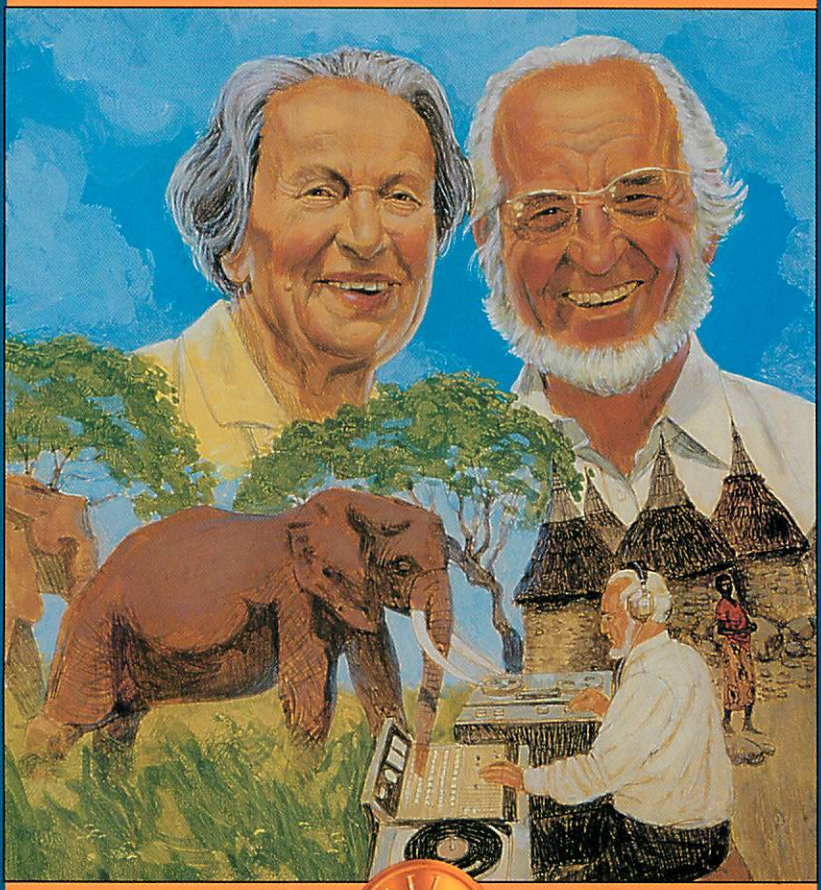
HALL OF FAITH SERIES

# Africa Adopted Us

*The story of Aimé and Madeleine Cosendai*

JAMES L. FLY



HALL OF FAITH

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# Africa Adopted Us

JAMES L. FLY



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# Dedication

To my editorial assistant and friend, Shirley B. Engel. I couldn't have written the book without her. She exemplifies the spirit of a true missionary because she's always dependable and willing to help with cheerfulness.

Edited by Randy Maxwell
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## Chapter 1
# The Sign of the Blue Cross

One, two. Left, right. The eleven-year-old boy pulled methodically at the engorged teats of the brown-and-white Swiss dairy cow. At first the warm ivory liquid streamed into the metal bucket with a pinging sound that soon became muffled as the bucket filled and the milk began to foam.

Outside the barn, a rooster crowed. The cow, impatient at standing so long in the milking stall, shook her neck, clanging the cowbell. Mooing loudly, she swished her tail and stamped her right rear leg, nearly knocking over the milk bucket.

"Hold it, now," cooed Aimé, stroking the cow's flank with one hand and steadying the bucket with the other. Aimé panicked at the thought of spilling a whole bucket of milk! He knew he must sell it later that morning at the creamery in Corcelles, the little village two miles below his parents' farm. Papa would understand and not say anything, but Aimé hated to let him down.

It was not easy being a Swiss farmer in 1925. Europe still reeled from the ravages of World War I. Though Switzerland had escaped the bombs and mustard gas that had destroyed the flower of French and German youth, the country still felt the effects of the depressed postwar economies of her battered neighbors.

Aimé silently prayed that the cow would stay still. Relief flooded over him when she began to chew her cud and let him finish milking. As if on cue, a gray cat jumped down from the hayloft with an insistent meow and padded up to the milkstool. She placed a paw on Aimé's knee.

"Hungry as usual, huh, you beggar? But I guess you need milk to feed your kittens. Just a minute and I'll pour you a little dish."

Aimé rubbed his hand over the mother cat's head. He liked to feel the vibration of her contented purring against his palm. The cat turned her head upward and licked the tips of his fingers with a rough tongue that felt like sandpaper.

"Hey, that tickles!" yelled Aimé.

Pulling the milk bucket out from under the cow, Aimé stood up and stretched his cramped leg muscles. Seven cows is enough for one morning, he thought to himself. Then he sloshed a little milk into a heavy stoneware dish. The cat hunched down on her belly and began lapping up the milk, pausing every now and then to daintily shake tiny drops off her whiskers.

Aimé laughed at the hungry cat.

"I'm just as hungry as you are, but I have to work for *my* food," he said in a teasing voice. Aimé snuffed out the kerosene lantern that he had lighted earlier that morning in the chilly darkness. Shafts of sunlight were streaming into the barn now, turning the network of ancient, dusty rafters into gold. The cow quietly left the milking stall and plodded out to the pasture.

Aimé closed the gate behind the cow and walked outside. Papa was splitting logs at the woodpile.

"*Bonjour,* Papa. I'm done milking," he said.

Papa Cosendai wiped beads of sweat from his forehead, then swung his sharp ax downward, sticking it into the chopping block, where it quivered for a moment.

Papa looked at Aimé with his bright blue eyes, eyes that projected an honesty that could not be bribed, a steadiness that would never waver from principle.

"That's good, Son. Did you feed the hogs?"

"Yes, Papa."

"And how about the chickens?"

"I did that too, Papa."

"Good boy," Papa said, rolling down the sleeves of his cotton workshirt. "If you're as hungry as I am, you could eat a horse."

"But not Mizra, Papa."

"No, not Mizra, Aimé," Papa said with a laugh that crinkled the corners of his eyes. He tousled Aimé's hair and put his arm around his shoulder. Mizra, a mare with two colts, was Aimé's favorite horse on the farm, and he loved to ride her on Sundays.

Aimé liked it when Papa teased and touched him. It made him feel so special. His name, Aimé, meant "beloved" in French, and that's just the way he felt. Both Papa and Mama loved each other very much, and the love they expressed for one another flowed out to their three children, their neighbors, friends, and relatives.

Aimé shivered with excitement as he and Papa walked together toward the farmhouse. Tomorrow, August 1, was going to be a very special day—Swiss National Day. Down in Corcelles, the villagers would dance and drink beer all day and then at night they would march around a large bonfire and sing the "Swiss Psalm," the national anthem.

Aimé knew his parents wouldn't drink and dance during the festival, for they were strict Protestants, members of the National Protestant Church. They also belonged to the Blue Cross Society, a temperance organization in Switzerland. Blue Cross members pledged that they would never drink alcohol and that they would help others who suffered with a drinking problem.

They carved a blue cross into the green shutters of their windows, and everyone who saw the blue crosses knew they would find no bottles of wine stored in the cellars of those houses.

Many times as they sat around the table Papa told about how his father used to get drunk and whip him and his brothers and sisters. Papa came to hate the smell of liquor on his father's breath, because he knew he would get a beating that night.

"Don't ever drink, Aimé. Alcohol makes you crazy," Papa had said to him many times.

Papa felt so sorry for alcoholics that he had invited a blind alcoholic to stay in their home. Louis became a member of the family and lived with them till the day he died.

Papa and Mama were just as concerned for the young people in their area.

"When you take something bad away, you must replace it with something good," Papa always told Aimé.

Tomorrow, the Cosendais had invited forty young people to come to their farm for a day of singing and playing games. There would be no tall glasses filled with golden beer capped by white froth. Just pure mountain water and fruit juice plus tables loaded with delicious produce harvested from the Cosendai's garden.

Aimé and Papa stopped at the water pump to wash their hands before going in to breakfast. They gazed across the valley to the west where the Jura Mountains marched across the horizon in a ragged blue column. On a clear day like today, Aimé knew, you could climb the ridge behind the farm and see Lake Neuchâtel sparkling in the sun.

Diane, the Cosendai's black-and-tan sheep dog, bounded up to them, her bushy tail wagging. Aimé reached down to scratch her ears, and she licked his hand.

"It is a wonderful thing to be Swiss, to be proud of our land

and to be free," Papa said, pumping the icy-cold water onto his large, rough hands. "It is even more important for us to be true Christians, Aimé. To be kind to others, to live what we believe."

Aimé listened with reverence and said nothing. Although the sun shone warm, he could feel goosebumps ripple up and down his bare brown arms.

From the open kitchen window of their house, Mama's voice rose in a beautiful melody that harmonized with the songs of the birds perched in the trees. Mama is always singing and smiling, thought Aimé. No wonder Papa loves her so much! Mama Cosendai's maiden name was Gentil, which in French means "nice." And that's just what she was.

As he and Papa stepped inside, the aroma of freshly baked bread tantalized Aimé's nose. Mama was stirring a pot of wheat cereal bubbling on the black cast-iron wood-burning stove. She smiled at Aimé, her plump cheeks glowing with happiness.

Wiping her hands on her apron, she came over and embraced him, then kissed him on his right cheek, his left cheek, and once more on his right cheek.

"*Bonjour,* Aimé. Are you excited about tomorrow?" she said.

"You know I am, Mama!" he exclaimed.

"Well, sit down for breakfast then. We've got a lot of work to do today to get ready for our guests, and we're all going to need the energy to do it," Mama replied, turning back to the stove with a laugh and resuming her singing.

Soon they were all sitting at the table, Mama, Papa, Aimé, his younger brother, Paul, and younger sister, Adrienne. Then there was Louis, the blind alcoholic who stayed in their home.

Mama shook her finger at Louis and frowned as if he could see her. "Now, Louis, if you go to Corcelles for the festival tomorrow, you won't drink, will you?"

Louis shifted uncomfortably in his chair and stammered, "I . . . I promise, Madame. Not a drop of beer will touch my lips."

Aimé looked at Paul and Adrienne. All three children had to muffle snickers with their hands. They knew he probably wouldn't keep his promise.

Papa glared at them so sternly they swallowed their giggles.

"Just do your best to stay out of trouble, Louis," he said. "You know you're always welcome here. We'll pick you up tomorrow night."

"*Merci, Monsieur,*" Louis replied, flashing a toothless grin

Papa read the Bible and prayed before eating. Then he picked up his knife and fork and smiled. "*Bon appetit,*" he said. And

everyone, including Louis, responded with, "*Bon appetit,*" the French way of saying, "Enjoy your meal."

Aimé gulped down his breakfast of bread, wheat cereal, and hot milk with honey stirred in. Soon he was back out at the barn, pouring milk into the metal milk backpack he would wear to Corcelles. Every morning he rode there with the heavy canister strapped to his back. Today his spirits soared like an eagle as he mounted his bicycle and pedaled down to Corcelles.

Aimé loved the feel of the breeze blowing in his hair. Wildflowers bloomed in the meadows, and bees buzzed lazily from blossom to blossom, gathering nectar. He passed a farmer and his wife driving to town in their horse-drawn buggy. They waved at him and smiled, and he waved back. In the distance he heard the church bell chiming eight o'clock.

"I've got to hurry. There's so much to do at home today," he said to himself.

Aimé coasted into Corcelles. The tall steeple of the church he and his family attended rose above the red-tiled roofs of the cement houses lining the narrow, winding streets. Cut wood was stacked neatly in front of each house. Pots of red geraniums rested on the windowsills, framed by green shutters. A huge Swiss flag, with its white cross emblazoned in the middle of a red background hung proudly from a line above the road. Men were setting up tables and chairs in the square, preparing for the feast and dance tomorrow. Two men with red faces and bulging muscles were unloading huge kegs of beer from a wagon. Aimé remembered the sign of the blue cross and resolved never to drink beer, no matter how Swiss it might seem. He wished Louis would listen to Mama, even though Louis was very funny when he was drunk.

On his way back home to "Maupas," the name of his parents' farm, he had to pass the Nicolier farmhouse. Aimé always dreaded the return trip because if the Nicolier brothers saw him they would tease him. Sure enough there was August, the biggest and meanest of the Nicolier brothers, leaning against a tree and looking for trouble.

"Hey, Blue Cross boy. You'd better drink some beer tomorrow if you want to be patriotic. Or maybe Papa and Mama won't let you." August spat out the words with a sneer that made Aimé tremble inside. He continued pedaling and ignored him.

"Come back here, Blue Cross boy. You and your family think you're better than we are, don't you?"

Aimé looked back over his shoulder just in time to see August pick up a dirt clod. He pedaled furiously and ducked just as the

clod whizzed over his head, August's mocking laughter ringing in his ears.

Aimé boiled with rage. "If I were bigger, I'd punch August in the nose. He deserves it," he blurted out. But he knew it was no use talking to Papa and Mama about the Nicolier brothers. They'd just say August and his two brothers had a hard family life and needed to be treated with kindness. Jesus said to love your enemies, didn't He? That was awfully hard to do sometimes, Aimé brooded.

Reaching home safely, he worked all day with Papa, while Mama cleaned the house and prepared the food. Small as they were, Adrienne and Paul did as much as they could to help too.

Next morning young people from around the area arrived at the farm. Some rode bicycles, some rode horses, and others came on foot. Aimé felt so proud of Papa and Mama as they led the young people in songs and games. He stuffed himself with plate after plate of delicious food. Then, all too soon, the special day was over, and as the sun set over the Jura Mountains, the Cosendai family was alone again.

Later that month, Aimé and his family attended another social gathering nearby. Journeying by horsecart, they arrived at a farmer's orchard for a special meeting of the Swiss Mission to South Africa. The family sat on a blanket under an apple tree and listened, fascinated as a black pastor from Basutoland talked about the need for missionaries to go to Africa. He was the first black man Aimé had ever seen.

Basutoland, Aimé learned, was a British colony called the "Switzerland of Southern Africa" where the strong, independent Basuto people raised cattle and produce.

"Young boys, young girls, I appeal to you to give your lives in service to Jesus Christ," the pastor said. "My people need to learn about the gospel, and you can help them. You can come and tell them about Jesus. You can show them a better way to live than trusting in witchcraft."

The words of the black pastor burned themselves into his soul. Aimé couldn't explain the feeling that swept over him. Did the Lord want him to leave Papa's farm someday and go as a missionary to Africa?

After the service, Aimé went up with Papa and Mama and shook the pastor's hand. Little did he dream that one day he would shake the hands of hundreds and thousands of African men, women, and children as a Seventh-day Adventist missionary to the Cameroons.

## Chapter 2
# The Prophet's Room

Aimé knew that Papa Cosendai wanted him and Paul to work with him on the farm when they graduated from school. When Papa was no longer able to farm, he would give the boys the farm for themselves and their future families. This was the tradition among Swiss farmers, and like most Swiss men, Papa Cosendai was a man who planned well ahead.

A stone's throw away from the Cosendai farmhouse lived an older farmer and his wife. One day he announced to Papa, "Henri, my wife and I are getting too old to stay here and farm. We are going to sell our house and move to Lausanne, or perhaps Geneva."

Papa rubbed his chin with his hand as he thought carefully. He looked at his older neighbor with an inquisitive gaze.

"I might be interested in buying if the price is right," he said.

"Come on in for a cup of coffee and we'll discuss it," the neighbor replied. Soon, the second house was added to Maupas. Since the Cosendai family was comfortable in their first home for the time being, they rented out the main floor of the other house to tenants. Arriving home from school one day, Aimé found Papa hard at work building an enclosed staircase up to the roof of the new house. Papa had learned carpentry and masonry as a boy, and he was a good builder.

Curious, Aimé leaned his bicycle against the barn and ran over to where Papa was working.

"What are you building, Papa?"

Papa laid down his hammer and took out the nails clenched between his teeth. He smiled at Aimé.

"This staircase will lead up to our 'prophet's room,' " Papa said.

Aimé wondered what in the world Papa could be talking about.

"A prophet's room?" he said. "What's that?"

"Do you remember the story we read for worship last year about the Shunammite woman?" Papa asked.

Aimé hated to admit it, but he had forgotten.

"I'm sorry, Papa, but I don't."

Papa stood up and looked kindly into his eyes. "We'll have to read the story again, I guess. It comes from 2 Kings, chapter 4. You see, during the days of Elisha the prophet, there was a woman of Shunem—the Bible, in fact, calls her a 'great woman'—who invited Elisha and his servant, Gehazi, to eat with her and her husband as they passed through that area. Elisha and Gehazi enjoyed their company so much they stopped by her house to eat whenever they came to Shunem."

