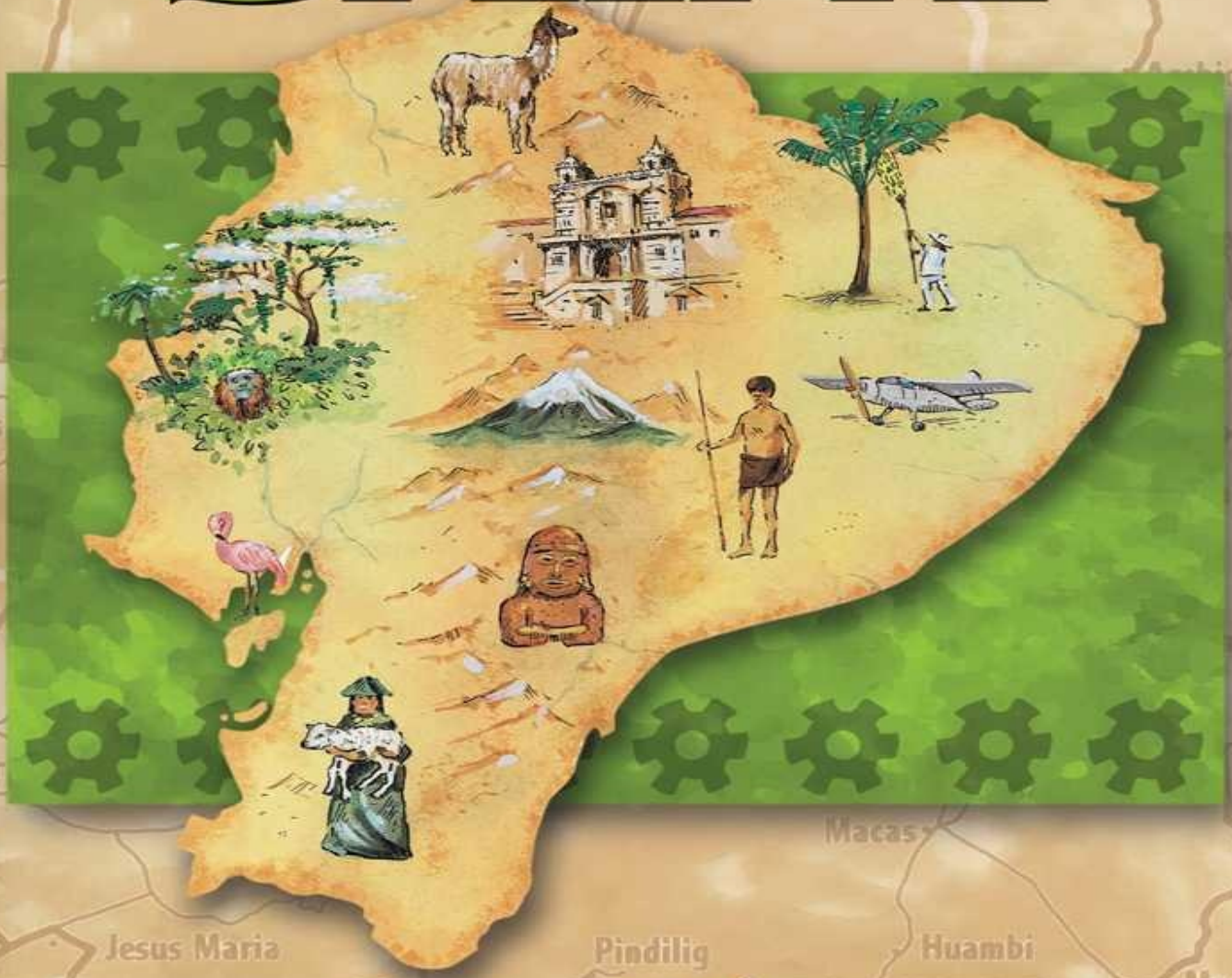
CHRISTIAN HEROES: THEN & NOW

NATE SAINT



On a Wing and a Prayer

JANET & GEOFF BENGE

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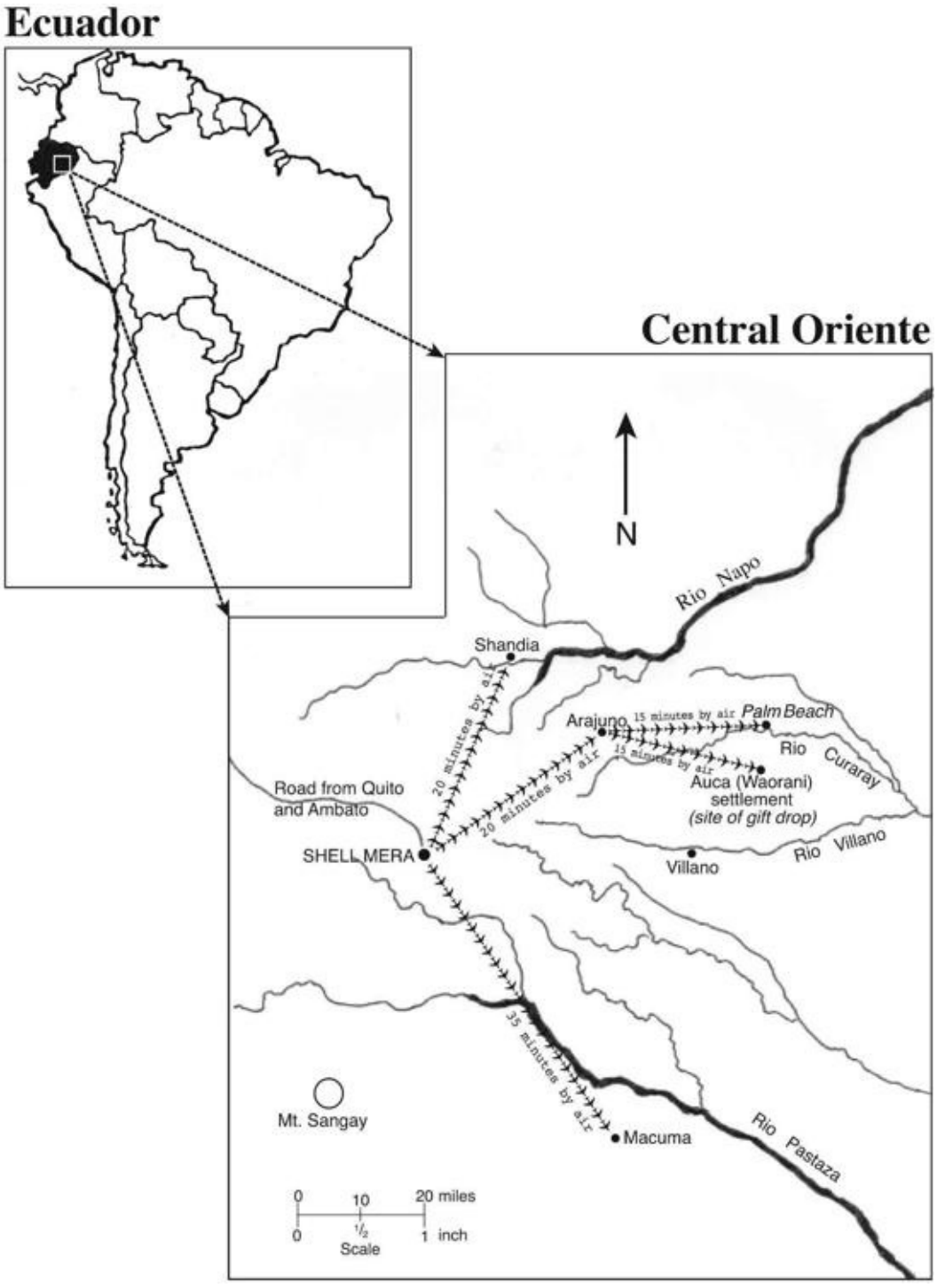
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This book is dedicated to the Waorani Church elders:

Tementa Nenquihui
Kimo Yeti
Mincayi Enquedi
Yowi Tañi
Kenta Huamoñi
Toñi Toñi

Three of these men participated in the attack at Palm Beach before God transformed their lives. All serve their tribe as evangelists, Bible translators, and Bible teachers. Their faith and hard work have given substance to Nate Saint's hope for the Waorani.

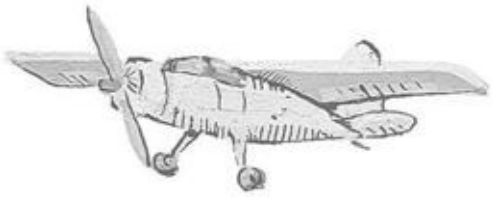
Special thanks to Marj Saint Van Der Puy and Steve Saint for their help in preparing this manuscript.

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Chapter 1



A Whole New World

Nate Saint turned and waited for his nineteen-year-old brother Sam to give him a leg up into the cockpit. He wished he could have swung his leg over himself, but seven-year-old legs just aren't long enough for some things. Sam gave him a good heave, and Nate tumbled into the leather seat. He wiggled around until he was sitting comfortably, then reached for the goggles hanging in front of him. As he sat in the Challenger biplane waiting for Sam to finish his ground check, Nate could hardly believe he was actually going to go flying. In 1930, most adults hadn't been in an airplane, but young Nate had a brother who was a flying instructor.

Finally, Sam climbed into the cockpit behind Nate. Nate heard him flick some switches, and then the engine came to life. The propeller whirled faster and faster in front of Nate until it seemed to disappear. Sam released the brake, and the plane lurched forward. He guided the aircraft to the end of the runway, where he pulled the throttle lever all the way to the "Full" position. The engine screamed louder and louder. The whole plane vibrated in time to its scream as the Challenger began to speed down the runway. Nate could feel his heart pumping fast as the plane skipped off the dirt runway and into the air.

Nate felt cold air rustling through his curly blond hair. He sat up as high as he could in his seat. He craned his neck and tried to see over the side of the plane, but he was just too short. Sam laughed at his effort and then banked the

plane slightly to the right. Now Nate could see clearly. They were circling Huntingdon, the town just outside Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where the Saint family lived. In the distance, Nate could make out the shapes of some of the buildings in downtown Philadelphia. He could also see the two tall, red brick chimneys of the coal-fired power generating plant on the edge of the Delaware River. Nate tried to remember every single minute of the flight so he could tell his friends at school all about it.

When Nate got to school on Monday, the teacher was a little surprised to hear that his parents had allowed him to do something as dangerous as flying. But then, she didn't know his family. The Saints had a reputation around Huntingdon for being a bit different. In some ways, Nate's parents, Katherine and Lawrence Saint, were very strict parents to their seven sons, Sam, Phil, Dan, David, Steve, Nate, and Ben, and their one daughter, Rachel, especially about religious things. Sunday in the Saint household was the Lord's Day, and after breakfast, the whole family went to Sunday school at the local Presbyterian church. After Sunday school, they would all attend the morning church service and then go home for lunch and family devotions, which included prayer and Bible study. After dinner, they all went off to church for another service. They also went to the weekly Wednesday night prayer meeting at the church. Beside the stove in the kitchen was a big jar of pennies from which they could take a penny for every chapter of the Bible they read to themselves.

For seven years, since Nate had been born, his father had spent nearly all his time in church. He wasn't the pastor; he was much too shy for that. Instead, he was an artist who specialized in reproducing stained-glass windows from the thirteenth century, and he was in charge of making the stained-glass windows for the Washington Cathedral in Washington, D.C. Sometimes he would take Nate and show him his work. And when he did, Nate could look up at the large window in the St. John's chapel and see himself. Yes, see himself. When Nate was five, his father had used him as the model for the stained-glass window of the boy giving Jesus his five loaves and two fishes.

As strict as his parents may have seemed, in other ways they weren't strict at all. A lot of things that bothered most mothers didn't worry Mrs. Saint one bit. Meals at the house were served at all hours of the day and night, whenever enough of the children gathered to make it worth setting the table. The Saints didn't worry if the children didn't eat their vegetables or if they had two desserts and no main course. Nor did they care if the children didn't keep their rooms tidy or had holes in their pants, or even if they were late for school.

Since Mr. Saint was rather forgetful, Nate's mother took care of most of the practical matters around the house. She was organized but, to most people, in a

different way. For example, the Saints' three-story wood frame house had a large room with hooks and shelves all around the walls. When all the family's laundry had been ironed, it was placed on the shelves or hung on the hooks. When any of the children needed clean clothes, they went to the room and found something to wear that fit them. It was a case of first up, best dressed! The system gave Mrs. Saint a little spare time to write her poetry and play the piano.

Because her father, Josiah K. Proctor, was an inventor, Mrs. Saint thought it was important to let the children experiment. In the late nineteenth century, he had invented machinery that made woolen mills operate more efficiently. He had started a company called Proctor and Schwartz, which later became Proctor Silex. This had made him a wealthy man. Despite being raised in a wealthy home, Mrs. Saint knew that having ideas and trying new things were more important than having lots of money. It was something she never forgot when she had her own children.

Indeed, more often than not, Mrs. Saint helped the children carry out their wild schemes. When the children came to her with an idea, instead of no, she would say why not? One time when Nate was only four years old, his big brothers Sam and David decided it would be great to sleep on the roof. Their mother thought it was a wonderful idea, too, and she and the children worked out how to make it happen.

Soon the household was buzzing with activity. Mrs. Saint arranged for a carpenter to build a fence around the flat part of the second-story roof over the kitchen. Then she had him build five cots. Extra blankets were found in the attic, and within a week, the family had a new "sleeping room" on the roof. Mrs. Saint and the children all dragged their blankets and pillows out a third-story window and onto the roof. Rachel, who was nine years older than Nate, would read bedtime stories to the younger children by flashlight. Nate remembered the story of David Livingston she read from the book *Fifty Missionary Stories Every Child Should Know.* Somehow, outside on a starry night, the whole adventure seemed more real than ever. For years afterwards, Nate spent many summer nights up in the "roof bedroom."

Of course, Nate's friends loved to spend time at his house. The house was set on an acre of land, and every bit of it was jam-packed with possibilities. Behind the studio where his father did his glass work was the Saint family's private, double-track roller coaster. The huge wooden structure had curves to swoop around and drops to plunge down. Mr. Saint had built it in his spare time with the boys. A few stray nails had gone through the roof of the house and caused leaks, but no one worried too much about that. Nate's parents thought it was more important for the children to have fun and to learn something than to

keep everything in perfect condition. Some of the adults in the neighborhood thought the Saints were a little odd, but there was always a line of kids wanting to ride the roller coaster or play in the fifty-foot swing that dangled from the tall elm tree.

Nate and his brothers also loved to make models of anything that moved: trains, boats, airplanes. Nate built a six-foot-long glider from a photo in a book, and he and Philip and Ben made a huge model railroad, which they continued to add to for several years. They called it the B and T and P Depression Railroad, for Ben, Thaney (Nate's nickname), and Philip, and because the country was in the middle of something called the Great Depression. Plus, the words sounded long and important to the boys.

Nate was always getting ideas about how to build things better or stronger. He won prizes at the nearby Abington hobby show for some of his inventions. One of his winning entries was a miniature train he made from scraps of metal left over from one of his father's window frames.

When Nate was ten years old, he got his second airplane ride. Sam landed a shiny, new 1933 Stinson aircraft at a nearby airport. Nate could hardly wait to climb aboard. Best of all, though, this plane had an enclosed cockpit with the seats side by side and two sets of controls. Nate sat down in the right-hand seat and tightened the lap belt as far as it would go. The belt still hung loosely around his small waist. Sam, sitting in the pilot's seat on the left, pulled some levers and flicked several switches. The propeller began to turn and the engine kicked in. The cockpit of the Stinson filled with a powerful hum. Nate watched the needles on the gauges of the instrument panel in front of him and Sam. The needles vibrated gently to the throb of the engine. Sam adjusted some more levers and set the flaps for take-off. He looked around to make sure no one was in the way before releasing the brake lever and touching the throttle to get the engine revving a little faster.

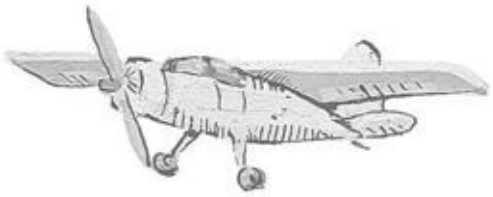
The Stinson aircraft rolled forward. Sam guided the plane all the way to the end of the runway, where he turned it around to face into the wind. Nate watched as Sam pushed the throttle all the way forward. The engine roared, and the Stinson leapt forward. As its wheels pounded up and down on the dirt runway, the plane jerked and twisted. Then the twisting and jerking stopped. Nate looked out the side window of the plane and watched the ground fall away below them. They were airborne.

They flew east across the Delaware River and out over New Jersey. Sam pushed his foot on the right rudder pedal and turned the control wheel. Nate again looked out the side window. He watched as the aileron on the Stinson's wing flicked up and the plane banked toward the south.

After they had been flying awhile, Sam motioned for Nate to take the controls. Sam showed him how to position his feet on the rudder pedals and how to hold the control wheel. Nate had to stretch to get his feet all the way to the pedals, but he made it. Then he put his hands on the wheel. It was amazing. He could feel the throbbing vibration of the engine through the control wheel. He pulled back gently on the wheel, and the nose of the Stinson began to climb. He pushed the wheel forward, and the nose dropped toward the ground below them. It was more thrilling to Nate than riding the roller coaster in the backyard.

A whole new world opened up to Nate that day. From then on, he knew without a doubt that he wanted to be around airplanes for the rest of his life. And everyone around him knew it, too. Airplanes were all he talked about. He drew pictures of airplanes, read about airplanes, and made countless airplane models. And Nate dreamed of the day when he would fly his own plane, just like Sam.

Chapter 2



Nothing Would Stop Him Now

It was springtime 1937, and fourteen-year-old Nate was stuck in bed. His mind was active, but his body wasn't. His right leg ached so badly he couldn't get out of bed, not even to go to the bathroom. Mrs. Saint liked to give her children vitamins and healthy food to make them better, but when she took Nate's temperature, she called the doctor right away. Something was seriously wrong. Dr. Allen examined Nate's leg. He paid special attention to a small cut Nate received when he had fallen off a sled the week before. Nate was puzzled. The cut was nearly healed, so why was the doctor paying so much attention to it?

After a few minutes, Dr. Allen closed his bag and went downstairs to have a serious talk with Mrs. Saint. He explained that Nate had osteomyelitis, a bone infection, in his right leg. Bacteria had traveled from the cut on his leg into his bone. Dr. Allen wished there were drugs he could prescribe to help fight the infection, but there were none. All he could do was give Nate some painkillers. The only thing that would help Nate was complete rest. The doctor hoped that with his body at rest, Nate's immune system would fight off the infection. If the infection spread to his knee or ankle, it would lock up, and Nate would be lame for life. But Dr. Allen told Mrs. Saint that even if everything went well and Nate's body fought off the infection, Nate would probably be in bed for months.

The days dragged on. Dr. Allen made many visits, but it was difficult for him to say whether Nate was improving or not. Nate slept a lot, but when he was

awake, his family spent as much time as they could keeping him company. Their visits kept his mind off the incredible pain that shot up and down his leg. Nate's older sister, Rachel, spent hours sitting with him and reading him stories. His brothers stopped in to tell him about their latest hunting or fishing trip or to complain about all their homework. Mrs. Saint brought Nate history and art books to read, and Nate's father often stopped in to pray with him.

Still, the Saint household had to go on, and there were many times when Nate lay alone in bed. He would think back to the summer before, when he had been at camp in the Poconoes. He especially liked to think about the Saturday night when they were all seated around the campfire. The counselor had asked who wanted to invite Jesus into their life. Nate had raised his hand. All his life he had heard Bible stories and said his prayers, but that night it all became real to him. It was the difference between seeing his father's pencil sketch of a magnificent stained-glass window and seeing the light glow through the real, finished window itself.

As he lay alone in his room, Nate spent a lot of time reading his Bible and praying. He knew his infection was serious and that he could possibly die from it. While that knowledge didn't really frighten him, he realized he was young and had so much life ahead of him. So he prayed and promised God that if he lived, he would turn his whole life over to God.

Finally, after several weeks, Dr. Allen announced that Nate was beginning to heal. Nate's body had fought off the infection, and the pain in his leg began to diminish. Nate started feeling a lot better, and before long he was restless and looking for projects he could do from his bed. He drew plans for a sailboat he wanted to build. He designed the boat with a rounded hull, unlike any other sailboat he'd ever seen. Somehow he knew the design would make the boat sail well. He also made papier-mache models. The hours sped by as he ripped up newspaper, pasted it, and molded it into shape. When the models dried, he painted them. He made a huge mask using this same process and had lots of fun scaring people who came to visit him.

As he got better, Nate wanted to spend more time downstairs in the living room. Since his leg was still too painful to walk on, the family got used to him crawling around the house on his hands and knees.

By the time Nate was finally better, he had a lot of schoolwork to catch up on. But he also didn't forget the promise he'd made to God. He kept up his prayer and Bible study and became president of the Baptist Young People's Union. He also taught junior Sunday school at Bethany Baptist Church, where the family now attended.

Nate also pulled out the plans he'd drawn while he was sick. It was time to

build the sailboat. This time he wasn't building a model, but a full-sized boat. He had designed the boat to be eight feet long and nearly as wide. It looked like half a ball with a mast and sail stuck in the middle. When he showed his brothers the plans, they just laughed and told him a boat that shape might float, but it would never go fast. Nate ignored them, smiled, and began building the boat.

Of course, making a boat from scratch is a difficult job, but Nate enjoyed overcoming each new problem the construction faced him with. He had to figure out how to get the planks on the outside of the hull to bend without breaking. He experimented until he discovered that wet wood can be molded without breaking. He worked out how long he needed to soak the mahogany planks before he could form them into the curved shape of the hull. He spent hours sewing the sails on his mother's treadle sewing machine and made all the metal fittings for the boat, as well. Finally, the boat was finished, and Nate proudly painted the name *Sinbad* on its bow and the home port of *Bagdad* on its stern.

He sailed *Sinbad* on the Delaware River. She skimmed upriver, leaving bigger, more expensive boats in her wake. Nate gripped the tiller and grinned at his brother David, who was manning the mainsail. His design worked even better than he'd thought it would. Somehow as the wind filled the sails, the tiny boat lifted in the water and skimmed effortlessly and speedily across the surface. Nate felt completely satisfied as he guided *Sinbad* up the river. Nothing made him happier than to plan something, make it, and then use it.

Whenever he had to sit for a long time, Nate became restless. He wanted to be out doing something, not sitting around. Because of this, school tested him, and by his senior year in high school, he was ready for something else. He tried working at night and going to school during the day, but that tired him out. So he reversed the order. He dropped out of day school and went to night school in Philadelphia while he worked during the day in a welding and machine shop. That suited Nate much better; he was doing things with his hands and using his brain at the same time.

Nate graduated from high school in 1941. As he graduated, the world was changing. World War II had been going on for nearly two years in Europe and Asia, and there were rumors that the United States was going to get involved in the war. Such rumors made it hard for a young man to concentrate on a career, so Nate drifted from job to job. He started working in a welding and machine shop and then switched to tree trimming. Then he tried pumping gas at a local gas station. All the while, Nate felt restless. He hadn't found his niche, and it was hard for him to focus long on any one thing.

Nate thought he'd like to travel, so he agreed to deliver a truck to a missionary family in the hills of southwest Virginia. However, things didn't

work out as smoothly as he thought they would. Once he'd delivered the truck, he had no way to get home. He decided to hitchhike. There was just one problem: There weren't many vehicles on the back roads of Virginia, so getting a ride wasn't easy. As Nate stood by the side of a road waiting for a car headed north to come by, he noticed a train in the distance. The railroad track ran along close to the road and then took a sharp bend to the north. *Surely the train has to slow down for the bend,* Nate thought to himself. He ran over to the bend in the tracks and waited for the train to get closer. As it approached, it slowed, and Nate began running alongside. When a boxcar came by with its doors open, he effortlessly swung his body through the door and into the empty boxcar.

Nate sat by the door congratulating himself on how easy it had been to hitch a ride on a freight train. As he looked around the dim interior of the empty boxcar, he noticed several dark shapes. As his eyes adjusted to the faint light, the shapes turned into hobos, homeless men who rode the trains from one part of the country to another in search of jobs or food. Nate was surprised by them at first, but he and the men got along fine.

Nate was thoroughly enjoying his free ride until the train stopped in Bluefield, Virginia. The Bluefield police regularly searched for hobos on the trains passing through town. Nate surely didn't look like a hobo, but he was on a train without a ticket, and as he soon found out, that was illegal.

