

The night started out like any other night. I had finished preparing dinner for the seven missionaries who were here in Patzicia attending a Cakchiquel Indian Language Training School. The meal had been served, the dishes and kitchen cleaned, and Carmelina, our sweet little Indian girl who helped me each day, had gone home.

My husband, Bleak, and I had retired to our little room for the night. We lived in one of the class rooms of the big beautiful chapel and we used the kitchen to prepare and serve our meals. We loved our little room. We felt so secure there. It was our refuge from the busy workaday world we were involved in as Agricultural Missionaries for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Guatemala. We talked of our day's work and our love for the people. Tired from the long labors of the day, we went to bed early. There was a peaceful calm in the air and sleep came easily.

Around three o'clock in the morning we were awoken by the shaking of our bed. Startled out of a deep sleep and never having experienced it before, I didn't know what was happening. Bleak threw his arm over me and in an emotion-filled voice said "Don't move, it's an earthquake and a bad one."

The shaking became more violent... unbelievably violent! We could only try to hold on to the bed. We could hear the furniture and our personal belongings being thrown about the room. It was as if a huge giant had the chapel in his hands and was angrily shaking it. I can only remember that I felt confused and thought "What can we do?"

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. The noise was deafening. Bleak was very quiet... praying. He later said that I cried out, "I want to go home!". I can only remember crying aloud, "Heavenly Father, Protect us!"

Then after what seemed like an hour, (actually it was about 35-40 seconds) the horrible shaking stopped, almost as abruptly as it had started. The room was as dark as pitch. We stumbled out of bed but couldn't walk in the room because of the debris that we kept stumbling over. Bleak was on the floor, feeling around for the flashlight, and luckily he felt it under his hand. He turned it on and we saw for the first time the shambles around us. Everything was upside down. The bookcase and portable clothes closet were sprawled into the middle of the floor. Debris covered every inch of the room. It was unbelievable!

We climbed over the rubble towards the door. It was barred by the table that had scooted across the front of it. Lifting the table out of the way, 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!

Two of the missionaries, Elders Ellsworth and Adkin, had been sleeping on the stage on the floor, right across the hall from our room. Suddenly we heard Elder Adkin calling out, "Help me, help me, my companion is hurt and I can't get him out!" Three of the other missionaries, Elders Schmollinger, Bernhardt, and Larson, were sleeping in a little adobe house about 150 feet from the chapel. They said they heard me screaming for help for Elder Ellsworth and they came running. Their little hut had crumbled to the ground, but they had crawled out without a scratch.

We ran immediately to see about Elder Ellsworth. The high ceiling that had been supported by huge concrete beams had fallen, breaking in the middle like toothpicks. Right under the point of one of the beams lay Elder Ellsworth. He was pinned under it apparently, and the huge beam seemed to be resting on his back and upper legs. He was lying on his stomach, still on his mattress on the wooden floor of the stage. He was conscious and quite calm. Though he was in great pain, he never lost his "cool". He kept saying over and over again, "Please, can't you hurry?" At one point, he even held the candle for them while they worked to free him.

When we saw that the beam was on him, our hearts sank! How could we possibly ever get him out? There was no way that we could move the beam; we had no lights, electricity... nothing to work with!

Bleak and the Elders talked for a few minutes, then they all knelt together and Bleak pleaded with the Lord to help us free Elder Ellsworth, to protect them as they worked and to hold the building together until they could finish their work. The tremors were still coming strong and the building would shake and rattle each time. Then Elder Bernhardt crawled under the massive destruction, laid his hands on Elder Ellsworth's head and gave him a special blessing.

They all went to work. They put strong braces under the beam, in hopes that it would help to keep the beam from falling more. How lucky that he was on a wooden floor. If he had been on cement, he would possibly have been killed. How miraculous that the beam didn't crash through the wooden floor! Now there was hope. We could saw out the beam from under him and release him. But what if

the beam fell on top of him when the floor was cut out? More bracing. We had a gasoline powered saw that the Elders had brought from the service station nearby, but we had no gasoline except in the pickup and we had nothing to use to cyphon it out. But they worked and worked with what few things they had. a little hand saw or whatever they could hack away the floor with. They crawled under the floor and worked like little beavers. It really took courage because we were still having really strong shakes. I later told them that they were really brave. They said they were scared to death at times but that they had to get him out.

At one point, I saw blood trickling from his mouth and I panicked. But I went off by myself and asked my Heavenly Father for the faith I needed and a peaceful feeling came over me. Bleak had told me not to worry. He said that as he was praying, he knew for a surety that Elder Ellsworth was going to be freed and that he would live and be alright. There was no doubt in his mind.