"I remember now!" Aimé exclaimed. "And then she convinced her husband to build a room onto their house so that Elisha and Gehazi could stay overnight," he said, breathless with excitement.

"Right," said Papa. "And you remember the rest of the story, don't you? Because of her hospitality to them, Elisha and Gehazi asked what they could do for her. She said nothing, but Gehazi noticed that she had no child and her husband was getting old. So Elisha told her she would have a son—but she could hardly believe it. Sure enough, though, she did have a baby boy, and that made her the happiest woman in the world."

"But didn't the little boy get a fever and die one day when he was helping his father harvest wheat?" Aimé said. The details of the story were coming clearer in his mind now.

"That's true," Papa replied. "His mother saddled a donkey and went to get help from Elisha. Elisha came back with her and raised the boy from the dead by the Lord's power."

Aimé was still puzzled.

"But Papa, that was back in Bible times, wasn't it? What does that have to do with what you're building now?"

Papa and Aimé were interrupted by Mama's singing. She walked toward them with freshly cut flowers from their garden in her hands. Paul and Adrienne skipped behind her.

"You've got a curious audience, I see," Mama said with a laugh.

Papa came around behind her and slipped his arms about her waist. "Well, what do you think, Marguerite?" he said, pointing to the wooden frame he had started for the staircase.

"It's a good start, Henri. I hope you are finished by winter," she said, turning around to kiss him.

"I should be, especially if I can get Aimé and Paul to help me,"

he said, glancing down at the boys.

A thrill shot through Aimé. He would love to work with Papa on something new! He was tired of plowing the fields and milking the cows. He'd always wanted to learn how to build things. But he still wondered why Papa was building a prophet's room.

"Why don't you explain it to him, Marguerite?" Papa said.

Mama knelt down and smiled at him. He could smell the fragrance of the flowers in her hands.

"You see, Aimé, we may not have any prophets coming by here today, but from time to time peddlers, ministers, and other travelers come by, needing a place to stay for the night. Hospitality never goes out of date. And when you bless others, God blesses you. The Bible even says that people have sometimes entertained angels without knowing it," she said.

The next few weeks were some of the happiest of Aimé's life. Papa taught him and Paul how to saw boards in a straight line and to hammer nails in all the way without bending them. He showed them how to mix cement and spread it evenly with a trowel. By the time the leaves of the oak trees turned gold and snow frosted the Juras, the prophet's room was ready.

One cold, windy Friday afternoon, two men, one short and one tall, both dressed in suits and overcoats and carrying heavy black cases, knocked on the door of the Cosendai house. Mama was in the kitchen with Adrienne, canning applesauce for the coming winter. Mother hurried to open the door.

Outside were two smiling men with chapped faces, who respectfully took off their hats. They were out of breath from the walk up the steep hill in the chilly afternoon air. Each time they breathed, vapor trailed behind them like smoke.

"*Bonjour, Madame,*" said the taller one, who had longish sandy hair and deep-set blue eyes that radiated kindness. His finely chiseled features resembled those of an artist. His companion appeared to be serious and reserved. He was stocky with dark hair and a moustache.

"My name is Lagger, and this is Brother Wutrich," began the tall one. "We are colporteurs from the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and we would very much like to show you some books that we think you would be interested in."

Adrienne peeked around Mama's legs while holding on to her long dress. Mama studied the faces of the men and then smiled.

"Please come in. It's very cold standing out there. I'll go and call my husband."

"*Merci, Madame,*" the men said in unison as they came into

the warmth of the house.

Aimé was in the barn milking the cows with Papa and Paul when Mama burst through the door, her face flushed with excitement.

"Henri, come quick! There are two young men sitting in our living room, and they want us to buy some religious books."

Papa's eyebrows arched in surprise as he rose from the milking stool.

"You boys stay here and finish the milking, and I'll go with Mama to see what this is all about."

Aimé began to milk with a vigor he never knew he had. He wanted to find out who these men were and what they wanted.

"I wonder why they came here," he said to Paul, who was forking some hay down from the loft.

Paul grinned mischievously at Aimé.

"You always want to know everything, don't you? We'll find out soon enough."

When Aimé and Paul finished milking, they went into the living room of the farmhouse and found the two strangers sitting on the sofa showing books to their parents.

"And so you see, Monsieur Cosendai, these books will be a wonderful addition to your library. They will help you to have an even closer walk with the Lord than you enjoy now," said the tall man called Lagger.

Aimé stared at the title of the books. One was *The Desire of Ages* and the other one *The Great Controversy.*

"You speak very convincingly," Papa said. "I think we will buy them and see if you are right."

"That's wonderful, isn't it, Brother Wutrich?" Lagger said, turning to his companion.

"Yes, it is," Wutrich said, his face breaking into a broad smile. He spoke French with a German accent. Then he cupped his hand and leaned toward his friend, whispering something in his ear.

Aimé strained his ears, trying to pick up what he was saying.

"Monsieur and Madame Cosendai," he began, clearing his throat with a nervous laugh. "As you can see, the sun is beginning to set over the mountains, and Brother Wutrich and I, according to our understanding of the Bible, observe the seventh-day Sabbath which begins on Friday night at sundown. Now, we don't want to impose ourselves on you in any way, but we are wondering if we could possibly stay here for the night. We will be glad to pay you—"

"No imposition at all," Mama broke in. "You can be the first

guests in our new prophet's room; and we won't accept a franc."

Lagger and Wutrich laughed out loud together.

"Prophet's room? What's that?"

Mama explained what the prophet's room was, and Aimé could tell that the two strangers were pleased, very pleased indeed. As he helped carry the men's valises up the stairs to the newly furnished room, he heard Lagger say to Wutrich, "Surely this is in God's providence."

This seventh-day Sabbath they talked about bewildered Aimé. Their family had always gone to church on Sunday, and so did everyone else he knew. Why did these men act so differently? he wondered.

That night after supper, Lagger played his violin. Aimé loved the strains of melody that poured forth from the polished wood instrument as Lagger drew his bow skillfully across the strings.

When he had finished Aimé said to Lagger, "I used to play the violin, too, but I broke my wrist when I was seven years old. I fell off the threshing machine, and I can't do it any more."

Lagger's eyes reflected sympathy as he put his hand on Aimé's shoulder. "That's too bad, but I know that God has a special work for you to do someday," he said.

"Where will you go after tomorrow night?" He liked these new men, even if they did have strange beliefs.

"We don't know exactly," said Wutrich. "We will be in this area for several months selling books, though."

"Then you can stay here," Papa said with a smile.

"And it won't cost you a franc," Mama added.

"This is really too good to be true," Lagger said, shaking his head. "We accept your gracious offer. Now, would you be willing to study the Bible with us from time to time during the evening?" he asked.

Aimé knew that Papa and Mama would say Yes. They read the Bible every morning and evening for family worship.

That Sunday, when Mama brought out their traditional Sunday meal—baked rabbit—Aimé noticed that Lagger and Wutrich looked at each other with uncertain expressions.

"Uh, Madame," Lagger began, "we do not wish to offend you in any way, but we cannot eat rabbit."

Aimé gasped, wondering what Mama would say. Nobody had ever refused her food before. Paul and Adrienne looked at him with wide eyes.

Mama set the platter down in the middle of the table and said nothing. But Aimé could tell that she was bewildered and hurt.

Papa leaned forward and said, "If it is because of a religious conviction, you will not offend us; but please let us enjoy the meal, and then you can tell us why you feel the way you do afterward."

Everyone laughed. Papa's humor could always break the spell of tense moments.

Lagger and Wutrich, the Seventh-day Adventist colporteurs, stayed with the Cosendais in the prophet's room for four months. Every evening when they returned home from a day of selling books, they studied the Bible with the Cosendai family. Papa, honest man that he was, could not refute the new truths that the young men pointed out. Besides the Sabbath, they learned about clean and unclean meats and tithing. They discovered that the dead are unconscious—not living in heaven or hell now, and that wicked people do not burn in hell eternally. Most thrilling of all, they realized that Jesus would come soon and end all the sin and suffering in the world, and that those who had trusted in Him for salvation would live forever in a beautiful new world that He would create.

Brother Wutrich said one evening, "One thing we don't have to teach you is not to drink alcohol."

Lagger agreed.

"When we saw the sign of the blue cross on your shutters, we knew that you cared about your health and the welfare of others. We felt sure you would be open to other things as well—such as not eating rabbit," he said with a wink.

Papa and Mama laughed, and so did the children.

Shortly before Lagger and Wutrich were to leave, Papa announced, "We believe everything you have taught us, and we want to be baptized by immersion and join your church."

Mama said, "God promises that hospitality always brings a blessing, but we never thought it would be new truths from the Bible."

Aimé knew they were right, but it upset him a little to think of joining a new church. What would their neighbors and friends say. And what would the Nicolier brothers do?

"We will send the evangelist, Brother Lecoultre, to study further with you in preparation for baptism," Lagger said. "You can't imagine the joy that your decision brings to our hearts."

Not long after, Aimé, along with Papa and Mama, was baptized at the church in Neuchâtel. They were baptized there because there was no Adventist church in Corcelles. The Cosendais became the very first Adventists in their village, and as a direct result of this, their faith would soon be tested.

## Chapter 3
# Papa Goes to Jail

Just as Papa and Mama invited young people from the community to their farm on festival days, so they extended their hospitality to their new Adventist brothers and sisters. On Sabbaths, Adventists from Payerne, Neuchâtel, and even from as far away as Lausanne, started coming to the Cosendai home to study the Scriptures, sing hymns, and eat Mama's delicious food.

This greatly disturbed the Nicolier brothers, who did everything they could to harass the Cosendais. One Sabbath morning in early spring, Aimé looked down the hill and saw the Nicolier brothers pulling a haywagon to the middle of the road and leaving it there to block the path of travelers. They put up a large sign that read, "Dance Every Saturday. Big Feast on the Hill. All the Wine and Pork You Can Eat."

"Look at that!" Aimé said to Paul, pointing to the wagon in disgust. "Those guys are at it again. Why can't they just leave us alone?"

"The whole village is talking about us now, Aimé. Not just the Nicolier brothers. I don't even want to go to the village church any more on Sunday afternoons. Everyone stares at us and talks about us like we're crazy or something. But Papa says we have to keep going to let people know we still care about them and that we're just as much a part of the community as they are," Paul replied, shoving his hands in his pockets.

Aimé was silent for a moment, thinking about how their new faith had changed their lives.

Adrienne ran out of the house, her hair freshly combed and braided. She wore a lacy white dress with embroidered flowers that Mama had sewn.

"I'm really glad we don't have to go to school today, aren't you?" she chirped to the boys.

"Yeah, but we'll hear about it Monday, I can guarantee you that," Aimé replied.

For the past two Mondays his classmates had surrounded him on the playground, demanding to know where he had been on Saturday mornings.

"Were you sick, Aimé?" asked one boy.

"No," Aimé replied, wishing they would leave him alone.

"Did someone in your family die?" asked another boy.

"No."

"Where were you then?" chorused everyone.

"My parents and I have become Seventh-day Adventists, and we have a church service in our home on Saturday mornings," Aimé tried to explain. But he could sense by the skeptical looks on their faces that it was no use.

"Come on, you're just playing hooky. You can't fool us!" shouted Marcel Nicolier, playfully shoving him backward. The corners of Marcel's mouth curved into a wicked grin.

"Yeah!" agreed a red-haired boy who pointed his finger at Aimé. "If we've got to go to school on Saturday you should too!"

And so it had gone for the past two weeks since becoming Adventists. It wasn't just the teasing of the classmates that bothered Aimé. His teacher, Monsieur Gonin had looked at him over the top of his wire-rimmed glasses when he walked into class that first Monday morning.

"Aimé Cosendai, you will stay after class and see me," said Monsieur Gonin.

"*Oui, Monsieur,*" Aimé had replied, taking his seat. He knew without asking why Monsieur Gonin wanted to see him, and it made his stomach flutter with uncertainty. Try as he might, he just couldn't concentrate on his math lesson that morning.

After class, Aimé walked up to Monsieur Gonin's desk after all his classmates had trooped out to recess. Monsieur Gonin was a stern man, but he was not unreasonable. When Aimé told him about where he had been on Saturday morning, Monsieur Gonin took off his glasses and chewed on the end of one bow.

"I believe you, Aimé. I have heard from some of the other people in the village that you and your parents have joined this new church that worships on Saturday. There is just one slight problem that we have."

He cleared his throat and put his glasses back on.

He continued, "And I think you know what that is. The law of

this canton states that every student must attend school on Saturdays. There are no exceptions. Do you understand that?"

Aimé nodded his head.

"Good. Then I shall expect you in class next Saturday morning. If you aren't there, I am sorry but I will have no choice but to report you to the headmaster, and he will be obliged to inform the educational superintendent. That is all. You may go now."

Aimé walked out into the hallway, his shoulders sagging. What could he do? What would Papa say? His footsteps echoed as he slouched toward the stairway.

After riding his bicycle home that night, he discovered that Paul and Adrienne had similar stories to tell. Their teachers, too, had told them that they must attend school next Saturday morning or be reported to the headmaster. That was the main topic of discussion around the Cosendai table that evening.

Aimé picked at his food. He didn't feel like eating, and, judging by their full plates, none of the rest of the family did either.

"Well, Henri, we knew it wouldn't be easy to keep the Sabbath," Mama said, taking hold of Papa's arm. "But we are convinced it is God's will."

Papa gazed into her eyes and smiled gently.

"That's true, Marguerite. We can't turn back now. Children, you will stay home from school this Saturday morning just like last week, even if it means being reported to the educational superintendent of the canton. I will speak to him personally if it comes to that. Don't worry," Papa said.

The next Monday morning, Aimé was called to the headmaster's office along with Paul and Adrienne. All their teachers had reported them for being absent the previous Saturday morning.

The headmaster stood up and adjusted his suit coat. He looked kindly at the Cosendai children, but Aimé knew it would be no use arguing with him, even though all of them were keeping up with their studies.

"I must report you and your parents to the educational superintendent. I regret that I have to do this, but it is my duty," he said.

Since Aimé was oldest, the headmaster handed him a sealed envelope.

"Take this to your father and make sure he reads it," he said.

All day long Aimé resisted the temptation to open the letter. "Maybe I should just throw it away," he thought, "and this problem will go away by itself."

But he didn't open it, and he didn't throw it away. He knew that if Papa found out he would be very disappointed in him.

The whole family gathered around Papa as he opened the letter that night by the soft glow of a kerosene lamp.

The letter crackled as Papa unfolded it. He read it without saying anything as four pairs of worried eyes looked expectantly at him.

"Well, it says that he is reporting us to the educational superintendent. It's hard to know what the superintendent will do, but unless I miss my guess, he will impose a fine on us," Papa said, handing the letter to Mama.

"How much do you think it will be, Papa?" Adrienne said, climbing into his lap.

Papa hugged her and kissed the top of her head.

"I don't know, Angel, but we can't afford very much. We're barely making it as it is."

The next week a letter arrived from the educational superintendent informing the Cosendais that unless they complied with the law, they must pay a fine each week for the Saturday morning absences of the children.

"There's nothing we can do but pay it," said Papa. The fine was five Swiss francs for each child.

Mama's eyes flashed and her mouth tightened into a firm line. Aimé had never seen her so upset before.

"Henri, this is robbery! We can't afford this," she said, her voice indignant.

"I know, *Chérie.* But we must keep trusting God to honor our faith. If they raise the fine, I will have no choice but to tell the educational superintendent that we cannot pay it," Papa said.

Tears welled up in Mama's eyes.

"That is just what I'm afraid of, Henri."

Fear gripped Aimé's heart and twisted his insides. What would the educational superintendent do to them if they couldn't pay the fine each week?

The next week, the fine was raised another five francs per child, and the following week, another five.

"I'm going to hitch up the wagon today and visit the educational superintendent in Payerne," Papa said, as he buttered a piece of bread for breakfast. "We cannot pay the fine any longer, and neither will we send the children to school on the Lord's day."

Mama rushed over from the stove and buried her head in his shoulder.

"God bless you, Henri. We'll all be praying for you."

Aimé couldn't concentrate on his studies at school that day. All he could think about was Papa's visit to the educational superintendent.

That evening when he got home, Papa told him, "You are not going to school on Saturdays, Aimé, but I am going to jail on Thursdays."

Jail? His papa? Aimé could hardly believe it.

"But, Papa," he protested. "I'll go to school on Saturdays. Surely God will understand. You can't go to jail. You aren't a criminal. They can't treat you like that!"

"No, Aimé," Papa replied in a quiet voice. "I won't let you go to school on the Lord's special day. Besides, I'll only have to spend one day a week in jail. They'll let me out in time to get home for milking."