The hobos and Nate were taken before a judge. They all stood in a line in the courtroom. The judge looked at each of them sternly and pronounced his sentence: a ten-dollar fine and ten days in the local jail. When the judge got to Nate, he hesitated and took another look. Anyone could see Nate was not a hobo, so the judge pointed at him and said, "Your sentence, son, is ten dollars *or* ten days in jail. One or the other. Which will it be?"

Nate knew the judge was being kind and trying to spare him from having to go to jail, but Nate had more time than money. "I'll take the jail time, Your Honor," he replied. And with that he went to jail for the one and only time in his life.

Nate sent three postcards from his jail cell back to Huntingdon. On the first he complained the potatoes were so hard he could bounce them off the floor. On the second he drew a sketch of an escape plan, and on the third he wrote in huge letters the word *FREE*. After his release, Nate hitchhiked home from Bluefield, keeping a safe distance from freight trains.

Whatever Nate was doing, his thoughts were never far from airplanes. In mid-1941 he got a job at an airfield on the outskirts of Philadelphia as a general hand for the Flying Dutchman Air Service, where big brother Sam had worked as a flight instructor. He was around airplanes, and he began to feel his life was

on track again. On June 16, 1941, while working at the airfield, Nate took his first official flying lesson. From then on, he saved every penny until he was able to buy himself a small airplane in which he could build up his flying hours, and eventually he got his private pilot's license.

Meanwhile, Sam had become a pilot for American Airlines, and he arranged for Nate to become an apprentice aircraft mechanic for the airline at La Guardia Field in New York City. It was an exciting time for Nate, who moved to New York and stayed with Sam, Sam's wife Jeanne, and their four-year-old daughter.

On December 7,1941, while Nate was working in New York, the biggest news story since the start of the Great Depression broke. Japan had attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. It all seemed so far away as Nate read about the attack in the *New York Times*. When the United States in response declared war on Japan and began drafting men and women into the armed services, it didn't affect Nate. The airline industry was an "essential industry," which meant that people like Nate and Sam who worked for airlines could not be drafted into the military, because their jobs were too important. So, as the United States entered World War II, Nate kept right on working as an apprentice airplane mechanic, knowing he would not be drafted.

But as 1942 rolled on, Nate became restless. All around him married men, many with young children, were being called up to go overseas to fight in very dangerous situations. Yet here he was, a single man with a "safe" job. Something about the situation bothered him. It didn't seem fair. Of course, there was one simple solution, but it was not a solution that would make him popular with his boss.

Finally, just before Thanksgiving, Nate got up the courage to tell his boss he was going to quit his apprenticeship and sign up for the Army Air Corps. His boss was very unhappy. Nate was a good worker, and his boss could not understand why someone would leave a "safe" job that thousands of other men would gladly take. But Nate stood firm. He was ready to go wherever his country sent him.

He made several trips to Washington, D.C., to apply for the Army Air Corps, but in the end he was accepted into the regular army. To get in, he had to take a six-hour physical exam, during which the doctors found the scars from his osteomyelitis. They were concerned that he'd had such a serious illness, but in the end he passed the exam. The doctors wrote a note in his records that read, "Accepted for Limited Service." Nate was so glad to pass the medical examination that he didn't give the note in his record a second thought. He certainly couldn't have imagined the impact it would have on his life in the years

to come.

Nate spent Christmas 1942 at home in Huntingdon Valley with family and friends. Then, on December 30, he took a train back to New York to join the army. From New York he was shipped off to Camp Luna in Las Vegas, New Mexico. Nate thought it would be nice and warm out there, but a surprise awaited him when he arrived. Camp Luna was located in the Sangre Mountains, and any thoughts of balmy nights and a suntan quickly faded as he trudged through three inches of snow to get to his tent.

Nate had joined the army to learn new skills, like flying commercial airplanes, but his first job involved using a skill he'd learned years ago at home in Huntingdon: cleaning toilets! Still, someone had to do it, and Nate did it with the same enthusiasm he showed when fixing an airplane.

Life quickly fell into a routine at Cape Luna. Nate was up at five in the morning for parade and barracks inspection. Then there was breakfast before the troops were marched out to learn all the skills necessary for fighting a war. They did fitness training and learned survival skills. By lights-out, Nate would fall into bed exhausted, but he was always up the next morning ready to go.

Whenever he got the chance, Nate went into town to church. News soon spread that he was a Christian, and other Christians sought him out to pray with them. Nate also arranged Bible studies for other Christians in his unit.

All the while, Nate never gave up on his dream of flying, even though he knew it wasn't easy to get flying jobs in the U.S. Army. Still, his persistence paid off, and he was accepted into a training program in Los Angeles. In the program he would learn to work on the C-47 cargo planes that the military used to transport men and supplies. At the training school, Nate studied in class from two in the afternoon until one o'clock in the morning. He learned all he could, and after graduating from the training program in March 1943, he was sent to an Army base in the Mojave Desert to work on C-47s. From there he was sent to Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis, Missouri.

All this moving around got a little tiresome. Nate had been in the army for only four months, and already he'd been from New York to New Mexico to California and now to Missouri. Sometimes he felt like he barely had time to unpack all his things before he got his orders to move on to his next assignment. He figured that if he kept that pace up, he could well see the entire United States at Uncle Sam's expense. But as much as he liked to see new places and new things, bouncing around from one place to another had its share of problems. Mail, for example, usually took a while to catch up to him. Sometimes letters went to two or three places before he received them.

Jefferson Barracks was a crossroad for many soldiers who were shipped in

to learn important things about fighting in a war and then were shipped out all over the world to fight for the United States.

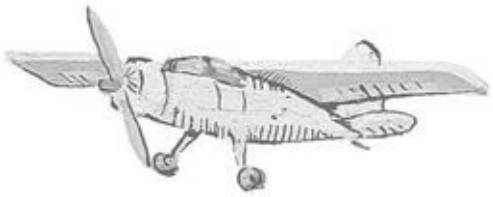
Nate enjoyed learning new things, especially if it was hands-on and not just from a book. In St. Louis, he learned how to survive a gas attack and use a variety of weapons safely. While he didn't like the idea of ever using a gun in a real battle, he enjoyed learning how guns worked. Once the soldiers understood how the various guns and rifles worked, they were expected to be able to take them completely apart and put them back together again without help or instruction manuals. Nate went one step further: He practiced until he could strip the guns down and put them back together in the dark! It wasn't difficult for a kid who'd been pulling his mother's appliances and clocks apart since he was a small boy.

Finally, after several months at Jefferson Barracks, Nate got the letter he'd been waiting for since enlisting in the army. The letter was addressed to "Saint, Nathaniel. 28th Training Group." Nate's hands trembled as he opened it. He took a deep breath before unfolding the letter. To his delight, the letter read, "You have been accepted into the Air Cadet Training Program. Please report to Morningside College, Sioux City, Iowa, at 2100 hours on June 12, 1943."

"Yippee!" Nate let out in a yell of excitement that brought his friends to see what was up. He showed them the letter. Finally, he was going to get to fly for the U.S. Army!

Nate hardly had time to pack his things and write to his parents before he was on his way to Sioux City, Iowa. As the train chugged along, he sat with fifty other cadets, but his thoughts were far away. He thought back to his first flight with Sam. It had been so exciting to feel the wind rustle through his hair and whistle around his ears. And it felt like electricity running through his body when Sam banked the plane and Nate looked down on the Delaware River from three thousand feet up. Now, thirteen years later, he was on his way to become an Army pilot. His dream was about to come true. He felt that same electricity in his body. Nothing would stop him now.

Chapter 3



A Different Kodachrome Slide

Hup two, hup two, hup two." Nate marched along to the rhythmic chant of the drill sergeant. He had been at Morningside College in Sioux City for three months now. The routine was tough but bearable. There were endless lectures and tests, fitness exercises, duties, and drills like the night march he was on. But it was all worth it, and now he was only two days away from beginning the best part of all: flight training.

As he marched in time with the other cadets across the darkened parade ground and around behind the mess hall, Nate thought of all the possibilities that lay ahead of him. The war was going strong; American and English troops had invaded and captured Sicily, and now they were preparing for an invasion of Italy. In the Pacific, American troops were forcing the Japanese back island by island. Many people thought there was a good chance the war would be over before long. Nate wondered if he might not even get to experience active duty. But even if he didn't, he knew his training would land him a good job as a commercial pilot. Perhaps Sam might be able to help him get into American Airlines. How exciting that would be; instead of greasing and fueling the planes, he would be piloting them.

By now, all the cadets were lined up behind the mess hall for a final inspection before being dismissed for supper. As usual, the food was terrible. Nate often joked that if the army served up dirty dishwater, most of the soldiers

would have a hard time recognizing that it wasn't soup. Still, he was hungry, and he ate what he needed before heading for bed and a good night's sleep.

His roommate, Bob Bjorklund, was already in bed when he got to the room. Nate wished him goodnight and sat on the edge of his cot. He pulled off his boots, and then his socks. He didn't know exactly why his right leg felt a little sore. He figured he must have bumped it during the march. Standing up, he pulled off his trousers, and as he did, his heart fell. The impossible had happened. There was a red swelling around the old osteomyelitis scar on his leg. It could mean only one thing: the infection was back.

Without saying a word to Bob, Nate took off the rest of his clothes and got into bed. He pulled the blanket tight around his body, hoping that in some magical way it would keep out not only the cold but also his thoughts. In the dark of the night, though, the thoughts seeped into his head. He didn't need a doctor to tell him that his flying days were over before they had begun. Hot tears welled up in his eyes and slid silently across his cheeks and onto the pillow. Years of anticipation drained out of him with the tears. It was over, all over. The next morning Nate did what he knew he had to do. He reported to the base doctor, who told him what he already knew—the osteomyelitis was back.

The following day was his twentieth birthday, but instead of going to the airport for his first day of flying with the other cadets, he bid them farewell from outside his barracks. He took a snapshot of them all smiling in anticipation of the flying that lay ahead. Then Nate climbed into an Army jeep and was taken to the hospital for x-rays. It was a birthday he did not want to remember, but one he knew he would never forget.

He wrote a letter to his parents and told them the disappointing news. He wrote: "The way the situation has changed during the last couple of days reminds me of that dog in Bryn Athyn that used to chase me when I rode past with my newspapers. I remember how he put it in reverse the day I dropped a firecracker in front of him. He skidded about ten feet forward while running backward before he stopped….I've just stopped—which direction I'll take off, I don't know."

He folded the letter and enclosed the snapshot of the other cadets on their way to the airport. He marked a little "x" where he would have been positioned if he'd been with them. But he wasn't with them, and there was nothing he could do about it. Life would have to go on. Despite his disappointment, somewhere deep inside he knew God had things under control, and in God he would trust.

The x-rays confirmed that Nate's osteomyelitis had indeed flared up again. It quickly settled down again, too, but a man with a medical problem could not be considered for duty overseas. The doctor stamped "Disqualified for Combat

Crew Duty" on his record, and that was the end of the matter. The army would never train him to fly now if he couldn't go into combat in an airplane.

For the next month, Nate was assigned to nonflying duties. Without the pressure of study or preparing to fly, he had a lot of time on his hands. He spent much of it reading and praying. One magazine he liked to read was *Reader's Digest*, and in the August 1943 issue he read about a new "wonder drug" called penicillin, which reportedly was able to stop infections. Nate thought of his osteomyelitis and that it was too bad penicillin hadn't been discovered ten years earlier when he first needed it.

After a month, Nate was transferred yet again, this time to Amarillo, Texas, where he was made the barracks chief in charge of fifty men. It turned out to be a lot harder work than he'd imagined, getting fifty men up and inspected each morning, but he enjoyed the challenge. Nate found a group of Christian men in the barracks and developed friendships with them. He also inspired several other soldiers to renew their commitment to God.

Again, with the pressure of study off, Nate had plenty of spare time, and the Army base at Amarillo seemed to Nate to be the most boring place on earth. Nate needed something to keep him busy and take his mind off not being an army pilot. Thankfully, one of the other soldiers introduced him to the base's photography department, which had a large darkroom and camera equipment available for soldiers to use free of charge. Nate took to photography. He loved both the artistic side of it—getting just the right light and the right camera angle for a shot—and the practical side, mixing chemicals and developing his film and photographs in the darkroom. Nate's favorite subjects to photograph were people going about their daily routines. He made photos of enlisted men polishing their boots, sergeants driving jeeps, cooks mixing biscuits. No one on base escaped the attention of Nate Saint and his camera.

Nate also used his spare time to write long, interesting letters. It was hard for him to believe a year had gone by since he'd signed up in New York. Now he was about to spend his first Christmas away from home. In a letter to his parents written just before Christmas 1943, he said: "Two fellows just closed the barracks door, leaving me alone….They left a radio on and I can hear distantly, 'O Come Let Us Adore Him.' There's snow on the ground and the stars are glittering clearly—like gems on black velvet, illuminated by a great hidden light…." He went on in the letter to tell how he was about to be transferred yet again. "They have made up special orders for me to proceed to Fort Wayne, Indiana. If flying is 'out,' I want to be useful in some way. It will feel good to get greasy, get a few callouses, skin my knuckles on a gadget, hurry to get 'er ready to go on time, and go to bed really tired again."

Once again, Nate settled into a new routine, this time at Baer Field in Fort Wayne. He was a crew chief working on C-47 transport aircraft. It was an interesting job, but just as in Amarillo, he had a lot of spare time.

One of the soldiers he worked with had just qualified for his license as a class E airplane mechanic. Until then, Nate had not been aware that the army would help mechanics become better qualified for other positions. It was an opportunity too good to miss, so Nate, who had left his apprenticeship at American Airlines early, now threw himself into studying for his class E aircraft mechanic's license.

When he needed a break from study, he would drive over to the Winona Lake Bible Conference grounds about forty miles east of Fort Wayne. Nate's older brother Phillip, who had become a well-known artist and evangelist, often spoke there. The two brothers spent many happy evenings talking together around the campfire. It was just like old times on the roof back in Huntingdon.

From time to time, Nate was sent from Baer Field on special assignments. In early November 1944, he was sent for several weeks to the Willow Run plant of the Ford Motor Company near Detroit. The plant was producing a new type of airplane engine, and because of his mechanical ability, Nate was asked to investigate the engine and report to the engineers back at Baer Field. Nate found the assignment interesting, but something else happened on the trip that totally changed his life.

For some time, Nate had been listening to Dr. John Zoller's radio broadcasts. Since he was so close to Detroit, it seemed like a good opportunity to visit Dr. Zoller's church and hear him speak in person. And so on New Year's Eve in 1944, Nate made his way to the Zoller Gospel Tabernacle in Detroit. He went into the church service with an ambition to be a pilot or an aircraft mechanic in the United States, but when he came out of the church in the early hours of New Year's Day, 1945, he had decided to go to Bible school and then become a missionary in some foreign country.

He wrote about this transformation in a letter home: "Now, you've heard people tell about God speaking to them, haven't you? I don't know about the other fellow, but that night I saw things differently…BING…like that. Just as though a different Kodachrome slide had been tossed onto the screen between my ears."

That night Nate realized how much time and effort he'd wasted going after his own dreams and plans, and he understood the deep joy that comes from surrendering every dream and plan and talent back to God. As this understanding grew in his mind during the church service, Nate decided to give up his dreams of flying commercially and enroll in a Bible college once the war was over. He

wrote in his diary soon after the service: “The Lord has given me no desire to preach, but I’d like someday to be able to tell somebody who has never heard….”

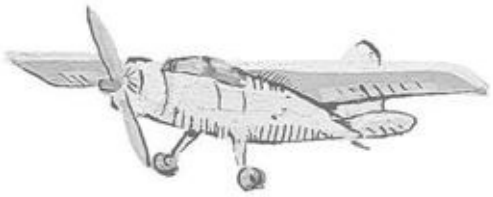
After six weeks at the Ford plant, Nate returned to Baer Field. When he got back, he recognized his father’s handwriting on the envelope of a letter from home. He ripped it open. His father didn’t normally write, so Nate was eager to know what he had to say. Inside the envelope was a brief note from Mr. Saint and an article he’d cut from the *Sunday School Times.* The article, entitled “On Wings of the Wind,” was written by a navy pilot, Jim Truxton. The article described a new organization that Truxton and an ex-Air Force WASP pilot, Betty Greene, had just founded.

Nate read on. The organization was called Christian Airmen’s Missionary Fellowship, or CAMF for short. CAMF had been formed to serve missionaries who were working in remote areas of the world by flying in supplies for them, carrying the supplies to a doctor when the missionaries needed medical help, and ferrying them quickly from place to place. Although the new organization did not yet have an airplane, the article invited airmen who were interested in the new ministry to reply to their Los Angeles office.

Nate sat on his cot and read the article through several times. He didn’t know what to think. He had just given up the idea of flying and had dedicated himself to becoming a missionary. But now, while reading the article, Nate was starting to realize that God might be showing him a way to be a missionary *and* fly. He thought about it. He had both an aircraft mechanic’s license and a private pilot’s license, two qualifications CAMF was looking for. He decided to write a letter to Jim Truxton.

Nate started the letter by saying: “Last New Year’s Eve in a watch-night service I responded to the missionary challenge. [I] have been interested in missionary work for some time but the Lord owned only my finances. He now has my life.” Nate went on to list his educational background and qualifications, and then he folded the letter and slipped it into an envelope. As he dropped the letter into the mailbox at Baer Field, he had no idea it would lead to the greatest adventures of his life.

Chapter 4



An Unacceptable Risk

Nate received a fast reply from Christian Airmen's Missionary Fellowship. Betty Greene wrote about CAMF's plans to begin work in South America. CAMF's first goal was to help Wycliffe Bible Translators set up some jungle stations in southern Mexico and then do the same in Peru. Betty Greene suggested that when the war was over, Nate join her in Peru and become the ministry's mechanic. Nate thought and prayed long and hard about her offer.

Meanwhile, army life continued as usual. There were new challenges and new locations. For a while, Nate briefed crews going into combat overseas. He loved the job; it gave him regular hours and an office of his own. Best of all, though, he got Sundays off. And every Sunday, Nate would be in church, usually with a few fellow soldiers he'd brought along with him.

On June 19, 1945, after eighteen months stationed at Baer Field, Nate was transferred to an air base near Salinas, California. Shortly afterwards, he was transferred yet again, this time to Castle Field in Merced, California. Soon after Nate arrived in Merced, in August, the Japanese surrendered to the United States. World War II was over, the war effort began to wind down, and everyone stationed at the base had more time on their hands. Nate used the extra time to tell others about the gospel message. He invited friends to church with him and began holding a regular Bible study on the base. As a result of the Bible study and the example of his life, many men became committed Christians.

While stationed at Merced, Nate continued to think and pray about the offer from Betty Greene. In the end, though, he felt he should go to Bible college first and get some theological training. Reluctantly, he wrote to Betty Greene and turned down her offer—for now.

About this time, Nate was also thinking about Marjorie Farris, a friend of a friend. Marj, as she liked to be called, was training to be a nurse in Los Angeles. She was about five-foot-two with short, wavy brown hair and sparkling blue eyes. Nate had met her only a few times, but there was something about her faith and the way she cared for those around her that attracted him. Marj lived in a flurry of activity, always visiting friends, volunteering her spare time to sit with ill patients, and leading Sunday school at a local church. Despite all her activity, there was a peace about Marj. She was never in a hurry and somehow always had enough time to make everyone she met feel special. Nate would have liked to spend more time with her, but Merced was three hundred miles from Los Angeles, and he expected to be sent home soon to Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, for good.

Men were being discharged from the army and shipped home every week from Castle Field. Nate waited impatiently for his discharge papers to arrive. After nearly three years in the army, he was tired of the routine of military life and the lack of privacy that came with it. As he waited, he came up with the idea of using his remaining leave time to go camping at Yosemite National Park. There he could get away from everything and be alone with nature. Nate had no idea just how alone he would end up being.

Nate set out for Yosemite with two army buddies. It was mid-December, and when they arrived, the park was nearly empty. The following morning, as the three men looked out the tent door, they knew why the park was deserted. It was not normal camping weather. Thick, damp fog had closed in all around them, blanketing them in gray silence. It was hardly the start to the trip they'd imagined, but Nate was eager to do something. He wanted to hike the trail up to Glacier Point. The trail was several miles long, and neither of his two friends was eager to hike it with him. So Nate, determined to do something different on this vacation, decided he'd hike the trail alone.

An hour later, wearing his army issue coveralls with two sweaters pulled over them and carrying a pocketful of peanuts to snack on, he headed up the mountain trail. He waved a cheerful farewell to his buddies and rounded the bend that officially marked the start of the well-used path. Hundreds of people used the trail in the summer, so he thought it wouldn't be too difficult to climb, even in the damp fog. And it would be good to get away from everyone and be able to make his own decisions for once.

Just beyond the trail head, Nate stopped to talk to a park ranger. He told the ranger where he was headed, and the ranger pointed out that it was not the best weather for climbing the mountain. Nate insisted he would be fine. The ranger told him if he got to the top, he would be welcome at the lodge at the end of the trail. Douglas Whiteside, a photographer, was spending the winter there and would love someone to chat with over hot coffee.

Nate could hardy wait to get moving. There was someone to talk to about photography at the end of the trail. He munched a few peanuts as he started up the mountain. There were no forks in the path, and every turn was well marked, so the trail was easy to follow. He whistled as he walked along, happy that there was probably not another person between him and Douglas Whiteside. He hoped, though, that he'd soon climb above the low clouds and drizzle and feel the warmth of the sun on his face. But instead of getting above the low clouds, he entered more and more fog the higher he went. Still, he didn't think too much about it; he was on a well-defined trail, and he could always turn back if conditions got too bad. Besides, a single telephone wire was strung above the trail, and he felt sure it led right to the lodge where Douglas Whiteside was staying.

It wasn't long before the misty drizzle turned to a steady rain. But Nate still didn't worry. He had on two sweaters and a woolen undershirt that kept out the rain. After he had been walking for a while, his muscles began to ache a little, so he walked backwards for a few minutes at a time to stretch them out. Upward he went, one army boot after the other.

As he got higher up the trail, the rain turned to light snow, and before long the light snow gave way to heavy snow. Now Nate was beginning to worry. He had no idea how far it was to the lodge at the top, but the telephone wire was still running along overhead. As Nate walked on, he began making emergency plans in his mind. If he got too exhausted to go any farther, he could break the wire. When the rangers came up to fix the problem, they would find him. Trouble was, if Nate had been thinking more clearly, he would have realized that the wire often broke in winter under the strain of snow and ice or because of landslides. As a result, the rangers usually waited until spring before they would fix the broken wire.

Nate trudged on. It was too late to go back, and he felt sure the lodge couldn't be far away now. The snow was already six inches deep, and it took all his effort to keep one foot moving in front of the other. After a while he had to use his hands to help lift his legs with each step. He was shivering so hard now it was difficult to reach into his pocket for the peanuts, and after putting the peanuts in his mouth, it took all his effort to chew and swallow them. He had to

stop every few minutes and rest. He would scoop up a handful of snow and stuff it into his mouth. As his body heat melted it, cold water trickled down the back of his throat. He looked around at the swirling whiteness that surrounded him and smiled to himself. *One thing's for sure,* he thought, *I'll never die of thirst up here.*

He continued to walk, keeping his head down, concentrating on the trail. He could still make out the outline of the trail beneath the snow. He also kept a close lookout for signs of life.

His feet were now damp and cold, and he was having a difficult time feeling his toes. It was also becoming difficult to concentrate on the path in front of him. He was just about to flop down onto the snow from exhaustion when he noticed something. He could hardly believe what he was seeing. He rubbed his eyes and looked again. He wasn't seeing things; there really were footprints in the middle of the trail, and fresh footprints at that! They could only be Douglas Whiteside's footprints. The lodge had to be close by. Footprint by footprint, Nate placed his feet where Whiteside's feet must have trod no more than five minutes before. If it had been any longer than that, the snow would have covered the footprints over.

As Nate trudged on, footprint after footprint, his mind began to tell him there was something strange about what he was doing. But what was it? He was so cold he was having trouble thinking straight. And then it dawned on him. It was the shape of the prints. Douglas Whiteside would be wearing boots in weather like this, but the footprints Nate was following were bootless. Not only that, but the feet making the footprints were each about seven inches wide. Nate fell to his knees and looked closer. The footprints he was following had been made by a huge bear. He had been following a bear up the mountain!

There wasn't much he could do about it now. If there was a bear on the trail ahead of him, he'd just have to deal with the situation when he got to it. Right now it was taking all his effort just to keep moving. He struggled on for about another hundred yards before the bear prints finally left the trail and headed toward a rocky ridge.

Totally exhausted, Nate fell into the snow. His legs would no longer do what his brain told them to do. He felt sure he was going to die right there in the middle of the trail. He didn't fear dying. Instead he felt angry, angry at himself for getting into the trouble he was in. How could he have been so stupid, so careless? He thought back to the New Year's Eve service in Detroit where he had dedicated himself to be a missionary. Now, because of his foolishness, he would never realize that dream. Instead, he had thrown his life away in a foolhardy hike up a mountain in bad weather.

