult. There was no base of members to help and befriend us, and the people did not know who we were and were suspicious of us. We did not have a proficient command of the language, and there were few written materials to help us. We did not

have a Mam copy of the Book of Mormon, nor of the discussions. There were many discouraging days, which turned into weeks and months.

But the Lord was with us. The first Mam baptism that we had in Colotenango was brother Andrés García. He showed real courage to be willing to be the first to be baptized. He shared with Elder Marini and me a dream that he had shortly after his baptism which to me is very significant. A rough translation of his description of it is as follows:

*"I dreamed I was walking and came to a large beautiful white building. I entered the building and at the door was met by some people who gave me a set of white clothing. I put on the white clothing and proceeded to walk through the building. It had large rooms and also small rooms, all of which were beautiful. As I went from room to room, the feelings that I felt were glorious, and I did not want to leave. We came again to the door of this building. I looked out, and there were my wife and children. I felt a tremendous urge that they should come to me and enter the building. I called to them, but they would not come."*

Andrés asked us for our thoughts of what this dream might mean. I suspect our mouths were hanging wide open. We had not spoken to him in detail of our temples, if we had mentioned the subject at all. Yet here was as clear a description of an LDS temple as any I had ever heard by someone who had actually entered the temple. We of course proceeded to teach him about temples and temple work.

That dream could not have been made of the random imagination of Andrés' mind. It came from heaven. It served as a powerful witness to me of two things. First, it meant that this bare-foot, poverty-stricken descendant of Laman, living in a dirt-floored adobe shack in a little village far removed from the center of the church, was judged by the powers beyond the veil to be of sufficient importance to receive this marvelous teaching dream. Second, of all the important concepts of the gospel, it is significant to me that the concept chosen for the dream was the importance of temple work. We had barely had a chance to get acquainted, and the Spirit was already trying to teach this first Mam member of the church about the importance of temples! At the time, the closest temple to Colotenango was in Mesa, Arizona—a nearly impossible journey.

These early days were filled with opposition. The local ministers of other churches were aware, of course, of what we were doing, and worked hard to convince their members of our evil intentions. The people were generally suspicious of us anyway. I stuck out like a sore thumb, being 6'6" tall with blond hair and blue eyes. I'm sure the people didn't know what to

*think of us, and we had not been there long enough for word to get around that our intentions were innocuous.*

*Elder Marini and I were approached one Sunday evening in Colotenango by a man we had been teaching. He had a very worried look on his face. He said, "Don't ever go to San Gaspar Ixchil (a small town not far to the south of Colotenango). The people are savage and have sworn to hack you Mormons to bits with machetes if you ever go there!" Earlier, the secretary to the mayor had warned us that the people of San Gaspar Ixchil were inhospitable, and that there had been a recent killing there. But we didn't think a lot of it. We had planned on several occasions to go, but for one reason or another we never went. After hearing this, we decided not to press our luck.*

*Perhaps more unsettling, one morning we found a hand-written note slipped under our door threatening us to leave the people of Colotenango alone, and to quit molesting them. Other families, even the Catholic Priest, received similar notes. Apparently someone was trying to give us a bad name. Once again I felt a long way from home, and vulnerable to whoever, wanting to do whatever to us. But we trusted in the Lord, and continued with the work.*

*I had an experience in Colotenango which proved to me that the Lord was actively involved in guiding us to the doors of the right people at the right time. I was saying my personal prayer on the morning of August 17, 1978, and received a very distinct spiritual communication. It was so distinct, in fact, that I wrote it down. It reads simply: "I will lead you to a prepared family today."*

*I was skeptical of this prompting because I felt it could have been my own wishful thinking at a time when we were experiencing a long, dry spell of finding receptive people to teach. It was such a long, dry spell, in fact, that sometime after this date, President O'Donnal called the Mam missionaries to his office in Quetzaltenango concerned about our progress, and wondering whether to continue or fold the Mam program.*

*Later that day (Aug. 17, 1978) Elder Marini and I knocked for the first time on the door of Juan and Carmen Jiménez. Over the next several months this family was taught, and one by one they were baptized; first Juan and the children, then finally Carmen, who had faced extreme opposition from her extended family, entered the waters of baptism (May 13, 1979). From what I hear, they are still active now, 14 years later, and have become a pillar of strength in the Colotenango ward. As to the spiritual prompting I had received that August morning, I can only say that it was right on the mark, and served as a learning experience to help me recognize these promptings when they come, and as an encouragement at a time when our spirits were down.*

*The last several weeks of my stay in Guatemala were spent translating the discussions from Quiché to Mam. I still understood Quiché sufficiently to perform the translation, and was assisted by a local Colotenango native. I suddenly became grateful for the difficult experiences I had at the first of my mission having been shifted from one language to the next. Though it was confusing and frustrating at the time, it helped me develop some very important language skills that helped with this translation. I carried the script home with me when I left Guatemala, August 1, 1979, and I spent the next several weeks entering the discussions into a computer on the BYU campus.*

*It was a delightful experience to live among the beautiful native people of Guatemala. From a selfish standpoint, I at first resented the poverty circumstances in which they, and consequently I, had to live. The food was simple (I have often wished I knew the tally of how many beans and tortillas I ate while in Guatemala), and the living conditions were generally without any of the luxuries that we consider staples. Hot and cold running water, toilets, electricity, floors and carpet, heating and air conditioning, automobiles, refrigerators, and telephones were all things that they, and generally we as missionaries, had to do without.*

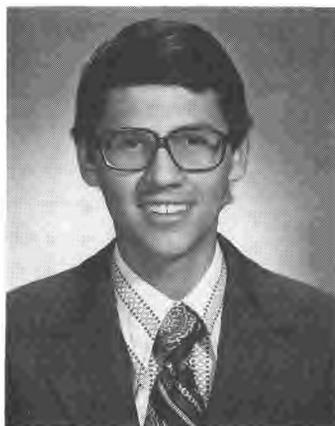
*In the early days of my mission, I remember sitting in adobe homes around the family fire, nearly choking on the smoke (no chimney!) as we would give discussions. Then I would stand up to leave and crack my head on the low-hanging truss beams and get a shower of black soot knocked loose by the blow. Then I would wish I was home.*

*But as time progressed, I somehow started to look past the poverty conditions that these people were living in, and saw them for what they are: Children of our Heavenly Father, and direct descendants of the Book of Mormon Lamanites, with all their prophetic promises still intact. During the two year period of time that I was a missionary, I experienced the full spectrum of feelings and attitudes toward this people. In the beginning, I looked at them with pity and concern for their pathetic situation. As time went by, I began to accept them and enjoy their association. Later, they became beautiful, and as the Book of Mormon says, "delightful" unto me.*

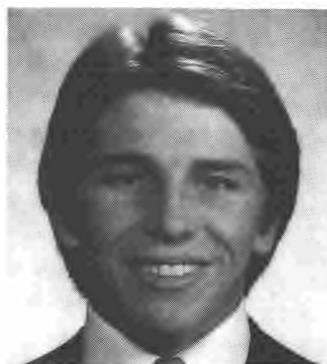
*Experiences In Taking The Gospel To The Lamanites*



*Elder José Zelaya, Sister Carmen O'Domal, and  
Elder John Bringhurst at San Pedro Carchá*



*Elder Oscar Delgado*



*Elder Kirk Sullivan*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*Baptisms at Chulac*

*(picture used with permission from Liahona Magazine)*



*Branch Presidency in Chulac*

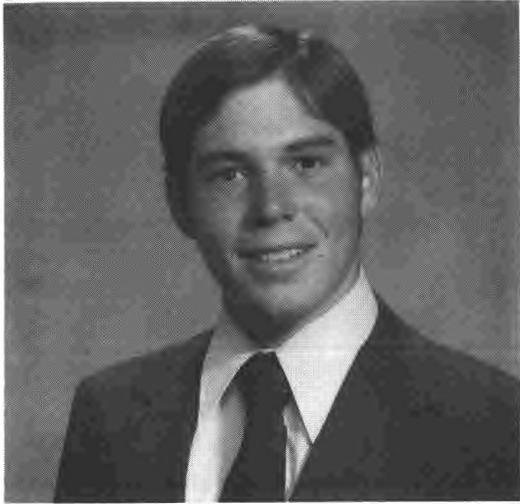
*(picture used with permission from Liahona Magazine)*

*Experiences In Taking The Gospel To The Lamanites*



*First members in Chulac  
(picture used with permission from Liahona Magazine)*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*Elder Scott Cooley*



*Elder Wayne Gelder*

## Chapter Twelve

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### *Elder Lost On Volcano* *A Lesson Learned*

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As mission president I received many requests from the missionaries asking permission to climb the beautiful volcanoes of Guatemala. I conceded to these requests under strict observance of the following rules: 1) To get permission directly from me as mission president, 2) To go under the supervision of Zone and District leaders, and 3) Experienced guides must accompany them. These excursions the elders enjoyed, while observing the above, until November 1976. Elder Brian Warren and David Lee Johnson, with two other elders and 2 sisters working in Sololá, decided they would like to climb the adjacent volcano, Atitlán, and mentioned this to their District leader, but did not await confirmation. They began their climb on November 22, 1976, from San Lucas, Tolimán, at the foot of the volcano on the edge of Lake Atitlán, where we have our home. Elder Johnson became separated from his companion and was lost on the volcano for seven days.

Immediately after hearing about Elder Johnson, the elders called me. We selected six strong elders, and with my assistants and my wife we drove to our home to set up search headquarters. We went first to the town of Santiago Atitlán, on the opposite side of the volcano from San Lucas Toliman, where we talked with the municipal personnel and

many men on the street who showed little interest in helping us find Elder Johnson. They all wanted us to pay them for climbing the volcano. Discouraged, we returned to San Lucas Toliman where I was inspired to talk with a Catholic priest, Father John Goggin, whom I knew. Father John readily offered his support and the services of those men working with them and other Catholic men, to climb the volcano to search for Elder Johnson.

An interesting incident occurred while I was conversing with Father John. The missionaries accompanying me were talking in *Cakchiquel* to several Indian workers. The priest observing this asked me how many years the missionaries had studied to speak the language so well. They were astounded when I told them they had studied less than two months. They could not believe this and told me they had people who had studied over two years and still could not converse as these elders were doing. I invited them to visit our training center in Patzicia and to send their people if they desired, but they never did.

With the assistance of the Catholic priests, a search party was organized and was to initiate their climb at midnight Wednesday. A total of 125 people were in the party. By Saturday night, five days later, Elder Johnson had not been found yet, and hardly anyone was available to continue the search. Father John suggested I go to a neighboring coffee farm on the southern slopes of the volcano and request the help of a good friend, Joseph A. Burge, and his workers.

Father John sent me in his 4-wheel drive vehicle with his driver to talk with Joseph Burge, who wholeheartedly offered his help, telling me he personally, with two of his trusted climbers would go up Saturday night. He told us to go up to his highest labor camp and recruit men to go up. The workers at the labor camp had just finished receiving their pay and many were gathered around the yard where there was a small store operated by a middle-aged woman. The men were not interested in climbing the volcano and none volunteered to help us. Observing this, the lady operating the store came out and scolded the men, saying they were inhumane, that the one lost was a person who needed their compassion and help, that she was ashamed they did not offer to go search for him. The men then began to offer to go up and a sizable group was organized.

The missionaries and others staying with us at our home had been fasting and praying. Several of the elders had gone up the volcano, two

and three times. Early Sunday morning they all were very discouraged and had little hope of finding Elder Johnson alive. They were not alone, for almost everyone had expressed this feeling. Both Carmen and I did not share this sentiment. We had a prayer meeting and I told the missionaries that we had not fully exercised our faith and the Lord was trying us and teaching us a lesson, especially me. On Sunday, November 28, several days since Elder Johnson was lost, I left the house alone, and drove to the town of San Lucas Toliman, parked the car and stood looking up at the volcano. It was a beautiful, clear morning. We had requested assistance from the Guatemalan Air Force, which did not arrive until this Sunday morning. As I stood looking up at the volcano and praying, an Army helicopter approached the volcano and flew around it four times, then left. As I observed the volcano I saw at the very top a flash of light, I knew that the Indians used mirrors in the sunlight as signals. I immediately knew Elder Johnson had been found. I returned to our cabin and related this experience, which gave much hope to everyone.

Some time after midday, while standing on the front porch, looking out over the beautiful lake, we heard a car approaching, honking continually. Father John arrived in his Jeep, blowing the horn, waving a paper, and shouting, "They found him, they found him!" He jumped out, embraced me and handed me the note which read:

2:15 p.m.  
28 Nov 1976

*Dear Father John,*

*My workers and I found David this morning at 9:00 a.m. Outside of dehydration, weakness, minor scratches and a badly sprained ankle, he should be well with a week's rest. Two workers and I carried him down to our breakfast camp and when another worker met up with us I ran down to the farm to get my car.*

*This will save 3 hours and carrying time with David. I should have him down to Terrasas by 4:30 p.m..*

*Regards, Andy Burge*

No one can express the joy we felt and the gratitude for the help of Father John and all those he influenced to help. It was the workers

who had hesitated to go up and were shamed into doing so by the inspired lady, that found Elder Johnson. We immediately packed things and placed a mattress in the back of the station wagon, and drove to the Finca, "Terrasas," where with Joseph Burge we awaited the arrival of Elder Johnson. Two little Indians, Felipe Toz Martín Xon and José Potzal, both about 5 feet tall, carried Elder Johnson down the volcano, on their backs. The trail is very steep and rocky and when the going got hard, they took off their sandals and carried him bare footed. We were happy to see him in such relatively good condition. After thanking Joseph and his people we drove to Guatemala City and the mission home. We first called Elder Johnson's parents and he talked with them, then he went to have a good warm shower and a change of clothes. His ankle was swollen and his pants were worn out, with big holes in the knees and seat, on which he had done much traveling because of his broken ankle, which occurred on Monday when he jumped off a 15 foot embankment. We took him to the hospital where they operated on his ankle, inserting a pin.

I asked Elder Johnson to write up his experience and this is what he said:

*This is an account of my experience on the Volcano of Atitlán. My companion and I were debating to climb the volcano practically all week and so I wasn't exactly sure if we were going to until Sunday, Nov. 21. When I first came to the mission my companion told me that it was against the rules to climb volcanoes, so I never worried about it. This rule was made while Pres. Arnold was president of the mission. When Pres. O'Donnal was made pres., my companions told me that it was O.K. to climb. I never remember hearing it right from Pres. O'Donnal directly. As far as I knew, the volcano was not even out of the borders of our district, so I thought that we only needed permission from our district leader. Our Zone Leaders were in Sololá the week before for Zone tour and we told them, our district leader and the other elders in our district that we would probably climb the volcano. It wasn't until later that I found out that we were supposed to get permission from Pres. O'Donnal.*

*Our district leader told us to take lots of water. I had never climbed a volcano before, but my companion said he had climbed about two or three volcanoes and that we wouldn't have any problems. From what I understood we'd be back in time to work on Monday night.*

*We didn't know what time a bus left for the volcano, so we got up before 5:00 a.m. and were out to the bus stop by a little after five. We didn't*

*have any breakfast. We didn't have anything except money with us. Well, I wore Levi's, tennis shoes and socks, a white shirt and a hat. I had a sweater also. I had my white missionary handbook, 2 articles of faith cards, and about \$6.00 in coins. The bus didn't come until about 6:00 a.m., and I think we got right outside of San Lucas by about 8:00. I slept all the way on the bus. We started going toward the volcano right from where we got off the bus and arrived at the base about 45 minutes later, maybe longer. We started and we got real thirsty, but didn't have any water. Finally, about 1/3 of the way up the mountain, I told my companion that I was getting too hot and tired going as slow as we were and that I was going ahead. I went ahead a ways, stopped, rested, and waited for my companion to catch up. I did that 2 or 3 times and then I got way ahead and never saw him again until the next Sun. night. Finally, I came to a fork in the trail and left my sweater on a stick to mark the trail I had taken with the intention that he would bring it to the top with him. On the way up, I stopped and took about 3 or 4 naps to cool down. One was about 20 min., a couple of about 5 min., and I don't remember what else. Usually after my naps I'd yell back, but he never answered. I think he took the other trail. Finally, I got to the lava line, where the trees and plants pretty well stop and there is just lava rock until you get to the top. It was my goal to get to the top and after waiting for a little while, I decided that he must have decided to go back down because it was after noon. I didn't want to get up that high and then go back down without reaching my goal, so I started climbing the lava. There are a few trees in the lava with colored plastic on them to mark the trail. I got to the top at about 2:00 p.m. I took about a twenty min. nap up there. When I woke up, it was very cold, the wind was blowing and the fog was very thick. I couldn't see any trees with markers on them. In fact, I couldn't see hardly anything. I had a prayer on the top asking for the Lord's protection and His help so that I could find the trail to get down. Then I started down what I thought was the same directions I had come up. I thought about staying on top until the fog cleared up, but sometimes the fog stays until morning. Besides that, I didn't know how cold it got up there and I was afraid I might freeze to death. I started to go down and realized that I wasn't going down the same place I had come up. I kept slipping and sliding down the lava. I scraped up my hands quite badly. Finally I reached the tree line again and after looking around for the trail and yelling for my companion, I found a dried up river bed that goes down the mountain. I decided that that was a good way to get down since it was a direct route down the mountain. I didn't know if I was on the same side of the mountain because I couldn't see lake Atitlán. After a while the fog started to lift on top of the mountain, but there was fog down below. If I had ever seen the lake again, I could have gone down easily, but I never did.*

Anyway, I started going down the river. I was going at a pretty good rate. The farther down I went the more jumps and waterfalls I came to. If I had realized that they were there, I would have chosen another way to get down. I came to some that I had to go around on the sides of the river. It was getting deeper all the time. During the rainy season the water comes down very hard and fast and digs a big, deep riverbed. I came to about a fifteen foot jump. I didn't worry about it because I jumped from higher than that before without problems. All the time I was going down the river, I was telling myself that I had to be careful, that all I needed was a broken foot or leg and I would be in trouble. Then I jumped and I guess I just landed funny because the minute I hit, I was almost positive that my foot was broken. It hurt and I didn't dare put pressure on it. I can't remember if I prayed right then or not, but I did pray an awful lot on that mountain. I crawled down the river on my seat and hands until I got about a 30' fall where the sides of the river were just like cliffs and there was no way I could get down. I climbed back up the river a ways to where I could climb back up onto the mountain. By that time the sun was going down. I climbed up a ways on my knees and found a fairly level spot to sleep on. The first night was the real test. I didn't know if I would freeze to death. I stuffed leaves inside my shirt, put my shirt collar over my ears and my hat over my collar, and put my nose and my arms inside my shirt. I woke up quite a few times each night, but got quite a bit of sleep. The first night I kept my foot elevated. The only time it really hurt was when I first broke it. I was up with the sun every morning. Tuesday, I crawled up the mountain quite a ways on my knees and went down on a different angle. I was always testing plants to see if I could get water out of them. I ended up in another river bed and crawled down it almost all day Tues. on my hands and seat. I tried to get my directions straight by using the sun, but each time I changed directions I'd look up again and it was the wrong direction. I found berries in the river bed and that was the first food I'd had since Sun. Hunger never really affected me, but I was always thirsty. The berries kind of quenched my thirst. I finally decided that I wasn't getting anywhere in riverbeds. By that time I didn't have any idea where I was or what direction I was going. I climbed out of the riverbed and started up a mountain. I think my main goal was to find the lake. The vegetation was too thick to see out. I wanted to get on top of somewhere where I could see out. I got a little ways up the mountain and slept there that night. I started climbing on Wed. and climbed for about half a day on my knees. My knees were getting very sore, so I decided to try out my foot. I found that by limping I could use it. Wed. I found this plant that the Indians call Gallo. It's very leafy and has dirty water inside, but I poured it into my hand and drank it anyway. Also, I found a type of root that has lots of water. I chewed them up until all the water was gone and then spit them out. I got to the top

about the end of the day. On one side, I could see Atitlán volcano and on the other side, I could see another volcano, but at that time, I didn't know it was Atitlán. I slept on top of the mountain that night. It rained a little bit. The wind blew all night. I could see a coast town in the distance, so the next day I decided to try to get there. I went down the other side of the mountain and at the bottom there was another river bed. This day was Thanksgiving and the only day that I found water. As I was going down the riverbed, I found a little trickle of cold water. I used a hollow plant for a straw. It was kind of like my thanksgiving dinner. I went down the river a little more and found that there were too many waterfalls that were impossible to get down. Next, I started to climb the other side of the volcano. It was hard to climb because of the thick vegetation, lava rock and small cliff, but I had the help of the Lord. I got a little ways up the mountain and slept that night. I heard barking below me that night and thought that it was dogs with people looking for me, so I yelled to get their attention. It must have been coyotes, however. That was the only time I had any kind of encounter with animals. There were always insects and birds, but not really any animals. Friday, I climbed all day, I found another type of root to chew. Also, I looked for pine nuts in the pine cones, but never found any. A little after noon on Sat., I arrived at the lava line on the other side of the volcano. I tried to climb the lava, but it was just too slick and dangerous. I kept sliding and cutting my hands more. I slept near the lava line with the intention of going around the mountain, trying to find someplace where I could climb up and find the trail that I had originally come up. I had been going for about an hour when I heard a bunch of shouting and tooting. I think it was about 8:00 a.m. I started yelling and going toward the sound as fast as I could. After about five minutes we met. There were 6 or 7 Indians from a plantation that had come up looking for me the night before. They gave me tortillas, rice, coffee, eggs and an avocado. I asked them if they had water, but didn't, so I drank the coffee. I'm not sure if it was made from corn or wheat or if it was real coffee. All I know is that I hadn't had any roots since the afternoon before and I was very thirsty. We started to walk back up the mountain to go down the trail on the other side. About 45 min. later the owner of the plantation came up with 3 other Indians. The 6 or 7 that found me went up the mountain to signal Pres. O'Donnal with their mirrors, that I had been found. Andy Burge, who is the owner of the plantation, brought water and salt tablets up with him and had left food further down the mountain. My desire for water was finally starting to be satisfied about 2:00 p.m. Mr. Burge and his Indians carried me down the mountain on their backs. Their strength and unselfish service were unbelievable. Pres. O'Donnal then drove me into the capital where I called my parents, took a shower and went to the hospital. That's a brief account of my experiences. I know that there were probably millions of

*prayers offered in my behalf with lots of hours of unselfish service spent. I will never be able to repay everything. The only things I can think of are to repent and sin no more, and do for others as they did for me. That's why I'm asking for your forgiveness. This experience was a great testimony building experience for me and I have learned many things. I'm a person that has to have a reason before I do a thing in many cases. I've learned that obedience is the most important thing: Obedience without question. I could have died for breaking a little rule.*

*I know this church is true and that Christ and God live! I love my mission and plan to be an instrument in God's hands to convert many.*

*Love,  
Elder David Lee Johnson*

It has always been amazing to me that anyone could become lost on a volcano, where the only way out is down. Elder Johnson constantly tried to descend in *arroyos* (brooks) which always boxed up or had falls that he could not get around. Had he, instead, rounded the volcano looking for a trail below the lava, sand line, I am sure he would have found one. The mornings and early afternoons were clear so one could see for hundreds of miles in all directions. But I am certain the purpose was to teach us a lesson. No volcano climbing was permitted after this experience.

*Elder Lost On Volcano – A Lesson Learned*



*Volcano Atitlán, where Elder David Johnson was lost for 7 days  
View from where mirror signals were seen when elder was rescued—November 1976*



*Andy Burge and Indians that carried Elder Johnson down from the volcano*



*Elder David Johnson after his rescue from volcano*



*Clothes worn by Elder Johnson while lost on volcano*

## Chapter Thirteen

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# *Guatemala Area Conference* *February 1977*

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Almost thirty years after the first missionaries arrived in Guatemala, the first Area Conference was held under the direction of President Spencer W. Kimball, who has so much influenced the work in this nation. The conference was announced and organized by Elder J. Thomas Fyans, our Area Supervisor and member of the Presidency of the First Quorum of Seventy. Elder Fyans had also organized the second Area Conference of the Church, and the first in Latin America, in Mexico City in 1972.

The conference in Guatemala was scheduled for February 21 and 22, 1977. The Church in Guatemala had no facility large enough to accommodate the number of people expected to attend. The area included Guatemala and El Salvador; with more than 20,000 members in Guatemala alone. It was decided that we should request from the government, the use of the National Gymnasium. As Carmen and I were personal friends of the director of the national Olympic facilities, Colonel Marco Antonio Soto, we visited his office to make the request. Because of our long-standing acquaintance and thus having a knowledge of the Church, he readily approved the use of the gymnasium for the Area Conference, and gave us a letter to this effect to present to those in charge of the facility. When we looked over the gymnasium we noted

that a partition had been erected, dividing the area. When we requested that we be permitted to remove the partition, our request was declined. Again we had to go to Colonel Soto who advised us that we could remove it with the stipulation that we put it back when we were finished, to which we agreed.

President and Sister Kimball, President Marion G. Romney, Elders Howard W. Hunter and L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve and Sister Perry, and Elders J. Thomas Fyans and Robert D. Hales of the First Quorum of Seventy and Sister Hales, arrived at the airport on February 21, and were met by a reception committee: Elder G. Enrique Ritcher, Regional Representative, and Sister Ritcher, Dave Judd representing Temporal Affairs, stake presidents and their wives, and Carmen and me. I recall as President and Sister Kimball entered the waiting room, they immediately came to Carmen and me and embraced and kissed us. They were all taken to the VIP reception room where they were welcomed by airport and government officials, then taken to the Camino Real Hotel. Later a banquet was held at the hotel for local Church leaders and their wives. At 8:00 p.m. there was a program presented by the different stakes from El Salvador, Quetzaltenango and Guatemala, and the Mission, with folkloric music and color.

Agreeable to an appointment on Tuesday morning, President Kimball called upon the President of Guatemala, Kjell Laugerud, at the president's residence. He was accompanied by President Romney, Brother David M. Kennedy, Enrique Ritcher, Colonel Augusto Conde and myself. This was a very pleasant visit in which President Kimball presented President Laugerud with special copies of the Triple Combination and had a cordial conversation. The Guatemalan president asked several questions concerning the Church and promised freedom of worship for the members in Guatemala. I had known President Laugerud from the first days of my arrival in Guatemala, in the early 1940s. His father Peter Laugerud was manager of the most prestigious hotel in Guatemala at the time, Hotel Palace, where I had taken up residence. Don Pedro was a Norwegian compatriot of León Lind Petersen, my good friend and chief cooperater in the rubber program. Kjell and his brother were at the hotel quite often, and at times Kjell would ask me to help him with his math homework.

The General Session of the Area Conference, held at the National Stadium, began with music rendered by joint choirs of the Guatemala City stakes. Sister Lapreel Huber was organist. An awkward incident

occurred as the conference began: The Regional Representative permitted a Catholic priest to play some prelude music on the organ, but could not get him away from it so Sister Huber could play, as was programmed. Finally he did relinquish the organ to her. This was a big event for Sister Huber and she regretted that the priest had taken most of her time.

The following persons spoke in the General Session: G. Enrique Ritche, Regional Representative; Carlos H. Amado, Stake President; Enrique Falabella, returned missionary; Berta de López, Stake Relief Society President; Elder L. Tom Perry, member of the Quorum of the Twelve; President Marion G. Romney of the First Presidency, and President Spencer W. Kimball. Translators were Rudy López and Percy Santizo.

Sessions for mothers and daughters and the Priesthood were also held in the afternoon at 4:00 p.m. The sisters at the National Gymnasium and the Priesthood in the Zone 9 chapel.

What a thrill and a blessing to sit on the stand with these great men of God and their lovely wives, and to look out over the large congregation and rejoice at the fruits of the spiritual awakening of these wonderful people. My mind turned to the many promises made to these very people by the prophets of the Book of Mormon, recalling that as the prophet Enos cried out in fervent prayer that the Lord God would preserve their records, the Lord had said to him: "Whatsoever thing ye shall ask with faith, believing that ye shall receive in the name of Christ, ye shall receive it." Enos then stated, "And I had faith, and I did cry unto God that he would preserve the records; and he covenanted with me that he would bring them forth unto the Lamanites in his own due time." The Lord went on to say, "Thy fathers have also required of me this thing; and it shall be done unto them according to their faith; for their faith was like unto thine." (Enos 1:15-16, 18). I could envision Nephi speaking to his people when he said, "Hear ye the words of the prophet, ye who are a remnant of the house of Israel." (I Nephi 19:24)—And here again was a great prophet, Spencer W. Kimball, speaking to this remnant. And Nephi had also said, "Then shall the remnant of our seed know concerning us...and the gospel of Jesus Christ shall be declared among them; wherefore, they shall be restored unto the knowledge of their fathers, and also unto the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which was had among their fathers. And then shall they rejoice; for they shall know that it is a blessing unto them from the hand of God; and their scales of

darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a pure and a delightsome people.” (II Nephi 30:4-6). As I observed two of our missionaries translating into sign language, I again recalled the words of Nephi, “And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness. And the meek also shall increase, and their joy shall be in the Lord, and the poor among them shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.” (II Nephi 27:29-30). And Nephi quoting the words of his father, Lehi, “And at that day shall the remnant of our seed know that they are of the house of Israel, and that they are the covenant people of the Lord; and then shall they know and come to the knowledge of their fathers, and also to the knowledge of the gospel of their Redeemer, which was ministered unto their fathers by him; wherefore, they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved.” (I Nephi 15:14).

As these thoughts were passing through my mind, I thrilled to know we were listening to a prophet of the Lord, and my heart was overflowing with joy for the small part that the Lord had permitted me to play in this marvelous work, together with my loving wife, in whose veins flows, strongly, the blood of father Lehi.



*President Spencer W. Kimball with Guatemala President Kjell Laugerud  
February 1977 – (picture used with permission from Liahona Magazine)*



*President Spencer W. Kimball receives the key to the city from the Mayor of Guatemala City — (picture used with permission from Liahona Magazine)*



*Youth choir singing to President and Sister Kimball at a reception during the first Guatemala Area Conference—February 21, 1977*



*First Guatemala Area Conference—February 21-22, 1977  
(picture used with permission from Liahona Magazine)*

## Chapter Fourteen

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### *President Of The Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission*

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When we were called to preside over the Guatemala Guatemala City Mission in July 1976, the division of the mission, forming three missions, had been approved, with the stipulation that El Salvador would be divided off in July 1976 and the new Quetzaltenango Mission would be organized a year later in July 1977. Each division would require a buildup of missionaries to supply both missions. Those missionaries serving in El Salvador on July 1, 1976, remained there. There was a gradual increase in missionaries during the first six months of 1977, in preparation for the other division on July first.

Dr. Willard and Ruth Skousen had made annual visits to Guatemala during the months of January or February, for several years. He flew their own private plane and usually were accompanied by another couple. They were visiting us in January 1976, when Elder J. Thomas Fyans was in Guatemala City. I suggested to Elder Fyans that Willard would make a great mission president. Although they were unaware of it, while talking with them on January 24, he actually interviewed them. Shortly thereafter, they received a call to preside over the Guatemala City Mission. We received a call to preside over the new Indian mission—the Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission. The

boundaries of the missions I had recommended were established with the Indian areas included in the new mission. All the missionaries serving in the Indian areas remained in the new mission, but it was my task to divide the missionaries speaking only Spanish. President Skousen mentioned that I had taken all the good missionaries, but this was not true—they were all good, only some were better.

After an orientation in Guatemala City with Elder William R. Bradford, on July 15, I officially turned the mission over to President Skousen, as he and I knelt in prayer in his office. When the mission was divided on July 1, 1977, there were three stakes, two missions and 20,000 members in Guatemala.

When final arrangements for opening the new Quetzaltenango Mission were underway, we could not find a suitable building for the mission home. On the week we were to move, Jorge Pérez located a lovely home in the better residential district of the city. The building was the residence of a couple, who were friends of ours, whom I had known for several years, and Carmen had known all her life. They wanted to sell the property, but upon learning that we would be living there, agreed to rent the home to the Church. After we had been there for five months I had convinced the Church to purchase the property, and I entered into negotiations with the Lemuses and later, through the Temporal Affairs Office in Mexico City, the home was purchased. We moved in on Saturday, July 16, 1977.

Elder Bradford arrived in Quetzaltenango the next day, Sunday, to set us apart for the new mission. That evening, with Elders William Worthington, John Bringham and Fulgencio Choy present, Elder Bradford first set me apart as Mission President of the Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission, then set Carmen apart. He gave us both beautiful blessings, and he told Carmen not to be concerned about our family, for the Lord would watch over them, but to dedicate her time and efforts to the mission. She had been quite worried about the family and this calmed her fears.

Again I was blessed with wonderful counselors. E. Israel Pérez continued as my first counselor, and Brother Burtis Embry was called as my second counselor. Brother Embry was a professor of agriculture engineering and a member of the faculty of Utah State University in Logan, Utah, which was under contract with the U.S. AID program in Guatemala. He was heading a very successful, small farm, overhead

irrigation project among the Indians in the highlands. He served with me until September 1978 when he returned to Logan, Utah. Brother Herman Gustavo Lang was then called and set apart as my second counselor on September 10, 1978; and with President Pérez he served until we completed our mission.

Almost without realizing how our efforts were being guided, many of the projects in which we were engaged in the Guatemala City Mission—simplification of the discussions, translations, intensified training in the Indian languages, taking the gospel to the people, construction of small chapels, etc.—were actually setting the groundwork for the opening of this new Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission.

Brother Eb Davis continued his frequent visits to Guatemala to offer much appreciated suggestions for improving our training programs and bringing us up to date on the progress of translations and printing. David Frischknecht, Larry Richmond and Julio Salazar, continued with translations and preparation of guidebooks, discussions, tracts and flip charts. In early August 1977, Larry Richmond, our former missionary, returned to complete the translation of the simplified discussions into the Indian languages, and to take photographs of local Indians and places to replace the Anglo flip-charts accompanying the discussions. David Tuttle with Bruce Lake continued with the *Quiché* literary program. Elder John Bringham continued his work on translating and typing the discussions in *Ke'kchi*. Dean Black spent considerable time in Guatemala preparing tapes in the Indian languages for rural radio programs. The elders in the mission assisted in evaluating these programs.

With approval from Elder Bradford, the mission presidency scheduled a mission-wide celebration for Thanksgiving Day, that fell on November 24. All the missionaries in the mission gathered in Quetzaltenango. The weather was beautiful and outdoor games were programmed and held on the city fair grounds. Elder Bradford and I participated in a softball game. A great time was had by all. A big Thanksgiving dinner, with turkey and all the trimmings prepared under the supervision of Carmen and Sister Embry, was held later in the stake center.

We held a very spiritual mission conference the following morning, with Elder Bradford presiding. After the conference the missionaries returned to their areas. The next day we drove to Cobán

for a District Conference. A beautiful chapel in Huehuetenango was dedicated on December 10, 1977, by Elder William R. Bradford.

In 1977 Elder Boyd K. Packer returned to Guatemala on a very specific and significant assignment from President Spencer W. Kimball. The Lord's hand was evident in bringing together all concerned with making arrangements for his visit.