Aimé's heart sank. It wasn't the amount of time that bothered him. It was the fact that Papa was going to jail at all. He felt ashamed and sorry that his own Papa would have to go to jail just because of him and Paul and Adrienne.

Thursday happened to be market day in Payerne, and the farmer's open-air market was held in a square right next to the ancient cathedral that had been made into city offices.

Word soon spread throughout the village that Henri Cosendai would not be able to sell his produce in the market that coming Thursday. His wife would have to do that because he would be spending market day in jail.

Aimé and Paul were in school. They couldn't hear what their teacher said because they were thinking about Papa and Mama going to the market together. They were wondering how Mama would do all the work selling vegetables and fruits while Papa was in jail.

The horse's hooves clip-clopped in sleepy rhythm as the wagon creaked into the square. Papa parked the wagon in front of the Cafe Du Marché and jumped down. Many other farmers had already arrived and set up their stands. The bounties of Switzerland filled the gray square with a cornucopia of shapes and colors—plump, red tomatoes, green bouquets of leafy lettuce, slender orange carrots, and earth-brown potatoes.

Papa looked at his wife as he tied the reins to a hitching post.

"I'm counting on you today, Marguerite, because I can't be here to help you. They'll let me out around four o'clock. Then he turned and walked toward the back entrance of the cathedral. A stairway spiraled up to the jail.

Soon Mama became so busy selling their produce she almost

forgot about Papa until he came out of the cathedral.

"Well, let's go home," he said, rubbing his hands together. "I don't think I like jail very much. But I'll have to go back next week, so I might as well make the best of it. It really wasn't so bad—except the food. Sure can't compare to your cooking, Mama!" Papa said, laughing. Marguerite laughed with him.

But Aimé didn't laugh the next day at school.

"Jailbird! Jailbird! Aimé's papa's a jailbird!" chanted a group of boys led by Gaston Nicolier, as Aimé mounted his bicycle for the ride home. Aimé gripped the handlebars so tightly his knuckles turned white. He wanted to throw his bicycle to the ground and rush at Marcel with his fists flailing, but he knew he would hurt Papa more by doing that, so he said nothing and rode away.

The weeks passed. Every Sabbath morning they held church in their home, and every Thursday morning Mama sold produce at the market in Payerne while Papa spent the day in jail.

Then, one Thursday afternoon, Papa hurried toward his wife, who was sitting on the wagon seat waiting for him. Papa's eyes sparkled with excitement.

"Mama, it's over. I guess they got tired of feeding me. Our children can stay out of school on Sabbath, and they will leave us alone. No more fines and no more jail."

When they arrived at the Maupas farm, they told the good news to their children. Aimé jumped up in the wagon and hugged Papa.

"I'm so glad, Papa. Maybe the boys will stop teasing me now."

"Ah, is that why you've been so glum lately?" Papa said, lifting Aimé's chin up with his forefinger. "Well, next year they won't be able to tease you anymore because you'll be going to the Adventist school in France just across the border above Geneva." Aimé knew it was true, and he was looking forward to it.

Elder Jules Rey, an Adventist pioneer worker in Switzerland, had visited the Cosendai home many times. One day, he had put his arm around Aimé's shoulders and said, "Aimé, you should be a missionary for God."

"Maybe, Elder Rey, if it is God's will," he had replied.

Next year he would go to Collonges to see if that is really what God wanted him to do with his life.

## Chapter 4

# Collonges, Canvassing, and a Call

The sleek olive-green train whooshed into the station of Payerne and stopped with a sharp hiss of its air brakes. A smartly uniformed conductor stepped onto the platform, followed by a stream of passengers weighted down with suitcases.

Papa Cosendai pulled out his silver pocketwatch and peered at the face, shaking his head and frowning.

"This is one day I wish the trains of Switzerland were not running precisely on time as they always do," he said.

"I know just what you mean, Henri," Mama said, putting her arm around Aimé's shoulder and squeezing him close. Her lower lip trembled, and her soft blue eyes glistened with tears.

Aimé said nothing, but he felt the same way Papa and Mama did. Excitement made his heart beat faster as he thought about going away to the French Adventist Seminary above Geneva, Switzerland, but at the same time waves of homesickness began to crash against the shore of his mind. He had never been away from home in his life.

But he knew he must go. Aimé recalled the words of the African pastor from Basutoland who had spoken at the meeting in the orchard and the strange feeling that had swept over him that he should go as a missionary to Africa someday. He remembered, too, the words of Lagger, the Adventist colporteur and violinist who had introduced his family to the message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Lagger had said he was sure that God had a special work for him to do. Did He? And finally, Jules Rey, the president of the Leman Conference in Switzerland, had told him he felt he should go as a missionary overseas.

Was it all just coincidence, or was God really calling him to be

a missionary? Aimé wondered. He must go to Collonges and find out for sure. Still, the thought of leaving the farm and his family almost terrified him. He felt so comfortable there.

"All aboard!" shouted the conductor, as new passengers, clutching their tickets and baggage, moved to the doors of the cars.

"Now, Aimé, remember to write us, and don't forget to brush your teeth," Mama said, kissing him.

Aimé laughed. "*Oui, Mama.*"

"Looks like I'll have our room all to myself," Paul said, poking Aimé in the ribs.

"Maybe so, but you'll have to milk the cows in the morning all by yourself," Aimé replied, slapping his little brother on the back.

Adrienne walked shyly up to him.

"*Au Revoir,* Aimé. I'll miss you. *Je t'aime* [I love you]."

Aimé bent down and hugged his little sister, choking back a feeling of sadness that nearly strangled him.

Then, when Papa embraced him, he almost broke down and cried, but he didn't.

"Aimé, you're a good boy, and I know that God will show you what He wants you to do at the school. We will miss you on the farm, but you can come and work on vacations, OK?"

"*Oui,* Papa," Aimé said, wishing he could savor this moment forever. Then he realized that the Cosendai family were the only people standing on the empty platform. A shrill whistle pierced the air, and the train began to move!

He snatched his suitcase and ran alongside the train. Reaching up with his free hand, he grabbed onto the railing and swung himself onto the first step of a second-class car. Out of breath, he turned around and waved at his family. They waved back. He could see Mama dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief. Faster and faster, the train clickety-clacked down the rails until it rounded a bend, hiding his family from view.

Aimé found a seat in the car and slumped down into it. He looked out the window at the countryside passing by in a blur of green trees and brown fields. The rocking movement of the train soon lulled him into a troubled sleep.

When he arrived that afternoon in Geneva, a smiling teacher from the school met him and drove him across the border and up the steep hill to the French Adventist Seminary. The seminary was nestled in the shadow of a large, rugged mountain called the Salève, whose sheer rock faces and treacherous crevasses challenged climbers from all over Europe.

Sunshine bathed the Salève in a mellow light that softened the

harsh contours of its wrinkled face, and Aimé could see antlike figures creeping slowly up the mountain, clinging to their ropes.

Opening the trunk of his car to get Aimé's suitcase, the teacher told him, "You must never try to climb the Salève by yourself, Aimé. There are hiking trails to the top, but it is very dangerous to go alone. The school sometimes has picnics on the summit. You can drive up there."

Aimé loved Collonges. He quickly forgot his homesickness as he settled into the dorm and met new friends. It was wonderful to go to a school where he could miss classes on Sabbath, and neither the students nor the teachers bothered him about it. In fact, they observed the Sabbath like he did. Aimé especially liked Bible class, and during a special week of prayer that first year, he determined to take theology and become a minister someday.

He also joined the missionary club—a group of students who were interested in the foreign mission field. The club often hosted returned missionaries who told of their experiences. Aimé thrilled to their stories and imagined himself hiking through snake-infested jungles to preach the gospel in remote African villages.

Two of his best friends in the missionary club were Roger Hirschy, a French student, and Madeleine Reimers, a beautiful, dark-haired Swiss girl with sparkling blue eyes, from Geneva. One evening after supper, he, Roger, and Madeleine talked together on the bench in front of the administration building. Down below them the three young people could see the lights of Geneva shining in the black velvet of the valley like stars twinkling in the night sky. Geneva, the young people knew, was the headquarters of the League of Nations established in 1920 to foster international peace. It had also been the city the French Reformer John Calvin had controlled in the 1500s. But they weren't thinking of Geneva on this warm spring evening.

"I really enjoyed Elder Raspal's talk today, didn't you?" Madeleine said to her two friends. "It's exciting to see God opening doors in new countries like Madagascar and Cameroon."

"Madagascar certainly has some strange plants and animals. And, as the world's fourth-largest island, it's considered to be a part of Africa, but the people look more Oriental than African, Elder Raspal said. I'd like to go there someday," Roger agreed.

"Me, too," said Aimé, looking over at Madeleine. He was becoming more and more attracted to this gentle girl with the sweet voice, but he didn't want to admit it.

"Madeleine, didn't you say your father once wanted to be a missionary?" he asked her.

Madeleine folded her hands in her lap, and her eyes became tender and sad.

"Yes, he did. When he was about our age, his parents sent him to Switzerland from Hamburg, Germany, as an apprentice watchmaker so he could earn enough money to go to an Adventist school and train as an evangelist. He worked in a tiny, unheated cubicle from sunup to sundown for a year. When he felt he'd earned enough money, my father asked the watchmaker for his money, but the watchmaker just laughed cruelly and told my father he needed the money and he could either stay or leave without pay. He left, but he had no money to go to school. So, he moved to Geneva, and he's been a watchmaker ever since. But I know he would rather be a missionary."

"Maybe you can go someday," Roger said.

Madeleine laughed, and the sound made Aimé shiver because her voice sounded as beautiful as violin music.

"You know, when I was little, Elder Raspal, who was a friend of my parents, used to set me on his knee and tell me I should become a missionary. I really would like to someday, and I know Papa would like me to also. That is his dream for me, but I would have to marry a missionary pastor first. They don't send women alone, you know—at least not yet. My mother doesn't want me to go at all because she's afraid she'll never see me again."

Aimé filed away her words in his heart. Right now he and Madeleine were good friends; that was all. And there were other girls he was friendly with too. He knew one thing, the girl he married would have to be the kind who was adventurous—the kind who could hike through jungles and not complain about getting her clothes dirty or her hair messed up.

Aimé soon found out that Madeleine was, indeed, that kind of girl. One day during a missionary club meeting, a boy rushed in and shouted, "Two climbers have just fallen off the Salève! Some teachers are forming a rescue party. Let's join them!"

His words electrified the boys in the missionary club. They jumped out of their seats and headed for the door. Aimé followed them and then turned around, surprised to see Madeleine behind him, looking as prim and delicate as a ballerina in her blue dress.

"Hey, you're not dressed for this Madeleine. None of the other girls are coming."

"I don't care, Mr. Cosendai," she said, placing her hands on her hips and looking at him with a determination he hadn't seen before. "I can climb as well as any boy."

Aimé sensed it was no use arguing with Madeleine, and he ad-

mired her courage. Madeleine was gentle, but a foundation of strength undergirded her gentleness.

Aimé and Madeleine caught up with Roger and the others. Aimé's lungs burned and his chest pounded as the search party picked their way up the steep, rocky slope toward the fallen climbers. He didn't think Madeleine could keep up with them. He offered to hold her hand, but she refused and ran ahead of him.

When they found the climbers, one man was unconscious. Blood oozed from a gash in his leg. He lay as limp as a marionette whose strings have been cut. A teacher from the seminary knelt and examined the fallen climber.

"We can't move him until the ambulance attendants from Geneva get here," he said, taking the man's pulse. "He may have a broken neck, and if we move him ourselves, he could be paralyzed for the rest of his life."

He directed Roger to cut some branches to splint the second climber's broken leg, and then asked the boys to take off their shirts so he could bandage the climbers' cuts.

After the ambulance attendants had carried away the climbers on stretchers, Aimé noticed that Madeleine's face was flushed.

"Pretty exciting, huh, Madeleine?" Roger said, joining them.

"It sure is," she replied, laughing. "I would like to be a nurse someday, but my mother says it's hard work. She's a nurse herself but never wanted me to become one. I would love to help people like this someday."

Later that evening, as Roger and Aimé ate supper in the cafeteria, Roger said, "Madeleine is quite a girl, isn't she? She'd make a good missionary wife."

Aimé took a drink of juice, letting the cool liquid slide down his throat. He smiled at his friend and shrugged his shoulders.

"Maybe," he said nonchalantly. He didn't want Roger to know how much he liked Madeleine, especially since he knew that Roger felt the same way about her!

The years rushed by like the countryside from a moving train, and soon it was time for Madeleine to leave Collonges. She was a year ahead of both Roger and Aimé. They missed her when she left to teach French to the son of the Swedish ambassador in Madrid, Spain. But the letters cheered both of them and made the next year go by even faster. With his theology diploma in hand, Aimé was sure he would be hired as a pastor, but he was disappointed when a letter came from the South France Conference, informing him that he must first sell books as a colporteur before they could consider hiring him as a pastor.

When he told his professor, Maurice Tiche, about it, the older man smiled sympathetically and laid his hand on Aimé's shoulder.

"I'm sorry, Aimé, but selling books is what they call Adventist military service—sort of a boot-camp training before you graduate to other things. I'm sure the Lord will bless you."

Aimé wasn't so sure, and when he began canvassing in Marseille and Toulon, cities in southern France along the Mediterranean coast, he was convinced that selling books was not for him. Each house was surrounded by a cement wall, and he had to yell at the top of his lungs to let the people know he was there and what he wanted. It seemed to him that he wore out more pairs of shoes than he sold books. Still, he achieved moderate success, and the next year the conference assigned him to Saint-Étienne as a student pastor, though he continued to sell books as well.

Aimé wrote to Madeleine about his experiences with the people he enountered in his work. By this time, she had moved back to France and was working as a secretary in the South France Conference. Madeleine wrote back and told him how much she enjoyed working for Elder Paul Badaut, the president of the conference.

"Elder Badaut started the work on the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius where the extinct dodo bird used to live. Most of the people there are from Indian descent and follow Hinduism. His stories of how he preached Jesus there are fascinating. It makes me want to go to a country where people have never heard of Him," Madeleine wrote.

Madeleine's letter made Aimé do some deep thinking. He, too, wanted to go as a missionary, but he didn't want to go by himself. Would Madeleine go with him if he asked her to marry him? He knew a lot of other nice girls, but none of them were like Madeleine—willing and ready to go anywhere and do anything for Jesus. Aimé prayed about it. He was impressed that Madeleine would make the perfect missionary wife, that is, if he ever received a call to go overseas. There was no guarantee of that, he knew. He resolved to propose to her at the upcoming regional meeting of the churches at Valence because he knew she would be there.

Standing on the bank of the Rhone River, in a beautiful public garden, Aimé and Madeleine watched a pair of swans gliding across the water in the golden sunshine of an October afternoon. The young couple talked about their dreams of mission service. A single red maple leaf parachuted gently from an overhanging

branch and landed in the water. It sailed away with the current, an autumn leaf-ship on its way to the distant sea.

Then, in a trembling voice, hoarse with emotion, Aimé asked Madeleine to be his wife. Her hands fluttered upward and landed on his cheeks, cradling his face with a feather softness that made his heart melt. Tears streamed down her face. She had never looked more beautiful, Aimé thought. Her blue eyes reflected joy.

"Oh, Aimé, I was hoping and praying that you would ask me at this meeting. There is nothing I would rather do. But I do think that we should wait till the year after next so that we can really get to know each other."

Aimé hugged Madeleine and laughed.

"I feel like I know you well enough now. But you are right. We can at least announce our engagement at Christmas. What do you think of that?"

He could feel her heart beating against his chest.

"I can't wait to tell Mama and Papa. They'll be so happy. They really liked you the time you came to our house in Geneva," Madeleine replied.

"And you have to come and meet my parents on the farm," Aimé said, taking both of her hands in his.

To their amazement, however, just a few weeks after they decided to get married, Aimé received an urgent call from the Southern European Division to go to French Cameroon to teach at the school in Nanga-Eboko. The regular teacher, who had only been there a year, had contracted tuberculosis and had to return to Europe immediately. When the division secretary told him the teacher's name, Aimé was surprised.

"Why his father helped me install electricity in our barn the summer before I left the farm to go to Collonges! It will be a privilege to serve in his son's place," said Aimé.

The leaders of the division asked him to get married the following summer instead of waiting another year, so he could go as soon as possible.

It didn't take Aimé long to convince Madeleine. He was sure now that the Lord had been leading in his decision to marry her. Aimé and Madeleine were married in the Adventist church at Geneva on August 15, 1937, by Pastor Maurice Tieche. Two weeks later, they boarded a ship in Marseille that would take them on their "honeymoon cruise" to the mission field in French Cameroon . . . and to a whole new life.