Sitting there thinking about the trouble he was in got Nate so angry with himself that somehow he found the energy to get back on his feet and keep trudging. As he walked, he began doing something he should have done a lot earlier: He began to pray. He didn't plead with God or make any bargains like, "If you just get me out of this mess, God, I'll do so and so." No, Nate had already committed his life to serve God as a missionary after he got out of the army. Instead, Nate thanked God for all the wonderful things He had done for him. As he prayed prayers of gratitude, a great feeling of peace came over him. In fact, he felt happy, and a broad smile spread across his face.

After a while though, despite the peace he felt inside, he became so exhausted that his mind went blank. Somehow his body kept moving. He became aware of dark shadows ahead of him. As he stumbled forward, the shadows became trees. He searched the sky above him for the phone wire. Finally, he spotted it running into the trees. With his eyes now fixed on the wire, he kept on going. Finally, the wire disappeared into a cabin. He'd made it! Or had he? There was still another hundred yards to go to reach the cabin, and his body was too exhausted to go on. His legs buckled beneath him, and he slumped face down into the snow. His face was so numb he couldn't even feel the icy cold of the snow pressed against it. *What a shame to walk so far and die within sight of help.* The thought slowly crept across Nate's mind. After several minutes lying in the snow, he again found the energy to will his body to stand up and lurch forward. Stumbling footstep after footstep, he got closer and closer to the lodge. But before he reached the building, he had to stop twice more to gather his energy. At last, he fell against the door of the lodge. He called out. It was a pitiful, breathless call, but somehow it got Douglas Whiteside's attention. As the photographer swung the door open, warm air rushed against Nate's face. Nate pushed past Whiteside and collapsed onto the nearest chair.

Douglas Whiteside was surprised at his unexpected guest, but he quickly sized up the situation. He poured some soup into a pan on the stove and dragged Nate to his bed and took off his wet clothes. Within an hour, Nate was fast asleep with hot soup warming his insides and a well-stoked fire heating his outsides.

The next day Nate told Douglas Whiteside all about his foolish trip. He wanted to head right back down the mountain, but Whiteside suggested he stay put for a while and get his strength back. This time, Nate took the advice.

The following day, Douglas Whiteside walked down the trail with Nate. He made sure they were safely below the snow line before letting Nate walk the last few miles to the start of the trail alone. Nate had left his army buddies two days earlier, excited to be alone for a while. When he got back, he was very glad to see them again. He didn't even think about his lack of privacy as the three of

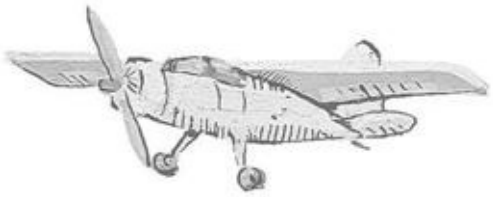
them piled into their tent for the night. In fact, it was quite comforting to hear his buddies snoring away on either side of him.

Nate pulled his sleeping bag around his shoulders and thought about the perilous trip up the mountain. How close he'd come to dying from cold and exposure! And it had happened because he'd been foolhardy. He had taken an unacceptable risk.

He thought about flying. It was risky, too. But it was an acceptable risk, like hiking the trail up to Glacier Point on a warm summer's day would be. In summer, the chances were good that you'd get all the way up there and back safely. If you took some precautions, packed some extra clothes and food, you could minimize the risk even more. Flying was like that. When you took off, there was a good chance you'd land safely. And if you were careful, thoroughly carried out your preflight safety checks, and were sure of where you were headed, you minimized your risk of crashing. But if you were foolhardy and took unacceptable risks, like flying in bad weather or neglecting safety and maintenance checks or making reckless maneuvers, you increased your chances of crashing.

Seeing how close he'd come to throwing his life away because he had taken an unacceptable risk, Nate decided there and then that for the rest of his life he would strive to minimize the risk in the things he did, especially when he was flying. He would never again be foolhardy and ignore the advice of people who clearly knew better than he did about things. With that thought fixed firmly in his mind, Nate fell sound asleep.

Chapter 5



Baskets of Wings

Finally, in February 1946, Nate was formally discharged from the army. It was time for him to head home to Huntingdon. He boarded a long train carrying discharged soldiers back east. At the same time as Nate was winding his way across the country by train, Betty Greene was flying CAMF's first plane to Mexico. It was a four-seater, 220-horsepower, enclosed-cabin Waco biplane.

Once back in Huntingdon, Nate had time on his hands again. He wasn't due to start at Wheaton College until the fall. To fill in the time, he bought himself a secondhand airplane and began using it to build up his flying hours. Before long, he had qualified for his commercial pilot's and instructor's ratings.

Three months after Nate got back home to Huntingdon, an air crash occurred that would change his life, not because he was in it but because he would have to repair the damaged plane. Betty Greene was about to finish her time in Mexico and head for Peru, and George Wiggins, an ex-navy pilot, had come to replace her. They had taken a flight together to familiarize Wiggins with the area and were attempting to land on a tiny airstrip at El Real, about a mile from the Wycliffe Bible Translator's jungle camp in southern Mexico, when their landing went wrong. Fortunately, both pilots had climbed out of the cockpit unhurt, which was more than could be said for the plane, which lay on its side, its two left wings torn off, its propeller bent out of shape, and its landing gear broken.

Betty Greene was aware that the accident could shut down CAMF altogether. Many people were watching the organization to see whether it really was worthwhile and safe to run an airline just for missionaries. As she looked at the wreckage of the Waco biplane, she knew something had to be done fast. She and George Wiggins were both pilots, but neither of them had any idea how to fix a badly damaged airplane in the middle of a tropical jungle. But Betty Greene knew someone who did.

By the time the request for help reached Nate Saint, via Jim Truxton, the details were a little vague. Somewhere in Mexico was a CAMF plane that needed “a bit” of help. After praying about it, Nate decided to put off going to college and give his time to where it was needed most. He called Jim Truxton and told him that, if he was needed, he could be ready to go in as little as two weeks.

Two days later, a letter arrived containing a rail ticket to the Mexican border. The ticket was dated for three days away! Nate raced into action. There was so much to do: photographs to be taken for a passport, visas to be obtained, certified duplicates of his aviation certificates and ratings to be made, his plane to be sold, and a million other little things to be taken care of before he left. Amazingly, on the third day, he was sitting on a train headed south with forty pounds of tools neatly arranged in a toolbox inside his duffel bag. He never let the bag out of his sight. Without his tools, nothing would be getting repaired in Mexico.

The train had crossed the Missouri River into Kansas before it began to dawn on Nate that he’d been too busy getting ready to actually think much about where he was going. He was on a train headed for Laredo on the Texas/Mexico border. But he had not had enough time to study where he should go once he crossed the border. He pulled out the letter Jim Truxton had sent him and read it carefully. The letter contained an apartment address, Apartado 8673, Tuxtla Gtz. Mexico. He had no clue where that was, only that somewhere in Mexico, in an apartment in a place called Gtz., someone was waiting for him!

Then, of course, there was the language barrier. Nate knew that Spanish was spoken in Mexico, but he didn’t speak Spanish. As the golden wheat fields of Kansas flashed past his window, marking the journey south, he began to wonder what he’d actually let himself in for. Perhaps once he found the plane, things would be easier. After all, it couldn’t be too badly damaged, because they’d asked for only one mechanic to come fix it. Perhaps he could have it flying again and be back home in time for the fall semester of college after all.

The train continued south, and Nate was glad when, on the last day of his trip to the border, four young Mexican men climbed into his carriage. He

listened to their Spanish and wondered if he could ever learn to speak the language like they did. In the end, he thought it would take him quite a while to learn to speak it that well, so he had the four young men teach him one phrase in Spanish: “Is there someone here who speaks English?” It seemed the only sensible thing to learn to say. Nate shared with the men the apartment address he was headed for. They looked at it and burst out laughing. It was a long time before they finally settled down enough to tell him that an *apartado* was not an apartment but a post office box. *Great,* thought Nate, *now I’m meeting someone in a post office box in Mexico!*

Together they tackled the job of finding Tuxtla Gtz. on the map Nate had tucked away in his duffel bag. Nate assured the men it must be somewhere between the Texas border and Mexico City, because that was where the map seemed to indicate most people in Mexico lived. But they could find no Gtz. between Texas and Mexico City. Slowly they scanned farther and farther down the map until they were at the bottom of Mexico where it borders Guatemala. There they found the province of Chiapas. And in the middle of Chiapas, they found the town of Tuxtla Gutierrez. On many maps, it turned out, the Gutierrez had been shortened to Gtz. Nate peered at the map, somehow hoping to get a clue as to what Tuxtla Gutierrez would be like. All he could see was a sea of unpronounceable place names, like Pijijiapan, Venustiano, and Huimanguillo.

In Laredo, Nate was going to collect a new propeller for the plane, but he hadn’t thought much about carrying it across the border to Mexico. The propeller was seven feet long, hard to disguise, and not the kind of thing someone entering Mexico on a tourist visa normally carries. The Mexican border guards thought an airplane propeller was a strange tourist item, too, and they would not let him into Mexico with it.

Nate found a phone and called the CAMF headquarters office in Los Angeles to see what he should do about the problem. He was told to ship the propeller to Mexico City and, since time had been lost, catch a plane there himself. Nate was quite glad to be zipping through the air to Mexico City rather than rumbling along overland by train and bus.

In Mexico City, Nate was met by Betty Greene, who had flown up from Peru. She told him about the damage to the plane. Nate was stunned as he listened. What did she mean when she said he would find the two wings and the struts in baskets in the hangar at the Tuxtla airport? Surely they didn’t make baskets big enough for airplane wings to fit in. As Nate was to find out soon enough when he peered into the hangar at Tuxtla, it all depends on how small the pieces of the wings are!

Propped up behind the baskets of wing pieces was what looked like a pile

of junk. As he looked more closely, though, Nate discovered that the pile of junk was actually the wing struts and pieces of the landing gear that had been removed from the plane and brought eighty miles out of the jungle to Tuxtla. Standing in the hangar, surveying all the pieces, Nate knew he was going to be in Tuxtla Gutierrez for a very long time.

Nate walked around and tried to imagine how he would tackle the job. He thought about the model planes he'd made as a boy. Perhaps he could approach the job the same way as building a model. In fact, the Waco biplane wasn't a lot different from the models he had made. It was constructed mostly of wood and fabric; it was just a lot bigger than his model planes, and it had a real engine. He plotted out a plan to rebuild the plane. First he would make new wing parts from wood. Then he would concentrate on the struts and the wing root that held the wings to the fuselage of the airplane. Finally, he would fix the landing gear. By then, the propeller should have arrived, and he would take it and all the other parts to El Real in the jungle and assemble the wings there. The wings would be much too big to carry in one piece if he assembled them in Tuxtla.

The trouble was, Nate was a mechanic, not a woodworker. To get the job done, he would need to find a cabinetmaker who could also build airplane wing parts. But how could he find such a person when he couldn't even speak the language? He had been working hard on learning Spanish and could count to thirteen with confidence, but he was a long way from being able to tell someone what he wanted them to do. While his Spanish had a way to go, he could draw simple pictures, which he figured anyone could understand. So with notebook in hand, he drew pictures of a man who worked with chisels and saws and went off to find such a man who wanted a job making parts for an airplane. It was an overwhelming task, but amazingly, Nate came back to his one-room house with Santiago, who had immediately understood what Nate wanted done. Santiago was also a good cabinetmaker who learned well from pictures, and he didn't mind giving up building cabinets for a while to repair airplane wings.

The slow process of rebuilding the wings began. Nate and Santiago began working in the hangar, but the owner wouldn't let them use their tools inside the hangar. It was too hot and rainy to do the work outside, so there was only one thing to do. The two men moved their wing-building operation to Nate's one-room house. There wasn't much space to spare once the two men and the two wings were inside. The house itself was made of adobe brick with a tile roof. It had a front and a back door, but no windows. The doors themselves were constructed in two halves, much like barn doors. It didn't take Nate long to find out why they were like that. Without the doors open, the room had no sunlight. When the doors were wide open, there was plenty of sunlight, but pigs, chickens,

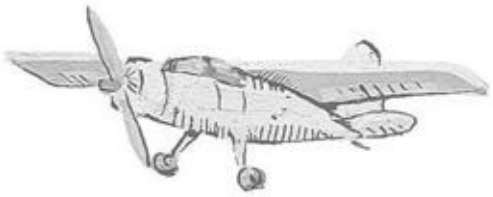
and burros would then wander through the house to see what the two men were up to. An answer to the problem was soon discovered. With the top half of the door open and the bottom half closed, there was still plenty of sunlight to work by, but the visiting animal problem was solved.

There were other animal problems, though. Bats, rats, scorpions, and cockroaches all vied for living space in the rafters of the house. They were impossible to get rid of. At first Nate hunted them down, but as quickly as he did, more came flooding in to fill up the empty accommodation space in the rafters. He learned to be very thankful for his mosquito net, which he tucked tightly around his bed each night. The net formed a kind of boundary between his world and the world of rodents, bats, and bugs that took over the little house each night after dark.

Not only were the insects and animals a trial, but Nate also found the local food very strange. He thought of the many other uses there must be for tortillas, which tasted to him like cardboard. When he ate frijoles and the hot sauce that seemed to smother everything, his stomach revolted. In the end, his stomach would allow him to eat only tomatoes, boiled eggs, and bananas. Despite the food and the creatures in the rafters, Nate kept on working.

Each day, Nate took out the blueprints and worked on the wings, using the wood parts Santiago had crafted. He often worked late into the night. Finally, though, the heat, poor food, lack of sleep, and stress of the whole project combined to keep him in bed. He was very sick, but he didn't know what he was sick with, and there were no doctors around to tell him. His only information came from a basic medical handbook that Betty Greene had given him. Nate lay on his stomach and propped the book on his pillow. Somehow he had to figure out what was wrong with him. He started at 'A' and read all the symptoms for every illness until he got to 'J,' where he found the word *jaundice* and a list of symptoms. Weakness? Yes. He could hardly drag himself from his bed to the cactus bush outside that he used as a bathroom. Yellow coloring of the eyeballs? He reached for the mirror he kept on the shelf above his bed and pulled down his lower left eyelid. There was a definite yellow tinge in his eyes. As he read through the list, he discovered just how sick he was. He needed help, and he needed it fast. He pushed the medical handbook from his pillow, rolled onto his back, and began to pray.

Chapter 6



The Remarkable Repair Job

The answer to Nate's prayer for help came in the form of Phil Baer, a missionary with Wycliffe Bible Translators. Phil was passing through Tuxtla on his way back to his mission station deep in the jungle, far beyond El Real where the Waco biplane had crashed. He was curious when someone in town told him about the American who was building wings in his house for a missionary airplane. Phil had to check it out, so he followed the directions to Nate's tiny adobe house. There he found a skinny man lying half conscious in bed, with airplane wing parts and a variety of tools spread around the room.

Immediately, he could see that Nate was in trouble. He radioed his mission station and told them he would be delayed in Tuxtla for a while. Then he set to work. First, he had to help Nate get well again. He concentrated on finding good food Nate could keep down. He went to the market each morning and bought meat and vegetables to make soup. Then he tackled the huge mound of dirty clothing and bedding that had piled up in Nate's house. There was no washing machine, so Phil had to wash everything by hand. To dry the laundry, he spread it on the cactus plant outside the house.

With good food and care, Nate's health quickly began to improve. Before long, Nate was up and about again. Phil insisted on staying to help Nate until he had finished making the parts for the wings. Phil lived in the jungle and knew how important it was for CAMF to be successful. The plane would save

missionaries hundreds of hours of traveling time and would open up whole new areas to the gospel message.

The days rushed by. Phil took over all the household chores, from washing the laundry by hand to cooking on a camp stove. There wasn't much cleaning to do because the cactus bush outside the house was not only the clothesline but also the bathroom, and the shower consisted of three crates stacked outside the front door with a hose draped over the top of them. The crates were only shoulder high, and when he'd first arrived, Nate had been too embarrassed to shower during the day, waiting instead until nightfall. But as he quickly found out, even in southern Mexico it could get cold at night. After a few weeks of shivering in the shower, he decided to start showering in the middle of the day with the sun beating steadily on his back and the occasional neighbor chatting with him as he soaped up.

Nate was grateful for Phil Baer's help. He realized that Phil had more important things to do than help a mechanic build airplane wing parts. But Phil never complained about the boring jobs or long hours he put in helping Nate, not to mention the time he was spending away from his wife and new baby. It was Nate's first experience with a real missionary in the field, and he was impressed with what he saw.

Time, though, was running out for Nate. He had only a couple of weeks left on his tourist visa and had to get the job finished. He had ordered the central beam that ran the length of the wing—the spar—and the wing root that connected the upper wing to the fuselage of the plane, but so far only the spar had arrived in Tuxtla. While he waited, Nate had a big problem to solve. As he studied the instructions that came with the spar, explaining in diagram form how it attached to the wing root, he noticed that the drawing of the wing root was different from the drawing on his blueprints. One of the drawings had to be wrong, but which one? Nate knew if he got to the jungle with the wrong wing root he would have to come all the way back to Tuxtla to make another one. That would waste days, and he didn't have days to spare.

Nate sat in front of his adobe house in the morning sun and thought about the problem. The only sensible thing to do, he decided, was to reconstruct the old wing root from the basket of pieces from the crash. He would then be able to compare it to the two different drawings to see which one was right. It took more than a day to sort out the splintered pieces that belonged to the upper wing and fit them back together into a spar and a wing root. Nate wondered as he worked which picture of the wing root would be the right one. The answer, he soon discovered, was neither. The reconstructed wing root was unlike either of the drawings; it was a completely different design!

Unfortunately, the broken pieces couldn't be fit back together accurately enough for Nate to use the old wing root as a pattern from which to make a new one. All he could do was take the materials to construct a new wing root into the jungle with him. There he could use the wing root from the right side of the plane as his pattern for the new one.

Finally, Nate had done all he could in Tuxtla. He needed to find the Waco biplane in the jungle and finish the repairs where it had crash-landed. But to get the eighty miles to the airstrip at El Real, he needed a plane that could transport him and all his parts and equipment. Since Phil could speak Spanish, he set off to see what he could find. Some locals told him about a charter plane that flew into town from time to time. Fortunately, the plane had just arrived a few days earlier.

Nate and Phil hunted all over Tuxtla for its owner. They found him in a tavern. He was a six-foot-two-inch, blond Dutchman named Hank. Unfortunately, Hank was too drunk to talk to, so Nate and Phil decided to come back the next day. But when they found Hank the next day, he was in a bad mood from being drunk the night before and didn't want to talk to anyone. It took several days of visiting Hank, and agreeing to pay him far too much money, to get him to fly Nate to El Real.

Dealing with a drunk, grumpy, greedy pilot opened Nate's eyes. *Is this what missionaries have to go through every time they need to get somewhere quickly?* Nate wondered. *How would I feel if it took two days to round up a pilot to fly my sick child to a hospital from some remote jungle location? An airplane could mean the difference between life and death.* Like never before, Nate understood the importance of airplanes in missionary work. He just hoped everything went well at El Real and he could get the Waco biplane flying again soon.

Early the next morning, Nate and Phil arrived at the airport complete with tools, blueprints, spars, the seven-foot propeller, and all the wooden wing parts Nate and Santiago had made. Nate had weighed every piece and had given Hank the weights. Hank didn't seem worried about how much the cargo weighed; he assured them there would be room for everything. Nate and Phil pushed and twisted and adjusted all the pieces until everything was stowed inside the plane. Nate thought it all looked too heavy for the Norseman airplane, but Hank was the pilot, and it was the pilot's job to know what was safe for his plane. *Besides,* Nate reassured himself, *Hank must know what he's doing or he wouldn't have survived as a jungle pilot.*

Nate held onto that thought as he climbed into the Norseman. He waved good-bye to Phil, who had been such a help and friend. By the time the Waco biplane was in the air again, Phil would be back home at his mission station with his family. Hank pushed the starter button, and the Norseman's engine belched

into motion in a cloud of oily smoke. Nate cocked his head to listen. The engine sounded fine to his mechanic's ears.

Hank set the flaps for take-off and revved the engine, and the plane moved forward. He guided the plane to the end of the grass runway, turned it around, checked his instruments one last time, and pushed the throttle all the way forward. They rumbled down the runway. Nate noticed that with the load, the plane took a long time to gather speed. When one of its wheels hit a large mud puddle, the plane slowed. Nate waited for Hank to ease off the throttle and come around for another try at take-off, since there wasn't enough runway left to get airborne. But Hank didn't flinch. He looked straight ahead as the plane ploughed on down the runway, despite the fact it showed no signs of leaving the ground. Eventually, though, the wheels thumped heavily several times and then lifted off the ground. They were airborne, but the trees at the end of the runway were too close to clear. Nate could see Phil running toward the trees, and he wondered why. It wasn't until several years later when he met Phil again that he found out. Phil could see the trouble the Norseman was having getting airborne, and he was running toward the spot where he was sure it would crash. But somehow it didn't crash. An unexpected headwind helped the plane to barely clear the trees and gain altitude.

Nate's heart was pounding. They hadn't hit the trees. They were still airborne and heading east toward El Real. Nate looked across at Hank, who was still looking straight ahead. He began to wonder if he'd been wrong about Hank. Perhaps it wasn't good piloting skills that had kept him alive this long. And they still had to land! Nate began praying hard as lush green tropical vegetation passed beneath them.

The jungle was so thick that Nate didn't notice the El Real airstrip until they were right over it. Hank buzzed the strip with the Norseman as Nate peered down. He could make out the outline of the Waco biplane. Its nose and left side were covered with a blanket. Nate wondered what the damage looked like beneath the blanket.

Hank banked the plane around and came in for a steep landing. When the wheels hit the ground, Nate breathed a prayer of thanks and hoped he never had to be at Hank's mercy again.

Hank was eager to get back to Tuxtla, so he helped Nate unload the plane. As soon as the plane was empty, he was on his way, leaving Nate alone in the jungle. Nate didn't have time to think about the snakes or the jaguars that could be lurking in the trees around him; he had a job to do. He pulled the blanket off the fuselage. His heart sank when he saw the damage. The wing area was more torn up than he'd thought it would be.

Nate wondered if the engine would still run after sitting out for so long. He turned the key, which had been left in the plane, and hit the starter button; the engine sprang to life. That was one less thing Nate had to worry about fixing. That is, until it spluttered and died two minutes later. Nate frowned and wondered why it had stopped. He found the answer soon enough. Mud wasps had built little mud villages in the fuel tank and fuel lines. Nate would have to think of a way to get rid of them and then scrape out their homes. It took him a day to do it and get the engine running again.

More days were spent fitting the wings together and measuring the right wing root as a pattern for the left one, which he made on the spot. The wing pieces fit together as easily as his model airplanes had. Soon Nate was in the final stages of the repair work. He had brought cloth with him to patch the fuselage, but the hole was much bigger than he'd thought, and the cloth wouldn't be enough. So one of the last things he did was to rip up his sheets and use them to patch the last hole in the fuselage.

Nate was putting the finishing touches on the patch when he heard a plane overhead. It was Hank and the Norseman. The plane circled a couple of times before coming in for a landing. It stopped at the end of the airstrip just long enough for a tall, dark-haired man to climb out. As soon as the man was clear of the plane, Hank hit the throttle and was off again. The man strode over to Nate, shook his hand, and introduced himself as George Wiggins, the man who had been copilot of the Waco biplane when it crashed. Wiggins ran his hand over the repaired wing and whistled with admiration at the remarkable repair job Nate had done.

Later that day, George Wiggins and Nate loaded up Nate's tools and belongings, and then the Waco skipped down the runway with Wiggins at the controls. Nate had wanted to take the first flight alone, but the instructions from CAMF headquarters made it clear that George Wiggins was the official CAMF pilot, and he must be in the plane at all times. Nate decided he would have to say something about the situation to Jim Truxton and CAMF when he got back to the United States. It was an unacceptable risk sending up two men on a test flight.

Despite Nate's feelings about the unnecessary risk involved in the flight, the Waco lumbered into the air. The men flew around the tiny airstrip several times, reasoning that if anything went wrong, they had a better chance of landing again than if they were flying over dense jungle. Satisfied that the repairs were safe and the left wing wasn't going to fall off in flight, they pointed the nose of the Waco towards Tuxtla, leaving El Real behind. On the flight back, George Wiggins took his hands from the control wheel. The plane kept flying in a

perfectly straight line, not veering to the right or the left. Nate heaved a sigh of relief; he had done a good job. There was no drag, and everything was in proper alignment.