On November 1, 1977, Elder Bradford toured the Pacific coast area of the Guatemala City Mission with President and Sister Skousen. I met them at El Zarco, Retalhuleu, and drove Elder Bradford to Quetzaltenango. Brother Clarence R. Bishop of Welfare Services also arrived this same day. On November 3, Gordon Christensen, the Director of Temporal Affairs and President and Sister Skousen joined Elder Bradford, Brother Bishop and me as we went to inspect the construction of the small chapels, later returning to Quetzaltenango. The entire party, including Elder Bradford planned on returning to Guatemala City that afternoon. I felt inspired to request of Elder Bradford that he and President and Sister Skousen stay with us that night and I would send them to Guatemala City the next morning, as I desired to discuss a few matters with him. To this Elder Bradford agreed. Brother Eb Davis arrived at the mission home that evening.

The inspiration I received was evidenced the next morning. As we were finishing breakfast, at about seven, the telephone rang and I answered in my office in the mission home. It was Elder Boyd K. Packer on the line. He asked if I knew where he could contact Elder Bradford and I told him he was there with us. He told Elder Bradford that President Kimball had called him into his office on three different occasions for periods of one to two hours and had told him the Lord was trying to tell him something and he was not quite sure what it was, but that it concerned the Lamanites. He said he needed to find out, but because of his health and age did not feel he could do the necessary traveling, so President Kimball had requested that Elder Packer go. He wanted Elder Packer to visit the archeological areas in Mexico and Central America and "observe the people, both the living and the dead." Elder Packer was calling to make arrangements for the tour of these areas, but before they could finalize a schedule he needed to talk with Presidents O'Donnal and Skousen, and if he knew where Brother Eb Davis was, to discuss this with him also. Elder Bradford informed him that we were all there with him, which was very interesting to Elder

Packer. So we finalized the itinerary together. President Skousen and I were involved because some areas were in our missions.

On November 10, 1977, Elder Boyd K. Packer arrived in Mexico City. The following day, with Elder Bradford and Eb Davis, they flew to Villa Hermosa and visited the ruins of Palenque, then on to Merida, Yucatan. On the twelfth they visited the ruins of Chichen Itzá and Uxmal, then on to Guatemala City. On Sunday, November 13, they drove from Guatemala City to Momostenango, where we were holding district conference. After the conference we returned to the mission home where we enjoyed lunch, then drove to San Marcos, La Grandeza, San Pedro S.M., and returned to Quetzaltenango. While driving back, Elder Packer requested we stop at some secluded place where we could offer a prayer. In my mind I had selected a spot, but when we neared the area, it commenced raining hard. When we reached the spot I had selected, I informed Elder Packer this was the place, but as it was raining he said we would do this another time.

November 14, 1977 was one of the most memorable and blessed days of my life. We arose early to begin our drive to Cunén, Cobán, Valparaiso and Guatemala City. On the mountain highway between Quetzaltenango and Huehuetenango, we stopped and enjoyed a beautiful sunrise. In Huehuetenango we ate the breakfast Carmen had prepared for us. We then stopped at the head of the river San Juan which flows ice cold out of the mountainside. Driving from the valley on the winding, mountain, dirt road, on our journey to Cunén, near the summit, Elder Packer asked Elder Bradford who was driving, to park the vehicle at the first opportunity so we could go up and "talk with the Lord." We walked up the side of the mountain, to a beautiful meadow, where we sat at the feet of Elder Packer and listened as he taught us out of the scriptures. What a marvelous experience to sit at the feet of a prophet of God and to be taught by him, especially in this beautiful setting! After he had taught us for some time, there in the warm sunshine, Elder Packer asked that we kneel in prayer. We knelt, with Elder Packer on my right, Elder Bradford on my left and Brother Eb Davis next to Elder Bradford, each touching the other's arms. Elder Packer poured out his soul in prayer to Heavenly Father for these people, asking that the promised blessings in the Book of Mormon be poured out upon them. He blessed the land, he pleaded with the Lord that the way be opened for those from whom the priesthood is withheld (at that time the temple in

Brazil, where there is a large percentage of Negro blood, was being completed). He gave a beautiful blessing to each of us accompanying him and through us to our families. At that time we had a very special, spiritual experience, which touched our very souls. What a glorious moment! We arose to return to the vehicle, and while walking, everything seemed more beautiful and I felt as if I were walking in a paradise. Elder Packer addressed me saying, "Forres, you should be paying the Church to be in this beautiful land." I humbly agreed.

We continued our journey, stopping in Cunen to look over the work and premises of the AYUDA program. From what we observed, their program of health and education was showing considerable success. From Cunen to Cobán is some of the most treacherous road in Guatemala, but the beauty of the countryside is breathtaking. I might say that November and December is the most beautiful time of the year in Guatemala. We arrived in Cobán at noon and had lunch at a *pension* (boarding house) owned by friends of ours. After lunch we drove to Guatemala City via El Rancho—another beautiful drive.

A twin-engine, six-passenger, small airplane was leased for the following day, November 15, for visiting the archeological ruins at Copán, Honduras, and Tikal in Northern Guatemala. President Skousen accompanied us on this flight. I was the only person in the plane who was not a pilot. We flew first to Copán. I had visited this area twice before, once with the first missionaries in 1948 and later with the Skousens. But this visit with Elder Packer was very different, as was the purpose of the visit. There was a different spirit, and as Elder Packer explained, this must have been a place of much bloodshed and sacrifice. All of us had a dark, depressing feeling, although from a purely archeological point of view, this is one of the most beautiful of the Mayan ruins. Upon leaving Copán, we flew to Tikal. Walking through this area and climbing the ruins, there was an entirely different feeling from that of Copán. Elder Packer mentioned that this was a peaceful, restful atmosphere. We all agreed. I had also visited Tikal on two previous occasions and apart from the beauty of Tikal, I had, on each occasion, sensed the same sweet, peaceful feeling. I was always sad to leave the area. We returned to Guatemala City late in the afternoon. Elder Packer left the next morning for Salt Lake City.

Elder Packer's assignment was extended to South America and the Islands of the Pacific. In a Progress Report on the work among the

Lamanites published in November 1977, Elder Packer states: "The following pages give a still picture of a moving subject. They show how much is now being done—and more than this—they show us to be in a place at last for a yet greater beginning." Every aspect of the Church's activities, with programs and members, are covered in detail in the 41 page report. Included are status of translations of materials in the different languages, including ordinances, Articles of Faith, missionary discussions, selected tracts, hymns, organizational guidelines, Guidebooks, basic manuals, forms and reports, Book of Mormon selections and D&C selections. The report distinguishes between Lamanites and Indians in the following definitions: "Lamanites—people in the Western Hemisphere and Polynesia who may be a mixed blood, who have some bloodlines that go back to Book of Mormon peoples. Indians—people in the Western Hemisphere who are essentially pure blood descendants of Book of Mormon peoples. It is not possible to have sharply cut lines nor to give figures that do not overlap to some degree." The total as of the date of the report are given as follows:

North and South America and the South Pacific:

Lamanites 75,515,770

Indians 31,990,300

Figures are given for each of the major groups. As of December 31, 1977, there was a total of about 500,000 Lamanite members in the Church. I am sure this will triple within a decade. A total of 17 Area Conferences were held where Lamanites were involved. In the seven-year period of 1970-1977, a total of 82 stakes were organized in Lamanite areas.

Speaking on Lamanite leadership, President Kimball made this promise in a talk entitled "To You Our Kinsmen":

*You will arise from your bed of affliction and from your condition of deprivation if you will accept fully the Lord Jesus Christ and his total program. You will rise to former heights in culture and education, influence, and power. You will blossom as the rose upon the mountains. Your daughters will be nurses, teachers, and social workers, and above all, beloved wives and full-of-faith mothers of a righteous posterity. Your sons will compete in art, literature, medicine, law and architecture. They will*

*become professional, industrial, and business leaders and statesmen of the first order. Together you and we shall build in the spectacular city of New Jerusalem, the temple to which our Redeemer will come. Your hands with ours, also of Jacob, will place the foundation stones, raise the walls and roof of the magnificent structure.*

*Perhaps your artistic hands will paint the temple and decorate it with a master's touch, and together we shall dedicate to our Creator Lord, the most beautiful of all temples ever built to his name.*

I am certain we will be astounded at the rapid fulfillment of the many promises made to this people.

The year 1978 was another eventful year with increased activity in ongoing programs: opening of new areas, principally in the rural, Indian regions, Indian language training, translations in the literary programs, preparation of tapes for radio programs in the Indian languages, progress in the construction of small chapels in the rural areas and an increase in conversions and fellowshipping, also supplying the meeting places with the necessary folding chairs, pulpits and blackboards.

A new group of missionaries for the Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission arrived on January 24, 1978. Among these was the first group trained at the Provo MTC in the *Cakchiquel* language. As was customary, we held a Family Home Evening for them in the Mission Home when they arrived. The missionaries working in the office, with my assistants and a few other missionaries in the area, attended the home evening. During this service, six different languages were spoken: English, Spanish, *Quiché*, *Cakchiquel*, *Ke'kchi*, and *Mam*.

On January 26, as Elder Gelder mentioned, a *Mam* language teacher, Sr. Ramon Aguilar, was employed for one month, for the first *Mam* language training in the famous town of Todos los Santos, Huehuetenango. Wayne Gelder, John Bartholemew, Jorge Cerros and Enoc Marini were the first elders selected for this program. The training period was completed in Colotenango on October 31.

Because there was much interest in the Church in Chulac, there was also strong opposition by some in the government sponsored cooperative; and the missionaries could no longer hold meetings in the public buildings. As mission president, I authorized the erection of a

temporary, A-frame shelter, using seven-meter, corrugated, asbestos, cement sheets. This served an important role until a permanent, small chapel was later constructed. A small school building was built in the rural area of Pancá, Momostenango, with funds received from an Aaronic Priesthood Quorum from the United States. This served a good purpose in the area where there was no school. Land was purchased in April for construction of the small chapels in Canquixajá and Santa Ana, Momostenango, and Comalapa, Chimaltenango.

On May 22, 1978, the first group of elders trained in the *Quiché* language at the Provo MTC, arrived. It was with great anticipation that we awaited the arrival of these missionaries, to ascertain the effectiveness of their training in the MTC, but as explained earlier, our hopes were not realized.

It was another memorable experience on June 9, 1978, when Elder William Bradford called me from Mexico and conveyed to me the text of the revelation received by President Kimball concerning the Priesthood, in which every faithful, worthy man in the Church may receive the holy priesthood. This filled my soul with joy, for I had had some very sad experiences in this regard; and I immediately recalled the prayer Elder Boyd Packer had offered with us on the mountain, just one year before, when he pleaded with the Lord that the way be opened that every worthy man would receive the priesthood. Dr. Russell M. Nelson and John Bennett were in Quetzaltenango at that time, representing the Sunday School General Board, and at a meeting that evening I informed them of the revelation, of which they were not yet aware.

Dr. Nelson had requested of the Stake President, that a local doctor's office be made available for him to give free, medical, cardiology exams to members and non-members, who desired to receive them. The clinic was made available and Dr. Nelson requested I accompany him as his interpreter. This was a beautiful experience and brought me close to Dr. Nelson. Later we were both called as Regional Representatives at the same time. Elder Nelson was later called into the Quorum of the Twelve. We have enjoyed a number of special spiritual experiences together.

In July 1978 our former missionary, Elder Hugh Bieseinger, returned to Quetzaltenango to work on translation of the Book of Mormon in the *Quiché* language. The *Ke'kchi* translation by Elder John Bringhurst was already in progress.

The first conferences to be held in the rural, *Ke'kchi* Indian areas, were scheduled for September 23, 1978, in the town of Senahu, and on September 24, in Chulac. This being the height of the rainy season, my assistants suggested strongly that we not go up into this mountainous region, as there had been reports of landslides and blocked roads. I knew these devoted people would be waiting anxiously for us and I could not disappoint them. The drive is normally about seven hours, in good weather. As my assistants were reluctant to go, I asked them to remain in Quetzaltenango. At an early hour, with my wife and the sisters representing the Relief Society, Young Women and Primary Mission Boards, we drove in the mission car. My counselor, Israel Pérez, with the brethren representing the Young Men, drove in the mission van. At Valparaiso, Cordell Andersen as District President and his wife, and missionaries from the district, joined us. Cordell was acquainted with the roads.

As expected, rain was heavy and the roads were muddy and there were some slides. The drive was beautiful along the Polochic River, then up into the mountains. Driving was slow and it got dark, long before we arrived at Senahu. President Pérez driving the van, was delayed on the road and was left behind. He was not acquainted with the road, and with heavy rain and darkness he didn't know which road to take when he encountered a fork in the road; so they offered a prayer. A light appeared in the distance, which they followed, arriving as the rest of us were leaving the small *pension* (boarding house), for the meeting which had been scheduled at 7:00 p.m., and it was then 8:45 p.m.

The members, missionaries and investigators were waiting and were delighted at our arrival, and expressed their joy at having us with them. After a very spiritual meeting, we ate a delicious meal prepared by the sisters. Our visit to the area marked the beginning of much progress in missionary work.

Early the next morning we left Senahu for Chulac. As the sun came up on a beautiful morning, we stopped on the road and had breakfast with food we had brought from the mission home. As we rested and ate, we enjoyed the beautiful mountain scenery. Upon arrival at Chulac, we found the branch president and the members and friends awaiting at the A-frame chapel. This chapel with wooden benches had capacity for about 150 persons. A shelter had been erected at the side, where the members were preparing food for everyone. The meeting was

scheduled for 8:00 a.m., but the branch president asked if we could delay commencing the meeting for a few minutes, as he had invited some friends from neighboring church groups. After waiting for half an hour and they had not come, we commenced our meeting. As only a few of the men spoke and understood Spanish, the meeting was conducted in *Ke'kchi* and the talks were translated. The hymns had been translated and were sung in their language. This was a very special meeting and there was an outpouring of the Spirit. As we closed the meeting, we looked and there filing down the mountain trail, was an entire congregation of about 150 people that the branch president had invited. There was a joyful reunion and I invited them to occupy the chapel and we would hold another meeting. They had their guitars so we invited them to sing. These were members of three Protestant groups—The Church of the Nazarene, Church of God and The Prince of Peace. We invited their leaders to say a few words, then the branch president and my counselors and I taught them the gospel. They were delighted with the meeting and demonstrated much interest in our message. The missionaries received many referrals.

Each member family had been assessed five *quetzales* for the food, which for them represented a sacrifice and at least one week's pay. They served a special soup of the area, *caldo de chunte*, prepared with turkey (originally with wild turkey), vegetables and spices—very delicious. Large pieces of cooked beef, a type of corn tamale, rice and soft drinks were also served. There was food for all. There was great rejoicing and this was an experience I am sure everyone will cherish and remember. There was much to talk about on our journey back to Quetzaltenango.

Because our mission was so spread out and covered much of Guatemala, including all of the Indian areas, we traveled almost constantly. To visit some of the remote, rural areas it was necessary to walk several miles. From the beginning of our mission Carmen accompanied me on all our visits. On October first we were traveling, holding zone conferences, and found ourselves in Cobán on October second. We left Cobán late on the third and drove to Patzicia, where we spent the night in the little apartment near the chapel where welfare couples often lived. All the traveling and activity of the mission was too physically strenuous for Carmen, and shortly after midnight she had a mild heart attack, which was very frightening. I immediately placed my

hands on her head and gave her a priesthood blessing, after which she was able to rest. Early the next morning we drove to Quetzaltenango where she rested and limited her activity as much as I could influence her to do so. She has always been a very active person. After two weeks we considered it advisable for her to enter the hospital in Guatemala City for extensive tests. On January 8, 1979, she returned to the hospital in Guatemala City for more tests and treatment for her heart condition.

The welfare of the church members in the Indian areas was constantly a concern and often discussed with the welfare missionaries, in search of a way to assist them in improving their income. In the mission there was a fine group of welfare missionaries, including several BYU students who were paired off with our regular missionaries, and again this problem was discussed. The mission presidency considered a project to construct a store outlet for crafts on the church property in Patzicia, which was on the Pan American Highway. Most of the members are engaged in making typical clothing and crafts, and some other crafts taught by the welfare missionaries. This project was discussed with the Area Executive Administrator, who approved the project. A local engineer was contracted for construction of a large, palm, thatched-roofed shed. With the assistance of members and welfare missionaries the shed was enclosed, a clay tile floor installed, dividers were made for warehousing, bathrooms with running water, store area and glass display counters. A welfare missionary who was a registered accountant, developed a system whereby the members would bring their goods to the store, identify the same and take turns selling, under the supervision of a local member who was an accountant and who would maintain a control on all goods and operations. All was in order, lacking only the opening to the highway and arranging the parking area. Tourist, travel agencies were to be contacted inviting them to have their buses stop at the store. However, before the opening we received instructions to terminate the project.

Significant and important meetings were held in Quetzaltenango on December 9 and 10, 1978, with Elder Bradford, Dean Black and Kelly Crab from the Missionary Training Center in Provo, regarding the difficulties encountered in teaching the Indian languages in Provo, and future teaching of hundreds of languages of the countries which would certainly be opened to the teaching of the gospel (India alone has over

400 languages). These meetings were important, especially considering our discouraging experience with the first groups of missionaries trained in *Cakchiquel* and *Quiché* in Provo. I had explained our concern about this matter in a letter to the Missionary Department and petitioned authorization to resume training in the Indian languages in our mission. This was what Brother Black and Brother Crab had come to discuss with Elder Bradford and me. We were authorized to resume teaching in the mission and training in Provo would be discontinued. I feel this experience was influential in the future decision of the Brethren to establish Missionary Training Centers in other parts of the world where temples are built or in areas near the temples. It was understood during the meeting that the Provo MTC would supply blueprints for teaching materials for language training in the field, for countries such as Guatemala.

On January 15, 1979, my sister Vivian arrived at the mission and stayed with us for six months. She performed a great service, teaching music and helping the Relief Society organization in the branches of the mission.

About mid-April 1979, Elder Bradford requested that I go to Mexico City with my wife and President Benjamin Martínez of the Mexico Merida Mission, and his wife, to supervise the second missionary training program for missionaries called from Mexico and Central America. I was in charge of the group of eighty-four missionaries who were located in a hotel in downtown Mexico City. The training was conducted at the Churubusco Center, which required transporting all the missionaries to and from the center each day, on the Metro. The elders were all on one floor of the hotel and the sister missionaries on another floor. My wife and I were charged with taking care of the sisters, and I had to interview each of them. While doing so, my wife either sat in the bathroom or on the floor in the hall with some of the sisters. This was a great experience, for us and for the missionaries. Still, it was no small task, as many diverse problems had to be solved from the time the missionaries were met at the airport, until they were again placed on the airplane. This was the beginning of the missionary training program in Mexico. Dr. LeRoy Hatch, with his wife, Jean, were soon called to head up this program. He became the first Missionary Training Center President in Mexico.

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*President and Sister Willard I. Skousen  
Guatemala Guatemala City Mission 1977*



*Burtis Embry, Second Counselor  
Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission—1977*

*President Of The Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission*



*Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission Home*



*President John F. O'Donnal and Sister O'Donnal with Elder Boyd K. Packer  
at a District Conference in Momostenango, Guatemala*



*John F. O'Donnal, Elder Boyd K. Packer and Elder William R. Bradford  
at the head of the San Juan River*



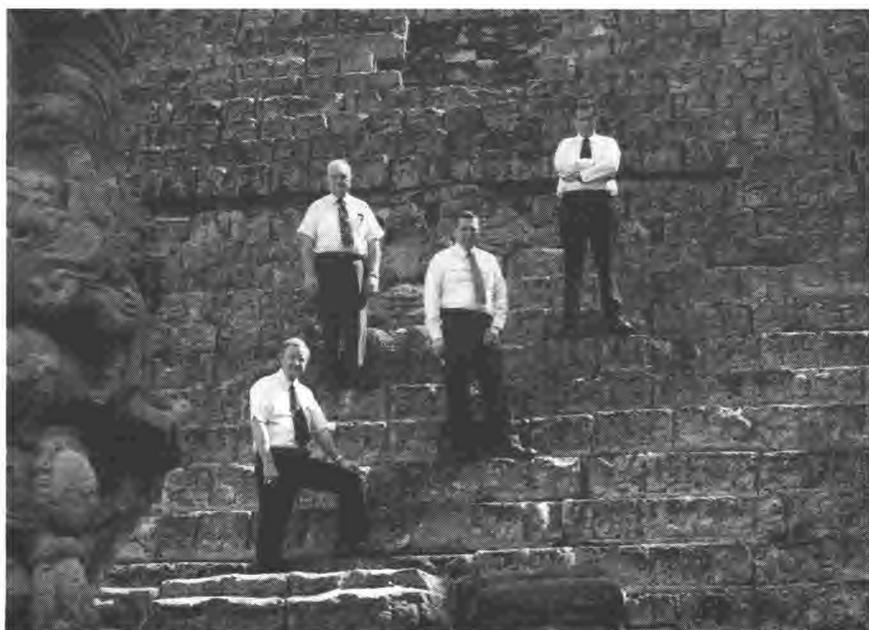
*Cumén Valley and village visited with Elder Boyd K. Packer—November 14, 1977*



*In small airplane with Elder Boyd K. Packer  
on his trip to archeological areas of Mexico and Central America in 1977  
Elder Packer, Elder William R. Bradford, Eb Davis, Willard I. Skousen, the pilot and  
John F. O'Donnal (taking the picture—the only one who was not a pilot.)*



*Elder Boyd K. Packer at Copán, Honduras Ruins*



*Elder Boyd K. Packer at Tikal, Guatemala Ruins*



*Tikal, Guatemala Ruins*



*A-frame—temporary meeting shelter at Chulac, Alta Verapaz*



*First conference held in Chulac area—September 24, 1978  
About 150 guests invited by the Branch President. The guests arrived  
as the first meeting ended, so another meeting was held for their benefit*



*Second meeting held at the conference in Chulac on September 24, 1978*

*President Of The Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission*



*Native Indian sister who attended the conference September 24, 1978*



*Delicious meal with "Caldo de Chunte," served by the branch members following the conference of September 24, 1978. They gave their all to feed the mission leaders who conducted the conference.*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*Missionaries who attended the Missionary Training Center in Mexico City, supervised by President and Sister O'Donnal from the Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission, and President and Sister Martinez from the Mexico Merida Mission*

## Chapter Fifteen

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# *Dedication Of Small Chapels And Reconstructed Patzicía Chapel*

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When the last of nine, small, rural chapels were nearing completion, Elder William R. Bradford advised us that Elder Boyd K. Packer had been assigned by the First Presidency to dedicate these historic chapels and the reconstructed chapel at Patzicía. The program was successful and had been championed by Elder Packer who, to our joy, was now assigned to dedicate them.

On June 4, 1979, Carmen and I accompanied Elder Bradford in meeting Elder Packer at the Guatemala City airport and drove to Quetzaltenango in the afternoon. In the early morning of June 5, we drove to La Grandeza, San Marcos, for the dedication of the chapel there. This was a very special and historic event, as this was the first chapel of its kind ever dedicated in the Church. After admiring the chapel from the outside and the lovely landscaped front and back gardens, Elder Packer and I entered the chapel and sat up front, observing the quiet feeling in the chapel, with members, missionaries and investigators present. After a few moments, Elder Packer placed his

hand on my knee and whispered to me, "It is here." I knew what he meant, as the Spirit was strongly felt. The meeting commenced at 10:00 a.m., with the Branch President, Manuel Faustino López, who is a great spiritual giant and a new member, thanking the authorities for the chapel and stating that the Lord now had a place to come to.

He was followed by Sister O'Donnal, who mentioned that exactly one year and eleven months ago, the branch was organized and at that time they were promised that if the members would keep the commandments, the Lord would provide a new chapel for them; that they should keep it clean, as well as their own lives, as it is the Lord's house.

President Israel Pérez then stated that as in the time of Christ and Book of Mormon times, Christ had set apart apostles, and "Today we have with us an Apostle of Christ, with the same power and authority as those of Christ's time." After which, I related how the small chapels were approved; that the prophet had approved the construction, but that this was only the beginning.

Elder Bradford then spoke, stating that this was a very historic moment. He congratulated the members on their faithfulness and exhorted them to remain faithful and to be a light unto their neighbors.

Following Elder Bradford, I translated Elder Packer's remarks. He brought the blessings of the prophet, then recalled that after a District Conference in Quetzaltenango two years before, upon returning to Salt Lake, he gave the recommendation to build these small chapels. He mentioned that this day was a very historic day, for this was the first chapel to be dedicated in a rural area anywhere in the world. He spoke particularly to the children, stating he had just met with President Kimball in Los Angeles, and that he sent his blessings; that this dedication was something to be remembered forever, especially by the children who someday would serve missions from La Grandeza to Africa, England, and Japan. He told them that the Lord had prepared all this. He then said, "We should teach the Gospel to all our sons and daughters. We now have the simplified manuals. The dedication of this chapel is only the beginning. At present a temple is being built in Mexico, and there are plans to build small temples. There will be a temple in Guatemala City, a temple in Quetzaltenango and in Cobán. President Kimball receives revelation, I am an Apostle and I receive revelation, your mission president receives revelation, as do all of our

leaders. Everyone has the right to receive revelation for their own welfare and that of their loved ones, as did Joseph Smith when he prayed." He told the fathers that they should always be loyal to their wives and wives to their husbands. He said, "This chapel is a most sacred place, and this chapel will help guide your home. The Lord is very pleased today, more pleased in fact, than when a large stake center is dedicated." He then explained the prayer and offered the dedicatory prayer.

After the dedication we returned to the Mission Home for lunch, then drove to Juchanep, Totonicapan, for the dedication of the second chapel. The chapel was filled and again the Spirit of the Lord was strongly manifest. The meeting commenced at 3:30 p.m. President Juan Batz of the Juchanep Branch was the first speaker. He directed his remarks to the members, stating that they should teach their friends, and sacrifice to obey the commandments so they will be worthy to reach eternal life and exaltation. He said he was responsible for the way he lived his life, since joining the Church. It is worth the effort to live the commandments and receive the blessings that come from obeying them. It was his desire that the chapel always be full, but that this could only happen with the help of the members.

Sister O'Donnal then spoke, stating that we had enjoyed the Spirit that day in La Grandeza and there in Juchanep. She testified that Elder Packer is an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ and was sent here by the Prophet. "As Christ sent his Apostles to teach the people, with the same authority, Apostle Packer is here to teach us. The chapel which is the house of the Lord, will be dedicated—you must keep it clean; clean your feet and your hearts of iniquity. Come here to learn and enjoy. The Spirit of God will abide here if you remain worthy," she said.

I stated that this had been a very special day; that it was 37 years ago last month when I arrived in Guatemala, the only member of the Church as far as I know. It was my desire to be faithful and bring the Gospel to this people. "When I became president of the mission, I knew that we must bring the gospel to all of you here in these beautiful mountains. These small chapels are a part of my dream. It is a blessing to have an Apostle of the Lord with us and to testify with us that this is the true church—the only true and living church. We wish all to know this, to add to the truths they now have. Teach your children the gospel.

Repent of your errors and perfect your lives in Christ. Help bring others into the Church through baptism with authority from the Lord.”

Elder Bradford then spoke these words: “I have had the opportunity to study the Book of Mormon and the history of its people, and I received this truth, of which the Branch President spoke. Because of our faith we are obligated to God at this time, to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to these parts of the earth once again. This is the only true Gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to be like the prophets of old, strong in the faith, and preach the gospel to the rest of the world. You are of the House of Israel. If you are faithful, we are going to have more chapels like this one, in all parts of the land. I say that I am your brother, and feel honored to be here with an Apostle of the Lord, serving in his work.”

While Elder Bradford was speaking, Elder Packer placed his hand on my arm and leaned over and whispered to me, “I feel I would like to give you a special blessing later.” When Elder Bradford concluded, Elder Packer spoke. He said: “I don't speak much Spanish, but I want to try. Sisters will you sing for me once more.” The Young Women sang again, “I Am A Child of God” in Spanish and *Quiché*, after which I translated his remarks: “Last Sunday I was in Los Angeles, California, with the prophet and we were in the Los Angeles Temple. I bring the love of the Prophet to you. He has much love for the members in the south and especially for the Indians. My first visit to Guatemala was five years ago, when I came to Quetzaltenango. Now Quetzaltenango is a stake. Two years ago we were in Ecuador looking for a place to build a building in similar circumstances, I saw a wooden stake in the ground, and the Spirit said to me that some day there will be a stake here, high in the mountains. This is a small chapel, but it is just as good as any other big Church building, and the Spirit is here. I want you to help the missionaries we have working here. The gospel was restored by the Lord, but before it was restored, never was there a time when there was an evil power that the Lord did not have more power over.

He continued, “We lived with our Father in Heaven. Sometimes we can almost remember back to the time before we were born. As we grow older we learn more or remember more. We came to earth for two reasons—one is to receive a body. It is like a house for our spirit. Some day we will die and it will be called a mortal death. Our spirit and our

body will be separated for a season. Our body will stay in the ground and our spirit will want to go to see our Heavenly Father, but we have to be clean to be in the presence of God. If our spirit gets dirty it can be cleaned. If we cannot get it clean we cannot return to our Father in Heaven--this is a second death, the separation of the spirit from God. How can we clean our spirit? 1) Faith in the Lord, 2) Repentance, 3) Baptism. Baptism is like washing ourselves; then we are clean. But there is a problem in keeping our spirit clean, and when we make a mistake, we dirty our spirit. The Sacrament is like being baptized again; we renew our covenants again. Come here on Sunday to renew your covenants with the Lord. Don't stay home on Sundays, so that your children can learn to be clean. We teach that we need to be pure, and to work. Here they can learn to partake of the Sacrament and be missionaries and teach the gospel to your people. Fathers be faithful to your wives. Mothers be faithful to your husbands, and parents be faithful to your children. We are making history here. New, small chapels will be built in all the world, and it began here in Guatemala. "This is the house of the Lord and will always have his Spirit here." He then dedicated the chapel.

Rejoicing in the Spirit that had accompanied us in the services of this special day, we returned to the mission home. This wonderful, uplifting of the Spirit continued with us, and in fulfillment of what Elder Packer had mentioned to me in Juchanep, he and Elder Bradford placed their hands on my head, there in the quiet and peace of my office, with my dear wife present, and Elder Packer pronounced a wonderful blessing upon me, in which he blessed my wife, our children and our children's children, promising that we would be together in happiness in the Kingdom of our Father in Heaven. What joy this brought into my heart, knowing without a doubt that the person pronouncing this blessing is an anointed servant and an Apostle of the Lord, and knowing that it was as if the Lord Himself had pronounced this marvelous blessing. Elder Packer then asked Elder Bradford to give a blessing to my wife, in which I participated, pronouncing upon her a beautiful blessing also. What an honor and a special privilege this was for both of us. In his blessing, Elder Packer set me apart as a Regional Representative, as I had been called, to take effect as soon as I was released as mission president.

Early the following morning, June 6, we drove in a 4-wheel drive vehicle to Santa Ana, Momostenango, where the third chapel was dedicated. The discourses and dedicatory prayer were translated into *Quiché* for the benefit of members and investigators in this area, many who do not speak or understand Spanish. The chapel was filled and people were looking in the windows, and the same sweet spirit was present. When we entered the small chapel, the branch president, a young man, Sebastian Itzep, sat reading his Bible in Spanish, although the meeting was to be conducted in *Quiché*. He was so intent that he paid little attention to us. He was asked to speak first and read Matthew 8:20—"The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath no where to lay his head." He then broke down in tears, and when he regained composure, he said, "Now the Lord has a place. Now we have a chapel, and the Lord has a place to lay His head." He expressed his happiness for having an Apostle in Santa Ana, and his joy of having the chapel dedicated to the Lord.

President Gustavo Lang, my second counselor, followed, stating that since the time of Moses, God has given His children commandments to build places to meet; quoting Isaiah 56:7-8. "Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer... for my house shall be called an house of prayer for all people. The Lord God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, yet will I gather others to him besides those that are gathered unto him." "The chapel may be small," he said, "but the missionary work is growing very rapidly."

Sister O'Donnal then spoke, referring to Luke 10:21-24, and said that the members are few but are seeing great things here in Santa Ana. She said, "Although D&C 97:15-16 speaks of temples, it can also apply to this little chapel. Brothers and sisters, you have to clean yourselves both physically and spiritually when you enter this chapel. This is not yours, but the Lord's house."

I then explained what it means to dedicate a chapel. Explaining also the different types of buildings and the purposes of chapels and sacred temples where your families can be sealed together for the eternities; and that other churches do not have the priesthood authority.

Elder Bradford related the following: "I remember the morning my wife and I and President and Sister O'Donnal knelt together among the trees where this chapel now stands, and prayed that the Church

would prosper here. I, acting as voice, prayed that the people in these parts would accept the gospel and not be conquered by Satan; that they would enjoy good crops and have happy homes. Today is a realization of this prayer. The purpose of this chapel is to give you a place to worship God. Generations of people are going to learn in this chapel, erasing the false traditions of their ancestors. Many will receive revelations and visions." He then added, "No one can be in the presence of an Apostle and not feel of his spirit and remain the same. Listen to his words and make good use of them in your lives."

Elder Packer then spoke before dedicating the chapel, and these are his words. "I bring you the blessings of President Kimball. It is beautiful here in Santa Ana. I have visited Guatemala several times and know how you live. The most sacred building in the church is not the temple, but rather your home. Things we do and do not do are taught in church, so that you can practice it in the home. The gospel is like a map. If we follow it we will be happy. I would like to share with you an experience that happened in Switzerland. This is a land of high mountains covered with snow. To reach Italy you have to go over these mountains, over very treacherous paths. A mission president had a group of missionaries with him en route to Italy. Some of the missionaries were not obedient and did not want to follow the mission rules. On the trail, some of the snow had melted underneath. It looked perfectly safe, but really was not. If they were to fall, it meant certain death. How would they know the way? Someone before had marked the trail with tall poles that the snow did not cover. All one had to do was follow the trail the poles pointed out, and he would be safe. When the mission president and the missionaries finally reached the top, the president turned and pointed to the trail by which they had come. He then taught them a lesson. He indicated each one of the poles and said, 'Do you see those poles by which we were able to climb the mountain? If those poles had not been there, we probably could not have made it. Those poles are like the Priesthood. If you follow them you will be safe, if you stray away, you will fall to your death.' The mission president then told the missionaries to remember the lesson. Sometimes our leaders look like ordinary plain poles. Nothing special. But they have been chosen by God to lead us, so we must follow them. Who will lead the Church in Santa Ana? The mission president? No. The missionaries? No. One of you will lead here. Sometimes members say,

'I will not follow him he is just a common stick, he does not look wise.' Be careful! You will fall to your death!" "Why did we build this chapel?" He continued. "So you can learn to follow your leaders. I am very pleased with these buildings. We have larger and smaller buildings, but none better, because the Spirit of the Lord is here. If you will bow your heads and close your eyes with me, I will offer the dedicatory prayer."

From Santa Ana the party drove to Momostenango, accompanied by President Lang, and from there traveled on to Canquixajá, stopping by the roadside for a picnic lunch prepared by Sister O'Donnal. The dedication of the Canquixajá chapel was carried out in the same manner as the Santa Ana chapel and there was again an outpouring of the Spirit. Alberto Ordoñez, the Branch President gave the opening remarks, expressing the happiness and gratitude he felt for having Elder Packer, an apostle, in Canquixajá. Also, that the Lord is very pleased to see His work going forward.