## Chapter 5

# The Honeymoon Boat and the Fire Train

Seagulls wheeled and cried above the deck of the gleaming white French ocean liner as it pulled slowly away from the dock in the harbor of Marseille. A blast from the ship's horn caused Madeleine to cover her ears and move instinctively toward Aimé for protection. The newlyweds were standing on the top deck of the liner, looking at the city, the last glimpse they would have of Europe for a long time. Aimé put his arm around his new bride.

"Well, Madeleine, are you sure we've made the right decision?"

"I'll admit I'm a little scared, but, yes, I'm sure, *Chérie.* The Lord has brought us together and called us to Cameroon. And He will continue to guide and keep us."

"But it was hard to say goodbye to your mother, wasn't it?" Aimé said, searching her eyes. Although Madeleine had committed her life to him and to mission service, he knew she was torn over leaving her family. Madeleine's mother was sick now, and she was afraid she would never see her again. When they had said goodbye to Madeleine's parents, the two women had clung to each other and wept. At that moment, Aimé had had second thoughts about accepting the call to Cameroon.

"Yes, it was hard saying goodbye to Mother, but the joy on my father's face makes it all worth it. It's almost as if he is fulfilling his dream through me," she said.

Aimé embraced her tightly and kissed her.

"Come on, let's go to the dining room. It's time for supper. We might as well live it up because I doubt you'll have waiters in white coats and black ties serving you at Nanga-Eboko," joked Aimé.

They continued their voyage and arrived in the harbor at

Douala, Cameroon, three weeks later.

"Well, we're here, Madeleine," Aimé said peering out of the porthole of their small cabin. Are you almost finished packing your suitcases?"

"All done, sir," Madeleine said with a smug smile and a salute. She went over to kiss him. "You know, Aimé, I could sail on this ship forever. I like being a tourist."

"I know just what you mean, *Chérie,* but the Lord has a work for us to do here. The ship's docking now. Let's go topside."

Aimé and Madeleine waited impatiently for the ship's first officer to command the sailors to lower the gangplank.

"I feel so sorry for the poor women!" Madeleine cried.

Women clad in long dresses and colorful scarves, babies tied to their backs, stood on the shore with huge baskets of mangoes and bananas balanced on their heads. They were waiting for the passengers to come off so they could sell their fruit. Another group of women walked by with huge loads of wood on their heads.

"They must have strong necks. Maybe you should try doing that, Madeleine," he said, nudging her gently.

Madeleine glared at him.

"Only if you do it first!" she replied.

Aimé could feel the humid heat sapping his energy and strength already. His clothes felt glued to his body, and he could feel perspiration trickling in rivers down his back.

He took out his handkerchief and wiped his face.

"Now I see why they told us to bring short pants and open-collared shirts. It's hot here!" He longed to get into the shade of the palm trees whose feathery plumes of branches swayed temptingly in the tropical breeze.

When they walked ashore, a tall smiling man dressed in khaki clothes and pith helmet walked up to them and shook their hands. He introduced himself as the pastor of a Protestant mission in Douala who had been assigned to greet the Cosendais and care for them during their first night in Cameroon.

The next morning the pastor took them to the train station for the long trip to the interior. The pastor helped them buy their tickets and then wished them well.

"Please greet Brother Fridlin and his wife, won't you?" he said to them, as he drove away in his car.

Used to European trains, Aimé almost laughed when he saw the train that would take them to Yaoundé, the capital city of French Cameroon. The engine was made of steel, but all the cars were made entirely of wood. And, they had open windows.

As they stood on the platform waiting for the signal to board, a group of ax-toting African men clambered into the first car. Aimé and Madeleine would soon discover that these men were the wood-cutting crew. Wood powered the steam locomotive. It consumed such great quantities, in fact, that the train carried a few woodcutters. The engineer would leave them along the way so they could chop down trees in the rainforest beside the tracks and prepare piles of wood to resupply the locomotive.

Aimé and Madeleine boarded the train and sat down on a hard wooden seat after they stowed their luggage overhead in the rack. Aimé noticed a large bucket of sand in the front of the car.

"What's that for?" he asked the man across the aisle.

"Oh, that's to put fires out in the car. Look at the floor," he said, pointing to several charred spots. "You'll find out soon enough. Every passenger has to be a fireman on this train."

It was true. As the train began to move, the smokestack belched out a dark cloud of soot as well as burning embers. They began coughing as black smoke poured into the car, making Aimé's and Madeleine's nostrils burn and throats tighten.

Suddenly a shower of embers flew into the back part of the car, and a fire broke out in the wooden floor.

"See what I mean?" shouted the man across the aisle. "Come on, let's get some sand on that fire!"

When Aimé returned to his seat, Madeleine was still coughing and holding her hand over her mouth.

Aimé laughed and shook his head.

"You know, Madeleine, this is really funny. Here I come to Cameroon to ignite the fire of the gospel in the hearts of the people, but I have to start by putting out a real one!"

Madeleine nicknamed the wooden monstrosity the "fire train." After a long and unforgettable ride, the fire train finally screeched into the station in a cloud of smoke and a shower of sparks. Marius Fridlin, director of the Adventist mission at Nanga-Eboko, greeted them warmly. Fridlin smiled and shook their hands and helped them with their baggage.

"Welcome to Cameroon," he said, as they followed him to the mission's pickup truck. "My wife, Marthe, will be so happy to see you. It's been kind of lonely out at Nanga-Eboko because we're the only Europeans there."

Aimé and Madeleine immediately liked Yaoundé better than Douala. Mountains surrounded the capital city, and the weather was much cooler and less humid.

Aimé's whole body ached with fatigue, and his eyes burned like

someone had kicked sand in them. If he could just lie down and sleep somewhere—but Brother Fridlin had said they still had a three-hour drive to Nanga-Eboko. It had been hard to leave the honeymoon boat the previous day, but he was more than glad to get off the fire train. And now they faced a three-hour drive over a bumpy dirt road. No doubt they would sleep in a mud hut that night, he thought.

When they lurched into the mission at Nanga-Eboko, Aimé and Madeleine were happy and surprised to see some nice new cement buildings, one of which was a large white house with a wide veranda and a sloping green roof.

"You'll be staying there with us. Elder W. H. Anderson, the missionary from America who started the Solusi Mission in Southern Africa, came here eleven years ago and chose this site for the beginning of our work in Cameroon. Elder Marius Raspal arrived in 1929 and constructed these buildings," Fridlin said.

"Dear Elder Raspal!" Madeleine cried, resting her head on Aimé's shoulder. As the travel-weary newlyweds eyed the cement buildings, no doubt they appreciated Elder Raspal more than ever before.

## Chapter 6
# A Trip Into the Bush

Baroomaboomboom! Baroomaboomboom! The sound of the drums rolled through the rain forest, announcing the soon coming of a missionary party to distant villages in the area surrounding the Nanga-Eboko Mission. Drummers pounded out the message from Nanga-Eboko to the nearest village, who, in turn, relayed it on till it reached the villages to be visited by the Cosendais.

"I tell you, that's a primitive but very efficient telegraph system, Marius," Aimé said one sunny morning to his colleague and friend, Marius Fridlin, the mission director for French Cameroon.

Fridlin smiled.

"Yes, they can even tell how many people are in your party and when they are expected to arrive. I wish you well, Aimé, as you preach the gospel out there. Most of the people around here have never heard much of Jesus. They worship many gods and believe the spirits of their ancestors direct their lives. I have visited there myself, and I believe there is real interest in Christianity. We need to cultivate it now."

Aimé's dreams had finally come true, and he was eager to march with Madeleine and the group of porters to the villages where he would preach and Madeleine would take care of the sick. The journey would take them a week, and they would have to cross rivers and swamps to get there and back.

It had been a year since they arrived in Nanga-Eboko, and they were happy to do something different than teach school. That in itself was a tremendous challenge, Aimé admitted to himself. He was responsible for teaching 300 African students, ranging in age from six years to adults, and most of them had never been to

school before in their lives. He taught them everything—history, math, reading, and writing. Even with Madeleine helping him, it was truly too much work for one man. What could he do? You did your best and let the Lord take care of the results, Aimé decided.

One thing they did that helped a lot was to choose the best of the older students and train them to teach the little ones. Fridlin was in charge of the mission. He traveled to many places preaching the gospel and training African laymen to preach to their own people. The primary school at Nanga-Eboko had proven to be an important way of spreading the gospel. Many of the students who learned the Adventist message in class returned to their villages during vacation and told their families what they had learned.

Requests were coming from more and more villages for Aimé and Fridlin to visit and teach them. The Cosendais and the Fridlins got along together very well even though they lived in the same house. The house was big enough so they really didn't get in each other's way. The two missionary couples became very close friends and worked together for twelve years.

When Madeleine gave birth to their son, Jean-Paul, in 1938, it was a bittersweet moment for Marthe Fridlin. She acted as midwife for Madeleine. Cradling baby Jean-Paul in her arms, Marthe said, "You know, we miss our own son, Gerard, so much, but I am happy for you. And I will take care of him so you can teach in the school and go with Aimé to the villages."

"That is very kind of you, Marthe," Madeleine said, reaching out her arms for Jean-Paul. "I know it must be very difficult for you."

The Fridlin's son suffered from kidney disease and had to stay home in France with his grandparents. The Fridlins missed him terribly, but they were willing to make the sacrifice in order to pioneer the Lord's work in Cameroon.

On this beautiful morning with the drums sounding like thunder, Marthe Fridlin came out on the veranda of the house, rocking little Jean-Paul in her arms. "I think I'd rather stay home with Jean-Paul than hike through the jungle with you. And I think he'd rather stay at home with me, too, wouldn't you, Jean-Paul?" she said, cooing to the baby.

Madeleine adjusted her heavy colonial helmet which all missionaries of that time wore to protect their heads from the tropical sun.

"I'm beginning to wonder if I shouldn't stay home at Nanga-Eboko, too, but I'm excited about going. I've always been game for adventure. I can leave in peace with perfect confidence that Jean-

Paul is in the best of care."

Marius Fridlin surveyed the missionary party of the two Cosendais and the porters. He checked to make sure they had everything they needed—food, portable beds, medical supplies, and a water distiller and jug.

"Well, I think everything's in order. Let's have a word of prayer, shall we? Dear Father in heaven, I pray that you will bless Aimé and Madeleine in a special way as they minister to the people in the bush. Please keep them safe and bring them back to us with good news. In Jesus' name, amen."

Aimé looked at Madeleine and smiled.

"I've been waiting for this moment for a long time. Are you ready to go?"

"I sure am. Let's get going before the sun gets too hot," Madeleine replied.

The Cosendais and their five African porters drove in the mission truck to the end of the rutted dirt road, then walked single file on the forest path. They camped beside the trail that night and lighted a blazing fire to keep leopards away. The jungle night was alive with strange sounds—hooting owls, chirping crickets, and occasionally the roar of a leopard.

The next morning, they were harassed by an attack of dreaded mosquitos. Fearing malaria, and its most deadly form—blackwater fever, they swatted them away so they wouldn't get bitten.

Aimé rehearsed in his mind what he would say to the chief and the people once they reached the first village. He had been studying the Bulu language from a dictionary that a Presbyterian missionary had made, but he didn't feel confident enough to speak yet without an interpreter.

"You'll do just fine, Aimé," Madeleine said to him as they placed more wood on the fire before going to bed that night. "I can tell that you're worried. I've never seen you so quiet before."

Madeleine's encouraging words buoyed his spirits. Just having her along on the trip was a great feeling. He knew that her medical treatments might just be the way to reach the hearts of the people.

The third day, as they neared the village, they came to a large swamp. The men waded through it, but one of the porters carried Madeleine over on his back.

Aimé looked up at her and laughed.

"I wish your mother could see you now."

"She'd just die," Madeleine said as the porter slogged through the swamp and deposited her on dry ground.

When they reached the village, a throng of people gathered around them. The women came up and touched Madeleine's face and hair. They had never seen a white woman before and wondered if she was real or was a ghost.

Aimé and Madeleine were ushered into the presence of the chief, who sat on a stool in front of his hut. They bowed respectfully to him and shook his hand. He pointed to their water jug and said, "Give me whiskey."

"We have no whiskey, but we do have some medicines that will help your people," Aimé told him through the interpreter.

The chief cupped his hand over his jaw and winced.

"I've had a terrible toothache for a long time. Can you pull the tooth?" he asked.

"I cannot, but perhaps my wife can," Aimé said.

Madeleine directed the chief to lean back and open his mouth wide. Then she asked Aimé for a pair of pliers that he used to fix the truck. With the chief groaning and Madeleine grunting, the bad tooth was extracted at last.

Then it seemed that sick people appeared from everywhere to be healed by the white woman from Nanga-Eboko. Madeleine dispensed pills. She washed and bandaged cuts, scratches, and sores. Through the interpreter, she talked to the women about the importance of eating good food and keeping themselves and their homes clean so they would be less likely to get sick.

Madeleine looked up at Aimé as she examined a sick child.

"I never earned a nursing degree like mother did, but here I am in Africa acting like a dentist and a doctor."

"You make a wonderful doctor, Madeleine. I'm proud of you," Aimé replied. Then he cleared his throat. "But I think I will wait to see a real dentist if I get a toothache myself," he stated with a laugh.

When Madeleine had finished holding the clinic, Aimé told the interpreter, "Have the chief call all the people because I have something very special that I want to say to them."

The drums of the village began to pound, calling people from miles around. When everyone had gathered, Aimé started to speak.

"My African brothers and sisters, you believe in the one great God who created heaven and earth. I also believe in Him, and I have a special book here called the Bible that helps me know more about Him. Would you like me to share it with you?"

The people nodded their heads and said, "Ayyy."

Aimé continued. He told them about Adam and Eve in the Gar-

den of Eden and how they disobeyed God and were condemned to die. He told them how Cain murdered his brother Abel and about Noah and the flood. They were especially intrigued with Jacob and the twelve tribes of Israel because they belonged to a tribe themselves. Aimé skipped to the New Testament and told them about how God had sent His only Son, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, to die for the sins of the people and to give them eternal life in a beautiful new world that He would create soon.

Looking into their eager faces, Aimé recalled the first time he had seen scars curving down both cheeks of an African man. Had a leopard pounced on him and marred his face? Aimé wondered. Later, he discovered that the scars were actually tribal marks cut into the man's face with a hot knife when he was only a child. Many African tribes use such marks to identify themselves so they will know at a glance whether another person they see is a friend or a foe.

Tribal marks separate people. African tribes have fought bloody battles and even enslaved one another for centuries. Even after independence, tribalism remains one of the biggest problems on the African continent.

Aimé skillfully and tactfully used tribal marks to make a spiritual point that the people could relate to.

"Jesus became a member of the tribe of man. His tribal marks bring all people together instead of separating them. The nailprints in His hands and feet, and the scars on His forehead, side, and back, will never be erased. The prophet Isaiah tells us that His stripes heal us. Do you want to be healed?" he asked the people.

"Ayyy," the people said again.

Aimé's speech was simple, but it was effective.

"Please tell us more tomorrow," the chief pleaded.

Aimé and Madeleine spent the next week visiting several villages in the area, treating the sick and preaching the gospel. When they returned to the mission, Aimé told Fridlin, "Marius, I believe there are some people in the villages who are ready to be baptized. You will have to do that yourself, of course, since I am not ordained yet."

During their twelve years at Nanga-Eboko, the Cosendais made many such trips into the bush. When they left in 1949 to build a new mission station on the Atlantic Coast near Kribi, nearly 4,000 people had joined the Adventist Church because of their work, the work of the Fridlins, and the work of the faithful evangelists they had trained at the Nanga-Eboko School.

And in addition to the school at Nanga-Eboko, they started more than 100 primary schools in the villages.

Life was not always easy for them, though, especially during the years of World War II. In addition to cutting off critically needed food and medical supplies, the war also prevented them from going home on their first scheduled furlough. It was a tough time for all—a time when the Swiss missionaries would have to depend on God as never before.

## Chapter 7
# A Miracle of Seeds

"Oh, Aimé, it will be so good to see mother again. I know that our visit will revive her spirits," Madeleine said one day in late August 1939 as she folded a pair of Aimé's slacks and packed them in an open suitcase lying on their bed.

"Did you make arrangements for the boat?"

Aimé smiled and took her face between his hands. "Marius and I booked passage today when we were in Yaoundé. It leaves next week from Douala. It may not be a honeymoon boat, you understand, but the cruise will be nice all the same."

"I still feel like we're on our honeymoon even though we've been here two years and have Jean-Paul now. So much has happened since we came. I can't wait to show Jean-Paul to my parents. They'll be so proud of him."

"Don't forget that Jean-Paul has *two* sets of grandparents," Aimé teased her.

"I know that, *Chérie.* He's a very lucky little boy, isn't he?" Madeleine replied.

"Now go away," Madeleine said, playfully pushing Aimé. "I've got to get this packing done, or we'll never be ready."