The next morning, Nate was again relieved when he heard the biplane buzz over his hotel before it headed back to Mexico City and on to missionary service. The job was finished, and it was time for Nate to return to Los Angeles to report to CAMF.

When he got to Los Angeles, Nate found that CAMF had just changed its name to Missionary Aviation Fellowship (MAF). The report Nate gave to Jim Truxton and the MAF board helped fix in place many of the new mission's policies. Because Nate had done such a great repair job under difficult conditions, MAF decided that in the future, it would look for pilots who were also mechanics, or at least had knowledge of how to fix a plane.

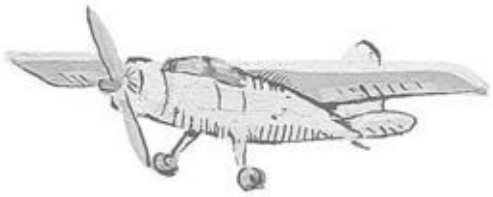
Nate also pointed out MAF's need for lighter airplanes. If a lighter plane than the Waco had flown onto the El Real airstrip, it would have cleared the trees and not crashed. MAF had to stop taking the first or cheapest airplanes it was offered and instead choose planes that were useful and safe to fly in the jungle. Nate also explained that light planes are easier to fix when something goes wrong.

Finally, Nate talked about safety procedures. Everyone knew the risks of traveling by plane in the jungle, but why risk more lives than necessary? Nate described how he and George Wiggins had both flown in the Waco on its test flight. If something had gone wrong with the repairs and the plane had crashed, two lives would have been lost. The leaders of MAF agreed, and new safety rules were drawn up.

When Nate had finished his report, the MAF board asked him what his plans were for the future. He'd had a long time to think about this on the nights when the rats scurrying above his head had kept him awake. He knew what he wanted to do next, and he told the board, "I feel led to get additional schooling—so that I might be first a witness of His saving grace and then an airman." With that remark, it was settled. Nate would go to Wheaton College and then join MAF as a missionary pilot.

When Nate left the MAF office late in the day, there was one other thing he needed to do before leaving California. He needed to visit Marjorie Farris, the nurse he'd met while stationed in Merced. They had been writing to each other, and he had been wondering if a girl like Marj had ever dreamed of a little house in the jungle complete with rats, scorpions, and snakes. It was a long shot, he had to admit, but it couldn't hurt to ask!

Chapter 7



Follow the Oil

Nate laid down his hammer and wiped his sweating brow. He poured himself a cup of water from a bottle perched on a log and looked around him. He never imagined Ecuador would be this beautiful. *No matter how long I live here,* he thought, *I will never get tired of the view.* To the south, about forty miles away, stood the snow-covered peak of Mt. Sangay, an active volcano. Every morning the mountain seemed different. Some mornings its top glowed red with lava, other mornings, smoke and ash billowed from it, blanketing the land below in grayness. To the east was jungle that stretched farther than the eye could see, all the way across the Amazon Basin to the Atlantic Ocean two thousand miles away.

Nate smiled to himself. The house he was building had a living room that faced Mt. Sangay. He could just see Marj and himself enjoying a morning cup of coffee as they admired the mountain's snow-capped peak.

Nate wondered how Marj was doing in Quito, the capital of Ecuador, high in the Andes Mountains more than a hundred miles to the north. He hoped she was getting plenty of rest; she deserved it. Ever since their wedding eight months earlier on Valentine's Day, February 14, 1948, they had been in a whirlwind of activity. First there had been the meetings with Missionary Aviation Fellowship to make sure they felt called by God to go out as MAF missionaries. Then there were all the meetings to raise money and explain the ministry of MAF. The

whole idea of pilots being missionaries was new to many folk in the church. Nate liked to explain that the mission of MAF was not to do what commercial airlines could do more cheaply but to go where there were no other airlines and where missionaries needed them most. He would say, “Our responsibility is to harness aviation to the needs of the mission field.”

Many churches and individuals had understood how useful an air service would be to missionaries and agreed to support Nate and Marj as they established MAF in Ecuador.

As soon as Nate had agreed to join MAF, Jim Truxton had set about finding the right location to base the new ministry. He had studied a map of Ecuador. The whole country is about the same size as the state of Nevada. To the west, the country borders the Pacific Ocean. On the coastal lowlands between the ocean and the Andes, bananas were grown for export. Also on the lowlands and all the way up to Quito, located high in the Andes Mountains in the northcentral part of the country, the roads were numerous and in fairly good condition. It was obvious there wasn’t a particular need for MAF there. But across the Andes in the eastern part of the country, the roads were scarce and in terrible condition. This part of the country, called the Oriente, forms the western edge of the Amazon rain forest. Across the region, missionaries seeking to share the gospel message with the many Indian tribes that inhabited the area lived in stations dotted throughout the jungle. There was a great need for more missionaries in the Oriente. The trouble was, it was difficult traveling through the swampy jungles to set up more mission stations. As Jim Truxton looked at his map, he decided this was the area where MAF needed to be working. The ministry would establish a base of operations in the Ecuadorian Oriente.

Missionaries, however, were not the only Westerners in the Oriente. There was another group of people busy making roads and airstrips to support their exploration of the area. This group of people worked for Shell Oil Company and since 1938 had been exploring the jungle looking for oil. Shell Oil had spent about forty million dollars developing the roads and airstrips necessary to carry men and supplies in and out of the Oriente. It had cost this much because the ground was covered with enormous trees such as balsa, ironwood, and mahogany. Once bulldozers cleared away the trees for a road or airstrip, the problem of the wet soil had to be overcome. Because the Oriente received more than three hundred inches of rain a year, the ground hardly ever dried out. And because it was so wet, the soil was unable to support the weight of a truck or a large aircraft landing. Tons of rock were blasted from the sides of nearby mountains and used to make foundations on the wet soil. On top of these foundations, the road or airstrip could be safely built. It was a long, expensive

process, but Shell Oil was certain there were billions of gallons of oil beneath the jungle. All the work would be worth it if they could be the ones to pump the oil out of the ground.

Jim Truxton visited Shell Oil's largest airfield and the company's Ecuador headquarters. It was located several miles from the old village of Mera, and so was called Shell Mera. There Jim talked to the chief of operations and explained MAF's goals. He asked if Shell Oil would let a MAF plane use the airstrip. The chief of operations listened carefully and then explained that another plane to help out in an emergency would always be welcome at Shell Mera, but he was worried about safety. If a MAF pilot crashed in the jungle, they would all have to take time out to look for him, and in many cases, planes that crashed in the jungle were never found.

Jim Truxton thought for a few moments, and then he made a deal with the chief of operations. MAF would rent an acre of land at the east end of the airfield for one dollar a year on the condition that the plane would have a radio on board and the pilot would stay in constant contact with an operator on the ground. That way, if the plane crashed, they would know where to look.

So the Missionary Aviation Fellowship followed Shell Oil Company into the Oriente, grateful for the hard work and money already spent to prepare the land for oil exploration that would now also be used to bring the gospel message to people who had never heard it.

Nate stripped off his shirt and went back to work, thankful that he was not building the new MAF house at Shell Mera alone. Charles Mellis Sr., a seventy-year-old builder from St. Louis, had come down to Ecuador to head up the building project. Jim Truxton was also there, as well as several missionaries whom Nate was going to be serving with his plane. Among them was Frank Drown, who would become one of Nate's lifelong friends.

Nate glanced across at the Stinson aircraft sitting just off the end of the runway. He may not have a house yet, but he did have an airplane. It had been the private plane of the owner of the Weyerhaeuser Company. When the owner heard about the work of Missionary Aviation Fellowship, he donated the plane for use in South America. Jim Truxton and Nate had flown it down from the United States. Now it sat on a runway in the jungle of South America, painted yellow, the color of MAF aircraft, and ready for whatever need came along.

In fact, Nate had already used the plane for the purpose it had been donated. Frank Drown, who had walked for seven days across jungle trails to help Nate build the house, mentioned that his family hadn't had any fresh food or medicine for five months. When he heard this, Nate took immediate action. As Frank dug foundation holes for the house, Nate flew out to Macuma Base, where Frank and

his family were stationed, and dropped a supply of fresh food and a letter from Frank. As he banked around, Nate saw Frank's wife, Marie, waving her thanks for the food. He wished there was some way to ask her if everything was all right and to take a message back to Frank, but there wasn't. There was no radio at Macuma Base and no place nearby to land. As he flew back to Shell Mera, Nate marveled how in just thirty-seven minutes he had covered the same distance that had taken Frank seven days to walk.

The day after the flight to Macuma Station, another family needed Nate's help. The Coopers were missionaries with the Christian and Missionary Alliance and needed transportation back to their jungle home at Dos Rios. Mrs. Cooper much preferred the idea of riding home in an airplane to the way she had ridden out of the jungle. She had come down with a bad case of malaria and needed hospital treatment. The nearest hospital was at Shell Mera, and having no other way to get there, she had been carried all the way by a faithful Indian guide! Now, three weeks later, she had recovered enough to be out of the hospital, but it would be months before she could face the walk back to Dos Rios. Nate offered to fly her and her family home, and in just over half an hour, they were back among the Jivaro Indians. News spread quickly among the missionaries of the Oriente that Nate Saint and his yellow Stinson airplane were an answer to prayer.

After Nate had been building the house at Shell Mera for three weeks, he received some wonderful news. Marj was coming to visit! She was six months pregnant, and because things had not gone well so far with the pregnancy, she had stayed behind in Quito. She was staying at a guest house run by HCJB, a radio ministry that broadcasted Christian programs around the world. The guest house was minutes away from the most modern hospital in Ecuador. Despite the trouble Marj was having with the pregnancy, her doctor had given her permission to make the bumpy thirteen-hour journey to visit Nate, as long as she lay down while she traveled.

Marj made the trip lying on a canvas cot in the back of a pickup truck. As she jostled along the winding road from Quito to Shell Mera, Nate prayed that she and the baby would be okay. They were. Marj climbed down from the truck a little wobbly on her legs but very grateful to have made it in one piece. Finally, she got to be with Nate in Ecuador. They had so much to talk about. During the evenings, they sat around the open fire, their backs to the army tents they slept in, and talked about their future. It was so exciting to be on the mission field, and Marj couldn't wait for the day when their baby would be born and she could move down to Shell Mera for good. But for now, they had to make the most of their week together.

Marj told Nate everything the doctor had said about how the pregnancy was

progressing and all about her Spanish language lessons. Nate eagerly told her about his first local “ministry” opportunity. He had started a Sunday school for the children of Shell Mera. He told Marj how a week after they had begun building the house, two little girls from the Shell Oil base came and asked when Sunday school would be starting. It was too good an opportunity to miss, so Nate had immediately said to the girls, “It will be right here in this tent on Sunday morning.” When Marj moved to Shell Mera for good after the baby was born, she and Nate would have an English-speaking Sunday school to run.

Nate also told Marj about the two flights he’d already made, and how he wished he could communicate with the missionaries on the ground. He then went on to tell her about their new “neighbors” in the jungle. Nate had first heard about them from David Cooper when he’d flown him and his wife and family back to Dos Rios. David had told Nate they were a tribe the local Quichua Indians called the “Aucas.” In the Quichua language, Auca meant “savage,” and the way David Cooper described them, the Aucas fit their name well.

White people had been in the jungles of Ecuador for three centuries, and in that time quite a few had met their death at the end of Auca spears. The first group into the jungle of the Oriente were Spanish explorers, then Catholic priests, and later on rubber hunters and gold prospectors. Finally had come oil companies searching for underground deposits of oil. Each group had stories to tell of ambush and terror that made the name Auca the most feared in all the Oriente. Members of other Indian tribes in the area knew the boundaries of Auca territory well: the Napo River to the north, the Villano River to the south, the Arajuno River to the west, and the Peruvian border to the east. It was nearly impossible to tempt anyone to cross over into Auca territory.

Nate told Marj all he’d heard from other missionaries about how the Aucas lived. They never wore clothes except for a woven string around their waist like a necklace. No one could be sure where they were at any time because they moved around a lot. They did not seem to have permanent houses or cultivate their land.

On the long evenings during Marj’s stay at Shell Mera, Marj and Nate often prayed for the Aucas, who had never heard the gospel message and wouldn’t unless something happened to change the way they “welcomed” outsiders. Somehow, Nate had a feeling his airplane would play a part in reaching them with the gospel; he just didn’t yet know how it would all fit together.

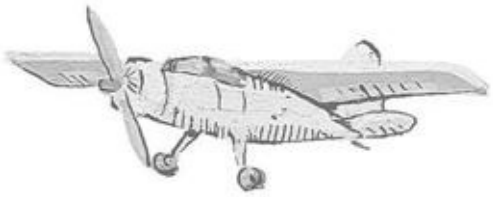
The day before Marj was due to make the grueling trip back to Quito, she got to see firsthand the value of a pilot and airplane in the jungle. She was hoisting up a GI sheet to Nate, who was standing on the roof joists, when an Indian man came running out of the jungle. Out of breath, he handed a note to

Marj. A little surprised, she opened it and read the scrawled writing: “Nancy Cooper sustained a bad gash.”

Nate and Marj immediately went to work. Marj headed for the Shell clinic, while Nate climbed down from the roof and set about preparing the plane for flight. Half an hour later, he was in the air headed for the Dos Rios mission station with anti-tetanus serum and bandages aboard the plane.

Nate and the yellow MAF Stinson airplane were a blessing to so many people. But as Nate was about to find out, being a blessing could also be very dangerous. A pilot flying a plane over the jungle is never more than a minute away from disaster and death.

Chapter 8



A Perfect Take-Off…

The air was crisp and clear. It was the day before New Year's Eve, 1948, and Nate was whistling to himself as he loaded up the Stinson aircraft. As he positioned suitcases and boxes, he couldn't help thinking about Marj. He had just come from the guest house where she was staying in Quito, and the good news was that everything with the pregnancy was fine and the baby was due any day now, maybe even on New Year's Day. *That would be an easy birthday to remember,* Nate thought. Once the Stinson was loaded, Mrs. Tidmarsh and her twelve-year-old son, Bob, were ready to board the plane. Nate helped Mrs. Tidmarsh into the backseat of the plane. Bob, holding a bag of candies, climbed into the front seat. Nate smiled to himself as he saw the look of excitement in Bob's eyes. It reminded him of how he'd been when he took his first flight with Sam.

Nate buckled his seat belt across his lap and made sure his two passengers did the same. He cranked the Stinson's engine to life, looked over his gauges, and then checked to make sure his flaps and ailerons were working properly. He set the flaps for take-off. There was no one at the airfield to wave good-bye to them, so Nate revved the engine and taxied to the end of the runway. As he positioned the plane for take-off, he checked the wind sock. It was almost still except for a slight crosswind from the east. Nate gunned the engine, and the Stinson headed down the runway for a perfect take-off.

Although located 9,300 feet above sea level, Quito is in a big valley surrounded by high snow-covered peaks. Nate looked at the mountains he would have to gain altitude to cross. As the Stinson vibrated with the engine at full throttle, he looked at the altimeter to check his rate of ascent out of Quito. He was two hundred feet off the ground and beyond the boundary of the Quito airfield. Below were cultivated fields. Nate glanced across at Bob, whose eyes were as big as saucers as he took everything in.

Suddenly, from nowhere, a violent downdraft slammed into the Stinson. The bag of candies Bob was holding flew out of his hand, and the suitcases in the luggage compartment at the back were hurled against the roof of the plane. Nate knew they were in trouble. He didn't have enough altitude to contend with a downdraft this strong. He jerked the control wheel to keep the wings level as he tried to maneuver out of the unusually strong air current. But the airplane was dropping too fast. It was plummeting, and there was nothing he could do to stop it. The last thing Nate remembered was a plowed field rushing up to meet the Stinson.

Nate opened his eyes and squinted at the bright light. He was in a large room with tiled walls, and people were moving around him. He heard voices. "Give him ten more milligrams of morphine," someone said. The words seemed to float by him. He felt a prick in his arm, and then everything went blank.

Later—Nate had no idea how much later—he opened his eyes again. This time he was in a smaller room, and Marj was standing over him. As he moved, she patted him on the hand. "Try not to move," she said. But he couldn't have moved even if he had wanted to. His body, from neck to hips, was encased in a giant plaster cast. His left foot was also in a cast. Marj told him he had a compression fracture of his fourth lumbar vertebra and a severely pulled ligament in his left ankle. His back was going to take a long time to heal. Nate asked about his passengers, and Marj told him Mrs. Tidmarsh had broken the small bones in both lower legs, and Bob had escaped with only bumps and bruises. Both of them would make a full recovery.

Marj, who had thought Nate would be visiting *her* in the hospital any day soon, was now in charge of a badly injured husband. At that moment, Nate was glad she'd become a nurse instead of the mathematics teacher she'd set out to be. After talking at length with the doctors in Quito, Marj told Nate that they weren't sure how best to treat his injuries and that he ought to go back to the United States to be treated by a North American doctor with more experience in this type of injury.

Nate's heart sank; they didn't have the money for him to fly home. But Marj was one step ahead of him. Before he sank into depression over the

situation, she reminded him he was an army veteran and, as such, he could get treatment at any army hospital free of charge. There was a large military hospital at the United States base in Panama, and Marj had already made arrangements for Nate to be flown there. The U.S. military had a cargo plane stationed in Quito that would ferry Nate to the hospital in Panama for treatment. Because Marj's pregnancy was too far advanced for her to travel, she would stay in Quito and have the baby.

With a cast covering half his body, Nate looked like a mummy as he was carried on a stretcher to the military transport plane. As he crossed the tarmac to the plane, he caught a glimpse of the yellow Stinson, which lay in a crumpled heap in front of a hangar where it had been dragged. The fuselage was broken in half, and the engine and landing gear had been ripped right off the plane. As he looked at the wreckage, Nate knew it was a blessing that he was alive.

On the flight to Panama, Nate had to stay lying on his back on the stretcher, since his cast didn't bend at the waist. He passed the time counting the number of rivets in the bulkhead. It was frustrating for him to be only a few feet from the cockpit and not be able to go up front and visit with the flight crew.

At the hospital in Panama, a battery of tests were run on Nate. After reviewing the results, the doctors decided his cast was immobilizing the wrong part of his back. The old cast would need to be cut off and a new one put on. That was the bad news. The good news arrived on January 10, 1949, the day after he arrived in Panama. It came in the form of a telegram from Quito, and it read, "Kathy Joan Saint born January 9th. All is well. Love Marj." Nate let out a whoop of joy. Everything was fine; he was now a dad! He wrote straight back to Marj and said, "Honey, don't be afraid to give that little gal lots of loving. She'll need the practice for when her daddy gets home….May the Lord guide our steps until we are making footprints side by side again."

As he lay in his hospital bed, Nate played the accident over and over again in his mind. There were so many questions that needed answers: How had it happened? What could be done to stop it happening again? How had the 9,300-foot elevation affected things? Obviously, the mountains around the airfield caused the wind to move in unusual patterns, and that was almost certainly the cause of the sudden downdraft. Still, if he'd had a bit more airspeed, the whole accident might never have happened. Letters between Nate and MAF headquarters in Los Angeles hashed over every detail of the short flight. Finally, everyone concluded that the sudden downdraft had caused the accident. But they also noted that in mountains at that elevation, downdrafts should be anticipated.

Nate also wondered whether there could have been some way to prevent his back from being broken. The lap belt had kept his hips in place, but the impact

had flung the top half of his body forward, fracturing his back. What was needed were shoulder harnesses as well as lap belts. A shoulder harness would have held him in his seat and stopped him from being jerked around and injured more. Nate wrote to Jim Truxton and told him his thoughts on fitting shoulder harnesses to MAF planes. Jim thought it was a good idea and ordered all MAF aircraft to be fitted with them immediately.

Nate spent a month at the hospital in Panama before doctors decided he was well enough to return to Ecuador. His back was healing nicely, but he had strict instructions from his doctors. He was to wear his cast for another five months and then have it cut off. After that time, he would have to wear a back brace, which the doctors made especially for him, until his back muscles were strong again. That would probably take another five months.

The military transport plane flew Nate back to Quito. This time, though, Nate got to stand up for the whole trip because of his new cast. It was tiresome standing for the whole flight. But despite his weary legs by the end of the journey, he couldn't wait to see Marj and new baby Kathy, who were waiting at the airport to meet him. His face beamed as he took his first look at the little blonde bundle Marj was carrying.

The newly enlarged Saint family spent several days in Quito. While there, HCJB, the ministry whose guest house Marj had been staying in, asked Nate to talk on the radio. The name HCJB was short for "Heralding Christ Jesus' Blessings," and the ministry's goal was to send Christian programming around the world by radio. Quito's high elevation and proximity to the equator meant there was little atmospheric interference of radio signals from the earth's magnetic field. Strange as it seemed, Quito, high in the Andes Mountains, was a perfect place from which to share the gospel message with the world.

During his many days in the hospital, Nate had been thinking about the idea of "expendability," and that was the subject of his radio talk. Expendability comes from the word *expend*, which means to use up. Nate used the term to mean that Christians need to offer themselves to be used up by God however He wishes to use them. During his talk, Nate said that "missionaries constantly face expendability. And people who do not know the Lord ask why in the world we waste our lives as missionaries. They forget that they too are expending their lives. They forget that when their lives are spent and the bubble has burst they will have nothing of eternal significance to show for the years they have wasted.

"Some might say, 'Isn't it too great a price to pay?' When missionaries consider themselves—their lives before God—they consider themselves expendable. And in our personal lives as Christians isn't the same thing true? Isn't the price small in the light of God's infinite love? Those who know the joy

of leading a stranger to Christ and those who have gone to tribes who have never heard the gospel gladly count themselves expendable…."

Nate knew what he was talking about when he talked of expendability. He had nearly been killed in a plane crash. Yet it didn't deter him. He was ready to get back in an airplane and serve other missionaries.

Nate, Marj, and Kathy took the bus back to Shell Mera. Once again, Nate couldn't sit down for the trip. He spent the entire thirteen hours standing on the back bumper of the bus, clinging to a handrail! *If the doctors could see me now,* he thought, *they would never have released me.* Still, Nate quickly forgot about the discomfort of the journey as the bus rolled down the dusty road and the new house at Shell Mera came into view.

After thirteen hours on the bus, Nate and Marj were both a little wobbly. They staggered into the yard of their brown stained house, whose timber had been cut from trees that once grew where the house now stood. The aluminum roof glistened in the sun.

As they settled into their new home, Nate and Marj grew to love it. Marj enjoyed the sense of being almost outdoors, because the house had large open windows in every room covered only with screens. The house was also almost bug-free, because the foundations were concrete pillars, each with a moat around it filled with oil, barring entrance by termites and other insects. Of course, there were a few things the house didn't have, like electricity and running water. To take a bath, the Saints had to wait for rain. They never had to wait for long, though, because Shell Mera had more than thirty-two feet of rain a year. When it rained, they would gather up soap and a towel and head over to where the rainwater flowed off the edge of the runway. The water flowing into a ditch there made a good shower.

Nate was not the type to sit around, or stand around, as his cast forced him to do. With his cast still on, he managed to find plenty of jobs to keep himself busy. He dug post holes for a fence around the yard and laid gravel to make a taxiway from the airstrip to the hangar that had been built next to the house. Unfortunately, the hangar was empty, because there was still no replacement plane stationed at Shell Mera. Missionaries had to revert to hiking through the jungle for days to get where they wanted to go. When Nate heard about one such trip that nearly claimed the life of a missionary, he became concerned. Three missionaries had been trekking out from the isolated Macuma station. While crossing a turbulent river on a raft, they lost some of their equipment. Then one of the missionaries became violently ill from fatigue. Because their food rations were dwindling, he struggled on with the others. Their ordeal had lasted for six days. And when they finally reached Shell Mera, the one missionary's feet and

legs were so swollen he could barely walk.

A replacement airplane was needed at Shell Mera, and it was needed fast. But before Nate could write to MAF to stress the urgency of the need, he received word from Jim Truxton in Los Angeles that a replacement plane was on its way to Shell Mera. Several days later, Hobey Lowrance, a MAF pilot sent to replace Nate until he was able to fly again, piloted the yellow, four-seater Piper Pacer across the Andes to Shell Mera, where he pulled it to a halt in front of the new hangar. Nate was waiting outside.

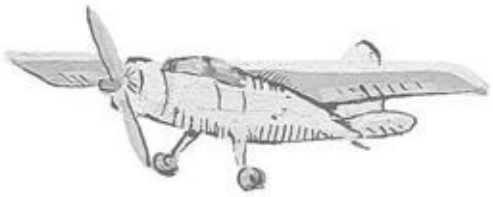
Hobey settled into the house with Nate and Marj. Soon he was busy servicing the missionary bases across the Oriente with the new plane. The missionaries were deeply grateful to again have air service to assist their work in the jungle.