President Lang then explained the history of the branch. "It started when Santiago Acabal came to my home very sick. At the time, I gave him a blessing and he was healed. Since he was cured he came to me once again to thank the Lord. A short time later, we had the first meeting in Brother Acabal's home, with 85 in attendance. Shortly after, there was another meeting held, and this time 120 attended. This was before the missionaries were assigned to this area."

Sister O'Donnal then said she remembered when this branch was first organized. She observed that many of the men had become inactive, then referred to Romans 1:18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." She told them it was the responsibility of the members to bring back into activity those who have strayed from paths of righteousness; to remember the importance of fasting and prayer and the importance of being clean; that they must leave the chapel today with the Spirit of the Lord as a testimony and a light to those who do not have it.

District President, Francisco Rosales then bore his testimony, after which I expressed the following: "You are very blessed to have the gospel here in Canquixajá. When President Lang first started the work here, the Spirit was very strong and it is still strong. But recently, Satan has used some members to try to destroy the truth. Some say that we

have come only to deceive. However, the people said the same thing of Christ in his day. Do not let people deceive you! The Lord wants everyone to be happy and that their crops be abundant and that every facet of life be better and that you will progress in every way. Because of this, we have been sent. Is this chapel a deceit? No. The Lord wants you to grow and progress. For this he has given you this chapel."

Elder Bradford then spoke saying: "It is very important that you capture the spirit of this meeting today. So that you can take it to your homes and teach it to your families. Your history as a people is a very promised one. You are a remnant of the House of Israel and your ancestors prayed continually for you. There are a lot of sisters here today. You, the women, may be the way to teach the gospel to the men and teach them so they remain firm. You are very blessed to have an Apostle of the Lord here. Listen to him closely."

Elder Packer gave the following message: "I am especially happy to see little children. I once had a very special experience with a little boy in Cusco, Peru. Cusco is 13,000 feet above sea level. First we visited a missionary that was up in a very high building. He was very sick. We administered to him and he was healed immediately. Later that night we attended a meeting. During the meeting, I noticed a little boy that had come in the back. He only had a shirt on and it was very cold. He probably came in to get warm. Then he saw the Sacrament bread, his hunger overcame his fear, and he slowly started sliding towards the bread. He worked his way along the wall until one woman saw him, and with one of those get-out-of-here looks, she motioned him to get out. The boy, filled with fear, ran out of the room. I was filled with sadness and wanted to cry. However, a little later the boy came back. I intended to teach the members a little lesson. When the boy started to come up, I brought him up front and sat him in President Tuttle's seat, to show that he was welcome. I wanted to teach them that maybe someday that boy might be a future leader. He sat with me until the meeting ended and with that he ran out, before I could stop him. I have never seen him since. I have often wondered about this boy, he is now old enough to be a missionary. I wonder, is he a member? Is he married? If so, do his sons come to church? Sometimes missionaries are very excited because they get to meet a president of a country or a king. Will they join the church? No, it is the common people." He further stated, "The Branch President is the one that leads here.

Revelation is for everyone, even the children. The children will have the opportunity to grow in the Church, something more than what their fathers had. When I was little, I went to a meeting where Apostle George Albert Smith stood to speak. It was then that I gained a testimony. That was over fifty years ago. I cannot remember what he said, or anything of his talk, but I remember that when he spoke I knew he was telling the truth—the word of God." Elder Packer then offered the dedicatory prayer.

I might explain here, some of the remarks made in our talks. President Lang mentioned the wonderful outpouring of the Spirit when the work first was initiated in this beautiful mountain valley of Canquixajá. Miracles had been experienced among these good people. Sister O'Donnal mentioned the falling away of the brethren. In my talk I referred to the fact the Satan had succeeded in leading some of the brethren away. Elder Bradford talking to the many sisters who were present mentioned they should teach their husbands and help them to remain firm. What happened here is what happens so many times when the Lord's work is making great progress. In Canquixajá there was a great spiritual beginning. But this being a remote mountain area of Guatemala, the leftist guerrilla movement had selected this area for much of their clandestine activities, including a portable radio station. They had come among the men in the area, including branch leaders, and persuaded many to work with them for which they were paid. This activity brought the wrath of the government and the army, in an attempt to clean up the area. They took some prisoners and killed many. Others of the men left with the guerrillas; thus leaving this little branch with few male members. The situation has since improved much and the work is going forward.

Following the dedication of the Canquixajá chapel, with Elders Packer and Bradford we drove to our lovely home on the shore of Lake Atitlán, which was near the remaining six chapels to be dedicated. We were all tired and in need of rest. Elder Packer told us to leave the dishes until morning as there would be time and we need not get up before seven. When Carmen and I came from our room before seven, we found that our special guests had washed the dishes without making a sound, and set the table for breakfast. This was somewhat embarrassing to us, and when I stepped out onto the verandah, Elder Packer was standing in the garden below. Those who know Elder

Packer know he loves the outdoors and he especially loves to watch birds and is an expert ornithologist. Looking up at me, he said, "Forres, come down here, you have a problem." I thought, "Oh no, we should have gotten up earlier." But then he said, "What are you going to do when you get to the Celestial Kingdom and find it is not this beautiful?" I love this great Apostle of the Lord.

On June 7, 1979, we had scheduled dedicatory services for three small chapels, beginning with San Andrés Semetabaj. Many members, friends and missionaries awaited our arrival before entering the chapel, which was filled for the service. As the services began, a paneled vehicle with a transmitter and loudspeaker stopped on the street in front of the chapel only a few yards away, and commenced playing loud music which was very disturbing and made it almost impossible to hear the speakers in the chapel. Elder Packer asked one of the missionaries to "step out and kindly request that the music be turned down." The man replied that he had been paid to do this and he had his rights and turned up the volume. Again the Elder requested that the man turn down the volume, but he would not. After a few seconds the man turned pale, turned off the transmitter and drove away.

President José Angel Batz began the meeting by bearing his testimony. Sister O'Donnal followed and explained the history of the Indian people who had fought for their liberty. "Great promises were made for you by Lehi, which you have a right to claim. You all should follow the example of one of your sister members, Noemi, who has worked hard with the lady missionaries. Your chapel is sacred, but your homes are even more sacred. You must keep them both clean. Follow the example of Nephi and the other Book of Mormon prophets. Be not afraid to do anything the Lord wants you to do," she said.

I followed Sister O'Donnal and explained the program of construction of small chapels, the Lord's desire that the gospel be taken to the people in the rural areas and giving them a place to learn and worship the Lord. I mentioned that only a few hundred meters from the chapel where we were, a tomb that is over 1,500 years old is being uncovered and investigated. It could be that of one of their ancestors. "You need to learn to be good members, for this the Lord has given you this chapel. Be firm and teach your children," I exclaimed.

Elder Bradford said the following: "These small chapels are the realization of many of my dreams, desires and wishes. I would like to mention the importance of the Priesthood. It is the same power the prophets of old had and used. It is available to everyone according to their worthiness. You are the few who have received this truth. You are the way to take the gospel to the rest of the House of Israel. You have an Apostle in your presence. Prepare yourselves to receive his counsel."

Elder Packer then said, "Last Sunday I was in Los Angeles with President Kimball and he sends his love and greetings. He really loves this people. This is the fifth building we have dedicated. This is a very special meeting--a dedication of this building to the Lord. We can say this building is ours, but we are going to give it to the Lord. Then it will be His building and His Spirit will always dwell here. I would like to talk to you about how special the children are. My memory is not as good anymore--I cannot memorize as well now. However, when I was a little boy I could memorize very well. In fact, I memorized a poem when I was a little boy and I can still quote it now, forty-five years later. Why? Because I was a little boy when I memorized it. That is why it is important that the children are brought to church--so they can learn. The other day I told President O'Donnal his son was better than he is. Did he get upset or mad? No, do you know why? Because it was a compliment. If the son is better than the father, that means the father has taught his son well and the son was able to progress. Why is the son's being better a compliment? Because the son is his pride and joy and the father wants his son to be the best. So if the son is better, that means the father has succeeded in rearing his son." "Who will be the leaders here?" He continued. "The missionaries? No, the missionaries are to teach, not to direct. You might think we have great missionaries, with power and intelligence, etc. Why not have them lead? Because the Lord has promised that he will give this power unto all nations. So your leaders will be chosen from among you, and you will lead. Maybe your first tries will not be great; you will make mistakes. But you will learn. That is the purpose. For example, you have priesthood leaders, and the Relief Society for the women, to help you learn. You might also say, 'It is better for Elder Packer to give a blessing to someone who is sick,

than a missionary or a priesthood holder from here.' No, it is better for the Elders to give a blessing than for me to give it. Here is a lesson. President David O. McKay visited a town where there was a boy with a bad pain in his leg. He had cancer and was ready to die. This family lived on a farm and with the boy sick in bed, it left only the father to care for the farm work. They lived in a very cold climate. Well, one night a water tap outside the house was left dripping. Because it was very cold, the dripping water made a big slab of ice underneath the faucet. The father saw the dripping faucet and decided to turn it off, so he stepped on the ice and slipped and fell, killing him instantly. The mother was very stricken by the death of her husband and with her son on the verge of death also. She attended the dedication of a new chapel in the town. President McKay was dedicating the building. While there, the mother pleaded with President McKay to give her boy with cancer a blessing so she would not be left alone with the farm after losing her husband. President McKay answered, 'No, have a local authority do it.' What a lesson. President McKay once said that if he blessed everyone that asked him, he would not have the strength to perform his duties as a Prophet. The Apostles' office is to give the local authorities the power and authority to perform the work and services needed. That is the reason for these chapels. So that the fullness of the gospel will be here. We have the scripture--the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price. President O'Donnal knows the scriptures. The missionaries study the scriptures. But that is not enough. You have to study and learn them also. You see the curtains of this chapel? They are here for this purpose, to be divided into classrooms so everyone can be taught at their level. Continue in your occupations, but learn the gospel so that you can be happy. That is what chapels are for. Now a word on revelation. The District Leader receives revelation. Nevertheless, more important is the fact that every person can receive revelation if they only ask for it."

There was a special outpouring of the Spirit and a mighty and powerful blessing was offered by Elder Packer, upon the building, the grounds, the village and the entire area. We then drove to Tecpán which had been the capital of the *Cakchiquel* Kingdom at the time of the Spanish Conquest. But the influence of Satan had

arrived before us. There we found that the personnel of the Church Construction and Maintenance Department in Guatemala City, with no authorization to do so, had changed the time of our meeting, both in Tecpán and in Patzún. In Tecpán there was no one to welcome us or attend the dedicatory service. The missionaries hurriedly gathered as many members as they could find, which were few. Elder Packer held a short meeting with the four missionaries and other members of the party, assuring us all would be well and that we should go ahead with the dedication as planned with the few that were present, among them a number of small boys. The services were held with a great spirit.

Candido Miranda, the Group Leader, was asked to speak first. He gave a warm welcome to the authorities and expressed, that even though the group was small, there are many great blessings in store for them.

Sister O'Donnal then expressed her deep sentiments thus: "I remember when I was here in Tecpán, three days after the earthquake had destroyed the town. I was here with all of you, crying. My soul hurts to see that Satan has stained the beauty of this special day. At times I am very emotional and my Lamanite blood boils." She then bore a strong testimony.

Next, with deep sorrow, I expressed my feelings. "Today we are all sorry for what has happened, but we should look at these circumstances as blessings in disguise. Missionaries have been here off and on for several years. Satan is working very hard in this area. But we can overcome! For, the last time I was here I promised you that if you as members here in Tecpán will live faithfully, this town will be conquered, and there will be a ward here, and then a stake. When I had to select which towns would receive one of these special chapels, there was doubt whether to put Tecpán on the list. I put it on the list, but then I took it off. Then I put it on again, then I took it off again. Finally, I put it on the list because the Spirit dictated, and today you have a lovely chapel. Now I promise you the Church will never be taken from here."

Elder Bradford said the following words: "As we entered this town I noticed that many people are in town today because it is a market day. Upon entering I thought, 'If only these people could comprehend the fact or even knew an Apostle of the Lord was

entering this town.' If you young people could understand the significance of this meeting, it could be the most important meeting of your lives."

Elder Packer in his Apostolic authority then spoke. "You know, I am at peace. There are some things that we know. As I travel the world in the Lord's work, it is very evident that Satan is trying hard to destroy His work. Satan never ignores this work. But the forces of righteousness are always greater than the forces of evil. All of you young ones will remember this day, this meeting, all of your lives. When you are grown you will stand at the pulpit telling of when the members in Tecpán were few and how the first little chapel was dedicated. If you want an easy church to belong to, this is not the one. In the Church of Jesus Christ everything is required. The Church will grow here with your faith. You cannot be discouraged, you cannot be frightened, fear is the opposite of faith. We are not frightened. We have faith. Be assured I will pray for you for many years to come. No matter where I will go, I shall pray for you. If I have to, I will pray and the Church will grow here and I could do it all alone! But you need to pray also and we will help the Church to grow. When discouragement comes, we have to pick ourselves up and continue going ahead. You young ones need to pray every day and you will become great leaders in your country and in the Church. You will be called as missionaries and will serve in different parts of the world--some in England, some in Japan and in other places as well as in your own country among your people. I have been in more than seventy countries testifying that Jesus is the Christ, that Joseph Smith was a prophet and he restored the Church, and that it is Christ's only church. Yes, I feel at peace. Now, if you will bow your heads and close your eyes, I will offer the dedicatory prayer." This was another beautiful prayer in which Elder Packer drove back the forces of Satan from the town and its surrounding areas. He blessed the people and especially the small boys and promised them many wonderful blessings.

We had lunch in a nearby restaurant. After lunch we drove to Patzún, where there had been time to reschedule the meeting as originally programmed. The chapel was filled to overflowing. Elder Packer enjoyed meeting and talking with the members. Sitting on

the lawn, he conversed with the children. At each chapel dedication he directed his remarks especially to the children.

As usual, the Branch President was asked to speak first. President Miguel Ajpop counseled the members to be clean, strengthen their testimonies and of the importance of always being good, faithful members of the Church.

Sister O'Donnal expressed the following: "I remember two years ago at one of your meetings my husband and I attended, in the closing prayer that was offered it was asked, 'Bless us Lord, that we may be worthy of a chapel'. Well, now you have it. Do not be discouraged, for you are very blessed descendants of Father Lehi. Keep the house of the Lord clean. Do not throw papers and garbage on the floor. Keep it clean from the things of the world also, for it is sacred."

I then said, "I would like to thank you for coming to this dedication in the rain. We are sorry for the confusion in the schedule. Satan is always trying to stop this, the Lord's work. I would like to congratulate you for starting your gardens. The Lord knows what you need and will guide you. You were promised additional classrooms, and you will get them. This is not an easy church. If you want an easy church, you must go to another, but this is the true church and there is no other true church. If you pay your tithing honestly, the Lord will bless you. I have a testimony that Elder Packer is truly an Apostle of the Lord. He has the same power and authority as the original apostles that were with Jesus Christ. You are very privileged to have him here in your presence. Listen carefully to what he tells us.

Elder Bradford's words, in part, were as follows: "Today I would like to bear testimony to you of the importance of our testimonies. When I was a little boy my grandmother took me on her lap and testified to me that Joseph Smith was a prophet. That testimony has remained with me and is still in my heart and mind. Grandmothers, grandfathers and parents, it is your sacred obligation to testify to your children and to teach them that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, and to teach them the principles of the gospel."

Again we were blessed to listen to Elder Packer's words: "I have a message for you from President Spencer W. Kimball—that he loves you. In my family we have ten children and now fifteen

grandchildren. The children are very important, and I have been impressed with the number of little children. Children learn faster, so teach them. They need to learn. I would like to share with you a story my mother told me when I was a little boy. My parents were very poor and lived on a farm. They had very little. One day a beggar came to the door and knocked. My mother was very afraid because he was a big man. Nevertheless, she answered the door and asked the beggar what he wanted. He asked her for some money to buy some food. He said he was hungry. She was afraid of this man and she had no money, so she prepared a sandwich for him and gave it to him. She told him she had no money but she could give him some food. He was not happy and mumbled something then turned and walked away. He walked a little way, and when he thought Mother was not looking, he threw the sandwich into the field. Mother was watching, and when she saw this, she was upset. Since she did not have a lot of food, it made her angry that he would just throw away good food. After this incident, sometime later, another knock came at their door. This time it was a tall, thin boy who said, 'We are hungry and need help. Will you please help us?' She looked at him and remembered the first incident. She said, 'No, we cannot help you.' He looked sad and turned and walked away. It was then that Mother saw there was a wagon with a family, and that they really did need help. But before she could stop them, they drove away. My mother always told me, 'Never turn away the needy.' This story my mother told me over fifty years ago, and I still remember it now. That is why it is so important that children come to church and learn. The Church is here for this purpose. For this purpose this chapel was built, to teach the children. Why did God choose a fourteen-year-old boy to be his prophet? Because boys are believers. Old men sometimes are skeptics. The youth are so important. Also, inspiration is for everyone. If President O'Donnal has a problem, he prays and he receives, by inspiration, a solution from God. It happens to everyone, especially to parents. Sometimes parents know their children should not do something, but if the children do not obey and do what they are told not to do, they will have problems. Sometimes children will say, 'My parents do not understand, and I will do what I want to do.' But then they find the parents really did understand and now they are in trouble. So

they learn a little at a time. Next time they will listen to their parents and they will learn.

“And now concerning the line of authority. If a blessing needs to be given, who would be the best to give it? Some would say it would be better if Elder Packer gave the blessing, or that it would be better for the Branch President to give the blessing. No, the father should give it. I was once visiting a town and a sister approached me and asked me to bless one of her relatives. I told her I would rather not and that it would be better if one of the local authorities did it. But she insisted, so I said I would go. When we arrived we found she had invited many people and was going to make it a big affair and a miracle healing for everyone there. When we entered the house I asked where the father of the boy that was to be blessed was. I asked him if he held the Melchizedek Priesthood. He said he did, so I asked him if he would bless his boy, because he was the father. He did and it was a beautiful blessing. The sister was very upset with me because I had the father give the blessing instead of me giving it. Later, the boy died, but that is not the end of the story. They said that after the father had given his son the blessing, he and his boy had grown very close. Before there had not been a closeness between the boy and his father. That blessing had brought them very close together and that was marvelous. Now if you will bow your heads and close your eyes I will offer the dedicatory prayer.”

Following the dedication we returned to our home on the shore of Lake Atitlán to spend the night. The last two small chapels were scheduled for dedication the following day, June 8, 1979. We drove first to Comalapa where we were met by the few faithful members, among whom were several boys and girls. Elder Packer again directed his remarks especially towards the children. A somewhat similar situation exists here as in Canquixajá, concerning the guerrilla forces.

After opening exercises, the Branch President, Rigoberto Miza, was asked to give the opening remarks. He gave a cordial welcome to the visiting authorities, and expressed how thankful the members were for the new chapel.

Sister O'Donnal then expressed her feelings. “I remember two years ago when we held a meeting on this same street in the Rodríguez's home. The same members that were there are here

today. It really does not appear we have had much progress. It is not the fault of the missionaries or the members, but it is Satan's influence. Oh, if only the people of the town knew that an Apostle was in their town and would recognize him. When I see these empty chairs, I realize there is much to be done. The people here are very set in their traditions and ways, but with faith and the strength of our testimonies we can overcome. It is a great blessing for you to have an Apostle in your midst. It is difficult for the missionaries here, but the Lord knows Comalapa will change its ways and traditions. That is why He has sent missionaries and has had this chapel built here."

I spoke next. "We cannot appreciate the full significance of this special day. I also recall the day when this town was opened to missionary work, and when the great earthquake struck and hundreds lost their lives. I do not think the hardness of the hearts of this people is because of their wickedness, but rather they have been deceived by their priests and ministers. I promise you that if you are faithful, this town will see the light of the gospel. If you are obedient, you will have good crops, good health and means to support your families; you will know right from wrong. This chapel is a place to learn the gospel so you can live it in your homes and with your families."

Elder Bradford then spoke. "There are prettier and more elegant chapels, but none more important. We need to understand just what this chapel is. It is a sacred place where we come to learn the gospel. Christ said, 'What manner of men ought ye to be? Even as I am.' This is where we come to learn to be Christ-like. Remember how sacred your homes are. We are not here by chance, but because the Lord has a purpose for us."

Elder Boyd K. Packer gave the following message: "I bring greetings from President Kimball to all of you here. When entering these small chapels I have thought they are like seeds. Now they are very small, but ready to grow into something big." He then related the following story:

"My father-in-law has a ranch. On this ranch are many wild horses. Our son had a little colt that was his, but was not ready to ride. We left for a mission, and some time later, when we returned and went to the ranch, we found the colt had grown into a big

stallion. My son realized it had been running with the wild horses while we were away. We spent a whole day looking for this horse. With some effort we were finally able to get him into the corral. Breaking a horse is a gradual process. The horse had to be left tied up for a few days. My son loved the horse and spent all day with it. Finally he went in the house for dinner, but ate very quickly so he could be out with his horse again. I told my son that under no condition should the horse be untied. While the rest of the family was eating dinner, he untied the horse. The horse reared up, and in order to hold the horse, my son wrapped the rope around his hand. When I saw my boy the horse had started running and his steps were getting larger and larger until he was taking great big leaps. Still the horse was running faster than the boy ever could. So the horse started to drag him. Fortunately, the horse was confused as to where the gate was, turned the wrong way and ran into a corner of the corral. While the horse was frantically trying to find his way out, I was able to release the rope from my boy's hand. With some effort we had the horse under control once again, and tied up in the corral. If the horse had turned the other way, it would have gone through the gate and up into the mountains and my son would have been killed. But he only came away a little bruised. Afterwards, I decided we needed a little talk. I told him the horse was bigger and stronger than him and it always would be. That if he wanted to ever train his horse, he would have to use his head and not his muscles. I was not mad at him, but rather with myself, because I had failed to teach him to never wrap a rope around his hand. For my mistake he was almost killed. Bad habits are like ropes wrapped around a hand--First one, then two and then more, each one pulling us a little harder. Pretty soon we are taking bigger and bigger steps to try to keep up. After a very short while the ropes tighten up on our hands and we cannot let go, consequently we are being dragged around by our sins. We come to this chapel to learn not to wrap the ropes of sin around our hands like Satan wants us to have. He wants you to be dragged down. We come to this chapel to learn to live the gospel. There are not very many members in this town. I speak in some settings where there are more people present at the meeting than there are in this whole town. Why? Because they come to hear an Apostle speak. Why not here? Because we are just beginning here.

But some day we will have other buildings and chapels in Comalapa. I am not discouraged. I see a seed here and know it will become like a flower. Learn the gospel and some day the world will be obedient like you. You will never forget what happened here today, some of you will tell your grandchildren that you were here for the dedication of the first small chapel in Comalapa. Then there will be many chapels." The dedicatory prayer followed.

Following this spiritual feast, the good sisters served us refreshments. We then drove to San Andrés Itzapa, where we were met by members and friends. The members, as in all the rural branches, are very humble people with meager material blessings. Yet, in this branch there was a special spirit which we all felt. The difference was made manifest as we moved about among the members in the nicely landscaped yard and prepared to start the meeting. A small elderly sister, clean and radiant, approached us. Her spirit was different. She came forward and embraced Elder Packer and said, "I have been to the temple." Before returning to her seat, she introduced her son, the branch president, and explained that he too had been to the temple. President Francisco Silva was dressed in a white suit and was accompanied by his lovely wife who was also neatly dressed. This made the difference, and Elder Packer expressed to me that he was impressed.

President Silva was invited to speak first. He expressed gratitude for the great blessing of having an Apostle in Itzapa. He said the gospel is giving light to all the people in this town. He then bore a strong testimony.

Sister O'Donnal was the next speaker. She said, "Every chapel dedication reminds me of the first meetings in these places. Here in Itzapa a small group met in a building with a tin roof, and when it rained one could not hear what was being said. Now you have this lovely new chapel. I feel there are other persons in attendance here today--our ancestors who have died. We have a great responsibility to help our dead, including those who are dead in spirit. Those who died in the earthquake, those who died at the hands of the Spaniards and all others. They are here and I feel a great need to save them. You are the way to save those who have died. You need to fast and pray for this generation."

My message was: "Yes, we think back to the beginning. There was a good reception of the message of the gospel here. Satan has worked hard among the members as he always does, and some have left the Church because of his lies and deceptions. However, we will continue and go forward and Satan will not win. This new program of construction of small chapels will continue throughout the world. Yes, the gospel will go to all the world."

Elder Bradford gave this message: "The building of these small chapels has been an experiment for all the world. We have tried it here in Guatemala to see if it would work. It has been a great success and now the program will go to all the world. It is here in the chapel where we learn to make our homes sacred, as they should be."

Elder Packer's message was: "This is the ninth chapel to be dedicated here. Ten chapels in one country is really history. Last year I was in Africa and I dedicated eight chapels. I remember in my youth, it was always exciting to have a general authority at one of our meetings. Well, I can tell you that we gain even more, as general authorities, from your spirit as members. I would like to tell you about an experience that happened in San Andrés Semetabaj. (He then related what had happened to the man that was playing the loud music in front of the chapel during the dedication). We do not fight. If other people want to criticize, let them. We do not have time to answer. There is the story of Nehemiah in the Old Testament. Nehemiah had been commissioned to build a wall around Jerusalem, to protect the city. The men that were against him and his righteousness, mocked him and said that the wall could not be built. They said even a fox could destroy this wall. Later, these evil men, Sanballat and Tobiah, saw that the wall was nearing completion, they were very upset and left the city. Then they became worried because they knew they could not get back inside, so they drew up a plan to kill Nehemiah. They sent messengers asking him to come outside the city, on the plain, to counsel. But because he was a man of God, he knew they were plotting to take his life. So what did he say? He sent messengers to the plain saying, 'I am doing a great work, I do not have time to go down. Why should I go down and the work cease while I am gone to you?'

I will not go down.’ The gates were closed and the people were saved from harm.

“Let me touch another point of doctrine. We have temples, why should we go to the temple? Let us talk about China. There are millions of people in China who have never heard the name of Jesus Christ. In Guatemala there are thousands that have never been taught correctly. There is a story in the Bible of when John and Peter were going into the temple. At the gate was a lame man asking for money. Peter and John looked at him and Peter said, ‘Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise and walk.’ The name of Christ and baptism--this is a question for all churches. Ask them and see if they can answer. Why would God, being all powerful and kind, not make the only two things necessary for salvation available to the greatest part of the people who have existed on this earth? They have no answer. We do--Baptism for the dead. I ask you, do you have the names and dates of your fathers and grandfathers? Some day they will be called for. I met with President Kimball in the Los Angeles Temple, with thousands of temple workers. We talked about temples. There will be tens and then thousands of temples. Here we have a small church, then there will be a larger one, then a larger one and more and more until there are thousands of churches.

“While my son was on his mission, at one time he had a companion who was very large and a very good athlete. One day the young people in the town were giving them a really hard time, throwing rocks and spitting on them, etc., until this great big athlete could take it no longer and he started to go after them. My son said he had to use every bit of strength he had to hold his companion back. He grabbed him around the chest and arms and held him from going after the youth. He said, ‘It is all right, let them spit on us and throw rocks at us, they can fight but they will never win.’ We will win. We don’t have time to fight. This work will continue until all have it. That is what we need to do. We will succeed and win. The work will continue.” The chapel was then dedicated.

At the closing of this special service, we drove to Guatemala City where we attended a Mission Conference of the Guatemala Guatemala City Mission. Both Elder Packer and Elder Bradford

gave important instructions to the missionaries. Elder Packer made an interesting comment, which expressed his love for the rural highland missionary program in Guatemala, when he said, "The other day I met President Kimball in the hallway of the Church Office Building and he told me he had my son's missionary papers on his desk, and asked me where I would like him to serve his mission. To which I replied, 'Wherever the Lord wants him to go.' But if he asks me where I would like my next son to go, I would be tempted to say, 'Send him into these highland mountains of Guatemala.'" "

We spent the night at the Mission Home, with President and Sister Willard I. Skousen. On June 9, Elder Packer and Elder Bradford spent the morning in meetings and interviews, with the realignment of three stakes and the organization of a new stake in Guatemala City. In the afternoon Carmen and I spent several hours shopping with Elder Packer, who loves to shop in antique shops.

The following morning there was a tri-stake Conference General Session, during which a new Regional Representative was named, two new Stake Presidents and High Councils were sustained, and a new stake was organized. After the conference we drove with Elder Packer and Elder Bradford and President and Sister Skousen, to Patzicia for the dedication of the chapel that had been reconstructed after having been destroyed in the earthquake of February 1976. The Area Office in Mexico City had planned to build a small chapel to replace the larger one destroyed in the earthquake, but as mission president, I insisted the chapel be rebuilt on the same foundation as the original chapel. Now the chapel was to be dedicated.

The chapel was filled to overflowing and there was a beautiful manifestation of the Spirit. I have listened to Elder Packer speak on many occasions, but never have I heard him give a more powerful discourse than in this service. The dedicatory prayer was very impressive and he pronounced many wonderful blessings on these people.

Branch President Fulgencio Choy, was asked to speak first. (He had been one of our great missionaries, his sister also. They served at the same time. Both are pure *Cakchiquel* Indians.) This was his message: "God works today through his servants, just as

anciently. Listen to the words of his servants that are here with us. I would like to ask you to keep your minds open so you can receive the message of Elder Packer, an Apostle. The majority of you here are descendants of Manasseh. If we only work and put ourselves to the test, the Lord will bless us. We are very blessed to have two general authorities in our presence.”

President Israel Pérez next expressed the following: “I would like to bear my testimony of our descendance from Mannaseh. We are a very blessed people. The day of the Lamanite is here. And today we are very blessed to have living apostles to guide us. There are many blessing and promises made to us, and they are ours if we only live and obey the commandments.”

President Willard I. Skousen followed the same theme, saying, “Today is a very special day. It can be considered that today is a beginning of many great things to come. We are the chosen of God if we obey the commandments.”

Sister O’Donnal then spoke. “What a great day it is that this chapel is completed once again, after the earthquake. I have seen miracles from God, and I have no more tears to cry. The Spirit of the Lord will not dwell in unclean places. Keep this chapel and your heart clean. I am sure there is one person that is very happy this chapel is dedicated--Elder Randall Ellsworth, who was trapped under a concrete beam for many hours. How many missionaries have the faith that he had, that this people will be converted?”

I said the following: “It gives me great pleasure to see the beginnings of a Stake of Zion in this chapel. In the week that Elder Packer has been here, he has dedicated 9 small chapels. We have seen miracles during the dedications. I have also seen the change, once again, after the reconstruction of this chapel. The Lord wanted a sacrifice, which you have given Him. This is the commencement of many stakes of Zion and chapels here. Even unto the building of temples in this area of Guatemala.”

Elder Bradford gave this message: “I have been thinking of two men, two missionaries--the first to open Patzicia. They suffered much tribulation and trials. Nevertheless, they worked very hard and finally there was a chapel. But something happened--there was a lot of contention and back-biting, etc., and some left the Church. Then a terrible earthquake knocked this building to the ground.

Now it has been reconstructed and God has sent one of His Apostles to dedicate it. However, it is very important to follow your leaders and to obey the commandments, in order to keep this chapel. Open your hearts and minds to the words of this Apostle of Christ.”

Elder Packer then gave this powerful sermon: “Thank you for all the inspiration you have given to me this past week. This chapel is a symbol that this work will never stop, we will never give up. This work will roll forward until it covers the whole earth. There is no power or combination of powers that can destroy this work. Whether in this life or the next, everyone will have the opportunity to confess that Jesus is the Christ. There have been three new revelations in our time, namely new sections added to the Pearl of Great Price, dealing with this subject of the redemption of the dead, and then the Blacks receiving the Priesthood. As you can see, we will never give up, and there is nothing that can stop this work. It has been prophesied that there will be many tempests and destruction. If this building comes down again, it will go up again—not as good as before, but better. We will never stop.

“There is a story told of a football game. In this game there are two teams participating. One team plays fair and clean, but the other team does not. The game never ends but just keeps going. At first both teams played well and the game went along fine. But then there were a few injuries and then more, many people were hurt and then finally someone was killed. First one team would be winning and then the other side would gain ground and get ahead. The game never ended. We could not see any sense in the game because so many were hurt and we were upset. So we went to the sponsor of the game and told him we could see no sense in the game, and told him to stop it. He looked at us and said, ‘No, you have not understood. I will not stop the game. Look over there, there is a whole row of fresh young players that have to play first. They have to be given a chance to prove themselves. You see, this game is individual, each player can win if he wants. There have been many heroes and many valiant players. There will be more also. It does not matter who seems to be winning during the game, just that everyone has to play. Then when everyone has played, we will stop the game. Those who have been valiant will win. Everyone will be

judged for their performance in the game and for who they played for.”

“In World War II there was a group of advance soldiers sent to Europe. They were to attack the beach from the sea, by way of boats. As the boats unloaded the men, they went for the shore fighting their way through the waves. From the shore, they heard a cry for help. One of the soldiers had been caught on the rocks and as the waves came in, they would smash him against the rocks and he was being beaten to death. His sergeant saw him and went out to the sea again to save the soldier. Everyone told him, ‘Do not go, you will be killed also. Leave him there, you can do nothing.’ The sergeant was warned that he would not return. He turned to them and said, ‘Whether I return is not important. I just have to go.’ That is the spirit! Not the spirit of the missionary that cannot wait to get home and not be a missionary. We need to be valiant, we will succeed. We will not be stopped.”