To go back a little, when we saw that the beam was on him, Bleak and I decided to go for help, not realizing that the quake was so general. While the Elders continued to work, we jumped in the pickup and headed for the center of town but the roads were caved in and we couldn't enter. We thought we would go to Chimaltenango, some 17 kilometros away...we could get the help we needed there. Just a little ways down the highway, the mountainside had caved in and we couldn't pass. Then we decided to go up the highway in the opposite direction to Tecpan. We could call the Mission Headquarters for help. We were only turned back by another cave in on that road. We could see the headlights of another car on the other side of the caved in area, wanting to pass. Then the horrible realization came... we were trapped in!

We rushed back to the chapel. As we passed the once-row of houses, all we could see was piles of rubble. An Indian woman ran out into the road crying, "Please help me, all of my children are buried under the house!" What were we to do? Our first responsibility was to Elder Ellsworth. So we drove on.

Elders Salazar and Evans were living down in the center of town. I told Bleak as we drove back, "If they aren't at the chapel by the time we get back, they're dead!" As we pulled up the road to the chapel, we could see them in the headlights, coming in a trot up the road! I wept for joy.

As long as I live I shall never forget the sounds that began to arise from the pueblo. We could hear the wailing and weeping as the people began to pulled their families from under the piles of fallen adobe. Their homes were deathtraps, for the adobe was only mud and crumbled to crush and smother them. In the dark early morning hours, the cries chilled my blood and the realization that we couldn't stop to help them added to our burdens.

Would daylight never come? Many of the Indian brothers started coming to see if we were safe. Here they were, concerned about us and their own homes were all destroyed. It reaffirmed their love for us and made our hearts glad. Several of them stayed and helped to free Elder Ellsworth. One said, "Sister, President' Choc's wife and two little sons were killed-", another came saying that the Relief Society President and her baby were dead. More and more. Fifteen members of the Branch were gone.

Finally daylight came and with it came more hope. Things always seem more hopeless in the dark of the night. I could see that the home of our next door neighbors was destroyed and I could hear the weeping of the women, so I walked over and climbed over the mounds of rubble into what had been their yard. They were already trying to dig out their corn, beans, pots, etc. 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 they would all die, 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, telling her that we have to be strong when things seem hopeless and that we have to have faith. She thanked me and softly said, "It is God's will" and thanked me.

The Elders and the brothers were still working frantically because it had been too many hours and Elder Ellsworth was becoming weak, cold and weary. He kept calling for a drink and we carried water and soda water to him to keep him from dehydrating. He was so brave through it all. I still marvel at his calmness even though he was really suffering and I am sure at times he wondered if we were ever going to get him out. But he never became panicky or lost consciousness.

Bleak was busy helping as much as he could. He had an operation several years ago and has artificial joints in his knees, so he couldn't climb under and help, but he ~~helped~~ assisted in every way possible. He checked all the electrical wires, etc. to make the area safe. He drew up and stored all the water from the damaged, leaking storage tank which proved to be a life saver later. He brought our mattress out of the building to prepare a place for the elder when we were ready to take him out.

Finally, about nine o'clock they yelled, "He's free!" They carefully pulled him 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. We loaded him into the pickup, still on his mattress. As we started to leave, Brother Doming Soloman came up to me, his eyes full of tears and his face stricken with grief and desperation. Softly, he asked, "Sister, 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?"

I asked Bleak and he said of course we would. We drove down the road a little way and stopped by a trail. Brother Soloman and the Elders ran down the 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 and we drove off, headed for Chimaltenango. As we came to the caved in area, we found that someone had made a narrow passage over the top, so we were able to pass over also. We could get to Chimaltenango, at least.

When we reached Chimaltenango, we found that the destruction was as bad there as it was in Patzicia. We drove through the center of town to the office and small clinic of a Dr. Behrhorst, a Gringo Dr. There were hundreds of wounded and dying in what was left of his little hospital and all over the grounds lay wounded men, women and children. They couldn't help us. A man came up to us and said that we could get help over at the public hospital, so we drove over there. We found the same situation there. We were given a number 163 and told we would have to wait our turn. A nurse came out and gave both of them a shot for pain. A doctor walked by hurriedly. An elder asked him to look at them. He quickly looked at them, said that Elder Ellsworth wasn't seriously injured, that they had hundreds that were much worse off than he was. He did say that his leg wound needed bandaging, so he tore a piece off my gown and wrapped it up and left.

We talked hurriedly about what we should do. We realized that they probably wouldn't be able to help him here when they DID get to him, but we were told that the highway into the city was closed by a caved-in mountainside. Some else said that there were ambulances on the other side waiting to take the wounded to the city. But all of this was rumors and we didn't know how much to believe. But we went with that hope. The Elders said that we would go as far as we could in the car, then they would carry him over the mountain pass. If the ambulances were not on the other side, they would walk and carry him into the city!