Finally, five months passed, and it was time for Nate to take off the uncomfortable and, by now, very dirty cast. Marj walked with him to the Shell medical clinic. She carried with her the back brace that had been specially made for Nate in Panama. Nate would have to wear the brace right away because his back would be too weak and floppy for him to stand up without it. At least that's what the doctors thought.

After the cast was taken off, Nate walked home with his brace on. It felt just as uncomfortable as the cast had, but with one big difference: Nate could take the brace off if he wanted to. And that's exactly what he did. When he got home, he hung it up in the corner of his closet and never wore it again. His back wasn't weak and floppy at all. The digging and gravel laying he'd been doing had made it as good as new.

Now, with the accident finally behind him, Nate was eager to get back to flying. He had some new ideas he wanted to try out.

Chapter 9



Tin Can Lifesaver

Hobey Lowrance took Nate up for a checkout flight to certify that he was fit and ready to resume his flying duties. After he'd certified Nate to fly again, Hobey returned to the United States.

Finally, after surviving a difficult pregnancy and a broken back, Marj and Nate were on their own, and it felt good. One evening, not long after Hobey Lowrance had left, Marj fixed some lemonade and grabbed a handful of the peanut butter cookies she'd baked the night before, and she and Nate sat in the living room on the orange crates they used as chairs. Together they drank and talked and munched away. They chatted about the future and their life together at Shell Merita, the name they had given to the new house. Nate talked about how excited he was to be back flying. As he talked, the conversation slowly turned toward one of the problems that had bothered him before the crash in Quito.

"I've been thinking about the problem of communicating with missionaries on the ground," he began. "Those times when a missionary needs help and there is no airstrip for me to land or I'm running out of daylight and don't have the time to land and take off."

"What about your 'bombing' system?" Marj asked. She was referring to the device Nate had developed where items could be put into small cylinders on the wings of the plane, and when he pulled a rope in the cockpit, a hatch would open and the items would parachute to the ground.

“That’s great for making medicine and mail drops, but what if the person on the ground needs to talk to me? I had a long time to think about this in the hospital, and I’ve got an answer. Get your sewing box and I’ll show you.”

Marj was used to Nate asking for strange things, so she brought him the sewing box. He placed it on the chest that served as a coffee table and opened it. He pulled out a reel of red thread and unwound about four feet of it. He tied the end of the thread to a pencil.

“Actually, I first thought about this during a church history class back at Wheaton College,” he said with a grin. “Watch this.” Nate stood up holding on to the reel, with the pencil swinging freely at the end of the thread. “What do you see?” he asked.

Marj looked puzzled. “A pencil swinging in a big circle,” she replied.

Nate nodded. “And what about the reel of thread, what’s it doing?”

Marj stared at the reel. “It’s doing nothing,” she said. “You’re just holding it still in the middle, and the pencil is swinging around it in circles at the end of the thread.”

“Exactly,” said Nate with a smile. “Now think of it backwards.”

Suddenly Marj could see what he was driving at. If it was turned upside down and the pencil was rotated in a circle around the outside of the reel, the reel would stand still in the center.

“Now imagine the reel is a supply bucket with a telephone in it, and the thread is a telephone wire.”

“And if you fly in circles and drop the bucket down on the wire, then you think the bucket will eventually stay still in the middle of the circle?” Marj questioned.

“You got it,” replied Nate, as he pulled a notebook from his pocket. “Now look at this.”

Marj leaned over as Nate opened the notebook. Inside were a series of diagrams showing different weights, lengths of rope, and radiuses of circles.

“This will take a little working out, but I think I can design a system for dropping a telephone into the middle of the circle so I can use it to talk to missionaries on the ground,” Nate said confidently.

The concept was so simple—it was just like the calm in the eye of a hurricane. Nate was amazed no one had thought of it before. He and Marj discussed how to test the idea. He would have to be sure the procedure was safe for both him and the person on the ground. After some practice to perfect the technique, Nate’s “bucket drop” system proved to be a great success, and it wasn’t long before it was used to save lives.

Frank Mathis, a missionary doing some Bible translation work in the area,

received an urgent message from the Indians at nearby Arapicos. The whole village had been infected with a disease by some soldiers traveling through the area. One young warrior had already died, and unless Frank could help them, many others seemed doomed to die also. Frank Mathis immediately set off down the jungle trail to Arapicos while a fellow missionary with the Gospel Missionary Union, Bob Hart, contacted Nate to see if he had any ideas on how to help the situation.

It wasn't long before Nate and Bob Hart were winging their way over the jungle toward Arapicos. As they flew, Nate pointed out the canvas bucket and the fifteen hundred feet of telephone wire that lay on the back seat of the plane. He told Bob about his bucket system. A telephone was wrapped in a blanket in the canvas bucket. Nate explained that Bob would have to drop the bucket from the side of the plane and slowly let the wire out while Nate flew in circles. Bob wasn't sure he knew exactly what Nate meant, but there was no time for questions, because within a couple of minutes they were circling Arapicos.

At the sound of the plane, Frank Mathis came running out of one of the huts in the village. He stood in a clearing and waved frantically at the plane. Nate smiled; he knew what Frank was thinking. There was no airstrip and therefore no way for Frank to communicate with the plane.

Nate circled the Pacer over the clearing. He could almost see the puzzled look on Frank's face. Then he gave the signal to Bob to drop the bucket with the telephone in it from the side of the plane. The bucket trailed behind the plane, arcing down on the long telephone wire. When all the wire had been let out, Nate banked the Pacer more steeply and reduced the size of the circle he was flying in. As he did so, the bucket began to arc inwards until it hovered a few feet away from Frank.

Frank ran over to the bucket and grabbed it. He pulled the blanket out and found the telephone. He let out a yell in amazement. He lifted the phone to his ear and heard a crackling noise. Then loud and clear through the crackle he heard the words, "Hello, Frank, this is Bob Hart. What's the situation down there?"

"Pretty bad," announced Frank, the amazement of talking to the plane above him by phone sounding in his voice. "Most of the village is sick."

Nate had Bob find out from Frank what the symptoms of the sickness were. As Frank told him the symptoms, Bob hurriedly wrote them down. Then he handed the list to Nate, who tuned the plane's shortwave radio in to the hospital at Shell Mera, where a doctor was standing by, and relayed the list of symptoms over the radio. The doctor asked a few more questions, which were relayed by Bob down to Frank Mathis, and soon the doctor had all the information he

needed to make a diagnosis. Bob pulled the bucket and telephone back onboard the Pacer, and the plane headed back for Shell Mera. By the time they landed, Marj was waiting with medicine to treat the illness. Nate refueled the airplane and flew back to deliver the lifesaving medicine.

That night as he drank his coffee with Marj, Nate explained the wonderful feeling of having saved lives without ever landing his plane. The bucket drop system had proved its usefulness.

News of Nate's ingenious maneuver with the bucket and wire spread around the world. He even received a surprise in the mail, a letter of commendation and 250 dollars from John Gaty, the general manager of the Beech Aircraft Company. Gaty was impressed with Nate's spiral-line technique, as it came to be known.

After the success of the bucket drop idea, Nate turned his attention to another problem. This time it was a safety issue. Flying over dense jungle, like that of the Oriente, was very dangerous, especially if something went wrong with the plane. On May 9, five months after the accident that nearly took his own life, Nate heard about a pilot and copilot from the Shell Oil Company who were killed while test-piloting a new Grumman airplane. Soon after that, an Ecuadoran transport plane crashed in the dense jungle. The crash site was only thirty-five miles from Shell Mera. All eleven passengers and crew were killed in the crash. Then in July, another Shell Oil Company plane flying passengers to the nearby town of Ambato crashed. Again, everyone on board was killed, thirty-eight passengers and crew in all.

Within six months of Nate's accident at Quito, fifty-one people lost their lives in airplane crashes within a hundred miles of Shell Mera. Each of the pilots in those planes had been more experienced than Nate. The crashes had given Nate a lot of reasons to think about safety when flying over the jungle.

Bob Hart, from the Gospel Missionary Union, was also a pilot, and he told Nate the story of what had happened to him about six months before Nate arrived at Shell Mera. Bob and George Poole, another missionary, had been flying over the jungle near Arajuno. They were cruising along about fifteen hundred feet above the jungle when the engine failed. They began to lose altitude, but there was nowhere to land. As far as the eye could see there was nothing except thick, green vegetation. Bob brought the plane down as best he could. While trying to avoid a huge balsa tree, the right wing clipped a palm tree, flipping the plane over as it crashed to the darkness of the jungle floor. The canopy of trees above them closed over the wreckage so that searchers couldn't see it from the air.

Bob had broken his ankle and shattered his knee and was unable to walk.

George Poole was badly cut and bruised, but nothing was broken. They decided George would walk for help. For nine days, George wandered through the jungle, all the while wondering whether Bob was still alive. Finally, George made it to Shell Mera, but he was unable to locate exactly where the plane had crashed. It took another two days before Bob Hart, more dead than alive, was finally found. Bob lived to tell a story every jungle pilot knew could happen to him if his engine ever quit while flying over the jungle. Bob's story sent a chill up Nate's newly healed spine.

Apart from human error, where a pilot makes a major mistake or miscalculation while flying, the biggest concern to pilots was their airplane's engine quitting in midair. If a car's engine quits, the driver can coast to a halt at the side of the road, normally with no harm to anyone. But when a plane engine quits in midair, it's a different story. An airplane's propeller corkscrews through the air, pulling the plane along with it. As the plane is pulled forward, the movement of air over and under the wings creates lift, which keeps the plane aloft. When the engine stops, the propeller stops, the plane's forward motion quickly slows, and as it does, the lift under the wings is reduced and the plane begins to lose altitude. If a pilot is flying over an open field or a road when this happens, he might be able to glide the plane in for an emergency landing. But if he is flying over jungle, he can do nothing to avoid hitting the trees.

Nate thought hard about the things that were likely to make an engine quit in midair. It was hardly ever the engine itself that was the problem, since it was checked over before every flight. Ninety-nine percent of the time when an engine quit in flight it was because the fuel was contaminated or had stopped flowing to the engine. So Nate made a list of the ways that fuel was most likely to be stopped from reaching the engine. Number one on his list was mud wasps plugging up a fuel line, which is what had happened on the airstrip at El Real in Mexico. Number two was water in the fuel. Of course, this didn't actually stop fuel from reaching the engine; the fuel just didn't ignite when it got there. Number three was cracks in the fuel tank. Number four was dirt under the float valve seat. And number five was running out of fuel either because of a faulty gauge or because of human error.

Nate knew number five on his list was more common that any pilot liked to admit. Sometimes a pilot would change plans in the middle of a flight, or in an emergency a pilot would be tempted to take a risk and hope that there was enough fuel in the gas tank to make it the extra distance.

Nate felt there had to be some way to lessen the chance of an airplane engine's quitting over the jungle. But what was it? There were so many different ways the fuel supply could be cut off. He tried to come up with the answer, but

nothing seemed to suggest itself as a solution. Then one day, as he worked away in the MAF hangar at Shell Mera, a truck went lumbering along the road on its way to Ambato. Lots of trucks passed Shell Mera on their way to Ambato, but something about this one caught Nate's attention. A boy was sitting on the roof of the truck cab with a five-gallon can of gas and a siphon tube. On the truck's fender beside the engine was another boy. He held the other end of the siphon tube. He tweaked the end of the tube with his fingers to control the flow of gas as he aimed it into the truck's air cleaner.

Nate laughed out loud when he realized what the boys were doing. With their tank of gas and siphon tube they were feeding fuel into the truck's carburetor in a tiny stream, completely bypassing the truck's own fuel storage system. It was a simple and ingenious trick, and it gave Nate inspiration. Why not use the same idea to bypass the fuel storage system of an airplane in an emergency?

Nate ran to the house and grabbed two of Marj's cooking oil cans. Back in the hangar, he beat them into the shape of a three-gallon tank and soldered them together. Then he cut a piece of balsa wood and shaped it into a cowling to go over the tank to make it aerodynamic. He strapped the tank and the cowling onto the left wing strut, and then he took a length of copper tubing and used it to connect the tank made from cooking oil cans to the manifold intake of the plane's engine. He put a valve on the end of the tubing and made a control rod from the valve to the instrument panel inside the plane. With the rod he could control the flow of fuel from the can to the engine.

It was dark by the time Nate finished his project, too dark to take the plane up for a test flight. So he put his tools away and headed to the house for dinner. All evening he thought of reasons why his new invention wouldn't work. After all, if the solution really was that easy, why hadn't someone thought of it before? And what if not enough fuel flowed through the copper tube and starved the engine, or too much flowed and flooded it?

By the next morning, Nate had almost reasoned himself out of taking the airplane up for a test flight—almost, but not quite. He tested the extra fuel tank in the hangar first. He started the engine and then gunned it before shutting it off and pulling the control rod he'd made the night before. When he shut it off, the engine didn't miss a beat as it changed from its own fuel supply to the one in the tin can strapped to its wing. The whole thing worked like a charm.

Still it was one thing for it to work while the plane was sitting still and level on the ground. Now Nate needed to know whether it would work in flight. He took off in the plane and circled Shell Mera about two thousand feet above the airstrip. Then Nate did the one thing that a pilot tries to avoid at all costs; he shut

off the regular flow of fuel to the engine. Within a few seconds, the engine began to sputter. Nate reached down and pulled the control rod for his emergency device on the instrument panel, and the engine shuddered back to life. Twenty minutes later, the engine was still humming along on its emergency fuel supply. Nate tested the system every way he could think of. He banked sharply one way and then the other. He climbed rapidly and then put the plane into a dive. In every instance, the cooking oil can fuel tank worked perfectly, and the engine never once faltered.

Nate could hardly wait to land the plane and share his success with Marj. With just four pounds of added weight and less than a dollar's worth of parts, he had solved a problem that could save many lives in the jungle, maybe even his own.

He wrote to MAF headquarters in California about his invention. Jim Truxton agreed that it was a great safety improvement, and like Nate's suggestion about fitting shoulder harnesses, he ordered all MAF planes to be fitted with Nate's "tin can lifesaver." Nate also applied for a patent for his invention and approval for it from the Civil Aeronautics Authority. He received both.

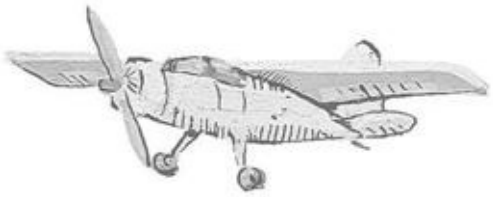
Nate's mind was running in other directions, too. In 1949, some of the students in his Sunday school class told him they would be leaving Shell Mera. After eleven years at Shell Mera, Shell Oil Company had decided to stop any further exploration in the Oriente. There was certainly oil beneath the jungle, but the company had decided there wasn't enough oil for it to be a profitable operation.

Since Shell Merita and the MAF property were leased from Shell Oil Company, Nate and Marj wondered what would happen to them. In fact, they wondered what would happen to all the buildings at Shell Mera. If someone didn't use them, they would quickly be overrun by the jungle again. Nate and Marj discussed the situation and came up with a big plan. Why not have MAF buy the property that the house and hangar sat on, as well as the airstrip and a little extra land on each side. Then it could get one of the other missionary groups working in the area to buy the property with the other buildings on it. Nate discussed the idea with his friend Frank Drown, who was a missionary with the Gospel Missionary Union. Shell Mera, it turned out, was just the facility his mission needed for a planned Bible college to train local Indian Christians.

And so, the headquarters for Shell Oil Company's exploration of the Oriente became the permanent home of MAF and the Berean Bible Institute. The facility, which had cost Shell Oil Company more than sixty thousand dollars to establish, was sold to both groups for a tenth of its value. Nate and Marj couldn't

have been happier. Things were going better than they could have possibly hoped.

Chapter 10



Raising the Roof

Nate and his older sister Rachel had a lot to catch up on when she came to visit in mid-1951. Of course, the first thing Rachel wanted to do was see her new nephew, Steve, born to Marj and Nate in January 1951. Steve was a happy, bouncy boy, and he took an instant shine to his Aunt Rachel. As Rachel and Nate sat together in the evenings and sipped coffee or lemonade and watched Mt. Sangay's crater glowing in the distance, Nate told her all about his emergency fuel tank device and his bucket drop technique. Rachel laughed as she listened. Nate hadn't changed much from the little blond boy back in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, full of dreams and schemes.

Rachel, in turn, told Nate all about her decision to become a Bible translator and about the two years she had worked among the Shapras Indian tribe in Peru. In 1948, at thirty-five years of age, Rachel had left the rescue mission in New Jersey where she had been working successfully with recovering alcoholics to become a missionary in the Amazon region. Her friends thought she was crazy, but deep inside, Rachel felt a call and a promise from God that centered around one verse: Romans 15:21. The verse said, "Those who have never been told of Him shall see and those who never heard shall understand." Rachel felt that God was calling her to make contact with a tribe which had never before heard the gospel message, and when she did make contact, she believed they would understand the message and respond to it.

After attending Wycliffe Bible Translator's jungle training camp in El Real, Mexico, near where Nate had repaired the crashed Waco biplane, Rachel had moved on to Peru. There she worked with two other Wycliffe missionaries translating the New Testament into the language of the Shapras Indians. It was challenging work, and Rachel loved it. But rewarding as the work was, somehow she felt it wasn't God's final destination for her. She felt there was another tribe God would lead her to, and there, amid that tribe, she would truly fulfill the promise from the verse in Romans.

Nate listened to all she had to say. Then several days later, when he took Rachel up flying with him, he flew out across the jungle before banking steeply to the left. As the plane turned, he motioned with his head in the direction of a ridge about ten miles away off the right side of the plane. "There's your tribe, Sis, just beyond that ridge," he said. He told her the little he knew about the Auca Indians. But Rachel was hardly listening; somehow she knew beyond a doubt that they were the people God was calling her to. She didn't know how it would happen, because Wycliffe Bible Translators didn't even work in Ecuador, but she knew God would arrange it. When Rachel returned to Peru and the Shapras Indians, she went back with a new excitement for all God had planned for her in the future.

By the time 1952 rolled around, Nate and Marj had been stationed at Shell Mera for three years, and it was time for them to take an extended break. MAF sent Bob and Keitha Wittig to take their place while they were away. After the Wittigs had settled in and Nate had oriented Robert to jungle flying and the locations of the various mission stations scattered across the Oriente, Nate and Marj gathered up three-year-old Kathy and one-year-old Steve and headed for the United States, where the kids would meet their grandparents for the first time.

Back in the United States, the Saints moved into a cottage on a missionary housing compound in Glendale, California. Grandma and Grandpa Farris, Marj's parents, moved into a house nearby. They, of course, were excited to be near their grandchildren. Having Marj's parents close by worked out well for Nate and Marj, who were able to speak in churches or meet with MAF officials and know their children were well taken care of by their grandparents. It was also a great arrangement for the children, who were treated to many ice cream treats by their grandparents.

Their time in the United States rolled by quickly. Nate and Marj had many invitations to speak at churches across the country. Many people had heard stories of the "savage" tribes of the Amazon region, and they wanted to hear more about the region firsthand from frontier missionaries working there.

Whenever the Saints spoke at a church, they made it a point to speak in the Sunday school as well. Nate and Marj both knew how important it was for young people to understand that God had a plan for their lives.

When Nate and Marj were not speaking at churches, Nate worked on new safety features for jungle planes. He was able to do this thanks to Granddad Proctor. His grandfather had died before Nate was born, but the money from his will wasn't distributed until 1952, when all his grandchildren came of age. Nate and Marj decided to do three things with the money they received. First, they put a little of it away as emergency money in case something happened to Nate and Marj had to raise the children alone. Second, they used much of it to buy the land around Shell Merita which they gave to MAF. Lastly, they kept some money aside so Nate could experiment with new safety features.

While Nate was busy with his experiments, Marj was out buying enough clothes to last them all until they came back to the United States on furlough again in another five years. It wasn't easy deciding what Kathy or Steve would like to wear, or even what size they would be in five years, but Marj guessed as best she could.

Nate kept in regular contact with the Wittigs at Shell Mera. The Wittigs were doing a fine job, but they were amazed at how much work Nate and Marj had to do. They understood why after three years the two of them had needed to take a break. They wrote to Jim Truxton and told him the work of MAF in Shell Mera was too much for one couple to do all by themselves. As a result, by the time Nate and Marj were ready to return to Ecuador in the spring of 1953, MAF had decided to send another couple to Shell Mera to work with the Saints. This also meant that another airplane was needed. Nate helped MAF choose a Piper Family Cruiser for the job. The Piper Cruiser had longer wings than the Pacer, which meant it could land on shorter airstrips. Nate thought it would be perfect for jungle flying.

Nate was very pleased with the way the Piper Cruiser performed as he flew his family across the United States from California to Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. He landed at the same airstrip where Sam had taken him up for his first flight twenty-three years before. Sam and most of the family were waiting for them at the old house. It was a proud moment for Nate to introduce his two children to all their aunts, uncles, and cousins. Of course, their time together went by too fast, and before long, Nate and a copilot from MAF were headed south over Mexico toward Ecuador in the Piper Cruiser. Marj and the children followed later by commercial airliner.

Seven days later, Nate flew over the patch of cleared Ecuadoran jungle he called home. He was glad to get back. As he circled the landing strip, he could

see Bob and Keitha Wittig waving enthusiastically to him. It wasn't long before he was sitting in his own living room sipping lemonade and listening to Bob tell the story of his "unfortunate" adventure.

Just several days before, Bob had been delivering a load of building materials to the Dos Rios missionary base. He was hurtling down the Shell Mera airstrip at full throttle for take-off when a huge dog began racing across the airstrip toward the plane. Bob could see it getting closer and closer, so he pulled on the control wheel and tried to get the plane off the ground. He didn't have quite enough speed, so the plane responded slowly. Bob heard a heart-sickening thud, and he knew the dog had hit the plane. He managed to get the plane into the air and then began to scramble for what to do next.

Nate leaned forward, waiting to hear what happened next. Bob went on. He knew the dog must have collided with the landing gear, so he would have to make an emergency landing and check it out. The most important thing to do before making the emergency landing was to make the plane as light as possible. The building materials for Dos Rios would have to go. Bob banked to the right of the airstrip, and while keeping one hand on the control wheel, he managed to maneuver the kitchen sink to the plane's doorway, where he shoved it out. Next went two sacks of cement, several boxes of groceries, and a fifteen-gallon can of kerosene. Thankfully, he had taken the door off the plane before he left, making one less obstacle to overcome in ditching his cargo.

Nate nodded in understanding. Bob had done just what he would have done under the circumstances. "How was the landing?" he asked.

Bob explained how he brought the Piper Pacer around for a landing. He slowed it down as much as possible as he approached the end of the runway. The undercarriage of a plane is very strong and built to handle landing on rough surfaces if need be, so Bob figured a collision with a dog probably hadn't done much damage. As he approached the end of the runway, though, he realized he must have figured wrong. His wife and a number of students from the Berean Bible Institute were pointing furiously at the right side of his landing gear. Bob knew something was wrong with it, and he worked his controls gently to make sure he got the left wheel of the plane down first. The left wheel ran along the runway, and Bob waited for the right wheel to connect with the ground. It didn't. The Piper Pacer just got lower on the right side until the end of the wing clipped the ground and dragged along the runway. Before coming to a halt, the whole plane skewed sideways in a shower of sparks from the wing rubbing on the ground. Fortunately, Bob was not hurt, which was more than could be said for the plane. The collision had ripped the right landing gear completely off, and the crash landing had bent the propeller and torn up the end of the right wing. But it

was all fixable, and the Piper Pacer would fly over the jungle again.

Nate was soon in the hangar inspecting the damage. The Pacer would take a bit of fixing, but compared to the Waco biplane repair job in Mexico, this job would be simple and straightforward. Nate had all the equipment he needed and the correct blueprints for the Pacer. Fortunately, MAF now had two planes based at Shell Mera, so the pilots wouldn't be out of action while the plane was being fixed, and missionaries wouldn't have to resort to walking the jungle trails to get where they wanted to go, as they'd had to do after Nate crashed the Stinson in Quito.

A couple of weeks later, Marj and the children finally arrived back at Shell Mera, and the Wittigs returned to the United States. Soon life for the Saints was busier than ever. While back in the United States, Nate had drawn up plans to enlarge the house. It was too small for the number of visitors who flowed through, and Marj needed a separate radio room. The plans called for pushing out both ends of the house and raising the roof for a second story. This would give the home eleven bedrooms, which sounds like a lot of rooms, but it wasn't long after the renovations were complete that the bedrooms were often filled with missionaries and their guests, who stayed over on their way in and out of their jungle stations or came to Shell Mera to visit the doctor. Sometimes the rooms housed children on their way home from boarding school in Quito.