Aimé kissed her quickly on the cheek and walked outside on the veranda. Dark clouds were gathering in the sky, heralding a tropical rainstorm. Soon the wind picked up, thrashing the palm trees in front of the house, and the first raindrops splattered the red earth, turning it into mud. Lightning splintered the sky, and thunder boomed like artillery fire. The rain came down in silver sheets, covering the mission like a curtain. Aimé had always liked watching storms, but this one made him uneasy, for it reminded him too much of a battle. He had been cheerful with Madeleine,

he thought, probably too cheerful. He didn't want to discourage her, but the news he had heard in Yaoundé that morning had been anything but good. Just two days earlier, Germany and the Soviet Union had signed a nonaggression pact, shocking the world. No one had thought that Hitler, the Nazi fascist dictator, and Stalin, the brutal communist leader of Russia, could ever be allies, but now it was true.

Hitler had already seized Czechoslovakia and now was demanding territory from Poland. Where would it all end? pondered Aimé. For two years Europe had teetered on the brink of war. If war broke out before next week, it would be very difficult for him and Madeleine to take the boat home. If war started after they arrived home, they would likely not be able to return to Cameroon and continue teaching school to the African children. Both prospects depressed Aimé. He couldn't bear to talk to Madeleine about it. He tried to shelter her from the news as much as he could—like an umbrella against the rain.

Aimé, Madeleine, and Jean-Paul were scheduled to catch the boat in Douala on September 3, 1939. Marius Fridlin had called Roger Hirschy, Aimé and Madeleine's old friend from Collonges, and his wife, to replace the Cosendais during their furlough to Europe. The Hirschys were serving in another part of Cameroon at the time. Aimé and Roger were in the middle of a class on September 1 when, without warning, Marius Fridlin burst through the door, his face as white as the piece of chalk Aimé was writing with on the blackboard.

"Roger, Aimé, please come outside," he said, out of breath. The African students murmured and shifted nervously in their seats as the three white men huddled together outside the window. They sensed that something was wrong.

Marius talked low so that he couldn't be overheard.

"Brothers, Radio France has just announced that Germany has invaded Poland! It is almost inevitable that England and France will declare war on Germany."

Aimé's heart sank like a ship torpedoed by a submarine. How could he tell Madeleine? Would they be able to go home to Europe, and should they if they could?

"Do you think we are in any danger here?" Roger said. "You know that Cameroon used to be a German colony before the League of Nations split it up and gave it to England and France after World War I. Surely, Germany resents our presence here."

"Yes, that's true, but I think Germany will have her hands full in Europe right now. We're too far away to worry about any in-

vasion. But I do think that a war will severely restrict our supplies," replied Fridlin, his forehead furrowing in worry.

Then he turned to Aimé, his eyes full of sadness. "Aimé, I'm afraid you know what this means."

Aimé nodded his head. It would be terribly risky for them to sail for Europe now.

"Yes, Marius. I just don't know how to tell Madeleine. Listen, Roger, you have no children yet. Why don't you take our tickets and try to get to Europe? You're due for a furlough too."

"I'll think about it, Aimé. That's very kind of you," Roger said.

Aimé dismissed his class and rushed home. He found Marthe and Madeleine, crying and comforting each other.

Madeleine flew into his arms, sobbing. "We can't go home. We can't go home."

Aimé stroked her hair and held her close. "I know," he said, with a soothing tone of voice. "But it will be all right. God will watch over our parents in Switzerland."

Two days later, France and England declared war on Germany, and World War II officially began, although for the next few months it would be a "phony war" since the two sides avoided attacking each other. Though the fighting hadn't begun yet, mail service between Europe and Cameroon stopped immediately.

Roger Hirschy and his wife took the Cosendais' places on the boat and managed to get back to Europe before the shipping lanes were completely closed to civilian transport. They had to remain in Europe during the war while the Cosendais and Fridlins were trapped in Cameroon.

Aimé and Madeleine worried about their parents, but they were living in Switzerland, a neutral country, and were relatively safe from the tanks and bombers of Germany's blitzkrieg that had destroyed Poland, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, and Denmark. They themselves were protected from attack due to the long distance between Cameroon and Europe. But they could not write their families, and their families could not write them. However, a more pressing mail-related problem concerned them at the moment. They also depended on the mail service to bring them seeds every three months for their garden. The garden supplied them with a variety of vegetables which supplemented the local produce like cassava, bananas, and yams. Even more distressing was the fact that the mail had brought canned and powdered milk for the mission, which Marthe and Madeleine fed to the twelve orphans the mission cared for. Lack of sanitation and proper medical care during childbirth left many mothers dead.

How would the orphans survive?

"Well, Madeleine, we have enough seeds to plant for this year's garden, but that is all," Aimé said with a note of finality in his voice. "The short days of this equatorial climate simply don't allow the plants enough growing time to produce seeds. I'm afraid our diet is going to be pretty sparse and dull after the garden is gone."

They stood silent for a moment, watching the sunset from the veranda of the house. "I guess we'll just have to trust the Lord to provide."

"At least we'll be able to eat," Madeleine said. "But I'm worried about the poor orphans. What will they eat?" She looked down at Jean-Paul, who was nursing contentedly at her breast.

"I have an idea about that," Aimé said, shaking a packet of carrot seeds. "There are many goats in the village. Let's talk to the chief and see if he would be willing to donate some goats to help feed the orphans. Goat's milk is very nutritious, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is, but each goat gives only a trickle of milk. Why, it would take nearly 150 goats to feed our children!" Madeleine exclaimed.

"I know. But if the Lord moves on the heart of the chief, I believe we can have a herd that big," Aimé said.

Both the Cosendais and the Fridlins visited the local chief. When they explained the problem, he immediately gave his permission and directed a young boy to round up the goats and herd them to the mission compound.

"Thank you so much," Madeleine said to the chief, shaking his hand. "God will bless you for this."

Every morning at 5:30 a.m., Madeleine and Marthe milked the goats. They fed the orphans with bottles.

One night when Marius and Aimé were away from Nanga-Eboko visiting a distant mission station that had recently been established, Madeleine was awakened by the noise of 150 goats bleating wildly with fear.

Jumping out of bed, she lighted the kerosene lantern and ran into Marthe's bedroom.

"Quick, Marthe, the goats are in danger! We've got to go out and see what it is. We can't afford to lose any, or the orphans will starve."

Cautiously, the two women, dressed in their nightgowns, walked outside into the darkness, holding the lantern toward the large pen where they kept the goats at night. The goats were milling around in confusion.

A fierce roar from the trees surrounding the pen froze the

women in their tracks. A pair of yellow eyes blazed in the blackness.

"A leopard! O Madeleine, I wish Aimé and Marius were here. I'm scared. What can we do?" Marthe said, her hands clutching her throat.

"We can pray, Marthe, and we can also stay here until he goes away," Madeleine replied calmly, squeezing her friend's arm. "As long as we have the light, the leopard will not attack."

She was right. Marthe and Madeleine stood guard by the goat pen with the lantern until the sky began to lighten. The leopard, crouched in a tree, finally leaped to the ground and padded away. He never came back again.

When Aimé and Marius returned, the two women told them about their encounter with the leopard.

"We are sure that God protected you and the goats. He knows that the orphans have to drink milk to survive," Marius said with a smile.

God knew, too, that the Cosendais needed seeds to continue planting their garden. When they harvested what they thought would be the last produce from their garden, Aimé noticed that a few of each kind of plant had produced seeds—enough seeds to plant another garden, something they had never done before!

"Madeleine, look!" Aimé exclaimed, showing her the plants that had seeds on them. "The Lord has wrought a miracle. We can plant another garden."

The Cosendais did plant another garden, and it not only produced food for them and the Fridlins, but also enough to share with many of their students. Not only that, but a few of each kind of plant once again produced just enough seeds to plant yet another garden. Every year during the war, the garden kept producing seeds. But when the war ended and the mail service to Europe resumed, amazingly the plants stopped producing seeds.

"Aimé, this is truly a miracle of modern manna," Madeleine said one day as she peeled carrots for a salad. "Jesus has multiplied our seeds like He multiplied the little boy's five loaves of bread and two small fishes to feed the 5,000."

"Yes, it is a miracle," agreed Aimé. "A miracle of seeds."

The war years brought other miracles as well, as the Cosendais and Fridlins planted the good seed of the gospel in the hearts of the Africans who lived and studied at Nanga-Eboko. And as that seed took root in hearts, the harvest of souls which resulted was, without exception, the greatest miracle of all.

## Chapter 8
# Taking Off the Helmet

Madeleine proved in every way to be the missionary wife Aimé thought she would be when he married her. During the war years at Nanga-Eboko, she developed skills with her feminine sensitivity and courage that helped her reach the people in ways Aimé couldn't.

There were times, though, many times, in fact, when the Africans taught the Cosendais more about trusting in God than they taught the Africans. One such case was Fanako, an elderly widow who lived on the Nanga-Eboko compound. Many years before when Fanako was a young girl, an aging chief had taken her to be his bride. He already had several wives, as was the custom in Africa at that time, and even today, polygamy is still widely practiced on the African continent just like it was during Old Testament times. And, as it was back then, a woman's worth is determined by her ability to have children—especially sons.

Fanako never had children, not even a girl, and the chief's other wives mocked her every time she came out of her hut to draw water from the village well. Finally, the chief abandoned her because she was barren. A little later, he died, leaving her a widow. No man in the village wanted her, and the women ignored her. Fanako felt like she mattered to no one, like she was completely worthless. When the Cosendais and Fridlins came to the mission, Fanako was old, gray, and bent. But they demonstrated a love for her that made her feel like she was special. And, as the Cosendais taught the students a new way of living and thinking, the students built her a hut near the mission. Touched by their kindness, Fanako joined the Adventist Church and faithfully attended the early morning Sabbath School lesson class that met

at 5:30 a.m. Sunday through Friday. She could only listen to the lesson, though, because she could not read or write. Fanako would hardly say a word during the class, and Aimé was not sure just how much she really understood.

One morning, Fanako did not show up for class, and that surprised Aimé. He wondered where she was. As he and Madeleine ate breakfast, a messenger came running up to the door and pounded on it.

"Madame! Please come quickly. Fanako is very sick, and she says she is dying. She wants to talk to you."

"Do you want me to come?" said Aimé, wiping his mouth with a napkin.

"No, that's all right. I think I'd rather go alone," Madeleine said.

Knowing that most Africans, even Adventist ones, are often terrified of dying because of their strong cultural belief in spirits, she ran over in her mind just what she would say to comfort Fanako.

Reaching the hut, Madeleine ducked her head and entered without knocking. The smell of death filled the air. Fanako lay on her bed on the floor. Her eyes brightened when she saw Madeleine. She raised her head up and stretched out her hand.

Pity mingled with indignation made Madeleine's heart ache as she gazed on Fanako's wrinkled face. She thought of the many years of loneliness and disgrace she had endured all because she couldn't have children! Fanako will not die alone, not as long as I'm here, Madeleine thought.

Kneeling by Fanako's bed, Madeleine took her hand and said, "Jesus will keep you. Don't be afraid. I—"

"It's not necessary for you to talk to me like that, Madame," Fanako interrupted. "I know that when I close my eyes I will see Jesus the next time I open them."

Madeleine's eyes brimmed with tears. She marveled at the fact that though she couldn't read or write Fanako understood perfectly that death is a sleep and that Jesus will wake the dead from their sleep when He comes again.

She smiled at Fanako.

"I love you, Fanako."

Fanako returned her smile, and then her grip loosened slowly on Madeleine's hand as she sank back on her bed. Her eyes closed and she died.

They buried the childless Fanako in a simple ceremony. No one came except the Cosendais, Fridlins, and the students. They had become her family.

Even though the planes and tanks that bombed and blasted the cities of Europe into rubble during World War II never reached Cameroon, death visited the mission far too often. The war increased the deaths at Nanga-Eboko because it prevented medical supplies from being shipped to Cameroon. More than ever, the Cosendais, the Fridlins, and their African brothers and sisters battled malaria and other tropical diseases without the weapons they really needed. Resourceful Madeleine helped many patients with simple remedies. She made a tea from leaves of a certain tropical tree that helped those who were suffering from fevers and coughs. She also sterilized and heated a small glass called a *ventouse,* using a match, a ball of cotton, and some rubbing alcohol. Then she applied the glass to infected wounds.

"The suction and the heat help draw out the toxins," Madeleine explained to Aimé. Her glass treatment became known throughout the country.

Nothing Madeleine could do, however, prevented Jean-Paul from getting malaria in mid-June 1944.

Madeleine smoothed Jean-Paul's hair. The six-year-old was lying in her lap, tossing and turning and mumbling deliriously. Perspiration poured from his forehead.

"He's burning up, isn't he?" Marthe said to Madeleine.

"I'm afraid so. Just two hours ago his teeth were chattering with the chills. We can't get any quinine, and there is nothing else that will help him."

"Well, I have an idea," said Marius, rubbing his hands together. "Why don't you two take a trip to South Africa for a mini-furlough where Jean-Paul can get some proper medical care? The shipping lanes are clear from Douala to Cape Town."

"Yes, that's a wonderful idea, Marius," declared Marthe. "You know, we care as much about Jean-Paul as though he were our own son. We don't want anything to happen to him. We can get along without you here for a while," she said to Madeleine and Aimé.

"Well, what are we waiting for, Madeleine?" Aimé said, putting his arm around her.

Madeleine heaved a grateful sigh of relief. Jean-Paul could get the help she couldn't give him!

Once Jean-Paul was well, the Cosendais felt free to relax for a while in South Africa. On their way back to central Africa they traveled by train to the Solusi Mission in Rhodesia, which pioneer missionary W. H. Anderson (among others) had founded back in 1894. Seeing southern Africa especially thrilled Aimé because it

was the black pastor from Basutoland, the British Colony surrounded by South Africa, who had first inspired him to go as a missionary when he attended the meeting with his parents in the apple orchard.

The poverty of the blacks in South Africa compared to the wealth of the whites, and the many ways the whites separated themselves from the blacks greatly disturbed him. In his heart he did not feel superior to the blacks in any way. By an accident of birth he had been given greater privileges, especially the privilege of knowing Jesus, and he simply wanted to share that knowledge with others—not by lording it over them as too many colonial missionaries did, but by becoming one with the people as much as possible without losing his own identity.

That was what Jesus did. Though He was God, He "became flesh and lived for a while among us" (John 1:14, NIV), not as a king but as a carpenter. That was what the apostle Paul did. Paul wrote, "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. . . . To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." 1 Corinthians 9:19-22, NIV.

Something had been bothering Aimé since he and Madeleine arrived in Cameroon. All missionaries, both men and women, were expected to wear a colonial helmet to protect their heads from the sun. The helmet, in fact, was much more than protection. It symbolized the white man's power and authority.

"The white man must have his helmet," was a popular expression he heard many times from both blacks and whites. Every time he heard it, the words grated on his nerves like a pebble in his shoe. To Aimé the helmet separated the white man from the black man. He longed to take it off, to go bareheaded with the blacks so they would know he was one of them in spirit. Conformity to custom, however, made Aimé reluctant to do it until he visited Brazzaville. There he saw all the French people wearing helmets just like he and Madeleine did. But when they traveled by ferryboat to the other side of the Congo River to Léopoldville, capital of the Belgian Congo, Aimé noticed that none of the Belgians wore helmets.

"If they can do it, so can I," he said to himself.

He took off his helmet and never put it on again.

## Chapter 9
# Furlough at Last

When the Cosendais returned to Nanga-Eboko, Marius Fridlin expressed his concern about Aimé taking off his helmet.

"Aimé Cosendai, I want you to sign a declaration stating that I am not responsible for you if you get sick. I really don't think you should take your helmet off."

Aimé laughed. He had prepared himself for Fridlin's opposition. "Marius, the Africans don't wear helmets, and I'm convinced that the helmet separates us from them. Obviously, there are other things that separate us. We're living in a large house while they're living in huts. We earn more money than they do. These things we can't really change, but we can take our helmets off, don't you think? The Belgians have done it. I saw it myself in Léopoldville."

Fridlin shook his head and threw up his hands.

"Maybe you're right. But I'm still going to wear my helmet. You haven't convinced me I shouldn't yet."

Aimé became the first missionary in Cameroon to take off the colonial helmet, and he could sense that although the Africans were surprised, they respected him for it. He felt closer to them than ever before and determined to do all he could to identify with them—to eat their food when they offered it to him and to sing their songs with them in worship instead of always expecting them to sing Western-style hymns.

Jean-Paul had done more to influence Aimé's attitude than almost anyone else. The little boy played every day with the African children, becoming one of them. After all, he was the only white child at the mission, and there was no way you could keep a six-year-old boy confined to the house!