So we started out again. We transferred the boy down beside the Elder. Several times we thought he 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. It was less than eight hours after the quake. 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.

As we neared the caved-in mountainside closer to the city, the traffic to the city was piled up, but we didn't wait in line. We drove on past them all up to where the tractors and bulldozers were working to clear some of the tons of dirt away. Over the top of the area appeared our Zone Leaders! The President of the mission had sent them to check on all the missionaries. They came running to our aid. They talked to the police and told them that we had a man who was hurt bad and might die and that we had to get him through immediately. They ushered us right through. We were the second of third car to get through. The highway was under tons and tons of dirt, so we had to drive over the top. It was right on the edge of a deep barranca and the wheels of the pickup just barely had room to pass. My heart was in my throat and I begged my husband to wait, but he said, "We have to get through and through we went!"

On the other side of the mountain were miles and miles of cars, not only on their side of the road but on ours, too. We had to drive on the shoulder of the road, the Zone Leaders running ahead to clear it for us.

Another fifteen or twenty minutes and we were in the city. We drove straight to the mission home. President Arnold jumped in the car and went along. They were taken to the best private hospital in Guatemala. Both he and the Soloman boy were admitted and treated with the very best of care.

The Soloman boy fully recovered. We hear often of the progress of Elder Ellsworth and he is steadily improving. He was flown to Panama to a hospital and then to the states. He had injuries to his legs, pelvis and kidneys, we understand but that he is out of danger and on the road to recovery.

We have seen many tragedies, but we have also seen many miracles. We have witnessed the Lord literally snatch his missionaries from all their different quarters and from the jaws of death. There were no other injuries, even minor ones to the missionaries.

Bleak and I know that he was protecting us. When daylight came, we looked back into our room and saw that the heavy concrete blocks had fallen forward over our bed, but were held in a leaning position! It was as if the Lord had put out his hand and held them off us. Two days later when the second tremor hit, they all collapsed and fell. They were so heavy that they cracked gouges into the tile and concrete floor. They fell right where our bed had been.

One would have to see the destruction in Guatemala to believe it. The towns of Patzicia, Patzun, Tecpan, Chimaltenango and Comalapa are completely destroyed. The figures listing the dead in these towns are into the thousands. It is reported that a third of the population of Tecpan died. I believe it. Patzicia had about a thousand. These are small pueblos, not cities. The trek to the cemetery in Patzicia was a steady stream all day Thursday. They were burying their dead in community graves. President Choc's wife, two boys, the Relief Society President, Sister Cua and her baby, and Sister Ordonez were buried in one grave.

Bleak and I have been in charge of distributing food, clothes, blankets and other supplies to these five towns as they came in and as the need arose. The mission immediately sent corn, beans, rice, blankets, etc. for the members. Most of their corn, etc. had been buried under piles of rubble.

It has been really 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. These towns are in the mountains and the nights are very cold. A night or two after the quake, the beans in our garden froze. The wind was strong and high and at night I would shudder when I thought of how many people were cold.

Blankets and tents were flown in from the church headquarters in USA. We gave them to the members according to their needs. If a family had been able to retrieve their blankets, they didn't receive as many as those who had none. Each member of each family had received a blanket, so by sleeping together, they could keep warm. The blankets here are small, but the ones from the church were large, 100% wool and they were all delighted to get them. We also distributed pots and pans, sugar, salt, lime that they use to clean their corn to make tortillas, and fresh fruit from the capital.

We missionaries were also thrown out into the open. The first two nights we slept out under the stars and nearly froze! The dew soaked our beds and our heads! But we were happy to be safely outside. The tremors were still coming and the skeleton of the church would rattle, sending shivers up and down my spine.

The mission sent up huge wide rolls of plastic to make temporary tents for the members and we used some of it, too to make us a long tent for all of us to sleep under. It was one long continuous bed, as we had to pool our blankets to keep warm. We were cooking over a campfire which also warmed our bodies and spirits. I was cooking for a large crew and was I ever grateful for my years of experience in MIA Girls' Camp. My girls would have been proud of me!

The first night that we slept out, an Indian family wandered into our camp from the highway. It was cold and they had walked all the way from the city that day, trying to get to Chichicastenango to see about their family. They had another days walk ahead of them. They wanted to go on, but we persuaded them to stay the night, because they had a baby and small child and they were crying. We shared our supper potluck with them and our blankets. The husband kept getting up all night to add more logs to the fire to help keep us all warm. Early the next morning we made a pot of mush and invited them to eat with us, but they said they had to hurry on to see about their family and after thanking us they scurried off down the road.