The June 23, 1979 issue of the *Church News* had the following article about the dedication of the small chapels:

*The building of small chapels, about the size of three classrooms in traditional ward meetinghouses, has proved to be a success in Guatemala, where 10 were dedicated June 5-10 and more are under construction.*

*These chapels may provide a pattern for all developing countries, according to Church leaders.*

*Of simple design, the chapels have a seating capacity for about 140 persons, three curtains to divide the main area into classrooms, a branch president's office and quarters for missionaries. The cost is about \$20,000 each.*

*During construction of these chapels in Guatemala, entire congregations were converted, quickly establishing the Church in the areas.*

*Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Council of the Twelve dedicated nine of the chapels -- La Grandeza, Juchanep, Santa Ana, Canquixaja, San Andres Semetabaj, Tecpan, Patzun, Comalapa and San Andres Itzapa.*

*He was accompanied by Elder William R. Bradford of the First Quorum of the Seventy and executive administrator of Mexico South and Central America, and Pres. John F. O'Donnal of the Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission...*

*In addition to the 10 new buildings, one chapel, housing the Patzicia Branch, was rededicated by Elder Packer. Destroyed in the 1976 earthquake, the building was recently rebuilt.*

*"As we have one setback, either by Satan's influence or by natural disaster, we will step forward as a Church and rebuild tenfold," said Elder Packer at the rededication.*

*Elder Bradford said the lessons the Church has learned in Guatemala could be applicable to all developing nations. "Elder Packer and I both felt that as we dedicated the buildings we were officiating in a new era of taking the gospel to the Lord's children.*

*"This program will allow us to be prepared when the Lord opens the doors of other nations where people live in similar economic situations."*

*The Maya highlands of Guatemala are accessible only over rough terrain in four-wheel-drive vehicles, or by walking, reported Elder Bradford. "The people in these areas have no vehicles," he said, "Nor do they have horses or beasts of burden. Men use head straps and carry loads up to 200 pounds, and the women also carry heavy packs.*

*"We had to meet the challenge of getting the local construction workers to go back into these areas and get the materials back there. We learned a great deal from the local people."*

*He said the natives of this area earn an average of \$600 per year, and live off the beans and corn they raise in steep hillside gardens. While they seldom or never visit a city, they do carry their crops on a 10 or 12 hour walk to the nearest market.*

*Much of the building material was carried in this manner, he said. The chapels were constructed in areas where 300-400 people could walk to it, through the forests and fields by trail. They were built where there were few or no members in some cases.*

*"We found that as we bought a piece of property and began excavation, all the local people would come around and ask what was going to happen there. When they were told that we were building a chapel, and it would be used to teach family unity, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and provide a place of prayer and worship, although they were non-members, they wanted to know if they could help.*

*"The donated labor, which was significant, was mostly done by non-members as the work started. Towards the finishing stages, the work was being done by members of the Church; the non-members having been taught and converted."*

*Elder Bradford said two missionaries, usually an American and a Guatemalan, live in each chapel. Between them, they speak Spanish, English, Quiché, Ke'kchi, Cakchiquel and Mam.*

*Dedication Of Small Chapels And Reconstructed Patzicla Chapel*

*"In areas where we had no members when we started, we had from 40 to 90 members at the dedication."*

*He said the chapels were filled to standing room only at the dedications. The people left their fields and were waiting as the two General Authorities, and Pres. O'Donnal arrived. The speeches were translated into the local dialect from English or Spanish.*

*"All of the congregations included many children, from small ones up to those in their teen-age years. Elder Packer and I could see the great future of these areas. The Spirit is brooding over these people and the work won't be slowed down, or its acceleration controlled.*

*"In each case, the dedicatory address talked about the youth and their responsibilities, the foreordained nature of their presence in those meetings and the future work they had to do," said Elder Bradford. "The buildings were dedicated to be protected from destructive influences, either from nature or from man, all the surrounding areas were given a special blessing that the crops would increase their yields. It was also asked that the elements would be tempered and the people's burdens would be lightened as they received the truth.*

*"A promise was made that through faithfulness to the things they learned in these small buildings, the Lord would see to it that temples at some future time would be made available to these people and the saving ordinances taught therein would be within their ability to reach."*

*Elder Bradford said the presence of the youth "gave us a vision of the future. As we expand this mentally, 10 to 20 years in the future, where we now have a branch, we see a stake. Those young men that were present at those dedications will have filled missions and will be the young men who return to be branch presidents and bishops, high councilors and stake presidents."*

*He said the Church is now established in Guatemala because there are missionaries, branch presidents and buildings where people are learning the gospel.*

*"We are established, and that is a forever commitment," he said.*

*"It isn't unusual for the Lamanite people in these hills to come looking for us, and for us to find groups of them waiting to be taught. They are a very family-oriented, domestic-type people. They take care of their young and very old, for whom they show great respect.*

*"Living the gospel is their very nature, and their conversion to the gospel is a natural thing. The ordinances of the gospel, when presented to them, reinforce virtue and family ties and they become very faithful as they learn these ordinances."*

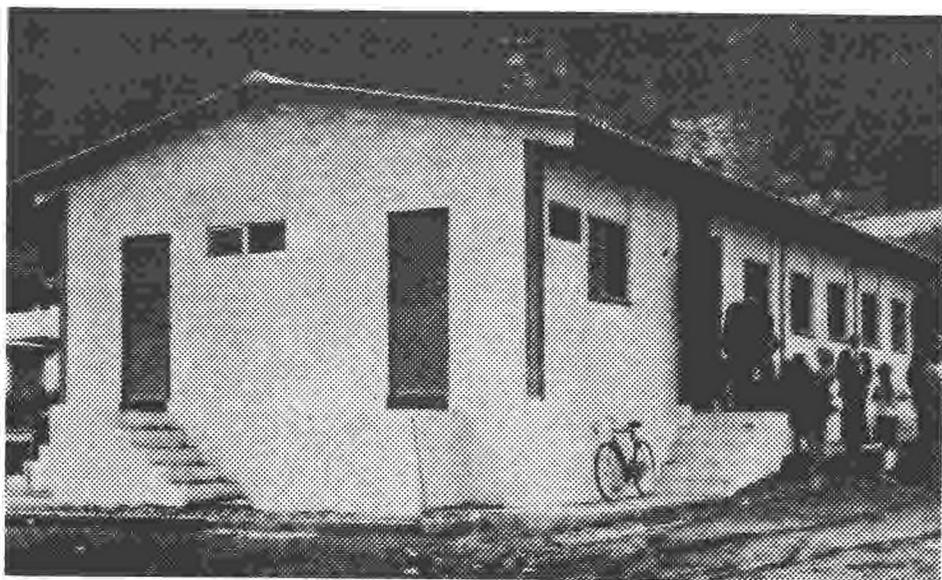


*Elder Boyd K. Packer chatting with Kakchiquel children in Patzún, Guatemala  
(Reprinted with permission from the Church News, copyright 1979)*

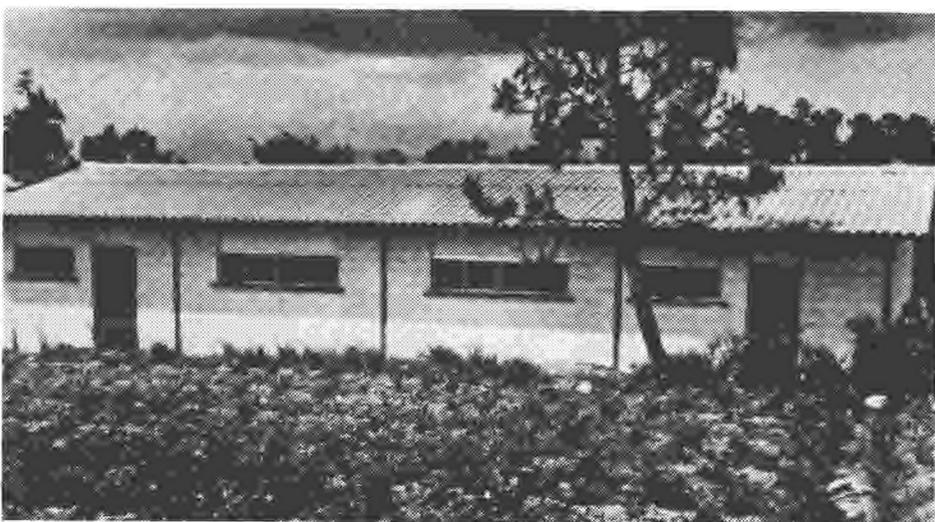


*Chapel in San Andres Semetabaj, Guatemala  
(Reprinted with permission from the Church News, copyright 1979)*

*Dedication Of Small Chapels And Reconstructed Patzicla Chapel*



*Chapel in Juchanep, Guatemala*  
*(Reprinted with permission from the Church News, copyright 1979)*



*Chapel in Canquixajá, Guatemala*  
*(Reprinted with permission from the Church News, copyright 1979)*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*View from verandah of O'Donnal's home at Lake Atitlán, Guatemala*



*O'Donnal's home at Lake Atitlán, Guatemala*

## Chapter Sixteen

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# *Completing Our Mission Calling As Regional Representative*

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We were so caught up in our mission with so many important activities, that we had not realized we were so near the end. The week spent with Elder Packer dedicating the small chapels was most enjoyable and spiritual. Elder Packer returned to Salt Lake City, Elder Bradford to Mexico City and we returned to Quetzaltenango to carry out the final activities of our wonderful mission. We made our last missionary assignments, held our last Zone Leaders' Seminar, organized the Branch of San Andrés Semetabaj, met with the leaders of Project Guatemala and those of BYU Project Guatemala and reported on the success of the welfare projects, held final interviews, held our final Mission Presidency meeting, and held our last meeting with the members of the Mission Auxiliary Boards. We then packed our personal belongings and moved them to our home on Lake Atitlán.

On June 24, 1979, we held our last District Conference in Colotenango, Huehuetenango. This was a very special meeting held

in the *Mam* language. The members were promised great things would happen in this area if they were obedient.

It was also very gratifying to me, before our release, to receive the following letter from Max L. Pinegar, President of the Missionary Training Center in Provo.

*June 12, 1979*

*Dear President O'Donnal:*

*The Missionary training Center is currently developing a culture text for Guatemala Indians. Since this material will be used at the MTC in the training of missionaries assigned to Guatemala, we felt that you would have an interest in the contents of the book. We also felt that your experience with actual conditions in the field would enable you to make valuable suggestions.*

*A trial copy of **Culture for Missionaries: Guatemala Indians**, is being sent to you under separate cover. We would appreciate it if you would review the material and give us your personal critique. Any comments concerning either strengths or weaknesses of the text that you care to make will be helpful to us.*

*Since the final copy is to be sent to Correlation within the next couple of months, we will need to have your input within 30 to 60 days, in order to incorporate your suggestions into the material.*

*Thank you for your time and attention to these important matters.*

*Sincerely, Your brother,*

*Missionary Training Center*

*Max L. Pinegar,*

*Mission President.*

On the last day of our mission I had final interviews with five great Latin-American missionaries who had all worked on the program to construct homes for the members who had lost theirs during the earthquake. I had worked with these elders for three years.

Our release from the Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission became effective July 1, 1979; and on that date we turned the mission over to our successors President Richard D. Allred and his wife Gayle. With an abiding satisfaction we returned to our home

on Lake Atitlán, where I completed my Report of Our Mission for the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve.

In the January 13, 1979, issue of the *Church News*, appeared an article by Ronald K. Esplin, entitled “Unfolding of Prophecy;” one of a series produced by the Church Historical Department on “A Church for all Lands.”

This article related my efforts to take the gospel to Central America, more specifically to the Lamanites in Guatemala. It relates the promises made to me in my patriarchal blessing, my visit with President George Albert Smith and the assignment of the first missionaries from the Mexican Mission to Central America in the fall of 1947; the organization of the Central American Mission by Elders Spencer W. Kimball and Bruce R. McConkie, in 1952; my participation in the missionary work over the years, until I was called as mission president in 1976; then the opening of the Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission in 1977; and the success in taking the gospel to the Lamanites in the rural highland areas.

### *Unfolding Of Prophecy*

*John F. O'Donnal may have been destined to take the gospel to the Lamanites. Born in the United States of parents from the Mormon colonies of Mexico, he received, in 1935, a patriarchal blessing in Colonia Juárez, Mexico, promising that one day he would perform a great work among the Lamanite people farther south...*

*For more than two decades Elder O'Donnal aided the fruitful work in Guatemala. But relatively few of the Indian people, many of whom spoke no Spanish, were reached.*

*Then, in 1977, the Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission was organized. Called to head it was John F. O'Donnal. Early results are promising. In the Chulac area, for example, two missionaries and a local leader have already gathered 116 members with 50 priesthood holders, eight of them elders. Mission leaders conduct special conferences in native tongues. Recently some 200 non-member friends joined the Chulac group at a conference, with 150 additional visitors from other villages arriving as the meeting ended.*

*Wherever the gospel has been preached among these people, writes Pres. O'Donnal, the members “are actively engaged in bringing their many relatives and friends into the Church.” He is convinced that*

*the time is indeed near when "thousands will be baptized and a nation will be born in a day."*

Another article appeared in the *Church News* of June 30, 1979, by Jerry Johnston, entitled "Teach Gospel of Simplicity, Service."

*After 30 years of living in Guatemala's savage, scenic highlands and being married to the first woman baptized into the Church in the country, John F. O'Donnal brought special perspective to his calling as president of the Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission.*

*(He will be released July 1, and succeeded by Pres. Richard D. Allred.)*

*Pres. O'Donnal has been patient, hardworking and creative. And in a mission where 172 languages are spoken and members must walk an entire day to attend priesthood meeting, those are valuable qualities.*

*"When I became mission president here, there was no question in my mind what needed to be done," he said. "We needed to take the Church right out to the people." And that's what's being done.*

*To begin with, Pres. O'Donnal says, communication has been the biggest problem. Today, missionaries speak four of the basic Indian languages. From those four, they are able to find parallels in most of the others. District conferences, once held in Spanish, are now being taken "on the road"—so to speak—and presented in the native tongue of the people in the region visited.*

*Chapels have also been a concern. When the president attended one priesthood meeting and spoke with a brother who'd walked six hours to get there, Pres. O'Donnal knew something had to be done. The General Authorities granted him approval to build nine small meeting houses in the outlying areas. They are sturdy structures with metal and block walls and living quarters for the missionaries.*

*"We've had to go to a simplified meeting system as well," Pres. O'Donnal points out. "We hold Relief Society, Primary and Priesthood at the same time, then go right into Sunday School, followed by sacrament meeting. Many people live so far away they can only make it in once a week."*

*But more than the physical concerns of getting the gospel out to the people, it has been Pres. O'Donnal's human approach that has brought success.*

*"We've found if an elder can help the welfare of a family—perhaps doctor a calf or something like that—the community looks at it and becomes interested in the Church. Then you've got contacts. When you get people*

*relating to the missionaries, then elders can teach them. But you get their attention through the service you've offered."*

*The "welfare" system of proselyting has worked well, but in such a unique and unstructured area as northern Guatemala, opportunities to teach come in many forms. And Pres. O'Donnal tries to take advantage of them all. Pastors from neighboring churches have invited missionaries to address their congregations—which the elders readily have done. Even commerce and business have provided teaching opportunities.*

*"Right now one of the greatest opportunities here comes in areas where there are large farms," Pres. O'Donnal points out. "Whether government or privately owned, the farm directors have found people who join the Church are better workers. And those workers are honest.*

*"Now some of those farm owners are asking us to teach all their workers. We teach anywhere from 150 to 600—dividing them into group meetings.*

*"It is a special situation, though. Any mission where entire villages come down from the mountains asking for the young men in white shirts they dreamed about, is special."*

*And Pres. O'Donnal has been a special president; a man with understanding and insight into the people here that takes 30 years to achieve. For now his plans are to remain in Guatemala, perhaps lending a hand to stabilize family life for Guatemala's migrant workers, workers who suffer from poor health, no security, and little family stability.*

*For Pres. O'Donnal, it's another dream in a land that believes in dreams.*

Having finished our mission, Elder Ezra Taft Benson, President of the Quorum of the Twelve, requested that we have a final interview with one of the members of the Twelve, and asked who I would like to have interview us. I requested Elder Boyd K. Packer, and on August 28, we met with him in his office. Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone had been assigned to accompany Elder Packer. We considered meeting with these two great men a special blessing. We explained the joy that had come into our lives over the years, serving in the missionary efforts in Central America, and especially the three years as president, first of the Guatemala Guatemala City Mission, then opening the new Indian, Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission; the taking of the gospel into the rural, mountain areas in their language; the many new programs; the simplification of the programs; and the building of small chapels in the rural areas. Programs championed by Elder Packer.

We also expressed the need for more Health and Welfare couples, and the need for additional teaching materials in the Indian languages, as we had explained to Brothers Dean Black and Kelly Crab. The members living outside the cities have no facilities in their homes for storing a year supply, and we suggested that a program should be developed to meet their needs. Also, we reported that there was a need for a Welfare Director in Guatemala, and suggested that Directors of Temporal Affairs should not be paid a salary but called to serve in that capacity.

However, my greatest concern has been the absolute necessity of giving more emphasis to the use of the Book of Mormon in missionary efforts; also to maintaining a commitment to the people in the areas as they are opened to proselyting and as people are baptized. Carmen and I are most thankful for the small part we have had in this great work, and the wonderful callings we have had to serve together among her people.

We had been contacted by the Church Historical Office requesting that we record our oral history under the James Moyle Oral History Program, and for us to arrange the interview with Gordon Irving of the Historical Department. Transcripts of the three interviews conducted by Gordon Irving for this program were recorded on August 28 and 29, 1979. A total of eleven and a half hours, which included 129 type-written pages, were recorded and bound in a book form. The content covered background of Carmen and myself from birth to the end of our mission in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala.

On April 30, 1979, I had received a call from President Marion G. Romney calling me as Regional Representative, to serve in Eastern Guatemala and Southern Chiapas, Mexico, upon termination of our mission in Quetzaltenango. This call was later confirmed in a letter from the First Presidency, dated April 27, 1979.

A seminar for Regional Representatives was held in Salt Lake City on August 27 and 28, 1979. This was my first seminar as Regional Representative. As previously mentioned, Elder Russell M. Nelson, who was also our cardiologist, was called as Regional Representative at the same time I was called, and together we enjoyed the seminar very much.

Elder William R. Bradford, Executive Administrator over Southern Mexico and Central America, invited me to attend a Stake Conference in Merida, Mexico on December 15-16, 1979. Two hours

before the first meetings were to begin, while awaiting his arrival in my hotel room, I received a telephone call from him advising me that he could not get out of Mexico City and requesting that I preside over the conference. Since this area was not in my assigned region, and I had arrived to attend the conference at Elder Bradford's invitation, I was not prepared to conduct a stake conference. In answer to my humble prayer I was directed by the Spirit and we had a very spiritual and profitable conference. I appreciated the confidence shown me by Elder Bradford.

We have a great love and respect for the Lord's anointed, many with whom we have served and traveled, and by whom we have been taught. Many have spent time with us in our home. Among them is Elder J. Thomas Fyans and his wife. He invited me to attend a stake conference in Guatemala City on June 7-8, 1980. He told me he wanted to discuss some important matters with me. We were both staying at the mission home with President and Sister Willard I. Skousen. After dinner and a visit, he invited me to his room where we discussed several matters, most important was the replacement of President Skousen. Because of the political situation in Guatemala and my concern for the missionaries and the missionary work there, I was very concerned when a new president was called to preside over the Guatemala Guatemala City Mission from the United States, who had no knowledge of Central America. I had not expressed this concern to anyone except my wife. But when Elder Fyans expressed his concern and requested my opinion, I was able to share my feelings with him. He then asked me who I would recommend. I told him that there was only one person I could recommend, who was prepared and capable of the position—that was Carlos H. Amado. He then asked if there was anyone else I could recommend. I named several others but told him they were not prepared in my opinion and that the only person I could recommend was Carlos. This discussion lasted until after midnight. Early the next morning Elder Fyans knocked on my door and asked if I would come to his room. There we resumed the same conversation and again I confirmed my feelings that only Brother Amado could I recommend. Early on June 9, Elder Fyans took a flight to Salt Lake City. On the morning of June 10, Carlos H. Amado received a call from President Kimball to preside over the Guatemala Guatemala City Mission and to report in two days to the New Mission Presidents' Seminar in Salt Lake City.

In late May or early June 1980, we welcomed into our home in Quetzaltenango, Mr. Sánchez Martín, accompanied by a lovely, young lady. He was welcomed because he told us he was acquainted with many of the Church leaders, especially those in Mexico, mentioning among others, Elder William R. Bradford and Robert E. Wells. He said he had visited with all of them. We learned he was a free lance journalist who was searching for information on the Mormon Church in Latin America for publication or sale to persons writing about the Church. It so happened that a book, unfavorable to the Church entitled, *America's Saints—The Rise of Mormon Power*, by Robert Gottlieb and Peter Wiley, was published in 1984. It was no coincidence that information gathered by Mr. Sánchez Martín was included in this book, however it was misrepresented. Four paragraphs were dedicated to my participation as a leader of the Church and a key figure in the highly populated Indian areas of Central America. Untrue quotes are attributed to me, and the true picture of the Church's activities and my efforts were distorted.

As Regional Representative I worked hard with the units under my supervision. Accompanied by my dear wife, I visited each unit every month, imparting the instructions received in the Regional Representative Seminar, and preparing the leaders in the districts for becoming stakes, and the stake leaders for dividing their stakes.

By August 1980, the Retalhuleu Guatemala District was ready to become a stake. Under the supervision of Elder William R. Bradford, on August 16, the Retalhuleu Guatemala Stake was organized, with Manuel Barrios as president.

On August 30, 1980, the Tuxtla Gutiérrez District was made a stake, with Enrique Sánchez Casillas as president. While interviewing the priesthood leaders, Elder Bradford expressed to me the strong manifestation of the Spirit and said he had never interviewed a more spiritual group of priesthood holders. The organization of these stakes was very gratifying to me and there was a great outpouring of the Spirit. It had been a great joy working with these special people, and especially to have been accompanied throughout, by my wife.

Our Area Council Meetings were always special, but the one held on February 20, 1981, was exceptional. Elder Richard G. Scott was the Executive Administrator. During the course of this meeting, strangely, the mail for the Director of Temporal Affairs was handed to him and

among the correspondence was a confidential letter from the First Presidency announcing the decision of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, to build a temple in Guatemala, and an invitation from the First Presidency for the Area Council to attend a special meeting in Salt Lake City, to discuss, approve and accept the temple in Guatemala. A sense of awe and humility came over the group, as no one present had knowledge of this. The news came as a joyous surprise to all present. To me it was a fulfillment of a promise received twenty-five years earlier. My whole soul tingled with exquisite emotion, a spiritual experience I cannot describe. Although, almost a year earlier, on October 6, 1980, when Carmen and I entered the office of Elder Boyd K. Packer, he raised his arms and said as we entered, "Before you ask, let me tell you, yes, you will have a temple in Guatemala and you will see it." I had no intention of asking about a temple in Guatemala, but the news that came out of the clear, blue sky, was thrilling to hear, from a prophet of the Lord. What a blessing!

Additional announcements were made and some plans presented at the April Regional Representative Seminar in Salt Lake City. The limits of the Guatemala Temple District were discussed, and I suggested that the Tapachula and Tuxtla Gutiérrez and Chiapas Mexico Stakes be included in that district. I am sure that meeting with all the General Authorities, President Kimball presiding, meant much more to me than to those of the nine new temple areas which President Kimball announced. This was a solemn and spiritual meeting, which occurred on my birthday, April first.

Although I did not know it at the time, my last official act as Regional Representative was the dedication, on March 22, 1981, of the addition to the Mazatenango, Guatemala chapel. There had been much growth in this ward during the last few years, and it was my feeling that Mazatenango would soon become a stake. I was released as Regional Representative on December 1, 1981.

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*President and Sister Richard D. Allred  
Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission 1979*



*Elder and Sister J. Thomas Fyans*



*Elder and Sister Carlos H. Amado*

## Chapter Seventeen

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### *Mexico City Temple Calling To The Presidency*

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In a speech given in the Mexico City Area Conference in 1979, President Kimball related the following:

*When I was in Mexico in 1946, I had great expectation for the Mexican people, and I had a dream about your progress and growth... I believe that when I had my dream there was not a single stake or ward in all Mexico. I saw a temple and I expect to see it full of young men and women.*

President Kimball announced plans to build a temple in Mexico City in March 1979, some thirty years later.

November 25, 1979 was the day of the ground breaking services for the Mexico City Temple. Presiding at the services was Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve, with Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Seventy conducting. Also in attendance were Elder William R. Bradford and Elder F. Burton Howard, of the Quorum of the Seventy, Emil B. Fetzer, Church Architect, Regional Representatives, Stake Presidents, and other Church leaders and

members. The Temple district at that time was composed of 53 stakes and 8 missions in Mexico, 14 stakes and 4 missions in Central America. Elder Packer offered the dedicatory prayer. Because of other assignments, we did not attend this service. The construction of the temple began on January 4, 1980.

While in Mesa, Arizona in May 1981, we received a phone call from Harold Brown in San Diego, California. He told me he would be in Mesa the next day and would like to visit with us. He told us he had been called to preside over the new, Mexico City Temple and inquired if I had received a telephone call from the First Presidency; to which I responded that I had not. He was surprised, and explained that he had requested I be called to serve as his counselor and Carmen as Assistant Matron to his wife Leonore. This came as a pleasant surprise to us and we happily accepted after Harold had called Elder Grant Bangerter, head of the Temple Department, who confirmed our calling. A letter from the First Presidency, dated April 15, 1981, extending the call for me to serve as second counselor in the Mexico City Temple, had been mailed to Guatemala while we were in Arizona. Guillermo Torres was called as first counselor.

Both Carmen and I were called and set apart as ordinance workers in the Arizona Temple on August 18, 1981, and served there, in both Spanish and English, until the end of January 1982, when we left for Mexico City. This was a wonderful and valuable learning experience for us.

During the last week of October, 1981, the Mexico City Temple Presidency and our wives enjoyed a training seminar in the Arizona Temple. President Guillermo Torres and his wife, Socorro, arrived from Mexico for the seminar. Having been invited to attend the Jordan River Temple dedication, all of us, except Carmen who was convalescing from surgery, attended a session of the dedication. While in Salt Lake City we attended a seminar in the Temple Department and spent part of a day in the Salt Lake Temple. On November 24, 1981, President and Sister Brown, President Torres and I were set apart, and each of the presidency had conferred upon us the sealing power to be exercised in the Mexico City Temple and the Arizona Temple. President Marion G. Romney was voice in my setting apart and conferring of the sealing power. I was saddened that Carmen could not be present when this took

place. With difficulty she attended our training period in the Arizona Temple.

On February 3, 1982, we left for Mexico City. Arrangements had been made for us to live with President and Sister Brown in a lovely home purchased by the Church for the presiding General Authority in Mexico City.

Upon our arrival in Mexico City we scheduled visits with Stake Presidents and Bishops, and the Temple Presidency, with our wives, gave them instructions and requested their support in recommending worthy members for temple ordinance workers, explaining the procedure and confidentiality of these recommendations.

We learned that there is much more to the preparation for dedication of a new temple than the construction of a building. There was the planning and approval for construction of dormitory facilities for families arriving in excursions. Plans presented by the Building Department would accommodate only 162 people, while the plans we recommended called for accommodations for 320, in separate, two-bed rooms for couples. Our recommendations were accepted. Much time was required in selecting and interviewing personnel to operate the temple, which included temple engineers and assistants, laundry and kitchen workers, custodians, maintenance, security, landscaping, etc. Recommendations had to be made for the required number of sealers to be interviewed and given the sealing power.

Clothing for the temple included clothing for patrons, curtains for ordinance work, veils, dresses and suits for authorized ordinance workers. The Presidency, with our wives, went to the Deseret installations where the clothing was to be made, and met with personnel of Deseret and a brother from Beehive Mills in Salt Lake City. We looked at many cloth samples and discussed availability, then selected and approved a number of materials that were available in Mexico. We had made a preliminary estimate of a total of 840 units each for male and female workers and patrons.

May 14, 1982, was a very special day. As a Presidency we had invited to dinner the men charged by the Church with the supervision of the construction of the temple, and their wives—Architect Ricardo Espiriti and his wife Anne; Claudius Bowman, the finance and importation manager and his wife, Marina; Aurelio Valdespino Ortiz and his wife. Brother Valdespino and his wife had been extremely

helpful with Mexican government officials and customs, obtaining freedom from duties on materials and furnishings for the temple. He is probably among the most knowledgeable authorities on customs in Mexico. He was also a Stake President. After a delightful dinner, we all gathered in the living room and spent the next five hours conversing and sharing experiences related to the temple, and the marvelous blessings and trials we had all experienced since joining the forces building the Lord's House in Mexico. Without exception, each had experienced quite serious problems in one form or another. We were all being tried, but each had also received great blessings.

There have been miracles regarding this special temple from the time it was announced, and in the selection of the temple site, but the greatest and most noteworthy, concerns the Mexican Government. Federal law prohibited the importation of material, furnishings and furniture into Mexico which are manufactured and available in the country. However, the Church desired that only the best materials and furnishings should be used in the temple and the Visitor's Center, and had requested the importation, free of duty, of over \$2.6 million of materials. Just to hope for approval to import these materials was unthinkable, but to expect importation free of duty, was entirely out of the question. Tirelessly, persisting for many months, Brother Valdespino with Brother Espiriti, Brother Bowman and the Church attorney, Agricol Lozano, had gone from one government office concerned with importation, to another, seeking approval, but in every case received a resounding "No." After much fasting and prayer, Brother Valdespino and his wife, and the other two young men and Elder Richard G. Scott, again visited the head officials requesting the importation and exoneration of duties. While one was talking the others were praying and the Spirit poured out upon these officials and they readily extended the permits. After signing the documents, the official made the statement that they did not know what was happening and why the permits were extended. Brother Valdespino told us in our meeting that he had pleaded with the Lord to show in some way His approval of the construction of the temple and His acceptance of what was being done to obtain the importation permits, but now there was no doubt the Lord had approved and had used His influence on the government officials.

Brothers Espiriti and Bowman told us the Lord had constantly guided them during the construction work. We, as a Presidency,

testified that the Lord had guided our efforts in our many responsibilities in organizing our work and carrying out the programs in preparation for opening the temple—some peculiar to this temple—such as authorization to use as ordinance workers, sisters with children at home, providing there were responsible persons to care for the children in their absence.

I bore my testimony that I knew each of us had been prepared for the work in which we were engaged, and suggested we kneel in prayer and thanksgiving unto the Lord and request his continued blessings and guidance. President Brown offered the prayer. This had been a great spiritual feast, and all departed filled with the Spirit.

Since Carmen and Sister Torres had not been set apart as Assistant Matrons, I suggested to President Brown that it would be well to do this, to help them in their responsibilities. At our Presidency meeting on May 19, 1982, President Brown, with President Torres and I assisting, set Carmen and Sister Torres apart. There was present a strong manifestation of the Spirit.

The interviewing of recommended members for temple ordinance workers commenced on August 8, 1982. A form was required for each individual recommended, signed first by their Bishop and then by their Stake President. These forms were attached to a master form which was sent to the First Presidency for approval. All the paper work and communication for these recommendations was my responsibility. When the names were approved the interviews began. After being interviewed by one of the counselors, those selected were then interviewed by President Brown. Interviews were held four nights each week. Those approved were then set apart as ordinance workers. This process took several hours. Those who were set apart were then taken on a tour of the temple still under construction, and given their initial instructions. This tour meant walking up four flights of stairs, which was too much for Carmen, although many times she did accompany the tour. Every temple worker interviewed also needed to be measured for clothing to work in the temple and Carmen was assigned this task. Well over 1,500 members were interviewed from stakes as far away as Puebla and Cuautla, the great majority of which had not received their own endowments.

When the property for the temple was selected and purchased, there was controversy and discontent among some of the local priesthood leaders. The property is in a rather poor, residential area,

and on ground that once was a lake, therefore the subsoil is marshy. I was told by priesthood leaders that prior to initiating any construction work, President Kimball had arrived in Mexico City, unannounced, and had spent several hours alone on the property, seeking inspiration regarding the location. Later he announced that this was the place the temple would be built.

On this lake-bottom terrain there are areas of light clay and sand with a water content of 85%, and with a water table only five to six feet below the street level. As the terrain is not suitable for normal construction, a special system was adapted, consisting of a floating foundation—an inflexible, reinforced slab poured over the entire area of the building, with beams placed on top of it, forming cells which were covered with another slab, substituting for the weight of the volume which was being displaced. This foundation slab was 13 feet below the street level. Nine wells, 36 feet deep, were dug to drain the area, using considerable ballast, in order to pour the foundation slab. Once the slabs were poured it was necessary that the foundation be leveled. To do this, while the slabs were being poured, preparations were made to drive control piles into the ground, each to a depth which would allow it to support at least 80 tons of weight. A total of 221 reinforced, concrete piles, 18 inches in diameter, were driven into the ground. These were driven to a depth of about 118 feet to give each a 100 ton weight capacity, with a 20% margin of safety. On the top of each pile was installed an adjustment control for leveling the temple. During installation of the steel superstructure of the above-ground levels, it was necessary to level the structure several times. Periodic checks are made to assure that the temple is level. This system of construction was also designed to resist earthquakes which are prevalent in Mexico City.

As a Presidency we had advanced very well with our preparations for the opening of the Mexico City Temple, however, because of delays in the construction we were informed by Elders Scott and Bradford that the completion date had once again been prolonged, and was not expected until late 1983. With little to do in Mexico and to give the Brown's and ourselves a break, Elder Scott told us we could return to Arizona for a period of six months to be with our family and work in the Arizona Temple. We departed on March 26, 1983.

We returned to Mexico City from our six-month break awaiting the completion of the temple, on October 5, 1983. That same afternoon,

Elder Marvin J. Ashton, who had arrived the evening before, dedicated the new Visitor's Center on the temple grounds. Chairs had been set up in the patio where many members had gathered. In the middle of the service there arose a tempest with torrential rain, which lasted only a few minutes, but left all in attendance soaking wet, except the authorities who were protected by an awning which had been provided.

While alone in the temple with Elder Richard G. Scott after the dedication of the Visitor's Center, he asked me to head the preparations and to supervise the activities for the Open House within the temple, and later for the dedication. I was humbled and highly honored to accept this assignment, which I knew entailed much planning, organizing and direction on my part. I was provided with a copy of the tentative tour diagram for the Open House and a copy of the Dedication seating plans.

The Open House was scheduled for November 8-19, 1983. The overall programming of the Open House, under the direction of the Area Executive Administrator, was managed through the Temporal Affairs Office. Special days and times were scheduled for visits of Mexican Government Officials, leaders of other churches, press and other VIP guests. I requested that Licenciado Agricol Lozano, with the assistance of Jorge Montoya Monroy, Jorge Contreras and Lehi García, be hosts to these special guests. To give the young people of the stakes the marvelous opportunity of assisting with the Open House and the Dedication, I requested 1,620 youth from 18 stakes to act as guides and supervisors of traffic in the parking areas. Training periods were conducted throughout the day and evening for three days prior to the Open House, on Saturday, Sunday and Monday, November 5, 6 and 7. On November 8, the temple was open to the public, and from November 8-19 there were three tours daily, headed by one of three supervisors. On each morning and afternoon tour there were 36 young women and 9 young men as guides, and 45 young men on the evening tour. All tours were assisted by temple security personnel. In addition to the above, there were 18 doctors and 13 nurses who rendered assistance during the Open House and Dedication. These were coordinated by Dr. Adriana Aguilar Santiago, Dr. Juan Carlos Sánchez Cerda and Dr. Samuel Ruiz Guadiana.

The supervisor on each tour made a report of the total number of people on the tour and comments regarding his shift. Many interesting things occurred during the Open House, too many to mention here. But

I will mention a few. There was great interest shown and questions asked, particularly by leaders and seminary students of the Catholic Church, some who had come from as far away as Guadalajara. Although the tours were conducted in silence, special groups were given the opportunity to sit in one of the larger sealing rooms and ask questions. An interesting event occurred when teachers of a local public school came to the temple with about fifty small children, all dressed in white, including the teachers. When they arrived at the temple door they were told that children under the age of eight could not enter. They were very disappointed and I was summoned to talk with the teachers. What a beautiful sight to see these little children all dressed in white, and when the teachers informed me they had made their clothes especially to come to the temple, as they knew everyone had to be in white to enter, my heart melted and I permitted them to go through, specially escorted. They were so quiet, reverent and happy to make the tour.

Our count indicated that just over 105,000 people visited the temple during the twelve days that it was open to the public. The largest number in any one day was 19,138 on November 19, the last day of the Open House. The temple was again opened on the twentieth and twenty-first, only for VIP guests.