Jean-Paul recovered completely from his bout with malaria, but now it was Aimé's turn to get sick. It seemed as though Marius Fridlin's words were almost prophetic.

"Madeleine, I don't feel well," Aimé said one morning at breakfast. "I have to go to the bathroom all the time."

"You look pale, *Chérie*," Madeleine admitted. She felt his forehead. "And you are hot too! Let me get a thermometer and take your temperature."

Madeleine shook the thermometer and placed it under Aimé's tongue. She waited a few minutes and took it out.

"Aimé, you must go to bed right away. You've got a high fever. If you weren't having diarrhea, I'd say you had malaria, but I think you have dysentery instead."

When Marius heard about it, he told Madeleine, "I was afraid this might happen. I told him not to take off his helmet."

Madeleine placed her hands on her hips and frowned.

"Oh, Marius, I don't think that has anything to do with it! He probably got it from something he ate. If he doesn't get any better, we'll take him into the hospital at Yaoundé."

Aimé lost twenty-four pounds in one week due to the dysentery, and his fever persisted. They put him in the back of an ambulance sent by the hospital in Yaoundé. Madeleine and Jean-Paul watched as the ambulance pulled away.

"Mama, is Daddy going to die?" Jean-Paul said, looking up at Madeleine with worried eyes.

"No, no, Jean-Paul. Your daddy is a very strong man. And Jesus will help him to get better soon," Madeleine said, reassuring herself as much as she did Jean-Paul.

Aimé returned home to Nanga-Eboko in two weeks, looking and feeling much better.

"Conditions are already improving, Madeleine. The hospital had medications for the first time since the war began. And I saw European foods in the stores. It's a good sign," he reported.

The war in Europe was, indeed, coming to a close. Hitler and his armies were trapped between the Americans, British, and the French in the west and the advancing Red Army in the east. On April 30 Hitler shot himself in his Berlin bunker and on May 7 the German army surrendered unconditionally to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander. When the Cosendais and the Fridlins heard the report of victory in Europe over their radio, they cried and hugged each other.

With tears streaming down her face, Marthe Fridlin danced around the room and said, "Now we can go home and be with

Gerard. We haven't even been able to write him."

"And I can go and see Mother," Madeleine said, smiling through her tears.

"I don't want to discourage you, Ladies," said the ever-cautious Marius Fridlin, "but it will take a while before everything is back to normal, perhaps a year or so."

Marius Fridlin finally took off his own helmet, but when he did so it was to return to France permanently. The war years had taken their toll on his body and mind. He had served well in Cameroon since 1935, but now it was time to go home and be with Gerard, his and Marthe's only son. They wanted to get reacquainted with him before he grew much bigger. They knew he would hardly know them.

Madeleine and Jean-Paul sailed to Europe themselves on furlough in the spring of 1946. Madeleine was five months pregnant, and when she and her mother met, she laughed and said, "Mama, don't hug me too tight. We've got another baby on the way!"

Madeleine's mother embraced her and then held her at arm's length.

"Madeleine, you look very tired and pale. Are you feeling OK?"

Madeleine hated to admit it, but she was not feeling well, and it wasn't just because of her pregnancy either. Nine years of teaching and making trips into the bush under wartime conditions had weakened her system. She worried about her new baby, kicking softly against her abdomen. Would it be normal? When she went for her physical, the doctor told her she was suffering from anemia. He prescribed iron pills and told her to get plenty of rest.

Madeleine's father never tired of hearing her stories about the seeds, the goats, the leopard, and Fanako. He rejoiced that through her he was experiencing the mission field he never got to go to as a young man.

Aimé's parents, Mama and Papa Cosendai, also enjoyed listening to their experiences. Aimé was sad to hear that Papa was planning to sell the farm and move to Lausanne. It made him feel a little guilty that he hadn't stayed and helped Papa on the farm, especially since Paul had gone on to Collonges too and was now working as a treasurer for the church.

Papa just smiled and said, "Aimé, in my heart I knew you would not be a farmer like me. I am glad that God called you to be a missionary, to be a spiritual farmer. Everything in this world is temporary. It is God's farm anyway, not mine."

Jean-Paul received more pats on the head, kisses on the cheek,

and candy than any mischievous eight-year-old boy deserved.

"Now, Mama, you'll spoil Jean-Paul," Madeleine said as her mother presented Jean-Paul with a new toy truck.

"We've been saving up eight years of love for him," her mother replied, patting Jean-Paul on the cheek.

Madeleine sighed and laughed at her indulgent mother. There simply wasn't a cure for doting grandparents.

While Madeleine waited for the contractions to begin that would signal the arrival of their new baby, Aimé spent a lot of time in Geneva, purchasing needed supplies for their next term of service.

As they lay in bed together one night, Madeleine cried out in pain and held her stomach.

"Aimé, my waters have broken, and the contractions have begun. They're coming closer and closer together now. Please get me to the hospital! Please!"

Aimé helped her to the car. He drove like a chariot racer in ancient Rome through the darkened streets of Geneva. The car's tires squealed as he turned a tight corner and streaked toward the emergency room.

Before he knew it, Madeleine was being wheeled down the corridor on a gurney by a nurse in a starched white uniform, and Aimé was left to pace nervously in the waiting room, pungent with the smell of disinfectant.

"It's a girl, Monsieur Cosendai," the nurse announced two hours later. "You may go and see your wife now."

Aimé felt a profound sense of relief. Now that they had a girl, their little family was complete.

"A perfect combination," Aimé said to himself.

Aimé and Madeleine named their daughter Aldine. Aldine was a beautiful little girl, but she was small and very weak when she was born. The Cosendais waited a few extra weeks to return to Cameroon so that the trip would be as easy as possible for Madeleine and Aldine.

The Cosendais taught at Nanga-Eboko three more years under the direction of Paul Benezech, the new mission president who had opened a mission station at Grand-Batanga back in 1938. Then, in 1949, Elder Benezech asked Aimé to pioneer a new mission station at Nanganjango near Kribi on the coast. Kribi, in fact, was just across the river from Grand Batanga. A man from Kribi found an Ingathering brochure one day as he was walking along the road. The only address printed on it was the division office in Berne, Switzerland. He wrote to Berne and asked them if they

could help him and his people learn more about the Bible. The division wrote back and told him there were teachers at Nanga-Eboko. The man was so interested that he and a friend took several weeks and walked over 300 miles to Nanga-Eboko to make contact with the mission!

The men invited the Adventists to start a new mission station at Nanganjango.

"Aimé, would you and Madeleine be willing to go and do this? You are veteran missionaries now, and it is time you pioneered something completely on your own," Elder Benezech asked.

"I'll talk with Madeleine and pray about it," Aimé said, although he knew what their answer would be.

The mission called Paul Bernard to replace Aimé as the principal of the school. Just before they left to go to Nanganjango, Jean-Paul requested baptism. He was now twelve years old and would soon have to go back to Collonges in France to complete his education.

The palm trees swayed gently overhead as Jean-Paul was lowered into the water and baptized. Several Africans who were watching, remarked, "Jean-Paul has now been born twice in Africa."

Aimé and Madeleine smiled and nodded their heads. Jean-Paul had endeared himself to the people of Nanga-Eboko. They would miss him almost as much as his parents would.

Aldine was three years old when the Cosendais moved from their comfortable home in Nanga-Eboko to a hut at Nanganjango that the local chief had lent them until they could build a permanent house.

The land the chief had given them was uncleared jungle. Aimé and his African helpers spent hours day after day in the humid heat cutting and chopping trees and bushes so they could start building the new mission.

Madeleine cooked outside in a wood stove and hung her pots and pans from a palm tree. Aldine played nearby, smiling and waving at the African women and their children who stopped to visit. Madeleine kept a careful eye on Aldine and worried about her constantly. She felt that Aldine had been affected by her anemia while she was pregnant. Aldine got sick easily and had been late in learning to walk and talk. Aldine loved to play dolls and sing songs about Jesus. Every Sabbath, the Cosendais took a group of young people down by the beach and sang together as Aimé played on a portable organ. Aldine played tag with the waves and made everyone laugh.

After two years of hard work, Aimé and his African helpers completed the house and began to build a church and a school.

"I can't wait to move into our new house," Madeleine told Aimé as they ate together under the palm trees. "And just think, you built it with your own hands."

Aimé smiled and took her hand.

"It will be good to live in a regular house again with a real bathroom and a kitchen for you. We'll move in after we come home from our next furlough."

But the Cosendais never got to move into the new house. Elder Benezech had gone home to Europe, and a new mission president, Elder J. A. de Caenel had taken his place. But he stayed only one year. He developed diabetes and had to return home himself. Because of his success at Nanganjango, Aimé was now asked to become the president of the newly organized French West and Equatorial African Union Mission, which was growing very rapidly in membership.

"Well, I guess we're not in heaven yet where a man builds his house and another does not inhabit it," he told Madeleine before they packed their bags for another furlough.

"At least you can joke about it Aimé," Madeleine said with a tired smile. "I'm not sure I can!"

## Chapter 10

# Now We Know You Love Us

Returning from furlough, the Cosendais moved back to Nanga-Eboko, and Aimé began his new responsibilities as president of the mission. The leaders of the Southern European Division, which administered the French West and Equatorial African Union Mission, decided that the mission should move its headquarters from Nanga-Eboko to Yaoundé, the capital of French Cameroon. The mission was growing so fast they felt it could be directed more efficiently from the capital city, which was the hub of transportation and finance for the country.

"Another move? Aimé, I don't know if I'm up to this," Madeleine said when he told her the decision of the division committee.

"I know just how you feel, Madeleine. But I do believe it is the Lord's will. It will be much easier for me to travel to the mission stations from Yaoundé," he replied.

Aimé and Kurt Scheidegger, the new secretary-treasurer of the mission, carefully laid plans to move to Yaoundé and start building houses and an office building near the edge of the city on land that the mission had acquired during the war.

At the same time, they were constructing a church at the mission station of Niamvoudou. The Scheideggers and the Cosendais moved to Yaoundé and stayed in primitive huts while the houses were under construction. Aimé frequently shuttled back and forth between Yaoundé and Niamvoudou to supervise the construction and to transport materials in the mission's pickup truck.

The road from Yaoundé to Niamvoudou was very dangerous, particularly during the rainy season when water often covered parts of the road that crossed swamps.

"We must get back to Yaoundé by morning because I need to

supervise the work crew there tomorrow," Aimé announced to Madeleine, who had come along with him on this trip.

The sun was setting as Aimé loaded the truck with their suitcases and some pineapples that the villagers had given to them.

Aimé looked anxiously at the sky. Black rain clouds had covered the setting sun, and the wind began to blow.

"Madeleine, we've got to hurry! There are two or three places in the road that are extremely dangerous," Aimé said, as he turned the key in the ignition. The engine roared to life, and Aimé pressed down on the gas pedal. The pickup shot away so fast that David, the young African man who was riding in the back, lost his balance and nearly fell out.

Suddenly the sky opened like a broken dam, and the rain fell so hard Aimé could barely see the road ahead of him. He stopped the truck so David could climb in beside them in the pickup.

Madeleine looked at Aimé, her eyes full of fear.

"Maybe we should turn back," she said.

"It's really too late for that, *Chérie.* And where would we turn back? The road is so narrow that we will get bogged down trying to do that. All we can do is go ahead," Aimé said, grimly staring ahead as he concentrated on the road.

The rain turned the road to mud, and Aimé had to gun the engine and skillfully steer the truck from one side of the road to the other to keep it from getting stuck.

He knew he couldn't stop again. If he did, they would bog down for sure. An hour later, the rain was still lashing the road when they came to a large swamp. The road had been elevated and shored up with wood on each side, but the water was level with the road now. Aimé floored the gas pedal. The truck lurched ahead, its tires desperately trying to find some traction in the mud. Halfway across the swamp, the truck stopped completely. The tires spun helplessly like a rat running on a treadmill.

Again and again Aimé pressed down on the gas pedal, but it was no use. They were stuck!

"What are we going to do?" cried Madeleine.

"Well, the first thing we've got to do is pray. I've never been stuck like this before and never in a rainstorm. We have some logs in the back of the truck. You can hold the kerosene lantern while David and I put the logs under the wheels. Then David will push while I drive. It's the only way," Aimé said.

"I'm afraid you are right, Patron," David said.

After prayer, Aimé got out of the truck and surveyed their predicament. It was worse than he had feared, but perhaps not

hopeless. The front wheels were fairly free, but the back ones were mired in mud. Madeleine held the lantern while Aimé and David took turns digging out the back wheels with a shovel.

The rain soaked their clothes and ran down their faces. It blinded their eyes. Aimé and David didn't notice the cold because they were working so hard, but Madeleine began to shiver.

"OK!" Aimé shouted above the roar of the storm. "Let's put the logs under the back wheels and see if we can get free."

Aimé got in the truck and started the engine while David braced himself to push. The logs gave the tires just enough traction so that the truck leaped forward like a tiger jumping out of an open cage. But before it could move very far, the tires sank in the mud again.

Picking up one of the logs, Aimé stuck it in the rising water beside the road to see how deep it was. He couldn't find the bottom. He knew now that they were in real trouble. If they didn't get out of there, they could all drown.

Time after time, Aimé and David placed the logs under the wheels while Madeleine held the lantern. The truck would move forward a little and then sink again. Just after midnight the truck finally crossed the last part of the swamp. Aimé, Madeleine, and David climbed into the cab and drove toward Yaoundé, too exhausted to speak.

They arrived at the construction site of the new mission headquarters at 7:00 a.m., just in time for Aimé to supervise the workers.

"I never want to take a trip like that again," Madeleine sighed, as she got out of the truck.

"Me either," Aimé said. "Aldine and Jean-Paul could have been orphans last night. If we are out there again and it looks like rain, we'll stay the night instead of trying to drive back."

Aldine came running out of the Scheidegger's house, where Mrs. Scheidegger had been caring for her. She ran into Aimé's arms. He lifted her up above his head and laughed.

"I missed you, Papa," she said in her sweet voice.

"I missed you too, Princess," he said.

Aimé hugged her tight and kissed her on the cheek. She was the apple of his eye.

When the mission houses and the office buildings were completed, Aimé, Madeleine, and Aldine went home to Switzerland for another well-deserved furlough.

Jean-Paul was doing very well in school and told them he wanted to come back and work in Cameroon when he graduated.

He was studying at Bogenhofen, the Adventist school in Austria, because every Swiss boy and girl was required to learn German before he could graduate.

"Papa, I feel more like an African than a European. Cameroon is my home."

Jean-Paul's words thrilled Aimé and Madeleine. They couldn't wait until he returned to Cameroon to help them in their missionary work.

Because of his pressing duties as union president, Aimé returned to Cameroon alone this time. Madeleine decided to spend the winter in Geneva with her parents.

Her mother was suffering from pleurisy. Every time she breathed it hurt. Madeleine spent a lot of time taking care of her. The winter that year in Geneva was bitterly cold. Lake Geneva froze over farther out than usual, and the snow piled up in drifts along the streets and in the yards. One blustery day in April, Madeleine bundled up Aldine and took the tram down to Grand Passage, one of Geneva's major department stores to do some shopping.

"Look at the funny people, Mama," Aldine said, pointing to a statue of a Swiss man leaning against a light pole and smoking a cigarette. At several tram stops in Geneva, the city had placed statues of people who looked like the real people who rode the tram. You had to look twice sometimes to realize they weren't real.

Madeleine laughed.

"Those aren't real people, Aldine. They're just big dollies."

Aldine giggled and squirmed in her seat. Then her face grew sad as the tram rumbled down the tracks through the center of town.

"I miss Papa, don't you? I wish he could be here to see the funny people too."

Madeleine squeezed her daughter.

"I sure do. We'll go to see him soon."

On the way back home from Grand Passage, Madeleine noticed that Aldine felt hot, and when she talked her voice was hoarse. She put Aldine to bed as soon as she got home and rubbed her chest with mentholated cream.

She told her parents, "I'm afraid Aldine is coming down with pneumonia. I shouldn't have taken her out today, I guess, but she seemed fine when we left this morning."

Madeleine's father put down the newspaper he was reading.

"I'm sure she'll be all right. You'd better wait till she's better,

though, before you travel back to Cameroon."

Madeleine took Aldine to the doctor and got some penicillin for her. She improved dramatically after a few days of taking the "wonder drug" and wanted to play with her dolls again.

Spring finally came to Geneva. The daffodils and the tulips bloomed in the parks, and young lovers strolled arm-in-arm. But Madeleine's heart was far away in Cameroon with Aimé. She and Aldine took a plane to Fort-Lamy (which today is N'Djamena, the capital of Chad). Dr. F. Brennwald, medical director of the Adventist hospital at Koza, which is just across the border in northern Cameroon, met them with the mission truck.