While Bleak and I were busy with our assignments and carrying the injured to the hospital, etc., the elders were working to help the people dig out from under it all. President Arnold sent two sisters up to help, Sister Hyer, a nurse and Sister Pulham, to help with the injured. Three different doctors came from the states to help out. Other Elders were brought in from outlying areas to centralize our forces. Tents were set up to house us. Two other missionary couples also came up, The Hyrum Fromms and Boyce Lines. They had specifically assigned duties and our crew grew.

I had started having some pains in my chest and my husband talked with the President, President Arnold and he sent up two more sisters, Wheatley and Johnson to take over the kitchen. By this time we had salvaged the stoves and other things from the kitchen and our cooking was somewhat easier, but still a major chore. The night that I started with chest pains, a doctor from the states was in camp. My husband asked him for medicine, as my pills were buried

in the rubble. He said he hadn't brought any and had none. The next morning, in a box of medicine he had brought was a bottle of nitroglycerin pills! Another miracle of the Lord.

We wish you could feel the special spirit of these wonderful Indian Brothers and Sisters. We would ask them if they needed a little rice or beans or sugar, and usually they would say, "Oh, sister, we still have a little. If we need some, we will tell you". Very few ever asked for any. This isn't true of all of Guatemala. We have had non-members come by the church and ask for anything... just anything. They heard we were giving away things and wanted something. They keep coming back again and again. Not so the members. And the government has really been flying in food, clothes, etc. by plane and helicopter to all the little pueblos. Many items of food and clothing have come in from all over... Outlying areas of Guatemala, Mexico, the states and other neighboring countries.

We know we are richly blessed to be here at this time and give the little service we can. Even though the fears that I have had since the quake have made me long for home many times, (the safety of home) I wouldn't leave now if I could. We have so much love and respect for these people. Our days are filled with many different kinds of helping. There is still so much to do. There is still so much rubble, sickness, death and dust. The babies continue to be born. The rains will bring more problems with landslides from the broken mountainsides.

But the church is building them good strong safe homes. Many of them will be off the ground for the first time in their lives. They have so much strength and determination. My daughter wrote and said that she was afraid that if her home and everything she owned were buried under the rubble, she would just sit down and give up. Well, perhaps some of them feel like this, but you would never know it. A visitor from the states said a few months ago before the quake that he couldn't see that these people were suffering. They seemed so happy and had a smile on their faces. Well, they are still seemingly happy and they still have a smile on their faces. Do you think they are suffering?

Our dear Branch President Pablo Choc who lost his wife and two little sons in the quake goes about his duties with a smile on his face. But when we are alone and talking, he says, "Oh, Hermana, I miss my wife so much. My home is so sad. I just hope that I can live worthy and work in the church so that I can be with them again. This life isn't too long. We just have to go on and do the best we can."

His son, Daniel, the first Cakchiquel Indian to go on a full time mission came to our tent the other night. He is here with the other missionaries working. He told us that he wanted to talk to us for a little while. After he had paid for his weeks food, he said, "I just can't believe that my mother is dead. It is so sad for me, but it is much sadder for my little sisters. They need her so much." But he goes along each day in his missionary work laughing with the other missionaries. Perhaps they don't know the pain that is in his heart.

And in spite of it all, we have more hope for these people than we have ever had before. We have a strong conviction that the Lord is cleansing Guatemala of all the old traditions, of all the filth and disease and poverty. Does this sound strange? It's hard to believe when you look around at them right now with all the sacrifices that have been made and with all the destruction.

But the great story of Hugh B. Brown's "Current Bush" keeps coming to mind. And as Brother Per, the counselor in the Branch Presidency told me the morning of the quake,

"Hermana, it is the will of the Lord. We don't understand it all, but he has a purpose in mind."

His home was gone, a new one that he had just built by the sweat of his brow. They hadn't even moved into it. Their fifth baby was almost due. But he had a peaceful happy smile on his face.

As I type this it is with a heavy heart. I came in to the city this morning to type this story up to mimeograph. As I sat down to type, the phone rang in the President's office. It was a call from Patzun. All the missionaries had gone there today to help some of the towns people to clean up their places. This was to be the last day of their labors. Tonight we were going to have a big dinner to reward them for their many weeks of hard work for the people of this area.

The call was to report that Daniel Choc, our first Cakchiquel Indian Missionary was killed when a wall that they were trying to remove had fallen on him. It is with a heavy heart that I return to Patzicia. The thought of seeing the face of his father is almost more than I can bear. He has had nearly two months since the death of his wife and two little sons.

There will be rejoicing on the other side. We will have to go on and work and try to live the best we can. I know he will see them again and great will be their joy together.