A small group of six sisters and three brethren, under the supervision of the Temple Engineer, Brother Luis Palacios, were assigned to clean the areas of the tour after each day of the Open House. There was much to be done and little time between the Open House and the Dedication services. The temple had to be thoroughly cleaned and set apart, and endowed temple ordinance workers had to be trained for the first initiatory and endowment sessions after the dedication.

Carmen was assigned to supervise the cleaning of the inside of the temple, with President Torres' son, Carlos, and Brother Richard S. Mills, representative of the Division of Construction--Temples and Special Projects. This cleaning project was to be accomplished in two days, November 22 and 23. Three stake Relief Society sisters were called to integrate the Temple Cleaning Committee. Four groups of 40 sisters, a total of 160 sisters, were to clean half a day each. All cleaning equipment and materials had been placed in the temple beforehand. A devotional was held before each cleaning shift, and the sisters were to remain strictly in their assigned area. After each shift the sisters were given a tour of the temple. After each day of the Dedication, a special

group of endowed brethren and sisters were assigned to clean the temple, dressed appropriately in white clothing.

In appreciation for her service in preparing the temple for dedication, Carmen received the following letter:

*Dear Sister O'Donnal:*

*The Temple and Special Projects Division of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints want to express our wholehearted gratitude and thanks for your personal dedication and the many hours you put in to prepare the House of the Lord in Mexico City for its open house and dedication.*

*Without the final polish accorded by the sisters, it could not be made acceptable to the Lord.*

*We personally want to commend you for your lovely spirit and will always cherish the hours worked side-by-side with our representative.*

*May the Lord continue to bless you always, and may the temple bring joy and happiness to the people of your country. You will always have a place in our hearts.*

*With love and gratitude,*

*Wallace G. McPhie, Manager  
Construction-Temples &  
Special Projects*

Much more care and attention was required for preparation and carrying out the dedication program scheduled for Friday, Saturday and Sunday--December 2-4, 1983--a total of ten sessions. Four supervisors were assigned, one for each level of the temple--Basement, Carlos Torres; Main Floor, Jorge Contreras; First Floor, Victor Montoya; Second Floor, Lehi García. Tickets had been issued to the stakes within the temple district for admittance to each of the ten sessions. Members were carefully selected to serve as security, to check and control tickets, for counting the numbers admitted to each session, and as guides and ushers; all wearing proper identification badges. Special attention was given for the movement within the temple of the General Authorities and special guests, for accommodating and evacuating those attending each session, for doctors and nurses and emergency facilities, for coordinating

noon meals for the General Authorities and special guests, for the use and control of elevators, escalators, telephones and intercoms, etc.

During the time between sessions the brethren recommended for sealers were interviewed and given the sealing power by President Hinckley and Elder Hunter. It was my sacred privilege to assist Elder Hunter with his interviews and to translate the giving of the sealing power and the pronounced blessings.

It was also a blessing, and I was highly honored when the First Presidency requested I talk in the third session. Following is the English translation of my talk:

*It is a great privilege for me to have the opportunity to speak to you this afternoon, and I wish to speak to you from the depths of my heart. I pray for your blessing and prayers.*

*My heart is full of gratitude for this people and especially for the prayers and faith of the ancient prophets of this continent. Enos and others made a covenant with the Lord, supplicating Him in prayer day and night that the records of their people would be preserved. The blessings of these records have come to us through the Book of Mormon.*

*We all rejoice today on this blessed and marvelous occasion. And as has been said here today, those on the other side of the veil are also rejoicing. I have been involved in the programs of this dedication, and I have seen tickets given out to those who wanted to attend; and I imagine that on the other side they are also very anxiously awaiting their turn to be here. Naturally, much more orderly and I am sure that none of them came late.*

*Just think, we have the privilege of doing the work for those people—the thousands of millions that are waiting to receive these sacred ordinances. We, in this holy place, can be the vessels to penetrate the veil with the power of the priesthood, doing the work so that those who came at the time when the Church was not upon the earth or did not have the opportunity to hear and receive the gospel, can now receive and hold the priesthood and be great before the Lord in His work.*

*This temple has brought great blessings, not only to the members of the Church but to the entire nation of Mexico. It is now your opportunity to bless all those who are waiting to receive the sacred ordinances and covenants in this Holy Temple. It is a blessing and also a responsibility. This is a large temple, capable of much work, and the responsibility is yours. I have observed the progress in the construction of this temple for some time, and I have seen the problems the difficulties and delays there have been in the construction, and there have been many. The same has occurred with*

*this people—they have had their problems, their difficulties and delays in receiving the blessings of the gospel—but today we are seeing the fulfillment of the prophecies and promises of the ancient prophets to this people.*

*I had the wonderful experience and blessing of directing the Open House and the Dedication of this temple, and I have seen the great blessings which have come to the young people and others who have served as guides and who have attended as visitors to the temple. No one with good judgment walked through this temple during the Open House without having their lives changed for the better. I have seen it in their faces, in their eyes, and in talking with them; and to think that all of those who served as guides, which were hundreds, carried with them to their homes, wards and stakes this beautiful spirit. The same thing is happening with the training of hundreds of temple workers. I dare say that in the history of the temples, there has never been a greater number of workers learning their responsibilities as workers, as there has been in this temple in Mexico. Before the Open House 1,400 sisters came during a period of seven days to clean this temple from top to bottom. They too received blessings and took the spirit of the temple to their homes.*

*I cannot conclude without thanking the two young men and their wives and families, who were responsible for the supervision of the construction of this temple. They have left part of their lives here; they love this temple; and we owe them much gratitude. Now the construction is finished, the temple has been dedicated, and I am certain we all know the Lord has been here to accept it.*

*The splendor and beauty of the temple now glistens and radiates on a nation previously sleeping and in darkness, to bless not only the faithful members, but a nation of faithful Mexicans and especially those who accept the gospel and become members of the true Church.*

*Brothers and sisters, the temple is the fountain of spiritual power for the members of the Church. Remember that; visit it often. I plead with the Lord to bless us in this work, and I do it in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Before the first session, the cornerstone ceremony was held, with President Hinckley speaking and applying the mortar to seal the stone in place. Other General Authorities also participated in this ceremony.

No one present could doubt President Hinckley's words, spoken with emotion, pausing to quell tears and a quivering voice. He testified of souls from "the other side of the veil" being present. "All rooms are filled with faithful Latter-day Saints, but I am convinced there is a larger, unseen congregation participating with us." Elder Agricol

Lozano, in the first session's invocation referred to December second, as "the most important day in this great nation." The emotional climax of each dedicatory session came as the congregation joined the choir in singing, "The Spirit of God Like A Fire Is Burning." Emotions were unbound, some merely had tears in their eyes, while others covered their faces with their hands and wept. We were blessed to have been invited to attend all ten sessions in the Celestial Room. During the sessions I would check to make sure all was well throughout the temple.

Following is the beautiful dedicatory prayer which was read by President Gordon B. Hinckley in the first session, and repeated by other General Authorities in the other nine sessions:

*Almighty God, thou great Elohim, in the name of thy Beloved Son Jesus Christ, we bow before thee in supplication and thanksgiving.*

*On this day of dedication our hearts turn unto thee. Surely thou hast favored us as thy sons and daughters. We thank thee for the restoration of thine everlasting gospel with all of its gifts, powers, and authority, including the keys of the eternal priesthood to be exercised in this holy temple in behalf of both the living and those beyond the veil.*

*We thank thee that thou hast given us a prophet to guide us in these troubled days. We thank thee for the love of thy people for thy chosen servant, President Spencer W. Kimball. Bless him, keep him, sustain him by thy power according to thy divine wisdom. Bless all associated with him in the governance of thy church, and bless thy faithful saints throughout the world. Leave us not alone. Prosper us as we walk in obedience to thy commandments.*

*We pray for the poor of whom there are so many in this land. Lift them from the bonds of poverty. We pray for those who are blind to truth. Open their eyes and quicken their understanding of thy revealed word.*

*Confound and frustrate the enemies of thy work. May their evil designs be as dry chaff, scattered and blown by the whirlwind of thy mighty power.*

*We thank thee for this great nation, the Republic of Mexico. Bless those who govern that they may be inspired to do that which will ensure peace and freedom for the people of this land, and the continued growth of the work.*

*Father, we thank thee for the many thousands in this part of thy vineyard whose hearts have been touched by the power of thy spirit and who have taken upon themselves the name of thy Son Jesus Christ, and entered into solemn and binding covenants with thee and with him. Surely thou hast*

*brought to pass a miracle of faith for which we thank thee. We pray that thou wilt continue to bless in a special way those who serve as missionaries to the good people of Mexico and its neighbor nations. Lead them to those who are sensitive to the promptings of thy Spirit. Hedge up the way of the adversary that he shall not have power to confound thy servants. May the testimonies which they bear find lodgment in the hearts of many truth seekers.*

*Bless thy saints in this great land and those from other lands who will use this temple. Most have in their veins the blood of Father Lehi. Thou hast kept thine ancient promise. Many thousands “that walked in darkness have seen a great light.” (Isaiah 9:2)*

*May the harvest that we have witnessed here foreshadow greater things to come as thy work rolls on in power and majesty in this the dispensation of the fullness of times.*

*Now, Father, we are here assembled to dedicate this beautiful and sacred house to thee and to thy Beloved Son. In the authority of the holy priesthood in us vested, this authority which is a gift from thee, and in the name of Jesus Christ we dedicate unto thee and unto him this, the Mexico City Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, with all parts and aspects of its structure, its fittings and its associated facilities.*

*Wilt thou accept it as the gift of thy thankful people, presented and dedicated unto thee as thy house. We pray that thou and thy Son may visit it according to thy will, and that thy Holy Spirit may always dwell here.*

*Father, sanctify this thy house, bless it, preserve it. May thy watchcare be over it always to protect it in all of its structure and facilities.*

*We thank thee for all who have labored to build it. We thank thee for those who have designed it, constructed it, decorated it, and made it ready for this day of dedication. We thank thee for the faith of all who have contributed of their means to make it possible. Give unto each that sweet feeling that comes of consecration to thee and thy work.*

*May this temple be holy to all who enter it. May they do so with cleanliness and with purity of heart. May none ever defile it, and may all who look upon it see it as a place of holiness and as the expression of a thankful people to their Creator and to their Redeemer.*

*May it be used frequently by an ever-growing number of thy saints in participating in the ordinances peculiar to thy house. May they with faith act in their own behalf and in behalf of the multitudes of dead who have gone before them. May love for thee grow in their hearts as they do so, and may they rejoice in the great opportunity that is theirs to labor here in this thy dedicated sanctuary.*

*Father in Heaven, we love thee. We love thy Son, our Redeemer. Hear our plea on this sacred occasion, and on all other occasions when with faith we approach thee in prayer.*

*Grant us peace, O Lord. Grant us strength. Give us wisdom and increased faith. Grant us inspiration and revelation in our sacred responsibilities. Grant us love in our homes and gladness in our hearts as thy sons and daughters. Forgive our sins and remember them no more against us, and help us to forgive any who do evil unto us.*

*We ask it all as thy thankful children, and we dedicate ourselves to thy service, in the name of our beloved Savior, thine Only Begotten Son, even the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Of the total of over 300,000 members of the Church in the temple district, over 40,000 attended the dedication services. Also attending the dedication were President Ezra Taft Benson and Elder Howard W. Hunter of the Council of the Twelve, Elder James E. Faust of the Presidency of the Seventy, Elder W. Grant Bangerter, Richard G. Scott and Ted E. Brewerton of the First Quorum of Seventy, Bishop H. Burk Peterson of the Presiding Bishopric, and D. Arthur Haycock, personal secretary to President Spencer W. Kimball. Because of poor health, President Kimball was unable to attend the dedication.

The Mexico City temple is one of the most beautiful buildings in the Republic of Mexico. It is a modern adaptation of ancient Maya architecture borrowed from the Mayan temples in Yucatan and Guatemala. It is a 126,000-square foot structure built on a seven-acre site in the Aragón area of Mexico City. The building is faced with white cast stone and has a 152-foot tower topped by a golden statue of the Angel Moroni. It was built at a cost of 15 million dollars.

A meeting with the Temple Presidency, directors from the Temple Department and all set-apart temple ordinance workers, was held in the temple Sunday evening after the final dedicatory session. The following day, Monday, December 5, 1983, at 5:00 p.m., the first live initiatory and endowment session was conducted for the set-apart, temple ordinance workers who had not received their endowments, and for members from Central America, mostly from Guatemala, who had attended the dedication. There were over 240 live endowments. Baptisms for the dead were also performed. We were blessed with several missionary couples from the United States to help with training and ordinance work.

I had the privilege of sealing seven couples from Guatemala, three of the young men had been our missionaries in the Quetzaltenango Guatemala Mission. The following day vicarious baptism and confirmations were performed, also thirteen endowment sessions, three of which were live sessions. The opening activities of these two days were supervised by members of the Temple Department. They were Elder W. Grant Bangerter, Head of the Temple Department, Derek F. Metcalf, Manager, and Rodney P. Foster and Parley K. Fullmer. Brothers Foster and Fullmer continued their assistance for several days.

Those were long, tiring days, filled with much joy and happiness. The temple was finally operating and we were there doing our part! How the Lord blessed us! Carmen and I did not finish our work until 3:30 a.m. on the seventh, so we stayed in the temple and rested for two hours in my office. We were up at 7:30 a.m. to begin a new day. We helped in the temple only a few hours. Elder Richard G. Scott had authorized us to move into an apartment owned by the Church and previously occupied by presiding General Authorities in Mexico. We spent the rest of the day moving into the apartment, where we lived for the remainder of our stay in Mexico.

The temple closed on December 17, 1983, for the Christmas holidays. We spent the two weeks while the temple was closed, in Guatemala, enjoying a good rest and Christmas at our home on beautiful Lake Atitlán.

Training of ordinance workers and supervisors was ongoing. Gradually the supervisors were able to assume their full responsibilities. This was a wonderful learning experience for us also. We felt so strongly the guidance of the Spirit in carrying out our duties. As a presidency we still had much planning, organizing and scheduling to do. We held almost daily meetings. It was gratifying to work with President Brown and President Torres. There was always a great manifestation of the Spirit in our meetings. We were all learning, and what a wonderful place to learn! How thankful we all were for the calling to preside over one of His Holy Temples. We constantly sensed the presence of those beyond the veil, and experienced many, very special, spiritual experiences—some too sacred to relate.

On March 6, 1984, very interesting and significant ordinances were performed in the temple for the Father of the Mexican Independence, Miguel Hidalgo y Castilla. These were done by

Armando Luis Martín Lucero, a descendant of the Hidalgo y Castilla family. It was also interesting that the sealing ordinance was performed by Julio Hidalgo Nieto.

It was wonderful working with the Mexican saints, especially with those officiating in the temple. We learned to love them and felt strongly their love for us. Their progress was great and they became highly responsible and proficient in their temple duties. During the first few months after the dedication of the temple, four of our best ordinance workers died suddenly, after a short illness. I am sure they were needed on the other side and are continuing their mission there.



*Mexico City Temple Presidency 1982  
Harold and Leonore Brown—President  
Guillermo and Socorro Torres, John F. and Carmen O'Donnal—Counselors*

*Mexico City Temple -- Calling To The Presidency*



*Ricardo Espiriti and Claudius Bowman  
who worked on the construction of the Mexico City Temple*



*Construction of the Mexico City Temple*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*President and Sister O'Donnal on the steps of the Mexico City Temple*



*The Mexico City Temple*

## Chapter Eighteen

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# *Guatemala City Temple Calling As Temple President*

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Two days before General Conference, on April 2, 1981, President Spencer W. Kimball announced that a temple would be built in Guatemala City. We received the news with great joy—truly a fulfillment of prophecy!

The ground breaking for the Guatemala City Temple was announced for Sunday, September 12, 1982, while we were serving in the Mexico City temple. There was unseen, powerful opposition to the building of a temple in Guatemala. It was my desire to attend the groundbreaking service with my wife, and we were unaware that we had been authorized to be there, for the letter of invitation did not arrive until two days after the event. Elder Boyd K. Packer had been assigned to preside over the groundbreaking service, accompanied by Elder Richard G. Scott. Elder Packer was unable to get to Guatemala, and Elder Scott almost didn't make it. Elder Packer related his experience at the temple dedication.

*I was assigned to break ground for the temple. I was to be in Lima, Peru, to break ground for that temple on Saturday and to be here Sunday morning to break ground for this temple. We accomplished the ceremony in*

*Lima. It was a beautiful occasion and we left immediately to the airport. I was coming to Guatemala, but the airplane lost an engine on takeoff. They managed to land it again, and I spent ten hours in the airport trying to get to Guatemala, praying I could be here. I knew that I could not do it finally.*

*Brother Scott was to be here as well. He was in Mexico City. I was finally able to contact him through a miraculous series of events and told him that I could not be there. That he should represent the Brethren. He sat all night in an airplane in Mexico City. That plane would not fly either. In the early hours of the morning, they finally took off, and he was here.... It was as if some power wanted to prevent it.*

In February 1984, before leaving for Guatemala on family business, Elder Scott requested that while there, I look over the construction of the Guatemala City Temple, which began immediately after the groundbreaking, and asked me to speak with the local architect working on the project, and give my impressions. I also spoke with Brother David Judd, the Church construction supervisor and to the contractors. I made the following suggestions which were not in the plans:

- 1) That a ceiling be placed over the large open space just inside the front entrance, to provide a large upper room for meetings or other purposes, and that an adjoining, inside stairway be provided.
- 2) That adjoining the stairway, office space be provided for counselors to the temple president.
- 3) That a private bathroom be provided for the temple president.
- 4) That the interior architectural design present a Mayan motif.
- 5) That a well be drilled on the property to provide an adequate water supply for the temple needs, as there was always a shortage of water in Guatemala City.

All the suggestions were implemented except #4—the Mayan motif for the interior design.

In drilling the well it was necessary to drill through two-hundred feet of solid rock, where an abundant supply of pure water was found. This was a confirmation to what I had been told in the vision I had of the

temple—that it would be built on solid rock although the area surrounding it is pumice.

Carmen and I, but especially Carmen, had long desired to serve as ordinance workers in the new Guatemala City Temple when completed. It was happily brought to our attention while we were serving in the Mexico City Temple, that the Guatemala City Temple was nearing completion, when on May 23, 1984, Brother Robert K. Flake and his wife Mae, who were trainers and he a sealer in the Mexico City Temple, received a call to go to Guatemala. Robert was needed as provisional temple engineer. Shortly thereafter, other missionary, trainer couples in the Mexico City Temple were called to go to Guatemala as trainers when the temple was finished. We had hoped we would receive a call, and Carmen became especially apprehensive when one couple refused the call to go to Guatemala. She could not understand how anyone could refuse to go to Guatemala or why others who were not willing to go were being called, while we who had such strong desires, were not called. She made her feelings known to the Lord in her prayers.

On the first of August, 1984, we went early to the temple and were busy with the activities there, when I received a telephone call from President Gordon B. Hinckley, extending to me a call to preside over the Guatemala City Temple and for Carmen to serve as Temple Matron. I can honestly say this call came as a happy surprise, since the normal time for calling new temple presidents had passed. President Hinckley asked if we could arrange to be in Salt Lake City on August 13, to attend the Temple Presidents' Seminar. I told him we would be there. I then sent my secretary to find Carmen and ask her to come to my office. As she entered my office I told her President Hinckley had called, to which she exclaimed, "You told him 'Yes'!" Not waiting for my answer, she threw her arms around me and kissed me. We both cried with joy. I was told by President Hinckley not to relate this to anyone except my family and to advise President Harold Brown. During the telephone conversation with President Hinckley, Brother Octaviano Tenorio, the temple recorder, passed by my office and immediately understood what the call was about. As I stepped into the hallway he embraced me and with tears in his eyes congratulated me. I then called the Browns who, with great emotion and joy, congratulated us also.

Our official call was confirmed in a letter from the First Presidency, dated August 2, 1984, which reads in part:

*Dear President O'Donnal:*

*This will confirm your call as the first president of the Guatemala City Temple. This will also confirm the call of Sister O'Donnal to serve as the temple matron.*

*We commend you and Sister O'Donnal for your faithfulness and willingness to serve, which have qualified you to fill these sacred callings in the house of the Lord.*

Our last active day in the Mexico City Temple was August 8, 1984. By that time, everyone knew we were leaving for Guatemala. We departed for Salt Lake City on August 10. The next two days were spent with personnel in the Temple Department, reviewing matters related to the temple in Guatemala. In a letter to Elder Bangerter I recommended Willard I. Skousen and Colonel Augusto Conde, to serve as my counselors. I was informed by Elder Bangerter that Brother Melvin Done of Albuquerque, New Mexico had been called to serve as Recorder of the Temple. I also requested that Oscar Argueta, a choice young member from Jalapa, Guatemala, who was working in the laundry of the Salt Lake City Temple, be employed as assistant recorder.

The Temple Presidents' Seminar was held in the Church Office Building, the Salt Lake City Temple and the Jordan River Temple, on August 14-16, 1984. Instructions were given to twelve, newly-called, temple presidents and their wives. At the close of the seminar we had a very spiritual testimony meeting in the chapel of the Jordan River Temple, with members of the First Presidency and the Twelve. Carmen was asked by President Hinckley to bear her testimony and she did so, beautifully, as always. This meeting was followed by a delicious buffet dinner in the temple cafeteria. After lunch with the General Authorities, we were all set apart. Carmen and I were set apart by President Hinckley, in his office. Before setting us apart, we enjoyed a delightful, brief visit with him. We dearly love this Prophet of the Lord.

On August 17 we flew to Boise, Idaho, where we were met by the Temple President and his wife. We were given a tour of the temple

which is similar to the Guatemala City Temple, although somewhat larger, and observed the different ordinances and sealings being performed. We noted that the laundry was not adequate, which we found was also true in the Guatemala City Temple. We then had lunch with our dear friends, Albert and LaPreel Huber, a former missionary couple in Guatemala. It was so nice to visit with them again.

We returned to Mexico City on August 31, and that same night President and Sister Brown, President and Sister Torres and the temple workers and personnel had planned a farewell party for us at the Aragón Stake Center. Because of a torrential rain and tempest, the brother assigned to drive us, was an hour late picking us up. These good people waited patiently for our arrival, then presented a lovely program with music by the Mormon Choir. Words were spoken by the Browns and the Torreses. Sister Torres described Sister O'Donnal as a great lady whom one could easily love, and referring to Proverbs 31:10—"a virtuous woman, for her price is far above rubies." Carmen and I expressed our great love and appreciation for these people and the wonderful way we had been accepted and for their expressions of affection for us.

Upon our return to Guatemala we were extended a warm reception by members and friends. We were happy to be back in our beloved and beautiful Guatemala, with the people we love so dearly. We realized we had a tremendous work ahead of us in carrying out all the necessary details in preparation for the dedication of the temple. Our experience in the Mexico City Temple prepared us for the task.

Our first concern was securing a place to live near the temple. It had been suggested that we rent a small, one-bedroom apartment, but from experience, we knew the house would have to serve as a residence with guest room and office, and also as a meeting place, warehouse and workshop. A suitable house was rented in Vista Hermosa near the temple, and we moved in on September 17, 1984. With the assistance of the Temporal Affairs Office, furniture and furnishings were purchased, although we moved in much of our own furniture.

Boxes of temple clothing, curtains, veils and other materials shipped from Salt Lake, were brought to the house. Fortunately there was a large storage room. All these materials had to be unpacked, inspected, counted, sorted and inventoried. There had been some losses in transit. All the women's dresses had to be shortened. To help with

this work, my wife organized a work committee of 12 sisters, and 5 sewing machines were brought to the house. The sisters also made the bags for all the temple clothing bundles. As there was yet much to be done, this committee continued their work after the dedication. Without their assistance we could not have completed what needed to be accomplished. At their last meeting, on January 21, 1985, each sister on the committee was given a gold pendant of the Guatemala City Temple.

We searched the market for cloth to make dresses and slips for the sister ordinance workers and cloth for white suits for the male ordinance workers. We arranged for professional seamstresses and tailors to make the dresses and suits. No suitable white pants for male patrons were available on the market, so these were contracted out. We did find men's white ties. What gave us the most concern were the white towels. There was no factory in Central America that could provide us with the needed quality and sizes. However, just weeks before the dedication a new factory opened in Guatemala City, that provided us with the towels in time for the dedication.

A directive was prepared for stake presidents and bishops, with points for consideration in recommending ordinance workers for the temple. Visits to the stakes throughout the temple district were initiated. Lists of names of proposed ordinance workers were sent to the First Presidency for approval. The first interviews commenced on November 13, 1984, at the Central Ward building. Seven ordinance workers were then set apart.

President Willard I. Skousen, who had been called as my first counselor, had arrived in Guatemala on November 3, 1984. My second counselor, Augusto Conde lived in Guatemala City. Training in the temple of endowed, set-apart, ordinance workers was initiated on November 20. The last interviews before the dedication were held on December 7.

There were many Government regulations and formalities which had to be satisfied before complete freedom from duty could be granted on all items imported for the temple, including an inventory and visual inspection of all items. The officials concerned could not understand why clothing should be exempt from paying duty, until they had inspected the clothing and had explained to them the purpose for which it would be used.

Many members were carefully interviewed before the required, paid personnel were selected for the different positions. I have no doubt there was inspiration in selecting these fine people. Sister Yolanda de Pellecer, a very special person and very talented sister, was chosen as secretary for the temple president although she was not at that time endowed.

Landscaping of the temple grounds was, for the most part, left to us. Immediate steps were taken to beautify the grounds.

Although construction work on the temple was still in progress, the Temple Committee recommended that general cleaning should be carried out on November 23, as the Open House was scheduled for November 27 through December 10, 1984. A total of 40 women and 60 men were assigned for this work. On the twenty-fourth the furniture was moved into the temple. It was necessary to have some furniture manufactured in Guatemala, including that for the baptismal area, instruction rooms, Matron's office and initiatory ordinance areas.

President Gene R. Cook, the Area President, arrived in Guatemala City on November 26, and after inspecting the temple, expressed his disappointment that, in his opinion, the temple was not ready as it should be for the Open House and dedication. However, at that time invitations had been sent out for the Open House beginning the following day, November 27. The Open House was conducted as scheduled, with the first day set apart for special, invited guests. At President Cook's suggestion, Carmen and I were dressed in our white clothes, receiving the guests.

There was much concern among those charged with the construction of the temple, and several meetings and telephone conversations were held with President Cook in Mexico City, to determine whether to recommend postponement of the dedication, which was scheduled for December 14-16, 1984. On November 30, brother Earl Monson arrived from Salt Lake City to inspect the temple. It seemed to me, as an observer only, that at this late date, no one wanted to assume the responsibility of telling President Hinckley that the temple was not physically ready for dedication, that at least six more months would be required to finish what needed to be done. Having lived through several postponements in completion of the Mexico City Temple, although not at such a late date as this, my personal opinion, which I did not make known, was that the dedication should proceed as

scheduled and that the work to be finished could be carried out during the periods the temple would be closed after the dedication. It was too late now for postponement of the dedication.

Around noon on December 3, I received a call from President Hinckley in which he asked my opinion concerning the status of construction and if the dedication should be conducted as scheduled. I told him this was putting me on the spot, and that there were people from Salt Lake with local construction supervisors, at present, inspecting the temple. Still, he insisted on my opinion. I explained my opinion as stated above, and told him I considered the dedication should proceed as scheduled. To this he said, "Then we will go ahead with the dedication as scheduled." After talking to President Hinckley I needed to go to the temple. As I approached the temple I was met by all those from Salt Lake and the local construction personnel, who asked me this question. "Did you talk to President Hinckley?" I replied that, yes, President Hinckley had called me about 15 minutes ago. I was then told that the Presiding Bishop's Office in Salt Lake had called, advising that, following President Hinckley's instructions, the temple dedication would be conducted as scheduled. The news traveled pretty fast, and I suppose a lot of people were relieved.

Some interior wall decorations with a Mayan motif were approved. My wife with Brother Weis, who was responsible for the interior decorating of church temples, searched the local market for appropriate materials. They were directed by the Spirit to small market places where they located and purchased two, beautiful, old *guipiles* (hand-woven, embroidered, typical, women's blouses), which were framed and placed on the walls in the foyer of the temple. Other authorized paintings were hung in the hallways.

Personnel from the Temple Department began arriving—Elder Angel Abrea, Brothers Fullmer, Brighton, Valgreen and Wood. At home, the preparation and marking of the last shipment of clothes from Salt Lake, ironing and preparing veils and curtains for the ordinance areas was completed. At the last moment I was told that part of the white pants made for patrons had been cut too short because the inseam measurement had mistakenly been used as the measurement from the waist to the floor. My recommendation was to add the necessary piece to lengthen the pants.

At the time of the Open House, Carmen was asked to write a short statement expressing her sentiments concerning the Guatemala City Temple. Following is the English translation of what she wrote:

*It is not possible for me to express in a few words my joy of returning to Guatemala after having been away for several years. Although the announcement of a temple in Guatemala was not a complete surprise, never did I think it would be so soon; and much less that my husband and I would be called and have the privilege of serving—he as President and I as Matron of this holy place.*

*I feel very humble and yet thankful to my Heavenly Father for the confidence He has placed in us.*

*I, having been the first person baptized here in Guatemala and in all of Central America, on November 13, 1948, in Guatemala City, by my husband, John Forres O'Donnal. I feel that as a result of the constant efforts these 36 years, to extend the true purpose of Mormonism; and now with a temple here, the members have the fullness of the gospel; and the fact that the construction of a temple was permitted, is a blessing for the entire nation, not only for the members of the Church. This we observe in other nations. The world will come to know the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from these holy sanctuaries and through the changes for good in the lives of the members.*

*I know this is a great challenge for me, because in me will be reflected that which I have accomplished through the understanding of that which I have spiritually received and from that which I learn each time I participate in the Church services here.*

*There is no doubt in my heart that this is "The House of The Lord" and that it will be a sanctuary dedicated to Him on December 14.*

*In my limited intellectual capacity it has not been easy to fully understand the magnitude of such sacred work. I recognize that the testimony I have, has come through my diligence in seeking in prayer and through dedication; and because of this, the Lord has blessed me greatly with a sensitivity, to **feel** and **know** that the work is real and true.*

*I appreciate the opportunity to express my sentiments in these few lines, but my gratitude to Almighty God is great, very great, because now "brightly beams our Father's mercy" upon this nation, my beautiful Guatemala, the Land of Eternal Spring.*

*Guatemala--November 24, 1984*

*Carmen G. O'Donnal*

Pressure was building on us to have our part ready for the dedication, but events were happening that robbed us of precious time. The telephone at home went dead and the one in the temple had not been connected. Our son Bruce, with his family, arrived unexpectedly with the intention of remaining in Guatemala. Shortly after their arrival they were involved in an accident that damaged their car, so they had to use our car for transportation, and wrecked it also. A new pickup truck I had just purchased for our business was stolen. We received a telephone call from our son and daughter in Mesa, Arizona, that Carmen's sister, Teresa, then living in Mesa, had been diagnosed with Leukemia, and they were sending her to us the following day. Robbers entered our home and stole our clothes off the clothesline. Carmen fell, almost breaking her right arm. In my rushing around dressing early one morning, I broke a toe on my right foot. All this happened a few days before the dedication. As if this were not enough, the city shut off the water in the area of our house and our water pump burned out. Both we and our guests, had to seek other places to bathe during the days of the dedication. Obviously the adversary was trying to distract us and to keep us from our duties, and to thwart the work.

As for the groundbreaking, the adversary tried to keep the brethren from attending the dedication. Without warning, Pan American Airlines discontinued all their flights to Guatemala as of October 31. Those who had reservations with them, including the General Authorities, had to try to find space on other airlines. Because December is the busiest time of the year to travel, all available transportation was overcrowded. It was only through divine intervention that the brethren were able to get to Guatemala.

Our daughter, Patsy, and her husband, Clark, planned on being with us for the dedication, as well as our friend Harvey Glade, who had been president of the Guatemala-El Salvador Mission, and his wife, Jean. Harvey and Jean arrived on December 11. Patsy arrived on December 12, and our son, John, on December 15. (Clark gave his place to John, feeling that it was more important that he be to the dedication.) However, it was also through a series of miraculous events, after much opposition, that Patsy and John were able to get there. There is no doubt that the Lord opened up the way for those who needed to attend the temple dedication.

We were concerned about the many things yet to be done to be ready for the dedication and to begin the ordinance work in the temple immediately thereafter. The night John arrived, he and Patsy, the Glades, Carmen and I stayed up all night working on the veils and altar cloths. Patsy and Jean also made a beautiful cover for the brides' book.

The final meeting of the Temple Committee was held on December 12, and on December 13, the final papers accepting the temple for the church, were signed by Brother Polley. The General Authorities attending the dedication also arrived on this date. They included the following:

The First Presidency:        Gordon B. Hinckley

Council of the Twelve:     Boyd K. Packer  
                                         James E. Faust

First Quorum of Seventy:  Richard G. Scott  
                                         Gene R. Cook  
                                         Ted E. Brewerton  
                                         Angel Abrea

The ten dedicatory sessions and the Cornerstone laying services were conducted in the Celestial Room of the Temple, as follows:

Friday--December 14, 1984:

    Cornerstone Services at 8:00 a.m.  
    First Session at 9:00 a.m.  
    Second Session at 12 noon  
    Third Session at 3:00 p.m.

Saturday--December 15, 1984:

    Fourth Session at 8:00 a.m.  
    Fifth Session at 11:00 a.m.  
    Sixth Session at 2:00 p.m.  
    Seventh Session at 5:00 p.m.

Sunday--December 16, 1984:

    Eighth Session at 8:00 a.m.

Ninth Session at 11:00 a.m.

Tenth Session at 2:00 p.m.