Besides enlarging his own house, Nate had to build a house for the second couple that MAF was sending to join them. The days were busy for Nate, because he also had his regular rounds of the missionary stations to make by plane. But since his furlough in the United States, he had a lot more energy, and he worked away quickly and happily. Still, he was glad when the Keenans finally arrived at Shell Mera to help with the work.

Johnny and Ruth Keenan were the perfect couple to work with Nate and Marj. They were hard workers, and they could see what needed to be done without being told. They had twin boys who were five years old, a year older than Kathy Saint. Ruth home-schooled her two boys and Kathy. She also had all the guests who stayed at Shell Merita over for one meal a day so that Marj didn't have to cook as often and was able to spend time alone with her family.

Ruth also helped with buying and packaging the groceries for the various mission stations. Marj took her to the "store" at Shell Mera, where a Quichua Indian woman stocked the shelves from a once-a-week trip to the market at Ambato. It was best to visit the store the day after the woman's trip to Ambato to ensure the vegetables were as fresh as they could be. Otherwise, by the end of the week, everything in the store was a little wilted.

With their supplies in hand, Marj and Ruth looked at the list showing the

number of people at each mission station, plus any guests they were expecting, and figured out how much fruit, vegetables, flour, rice, oil, and milk powder they would need. On the dining room table in Marj's kitchen they would separate the food into family lots and label and weigh each box for Nate to load up and deliver the next day. Marj would enter the cost of each family's groceries into a black ledger and then bill each family at the end of the month.

Johnny Keenan was an excellent pilot, and it didn't take him long to learn the art of jungle flying. Like Nate, Johnny wasn't a man to take any chances, so the two of them got along well.

It took only a couple of weeks for Nate and Marj to wonder how they'd ever managed without the Keenans to help them. Together they were responsible for serving twenty-seven missionary families. That was a big increase from the six families Nate had started out serving in 1948. And more stations were being established in the jungle all the time.

About this time, Nate got a letter from Rachel, who was back working among the Shapras Indian tribe in Peru. Rachel wrote about her conversations with Chief Tariri of the Shapras and her attempts to convince him that head-hunting was wrong. But he didn't seem to listen to what she said. Still, the two of them had become good friends. Rachel had also kept busy with her two Wycliffe coworkers translating the New Testament into the Shapras language. In the letter, she also told Nate that she couldn't shake the feeling that the Aucas were the group God had singled out for her to work with, although she didn't know how this would come about. In the meantime, she continued to trust God.

Amazingly, things began to work out, though perhaps not as quickly as Rachel would have liked. At a Wycliffe Bible Translators meeting in Peru, Cameron Townsend, the founder of the mission, announced that Wycliffe had been invited by Ecuador's president, Velazco Ibarra, to begin working in his country. Ibarra realized that someone had to help the Stone Age tribes who lived in the jungle of the Oriente to enter the twentieth century. Christian missionaries, the president noted, seemed to be the only ones who were brave enough to try!

By February 1955, Rachel was back at Shell Mera. Her first priority was to see Nate and Marj's new baby boy, Philip, who had been born right after Christmas. Big sister Kathy eagerly showed her Aunt Rachel exactly where Philip slept and how her mother bathed him.

Rachel had come from Quito where, along with a group of Wycliffe Bible Translators, she had met with President Ibarra. Nate and Marj wanted to hear all about the meeting. Rachel began by describing what she'd worn to the meeting. Since she didn't have any fashionable new clothes, she decided to wear the red headdress Chief Tariri had given her as a farewell gift. She sewed a black veil

onto the front of the headdress, which, according to her, looked very glamorous in its own special way.

Nate smiled to himself. The sight of his stocky, middle-aged older sister in an Indian headdress with a veil at an official function was something he would have loved to have seen.

Anyway, Rachel's "hat" had caught the president's attention, and he stopped to talk to her. He asked her where she was going to work. "Among the Aucas," she had told him. Stunned by her response, President Ibarra had replied, "You are going to work with the Aucas? When I flew over their territory a while back, they threw spears at my plane. No white person has ever been able to live among them. Are you sure you really want to try?"

Rachel grinned at Nate. "I don't know what came over me," she said. "I forgot he was the president. I looked him right in the eye and said, 'Yes, I believe God will make a way for me to do that.'"

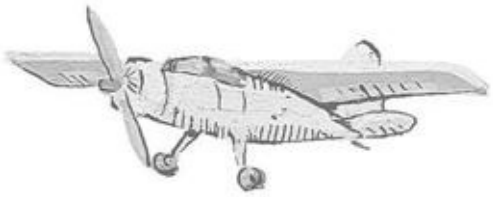
Nate patted her on the back. That was his sister, never beating around the bush when she had something to say. He was proud to have her in Ecuador and know that when she finally made it into Auca territory, he would be the one serving her in his plane. Of course, a lot of changes would have to take place before it was safe for a single woman to live among the Aucas. But if Rachel believed that's where God was leading her, then Nate and Marj would believe right along with her.

Within days, Rachel had her first assignment. An Auca girl named Dayuma had been located at a large plantation, called Hacienda Ila, to the west of Auca country. Dayuma had fled from the jungle after her father had been killed by another tribal member. She was too scared to return to her people, so for eight years she had been chopping sugar cane and digging yucca root on the plantation. The owner of the hacienda, Don Carlos Sevilla, a tall man about sixty years old, had allowed Dayuma to stay and work, even though he'd had some bad experiences with other members of her tribe. He bore six scars, made by razor-sharp Auca spears, that were a reminder to him of one particular rubber expedition up the Curaray River into Auca territory.

Rachel was thrilled by the way things were working out. She did not need to go into the jungle to learn the Auca language. Dayuma had come out from the jungle. Rachel was also thankful for the kindness of Señor Sevilla, who offered her the run of his house. During the day, Rachel organized her language learning and translation work, and her evenings were spent with Dayuma. It was a perfect arrangement, and one day, she hoped not too long in the future, Rachel would trek into Auca territory to meet and speak with these mysterious people face-to-face. At least, that was *her* plan.

Meanwhile, back at Shell Mera, Nate had a challenge of his own. A missionary couple were planning to move to the abandoned Shell Oil exploration base at Arajuno, and Nate had offered to help them get set up there. It would also be the closest he'd ever been to Auca territory.

Chapter 11



Ruins of Arajuno

In early 1955, Nate touched down the wheels of the Piper Cruiser on the overgrown airstrip at Arajuno. Ed McCully sat in the seat beside Nate, his six-foot-two-inch frame slightly hunched over. Ed strained for a first look at his new home. Arajuno was an abandoned Shell Oil exploration base near a large Quichua Indian village. Like all Shell Oil bases, including Shell Mera, Arajuno had a wonderful packed sand airstrip. It was overgrown with weeds at present, but it could easily be reclaimed. That was more than could be said for the buildings. Arajuno was a ghost town. Once there had been brick houses boasting running water and electricity, as well as a tennis court, a bakery, a narrow gauge railroad, even a hotel. But Shell had abandoned Arajuno in 1949, and by now most of the buildings had rotted away, and a blanket of vines and creepers draped over everything that hadn't rotted.

As Nate poked around the abandoned site, it made him think of his childhood. He and his brothers would have had a wonderful time exploring something like this. Maybe they would even have gotten the narrow gauge railroad working again. After prodding around for a while, Nate turned his attention back to Ed.

Ed and his wife, Marilou, had a lot of work ahead of them building a house from the ruins of Arajuno for themselves and their two small children. But Nate, intrigued by the adventure of rebuilding a ghost town, was already busy thinking

about which of the old foundations would be best to use for the McCullys' new home. Of course, mixed with the adventure was the sobering knowledge that Arajuno was on the Auca side of the river, just outside Auca territory. Ed and Marilou planned to work with the local Quichua Indians on the other side of the river. One day, though, they hoped they would be able to make contact with the Aucas: friendly contact, that is.

Shell Oil Company workers at Arajuno had had some "unfriendly" contact with the Aucas. Two years before Arajuno was abandoned by Shell, three workers were killed there by Auca warriors. Two of them were Quichua Indian workers, and the third was a European man. The workers had been ambushed near the settlement and speared to death. After that it became difficult for Shell to find Quichua workers willing to cross the river from their village to work in Arajuno. A year later, the Aucas attacked again. This time they speared eight workers to death. Not surprisingly, it became almost impossible for Shell to attract any Indian workers to Arajuno after that, and so the decision was made to pull out and close the base.

As Nate and Ed worked on the new house, they never forgot they were at the edge of Auca territory. They were continually watching out for Aucas, who were easy to tell apart from the Quichuas. Although both groups were short and had jet black hair and coffee-colored skin, Quichuas wore Western style clothes, while the Aucas wore only a woven string around their waist and huge balsa wood plugs in the lobes of their ears.

Rachel had told Nate that the Aucas knew the power of the white man's gun and were afraid of it. None of the Shell Oil workers who had been killed were carrying guns. When he was alone at Arajuno, Nate worked with a small revolver tucked in his belt. At first it gave him a sense of safety, but then he began to wonder whether the Aucas would even recognize the small revolver as a firearm. It didn't look at all like a rifle, the most common gun in the jungle. Nate also wondered how safe it would keep him, since he knew he could never shoot to kill anyone, even an Auca warrior. The most he would allow himself to consider was shooting a would-be attacker in the leg, and then only as a last resort.

When the new house at Arajuno reached the roof stage, Nate decided to use a system he'd worked out when he was back in the United States on furlough. The system provided a safe way to transport lengths of aluminum sheeting on the underside of the plane. The aluminum sheets were especially useful for roofing. Nate worked out how to rig a rope sling under the plane. A partially inflated air mattress served as a buffer between the seven-foot aluminum sheets and the plane. The rope sling was tied in such a way that if one corner of it broke

for any reason, the whole sling would drop off, and the aluminum sheets would drop to the ground instead of dangling dangerously under the plane's fuselage. However, anytime a pilot does something with an airplane that it's not built to do, there is risk involved. Nate was willing to take that risk himself, but he never let anyone else fly in the plane with him while he was using the sling to transport aluminum sheeting: That would be an unacceptable risk.

By mid-April, the roof was on, and all the new house needed was a few finishing touches, though not the normal touches you might think. Nate rigged up an electric fence around the yard. A powerful battery-operated light was arranged to floodlight the yard. If their dog barked, Ed or Marilou could switch the light on from inside the house. Nate also installed a very loud alarm bell that he hoped would scare off intruders.

The Quichua Indians were happy to cross the river to visit the McCullys, but they never forgot they were on the Auca side of the Arajuno River. As the sun began to set over the jungle, they would say a hasty good-bye and wade back across the river to safety, leaving the missionaries to make it through the night alone.

Each week, when he flew in groceries and Ed's *Time* magazine, Nate heard how the McCullys' mission work with the Quichuas was progressing. It was quite a while before Ed became aware that Nate had been reading his *Time* first and then carefully slipping it back into its mailing sleeve and delivering it to Ed along with his other mail. But one time Nate forgot to put the magazine back in its sleeve and delivered an empty sleeve to Ed. Nate had to confess he'd been slipping the magazines out and reading them before bringing them to Ed. After that, Ed had a running joke with Nate about him "stealing" the mail.

Marilou, who had just found out she was pregnant again, and her two toddlers often brought cookies and lemonade out to the plane where she and Ed and Nate would talk for a while. All too soon though, Nate's wristwatch alarm would sound, indicating it was time for him to be off to his next stop.

Wherever Nate flew, he took news from one missionary to another. Ed and Marilou McCully loved to hear what was happening with other missionaries, especially the Elliots and the Flemings. They all worked with the same Plymouth Brethren missionary society, called Christian Missions in Many Lands.

Jim and Betty Elliot, and their new baby, Valerie, lived twenty minutes by air north of Shell Mera at a place called Shandia. Jim and Betty were a high-energy couple who threw themselves into whatever work they had to do. The Elliots had met at Wheaton College, where Jim was an honor student and school wrestling champion.

Pete Fleming and his new wife, Olive, lived at Puyupunga, seven minutes

by air southeast of Shell Mera. Pete had a master's degree in English literature and excelled in golf and basketball, two sports he didn't get to practice much in the jungle! Pete was always happiest spending his days with a sketch board and a pen teaching Quichuas to read the Bible for themselves.

There was also a large Gospel Missionary Union station at Macuma, thirty-five minutes by plane southeast of Shell Mera. Macuma station was run by longtime missionaries Frank and Marie Drown. Frank had helped Nate build the MAF house at Shell Mera, and he and Nate had become good friends. The Drowns worked with the Jivaro, an infamous head-shrinking Indian tribe. The Jivaro were called headshrinkers for a very good reason. When they killed an enemy, which was quite often, they cut off his head and shrunk it. The process they used to do this was secret, but they were more than willing to show people the results of their handiwork, which were perfectly preserved human heads, each a little larger than a baseball.

Roger and Barbara Youderian also lived at Macuma. They had been there since 1953 and helped the Drowns with their work among the Jivaro.

Nate loved to visit all of them and bring encouraging news from the other missionaries working in the Oriente.

There was one other place Nate loved to fly to as well. Unfortunately, he couldn't land there because there was no airstrip. Even so, every couple of weeks he would point the Piper Cruiser east towards Hacienda Ila. He would fly low over the main house and drop letters and goodies for Rachel. He often prayed for her as he flew. It seemed almost impossible to think that God would make a way for her to live among some of the most violent and unpredictable people on earth. But Nate knew Rachel was stubborn, and if she believed God had called her to the Aucas, she would do whatever it took to get there.

For Nate, Monday, September 19, 1955, started out like any other day. Baskets of fruit, sacks of flour, and cans of kerosene had been weighed and loaded into the Piper Cruiser. Nate fueled the plane and examined the runway. Before long he was in the air and headed for Arajuno to deliver supplies to the McCullys. It was a beautiful, clear morning, and Nate estimated visibility was about seventy-five miles in any direction. By the time he'd landed the Piper at Arajuno, he had an idea. Why not take Ed up with him in the plane and see if they could spot an actual Auca settlement. Nate normally flew around Auca territory, but visibility was so good, it seemed a shame to waste the opportunity.

Once the supplies were unloaded, Nate suggested his plan to Ed, who also was eager to see if they could spot some of their "neighbors." Nate soon had the plane back in the air and headed east across Auca territory. Ed peered down on the sea of green trees below them. They followed a river for about fifty miles

before turning north. Ed strained to see signs of life below. He saw a giant tapir sunning himself on a beach along the river. He also saw several anteaters and a flock of lime green parrots, but no sign of people. Or was there? Ed had Nate loop the plane around for another pass. Had the land below been a garden at some stage? It was hard to know, because in the jungle, within a few weeks, climbing and creeping plants swallowed up almost everything. But there was a large opening among the trees below that had probably been cleared by humans at some stage.

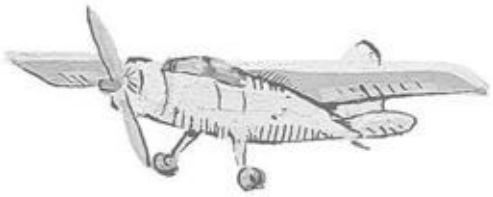
Nate would have liked to have stayed longer flying over the area, but he still had deliveries to make to some of the other mission stations before the day was over. It was hard to leave without having found an Auca village, but Nate finally turned the nose of the Piper westward towards Arajuno. As he did so, he thought he saw something in the distance, about five miles off the left side of the plane. He pointed it out to Ed, but Ed couldn't see anything. Was it Nate's imagination working overtime, or had he really seen something? He had to check it out!

It took only a few minutes before they were over the spot where Nate thought he'd seen something. His heart was racing. And sure enough, there it was, a small clearing planted with manioc and several small Auca houses. Ed and Nate whooped and hollered with delight. They had found the Aucas. They flew around in circles for about fifteen minutes, never going down too close to the ground for fear of frightening the Aucas.

On the trip back to Arajuno, Nate and Ed discussed their discovery. Ed thought there must be more than one Auca settlement, because it was a long walk from there to Arajuno. Nate wasn't so sure; all jungle people were good walkers. In the end, they decided it would be best to keep their discovery secret. Who knew what might happen if the military, the Quichuas, or the media knew the exact whereabouts of this village.

That night, as Nate and Marj sat in their living room and sipped lemonade, with Mt. Sangay glowing in the distance, they had a lot to talk about. They wondered what the Aucas had thought when they saw the plane flying overhead. What should the next step be now that Nate and Ed had discovered the Auca encampment? Who should be involved? Whatever happened, Nate knew he wanted to be a part of it. Reaching a tribe that had never heard the gospel message before and using his airplane to do it would be like living one of the stories from the big book of missionary stories Rachel had read to him so many years ago on the roof in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

Chapter 12



Gifts That Weren't Spewed Up

Two weeks after he and Ed McCully had sighted the Auca village, Nate was scheduled to fly Ed, Jim Elliot, and two Quichua helpers to Villano to spend time preaching to Quichua Indians. The group had gathered at Arajuno and waited for Nate. When Nate arrived, he realized the group had more equipment than he'd thought, so he would have to make two trips. Because Villano was located on the other side of the Aucas, Nate would make a total of four trips across Auca territory. He decided he would keep his eyes peeled for more Auca settlements on each trip.

Nate flew Jim Elliot and the equipment into Villano first. He kept a sharp lookout as he flew, but he saw no more settlements. On the second trip with Ed McCully and the two Quichua helpers, Nate decided to fly a little farther to the east. The weather was clear and he was ahead of schedule, so he zigzagged the plane over the jungle valleys. About fifteen minutes out from Arajuno, they hit the jackpot! Below them were at least six Auca houses in one clearing, with smaller houses dotted around the outskirts of the clearing.

It was impossible to keep the excitement of the discovery out of their voices, and although Nate and Ed spoke in English and the Quichua helpers didn't know what they were saying, the two Quichuas were soon peering from the plane to the village below. Fear crossed their faces as they whispered the word "Auca" to each other.

Knowing that the two Quichua Indians had recognized the clearing as an Auca settlement created a problem for the missionaries. Anything could happen if the two helpers told their friends where the Auca settlement was located. Word could spread to the families of Quichua Indians who had been killed by Aucas, and they could seek revenge through a surprise attack on their enemy. That would mean the Aucas would have to kill more Quichuas in return. The bloodbath could go on for years. Somehow Ed and Nate had to convince the Quichua helpers to keep quiet about what they'd seen. As the plane taxied to a stop at the end of the Villano airstrip, Ed explained to the helpers the danger of telling their friends where the Auca village was located. They seemed to understand the importantance of saying nothing about what they'd seen, and they promised to remain quiet about it. Nate and Ed hoped they would keep their word.

Seeing the Auca village gave Nate a lot to think about as he flew back to Shell Mera alone. The Aucas were caught in a circle of violence. They killed before they listened. How could missionaries reach people who were so violent they murdered all outsiders they came in contact with? How could they get the attention of such people and, more importantly, win their trust long enough to prove they had come in peace? Nate had no answers. And he had no idea at the time that the eventual answer would involve laying down his own life to help build that bridge of trust.

On October 2, 1955, two days after Nate had dropped them off, Johnny Keenan flew back to Villano to pick up Ed McCully and Jim Elliot and take them to Arajuno. But by the time the plane reached Arajuno, the weather had turned ugly. There was a fierce crosswind blowing that whipped the trees around Arajuno from side to side. Everyone aboard the plane could see it was too dangerous to attempt a landing. There was nothing for Johnny to do but fly Ed and Jim back to Shell Mera with him and wait for better weather the next day. That night, in the Saints' living room at Shell Mera, Nate, Ed McCully, Jim Elliot, and Johnny Keenan held a "committee" meeting to talk about everything that had happened in the past couple of weeks concerning the Aucas.

They pored over maps of the area, and all agreed that seeing not one, but two Auca settlements in the previous two weeks was amazing. Maybe, they decided, God was trying to get their attention. Could now be the time He wanted them to reach out to their "neighbors"?

Marj brought them hot cocoa and homemade cookies as they continued to talk. Each of them knew that contacting the Aucas would be a difficult and dangerous task. In fact, they weren't altogether sure it could be done. Nate told the others everything Rachel had managed to find out about Auca culture from

Dayuma at Señor Sevilla's hacienda. For one thing, the Auca culture was based on revenge. If a member from one tribe or family was killed, it was important for the other members of that family or tribe to kill someone from the other group. It didn't matter whether it was the person who had done the killing or a relative of the killer or someone else from the killer's group that was executed. What was important was that someone was killed in revenge. The cycle would go on and on. It was a case of kill or be killed. And it pointed out the danger the men would be in if they tried to make contact with the Aucas. To the Aucas, these men were members of the "white man's tribe" and could well be seen as targets of revenge for all the bad things white men had done to them over the past hundred years or more. Aucas had long memories when it came to revenge! It was a sobering thought, and one each of the four men present took to heart.

One of the ways to reduce their chance of being killed was to be able to communicate to the Aucas that they had come in peace. What they needed were some simple Auca phrases, and there was one Auca who could help them: Dayuma.

Jim Elliot's ears pricked up; this was a job for him. He lived only a four-hour trek from Hacienda Ila, where Dayuma was living. Not only that, but of the four men, he picked up languages the fastest. He jumped into the conversation and volunteered to go to the hacienda to learn some Auca words from Dayuma. The others agreed, and Jim Elliot had his first assignment for "Operation Auca."

The men knew that words alone wouldn't be enough to convince the Aucas they had come in peace. Before setting foot in Auca territory, they needed to demonstrate by their actions that they meant no harm. The question was how to do this. As they talked about it among themselves, they realized that giving gifts was a symbol of friendship around the world. If they gave gifts, perhaps the Aucas would understand they wanted to be friendly.

What better way to give gifts without putting themselves in danger than to drop them from an airplane. But Nate remembered a story Rachel had told him. After the three oil exploration workers were killed by the Aucas at Arajuno, Shell Oil Company had used a plane to drop gifts as a way to try to pacify them. The only problem was that the plane had overflown Auca territory, and the Aucas had thrown spears at the plane. Of course the plane was flying too high for any of the spears to actually hit it, but the Auca warriors believed they had hit and wounded it and the gifts that were being dropped from it were being vomited from the wounded plane's stomach! Nate and the other men would want the Aucas to know that they had sent the gifts and that the gifts weren't being spewed out by some wounded flying monster! The bucket drop seemed to be the answer. But would the Aucas know to catch the bucket and lift the gifts out?

There had to be a way to make the bucket slide off the line when it hit the ground. Nate's first Operation Auca assignment was to devise a way to get the bucket to detach from the line so it could be left behind with the gifts in it.

It was agreed that Ed McCully would assist Nate with the bucket drop and that Johnny Keenan would free up Nate as much as possible from his regular flying duties so he could work on the project. Johnny would also serve as backup pilot for the operation if Nate was unable to do the flying for any reason.

It was after two in the morning when they finished talking about their plan and headed for bed. But even then, Nate had a hard time getting to sleep. He had two things on his mind. One was rigging the drop line so that the bucket would drop off the end when it touched the ground. The other was Rachel. Learning the Auca language and making contact with the Aucas was what she was now devoting her life to. It troubled Nate to leave her out of their group and not tell her what they were planning. He tossed and turned thinking about the situation. Finally, he decided that while Rachel may be disappointed about not being included in their plans, in the end, their making contact with the Aucas would help her to be able to live among them sooner rather than later. Besides, the men had all agreed that the fewer people who knew about their plans the better. The plan was daring and dangerous, and they didn't want others worrying about them. Nate decided that first thing in the morning he would explain it all in a letter to Rachel. He hoped he would be able to explain it to her in person after they'd made contact, but if something went wrong, he would leave the letter for Marj to give to Rachel. Finally he fell asleep.

Nate awoke the next morning thinking about broom handles. While Johnny flew Jim Elliot and Ed McCully to Arajuno, Nate began working on a bucket release system that involved using a broom handle. By the time Johnny returned to Shell Mera, Nate was ready for some trials. He had already taken the doors off the Piper Cruiser, and with a light breeze blowing from the southeast, he gunned the plane down the airstrip and took off. Johnny sat in the copilot's seat, holding a canvas bucket with rope and a broom handle attached to it.

As they circled Shell Mera, Nate explained to Johnny how the gadget should work. Johnny would drop the broom handle and the bucket over the side of the plane as they approached the target on the ground. The bucket was attached to the broom handle, and when the handle hit the ground at an angle, it would slide from the rope loops, releasing the bucket.

Marj and Ruth Keenan waited by the airstrip for the first tryout of the release system. They watched as the broom handle and bucket dangled nearer and nearer the ground. The bucket was twenty feet away, then ten; then the angled broom handle rested gently on the ground, releasing the tension on the

drop line. The handle then slipped from the rope loops around it, leaving the bucket sitting in the middle of the runway. Marj gave Johnny a thumbs-up sign as he began to reel the rope back into the plane. The bucket had landed without a hitch. They tried the procedure several more times that day, and each time it worked perfectly.