As they bounced along the road past villages of round adobe huts covered with straw roofs that looks like Chinese hats, Aldine fell asleep in Madeleine's lap.

"You can stay a few days with us at Koza before taking the plane from Maroua to Yaoundé."

"Thank you, Dr. Brennwald. That's very kind of you, But I want to see Aimé as soon as possible," Madeleine replied. "I'll stay tonight but take the plane tomorrow, if you don't mind."

Dr. Brennwald laughed as though he knew a secret she didn't.

"He is already at Dogba, working out some problems at the mission there. He will drive up tomorrow to see you."

Dogba was an Adventist secondary school about an hour away from Koza Hospital.

From a well deep in her heart, tears flowed into her eyes. It seemed like years since she had seen Aimé. She gazed out of the open truck window at a group of blue-robed Sara women carrying waterpots on their heads and walking single file to a well. It was so good to be back in Africa again. This was home. But she had to admit that she preferred Yaoundé's climate and terrain to the dry north. Treeless mountains rose above scrubby plains. She could taste dust in her mouth, and the heat nearly suffocated her.

That night it was so hot at Koza that she and Aldine slept outside on camp beds. Because roving bands of hyenas sometimes prowled the hospital compound, she kept a stick beside her and slept with one eye open. Their weird howls, which sounded like hysterical laughter, echoed in the darkness and sent chills up and down her spine. Aldine slept peacefully beside her, oblivious to the howls of the hyenas.

The next day when Aimé arrived from Dogba, Aldine ran into his arms. Then Aimé and Madeleine embraced for the longest time.

"Let's not be separated for this long again," Aimé said.

"That's the best advice I've heard in a long time," said Madeleine, kissing him.

They stayed and visited at Koza for another day, and then Madeleine took Aldine with her on the plane back to Yaoundé.

"I'll be home in a week or so," Aimé said. "I've got some more visits to make."

"Well, when you come, I'll have a home-cooked meal waiting for you," she said.

Madeleine was distressed to find that all the children on the mission compound at Yaoundé were coughing when she and Aldine arrived.

"I'm afraid there is an epidemic of whooping cough going on around here," Mrs. Scheidegger explained. "It started just last week. You'd better keep Aldine inside the house."

Aimé returned a week later, just as he said he would. He spent the next morning playing with Aldine. Then at noon, as the Cosendais ate dinner together, Aldine suddenly came down with a fever and began to wheeze and cough.

"Oh, Aimé, she's just gotten over the pneumonia, and now she's caught the whooping cough as the other children have! We'd better get her to the hospital right away," Madeleine said. Her face wore a worried look.

"I'll get the car. I'm sure she'll be all right," Aimé said, rising to his feet.

But Aldine was *not* all right. Her fever rose higher and higher, and she coughed without stopping. That night she closed her eyes for the last time in Aimé's arms as she went to sleep in Jesus. She was nine years old.

Aimé sobbed softly as he rocked Aldine in his arms.

"Oh, my precious little girl. *Ma petite fille.* I'm so glad I came back yesterday so I could tell you goodbye."

The loss of Aldine shattered the Cosendais for a long time. But never once did they consider going home to Europe, and that was something that surprised the Africans. Almost any time a missionary family suffered a tragedy like losing a child, the family went home and never came back.

When they buried Aldine many people came to her funeral. A group of Adventist Cameroonians asked Aimé if he would now go home to Europe permanently. They expected him to say Yes.

"Oh, no," said Aimé. "No, the Lord still has much work for us to do here. This is our home now. We're staying."

The men shook their heads, and their eyes widened in awe.

They told him, "Now we know that you truly love us."

## Chapter 11
# Hunting Tragedy!

Like an African warrior hunting antelope on the plains, death shot two arrows into the hearts of the Cosendais in 1953 when it claimed not only the life of their daughter, Aldine, but also of their good friend and colleague Roger Hirschy.

Roger and his family had returned to Cameroon after World War II ended. The mission field had called to Roger's heart ever since he was a student at Collonges, and there was nothing that could keep him away, not even a world war, although for several years it had delayed his return to Cameroon from furlough.

At the time of his death, Roger was serving as the president of the Batouri Mission in east Cameroon. Aimé visited Roger and his family from time to time on his rounds as the union president, and Aimé and Madeleine sometimes had the opportunity of entertaining Roger when he traveled to Yaoundé for the union committee meetings.

Roger was in the prime of life then, a strong, robust man in his late thirties who faced each morning with courage and confidence. His suntanned face often broke into a smile followed by laughter that cheered everyone up, no matter how difficult the circumstances. That was what made Roger's death all the more tragic. It should never have happened, but it did.

Roger had one major flaw—sometimes he listened to and followed the advice of others even though his better judgment told him otherwise. And the last time he did, it killed him.

Like Isaac in the book of Genesis, many Africans like to eat meat—preferably wild meat from game animals killed in the hunt. One of their favorite animals to eat is the wild buffalo, which, they say, has delicious meat but is also Africa's most

dangerous game animal. These black-hided animals stand six feet at the shoulder and weigh about 1,200 pounds. With their heavy hooves and sharp, curving horns, the wild buffalo of Africa can kill a lion. They have also killed many hunters, and Roger Hirschy was one of their unfortunate victims.

One Friday afternoon during the rainy season, Roger finished conducting a meeting for some evangelistic workers. After the meeting, a group of men came up to Roger with excited looks on their faces. A spokesman for the group said, "Pastor Hirschy, we know you are a good hunter. If you can kill a buffalo for us, we'll be very happy. We haven't tasted buffalo meat for a long time."

Roger scratched his head, and a worried look came into his eyes.

"I would like to do that for you, for I enjoy hunting, as you know. But the grass is too high now. It would be very dangerous."

"Ah, but Pastor Hirschy," said the spokesman, taking his arm, "we will send many trackers and porters with you. You will not be alone!"

Roger shook his head.

"No, I can't. It's too dangerous. Can't you wait till the rainy season is over and the grass is shorter? Then the buffalo would not be able to take us by surprise."

The men pressed around Roger like a pride of lions closing in for the kill. They could see he wanted to please them.

"We have waited too long!" they chorused together. The spokesman pleaded, "Please shoot a buffalo for us. Our children and our wives have been hungry for buffalo meat for so long. It would make them very, very happy. You are a great hunter, like Nimrod or Esau. God will protect you," said the spokesman. "Think of the nice trophy you can hang on your wall."

Roger's pride and desire to please the Africans won out.

"Well, all right. But just this once."

The group of workers clapped and cheered. They hurried home to tell their wives about the buffalo hunt on Sunday.

On Sabbath Roger preached in the Batouri church and spent the afternoon with his family. Sunday dawned bright and clear as Roger pulled away from the mission with two rifles stowed in the gun rack of his Dodge pickup. A group of porters and trackers sat in the back, laughing and talking about the hunt. They bragged about how many buffalo they would kill and how much they would eat at the feast that night.

The hunting party drove north for two hours until they came to a wide rolling plain bordered by a forest. The tall green grass

rippled in the wind like waves on the sea. Roger stopped the truck and got out.

"All right. There should be some buffalo somewhere along here for the next ten miles. The grass is high, so we must be very careful. When you see something, let me know right away," Roger said to the trackers and porters.

Roger drove slowly along the rutted dirt road, scanning the horizon on both sides for any signs of buffalo.

One of the trackers pounded on the window, and Roger stopped the truck again.

"Patron, look! There are some buffalo droppings and tracks on the side road. And they are fresh. They are here. We can follow their tracks and find them."

"OK," Roger said. "But as I said before, we must be very careful. Once we locate the buffalo, I want everyone to stay still and be quiet so that I can shoot. Do all of you understand that?"

"*Oui,* Patron," the men said.

The trackers knelt down and examined the tracks and the droppings. Then they walked single file off the road into the grass followed by Roger, who held his rifle at the ready. The porters followed behind with the bags they would need to carry out the butchered meat.

As they topped a small rise, the tracker in the lead whirled around and put his finger to his lips.

"Shh. They are here!" he whispered. He motioned for Roger to come forward. Roger kept low and ran to the front of the line. Directly in front of them near the forest stood a pair of buffalo, glaring at them with their dark eyes. Their nostrils flared as they snorted a warning. The buffalo had heard their approach and now, instead of retreating and running away into the trees like most other African game animals would, the bad-tempered buffalo charged.

Instantly, Roger raised his rifle and took aim. Boom! The rifle roared, the impact jerking Roger's right shoulder backward. The lead buffalo sank to the ground, mortally wounded, while the other one turned and ran into the trees.

The trackers and the porters cheered and slapped each other on the back and started to rush toward the wounded animal.

"Careful!" Roger stopped them. "The buffalo is wounded. It's not dead yet. We must approach it very carefully." He pointed to the lead tracker.

"You come with me, and the rest of you stay here," he commanded.

Roger and the lead tracker cautiously approached the downed buffalo. Blood gushed from the wound near its neck. The wild-eyed animal thrashed and kicked, trying to get up, but it couldn't. At point-blank range, Roger raised his rifle a second time to finish the kill. Without warning, from the tall grass on his right, the second buffalo appeared out of nowhere and charged. Two thousand pounds of rumbling fury bore down on Roger.

"Patron!" the tracker yelled in horror and ran away.

Roger wheeled to face the second buffalo, but as he did so, he tripped over a root and fell backward. The rifle flew out of his hands, and he landed on his back. The enraged buffalo trampled him with its hooves and tried to gore him with its curved horns.

The hot breath of the huge beast nearly choked him as he desperately managed to grab the horns with his hands.

"Shoot him! Kill him!" Roger yelled to the porters and trackers, but they cowered in the grass, too frightened to do anything. Roger held onto the horns as the buffalo tried to get its head free. Finally, Roger couldn't hold on any longer. With a mighty twist of its head, the buffalo shook off Roger's grip and gored him in the leg.

Roger screamed out in pain, and his scream broke the Africans' spell of fear. They sprinted forward from their hiding place in the grass with sticks and surrounded the animal. They beat the buffalo until it slowly walked away, as though it were satisfied that it had avenged the death of its partner.

Roger sat up and examined his wound. The blood spurted out of the deep gash in rhythm to the beating of his heart. The horn had cut an artery! He could easily bleed to death. Immediately, Roger drew his hunting knife and cut the strap off his camera. He tied the strap around his leg above the wound. Then he tied a knot, and using a small stick, he twisted the strap into a tourniquet that stopped the bleeding.

Roger's chest heaved as he breathed rapidly. "You've got to carry me to the truck and hurry!" he said weakly.

The men made a makeshift stretcher from some canvas bags and tree branches. Gently, they laid Roger on the stretcher and carried him to the truck; but he was too weak to drive himself, and none of the men knew how to drive.

"The only thing we can do is wait until another truck comes by," the head tracker told the men.

Finally, after four hours of waiting, a truck came by. The men flagged it down and told the driver about the wounded white hunter.

"Put him in the back, and I'll drive him to the nearest hospital," the truck driver said.

The truck took Roger to a military hospital at Batouni. When they carried him in, his blood pressure dropped dramatically due to shock and loss of blood. The French physician in charge told the nurse who had taken the blood pressure, "We must call the governor of the province immediately and ask permission to use his plane to fly this man down to Yaoundé."

The colonial governor of that province of Cameroon dispatched his personal DC-3 to fly Roger to Yaoundé.

When the surgeon at Yaoundé examined Roger, he told him, "Your wound is no problem. I've seen worse wounds in the war. There is no doubt in my mind that you will recover."

The next day Roger seemed much better. The surgeon had sutured the wound up nicely, but the wound itself was not Roger's only problem. The shock to his system and possibly internal injuries or infection caused his kidneys to shut down.

The hospital called for French soldiers to donate blood so Roger's doctors could perform a blood transfusion.

Aimé was away on a trip, but when Madeleine heard about Roger's hunting accident, she rushed to the hospital the very first day and visited him every day for a week.

Roger was weak but conscious. He and Madeleine talked about their days at Collonges and about the work of the church in Cameroon.

"I know that Aimé will be anxious to visit you when he comes home. He's scheduled to arrive in a couple of days," Madeleine said.

The smile faded from Roger's lips like the sun setting in the evening, leaving only darkness behind. "It might be too late, Madeleine," he said. "I was so foolish to listen to the workers. So foolish. Please tell my mother that I love her and that I am thinking about her."

Roger's words horrified Madeleine. She knew he was weak, but she thought his words were the words of just a sick and discouraged man, not a dying one.

"Oh, Roger, you're going to get better," she said with a soothing tone of voice and a bright smile.

"Just tell my mother, my wife, and my children that I love them," Roger whispered again, turning his head away from Madeleine.

Madeleine took his hand and leaned over the bed.

"Let's pray together, Roger," she said.

Madeleine ended her prayer and squeezed his hand. She bent down and kissed him on the cheek.

"I'll see you tomorrow morning, Roger, OK?"

Her words seemed to cheer him up. He managed to smile and said, "OK."

Madeleine really believed Roger was going to recover as she walked down the corridor and out the door into the night.

The next morning she arrived at the hospital bright and early, carrying a bouquet of flowers that she had picked from the garden at the mission, certain that their bright beauty would cheer up the stricken man.

But as she walked toward Roger's room she saw a cluster of people in front of the door. A nurse who was writing something on a clipboard saw her approaching and quickly handed the clipboard to an orderly. She walked up to Madeleine, her starched white uniform rustling with brisk efficiency.

"I am afraid that Monsieur Hirschy is dead, Madame," the nurse said.

Madeleine shook her head. It couldn't be. It just couldn't be.

"But he was recovering and he has a wife and five children and—"

The nurse put her arm around Madeleine and steered her in the direction of the hospital lobby.

"I'm afraid it's true. His heart stopped beating this morning. We tried to revive him, but it was no use. I'm very sorry," the nurse said.

Madeleine was too stunned to speak. Roger, dead? The laughing, happy-go-lucky friend she and Aimé had known at Collonges? The dedicated missionary who had served in Cameroon with them? It couldn't be, and yet it was.

The bouquet of flowers slipped out of her nerveless hands and fell to the floor, flowers that Roger Hirschy would never see and never smell.

The last chapter of Roger's mission service in Cameroon had been written, a sad epitaph to a tragic mistake. But although death had pierced their hearts twice, Aimé and Madeleine would write many more chapters in their own book before they returned to Europe.

## Chapter 12

# Over the Air and Into Prison

As president of the union, Aimé traveled throughout Cameroon, from the hot, humid coast to the cooler highlands of the interior and up north to the arid plains and treeless maintains. Madeleine really missed him because he was gone from home 265 days a year! During this time, Jean-Paul returned from school in Europe to teach the secondary school at the Sangmelima Mission, following in the footsteps of his missionary father. Together, Jean-Paul and Aimé visited a tribe of Pygmies who lived in the forest area there. Jean-Paul started a school for the Pygmies, who loved to sing, and learn how to read and write.

Time after time, as Aimé visited the villages where the people worshiped their ancestors and nature gods, he wondered how the Adventist Church could ever reach the people living in the hundreds and thousands of such villages scattered throughout Cameroon's vast countryside.

After 1960 when the wind of independence swept across the entire African continent, the answer came to Aimé, and when it did, it startled him. In 1960 many African countries won their independence from the European countries that had colonized and controlled them for half a century or more. France and Great Britain granted independence to the United Nations trust territories of eastern and western Cameroon, which they had administered since 1946. Eastern Cameroon became the Republic of Cameroon in 1960. In 1961 the northern part of western Cameroon joined Nigeria, while the southern part of western Cameroon joined eastern Cameroon to form a federal republic.

Now the African Cameroonians took charge of their own affairs for the first time. Many of them had been educated in Europe and

had led the organizations that called for self-government. At the same time that the Cameroons united and gained independence, the French Equatorial African Union Mission, of which Aimé was president, expanded its territory beyond Cameroon to include the countries of the Congo Republic, Gabon, the Central African Republic, and Chad, and became known as the Equatorial African Union Mission.

Now more than ever before, Aimé wrestled with the great problem of how to reach the millions of people living in the cities and in the bush of these countries. With the Africans now in charge of the country, Aimé made it a point to become acquainted with the new leaders and make friends with them as far as possible because he did not want to see the work of the church hindered in any way. At this time, there were thirty-six churches in the Equatorial African Union Mission with a total membership of 6,066.

One day Aimé expressed his concern to Madeleine and Kurt Scheidegger as they ate dinner together.

"You know, the Lord has laid a heavy burden on my heart. The Bible says that Jesus is coming soon, but He won't come until the gospel has been preached throughout the world. There are many places in Cameroon and these other countries where people still have never heard of Jesus. I wonder how we can reach them? We just don't have enough missionaries or even African workers to send out."

Kurt Scheidegger laid down his fork and looked at Aimé with understanding.