After concluding his beautiful talk in the first session, President Hinckley read the Dedicatory Prayer in English, after which an interpreter read it in Spanish. This prayer was repeated in the same manner in each of the other nine sessions. Following is the text of the Dedicatory Prayer:

*Hallowed be Thy holy name, our Father, Thou art the great Elohim to whom we lift our voices in thanksgiving and prayer on this day when we dedicate Thy house.*

*Thou hast honored us in directing, through Thy prophet, that a sacred temple should be built in this land. Now the yearnings of our hearts for the higher blessings of the gospel may be realized. We think not only of ourselves, but of our forebears through whom has come our inheritance. Under the keys of the Holy Priesthood restored by Thy power, we may now receive our washings and our anointings, our endowments and our sealings through the ordinances which Thou hast revealed in this dispensation. Thou has sent Thy prophet Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, that the purposes of the earth may be fulfilled and that those who have passed beyond the veil of death may partake of the blessings of Thine everlasting gospel and move forward on the way of eternal life.*

*Thou kind and gracious Father, our hearts swell with gratitude for Thy remembrance of the sons and daughters of Lehi, the many generations of our fathers and mothers who suffered so greatly and who walked for so long in darkness. Thou hast heard their cries and seen their tears. Now there will be opened to them the gates of salvation and eternal life.*

*Dear Father, have mercy upon us of this generation. Fortify us in our faith. Strengthen us against weakness. Give us power to resist the wiles of the adversary. May love for Thee and Thy Son grow in our hearts, and may it be expressed in our love one for another as Thy covenant sons and daughters.*

*We thank Thee, O God, for lifting the scales of darkness which for generations clouded the vision of the descendants of Lehi. We thank thee for the wondrous light of the gospel, restored in this dispensation through the instrumentality of Thy servant Joseph Smith, whom Thou didst ordain a prophet to the nations. We thank Thee for the glorious vision given him in the opening of this dispensation. We thank Thee for the restored record of our ancestors—the record of Lehi, Nephi and Jacob, of Alma and Mosiah, of*

*Benjamin and Mormon and Moroni. We thank Thee for this voice which has come from the dust to bear witness of the divinity of Thy Beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for listening ears and believing hearts, that Thou hast touched us by the power of Thy Spirit to recognize divine truth when it was brought to us by Thine ordained servants.*

*And now, acting in the authority of the everlasting priesthood, and as Thy servants duly commissioned, we dedicate to Thee and to Thy Beloved Son this, the Guatemala City Temple of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We dedicate the ground on which it stands, with the beauty of thy creations growing thereon. We dedicate the structure from the foundation to the figure of Moroni which crowns the tallest steeple. We dedicate the baptismal font, the endowment rooms, the beautiful celestial room which represents Thine abode, the sealing rooms with their sacred altars, together with all related facilities. We dedicate the ancillary buildings that they may contribute to the purposes of this temple. While so doing, we dedicate ourselves to the sacred work to be performed herein.*

*Please accept this house as the gift of Thy children. We have built it according to Thy will, that Thou, our Father, and Thy Son, our resurrected Lord, might have a place to manifest Thyself to Thy people. We consecrate it with love. Let Thy mighty blessings rest upon it and Thy Holy Spirit sanctify it.*

*Wilt Thou bless the grounds and the exterior that they may be beautiful to all who look upon Thy house. May those who are worthy to enter it come with thanksgiving in their hearts, and in a spirit of dedication and love for Thee and Thine eternal pattern of salvation. May faith grow in their hearts. May they be sanctified in their minds, and may visions of Thy glorious, eternal plan unfold before them. May families rejoice as they are bound together under the authority of the Holy Priesthood for all eternity with an everlasting covenant.*

*Protect this Thy house from hands or voices that would defile it. Preserve it from the tremblings of the earth and the storms of nature.*

*Bless our land, O Father, this nation of Guatemala where stands Thy holy house. May those who govern do so in righteousness. Bless them as they act to preserve the liberties and enhance the prosperity of the people. May there be peace in the land. May it be preserved from revolution and war. May there be freedom and equity under the law. May there be education and opportunity for all. May the forces of oppression and darkness be stayed by Thy power and may the light of truth shine over this Republic. So bless, Father, its neighbor nations that they may be preserved in independence and freedom.*

*Prosper Thy faithful sons and daughters as they serve Thee in righteousness and walk in obedience to Thy commandments. Preserve them*

*from hunger and privation, and may the generation of their posterity walk with faith before Thee.*

*We lift our voices in faith to ask Thy blessing upon Thy prophet, President Spencer W. Kimball, that Thou wilt increase his days and give him strength according to thy divine will. Bless all associated with him and all who carry responsibility wherever Thy work may be established.*

*Father, we thank Thee for the redeeming sacrifice of Thy Son. We love Him for what He did for us and for all mankind. We bless His holy name. We come unto Thee through Him who gave His life as a ransom for each of us.*

*Accept our thanks. Hear our prayer. Bless us with a spirit of dedication to Thee and Thy great work, we humbly ask as Thy thankful sons and daughters, for whose blessing Thou hast revealed Thy glorious plan of everlasting life, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. Amen.*

President Willard I. Skousen had been invited to speak in the second session, President Augusto Conde in the fifth session, and both Carmen and I had been invited to speak in the ninth session.

I was aware that we should not talk about our sacred, spiritual experiences and I had pondered over whether I should mention the vision I was privileged to experience concerning the temple. It was my desire to relate this experience. Those present in the first session had had the rare opportunity to hear Elder Boyd K. Packer relate a personal, spiritual experience he had pondered over for several weeks. During lunch with the General Authorities, I mentioned to Elder Packer that I too had pondered over mentioning my experience and asked him if he felt it would be appropriate for me to do so. His answer was that if I felt good about relating it, I should do so.

Noting my discomfort because of my broken toe, Elder James E. Faust offered to give me a special blessing, for which I was very thankful, after which I experienced little pain.

Following are the talks given by Carmen and myself in the ninth session:

(English translation of Carmen's Talk)

*My dear brothers and sisters, it is a great joy for me to be here in front of you this morning, and a blessing and a privilege. I give thanks to my Heavenly Father for this marvelous opportunity.*

*During the nine dedication sessions I have enjoyed the Spirit of the Lord as well as of those who have been present. I have seen three kingdoms represented here in this temple, the Cakchiquel kingdom, the Ke'kchi kingdom, and the Quiché kingdom. I have been given a patriarchal blessing and I have been told that I am of Ephraim, but that does not mean that in my veins does not flow the blood of Lehi, Lamanite. With great love, with great pride, with great joy, I give thanks to my ancestors, because although I come from a mixture of Spanish, French, and English, who have always believed they are of blue blood, I testify that my blood is not blue. It is very red and I am very proud to carry Lamanite blood.*

*I give thanks also to my Heavenly Father for the arrival here in Guatemala of that great man who taught me the gospel, my husband. In my limited intellectual capacity it was impossible to understand what he was telling me, that it was the true church, the only true church upon the earth, and many times I was offended when he said, "You who carry the Indian blood will rise up."*

*On our honeymoon we passed through towns in the highlands; we stopped at the top of a mountain, and he said to me, "All those houses that you see, all those Indians, will hear the gospel." Then I heard once again "Indian," as is true with us Latins, who would not want that to be mentioned to us, but being members of The Church of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God here on the earth, in this city, in this nation, we should understand that it is a privilege.*

*After many years I have come to understand all those things. The Lord has allowed me to see with my own eyes what was once manifested to my husband, that there would be a temple in Guatemala, in this place, white and beautiful as it is.*

*These are very personal things, but it is joyous to me to tell them. It did not surprise me when they announced this temple. I had the faith that someday there would be a temple, but I am sorry to tell you that I did not think I would see it. The Lord has allowed me to live to see this miracle with my own eyes. I also want to confess that during the years we were outside of Guatemala, I always longed to return, knowing that there was going to be a temple here. I pleaded with the Lord to allow me to return and to give me the opportunity of working in the temple if it was His will.*

*There were also times in which I had one foot in this world and the other foot in the other world, and at that time I promised my Heavenly Father, "Lord, I am ready to go, if you need me there, but I am also willing to stay here if you need me and I can be of some service," and this He granted me.*

*Through faith I have felt a certainty of the things that have happened that I have requested. I did not ask for the position I am now in as the*

*Matron of this temple, in which I feel very humble. It is a privilege and I have promised my Heavenly Father to serve Him all the days of my life, to give my talents, if I have them, my time, and my love to His service with my own people.*

*I am very happy to have with us my beloved husband, to whom I am grateful and love so much, here as president of the temple of my people. I thank him for our four children, who know that we love them very much. We love their families, but when we were called as presidents of the Quetzaltenango Mission, I also remember the words of Elder Bradford, who said, "Sister, the Lord has prepared you for many years to accompany your husband wherever the Lord calls him. Now He needs your talents, your time, and all that He has given you for the enlargement of His kingdom here on the earth in these areas."*

*What was it that came to my mind? My children, my grandchildren, but he continued and, "Do not worry about your family. The Lord will take care of them and you will enjoy the blessings along with them."*

*I testify that this is the true church, that temple work is the maximum we can hope for. We have reached the culmination of our efforts, and when I think back it seems unbelievable, but I testify that miracles are fulfilled, and they exist, and that the Lord loves us.*

*I leave my love with all of you, also promising the Lord that I will do whatever He wants. I will fulfill whatever He assigns me as long as He wants, always beside my husband, whom I support in everything and love very much.*

*I know that President Kimball is a living prophet of the Lord. I have known him for many years. He blessed our first son who was born here in Guatemala. He was the first child blessed within the covenant here, the first child who was blessed in the branch. President Kimball asked me, "Why do you want me to bless him? Your husband has the priesthood and it is his privilege." I told him, "My husband and I are in agreement. We love you very much and we feel that you should bless the first fruit of the Church in this land." And so it was. I would like to send my love to President Kimball through all of you great brethren, whom I respect, support and love so much.*

*I leave my testimony that the Book of Mormon is the most valuable gem that anyone can possess, that God lives, that Jesus Christ is our Savior and the God of this world. I leave these words in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

I had been assigned 12 minutes, but when I got up to speak, President Hinckley called me over and told me to take all the time I desired.

(English translation of my talk)

*What a glorious day! Not only for us, who live in mortality, but for all those who are anxiously waiting. No one can know my feelings and my joy without having experienced what I have experienced and felt and enjoyed divine aid. I am going to explain why.*

*I know without any doubt that this place, this area of Vista Hermosa, is sacred. The first missionaries were brought to Guatemala to our home, on September 4, 1947. President Arwell L. Pierce came with his counselor, Moroni L. Abegg, and four missionaries. On September seventh we went in my car on the highway, which in those days was under construction. It was not in use. We drove through the rubble, and reached the highest point possible, and there partook of the sacrament. It was a rainy day. The city was covered with dark clouds. President Pierce, the mission president, dedicated the land for the preaching of the gospel. Then it began to rain hard. We all had to get into the car and there bore our testimonies. When we finished our testimonies and the dedicatory prayer, the dark clouds parted directly over the city and resplendent rays of sunshine burst forth.*

*A little over a year later, after great struggle against tradition, against family and against the forces of Satan, my wife was converted to the Church and was baptized here in the stream behind the "Campo de Marte," the first baptism in Central America in this dispensation, and now we have the holy temple in this place. Tell me, isn't it blessed? Isn't it sacred?*

*I arrived in Guatemala as a young man, 24 years old, the seventh child of a family of fourteen. I was sent by the government of the United States. I wandered through these mountains alone, seeing this people, loving them, and crying. I wandered through the jungles, and saw the people there, people so loving, and I wept because the gospel was not here. I was driven by the Spirit during all those years, until I went to Salt Lake City to speak with the prophet. I made two trips in 1946 and 1947. It was not a coincidence that the prophet was President George Albert Smith, who gave the responsibility to the Apostle Spencer W. Kimball for the work of the Lamanites.*

*In the first month of 1947, the First Presidency wrote a letter promising to send missionaries. The Central American Mission was annexed to the Mexican Mission, which at that time was the only mission in all of Mexico. The first four missionaries came on September 7, 1947, to our home.*

*Since that time there has been great opposition, as Elder Packer has explained that he had felt strongly. Satan has tried to destroy my wife and*

me, physically and spiritually. During these years we have traveled to the United States many times, and there has not been a time that we have undertaken our journey to the south that we have not had strong opposition, to the point of wanting to take our life. Satan possessed my wife in Tepic, Mexico, and by the power of the priesthood I cast him out. One night during a return trip to Mexico City I nearly died in the small town of Sabinas, Coahuila, Mexico. By the faith and prayers of my wife, I was able to arise in the morning and continue our journey.

In 1956 there was a lot of pressure on me to be assigned elsewhere and leave Guatemala. I made preparations to go to Brazil, where my supervisors wanted me to trade with one who was working there. After arranging my passport and having the trip arranged, I started for the South Coast, where my family was. It was a very rainy afternoon, there was a detour in the highway, and I took the detour. I had to cross the railroad tracks and there I had an accident with the train. My life was saved; the car was destroyed. This was on May 12, 1956.

I was taken to the hospital at Tiquisate, and later I had to go to the hospital in Guatemala City for surgery. As I was recuperating, (and I have thought a lot about relating this, since it was a very personal experience; however, today and in the previous sessions we have heard many personal experiences), I had a very personal spiritual experience in which the Lord told me that He had saved my life because my work here was not finished, but that my life was not my own. He told me that there was going to be a temple here in Guatemala City, and He showed me the temple in a vision.

These things, during the course of the revelation, I dictated to my wife and she wrote them down. I have a confirmation of this. In all these areas in Vista Hermosa the subsoil is of pumice. It is of volcanic sand. The Lord told me that the temple was going to be built upon solid rock. In drilling a well here on this lot beside the temple, they had to drill through more than two hundred feet of solid rock. This temple, I am sure, has a special mission.

I hope to see the day, while I am still here, in which the ordinances can be given in the Indian languages. I know that won't happen until we are prepared. We are preparing. I had the opportunity of having in the mission with me many young people who learned those languages, and I am sure they are anxious to see that these ordinances are given here in the temple in these languages. It was not a coincidence that in the vision I saw of the temple, the people I saw entering and leaving were pure Lamanites.

During the time I was in the mission, it made me very sad to interview these people for baptism through interpreters, and to know that they did not know more than that they existed. They did not know more than they had a name. They did not know where they were born or who their parents were. In some cases, some had had twelve children, of whom ten died.

*Of the ten who died, they did not remember their names. Their births and deaths were not registered, and I thought, "What about the records?" I discussed this with Elders Mark E. Petersen and Bruce R. McConkie. They asked me what I was doing. I told them, "I am baptizing them, brethren." "You do well," they responded.*

*I know that the veil is very thin. I know that we are going to have the records of these brothers and sisters. I know that their children are waiting to be sealed to them. I know that they are pure. Never in my life have I interviewed people as pure as this people—men to receive the priesthood, so clean and so pure in their lives. We have a very great obligation to them here in this temple.*

*The Lord's work on the other side of the veil, as Elder Brewerton mentioned this morning, is being performed. This I know. In Mexico City we interviewed and set apart about fifteen hundred workers. We began the work in the temple, and in a short time, brothers and sisters, out of the best workers we had there, four suddenly died. Why did they die? Why did they pass away? To work on the other side of the veil.*

*Our obligation is very great, brothers and sisters. You have noticed in the prayer, or will notice in the dedicatory prayer, that it says, "We dedicate ourselves to this sacred work which will be performed here." We dedicate ourselves. We are dedicated to this work. But, brothers and sisters, many blessings will come from our work. Remember that the temple is the greatest place of spiritual power in the Church.*

*Brothers and sisters, I know that you will be protected and blessed. These nations will be blessed and protected. The more work done, the more power there is, because power comes forth from this temple. We must live according to our covenants in order to have the faith to exercise that power.*

*I want to read to you from D&C 97:15-16, where it says, "And inasmuch as my people build a house unto me in the name of the Lord, and do not suffer any unclean thing to come into it, that it be not defiled, my glory shall rest upon it; Yea, and my presence shall be there, for I will come into it, and all the pure in heart that shall come into it shall see God."*

*In D&C 105, the Lord gives us many promises and says in verses 11 and 12, "And this cannot be brought to pass until mine elders are endowed with power from on high. For behold, I have prepared a great endowment and blessing to be poured out upon them, inasmuch as they are faithful and continue in humility before me."*

*And the Lord says, "...I will fight your battles." (D&C 105:14) This people will be protected, if we live according to our covenants, brothers and sisters.*

*I would also like to refer to D&C 109, to the great blessings promised to those who enter and make covenants in this holy temple. In verse 22 it*

says, "We ask thee, Holy Father," (this was during the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, but it applies to us) "that thy servants may go forth from this house armed with thy power, and that thy name may be upon them, and thy glory be round about them, and thine angels have charge over them." What a blessing!

*But sisters and brothers, I knew all this. The Lord indicated it to me when I was eighteen years old. In my patriarchal blessing, He told me all this—what was going to happen in my life.*

*I give thanks and bear my testimony that I know the Lord brought me to Guatemala. I have seen thousands of miracles here in the changing of lives, which gives me so much joy. We will see thousands more. I know that I knew my wife in the former life. I know that there we conversed with our Lord and planned what we were going to do here. I know that He prepared her for me. I love her and love my children which God has given us.*

*May God bless us to understand these sacred things, I ask in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

During the time between each session, in the President's office, President Hinckley interviewed those men who had been recommended as sealers. It was my sacred honor to assist President Hinckley in translating the interviews and assisting him when giving the sealing power. President Hinckley had approved Carlos H. Amado, a Regional Representative, whom we had recommended to be a sealer, and set him apart—the first Regional Representative to be a sealer as well.

Immediately following the last dedicatory session, the cleanup and transformation of the temple began, in preparation for the first endowment session the following morning. Brethren with temple recommends, under the supervision of the construction supervisors, removed the chairs, rearranged and prepared the temple, some working through the night, making sure all was in readiness.

The first endowment session began at 9:30 a.m. on December 17. It was significant and a great joy to us, and a sacred privilege for our children, Patsy and John, to take the first vicarious names and to be the first witnesses in the first session—they having been the first children born in the Church in Central America.

Those set-apart ordinance workers who had not received their endowments were on the first live session, together with saints from the other Central American counties who had traveled to attend the dedication. I performed the first sealing, for the Church Construction

Supervisor, Dave Judd, and his second wife, María Elena, from El Salvador. Many other sealings were performed that day. Patsy stayed to help with the children who were to be sealed. It was a long but very gratifying day.

We had worked all day and late into the night without stopping to eat or drink. I was concerned because Carmen was looking very weary. After we had gone to bed, at about 2:30 in the morning Carmen could not awaken me when she was overcome by muscle cramps and spasms throughout her body. She couldn't walk, so with great difficulty she crawled from our bedroom to where Patsy and John were sleeping, hoping they would hear her cries for help. She awakened Patsy who found her crying in pain, curled up on the floor, her arms and legs in a contorted position, almost as if she were possessed. Satan would not desist in trying to destroy us. Although she looked very frail, after John and I gave her a blessing she obtained relief and was comforted.

Our children had the honor of attending the first and ninth dedicatory sessions in the Celestial Room. Each day Patsy wrote her impressions as follows:

*December 14, 1984—*

*I am totally overcome. Words cannot express the feelings in my heart after attending the cornerstone ceremony and the first dedicatory session of the Guatemala City Temple today. The entire time my thoughts were of my heritage and my ancestors, and on how significant and what a blessing it is for me to be here to witness this historic event.*

*What a privilege it was to be in the Celestial Room. The Hosanna shout was particularly impressive. Listening to Elder Packer and Elder Faust address us in Spanish touched me deeply—it was like the gift of tongues. Elder Packer shared a dream he had while in Guatemala on a special assignment from President Kimball, which had a direct influence on the decision to build a temple in Guatemala. He also shared the experience of his and Elder Scott's trying to get to Guatemala for the groundbreaking of the temple, and how it was as though some power wanted to prevent it. He never made it, Elder Scott finally did. I was reminded of how my parents were prevented from attending the groundbreaking ceremony also, and of all the adversity they have had since receiving their call as president and matron of this temple.*

*During the dedicatory prayer, when I closed my eyes, a vision was opened up to me—at first I saw some very beautiful, rich and verdant terrain, such as is typical in Guatemala, as if at the foot of two volcanoes. I moved*

through it, northward, as if traveling through time; there I saw multitudes and multitudes of people assembled, dressed in white, their dark hair flowing. The terrain in the background farthest from me changed to red mountains, typical of the Arizona desert or Shiprock, New Mexico. I know not the significance, unless I was seeing the multitudes of Lamanite descent, from South to North America, who were present and prepared to receive their temple endowments. Throughout the session I had the distinct impression that this temple is here because of, and specifically for the Indians—the direct descendants of Father Lehi—not so much for those of mixed blood.

President Hinckley said he was satisfied that Father Lehi smiles this day because of what is being done; and he could feel the presence of a great unseen congregation who have an interest in what took place. Certainly the veil is very thin. I am sure Lehi, Nephi, Mormon, Moroni and all the prophets who foresaw and have anxiously awaited this day, were present today.

December 16, 1984—

We had another spiritual feast this day. In fact it has been the highlight of the entire dedication. Daddy received permission to allow his children to attend the ninth dedicatory session where he and Momma were to speak.

President Hinckley said that he has participated in the dedication of many temples, perhaps more than any other man in the Church alive today, and he had felt the presence of the Spirit of the Lord in many places, but did not know that he had ever felt it so strongly as he had felt it here today. He said that while Daddy was speaking, a vision opened up to him of the history of the Book of Mormon and of all of Lehi's children; how they had been led away by the foolish traditions of their fathers and because of it had suffered greatly and lived in poverty and ignorance for generations, and had been refined in the fires of terrible adversity. He said the completion of a temple here in Guatemala is a culmination of hopes and dreams of thousands of years. It is the fulfillment of the promises made to Lehi and Nephi that their seed would not be utterly lost. He said he has been touched more deeply than he could explain, by Daddy's and Momma's words, and had come to realize "that they have been a part of the Lord's plan, instruments in the hand of God to assist in bringing about the redemption of His wayward children." All that has happened in Daddy's life and all that he has been able to accomplish here, he was chosen and foreordained to do, to bring to pass the fulfillment of the promises to Lehi's children. President Hinckley was also impressed that a vision of a temple in Guatemala was given to someone else, years before it was given to the prophet.

*President Hinckley continued to comment throughout the day about the feelings in his heart and the clarity of the vision he now had because of the words spoken by Daddy and Momma, and how much more special that made them and this temple.*

*As his children we have grown up hearing about Daddy's vision of the temple and his feeling about his mission here in Guatemala and his love and vision for the Indians. But I had never appreciated him as I do now, after President Hinckley's remarks, and when the entire picture is before me. He is truly a chosen man of God, foreordained for the special mission of bringing to pass the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies made in the Book of Mormon to Lehi's children.*

*During the ninth session I had another spiritual experience that began as we and the choir from the Guatemala Las Victorias Stake who was to sing in the session were waiting to enter the temple. I was overcome as I looked at their faces and saw pure and delightful youth entering there—also a fulfillment of prophecy. They sang beautifully throughout the session, but particularly the final "Hosanna Anthem" and when the congregation joined them in singing "The Spirit of God Like A Fire Is Burning." During the chorus when we sang, "We'll sing and we'll shout with the armies of heaven"—in Spanish it is translated "with the hosts of heaven"—I saw, directly above the choir, a heavenly choir, dressed in white, all with white hair; and I felt the "hosts" of heaven that filled the Celestial Room. The beauty and the volume of the singing was intensified by the heavenly choir. Never had that hymn had so much meaning. I was so filled with the Spirit and totally overcome with emotion that I could no longer sing. Even now, as I recall the experience, my emotions can not be controlled. This was an experience I will never forget.*

*As the General Authorities were leaving, Elder Faust came to John and I in the foyer of the temple. He put one arm around John and one arm around me and told us how glad he was that we had been able to attend. Several times throughout the dedication he had said to me that it was a good thing I was there to help my mother. Then he looked at John and I and said, "I was talking to you two in my talk when I said that I hope you appreciate your heritage. You have a great inheritance, and it isn't money and it isn't land. You are truly blessed."*

*December 17, 1984--*

*To our surprise and great joy, Daddy told John and me yesterday, that he wanted us—the first fruits of the gospel in Guatemala—to take the first names given in this temple and to be the first witnesses in the first session and the first through the veil. Words cannot express the excitement we felt, and at the same time the humility at realizing its significance.*

*It was Daddy's wish, but I also feel that it was meant to be. It was significant that Daddy's and Momma's only children born in Guatemala, and the first born and blessed in the Church in Guatemala, also be the first through the Guatemala temple.*

*I believe as one of the General Authorities said, that what we have experienced here during the temple dedication "will leave such an impression on our minds, that none of those present will ever forget it."*

John Frank expressed his feelings thus:

*I was filled with excitement to be able and permitted to travel to Guatemala with my sister Patsy for the Dedication of the Guatemala City Temple. I was saddened by the fact that my eternal friend and companion, Linda, whom I love and adore, and my sweet children with whom we've been blessed, could not go with me, but they sent me off with their sweet love. As I flew to Guatemala I was extremely anxious to arrive and be with my parents and other loved ones. We have been waiting for this great event for many years in our family. When we arrived we were greeted by our family and friends with love, and much happiness to see us. I could feel the excitement of Guatemala City as things seemed to buzz with the open house that had taken place earlier and the announcement of the dedication. I don't remember the schedule of events but we were up, it seemed literally all that night helping prepare the veils for the temple. What an honor. What a wonderful purpose to be engaged in.*

*As the time came for the dedicatory sessions I became eager and avid. The Spirit was remarkable. The members in attendance were so moved they seemed in wonder of the magnitude of what was happening and the beauty of their surroundings. The temple was majestic. What beauty!*

*It was so wonderful to be able to sit and listen to the General Authorities and feel of their spirit and love for all. To be able to sit and eat and rub shoulders with President Hinckley, Elder Faust, Elder Packer and many others that were there in attendance. I testify they are wonderful men of God.*

*The ninth session of the dedication was the most spiritual to me. It was overwhelming. Visions were seen. Angelic choirs were heard, and I myself heard them. What an experience. Multitudes of Lehi's children were witnessed to be there in attendance. Such joy and happiness I felt. My mother and father spoke and bore testimony of the divinity of the work of the Lord and of their experiences, manifestations and instructions they had been given by the Spirit of the Lord for many years in their lives. Once again what joy and love filled the temple that day. And it was so strong from the*

*other side of the veil. I was so blessed to feel and witness this great day. The dedicatory prayer was wonderful. The Hosanna Shout was wonderful. I cannot express adequately in words as to how I felt. This experience can only be expressed spiritually. I will never forget this blessing of the Spirit.*

*My sister, Patsy, and I were the first fruits of the gospel in Guatemala. We were so honored and blessed to have the great opportunity of taking the first names and of being privileged to be the first to pass through the veil at this special temple. A prophecy was now fulfilled. What a beautiful and spiritual experience.*

*After the first full day that the temple was open for endowments and sealing, my mother became severely ill with muscle cramps and spasms in the night. So much so that we were very worried about her. My father and I anointed and blessed her to get well and she did, almost immediately! What a wonderful blessing the priesthood is.*

*It was so nice to be able to sit with my parents and talk about the multitude of spiritual things that had taken place and were taking place in their lives.*

*I love them so much and am so thankful for being placed in their home. They love the Lord and have been dedicated to his purposes of showing love and teaching the gospel to all of those sons and daughters of Father Lehi. They have been honed, polished and groomed by the Spirit to be able to accomplish all they have in Guatemala. They are definitely elect! I thank my Father in Heaven for them.*

*I love the Lord and know the Book of Mormon is true; that the prophet Joseph Smith was a man called of God to bring forth the gospel in this dispensation. The Church is true. Jesus is the Christ and lives! I humbly leave this to my earthly father and mother who have given me much. Whom I love and respect. I thank my Father in Heaven for this experience that will be with me all my life. In the name of Jesus Christ I say these things. Amen.*

*Love, John Frank*

María Isabel Gálvez Dieguez, Carmen's half sister, was present in the second session, and later related the following, concerning her experience:

(English Translation)

### *An Unforgettable Experience*

*On the fourteenth of December, 1984, was the beginning of an intense desire and expectation, as was felt by thousands of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and with them I turned toward the temple to attend the dedication.*

*Those who would attend the second dedicatory session were gathered around the temple, I united with them and guided by men especially assigned to direct us, I arrived at the chapel where a preparatory meeting was held, after which, in perfect order we were directed to the interior of the temple to a room adjacent to the Celestial Room so that we could observe the ceremony. While seated there, a brother came and conducted me to the last row of seats in the last available chair in the Celestial Room. I felt a great emotion upon entering the Celestial Room, even goose-bumps over my entire body, which I believed to be brought on because of my emotion in being in this holy place. But as the ceremony commenced, a female person, dressed in white with pink flounces on her shoulders, came to sit by my side. She had black hair which fell over her shoulders. I did not see her face. Because of emotion and reverence I did not turn to look. She remained attentive and reverent through the session. At the moment of the Hosanna shout, I did not notice if she waved a handkerchief because I was crying and felt the presence of the Lord! The session ended and we were requested to file out in order, which we did; however the lady had disappeared from my side.*

*In an attempt to know who this person might be, I discussed this with my sister who had not been able to attend because of illness. I do not know, but someone did accompany me in that unforgettable occasion. I am grateful to my Father in Heaven for this privilege and hope with His help some day to know who she is.*

*Isabel Gálvez Dieguez*

NOTE: Isabel's mother died giving her birth, and the aunt who raised her was also deceased.

Shortly after returning to Salt Lake City, following the dedication, President Hinckley spoke at the First Presidency's Christmas Devotional Satellite Broadcast. The devotional was not made available for viewing in Guatemala. However, I was informed by friends that President Hinckley had spoken about me in his message. How humbling it was to realize that this great servant of the Lord would relate my humble story

to all the members of the Church. President Gene R. Cook handed me a copy of the video-tape recording of the devotional, sent to me by President Hinckley. I include here what President Hinckley related:

*Let me tell of another person I met in Guatemala. He is John O'Donnal, the president of the Guatemala City Temple. He stood before a congregation and with a voice choked with emotion told his story.*

*As a young man he was graduated from the University of Arizona with a degree in agricultural science. He was employed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and was sent to Guatemala to work on a project to develop the growth of natural rubber trees to meet a critical need when war was engulfing the world.*

*As I remember his words, he said: "I was twenty-four years of age and unmarried when I came to Guatemala forty-three years ago. I had been reared with a love for the Savior and His teachings. In the course of my work here, I walked day after day through these mountains and jungles among the native peoples of this land. I came to know them and to love them, and as I saw the poverty and darkness in which they lived, I wept for them. They were the purest people I had ever known, but they were without the light of the gospel. I cried to the Lord concerning them. I knew that their one sure hope lay in obtaining a knowledge of and a love for Jesus Christ, and in receiving the record of their forebears, which testifies of Him.*

*"In time I fell in love with a beautiful girl in whose veins flowed English, and Spanish blood and also the blood of Lehi, Laman, and Samuel. We were married and spent our honeymoon in the mountains among the native people. I told her that some day these people must hear the gospel and that they would rise in strength and beauty.*

*"In 1946 and again in 1947 I traveled to Salt Lake City and pleaded with the President of the Church to send missionaries. Finally, in September 1947, the mission president and his counselors brought four elders to our house. The next day we drove onto a mountain where together we had the sacrament, and the mission president dedicated the land for the preaching of the restored gospel.*

*"My wife was the first native of Central America baptized into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Today she stands at my side as the matron of this beautiful temple."*

*He continued: "In 1956 I was in a serious accident and was taken to the hospital for major surgery. My life hung in the balance, and in those circumstances I had a remarkable experience. The Lord showed me that a temple would be built in this land.*

*"Also, I was informed by a power beyond the power of man that my life would be spared but that my life would not be my own."*

*His life has not been his own. As a scientist and administrator, he established and operated a large rubber plantation and operated for a short period a tire factory for one of the great rubber companies in the United States. But he did still yet a far more significant thing. In the spirit of the Master, he went about doing good. He worked sharing the gospel among the native peoples of Guatemala. For more than forty years he has lived with them, has spoken their language, has sorrowed with them in their sorrows, has taught them the everlasting gospel, and has been a quiet, unassuming, but magnificent pioneer in the development of the work of the Lord in that land.*

*When he walked the jungle trails alone, he was the only member of the Church in all that land. Today there are more than forty-four thousand of them. He nurtured the first little branch. Today there are twelve stakes of Zion in Guatemala and many more in the surrounding nations of Central America. Once, a few members met in his home. Now beautiful chapels of the Church dot the land. On a hill above Guatemala City is a magnificent temple with the figure of Moroni atop its tallest steeple.*

*It was this Moroni who wrote among his final words this charge to us:*

*"Awake, and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; yea, and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion; and strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever, that thou mayest no more be confounded, that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled.*

*"Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness." (Moroni 10:31-32)*

*John O'Donnal was told when the veil between life and death was thin that his life would be spared but that his life would not be his own. How true that must be for each of us. None of us may rightly say that his life is his own. Our lives are a gift from God, and when we leave this life may not be according to our wish. Truthfully, our days are numbered not by ourselves, but according to the will of God.*

I also received the following letter dated December 18, 1984, from Elder James E. Faust:

*Dear President and Sister O'Donnal:*

*It was a delight for us to be with you in Guatemala. We appreciated so much every kindness and courtesy which you extended to us. We are most*

*appreciative of all that you did. We appreciated also becoming acquainted with your family. It was choice to have them there.*

*Your remarks on Sunday were inspiring and thrilling. You have been great leaders and the Lord has magnified you and blessed you.*

*Will you please express appreciation to all of your associates who helped so very much in connection with the proceedings of the dedication. I pray our Heavenly Father will continue to bless and be with you in all you do.*

*With every good wish.*

*Sincerely,  
James E. Faust*

Realizing that excursions to the temple must be strongly encouraged as these would be the major source of activity in the temple, a building just a block from the temple was leased to house those arriving in the excursions. This building was made ready, with kitchen, dinning room, bathrooms, and furniture to accommodate 40 people. Another building nearby was also rented and a Missionary Training Center was opened for Central America.

Assistance was continually rendered by personnel from Church headquarters, for adjustments and repairs of equipment, but the major problem was with the computer system, as it had been in the Mexico City Temple, until an electrical engineer discovered that a five kilowatt voltage regulator was required for the few seconds start-up, to control the heavy demand. There were also problems with the air conditioning system. A friend, Daryl Slade, from Mesa, Arizona, volunteered to come to Guatemala and spend one month ironing out the problems. He spent from October 10 to early November 1985, on the project. The electric emergency plant was inadequate and a larger plant was purchased and installed. The underground water storage tanks also were inadequate and additional tanks were added to triple the supply. The oil in the material used to bond the white marble siding of the temple, caused a dark discoloration in the marble which we were never successful in remedying. It became necessary, because of termite damage, to replace all the inside doors of the temple. These were replaced with beautiful mahogany doors. There were other minor adjustments also. I mention these, not in a negative sense, but only to show some of the physical problems with which we were faced.

However, our greatest concern was for the welfare of the children brought to the temple to be sealed to their parents, and for the sisters attending these children. A lovely nursery had been provided in the annex building, separated from the temple entrance by approximately 18-20 yards. During the six-month rainy season and the cold months, it was a serious problem carrying the children from the nursery to the temple in the rain and cold. We had requested a covered walkway for this area, but our request was not heeded until I took the matter up with Elder Howard W. Hunter and Bishop Henry B. Eyring during a visit they made with President Gene R. Cook to our home at Lake Atitlán, on October 20, 1985. Included with this project was a much needed covered area at the front entrance to the temple.

Many other important matters concerning the temple and the Church in Guatemala were discussed during Elder Hunter's and Bishop Eyring's visit. It was also another beautiful opportunity for us to spend time with these dear friends with whom we have had wonderful experiences in the past, and to become acquainted with Bishop Eyring. Before leaving Guatemala City I took Bishop Eyring to an art supply store, and while at the lake he painted a watercolor picture from our front verandah. This he presented to us before leaving. President Hunter later wrote us, and after relating his follow-up on our projects, he wrote:

*Each time I see Bishop Eyring in the hall or in a meeting, we comment about the delightful time we had on the trip to Lake Atitlán. I will never forget it nor will he, neither will either of us forget your kindness to us while we were with you in Guatemala. There are some things we do as a routine matter and other things that are highlights in our lives. To be with you in the temple and to go to your home on the lake, is a delightful experience that will never be forgotten. Thank you for your kindness and your hospitality.*

Bishop Eyring also wrote expressing his appreciation. How marvelous to be with these great men and for them to take time to write expressing their feelings.