It was only days later, on October 6, that Nate had enough spare time to try a gift drop over Auca territory. But what gift should they drop? It had to be eye-catching and useful. The Aucas still lived in the Stone Age; they hadn't discovered how to make metal. Nate knew if they were like the Quichua Indians, they would want metal things. Metal pots were a good choice; they were strong and didn't break like the Aucas' clay pots did. Machetes were good, too. A tree could be cut down a hundred times faster with a machete than with a stone ax.

Marj and Nate decided a small aluminum kettle with a lid should be the first gift. In it they put a dozen brightly colored buttons. Of course, they knew the Aucas wouldn't use them to button up their clothes—they didn't wear any! But Marj thought they would make nice decorations. They also wrapped some salt and put it in the kettle. Nate knew from talking with Rachel that the Aucas did not know what salt was. He decided that if he gave them some salt and they worked out that it could be used to preserve meat, it would be useful to them. Last, Marj tied fifteen lengths of colored ribbon to the handle of the kettle. She thought that ribbons fluttering from the kettle as it fell to the ground would make the kettle look like a gift.

Nate kissed Marj good-bye and gave Kathy, Stevie, and Phil each a special hug before setting out. His first stop was Arajuno to pick up Ed McCully. As before, Nate had removed the door from the right side of the Piper Cruiser to make it easier for Ed to lower the bucket to the ground. From Arajuno they headed out over Auca territory.

It took Nate only a few minutes to spot the settlement he and Ed had discovered from the air. Excitement built in the two men as Nate circled above it. Ed leaned from the plane, eager for a first glimpse of a real Auca. Spread beneath the plane was a large house made with poles and thatched with leaves. The rectangular house with rounded ends was surrounded by several tiny houses, barely big enough for a single person to stand in. The main building stood beside a stream, and the men could make out a track from the building to a small sandbar in the stream. They figured that was where the Aucas probably washed themselves and drew water. Since the sandbar was clear of any trees or long grass, Nate decided it would be a great spot to drop the bucket with the kettle in it. That way, even if no one was around to watch the drop, someone would be sure to eventually find the bucket containing the gift on the sandbar.

Nate slowed the Piper Cruiser to fifty miles per hour and started flying in tight circles while Ed uncoiled the rope and slowly lowered the bucket two thousand feet to the sandbar below. “Yes!” he yelled enthusiastically, as the bucket landed on the sandbar about a yard from the water’s edge. The broom handle slipped from the rope loops as it was supposed to, leaving the bucket firmly on the ground. Ed hauled in the rope, and all the way back to Arajuno he and Nate talked about who might find the gift and what they might think of it.

Meanwhile, Jim Elliot made the four-hour trip to Hacienda Ila. Dayuma was happy to help him with a few simple words and phrases, and she didn’t even ask why he wanted them. Rachel Saint was away in Quito at a conference, much to Jim’s relief; he didn’t want to have to explain to her why he wanted to learn the words and phrases from Dayuma.

As he traveled home to Shandia, Jim pulled the index cards he’d written the words and phrases on from his pocket and began to memorize them. “Bito weka pomopa,” he repeated over and over. The phrase meant, “I want to come near you.” Then he started on “Abomiro imi?” or, “What is your name?” And then there was the word for outsider, *cowodi.*

Back at Shandia, Jim copied out the words several times, and over the next week he gave a copy of them to each member of Operation Auca. The men all practiced the phrases and tried to imagine how and when they would get to speak them to real live Aucas in the jungle.

A week after the first gift drop, Nate and Ed returned for another drop. They thought it would be good if the Aucas got used to their coming back on a regular basis. For this drop they decided to leave a machete, which was well wrapped in canvas, since they didn’t want it to swing around and hit anyone on the ground. That was, if anyone was there. All they had seen so far were Auca houses, but no live Aucas themselves.

Nate banked the plane and circled low over the house near the sandbar where they had left the kettle. The kettle was gone, as were the bucket and broom handle. Next Nate maneuvered the Piper Cruiser upstream to circle the next Auca house. They didn’t want the Aucas to think they were playing favorites with one family. A canoe was resting on the bank of the stream near this house, a sure sign that someone was inside. Ed leaned as far as he could from the open doorway of the plane. All of a sudden, he yelled, “I see someone!”

As he banked around, Nate glanced through the open right side of the plane, and sure enough, two thousand feet below them was a young man running in a circle and waving his arms towards the sky. Within a minute, two other men had joined him. What could be better than dropping the bucket right where the men were. Nate banked the plane into a tighter circle over the spot and told Ed to

lower the bucket, which drifted lazily from the end of the rope towards the ground. At the last minute, a wind gust blew the bucket off course, and the bucket landed in the water a few feet from shore. One of the Auca men dived right in after it. He waded over to the bucket, grabbed the machete, and began waving it wildly over his head. Ed could make out a huge grin on his face.

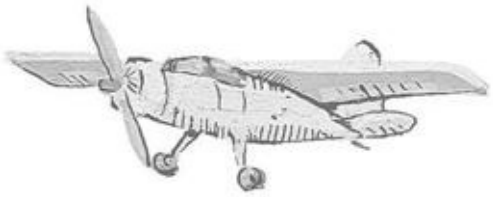
Over the next several weeks, Nate and Ed made a bucket drop every Thursday. After the third week, they no longer needed the broom handle system because the Aucas had become daring enough to reach for the bucket and remove the gifts inside. Nate rigged up a battery-powered loudspeaker in the plane, and sometimes Jim Elliot came along with them and spoke his Auca phrases as the bucket was lowered. The Aucas who heard his voice gazed up with wondering looks on their faces. No doubt they were trying to work out who the person above them was with the booming voice and strange accent speaking their language. They were puzzled but not frightened. They even sent gifts up to them: a headdress made from parrot feathers, a smoked monkey's tail, even a live parrot complete with half a banana to keep it occupied as it swung to and fro in the bucket on its way up to the plane.

On the eighth gift drop trip, Ed leaned out the door opening and yelled, "Bito weka pomopa" (I want to come near you). The four Auca warriors who heard him danced and raised their hands as if to say "Welcome." Nate and Ed were thrilled. The Aucas had all but invited them to visit!

This called for another Operation Auca "committee" meeting, at which Jim Elliot suggested that the time was right to land the plane somewhere near the village and wait for the Aucas to come to them. But they would need to act quickly because the rainy season was nearly upon them. He thought the next full moon, the night of January 3, 1956, would be a good time to do it, because the moonlight would give them lots of light in the jungle and make it more difficult for Auca warriors to ambush them in the dark. Nate just shook his head. Jim made it sound so easy, but in all his years flying in the Oriente, Nate had never come across a natural landing site in the jungle. He thought they'd probably have to trek in to make contact with the Aucas, and it would be better to wait until after the rainy season to do that.

They talked about the situation some more and finally it was agreed that Nate should make some more passes over Auca territory to look for possible landing sites. Nate knew it would be a miracle if he found a suitable site.

Chapter 13



Operation Auca

Nate skimmed the Piper Cruiser as close to the surface of the Curaray River as he dared. The muddy river curled below him like a sleeping snake among towering trees. Nate and Ed had just finished their ninth gift drop to the Auca village on the next river over south from the Curaray. The weather was clear and there was no wind, so instead of flying directly back to Arajuno, Nate decided to follow the twisting, brown Curaray River in the hope of finding a suitable landing spot not too far from the Auca settlement.

About four miles by air from the Auca village, or a six-hour slog by foot along a jungle trail, Nate spotted a possible landing place. It was a white sand beach perched between the jungle and the slow-moving river. He circled the plane back for a better look. It seemed promising, straight and wide, but was it long enough for a landing? Thankfully, Nate had planned ahead. He asked Ed McCully to reach into the back of the plane and grab the cardboard carton there. As Ed pulled the box into the front and lifted the lid, a puzzled look spread across his face. The box was filled with neatly stacked small paper bags, each filled with something heavy and tied shut.

Nate grinned. He loved to keep his friends guessing. Finally he explained the bags to Ed. The paper bags were filled with flour, and if they were dropped on the ground from a height, they would burst, and the flour would spill out. If Nate flew the plane at a constant speed and Ed dropped the bags at set intervals,

say every two seconds, they could count how many bags fell onto the beach. Then, when he flew back to the Shell Mera airstrip and dropped the same number of bags at the same time intervals and airspeed, he could measure the distance between the first and last flour "bombs" and determine how long the beach actually was.

Ed nodded as Nate banked the Piper around for another pass over the beach. Nate slowed the plane's speed to a steady sixty miles per hour. Ed looked at the second hand on his watch. He let go of the first flour bomb bag, then a second, and a third. He had dropped five bags by the time the beach disappeared beneath them. They headed back to Shell Mera, and once again, Nate steadied the plane's speed at sixty miles per hour. Ed kept his eyes on his watch as he dropped five more flour bomb bags two seconds apart. Nate landed the plane, and he and Ed measured the distance between the first and last bags—210 yards. The beach on the Curaray River was 210 yards long. Nate whistled. It was going to be a tight squeeze landing and taking off in that distance, but it could be done. Nate would have to pay close attention to the weight in the plane though. Every extra pound of weight meant the Piper Cruiser would need another foot of landing and take-off room.

Tight as it might be to land and take off there, Nate was sure it was the best landing strip they would find. They named the strip "Palm Beach" because of the palm trees that surrounded it. Now that they had a place to land, they could make firm plans for their trip into Auca territory.

The men decided they would land, set up camp on the beach, and stay there for three days and nights. Jim Elliot volunteered to draw up plans for a simple tree house where three men could sleep in safety high above the jungle floor. He would precut all the timber so it could be put together quickly once they got to Palm Beach. Jim had some leftover scraps of wood from the new house he'd just built at Shandia. Nate would use the sling system to fly in some sheets of aluminum for a roof.

Nate was concerned about leaving the plane on the beach overnight. For one thing, if it rained heavily and the river flooded, the beach could easily be covered with water in twenty minutes, making it impossible to take off. Or worse, the plane could be washed away. It would also be impossible to protect the plane during the night. While the men were sleeping in the tree house, the Aucas could destroy the plane and leave the missionaries with no way to escape. Everyone agreed it would be best if Nate flew out each night and returned the following morning. That way he could also bring in fresh supplies.

Planning for the final stage of Operation Auca was well under way when the sun rose over the jungle on the Oriente on Christmas morning, 1955. The

Saint kids were ready for action. Kathy poked Phil until he woke up, and then she hoisted him out of his crib. He had no idea what Christmas was, or even that it would be his first birthday in a few days, but Steve and Kathy needed as much help as they could to get their parents out of bed. The three of them hurried into their parents' bedroom to remind them there were presents to open. Nate smiled as three little blond heads appeared over the edge of the bed. He could remember as well as anyone the childhood lure of unopened presents. He and Marj got up, and while Nate dressed Phil, Marj made a large pan of oatmeal. With the noise in the kitchen, the rest of the household awoke.

Five other children were staying in Shell Merita. They were older children who had come down from Quito to spend Christmas with a family rather than in their dorms at school. Their own parents were missionaries who, for one reason or another, couldn't be with them for Christmas. Nate and Marj welcomed them to their home with as much love as if they were their own children. Soon the pan of oatmeal had been devoured, and it was time to open presents.

Four-year-old Steve had a pretty good idea what his present was. His dad had spent hours building a model railway complete with papier-mache landscape. The track even wound around a model of Mt. Sangay that came complete with a red light at the top and streamers that shook during "eruptions." As Nate handed the model railroad over, Steve's eyes lit up. Nate smiled. It was fun to have a son who liked the same things he had liked as a boy. It brought back memories of the B and T and P Depression Railroad he and his brothers had built as children. Nate looked forward to the many happy evenings he and Steve would spend together playing with the model railroad.

Next, Kathy opened her present. It was a doll. Kathy's six-year-old eyes widened with delight. She knew all about how to look after a baby doll, because she'd spent so much time "helping" her mother with Philip. Now they each had a baby.

Steve and Kathy never let their gifts out of their sight all day. At noon they sat down to enjoy the wonderful feast Marj had cooked for them all. Later in the afternoon, many of the young people from the Berean Bible Institute came to visit. The Saints' house was a natural gathering place for people in the area.

Because his living room was filled with people, Nate perched on the end of his bed with the typewriter in his lap, trying to finish a letter to his parents. He thought for a while about what to say regarding Operation Auca. It was a problem to him. He wasn't used to keeping secrets, so he had to be careful about what he said to his parents. He couldn't give them too many details. No one knew about their plans except the men and their wives. Aside from not wanting other missionaries to be unduly worried about the danger involved in what they

were planning to do, they were afraid that if word got out about their plans, the Aucas might be swamped with photographers and journalists coming to record Stone Age men meeting twentieth-century white men.

While they needed secrecy, Nate also knew they needed prayer support, and his and Marj's parents could always be counted on for prayer during a new project. He started typing away. He wrote: "Please be in prayer for a special project the 3rd of January….We are attempting to contact a primitive group of Indians….I will be flying in support for the operation.…[I] feel a real need for prayer to help at this time. A sudden move or careless word at this critical stage in the operation could slam the door of hope on people who live in the Stone Age."

The next day, Nate dropped the letter into a mail sack, and the letter began its long journey across the mountains to Quito and then on to Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. By the time it would reach its destination, Nate's parents would know far more about Operation Auca than the letter could ever have told them.

A week later, on New Year's Day, 1956, the final plans for Operation Auca were made. With Nate no longer planning to stay overnight in Auca territory, the men felt they needed some extra partners involved in the project so there could be more than just Jim Elliot and Ed McCully left on Palm Beach. There was safety in numbers. Pete Fleming agreed to be part of the group, and Nate had also asked Roger Youderian from Macuma station to join them. This brought the number of people on the beach during the day up to five. However, because the tree house Jim Elliot had prefabricated slept only three men, and because Pete Fleming was the lightest of the team, he was chosen to fly out each night with Nate. Each day, Nate flew over Palm Beach to check whether it remained in good enough condition to land and take off on. Everything was on schedule and going according to plan.

On Tuesday, January 3, 1956, the alarm clock jarred Nate awake at six in the morning. He had managed only a couple of hours of sleep. He had spent most of the night going over in his mind take-offs and landings from Palm Beach. Nate went over every possible situation. On one landing, the plane ploughed into the jungle, and another time it flipped over after its wheels hit a stick that had gone unnoticed. Another time Nate imagined that a group of ants had tunneled under the sand as they often did, and when the Cruiser hit the unstable sand, its wheels caught in the trench and spun the plane out of control. In his mind, Nate practiced for every kind of emergency procedure he had ever heard of, hoping he wouldn't have to use any of them.

Nate also thought about the danger involved in what he was about to do. The men had done everything possible to keep themselves safe, but they had also

promised each other that if Auca warriors attacked them, they would not shoot at them; they would only fire shots over their heads. There would be nothing worse than coming in peace to tell the Aucas about God's love for them and then shooting them if things didn't go as they'd planned. Each man had pledged to the others that if it came to that, he would sooner die on Palm Beach at the hands of the Aucas than risk killing people who had no idea who God was or that He loved them.

Besides, Nate and the others had already faced the possibility of death. Being a missionary in the Ecuadoran jungle was not without danger. There were poisonous and dangerous insects and animals in the jungle. Tropical diseases also posed a threat to missionaries, as did accidents from falling trees or from drowning while fording one of the many rivers that crisscrossed the Oriente. On top of that, Nate was a pilot, a job that had certain risks of its own, especially flying in the jungle. Long before he'd agreed to fly support for Operation Auca, Nate had come to terms with the fact that he might die serving as a missionary.

At 8:02 a.m., two minutes behind schedule, Nate took off from Arajuno with Ed McCully and some of the food supplies aboard. He had taken the door off the plane to enable them to transport bulky items. Fifteen minutes later, the two men were over Palm Beach. Nate swooped the Piper Cruiser down for a near landing. As wind rustled through the cabin of the plane, both men peered at the sand racing past beneath them. Were there any sticks or new holes since the last time Nate had looked? They couldn't see any, so Nate banked the Cruiser around for a landing. He set the flaps and slowed the plane as much as he could before setting his wheels down on the sand. The sand turned out to be softer than he had thought, but it was still firm enough to land and take off on. Nate cut the engine of the plane at the end of Palm Beach. He and Ed had made it safely; they were now in Auca territory. As they sat in the plane for a minute and thought about where they were, they were both filled with a mixture of excitement and apprehension about what lay ahead.

The two of them unloaded the plane. Then Nate took off to pick up Jim Elliot and the precut pieces of lumber for the tree house. Ed waited on the beach for him to return, his ears alert for the slightest sound.

It took Nate five trips to deliver all the men and the equipment to the beach. Once everyone and everything was there, they all knew what to do. Their first job was to put up the tree house so they would have a safe place to spend the nights. A nearby ironwood tree was chosen. As Ed and Jim hammered the first pieces of wood onto the tree to use as steps, they quickly realized why it was called ironwood. It took longer than they'd thought to nail steps up the tree, but no one stopped until the work was finished. Jim gave directions on how to

arrange the planks of wood and pieces of iron for their tree house thirty-five feet above the ground.

Once the tree house was finished, Nate and Pete Fleming felt okay about leaving the other three men for the night. The trio would be safe in the tree house, and Nate would fly back first thing in the morning with more supplies. After all five men said a prayer together, Nate and Pete climbed aboard the yellow Piper Cruiser and took off from Palm Beach. As soon as he was airborne, Nate radioed Marj to let her know everything had gone according to schedule. It was a message she'd been anxiously waiting to hear.

Before they headed for Arajuno, Nate and Pete had one last thing they needed to do. They had to invite their "neighbors" over to visit. Nate flew over the Auca village where they had been leaving the gifts and spoke into the loudspeaker. "Come tomorrow to the Curaray River," he tried to communicate in their language. As he looked down at the faces of the Aucas, they looked puzzled. He wondered if they'd understood any of what he had just told them. Only time would tell.

The next morning, Wednesday, as soon as the fog had cleared, Nate and Pete flew back to Palm Beach and waited for the Aucas to arrive. No one came. It was the same on Thursday. The men discussed the situation. There was no way of knowing whether or not the Aucas had understood. Maybe they didn't realize how close the men were to their village. Maybe they thought it was a trap. All the men could do was wait and pray that someone would have the courage to come and meet them.

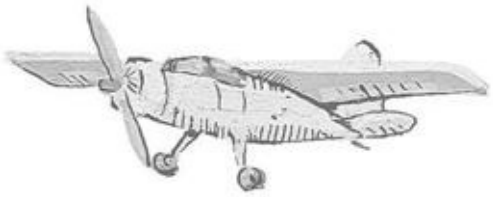
Meanwhile, there was plenty to do around the campsite. Nate, as usual, kept a diary. This time, though, his typewriter had been too heavy to fly in, so he wrote by hand in a small pocket notebook: "Except for forty-seven billion flying insects of every sort, this place is a little paradise. With the help of smoke and repellent we are all enjoying the experience immensely. A little while ago Jim pulled in a fifteen-inch catfish. It is roasting over the fire now."

Ed had the latest edition of *Time* magazine with him. He read bits and pieces aloud to them all. President and Mrs. Eisenhower had another grandchild. Five-year-old Prince Charles of England had given his mother a painting of herself for Christmas. The head of General Motors, Harlow Curtice, was *Time*'s Man of the Year. But it all seemed a million miles away from the tiny strip of sand clinging to the side of a river on the edge of the Amazon Basin.

Every hour or so, Jim Elliot waded out into the river with his Auca phrase book. From the middle of the river he would yell words and phrases into the jungle. "We like you." "Come and visit us." "We will not hurt you." "Come and eat with us."

Each time a bush rustled or a bird squawked, the men turned to see if they had visitors, but no one came.

Chapter 14



From the Silent Jungle

On Friday morning, Pete Fleming and Nate touched down on Palm Beach at 9 a.m., just in time to join Jim, Roger, and Ed for oatmeal, which was bubbling away in a pot over the fire while Roger mixed up powdered milk to pour on it.

Nate had already had one breakfast at Arajuno, but he was always ready to eat another. After breakfast, the men took their "stations" for the morning. Nate thought it was a strange sight as he cleaned up after breakfast. Three American men were standing a few hundred yards apart, knee-deep in a muddy river yelling phrases in the Auca language. To cover as much jungle as possible with their yelling, Ed stood at the top end of the beach, Roger was near the center of it, and Jim Elliot was as far downstream as was safe. "We like you. We want to be your friends. We want to come near you," rang through the jungle as the three of them yelled as loud as they could. They had yelled the phrases so often over the past few days that they'd almost forgotten why they were doing it.

As they took a breath between yells, from the silent jungle, leaves rustled. All eyes turned in the direction of the sound. Out from the thick vegetation stepped two Auca women, one who looked about sixteen years old, and the other who looked old enough to be her mother. They were both naked except for a few strands of string around their waists and huge balsa wood plugs in the lobes of their ears. The missionaries stood motionless. They were so excited some Aucas had finally arrived at their camp they almost forgot what to do next. Suddenly

they remembered. In unison the three men called, “Poinani” (you’re here), the Auca way of welcoming one another.

The two Auca women looked unsure of what to do next, so Jim Elliot waded cautiously across the river to them. He took both their hands and motioned them toward the campsite. They allowed themselves to be led. *So far so good,* Nate thought, as he slowly reached into his backpack and pulled out a camera.

Once the Auca women had crossed the river they seemed to relax. They squatted by the fire, and Ed offered them some lemonade. They drank it with enthusiasm. When they had finished drinking, a small, muscular Auca warrior appeared on the other side of the river. He waded across and joined the two women by the campfire. The missionaries eagerly welcomed him, and soon the three Aucas were taking turns talking as fast as they could. They didn’t appear to notice that the missionaries could understand only one word in a hundred, if they were lucky.

The question of what to do next was answered by “George,” the nickname the missionaries gave the Auca warrior. George trotted over to the airplane and began to climb in. His message was loud and clear: “Take me for a ride.”

Nate laughed. “If that’s what George wants, then that’s what George will get,” he said as he walked over to the plane. They found a spare shirt of Pete’s and buttoned it on George, since it would be a lot cooler in the air with no doors on the plane. George was quite a sight to see sitting in the front seat of the Piper.

As the plane lifted off Palm Beach, George started yelling, and he yelled all the way to the Auca settlement. When he saw his village from the air, he yelled even louder and then collapsed into laughter when he saw the look of shock on the faces of his relatives below. Nate could not begin to imagine what the Aucas on the ground were thinking. George, who had no idea of the danger of an airplane, tried to crawl out onto the wing strut so the Aucas below could see him. Nate was glad they’d put a shirt on him, as it provided something to grab onto to pull George back into the plane.

When they got back to Palm Beach, George had a long talk with the women, and there was a lot of giggling. “Delilah,” as they dubbed the younger woman, and the older Auca woman showed George what they’d been up to as well. They offered him a hamburger, complete with ketchup, which he ate gladly. Then they handed him Ed’s *Time* magazine. George stared at it for some time, though he had no idea of written language, photographs, or current events.

The men passed the rest of the afternoon watching the reaction of the Aucas as they presented them with gifts and showed them gadgets. Jim Elliot got out a yo-yo. Nate played his harmonica. Ed blew up several balloons, and Pete

showed them how to ping rubber bands. Roger presented them with a skein of red wool. George took control of it and quickly wound it around his body like a sash. Delilah made clicking noises and smiled at his new decoration.

Nate and Pete waited as long as they possibly could before they flew out to Arajuno for the night. On the way they wondered aloud what the three Aucas would tell their fellow Aucas about the day.

As the evening wore on, the Aucas seemed happy to stay with the remaining three men. Jim Elliot gestured for them to spend the night sleeping by the fire. The offer seemed to please the older woman. However, Delilah didn't seem happy. She got up quickly and walked off into the jungle. She was gone as silently as she had arrived. George yelled after her, but she didn't turn around. After a couple of minutes, he shrugged his shoulders, stood up, and followed her into the jungle.

Jim, Ed, and Roger waited for the older woman to do the same. Surely she wouldn't think it was safe for her to stay alone with three *cowodi* (outsiders). To their surprise, she did stay, and when darkness had completely engulfed the jungle, she curled up beside the fire and went to sleep.

As the three missionaries climbed the ironwood tree to bed, they were thrilled with how the day had gone. They had made friendly contact with the Aucas. Surely, they thought, the three Aucas would go back to their village and tell the others there was nothing to be afraid of, and the rest of the village would come to visit them on Palm Beach.

What the Operation Auca men had no way of knowing at the time was why George and Delilah had come to their campsite in the first place. George and Delilah had wanted to marry, but Delilah's family did not like George and would not give them permission to marry. This had upset Delilah, who had told her family she would run away to the cowodi (outsiders) if they didn't change their minds about the wedding. Instead, her family laughed at her, so in a rage she had set off through the jungle. George followed her, but in Auca culture it is a very bad thing for an unmarried man and woman to be alone together, so the older woman had followed them to be their chaperone. They had all arrived at Palm Beach together, just as Delilah's desire to run away had petered out. They went ahead with a visit anyway. And they had an interesting time with the cowodi, who turned out to be a strange bunch but not dangerous. However, when first Delilah and then George left the campsite, the older woman had had enough of chasing after them. So she stayed on the beach and got a good night's sleep. In the morning, this created a problem for George, because he and Delilah had spent the night alone together. He had to think of a good excuse quickly. And he did. He decided to tell a lie: a lie that would change the course of countless lives.

The next morning when Jim, Roger, and Ed climbed down from their tree house, the embers of the fire where the older woman had slept were still warm. They realized she must have stayed all night and fed the fire. But now she was nowhere to be seen.

All day Saturday, the men waited for something to happen. Nate estimated it would take George and Delilah about six hours to walk back to the Auca village, if that was where they were headed. It would take them an hour or two to explain to the other Aucas what had happened when they visited the cowodi, and then another six hours for a larger group to trek back to Palm Beach. But they did not come, and by three in the afternoon, Nate felt it was time for him and Pete to head back to Arajuno. First, though, he gathered up all the film from the cameras and letters the men had written to their wives. Whatever happened, they wanted the outside world to have a record of what they had done on Palm Beach.

As they flew back, Nate and Pete couldn't help but be a little disappointed. Why hadn't the Aucas come back? After a good night's sleep, Nate felt a lot more hopeful. Something told him today was going to be a special day.

On the way back to Palm Beach, Nate circled the Auca settlement to see whether there was any unusual activity going on. But there wasn't even any of the usual activity. The place seemed deserted. It was a great sign. Nate and Pete grinned at each other. Maybe the whole village was on its way down to the beach to meet them!

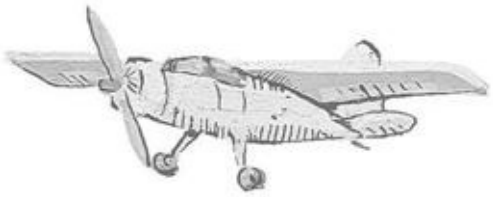
Nate slowed the plane to about sixty-five miles per hour and skimmed along close above the thick vegetation. It was impossible to spot the Aucas through the dense canopy of trees, but Nate had to try. Pete strained his eyes trying to peer through the treetops. Then, amazingly, they saw them! Wading across a stream ahead were ten Aucas headed toward Palm Beach. Today really was the day when they would meet the whole Auca village!

As the two men flew on to Palm Beach, Nate checked his watch. It was 12:30 p.m., time to call Marj on the radio and let her know how things were going. How excited she would be to know things were finally moving ahead. Nate told her they were expecting an Auca visit in the early afternoon and that he would report in with her at 4:30, though he knew she wouldn't leave the radio room all afternoon, just in case they needed help.

As the Piper Cruiser's wheels touched down on the sand of Palm Beach, Nate yelled to the others. "This is it, guys! They're on their way."

The men all let out a whoop of excitement. Their faith and patience were finally about to be rewarded.

Chapter 15



The Radio Remained Silent

The ten Aucas creeping silently through the jungle had been up all night, carving and sharpening new nine-foot spears. *What else could they do?* they had asked themselves as they worked. An enemy had entered their territory, an enemy who had already attacked three of their people. Nankiwi had told them so. As he ran his fingers over the red wool wound around his waist, Nankiwi had told them how they had fled in panic. He and Gimari had run in the same direction, and Mintaka, who had already crossed the river, ran in another direction. Thus, the three of them had become separated, and Nankiwi and Gimari had been forced to spend the night together. But as Nankiwi explained, that point wasn't important. What was important was that a group of dangerous cowodi had invaded their territory intent on harming them just like all the other cowodi had done in the past.

This was bad news. The Waorani (the name the Aucas called themselves) had hoped the cowodi in the yellow wood-bee (airplane) might be friendly. After all, the wood-bee that buzzed over the village had dropped many ax heads, machetes, and iron pots. This was not the work of an enemy, or was it? Only a very clever enemy would pretend to be friendly and then attack. These cowodi must be extra clever!

After Nankiwi had told them all about how the cowodi had attacked them, Gikita, the old man of the village, began to recall all the awful things other

cowodi had done to them throughout the years.

Through the night, Gikita told them story after story about the treacherous cowodi. He told of cowodi with guns that killed a person with a cloud of smoke, of cowodi who had stolen their children to work on haciendas, cowodi who had killed the fish and animals, and cowodi who had cleared away huge patches of the jungle. With each new story, hatred of the cowodi grew, and the solution became more clear. The cowodi on the banks of the Curaray River were surely no different from any other cowodi, and they would have to be killed.

Gikita's stories had made them all so angry at the cowodi they had forgotten to ask Nankiwi who had given him the red wool he now wore around his body as a sash or why, if the cowodi were so dangerous, had they taken him in their wood-bee and brought him back? They were questions that seemed unimportant to ask. They had already decided what to do. They would follow the old ways and kill the intruders.

The attack party had set out through the jungle with their spears. Now the sound of water rushing over stones told them they were near the Curaray. The five young men and their leader peered out from the leaves. They were on the same side of the river as the missionaries. They could see the yellow wood-bee standing at the end of the beach. They counted the cowodi; there were five of them. The cowodi were big men, and they surely had guns. The young warriors crept back from the edge of the river about a hundred yards and began to argue. They told Gikita it wasn't possible to kill five big strong cowodi who had guns. They wanted to watch the cowodi for a while. Gikita argued with them. Weren't they strong enough to kill the cowodi and protect their families and territory? Didn't they know the cowodi would kill all the Waorani if they didn't kill them first? Hadn't they listened to Nankiwi? The young men hung their heads in shame. They must kill or be killed. Now was not the time to be a coward.

Gikita announced the plan of attack. Three of the women in the party would enter the river from the far side to distract the cowodi. While their attention was distracted, Gikita would attack. He would spear each of the men himself, and the young warriors would then finish them off. They all agreed with his plan.

The women waded into the river and approached the beach from the opposite bank. Jim Elliot and Pete Fleming waded into the river to greet them, just as they had done three days before when the other three visitors had arrived.

At the same time, Gikita crept around through the jungle behind Nate, Roger Youderian, and Ed McCully. As he did so, he slipped on a wet log and fell. His spears clattered to the ground. All three men turned to see what the noise was. The four youngest attackers started to run away. They had lost the element of surprise, the most important thing in any successful attack. Still,

Gikita had to show the young warriors how to act strong. With a warlike yell to the younger warriors to follow him, Gikita charged out onto the beach to begin the attack. His first target was the wood-bee pilot. He drew back his powerful right arm and hurled his first spear. It hit its mark. Nate fell onto the sand, his arm crashing against a rock, shattering the glass of his wristwatch. The hands on the watch stuck at 3:10.

Ed ran over to help Nate, and as he did so, he too felt the painful impact of a spear in his back. Roger, standing slightly back from the scene, watched in horror. As he turned his head away, he saw another Auca warrior sprinting across the beach towards Jim and Pete, who were crossing the river. With a single action, Nampa thrust his spear into Jim Elliot.

At the same time, Pete, who had been standing beside Jim, raced over to a log, which he climbed on and began to yell in the Auca language as best he could, “We just came to meet you. We aren’t going to hurt you. Why are you killing us?” His question was answered with a wild cry as a nine-foot spear pierced his body.

At that moment, Roger, a veteran World War II paratrooper, knew what he had to do: He had to get to the radio. He sprinted to the plane and climbed partway into the front seat. He grabbed for the radio microphone that hung on the instrument panel. Marj would be standing by, if he could just get through to her. But he couldn’t. Nimonga crept up behind him. He was puzzled by this cowodi. What was he doing? Nimonga watched as the cowodi reached down and picked up a black fruit with a vine tied to it. Nimonga couldn’t understand why a man who was about to die would reach for something to eat. Still, there was no door on the plane, and this man was an easy target. The black radio microphone dangled uselessly as Roger fell from the door of the plane and landed with a heavy thud on the wet sand.

Later, as the Waorani dragged the five bodies into the river, they talked among themselves. The cowodi had guns. In fact, the gun that belonged to the man speared in the river had gone off during the struggle and grazed one of the women hiding in the jungle. Why hadn’t they used their guns to defend themselves? They discussed this all the way back to the village, but they had no answer.

Back at Shell Mera, it was 4:30 p.m. Marj Saint strained to hear even the faintest crackle of a message on the radio, but there was nothing. She checked her watch. She told herself it may be a few minutes fast, though she knew it wasn’t. Nate was never late for a call in, but these were special circumstances. He could be in the middle of a conversation with a group of Aucas. The thought comforted Marj. She busied herself, sitting Phil in his highchair for an after-nap

snack. As she peeled him a banana, she listened closely to the radio. Five minutes passed, then ten. Marj told herself to keep calm. The radio may not be working. She would just have to be patient.

Barbara Youderian called in from Macuma, and Betty Elliot from Shandia. Both wanted to know whether Marj had heard anything. She hadn't. Their conversations were short; they had to keep the radio frequency open for Nate to call in.

Dusk fell. Marj made macaroni soup for the children and waited for the news that the Piper Cruiser had shown up at Arajuno. But the radio remained silent. In her heart, Marj knew it was too much to believe that the radio was dead *and* that Nate had willingly stayed the night at Palm Beach with the plane. Something was terribly wrong.

Marj tossed and turned in bed that night. She thought of every possible reason why Nate had not called or why he had not flown the plane out. But nothing made any sense. Something must have happened to the men. She hoped that whatever the problem was, the men were safe. Maybe they were making their way out on foot. She refused to let herself think the worst.

At first light on Monday morning, Johnny Keenan climbed into the Piper Pacer. He hadn't slept much, either. He pulled a piece of paper from his pocket and read it. He didn't need to; he'd read it a dozen or more times already this morning. It was the neatly written coordinates and instructions on how to find Palm Beach from the air. Nate had left it with Johnny just in case he needed to look for the men.

Now Johnny was almost afraid to look for them. What would he find? He would know soon enough. As he buzzed over Palm Beach, the Piper Cruiser he'd flown himself so many times before lay on the beach. It had been completely stripped of all its outer fabric covering. A chill ran down Johnny's spine. Where were Nate and the others? Johnny peered down on the muddy water, but he could see no sign of the men. With a feeling of dread, he turned the knob on the radio. "Come in, Marj," he spoke into the microphone.

Marj was grateful to have some news. At least it explained why Nate hadn't flown out. But what should she and Johnny do now? Perhaps the men were injured out in the jungle or were fleeing from the Aucas, who had attacked the plane. She had to think of a way to get help, but how?

Amazingly, almost unbelievably, there was a knock at the door. Marj opened it, and there stood Larry Montgomery, a pilot for Wycliffe Bible Translators. Larry greeted Marj and explained that he'd been passing through Quito when he had the strangest feeling he should get on the bus and make the thirteen-hour trip to Shell Mera. He apologized for not letting Marj know he was

coming ahead of time. Quietly, she asked Larry to come in and sit down; she had something to tell him. For the first time, the story of Operation Auca tumbled out to someone not directly involved in it. Larry listened carefully, and when Marj was finished, he took charge. As it turned out, his friend General Harrison was in charge of the U.S. military for the whole Caribbean region. General Harrison was a Christian, and if Larry could get hold of him by shortwave radio, he was sure the general would help. Marj showed Larry into the radio room, and Larry sent out a message. The general's aide received it, and within half an hour, the general was on the line.

General Harrison called Air Force Major Nurnberg in Panama and ordered him to head up a military rescue team. By lunchtime, the rescue team was on its way from Panama to Shell Mera.

As the news of the unfolding events in Ecuador hit the airwaves, key people leaped into action, as if they had all rehearsed their parts many times. Shell Mera was about to be invaded.

In Washington, D.C., famous *Life* magazine photographer Cornell Capa slung his camera bag over his shoulder and headed for Washington National Airport.

In Quito, *Time* magazine foreign correspondent Jerry Hannifin, who had interviewed Nate for a story on jungle pilots only weeks before, jumped into his jeep and roared southward toward the Oriente.

In New York, two officers from Christian Missions in Many Lands, the Plymouth Brethren mission agency that Jim Elliot, Pete Fleming, and Ed McCully worked with, booked emergency flights to Quito.

In Los Angeles, MAF president Grady Parrot threw a few clothes into a suitcase and rushed to Ecuador to help find his friend Nate Saint.

Captain Sam Saint was called out from a conference meeting to take an urgent phone call. He never even returned to the meeting to collect his papers. Instead he went straight to the airport.

From all over the world, people wanted to know what had happened to the men who had gone off to meet a group of Stone Age people. What was being done to find them, and had anyone yet found any clues as to their fate?

Abe Van Der Puy, from HCJB in Quito, came down to Shell Mera. When he arrived, the MAF house was so crowded he pushed a piano stool into a corner, and it became his office. From there he wrote all the press releases and news bulletins that went out around the world updating the search.

Johnny Keenan flew out and fetched Marilou McCully, Betty Elliot, Olive Fleming, Barbara Youderian, and Rachel Saint. By Tuesday, every room in Shell Merita was full, and the Keenans and families from the Berean Bible Institute

were taking the overflow.

Kathy Saint helped her mother make up the beds. As they moved from room to room, Kathy reminded herself that it was her seventh birthday, but somehow it didn't feel like it. Her daddy had been gone for two days now, and she was old enough to ask questions her mother couldn't answer.

On Wednesday January 11, more bad news arrived. Johnny Keenan had made another pass over Palm Beach. This time he'd seen two bodies from the air. They were in the water, and both were wearing khaki pants and white tee shirts. Any of the men in the group could have been wearing those clothes, so he couldn't tell whose bodies they were.

Back at the MAF house, Kathy and Steve Saint were glued to the window, watching the startling scenes. Three large military planes flew in, and a dismantled helicopter was wheeled out of one of them. Steve stared in fascination as the small helicopter was put back together. He would have loved to have asked his father to explain exactly what they were doing, and Nate would have loved to have told him, but it was not to be.

A search party was organized, and Frank Drown, who worked with Roger and Barbara Youderian, was asked to lead it. He had worked in the Oriente for twelve years, and he knew better than anyone what they were up against making it overland to Palm Beach. Roger and Nate were two of his closest friends. Dr. Art Johnston from the HCJB mission volunteered to go on the search party, as did several other missionaries in the area. They set out on Thursday morning, January 12, accompanied by thirteen Ecuadoran soldiers.

Marj spent her day tirelessly logging radio calls from military planes flying over Palm Beach and small planes from Quito flying in more helpers. Somewhere in the back of her mind, she also managed to plan dinner for the thirty or so people who were in the house by now.

Friday, January 13, 1956, was a day the men in the search party would never forget. They had spent the first night camped outside Auca territory. At dawn, they broke camp and headed into dangerous territory. They poled dugout canoes down the shallow, winding Curaray River.

About mid-morning, they met a group of Quichua Indians making their way upstream. This was surprising to Frank Drown, because they were coming from deep in the heart of their dreaded enemy's territory. As Frank talked with them, he learned why they were in Auca territory. The Quichua Indians were Christians from the village across the river at Ed McCully's mission station at Arajuno. Out of concern for their missionary, they had put together their own search party to go after him. But their news was not good. They had found Ed's body downstream from the airplane. One of the Quichuas had Ed's watch with him to

give to Marilou. The Quichuas had taken off one of Ed's shoes and carried it back upstream and left it beside the remains of the airplane.

The search team poled on downstream, keeping a sharp, grim watch for any movement or sound that might be the Auca killers.

Finally, as the skies darkened with rain, the search party arrived at Palm Beach. The U.S. military helicopter brought in from Panama swooped down near them, as planned. It headed downstream a few yards and hovered. The men knew they were showing them where the first body was. They found the body caught in a tree branch and dragged it upstream. The helicopter moved on. Within an hour, the search party had recovered the bodies of four men. The bodies had been in the water too long and were now unrecognizable. Watches and wedding rings told the members of the search party who they were: Nate Saint, Jim Elliot, Roger Youderian, and Pete Fleming. But Ed McCully's body was nowhere to be found. The river must have washed it away. However, the search party did find the shoe beside the airplane, where the Quichuas said they had left it. There was no doubt it was Ed's; he wore size 13 1/2 shoes. It also confirmed that the Quichuas had indeed seen Ed's body farther downstream, where it had been carried by the current. Now, at least Marilou McCully would be spared having to wonder whether somehow Ed had escaped and lay injured in the jungle. There was no doubt; all five men were dead.

Frank Drown climbed the ironwood tree to investigate the tree house, hoping to find some clues as to what had happened to provoke the horrible scene below. But there were none to be found.

The skies darkened as a fierce storm approached. The nervous search party worked quickly to dig a common grave under the ironwood tree. The thirteen Ecuadoran soldiers stood guard on the perimeter of Palm Beach. They faced the jungle, their fingers resting on the triggers of their guns, watching for the slightest movement of the leaves.

When the rain began to fall heavily, the search party pulled sheets of aluminum from the roof of the tree house and balanced them over their heads for shelter. There was a huge crack of thunder just as the bodies were being lowered into the common grave. Frank Drown said aloud a short prayer. He stood beside the grave, brokenhearted at the death of five faithful friends. He had no idea that one day he would be the only person able to give his grandchildren an eyewitness account of the funeral of their other grandfather.

As soon as the men were buried, the search team had its own safety to be concerned about. Carefully, alert to the crack of even a twig, the men made their way, mile by mile, out of Auca territory. Two and a half days later, they were back at Shell Mera, where six women waited to hear the final news. Five of the

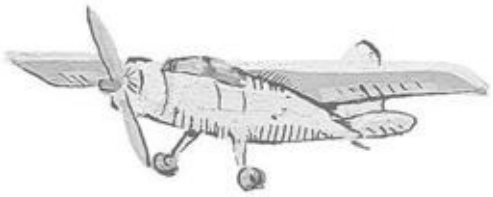
women wondered whether they were wives or widows. The sixth, Rachel Saint, wondered if she had lost the little brother she had helped to raise. Major Nurnberg, who had first spotted the bodies from the helicopter before landing on Palm Beach, tried to tell the women what he'd seen as gently as possible. But there was no easy way to say it; all of the men were dead. The wives were now widows, and their nine children, one of them still unborn, were fatherless.

That night, the people who knew and loved Nate Saint, Jim Elliot, Ed McCully, Roger Youderian, and Pete Fleming gathered in the living room of Shell Merita. Mt. Sangay, clearly visible in the distance, glowed red. Marilou McCully, who was ready to give birth within days, sat at the piano and began to play the melody to the hymn the men had sung with such high hopes the morning they had left for Palm Beach. Betty Elliot sang the words:

We rest on Thee, our Shield and our Defender,
We go not forth alone against the foe.
Strong in Thy strength, safe in Thy keeping tender,
We rest in the Thee, and in Thy name we go.

Frank Drown opened his well-worn Bible and read the verse: "Be ye faithful until death, and I will give you a crown of life."

Chapter 16



The Legacy

While Nate was deeply missed by those who knew him, and especially by Marj and the children, his death was not the end of the Auca story or of the work of MAF in the Oriente.

Marj stayed on at Shell Mera for six months after Nate's death. She faithfully manned the radio for Johnny Keenan as he continued to serve the missionaries working in the jungle. At the end of six months, Hobey Lowrance and his family arrived as permanent MAF replacements for Nate and Marj.

Marj moved from Shell Mera up to Quito, where she took over running the HCJB guest house, the same guest house she had stayed in when she first arrived in Ecuador pregnant with Kathy.

Back in Shell Mera, Johnny Keenan and Hobey Lowrance continued to fly over the Auca village near the Curaray River. They carried on using Nate's bucket drop system to drop gifts to the villagers. Oddly enough, the Aucas still accepted the gifts, and even returned gifts of their own. Sometimes as he flew over their territory, Johnny would catch a glimpse of bright yellow strips of fabric decorating rooftops. The fabric was from Nate's Piper Cruiser.

Meanwhile, on Palm Beach, the remains of the Piper Cruiser sank into the mud beside the Curaray River and was soon completely covered.

Rachel Saint continued her work learning the Auca language from Dayuma, who, in the process, became the first Auca Christian. Together, Dayuma and

Rachel prayed that God would open up a way for the two of them to bring the gospel message to the rest of Dayuma's people.

In 1958, two years after the deaths at Palm Beach, two Auca women, Mankamu and Mintaka (the older woman who had come with George and Delilah to visit the missionaries at Palm Beach), walked out of the jungle. With hand gestures, they made the Quichua Indians understand they wanted to make contact with white people. The Quichuas took them to Elisabeth Elliot, who was still a missionary in the area.

Eventually Mankamu and Mintaka invited Rachel Saint and Elisabeth Elliot and Dayuma to return with them to their village and live. Rachel and Elisabeth and Dayuma accepted the invitation and were welcomed into the tribe. Of course, there were those members of the tribe who were suspicious of the two women. They wondered why no one had ever tried to avenge the deaths of the five men. Perhaps the two women had come to spy on them and tell other cowodi where to find them and kill them. Dayuma, Rachel, and Elisabeth tried to calm their fears. They told them they had come in peace and that there was another way besides killing to deal with what had happened at Palm Beach. Slowly, as the three women lived among the Auca, the fog of generations of hatred and killing began to lift, and many in the tribe came to understand there would be no revenge for the killings. A new concept, one which they had no word for in their language, began to take root in their hearts. That concept was forgiveness.

In 1961, Rachel and Elisabeth watched as the first group of Waorani (Auca) Christians was baptized by Dr. Ev. Fuller from the mission hospital at Shell Mera. Shortly afterwards, Elisabeth Elliot returned to live in the United States. Rachel remained in Ecuador and lived among the Waorani for the rest of her life. She died in 1994. Thirty-eight years after her brother had been buried in Auca soil, Rachel, too, was buried there.

Forty-three years had passed since Nate Saint first pointed out Auca territory to Rachel and said, "Sis, those are your people." How right he had been. He never dreamed, however, that it would be his own death and the deaths of the other four men on Palm Beach that would help the Auca to understand the meaning of forgiveness and set the stage for his sister to introduce the greatest story of forgiveness ever told.

The legacy of the two Saint siblings, buried not far from each other in Auca territory, is that today approximately one out of ten Aucas is a Christian. And those believers are sharing a message with the rest of their tribe. It is the same message that Nate's death and Rachel's life among them so clearly illustrated. It is God's message of hope, love, and forgiveness.

Epilogue

In 1967, Marj Saint married Abe Van Der Puy, who had become the head of HBCJ in Quito. Abe's first wife died of cancer. Between the two of them, they have six children.

In 1970, Kathy Saint married Ross Drown, the son of Frank Drown, Nate's good friend who led the expedition to recover and bury the bodies of the five men at Palm Beach. And so it is that Frank and Nate share the same grandchildren, two boys, Brent and Darron, who are both graduates of the Air Force Academy. Flying seems to run in the family!

In 1994, a Waorani (Auca) man found a strange metal object in the sand beside the Curaray River. It turned out to be the remains of Nate's Piper Cruiser airplane, brought to the surface by flood waters after thirty-eight years of being buried. Steve Saint, also a pilot, organized a team to recover the remains, which now stand at MAF's headquarters in Redlands, California, as a silent witness to early missionary aviation.

That same year, Steve Saint helped the Waorani bury his Aunt Rachel. After the funeral, Waorani Christians asked him to come and take Rachel's place. At first the idea seemed laughable. Steve had a wife, four teenage children, and a business to run in Florida. But as he prayed, he stopped laughing and started packing. God had called him, like He had called his parents and his aunt before him, to the Ecuadoran jungle.

In 1995, Steve, his wife Ginny, and their four children moved to Ecuador to live among the Waorani. Together they are looking for ways to enable the Waorani to take responsibility for the spiritual and physical needs of the tribe so they can protect their territory, identity, and way of life. With Steve's help and encouragement, they have carved a tribal center from the virgin jungle and built an airstrip, a medical and dental clinic, and a school. The growing Waorani church is playing an important role in the development of their tribe. Members of the church are building a small airplane, which they will use to transport patients and medicine to and from the clinic and take church elders to share the gospel message in those Waorani villages that have not yet heard it. Nate Saint would have been pleased.

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About the Authors

Janet and Geoff Benge are a husband and wife writing team with more than twenty years of writing experience. Janet is a former elementary school teacher. Geoff holds a degree in history. Originally from New Zealand, the Benges spent ten years serving with Youth With A Mission. They have two daughters, Laura and Shannon, and an adopted son, Lito. They make their home in the Orlando, Florida, area.

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