After serving with us a year, President and Sister Skousen requested they be released. We will always cherish their friendship and their valued participation in serving with us during the opening of the temple and the carrying forward of the Lord's work in this special

temple. He not only served in the Temple Presidency, but helped us and many others as our doctor. Another great couple and special friends, Guillermo and Porfiria Balderas from El Paso, Texas, were called to replace the Skousens. They had served faithfully with us in the Mexico City Temple. President Balderas was set apart by President Ted E. Brewerton with authorization from the First Presidency, on November 18, 1985, and I set Sister Balderas apart as Assistant Matron.

Luis Amado was called by the First Presidency to serve as Guatemala City Temple Recorder, effective April 1, 1986, replacing Brother Melvin Done. Luis received training in Salt Lake City during General Conference.

Elder William Grant Bangerter and his wife visited the Guatemala temple and stayed with us for two days—May 5-6, 1986.

We were advised of President Spencer W. Kimball's passing away on November 5, 1986. We were told that the activity in the temple should continue on a normal basis. In a way we were saddened by the passing of this great prophet of the Lord and dear friend. We knew of his many illnesses and sufferings; however, we had also seen the tremendous responsibility and workload carried, alone for many years, by his counselor, President Gordon B. Hinckley. Now with the calling of another First Presidency, his load would be lightened.

After serving with us for 14 months, President and Sister Balderas requested they be released. Udine Falabella and his wife, Graciela, were called to replace them. Udine was set apart on January 24, 1987, by Elder Boyd K. Packer. President August Conde was also released and he was replaced by Melvin Done, on March 1, 1987. I set Sister Done apart as Assistant Matron at that time.

President Hinckley called me in July 1987, reminding me that our three years in the temple would soon end and asked if we would be willing to serve another year. This was a difficult decision to make. We loved working in this special temple, we loved the people; however after my surgery, which will be discussed later, my health was not yet back to normal, and we desired to be near our family, having been away from them for so many years. We told President Hinckley we would like to be released. When the news got out, there began to be a series of farewells by the temple employees, temple ordinance workers, the stakes and the Region and our many friends. E. LeRoy Hatch and his wife Jean, were called to preside over the temple. They arrived in Guatemala

*Pioneer In Guatemala*

on September 3, and on September 6, 1987, we turned the temple over to them, as we knelt in prayer and thanksgiving in the temple president's office.



*Groundbreaking for Guatemala City Temple—September 12, 1982*

*Guatemala City Temple – Calling As Temple President*



*Groundbreaking ceremonies Guatemala City Temple--September 12, 1982  
Elder Richard G. Scott and stake presidents in Guatemala*



*Guatemala City Temple under construction*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*Construction of the Guatemala City Temple*



*Guatemala City Temple Presidency 1984  
Augusto Conde, 2nd Counselor—John F. O'Domal, President  
Willard I. Skousen, 1st Counselor*

*Guatemala City Temple -- Calling As Temple President*



*Guatemala City Temple Presidency and Matrons 1984*

*Mae Flake, 2nd Assistant—Carmen O'Donnal, Matron—Ruth Skousen, 1st Assistant  
President Conde, President O'Donnal and President Skousen*



*Final preparations for the dedication of Guatemala City Temple,  
December 12, 1984 – Harvey and Jean Glade and Patsy O. Huber*



*Guatemala City Temple*



*Guatemala City Temple*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*President Gordon B. Hinckley setting cornerstone of Guatemala City Temple  
December 14, 1984*



*Visit to O'Donnal's home on Lake Atitlán, Guatemala, by Elder Howard W.  
Hunter, Elder Gene R. Cook and Elder Henry B. Eyring (painting in the house)*

## Chapter Nineteen

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### *Miraculous Healing*

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During my childhood, particularly between the age of 9 and 11, I was bothered with intestinal gases and indigestion to the point of having to sit or lay down for relief. Other than this problem, I have always enjoyed good health. However, on January 9, 1982, I experienced the first indication of a serious intestinal condition which four years later, almost to the day, resulted in serious surgery for what was diagnosed as Regional Enteritis or Crohn's Disease. On this first occasion I had a buildup of intestinal gas with severe pain. Neither taking bicarbonate of soda nor enemas brought relief. As my condition worsened, we called Dr. Willard Skousen, and on the way to see him I stopped to throw up, which gave me some relief. Dr. Skousen diagnosed the problem as adhesions or an intestinal blockage. He massaged my abdomen and administered an injection to relax my digestive system. The second attack came eight months later in Mexico City, at which time I was given a priesthood blessing by President Harold Brown, and received immediate relief.

The third attack was 13 months later while driving through Mexico on our return to the Mexico Temple. It had been a long drive and it was late when we stopped at a motel in the small town of Salinas, Mexico. While traveling we never stop for lunch but eat sandwiches Carmen prepares, and we buy fruit along the way. We had eaten some

delicious grapes and tangerines and then ate a nice dinner at the motel restaurant when we arrived. About an hour after retiring I had my third and more serious attack of intestinal blockage, which became very serious. Carmen called the office and learned there was a doctor residing at the motel and advised us to go see him. I was in so much pain I could walk only with Carmen's assistance. The doctor gave me a prescription for an injection. With Carmen driving, we went in search of a drug store, and after some time found one open. The pain and pressure on my diaphragm had become so intense, my breathing was being seriously impaired and I knew that if I did not get relief very soon I would pass out and probably die. Naturally, Carmen was concerned. She helped me into the pharmacy, quickly prepared the injection and administered it in my arm, which immediately induced vomiting while sitting on the sidewalk, and as on previous occasions, I obtained relief from the pain and was able to breath. We returned to the motel and knelt down in humble prayer and thanksgiving for my improvement. The Lord had heard and answered our prayer with the great faith of my dear wife. I slept well the remainder of the night, arose early and drove to San Luis Potosi, and the next day on to Mexico City without further problems.

The two weeks while the Guatemala Temple was closed in December 1986, we spent in Mesa, Arizona, with our family, returning on January 1, 1987. We were so happy to be back and renew our work in the temple. There is such a special and sacred spirit in this temple. The veil is thin and I sensed the presence of many who are anxiously awaiting their work to be done. I felt an urgency to get on with this work and enjoyed spending hours alone with them in the temple. It was on one of these occasions, on Saturday, January 6, 1987, upon leaving the temple, munching on a delicious popcorn ball Ruth Skousen had given us when we left Mesa, that I began to suffer gas pain and knew that again there was a blockage in my intestines; and this time the spasms were coming at increasingly shorter intervals. I took a pill to activate my intestines, with negative results. Vomiting which followed gave no relief as it had on three previous occasions. By 11 p.m. I was in much pain, so Carmen called President Guillermo Balderas and Carlos Amado, who administered to me. By that time we decided I should go to the hospital. Carlos Amado accompanied us to the emergency room and Dr. Cezar A. Passarelli met us there at midnight. X-rays and blood

tests were taken and a tube placed through my nostrils into my stomach. In a hospital room a stomach pump was used and I was given an injection for pain and did finally rest.

The following morning I was advised that there was an obstruction in the ileum which required surgery that evening. I told the doctors I would prefer to fly to either Salt Lake City or Houston, Texas for the surgery, but they explained my condition was such that I should not attempt the trip. Dr. Mario de la Cerda, the orthopedic surgeon who had twice performed surgery on my shoulder, recommended I have the surgery in Guatemala as advised. After praying for inspiration, both Carmen and I decided to go ahead as suggested. We requested Dr. Roberto Arroyave, also a friend whom we have known for many years and an excellent surgeon, perform the operation. Dr. Arroyave, incidentally, had roomed with Dr. Russell M. Nelson while studying medicine in the United States.

In the recovery room after the surgery, I had difficulty breathing. Carmen spent this very difficult night with me. As there was no improvement in my condition, I was placed in intensive care with a special nurse. I was given enemas to induce bowel movement, without success. I missed the Area Council Meeting, but special prayers were offered in my behalf. Members in the stakes were fasting and praying for me. I was told the First Presidency and the Twelve remembered me in their prayer circle. My name had been placed in the temples in Guatemala, Mexico, Arizona and Salt Lake City. Those in the Temple Department were praying for my recovery also. Carlos Amado and his brother Luis, gave me a special blessing, asking that the doctors attending me be given guidance and inspiration. After stake meetings on Saturday night the eleventh, President Gene R. Cook and his Executive Secretary, Brother Shirts, came to the hospital and administered to me. President Cook gave me a very special and unusual blessing. In it he said that not only the living were praying for my recovery, but that those on the other side of the veil were also praying and doing what they could. What a privilege to receive this enlightenment which added strength to our faith.

On the fourteenth I was advised that there would be another operation on the sixteenth, as the first one had not produced the necessary results. Again both Carmen and I were opposed. Carmen was exhausted, having had very little sleep and rest, and was almost at

the end of her strength. She called upon our Branch President, Raymond Kohl, who was an employee in the U. S. Embassy, who made all the arrangements to fly me to Houston, accompanied by Dr. Enrique Chacón, Carmen's relative. He also called our dear friends, Willard and Ruth Skousen, and requested they meet us in Houston. The doctors in the hospital continued to strongly advise against traveling to Houston. Again we prayed for guidance and I received inspiration to have the surgery in Guatemala. President Kohl advised the Skousens, who decided to fly to Guatemala to be with me during the surgery and to give support to Carmen. They arrived on the fifteenth. The following day, with Willard present, the second surgery was performed. Willard told me later that my small intestine had the appearance of cold spaghetti; and including what was removed in the first operation, it had been necessary to remove about 40 inches of my small intestine and all of my ascending large intestine. Dr. Arroyave was at a loss as to what to do about the large cavity caused by the removal of my ascending colon and asked Willard's advice. Not doubting inspiration, he suggested my remaining intestine be pulled over and sewn into this cavity, which was done.

Following this surgery my condition was critical. Not only was I contending with the effects of the surgery, but I was also being tormented in my mind by the adversary, with thoughts that I should stop struggling to recover, that there was no hope and that my faith and that of others had failed. But, I would not give up. Noting my resolve, I was then tormented in my mind by loud, satanic music and flashing light, until I thought I would go insane. Struggling against these things, and exercising my faith required much energy, of which I had little to spare. However, I never lost faith that I would recover and that there were still things I should accomplish. I recall receiving several visitors, among which was Brother Derrick Metcalf, Manager of the Temple Department, to whom I explained some of the urgent matters needing attention in the temple.

The doctors and nurses attending me were very concerned and apprehensive, awaiting positive reaction in the functioning of my intestines, and they were doing all they could to encourage it. About mid-morning the day following surgery, my bowels automatically moved. What a relief and what rejoicing as the word spread to the nurses and doctors! How thankful I was to feel alive again, and I gave

thanks to my Heavenly Father, again and again. As I improved I was given water and diluted grape juice. I remained in intensive care until January twenty-second, but was still attended night and day by special nurses. I was so grateful the Skousens were with us, especially for the support and help they gave to Carmen. Each evening before leaving the hospital Willard would give me a treatment and a massage, which helped me rest and sleep well. He also insisted I get up and walk. I knew they would soon have to leave, but I hated to see them go. They did not leave until they knew I could go home, and before leaving he helped remove my last I.V. I left the hospital the same day they left for Mesa, January 25, 1986.

The night of the twenty-seventh, President Gene Cook, with President Gary E. Elliot, of the Guatemala City Mission, came to visit. I was so glad to see them. President Cook then told us the blessing he gave me in the hospital was quite unusual and that the words were not his, which surprised even him. This was a testimony to all of us, and another miracle in my life. How thankful I am for the wonderful blessings I have received and continue to receive! How grateful I am for a caring and loving wife and companion. She always has and still does lovingly care for my every need. Daily exercise and walks with her helped me regain my strength. We attended a temple session on February 12, 1986, and I resumed my duties part time. My prolonged recovery was a major factor in our decision not to extend our temple assignment another year.

After my ordeal I received the following note and poem from our daughter-in-law, Linda, John Frank's wife, dated January 31, 1986:

*Dear Daddy,*

*I was so touched when you were here last time and I had the opportunity to hear the tape of the Temple Dedication.*

*And then when you became ill we were so concerned about you. After we talked with you on the phone last night I couldn't sleep. I wanted somehow to let you know just how much I love you. So I got up and wrote this poem for you as an expression of my love.*

*I was but a normal man  
And I knew not what to do.  
I came to work a land  
But I found much more I knew.*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*

*I could see it in the eyes  
Of the peasants walking by.  
And I felt a strong desire,  
But so helpless here was I.  
They were waiting for the truth  
That was lost in ancient days,  
Of the teachings of our Savior  
And his kind and loving ways.  
So I prayed with all my heart  
For His guidance so divine.  
And I wanted for instruction  
How to open up their minds.  
The Lord then in His wisdom  
Made it possible for me,  
To see his future plans  
Through an act of tragedy.  
I lay with death awaiting  
Standing near to cross the veil.  
But my mind was like a book  
And a story He did tell.  
"Your life is not your own,"  
Said a voice from upon high.  
"You have a special mission  
For this purpose you'll not die.  
Obey my every word  
And this vision you'll fulfill.  
Save not for any reason  
But I say it is my will."  
A humbleness came over me  
And His will then became mine.  
My life has been to serve Him  
To fulfill His plan divine.*

*Please take care and don't push yourself too soon or too hard.*

*We love you,  
Linda*

## Chapter Twenty

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### *Peru Missionary Training Center -- Calling As President*

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After being released from our assignment in the Guatemala City Temple, we spent as much time as possible enjoying our family and getting acquainted with our grandchildren. In September 1990, we invited two of our sixteen-year-old granddaughters, Michelle Huber and Natalie O'Donnal, to spend a week with us at a resort in Cancun, Mexico. We had also been invited to visit with Guillermo and Socorro Torres, who had served with us in the Mexico City Temple presidency and who were then presiding over the Mexico Merida Mission.

We were in Guatemala prior to our trip to Mexico. We planned to leave our lake home for Guatemala City on Monday, September 3, but I had a feeling we should leave earlier, on Friday, August 31. We had been in our apartment in Guatemala City only ten minutes when the telephone rang. Elder John Lasater of the Seventy was calling to extend to us a call to preside over the Missionary Training Center in Lima, Peru. He was surprised to learn that I was then 73 years old. This call came as a complete surprise to us, and knowing that this is a very strenuous position, especially at our age and state of health, I told Elder Lasater I would get back with him, but I knew that we could never turn down a church calling.

On September 11, we flew to Mexico where we were met at the Merida Airport by President and Sister Torres and taken to the mission home. We had only been there thirty minutes when the telephone rang. It was Elder Angel Abrea of the Missionary Department, asking for me, which surprised everyone. He told me this was a follow-up to Elder Lasater's call and asked if we would accept the call to go to Lima. I told him he knew we would never turn down a call, and we would be happy to accept.

We spent from January 7-17, 1991, in the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah, where with five other couples, we received instructions on training missionaries in the Missionary Training Centers outside the United States, in Japan, Samoa, Mexico, England, Argentina and Peru. We were the oldest of the six couples, two of which had recently served as mission presidents. It had been twelve years since we had served as president of the Quetzaltenango Mission, and the missionary program had undergone considerable change. The missionary training is an inspired program developed directly by the General Authorities.

We were set apart for our mission by Elder Angel Abrea, who promised great things would happen, that this had been a special call; but then he said two different times, that it was not known why I was called, but that this call would bring about miracles. Miracles did happen, and shortly after our arrival in Lima, we knew, at least partially, why we had been called.

In an interview prior to our departure we were told that the full program was not being carried out at the Lima MTC, and we were requested to expedite the use of the entire program. The medical department then informed me that there was a high percentage of Peruvians entering the missions with tuberculosis, which is not only a communicable, bacterial disease, but treatment was prolonged and expensive for the Church. I was requested to consult with a doctor upon arrival and devise a program for screening those missionaries diagnosed as having the disease. We learned that Elder William R. Bradford had been assigned to the South America North Area presidency. I called him to let him know we were going to the Lima MTC. He expressed his pleasure that we would be serving again with him in his area. We love Elder and Sister Bradford and were more than happy to be working with them.

We left the Phoenix airport at 6:00 a.m. on January 29, 1991, and arrived in Lima at 12:20 a.m. on the thirtieth. With little time to organize and prepare, our first group of missionaries arrived the following day. There were no assistants to help with the teaching, and it was not possible for us to carry out the program as outlined, so we followed the outline left by the former president. To complicate the situation, we had received more elders than we had beds for. Of these, several were from a Venezuelan mission who had been in their mission for six months without MTC training and without having received their endowments. The situation was frustrating, to say the least.

Carrying out the program as outlined could not be done without help. I requested volunteer assistance from recently-returned missionaries who had used the program and had been successful in their missions. Two former assistants to their mission presidents and an excellent sister were selected with a promise that I would request, in the near future, an assignment with a salary. This was approved by the Area Presidency. An excellent seminary teacher requested that he be allowed to continue teaching a two-hour class for each group.

Each group stayed with us only twelve days, and attended the temple on two different mornings. The MTC relied on vehicles from the two Lima missions to transport our missionaries to and from the temple. Ten to fifteen missionaries squeezed into nine-passenger vans. This simply was not acceptable. I discussed the situation with Elder Bradford who immediately authorized contracting a comfortable, forty-five seat tour bus.

The situation in all of Peru was bad, especially in Lima, with assassinations, bombings of businesses and embassies, and garbage piling up throughout the city. A cholera epidemic was rampant, killing thousands. Our concern for the missionaries increased with the unsanitary condition of the MTC building, especially the dormitories, bathrooms, laundry, food storage areas and kitchen. A test of our water supply indicated contamination, even traces of human excrement. We began to understand why we were there. We worked hard to remedy the situation.

A meeting was arranged with a doctor recommended by the Church Medical Department. He taught us what precautionary measures should be taken regarding cholera, and what action should be taken in case a missionary contracted cholera. I also discussed with the

doctor the initiation of a program to screen missionaries for tuberculosis. Since tuberculosis is so prevalent in Peru, a skin test is unreliable, as most people would test positive. It was decided that all Peruvian missionaries would receive a chest x-ray upon arrival at the MTC. Those with positive results would be returned to their stakes or mission for treatment. It was very sad indeed, when some had to be sent home. All of the MTC personnel received x-rays and were found to be negative.

After doing all we could, under the circumstances, to improve the conditions at the MTC, following the departure of a group of missionaries on March 19, 1991, we decided to have the entire building fumigated and closed overnight. We took a room in the Cezar Miraflores Hotel so this could be accomplished. The previous day I had received a telephone call from the MTC president in Chile. He told me about the new center they had, which was nice and with a capacity of over sixty missionaries, but that they were receiving only 20-25 in each group. Being very concerned about the existing conditions at the Lima MTC, Carmen and I knelt down and sought guidance in prayer, requesting inspiration as to what should be done. A strong impression came, that the MTC could not continue to operate in its present condition. The conversation with the Chilean MTC president immediately came to mind, with the idea that our MTC be closed and all future missionaries be sent to Chile, until the new MTC building in Lima was completed. Construction of the new building was scheduled to begin within the next few weeks. Subsequently, instructions were received from Salt Lake City postponing, indefinitely, construction of a new building, because of the unrest in Peru.

The next morning I called Elder Bradford and explained to him and the Area President, Elder Charles Didier, our impressions concerning closing the Lima MTC. Because of the unsuitable condition of the existing building and the indefinite postponement in constructing a new building, I was authorized to immediately begin looking for a hotel or a building to lease, where we could relocate. The local Temporal Affairs Office was advised to assist us in this effort. Hotels, we soon found, were far too expensive. For more than two months we searched for a suitable building, to no avail. We again discussed the matter with Elder Bradford, and it was our feeling that we should request authorization to renovate and make suitable the building we were using

and requested the appropriation for this purpose. The project was authorized.

All mattresses, pillows, blankets, linens and towels were replaced—the linens and towels, so there could be two changes during the twelve-day stay. A new clothes washer and dryer were added. All bathrooms were renovated and made sanitary. Water heaters were replaced. Broken beds were discarded or repaired, and six additional bunk beds purchased. The sitting room for the MTC president was made into an additional bedroom for missionaries, with a bathroom and closet. The food storage area was fumigated, cleaned, walls and floor painted, new steel shelves installed, plastic-covered containers for food storage were purchased and a pest control program instigated.

A partition was removed to enlarge the president's dining room, and a new kitchen was installed with a pantry and a restaurant-style stove with hood, also dishwashers, refrigerator, kitchen utensils, dishes and flatware. A new dining room was built utilizing part of the garden, to provide additional teaching area. Rotting wood floors were repaired and new rugs installed in the teaching area, office and hallway. Drapes and curtains were replaced. The capacity of the MTC was increased to house a maximum of fifty missionaries.

The president's office was cleared and cleaned of cluttered tables and filing cabinets, and comfortable furniture was installed. The beautiful, mahogany library was cleaned and old books removed. The assistant's office was moved to what was an extra bedroom with bathroom and closet. Another adjoining, small room was made suitable as a study room for instructors. Audio-visual equipment was replaced, as was office equipment and telephones. A computer was installed in the assistant's office and, at the insistence of Elder Bradford, cable television was brought into the president's bedroom. He felt it was important for us to keep up with world affairs. A secure library, with steel shelves for books, missionary lessons and tracts, was arranged in a hallway that was not being used. A roof was placed over the patio as a protection from the fine mist which is the only rainfall received in the Lima area.

Additional help was required and authorized for the kitchen, laundry and cleaning. To relieve the president's wife of the need to prepare Sunday meals and to serve and clean the kitchen, sisters were employed and assigned to take turns serving in the kitchen, as all

Sunday services were held in the MTC. The services of a registered nurse was contracted, to assist with sick missionaries and to give the necessary injections.

In the past, all new missionaries were received at the MTC through the back door. To reach the president's office and main hall, they had to be directed through the rear patio and kitchen. This was changed, whereby all new missionaries and their families entered the front door and were met by the president and his wife.

Of our various Church callings, this assignment to preside over the Lima, Peru Missionary Training Center, was the most difficult, although it was also the most rewarding and educational. It was difficult, not because of the work or the 24 hour vigilance—we are accustomed to working long hours—but emotionally this was almost too much for us. We learned to love each missionary in every group, each with their own particular needs. The groups numbered from 25-45 young people from widely different educational, social, economic and spiritual levels—from college graduates in medicine, law and other professions, to those coming from poverty with little education—all in the same group. Most had personal problems of varying degrees of seriousness not resolved with their priesthood leaders prior to receiving their call, and many had health problems. Most were there because they desired to serve the Lord on a mission; but others were there because of pressure from parents, bishops or stake presidents. It became our challenge to assist each to grow spiritually, correct their lives and become worthy servants of the Lord, and to teach them how to be diligent and successful missionaries. This, within the twelve-day stay at the MTC. Some arrived with only the clothes on their backs, with threats on their lives, and with serious health problems. It was heartbreaking when one had to be sent home, especially because of tuberculosis infection. It seemed that those with the greatest desire to serve a mission were the ones who had to be released because of TB.

From their arrival on Friday, until the following Wednesday, just four days, our efforts concentrated on helping each to understand the importance of being worthy, repenting and doing what is necessary to put their lives in order, and to be prepared to enter the Holy Temple. Requests for interviews were slow, but by Tuesday evening, ten to fifteen were in line for an interview with the president. Most were problems that were easily resolved, but there were those with very

serious moral transgressions that took considerable time and an occasional, necessary release. Most of these interviews lasted beyond midnight and I learned more forcibly to rely on the inspiration of the Spirit than at any other time in my assignments. These were most humbling moments, especially when there was no way to communicate with the bishop or stake president and a decision had to be made. I will always be thankful for the transformation in the lives of those wonderful young people, as confirmed by their letters and the success in their missions.

The fast and testimony meetings on the Sunday prior to their departure, were beautiful and very rewarding. To listen to the stories of their lives and what the few days in the MTC meant to them, and to hear the strong testimonies of the gospel they had gained, was very emotional, and our hearts were filled with joy and satisfaction. We learned to love each one, and it was difficult to say good-by every two weeks to those in each group. We will always be thankful for this experience.

Our saddest experience happened as one group prepared to depart for their respective missions. A Peruvian young man from a small town, the only member of the Church in his family, with little worldly means and whose parents reluctantly gave their permission for him to serve a mission, came to my office and told me someone had taken his wallet which contained what little money he had. After a thorough investigation we were unable to discover who had taken the wallet. This young man again came to my office to tell me he held no hard feelings for the person who had taken his wallet, and he had nothing but love for everyone. He had written a letter to his family telling them what a wonderful experience he had enjoyed at the MTC and how wonderful the president and his wife were. He did not mention the lost wallet. That morning he left for his mission in Lima, and to his first assignment.

The following morning he, with another missionary, traveled by bus to a small town in the mountains, where they were met by their new companions. They gathered their bags and walked to the sidewalk. They had gone only a few yards when a shot rang out and our young missionary was hit and killed. The shot came from a vacant, second-story window of the police station. No investigation was ever made nor did the case go to court. His parents received the news the same day they received his letter.

Sad and infuriated, the family determined they would sue the Church. The mission president visited and talked with them, yet they were determined the Church was responsible. After again reading their son's letter, they desired to come to the MTC to talk with my wife and me. We were happy to meet with them. The father and brother came to my office. They were very proper and cordial and were neatly dressed. They told me about the letter and how the son had expressed his admiration and love for us and they had a strong desire to meet and talk with us. We explained to them the activities of the MTC and talked with them about the gospel. The Spirit touched their hearts. They decided to not take action against the Church and began attending church services and requested to be taught by the missionaries.

Conditions in Peru seemed to worsen daily—with bombs, killings, blackouts several times a week, threats by terrorist groups on individuals and businesses, especially those connected with United States interests. There were four major leftist organizations of which the Shining Path, a Chinese Communist group was the strongest. Terrorist activities by these different groups was carried out quite openly. Although, at that time, 50 church leaders and 500 members of different denominations had been killed, the LDS Church had not been singled out and targeted.

President Charles Didier and Elder Hartman Rector Jr. were released from the South America North Area presidency in August and Elder William R. Bradford was called as president, with Elder Gene R. Cook and Elder Julio Davila as his counselors. Having worked closely with Elders Bradford and Cook in the past, I was excited to be working with them again.

President Bradford visited us at the MTC early in October 1991 and invited us to attend a Mission Presidents' Seminar in Quito, Ecuador, later that month. We were reluctant to both be away with a new group of missionaries coming in, but he insisted and requested we arrive a day early to meet with President Gordon B. Hinckley who would be attending the seminar. When it came time to depart for Quito, we felt that we should not go early, and when we arrived we learned that, had we gone early, we could not have met with President Hinckley anyway, as he had been in the Ecuador Guayaquil Mission. The first evening of the seminar we enjoyed a dinner with the general authorities and all the mission presidents and their wives. We were privileged to sit

at the table with President Hinckley. When he spoke that evening, it was a bit embarrassing that he took the first ten minutes talking about Carmen and myself and our service in the Church. He said, "Brother O'Donnal is the father, the grandfather and the great-grandfather of the Church in Guatemala." In his talk he explained that it had been eleven years since temples had been announced for Ecuador and Colombia, but not constructed, and that he was here to try to understand why. Not only the members but also the leaders were lax in compliance with the Lord's commandments: tithing, personal and family prayer and scripture study, Family Home Evening, etc. He said he had hoped the Lord was not displeased with him. During one day of the seminar we toured the highlands of Ecuador, which was a delightful experience.

In an Area Council Meeting in Lima, the Area Presidency presented to the priesthood leadership, a program for personal, stake, ward and mission spiritual improvement, to be spread over several months, ending in special fast and prayer meetings in January and February of 1992. The program was readily accepted and immediately, had very positive effect on the lives of the members. After the presentation I expressed to Elder Cook how happy I was with the program; however, I told him that I felt this caused Satan to be unhappy and that he would soon show his angry head, to which Elder Cook agreed.

During an Area Council in November, prior to our departure from Peru, I was advised that the Area Presidency had decided to open an MTC in Bogota by February 1, 1992, for missionaries from Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador. Missionaries from Bolivia and Peru would remain in the Lima MTC. The missionaries from the Bogota MTC would come to Peru for two days to attend the temple only, and then fly directly to their own missions, until the Colombia Temple was completed. Unfortunately we were no longer in South America when this was accomplished.

On November 25, 1991, I received a telephone call from President Martin Openshaw, president of the Lima Peru South Mission, advising me that we should not accept any invitation to attend any meetings, and should not expose ourselves unnecessarily. Two days later we were to take the missionaries for their second visit to the temple. We quietly boarded our chartered bus and drove to the temple. Upon arrival we were met, as always, by the temple president, Rudy

Mortensen, and I was invited to change into my white suit in his office. President Mortensen advised me that he had received a call from President Bradford earlier, requesting we call him in Quito upon my arrival at the temple. While I changed my clothes President Mortensen talked to President Bradford who asked him how soon he could leave Peru. To this he replied that his suitcase had been ready since his arrival, so that he could leave at any moment. After assuring President Bradford that his counselors were capable of operating the temple and that signatures were in order on bank accounts, he was told to leave on that night's flight for Miami, Florida. President Bradford told Rudy he could return to Lima in January. President Bradford then talked to me and asked how soon I could send the missionaries to their respective missions, that they should be out, no later than Sunday. This was Friday and reservations had been made for their departure on Tuesday. He advised me that Carmen and I should leave Peru as soon as the missionaries were dispatched, and that we should take all our belongings as we would not be returning to Lima. We later learned that President Openshaw and his wife were also taken out with very short notice. The other Anglo mission president and his family had been concealed in a hotel.

I immediately called my assistants requesting they change reservations and ship out all missionaries immediately, and not later than Saturday. Naturally they desired to know why, and I told them that I had been instructed to do so. I could not tell them we were leaving. They were able to move out all missionaries by Saturday afternoon. One more group of missionaries would be arriving in December, prior to the closing of the temple. I assured President Bradford that my assistants could take care of this one group, as they had done well while we were in Quito for the seminar. We then told my assistants we had been authorized to go home to be with our family for Christmas and to have medical check-ups. We had been informed that we would be picked up that evening at 8:30 p.m. The director of Temporal Affairs arrived with three vehicles at 8:00 p.m.—one leading, one for us, and one for our luggage. We then had a wild ride—the long, back way to the airport. We were taken directly to the VIP lounge where we were attended personally by the director of the airport and taken by him to our plane. It saddened us to leave Lima, especially under these conditions.

Later we were told that the Area Presidency had learned that on December 5, 1991, the Shining Path terrorists were celebrating an anniversary and were targeting the North-American, Mormon Church leaders in Lima. I asked President Bradford how they had received the information, to which he replied that they had been given some information and much had come through inspiration.

The thirty or so North-American missionaries in Peru, all of whom would have finished their missions within a few months, were all released. President Openshaw was reassigned to the Philippines and the other, new, mission presidents were assigned, one to Colombia, and the other to Argentina. All of our positions were filled with local Peruvians. It is my personal feeling that the time had arrived for local leaders to assume the leadership responsibility as President Spencer W. Kimball had told us years before. The Church has continued to move forward in Peru, and the future is bright there.



*MTC Presidents at Seminar held at the MTC in Provo*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*Teachers at the Lima Peru MTC--1991*  
*FRONT: Magaly Becerra, Jenny Varela, Moises Martinez*  
*BACK: Rafael Espinoza--Assistant, and Carlos Virrueta*



*Taking MTC missionaries to Lima Peru Temple*

*Peru Missionary Training Center – Calling As President*



*Group of MTC missionaries at Lima Peru Temple*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*Lima Peru MTC  
Staff in foreground*



*President and Sister O'Donnal at Lima Peru Temple with missionary  
who was killed two days after arriving at his assigned area in Peru*

*Peru Missionary Training Center – Calling As President*



*President and Sister O'Donnal with Temple President, Rudy Mortensen, and Sister Mortensen, at Lima Peru Temple*



*President and Sister O'Donnal at Lima Peru Temple*

*Pioneer In Guatemala*



*Lima Peru Temple*



*The O'Donnals with mission presidents in South America Area and their wives, on tour with the Area Presidency in Ecuador*

## Chapter Twenty-one

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# *Update On The Growth And Progress Of The Church In Guatemala*

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On October 19, 1991, the land of Guatemala was again dedicated for the preaching of the gospel by Elder Marvin J. Ashton of the Council of the Twelve, as part of a continuing effort to individually dedicate each of the countries in Central America that were dedicated as a whole in November 1952, by Elder Spencer W. Kimball. Attending the dedication were Elder Ashton and his wife, Norma, and Elder Russell M. Nelson and his wife Dantzel. Also attending were the Central America Area Presidency and members of the Seventy, Elder Ted E. Brewerton, president; and his counselors, Elder Carlos H. Amado and his wife, Mayabel; Elder Jorge A. Rojas and his wife, Marcela; and some 110 people, mostly stake and mission presidents and their wives. The services were held on the grounds behind the Guatemala City Temple.

In his dedicatory prayer, Elder Ashton noted: "We stand...on ground which was once sanctified by the presence of prophets. We are reminded of the Savior's repeated visitations to the lands of this

region...” He also expressed gratitude for the fortitude of those who pioneered missionary work in the area. He acknowledged the dedicatory prayer offered by then Elder Kimball, who petitioned that the way might be opened for free, undisturbed and unlimited missionary work among the citizens. “We renew this prayer and ask this blessing again for this nation and surrounding countries.”

The division of stakes and organization of new stakes has continued at an increasing rate since the first stake was organized in Guatemala City on May 21, 1967. Construction of chapels and other physical facilities has progressed well, keeping pace with the needs of the flourishing membership.

On October 26, 1986, Elder Gene Cook, as President of the Central America Area, presided over the organization of the Chimaltenango Stake, the first *Cakchiquel*-area stake. We had worked long and hard over the years to help bring this about. The stake center is the reconstructed chapel in Patzicía. President Mario Salazar was called as Stake President. What a glorious occasion to see all these beautiful people mostly dressed in their native dress, singing and rejoicing. All the former presidents of the Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission and the president serving at the time, were in attendance at the conference.

Ten years later, on November 10, 1996, the Patzicía Guatemala Stake was created from the Chimaltenango Guatemala Stake. Carlos Antonio Guit A. was called as stake president, with Martín Per T. and Rubén Merén A. as his counselors.

On March 4, 1989, Carmen and I and Willard and Ruth Skousen, were invited to attend the Regional Conference in Guatemala City, presided by President Thomas S. Monson and Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Twelve. In the evening, as Willard and I entered the foyer of the convention hall of the Hotel El Dorado, where the general Priesthood meeting was held, we were met by Elder Nelson, as if he had been waiting for us. He requested we join him and the other Regional leaders on the stand. We did so, reluctantly, not having any leadership calling at that time. Carlos Amado sat by us. In his talk, Elder Nelson mentioned that some of those present would some day be called as general authorities. Hearing this I nudged Carlos Amado, who to me was the most likely.

The general session of the conference the following day was held in the Military Stadium at the Campo de Marte, in Guatemala City. With the Skousens, we were going to take seats in the general seating area when we were approached by one of the ushers who informed us we had been invited to sit with the General Authorities and other Regional leaders. Again we were reluctant to occupy seats to which we felt we were not entitled. I was surprised and frightened when President Monson asked me to take five minutes and share my testimony.

During April 1990 General Conference, Carlos Humberto Amado was called to the Second Quorum of the Seventy—the first General Authority from Guatemala, and a fulfillment of the words spoken by Elder Nelson on March 4, 1989. Later Carlos confided to us that he had received inspiration in a special meeting in the temple, that he would be called. In the summer of 1992, Carlos was called to the First Quorum of Seventy.

As of December 31, 1995, there were 28 stakes in Guatemala, with another scheduled for organization in Cobán, Alta Verapaz, in January 1996. On September 30, 1995, there were a total of approximately 135,000 members of record, with approximately 17,000 additional members whose addresses are unknown. With a total population in the Republic of Guatemala of about 10,500,000—approximately 1.3 percent are members of the Church or one Latter-day Saint in seventy-eight. The Church continues to grow at the rate of about 8 percent each year.

With the rapid growth of the Church in Mexico and Central America, the Area Office of the Presiding Bishopric over Temporal Affairs in Mexico City, which served both Mexico and Central America, could no longer carry the work load. The Mexico City Temporal Affairs Area Office was the second established by the Church worldwide, London, England being the first. In 1979, a Temporal Affairs Office was established in Guatemala City, to service all of Central America. Jeffrey Allred was employed by the Church to serve as the first director of this office.

As political problems increased in Guatemala, the office was moved to San José, Costa Rica, in 1980; but was later moved back to

Guatemala City in 1985. Following are the names and dates of the **Directors of Temporal Affairs in Guatemala.**

Jeffrey Allred.....	1979–1982
Franklin Enriquez.....	1982–1985
Lynn Justice.....	1985–1990
Cregg Hill.....	1990–1993
Bruce Carter.....	1993–

A Missionary Training Center for Central American missionaries was organized in January 1985, with Richard D. Allred called as president. Brother Allred had been president of the Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission. The MTC was housed in a rented building only a few blocks from the temple. Land was purchased near the temple, on which a new 36,000 square-foot facility was erected for housing missionaries, temple missionary couples and temple patrons who traveled to attend the temple. The ground breaking ceremony for the center was conducted by the Area Presidency in July 1992, and on January 22, 1994, it was dedicated by Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Council of the Twelve. The new facility will accommodate 102 missionaries and about 112 temple patrons and seven temple missionary couples. The following have served as **Presidents of the Guatemala MTC:**

Richard D. Allred.....	1985–1988
E. Keith Stott.....	1988–1990
Hector Paredes.....	1990–1992
J. Boyd Fenn.....	1992–1994
Milton G. Wille.....	1994–1996
Moreno Robins.....	1996–

In 1996, there were four missions in Guatemala. I am including a chart with a summary of the missions of Guatemala, the year they were organized and their respective presidents.

### MISSIONS OF GUATEMALA AND THEIR PRESIDENTS

	Central American	Guatemala El Salvador	Guatemala Guatemala	Guatemala Quetzaltenango	Guatemala South	Guatemala North	Guatemala Central
1952	Gordon M. Romney						
1955	Edgar L. Wagner						
1959	Victor C. Hancock						
1962	Leslie O. Brewer						
1964	Terrence L. Hansen						
1965		Terrence L. Hansen					
1967		David G. Clark					
1970		Harvey S. Glade					
1973		Robert B. Arnold					
1976			John F. O'Donnal				
1977			Willard I. Skousen	John F. O'Donnal			
1979				Richard D. Allred			
1980			Carlos H. Amado				
1983				Jorge H. Pérez			
1984			Gary Elliott	Manuel Cedeño			
1987				Mario López	Adolfo Avalos	Gordon W. Romney	
1990				Julio E. Alvarado	Gilberto Cerda	David Frischknecht	
1993				Manuel González	George E. Lyman	José Jiménez * Andrés R. Ramos	Denis R. Morrill
1996				Timothy C. Lunt	Victor O. Pickett	Alan J. Parry	R. Larry William

\* Died in plane crash 11-21-93

When the Church organized Area Presidencies, the office for the Mexico and Central America Area was also established in Mexico City. However, as the work load increased, it became advisable to establish an Area Office in Central America. Guatemala City was selected, and the Central American Area Office, which included the Republic of Belize, was organized on October 1, 1990. The following have served as **Area Presidencies**:

October 1, 1990 – August 1991

Ted E. Brewerton – President

Gardner H. Russell

Carlos H. Amado

August 1991 – August 1992

Ted E. Brewerton – President

Carlos H. Amado

Jorge A. Rojas

August 1992 – August 1993

Ted E. Brewerton – President

Carlos H. Amado

Jay E. Jensen

August 1993 – August 1995

Carlos H. Amado – President

Robert E. Wells

Joseph C. Muren

August 1995 – August 1996

Joseph C. Muren – President

Lino Alvarez

Jorge A. Rojas

August 1996 –

William R. Bradford – President

Lino Alvarez

Julio E. Alvarado

The following have served as **Temple Presidents Of The Guatemala City Temple:**

1984–1987 .....	John Forres O'Donnal
1987–1990 .....	Ernest Leroy Hatch
1990–1993 .....	Richard D. Allred
1993–1996 .....	Owen Dean Call
1996– .....	Udine Falabella

A much longed-for dream has become a reality as the temple ceremonies have been translated and recorded for the four major Mayan languages (*Cakchiquel*, *Quiché*, *Ke'kchi* and *Mam*) and are in use in the Guatemala City Temple. The last, *Mam*, was completed in January 1993. This special work of translation and recording was accomplished by dedicated missionaries who, with much effort and divine assistance while in the mission field, and with continued study and practice, became proficient in the languages. They were assisted in the translations, reviewing and recording, by good faithful members who I know were prepared and sent to this life with the assignment (among others) to be involved in this marvelous work; even though some who assisted in the recording were illiterate.

While in the process of recording the *Mam* ceremony, an ex-missionary, Romel Fuentes, who does not speak *Mam* natively, told a remarkable story about learning the language. His parents did not speak the *Mam* language but his grandparents did. *Mam* blood flows in his veins. He is an educated man and a professor of electrical engineering at the University of Guatemala City, who has a remarkable gift of the *Mam* language. He was asked how he acquired such a command of the language. He said he had spent the majority of his mission among the *Mam* people, and had some additional help. While he was on his mission he had dreams. In these dreams, a man would appear to him and lecture him on grammar of the *Mam* language. Romel would wake up and write down what he had learned, and the information proved to be correct. This caused speculation that his *Mam* ancestors on the other side of the veil were very anxious for him to learn the language well. It

is significant that Romel, a non-native, was chosen to portray Peter in the recording, as this is the most demanding part.

Even before the ceremonies were available in these Mayan languages there was a very special spirit that accompanied these wonderful people when they visited the temple. How much more so now, as their understanding is much greater when they listen in their own languages. Even the ordinances and sealings are translated for them. Again these translations, for the most part, have been made by those who learned the languages while on their mission. What a blessing the Lord has provided for these chosen people!

A Family History Service Center was set up in the annex of the Guatemala Temple when the temple opened in 1984, where members could order films from Salt Lake to research and extract their family names. Microfilm and microfiche readers were also sent to stakes in the area—closer to the people—to facilitate Family History research; however most were not put into operation because they didn't know how to use them and there were not enough trained personnel to assist and train them. In 1992, when Melvin and DeAnne Shelley, who were called as Family History missionaries, arrived in Guatemala, they found in most of the stakes the equipment had not even been unpacked.

At the center in the temple annex Brother Poloski Cordon, the assistant temple recorder, was hired to work part time in assisting the members with their family history research. Brother Lionel Reyes caught the vision of extraction and began extracting the names from the films ordered from Salt Lake; however the names were only put onto cards, not on computer disks. Other missionary couples did what they could to help, but it wasn't until Brother and Sister Shelley arrived in 1992, that the full Family History Program was organized and put into operation; this, as well as the training of Family History specialists in the stakes, was the purpose of their mission.

At that time, the majority of temple work was from the Temple File names which were from Mexico, and only a few Family File names, as people took their Family Group sheets to the temple. Those names were processed and entered into the computer at the temple annex.

While serving in Guatemala, the Shelley's were also instrumental in implementing the Temple Ready program where members can clear

their own family names and prepare them for temple work, rather than having to first submit them to Salt Lake.

The Family History Center in Guatemala now services all of Central America and Lionel Reyes has been hired by the Church as the full-time coordinator.

Of their Family History work in Guatemala Sister DeAnne Shelley writes:

*We completed two consecutive, 18-month missions in Central America. Guatemala was our home and we served under two Area Presidencies, Presidents Ted Brewerton, Carlos Amado, Jay Jensen and Presidents Carlos Amado, Robert E. Wells and Joseph Muren. President Carlos Amado was our supervisor. Our direct supervisor in Salt Lake was Brent Peterson of the Family History Department.*

*There were eleven Family History Centers in stake centers in Guatemala when we arrived and twelve centers were added during our mission. Those stakes adding family history centers were Atlantico, Las Victorias, La Laguna, El Molino, Chimaltenango, Jalapa, Villa Nueva, San Marcos, Coatepeque, Malacatán, and Calvario.*

*Our Area plan for three years included obtaining the complete film collection for Central America to be housed in the annex of the Guatemala Temple. Seventeen thousand films were obtained, catalogued and placed in cabinets. Ninety thousand extraction cards were in the center when we arrived and with the help of Elder and Sister Sabin all the extraction records that qualified were entered into Temple Ready. As a result, for the first time, the Guatemala Temple had Central American names for the Temple File, instead of names from Mexico. Extraction of names continued at a rapid pace.*

*Priesthood leadership training sessions were conducted in each stake at least three times and workshops were included in the sessions. We also trained Family History Center directors and librarians in each stake center. Submissions to the Family File at the temple were increased.*

*One of the joys of redeeming the dead is when special projects come along and you can be involved in them. To do any genealogical project well it requires the inspiration and love of the work by many people. Such is the project of the Mayan Kings.*

*In the fall of 1992, Ramiro Asturias Zamora from Costa Rica came into the Area Family History Center with two folders. One was the genealogy of the Asturias Family from Guatemala to Spain to Israel. The other folder was to me very exciting. He had used different sources and had the lineage of the Mayan Kings. He did not have dates and places but he*

*had done extensive research. The following week, we called Salt Lake and then the Ancestral File Department called us; also Prof. Bryon R. Merrill of BYU, who had been given the assignment to work on the Aztec and Mayan lineage, called and asked about the documents. They were copied and immediately sent to these departments.*

*In the fall of 1993, we had asked for 75-100 names from Central America for a family history extraction conference we were going to have in November. We received a call from Salt Lake asking if we would like to have the Mayan kings processed for the Guatemala Temple. We were thrilled and anxiously awaited for the names to arrive. We then received a call from Salt Lake and were told that the names could not be supplied at this time and would be sent later. We received permission to process Guatemala names from one of our extraction projects and those names were used.*

*In January 1994, we received a letter and computer disk of names of the Mayan rulers from the mid 1300's to the mid 1500's. The Cakchiquel and Quiché tribes were represented.*

*We proceeded to do some history research of these tribes and discovered that the Chimaltenango area of Iximché was the last Cakchiquel capital. For the Quiché tribe, the area of Chichicastenango and Santa Cruz del Quiché in which the Utatlán Ruins represented the last remaining Quiché capital.*

*The night before I was to correct the names on the disk from Mrs. to Señora and other minor corrections, I flipped on the TV and a movie was just about to start. It was 9:00 p.m. and I usually do not watch a movie at that hour but I started the film. The movie was called Kings of the Sun, starring Yul Brenner and George Charkiris. It started with the history of two tribes who were warring and then this tribe escaped, traveled south in long boats and landed in Guatemala. Immediately, I sat up and became fascinated with the story. This was the story of the names we had received from Salt Lake. Balam, King of the Cakchiquel settled in from the sea, took a wife and lived in relative peace until the Quiché tribe descended upon them. The two kings became friends. The story was thrilling to me. Balam was the last King to offer up human sacrifice and the area was pictured much like Iximché where there are still remaining ruins. All that evening I was much impressed with the clothes and spirit of the two tribes who tried to get along but really had very different ways of life. Finally, there was a war and the Spanish came and killed all the tribal leaders. I awakened several times that evening thinking about these people.*

*The next morning, I proceeded to correct the disk of names to make them perfect Spanish as directed by the recorder of the Guatemala Temple, Percy Santizo. Immediately, I began to read the names of those I had*

watched in the movie the night before. I was now totally engrossed in this project.

The strongest Indian tribe at the time of the Spanish conquest was that of the Quiché who occupied the greater part of the western highlands and were constantly at war with their neighbors the Cakchiquels. The Quichés were great warriors and had a high degree of culture. Alvarado marched across the Guatemala area from the Mexican border and destroyed the Quiché capital, Utatlán, in 1524. Alvarado asked help of his Cakchiquel allies to help destroy the Quiché tribe who had fled to the surrounding mountains. After destroying the Quichés, he then turned on the Cakchiquel and slayed them.

We felt very inspired to use the saints from Patzicia and Sololá for the Cakchiquel names; and the members from Chichicastenango, Santa Cruz del Quiché and Chinique were chosen for the Quiché names.

On Sunday May 29, 1994, Elder Shelley, the temple President and Sister Call and myself went to the areas of the names being submitted to invite those saints to participate in the ordinances. I relived the movie and could feel the spirit of these areas.

Baptisms were performed on Saturday, June 4, 1994, with the members of the Patzicia Wards in the Chimaltenango Stake of Guatemala. Bishop Carlos Antonio Guit Agiquichi arranged for the youth and the needed adults for the initiatories. The youth performing the baptisms were Paul Fernando Parada, Pablo Vinicio Castillo, Maria H. Choc Ajquejay, Telma Choc Ajquejay and Gabriela Parada Paniagua.

Saturday, June 11, the Cakchiquel areas of Patzicia and Sololá and the Quiché areas of Chichicastenango, Santa Cruz del Quiché and Chinique performed the endowment and sealing ordinances. In Sololá, Patriarch Miguel Enrique de León Leja and leadership missionaries, Elder and Sister Willard R. Griffin, helped make arrangements for the Quiché members.

Both days were exiting here at the Guatemala Temple. The Saturday afternoon hours were reserved for this project and the Saints were happy and excited to be involved in the ordinances. Many pictures were taken and many of the Saints wept as their group was called to go into the temple. Brother Bruce Carter was able to do many interviews for the temple recommends that morning before the sessions were scheduled. One very aged sister kept coming to my desk and hugging me because she was so excited to be here to do this work.

Royalty names of 68 men and 33 women were completed. Sessions were heard in the languages of Cakchiquel, Quiché and in Spanish.

After the session in June, the Area missionaries, Anderson, Thorop, Payne, Sabin and Whitmore served a lovely hot meal in the new MTC building. We asked Ramiro Asturias who had started all this project if he

would talk to each group and if they had any experiences they would like to share he would be happy to write them.

*[Of the testimonies that were shared] I have selected four that seem to sum up the feelings of these beautiful Saints. In translating from Spanish to English you lose the poetic manner of their feelings.*

**(English Translation)**

*“Being able to do the work in our own language, Cakchiquel, caused me to think about the changes achieved in our lives thanks to this sacred temple. Upon receiving the ordinances I felt that I was someone else and not myself.”*

*Victor Fabian Guit*

*“We felt great pleasure in being able to help our forefathers. I did not know how they were. I am grateful to all those who were concerned enough to find their names. I felt someone touch the back of my right hand but it was not touched by any of the brothers present, it was very special.”*

*Pablo Choc Loch*

*“I have been in the world many years; I have been in the Church many years, but I have never seen a work like we are now doing in the temple of the Lord. I am grateful to my Heavenly Father for the calling of the youth, because of my missionary son I had the opportunity of coming to the temple.*

*Juan Mich*

*“Thanks to Joseph Smith we can perform ordinances that allow us to think of life in the spirit world; and it is our Father in Heaven who has given us this unique priesthood authority. Proof of this is the close communication that we experienced in the temple this morning. It is proof of the love our Father in Heaven and his Son, Jesus Christ have for us. Perhaps we will never again have a similar feeling. I am grateful to be with this select group of people.”*

*Carlos Eduardo Córdova Rosales*

*“I feel very privileged to have been here in Guatemala and become a part of this project. I am thankful for my membership in the Church. I will ever be thankful to Joseph Smith for the restoration of the gospel and the wonderful opportunity to attend the temple. I will never forget for one moment my healing in the Oakland Temple after being in a wheelchair for 3*

*Update On The Growth And Progress Of The Church In Guatemala*

*years. Each day as I am able to serve in Central America, I am ever grateful to a kind and loving Heavenly Father for this opportunity.”*

*DeAnne Anderson Shelley*

Indeed these chosen children of Father Lehi are “blossoming as a rose” and stepping forward to claim their promised blessings.



*Elder Carlos H. Amado  
First General Authority from Guatemala*



*Former Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission Presidents at the organization of the  
Chimaltenango Guatemala Stake – Richard D. Allred, John F. O’Donnal,  
Jorge H. Pérez, and Manuel Cedeño—president at the time*



*Cakchiquel Indian Choir at organization of the Chimaltenango Guatemala Stake  
October 26, 1986*

*Update On The Growth And Progress Of The Church In Guatemala*



*Organization of the Chimaltenango Guatemala Stake in  
the reconstructed Patzicia chapel – October 26, 1986*



*Melvin T. and DeAnne Anderson Shelley*



*Quiché members from Chichicastenango and Santa Cruz, Quiché, who did temple work for Mayan Kings*



*Cakchiquel sisters from Patzicla who did baptisms for Royal Mayan families*

## Chapter Twenty-two

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### *Testimonies and Tributes*

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What The Arrival Of The Church In Guatemala Means To Me

by

Udine Falabella

(English Translation)

Since The Conquest to our time there have existed those who, in good faith, have desired to give to the Guatemalan people a system of life in which man could feel free, secure and with opportunities to progress and to achieve; that all, absolutely all, may have the same rights, obligations and opportunities. All have failed in their attempt in spite of their good and noble sentiments; there are those who have offered their life and yet their sacrifice has been fruitless.

In the year eighteen-hundred and twenty, the heavens were opened and a revelation of transcendent importance touched the mind and the heart of a young man known as Joseph Smith Jr. For many long years Guatemala remained unaware that the restored gospel was upon the earth, until a young man, whom many appreciate, had the vision to request of the First Presidency of the Church that missionaries be sent to Guatemala, to bring tranquillity, peace, liberty and security, both physical and spiritual, temporal and eternal. From that moment on, thousands of Guatemalans have realized blessings, with the doctrine and the programs of the Church being an example of the ideal, that those illustrious men desired for our fellow countrymen and who died without

seeing or realizing the fruits of their efforts. That is why I consider that the man who has done more good for Guatemala is a man full of faith and spirituality, who in his youth was successful in having the Head of the Church send four missionaries to open the proselyting effort in Central America. From that time, September 4, 1947, to this day, thousands of men and women who have been receptive to the message of the restored gospel, have changed their lives and are examples of righteousness, of honesty and patriotism. Thanks to Brother O'Donnal for his vision, for his faithfulness, his spirituality and his constant pilgrimage to this land which, not being his country, he loves with all his heart; and all those who know him feel grateful for that enormous good that he brought to this land, for there is nothing greater that can be done for humanity than preaching to them the good tidings of the restoration.

He who writes this was baptized on May 11, 1962, has filled several different callings: secretary (scribe), Mission Sunday School President, District President, Stake President, Patriarch, Regional Representative, counselor to the president of the Guatemala City Temple, [and as of September first, 1996, President of the Guatemala City Temple]. Of all these callings, the one in which I have experienced the most pleasure and enjoyed more spirituality, was when I served as a counselor to the man who brought the gospel to Guatemala, John F. O'Donnal. Many were the special spiritual experiences I lived, but because of their sacredness cannot be expressed. I only know that President O'Donnal always enjoyed the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

Some of these experiences came from the center of eternity, and I would not exchange anything in my life for those manifestations of the Spirit. President O'Donnal loves temple work; when we would kneel to offer our prayers to the Lord, as the words of gratitude fell from his lips, I sensed that President O'Donnal was conversing with the Lord.

I am grateful to the Lord for the blessing of association with that great man who with his worthy wife, Sister Carmen O'Donnal, have dedicated their lives to the service of the Church. I repeat and give testimony, coming from the depth of my heart, that there is no one who has done more good for my country as President O'Donnal. Thanks President O'Donnal, we carry you in our hearts not only for this time but for the eternities.

## **What The Church Means To Me**

by

Luis Amado

(English Translation)

It is truly difficult to imagine this blessed land without the light of the gospel; one cannot think how it would have been when the just sought, but did not find, that which their hearts knew was right. What a blessing to live at this time when the Church, the temple and all the blessings of the gospel are available to those who soften their hearts and listen!

Nineteen hundred and forty-seven marks the time of the return of the glorious promises to Guatemala, since in 1947 the first full-time missionaries in this the dispensation of the fullness of times, were sent to this beautiful land, which also marked the beginning of the re-establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the land of the inheritance of the descendants of Lehi. The restoration of the knowledge of the true gospel resulted in the opening of the windows of heaven and the pouring forth of many blessings for all those, that even when they had "the royal right of birth" as legitimate heirs of the promises made to their fathers, did not have access to them, because there was no one to communicate these to them.

The arrival of the Church in Guatemala was literally a new dawn and the fulfillment of the ancient promises made to our faithful ancestors who were concerned for the well-being of their descendants in the last days. Nephi, on translating the teachings of the prophet Lehi, his father, makes the following comment: "And in that day shall the remnant of our seed know that they are of the house of Israel, and that they are the covenant people of the Lord; and then shall they know and come to the knowledge of the gospel of their Redeemer, which was ministered unto their fathers by him; wherefore, they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved." (1 Nephi 15:14). Jacob, brother of Nephi, also commented: "...God will be merciful unto many; and our children shall be restored, that they may come to that which will give them the true knowledge of their Redeemer." (2 Nephi 10:2). The reality and fulfillment of these and other similar prophecies are

contained in the return of the true gospel to Guatemala, to the legitimate heirs and direct descendants of the ancient inhabitants of these lands. It is truly wonderful to read these prophecies and promises and then listen to the members of the Church bear their testimonies of the truthfulness of the gospel; but even more impressive is to hear them testify of "their" Savior and "their" Redeemer.

During the course of my life I have constantly received the richest blessings from my Heavenly Father. To begin, "I was born of goodly parents." I received from them a good education and a good example, in the secular as well as the spiritual and the moral. The most impressive of these teachings from my parents is that these were always accompanied by example; even though not always were we told what to do, it was easy to learn and know what to do solely by observing them. The integrity, the generosity, the desire to share and to help others were sermons preached many times by example and conduct, although few times through words, we always leaned from what we saw them do.

In September 1958, four days after I reached eight years of age, I was baptized a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, only two years after my parents and my older brothers did so. My membership in this Church and the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His gospel have been a total guide in my life, a determining factor in the manner in which I see things as well as the manner in which I think and act. I am the eighth child in a family of 15 children—(I have seven brothers and seven sisters, seven older and seven younger—I am exactly the one in the middle). I feel very grateful and blessed for the many things I learned by having been born into such a select family group.

Many times in the course of my life under the most diverse circumstances I have asked: What would have become of my life had I not been raised in this church? What would I be doing today had the light of the gospel not been there to illuminate my path and give answers to the most important questions, those that really count? How would it be to live without having a complete understanding of the purpose of life and why we are here? Each time I have thought thus, I am greatly terrified just to imagine what it would be like to see the world without the light of the gospel. On the other hand, each time the answers come and the Spirit verifies their truth, it gives me a feeling of profound gratitude, tenderness and consolation to know that among all of His children, my Heavenly Father has taken the time and bothered to call me

and choose me to be a bearer of His Priesthood and that He has sent the Holy Spirit, time and time again, to confirm in my mind and in my heart these eternal truths, to give me peace and comfort which represents knowing with certainty that goes beyond any doubt, that these things are true, eternal and that they proceed directly from God. The gospel of Jesus Christ has been converted into the guide of my life and its precepts have become the governing values of my life.

To be a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has given me a true understanding of who I am. It has shown me "royal parentage" with God and has caused our relationship as Father and son to be converted into a real and tangible relationship; also, it has helped me to understand what my mission is in this life and as a consequence, my life now has significance and purpose. As Abraham, "Finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; ... I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers." (Abraham 1:2) It is because of these truths and this knowledge that finally I understood that although this earthly life is temporal, we should live it with eternal goals, since my very being is eternal and will transcend all barriers of time to continue for all eternity.

Of all the experiences and blessings I have had there are two that stand out and which have given meaning, worth and orientation to my life, namely:

The first was having served as a full-time missionary. It was during those wonderful days that I learned to feel and recognize the true love of Christ; it was during my days as a missionary, while serving and putting others' interests before my own, that I finally understood and had forcefully impressed upon my soul the significance of Jesus Christ's words when he said: "Whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall find it;" it was also during the course of my mission that I learned to separate my sentiments from the whisperings of the Spirit and to recognize its influence. For being totally dedicated to the work day after day and as a consequence of adversity (which in the mission field presents itself in diverse ways, such as persecutions, afflictions, trials, etc.), that I finally learned with certainty that "the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven." I learned that it is possible for a man to know Jesus Christ, walk with

Him, do His will and live happily. It is powerfully brought to my attention, that many years (now more than 21) after completing "my" mission (really it was the Lord's mission and for the Lord), the principles that govern my life today are the same principles that I learned on my mission, in which case all I thought I was giving has returned to me a hundred fold. It was in the mission field that I really learned to pray and not only to ask but to listen; it was precisely this experience that brought to my life the greatest blessing that God has given me.

The second blessing, the greatest of my life, has been having found Ruth, and with the aid of the heavens, convinced her to be my wife and eternal companion. The Lord showed me whom I should marry, through personal revelation, in the same manner in which He taught and trained me in the mission field to recognize His will; He even gave me some details so I would be certain that she, Ruth, was my "help meet." Ruth has truly been a blessing in my life and a fountain of constant inspiration. It has been interesting to see how at times she has the ability to see things so easily, so logically and differently than I; that in this way she compliments and helps me to resolve problems or simply gives me suggestions as to a different way of doing things, better than what I was doing. On other occasions we are so in accord regarding the direction we should go that it is also easy to know what we should do. Her influence in my life is so good and positive that it is hard for me to think of life without her. For this reason I feel that the two most important decisions I have made and which changed my life, that molded, that improved and marked a definite course, have been the decision to serve a full-time mission and the decision to marry Ruth. All other good things I have in this life in some way are connected to either of these two decisions and are dependent upon them.

There have been many other events and many other people who have greatly influenced my life. Juan O'Donnal is one of these people. As far as I can remember, my family has always been friends of the O'Donnals. For many years, while I was living in the United States, I did not see them nor know of them. When I returned to Guatemala, Juan was the President of the Guatemala Guatemala Mission; it was during this time that the Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission was organized, over which he also presided. I remember many of his sermons and the things he taught; in fact, many of my friends served as

missionaries under his direction and they always speak of him and his wife, Carmen, and the positive influence they were in their lives. I also have fond memories when Ruth and I attended the dedication of the Mexico City Temple, where the O'Donnals served in the presidency. The way they cared for us during the first endowment session and the sealings they performed, even at midnight, added to all the memories connected with the sessions of the dedication, are part of the fond memories that have become indelible; and those days charged with a Spirit so strong, will always live in our hearts. They are also memories filled with gratitude for the service, the devotion and the love demonstrated by all those who cared for us.

Once when Juan and Carmen were called to serve as President and Matron of the Guatemala City Temple, I had the opportunity to serve and work with them in various ways. Even before the dedication we commenced working together, as at that time I was Manager of the Purchasing Office of the Area Office of the Presiding Bishopric, and in cooperation with them, according to their previous experience and the needs, we commenced to equip the temple, purchasing white clothing, office equipment and all that was needed in order for the temple to function. I don't think we will ever forget the first white trousers we bought and the length of some of them; the Lord truly loves us and is merciful with us when we do all that is our part. Is this not true? We were also involved in the Temple Dedication Committee in which I served as coordinator of translations from English to Spanish. The impression that attending ten dedicatory sessions left on my soul, the privilege of being translator for President Hinckley, as well as the strong spirit that accompanies the dedication of a temple, are events which shall forever live in my heart, whose indelible mark on my soul testifies of the eternal nature of this work and its transcendence on both sides of the veil. How could one doubt after such pure and clear influence, the manifestations of God?

Later, the entire time that the O'Donnals served as President and Matron of the temple, I first served as a sealer and a year later as Temple Recorder; we had great and special experiences. Just to think of such richness of spiritual experiences, one can only say as did Oliver Cowdery when he referred to his experiences with Joseph Smith the Prophet: "These were days never to be forgotten...the inspiration of heaven awakened the utmost gratitude of this bosom...."(JSH 1:71)

I admire the O'Donnals' zeal for doing the things of the Lord in the Lord's way; and as we spent more time together in ecclesiastical tasks, doing the work of the temple, I began to think of him as Laman and Lemuel said of their father, only I say it with respect, very sincerely and with much love: "he is a visionary man" to whom the Lord has entrusted many things and has let him know, through visions and personal revelation even before these things occur, what His will is and what is expected of him.

The example of unselfish service that the O'Donnals have given to us as we see them fulfill full-time missions, time and time again, shall forever live in me and my family; they have shown us the way and have inspired us to follow their good example. Definitely we will imitate them as they have shown, by precept and even more importantly by their example, that to serve the Lord brings happiness, blessings, love and peace.

Guatemala—October 1995



*Udine and Graciela Falabella -- Luis and Ruth Amado*

## Chapter Twenty-three

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# *Time Line Of The Church In Guatemala*

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May 21, 1942	Arrival of John Forres O'Donnal in Guatemala ..... p. 21
Dec. 31, 1946	John Forres O'Donnal visits President George Albert Smith requesting missionaries be sent to Guatemala ..... p. 55
July 1947	Central America made part of the Mexican Mission..... p. 58
Sept. 4, 1947	First missionaries arrived in Guatemala ... p. 58
Sept. 7, 1947	Dedication of the Land of Guatemala for the preaching of the gospel by Arwell L. Pierce ..... p. 58
Nov. 13, 1948	First baptism in Central America ..... p. 61
June 12, 1950	First Branch organized in Guatemala City p. 62

*Pioneer In Guatemala*

- Aug. 22, 1950 First property for construction of a chapel was purchased by the Church in the name of John F. O'Donnal..... p. 63
- Nov. 16, 1952 Central American Mission organized..... p. 63
- Nov. 16, 1952 Dedication of Central America for the preaching of the gospel by Elder Spencer W. Kimball ..... p. 63
- Jan. 8, 1953 First full-time, Lamanite missionary in Central America ..... p.69
- 1953 Coban, first Ke'kchi Indian area opened.. p.169
- Jan. 9, 1955 First chapel in Guatemala completed--dedicated by Elder LeGrand Richards ..... p. 71
- Dec. 15, 1956 First *Cakchiquel* Indian area opened ..... pp. 72 & 169
- March 25, 1958 Law prohibiting churches from owning property was abolishes--property for 1st chapel changed to name of the Church ... pp. 53 & 72
- Feb. 21, 1960 First Sunday School Board organized ..... p. 74
- July 5, 1960 First Relief Society Board organized..... p. 74
- Aug. 1, 1965 Central American Mission divided -- Guatemala-El Salvador mission created ... p. 77
- June 29, 1966 Church recognized by Guatemalan Government and received legal status..... pp. 53 & 78
- May 21, 1967 First Stake organized in Guatemala by Elder Marion G. Romney ..... p. 78

*Time Line Of The Church In Guatemala*

- 1967 Seminary Program started ..... p. 78
- 1975 *Cakchiquel* Indians, first to have the gospel taught in their own tongue -- teaching in *Quiché, Ke 'kchi* and *Mam* languages soon followed. .... pp. 149 & 177
- Oct. 25, 1975 Quetzaltenango Guatemala Stake organized by Elder Bruce R. McConkie -- first stake outside of Guatemala City ..... p. 81
- Feb. 4, 1976 Major earthquake in Guatemala..... p. 119
- July 1, 1976 Guatemala-El Salvador Mission divided--creating Guatemala Guatemala City Mission and El Salvador Mission ..... p. 110
- 1976 Translation work--Indian languages ..... p. 147
- 1976 Language training--Indian languages ... pp. 114 & 149
- Feb. 21-22, 1977 First Area Conference in Central America ..... p. 213
- June 27, 1977 Latin Orientation Center (LOC) for Latin American missionaries initiated .... p. 151
- July 1, 1977 Guatemala Guatemala City Mission divided -- Guatemala Quetzaltenango Mission created ..... p. 219
- 1978 Construction of small chapels in rural areas of Guatemala ..... p. 152
- June 4-8, 1979 First small chapels in rural areas dedicated by Elder Boyd K. Packer..... p. 241

*Pioneer In Guatemala*

June 10, 1979	Reconstructed Patzicia chapel dedicated by Elder Boyd K. Packer ..... p. 264
April 2, 1981	Construction of Guatemala City Temple announced ..... p. 301
Sept. 12, 1982	Groundbreaking Guatemala City Temple. p. 301
Nov. 27-Dec 10, 1984	Open House Guatemala City Temple ..... p. 307
Dec. 14-16, 1984	Dedication Guatemala City Temple..... p. 311
Dec. 1984	Family History Center in Temple Annex p. 368
Jan. 1985	Missionary Training Center for Central America organized in Guatemala ..... pp. 329 & 364
Jan. 1985	Building for housing temple excursion leased ..... p.329
Oct. 26, 1986	Chimaltenango Guatemala Stake organized by Elder Gene R. Cook-- First <i>Cakchiquel</i> Indian stake ..... p. 362
July 1, 1987	Guatemala Guatemala City South Mission and Guatemala Guatemala City North Mission created ..... p. 365
April 1990	Carlos H. Amado called to the Second Quorum of the Seventy--First General Authority from Guatemala..... p. 363
Oct. 1, 1990	Central America Area Office in Guatemala -- Area Presidencies ..... p. 366
Oct. 19, 1991	Land of Guatemala dedicated by Elder Marvin J. Ashton..... p. 361

*Time Line Of The Church In Guatemala*

- 1992 Family History Centers in Stake Centers --  
Complete collection of Central America  
Family History films obtained and housed  
in Temple Annex .....pp. 368 & 369
- Jan. 1993 Temple ceremony available in four major  
Indian languages--(*Cakchiquel, Quiché,  
Ke 'kchi, Mam*) ..... p. 367
- July 1, 1993 Guatemala Guatemala City Central  
Mission created ..... p.365
- Jan. 22, 1994 MTC building in Guatemala dedicated--  
MTC Presidents ..... p. 364
- June 4-11, 1994 Temple ordinances for Mayan Kings  
performed in Guatemala City Temple ..... p.369
- 1984-1996 Temple Presidents Guatemala City  
Temple..... p.367

*“... there shall be many which shall believe the words which are written; and they shall carry them forth unto the remnant of our seed. And then shall the remnant of our seed know concerning us, ...*

*And the gospel of Jesus Christ shall be declared among them; wherefore, they shall be restored unto the knowledge of their fathers, and also to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which was had among their fathers.*

*And then shall they rejoice; for they shall know that it is a blessing unto them from the hand of God; and their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a pure and a delightful people.”*

*2 Nephi 30:3-6*