"It is a perplexing problem, isn't it? Surely God must have an answer," he said.

"God always has an answer to everything," Madeleine said as she refilled their water glasses. "If we pray with all our hearts about this, I am sure He will let us know what to do."

And God did, in a remarkable way.

In 1963 Aimé made friends with Cameroon's commissioner of information. One day, the courteous, well-dressed man called him into his office in Yaoundé.

He smiled and folded his hands on his desk.

Aimé could tell that he had something important to say, and he wondered what it could be.

"Pastor Cosendai, why do you Adventists not broadcast over the state radio? The Catholics do and so do some of the Protestant churches. We will give you free air time every week if you can come up with a program."

The commissioner's words took Aimé by surprise. Why hadn't he thought of using radio before? Yes, that was the answer! He knew that many Africans owned radios, even in the remotest villages. Radio would be perfect. The church could broadcast its message to thousands of villages at once.

Aimé's heart beat faster and faster. He tried to control the excitement in his voice.

"It is something I have not thought of before, monsieur. If you give me time, I will talk to our committee about it, and I'm sure we can arrange to broadcast a program."

"Take all the time you need, Pastor Cosendai. Your church is doing a good work in Cameroon. You have established many schools and clinics plus the hospital at Koza in the north." He leaned across his desk and lowered his voice. "And if you want to know the truth, I believe that what you are preaching is the truth."

The words of the commissioner thrilled Aimé. Surely God was opening doors!

When Aimé got home that evening, he told Madeleine about his meeting with the commissioner.

"I knew that God would have an answer to your burden, *Chérie,*" she said, putting her arms around him. "I am sure the committee of the union will vote to broadcast our message over the radio."

The union committee did vote to do so. Since they had no production studio there at the union headquarters in Yaoundé, and since Aimé was traveling so much, he decided to order Voice of Prophecy tapes from France and broadcast them over Radio Cameroon during the time the commissioner gave him.

But the commissioner was not satisfied. After listening to several of the tapes, he called Aimé into his office.

"Pastor Cosendai, these Voice of Prophecy tapes are good. They are preaching the right doctrines, but they are more suitable for Europeans. They are not adapted to African culture."

Aimé knew he was right, but how could he produce such a program himself? They had no recording studio.

Once again the commissioner had the answer.

"Listen, there is a Protestant church here in Yaoundé that has a recording studio. Perhaps they will let you use it until you can build your own studio."

But there was one thing that Aimé disagreed with the commissioner about. The commissioner suggested that he call the radio program "The Lord's Sabbath."

Aimé protested. "With all due respect, monsieur, I think the name is limiting. It is true that we believe in the seventh-day Sabbath, but that is certainly not the only thing we believe. We want to present a broad view of the gospel. I would rather call the program "It Is Written," because we believe in the entire Bible. Also, that is the expression that Jesus used three times when he was tempted by the devil in the wilderness."

The commissioner toyed with the gold ring around his finger and thought for a minute. Then his lips blossomed into a broad smile.

"Of course you are right. 'It is Written' is the best name you could possibly have."

And so, Aimé began to prepare scripts for the new radio program. He had spent enough time in Africa to know the culture of the Africans and what things were important to them. He went to the Djongolo church, the main Adventist church in Yaoundé and recorded the Dorcas choir there. The Dorcas choir was a group of women who sang African gospel songs while they accompanied themselves with hollowed-out bamboo poles, tambourines, and rattles.

He also recorded other African Adventist choirs, singers, and instrumentalists. The Protestant church gave their permission for the Adventists to use their recording studio, and soon Aimé was recording and sending out the new program. On Independence Day, he prepared a special program that focused on the freedom people can have in Christ. He made programs on polygamy, witchcraft, and on marriage and the family, which all Africans are intensely interested in. Aimé knew that Africa marches to the drum of the Old Testament. He knew that since many of them come from polygamous families and have many brothers and sisters, they relate better than Europeans and Americans do to Bible stories like Joseph and his brothers.

And in the bush, many Africans still live like the people in Bible times did. Women draw water from wells. Shepherd boys herd goats and sheep. And yet they are in touch with the modern world through radio.

The response of the people truly amazed Aimé and Madeleine. On their broadcasts they began giving the address of the mission and told their listeners to write in for a free copy of the week's message if they wanted it.

The first time they made that offer, only twenty-five people wrote in. But in just a few weeks, the numbers was up to 200 and then 500 and soon 1,000.

Madeleine's job was to copy the scripts and send them out, but when the number of requests reached 1,000, she realized that something else would have to be done.

She was standing by the mimeograph machine turning the crank one afternoon when Aimé walked in. Each time she turned the crank a newly printed copy of the script flew into a neat pile in the tray at the end of the machine.

Aimé picked up a copy and looked at it.

"I like the smell of freshly mimeographed scripts, don't you, Madeleine?"

Madeleine stopped cranking and pushed a stray wisp of hair out of her eyes.

"If you had to do this for two or three hours, maybe you wouldn't," she said, fatigue straining her voice.

She sighed and leaned against the counter.

"Aimé, we really need to do something different. My arm is sore from cranking so much, and I have other things to do."

Aimé tugged thoughtfully at his beard.

"Well, I think the logical solution would be to have the press print the script now. Kurt and I started that press in 1954, and they have been doing more commercial work than spiritual work lately. I think it's time for them to increase their work for the church."

The press started printing the radio scripts. By the time Aimé left Cameroon on his first permanent return to Europe, the press was printing 8,000 scripts.

When he went on furlough after starting the radio program, Aimé purchased some good recording equipment in Switzerland and had it shipped to Cameroon. Soon the union had its own recording studio, which made it much more convenient for Aimé to produce the program.

It was not long until his voice was recognized by people all over Cameroon as well as the adjoining countries since they sent the tapes to radio stations there also. And not once did they have to pay anything for air time.

Aimé's dream for reaching people in the remotest villages had been realized, and now he began to schedule one-week evangelistic meetings with the listeners in the larger cities. He announced the time and location over the radio program. On opening nights Aimé had a hard time believing it when hundreds of people filed into the meeting room and took their seats. Many of them accepted the Adventist message and joined the church by baptism.

Perhaps the greatest thrill that Aimé experienced as a result

of the radio program was that the commissioner of information himself, the man who had suggested that he begin the program in the first place, requested baptism also.

But Aimé was spreading himself way too thin. He was still the president of the union and had to travel much of the time to check up on the various mission stations. When he returned to Yaoundé, he would prepare the radio scripts and record the program. He hardly had any time to rest and relax, and Madeleine became worried about him.

"Aimé," Madeleine said one day at supper, "you can't keep up this pace anymore. You're going to kill yourself."

Aimé studied the worried look in her eyes. He knew she was right, but it was hard to admit it.

"Aimé, what would you rather do? Prepare the radio program or be the union president?"

Aimé pondered her words for a moment.

"You know that I find the radio program more satisfying than anything else I've done in all our years in Cameroon. But I like to promote evangelism, education, and health."

"I know. But I really don't think you can do both. It's too much for one man!" Madeleine said, raising her eyebrows.

After dinner that night, Aimé took a walk through the streets of Yaoundé and thought about what Madeleine had said. When he got back he had made up his mind. He would accept giving up the presidency in order to stay on as the director of the radio program.

The Southern European Division, which administered the Equatorial African Union Mission, accepted his plan and sent Elder Edwin Ludescher to take over as the new union president in 1970. When the Africans heard about it, they were surprised again at Aimé's attitude.

They said to him, "Now that you are no longer president, we were sure you would go home to Europe. You don't have the authority now."

Aimé shook his head and laughed.

"It doesn't matter to me who has the authority as long as the work gets done. Don't you remember what Jesus said, 'The Son of man came not to be served, but to serve'?"

Aimé's example taught his African brothers and sisters an important lesson in humility.

When Edwin Ludescher arrived to take over the presidency of the union Aimé felt like he did as a boy when he took off the heavy metal milk backpack every morning at the creamery in Corcelles.

Now he was free to concentrate his energy on the radio program alone. Madeleine also began a program of her own. Ever sensitive to the needs of women, she and Christine Awo, a Cameroonian Adventist nurse educated at Nanga-Eboko, started a program called "We and Our Children." But after three years Christine married, and the program had to be cancelled because Madeleine didn't have time to do it by herself.

Aimé and Madeleine truly pioneered the radio outreach of the church in West Africa. Today, at the headquarters of the Africa-Indian Ocean Division in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, a staff produces a daily program in French called "*La Vie Abondante*" which is broadcast over Radio Africa One, Africa's most powerful shortwave radio station in Gabon. The scriptwriter and music director of "*La Vie Abondante*" (The Abundant Life) is Beatrice Grisier, who grew up in Cameroon with her missionary parents. Aimé and Madeleine, in fact, "adopted" Beatrice as their daughter for a while during the time her parents became very ill with bilharziasis, a dangerous parasitic disease contracted by drinking contaminated water. Beatrice later married Daniel Grisier, a French pastor who now directs the Adventist World Radio program for the Africa-Indian Ocean Division.

The Lord also opened up a new ministry for Aimé. Every time he passed by the forbidding stone walls and guard towers of the prison in Yaoundé, the words of Jesus came to his mind, "I was in prison and you came to visit me." Matthew 25:36, NIV. He knew that the Holy Spirit was urging him to visit the men in prison. Aimé received permission from the warden to visit the men and conduct a Bible study class.

The first time Aimé entered the prison, he was shocked. The prison yard was dirt, and the rain had turned it into mud. The prisoners wore rags and went barefooted. Six men shared a single cell. The stench of unwashed bodies and overflowing toilets sickened him. As Aimé walked through the prison yard the men stared at him with hopeless eyes like those of wild animals who are locked in cages and know they can never get out. Some of them cursed him and told him to go away.

But Aimé didn't despair. He knew that Jesus was with him and that every one of these prisoners was a person that He had died for. Aimé began Bible classes for the men and at the same time tried to meet their physical needs too. He arranged for the Dorcas Society to gather clothes for the men. Gradually, as he shared the gospel with the prisoners, some of them began to let God change their lives. The warden and the guards noticed the change

in their behavior and attitudes, and eventually a number of them were released. One former prisoner that Aimé ministered to is now the principal of the elementary school in Yaoundé, which is the largest Adventist elementary school in the world. Over 4,000 students go there, and most of them are non-Adventists. Another man works in the Central African Publishing House, and still another serves as an elder in the church.

Aimé dreaded the times he was called to visit prisoners who were condemned to die. They were chained in a special place in the prison. It drained Aimé emotionally to visit these men because he didn't know if he would ever see them again. But sometimes he was able to visit the men's lawyers and save them from execution. He even organized a men's chorus and recorded their singing for the radio program.

It didn't take long until the prisoners greeted Aimé with cheers instead of jeers. They could tell that he loved them and cared about them.

Aimé identified with the prisoners, and as a result of spending so much time with them, he felt like he knew how grateful a man who is manacled and condemned to die must feel when he is released at the last second before execution.

Everywhere he looked, Aimé was surrounded by men who either literally or spiritually had tasted freedom. They were living testimonies of God's power to deliver the captives and "set at liberty them that are bruised." And the transformations he witnessed never ceased to thrill his soul.

## Chapter 13
# Water in a Dry Land

Aimé and Madeleine thought they would never serve in Africa again when they went home to Switzerland for permanent return in 1982, but they were wrong. Scarcely a year had passed when they were asked to return to Cameroon on a special-service assignment to administer Koza Hospital until a permanent director could be found. The previous medical director and his staff had gone home to Europe, leaving behind dissatisfied people in the community and on the hospital staff.

The main problem was water. Koza is situated in a valley in the middle of the Mandara Mountains in northern Cameroon, a dry desolate place much of the year. People value water in this area more than they do gold or silver because it is so scarce and so necessary to life.

The well at Koza Hospital simply did not produce enough water for the demands of the patients and the staff members. People from the community were used to coming to the hospital every day for water. But the medical director decided that the hospital could no longer afford to give water to the staff or the community. Angered by this decision, the people complained to the chief of police. There seemed to be no solution to the problem. Frustrated by the lack of water and the climate of discontent, the medical director, along with the European staff members who served with him, decided to go home to Europe.

Aimé and Madeleine arrived in Koza in November 1984, not knowing what they would do to solve the problem but trusting in God to provide the answers as He had so many times in the past.

They knew the history of Koza Hospital by heart, for Ruben Bergstrom, the Adventist pioneer in that part of Cameroon, had

served there when they and the Fridlins were at Nanga-Eboko. Many times Elder Bergstrom had told them the thrilling story of how God had led him to establish the mission at Koza.

In the mountains surrounding Koza live the fierce Kirdi people, various tribes that fled from the Muslims and took refuge there in the late nineteenth century. The Muslims called them *Kirdi* which means "pagan." The Kirdi resisted the attempts of the Muslims to convert them and hung on to their own religion of worshiping nature gods.

So fierce and savage were they, that neither the Muslims nor the colonial governments that came after them could subdue them. Wearing almost no clothes in that hot, dry climate, the Kirdi divided their time between raising millet and fighting each other. Millet grows during the brief rainy season, and the Kirdi use every part of the grass. They grind the seeds into flour and boil it for porridge. They weave the stalks into baskets and cover the roofs of their mud huts with them. They even use the inside of the millet stalk, which is like balsa wood, to make toy airplanes and cars. They throw away absolutely no part of the millet.

Ruben Bergstrom and his wife arrived in northern Cameroon in 1931 to start the first rural Adventist mission in the region of Maroua at Dogba. He gradually earned a reputation among the Kirdi as an honest man who meant them no harm, and his wife, who was a nurse, treated many sick people, which won their confidence.

Eighteen years later, in 1949, Elder Bergstrom wanted to start a second mission station and asked the main chief of the Kirdi for a piece of land.

The chief told him, "We don't like foreign people to come near us, but we know you." And then the chief made a remarkable proposal to Elder Bergstrom.

The chief told him, "Since you are a man of peace, we will give you our battleground, and you can build there a place of healing for us."

And so Koza Adventist Hospital was built on the battleground of the Kirdi. The Prince of Peace walked unseen among his missionary helpers, bringing true peace to Koza for the first time.

But now, in 1983, Aimé and Madeleine had come to fight the battle of little water and unhappy people, while trying to restore peace to Koza. It wasn't long before they discovered just how serious the problem was.

It was almost impossible for them to take a bath or a shower. The tiny stream of water that trickled from the faucet in their

house was barely enough to fill a bucket. With that water they washed their faces and hands in the morning, and their hands throughout the day. In the evening they dumped the bucket of water into the toilet, which was the only water they to flush it.

Most of the water from Koza's well had to be pumped into the hospital each morning. Despite the lack of water, Aimé decided to change the policy of the former administration. Instead of refusing water to the personnel of the hospital and to the people in the community, he would ration it instead. When he did this, relations between the hospital and the people improved overnight.

"But we must do something," Aimé said to Bernard Mamin, the French maintenance man for the hospital.

"Can you dig the well deeper?"

Mamin smiled and shook his head. He paced back and forth in front of the well deep in thought.

"We can try. Maybe we can get it one meter deeper with the equipment we have, but we really need to contract with companies who have professional drilling machines."

"How much money do you think that would cost, Bernard?" Aimé said.

"A lot more money than we have, I can tell you that," Mamin replied. "I'll go ahead and drill another meter, but it won't improve the water volume that much," he said.

The next morning Aimé arose at 5:00 a.m. to go jogging around the Koza compound. The sun rose slowly over the Mandara Mountains, blood red from the dust in the air. It was so dry at Koza that Aimé had to rub baby lotion on his feet every day to keep them from cracking. As he jogged he prayed silently to the Lord about the problem of no water, and slowly an idea began to form in his mind. He would write to the Adventist Development and Relief Agency and apply for funding to help drill a new well at Koza. He knew that ADRA had helped out in similar projects in other countries. ADRA received much of its money from the U. S. government and other countries that channeled money through them to help needy areas in the world.

Aimé explained his plan to Madeleine at breakfast.

"Do you really think ADRA would help us?" she said, placing a bowl of millet porridge in front of Aimé.

"It's worth a try. I think we have a good chance, yes," Aimé said.

A knock on their front door interrupted their conversation.

"I wonder who that is," said Aimé.

"I think it's the police chief," said Madeleine.

She took off her apron and folded it over her chair.

"He's been coming around here lately."

"Really?" Aimé said, eating a mango. "What does he want?"

"Whiskey," Madeleine said, rolling her eyes upward.

"Well, we certainly don't have any of that," Aimé said.

"I've been giving him herb tea. He seems to like it. At least it's better than giving him nothing. You know, he was very skeptical about us when we first move in, especially since there was such an ugly mood here."

Aimé laughed. "Well, you better get the police chief his tea. By now he knows this is a blue cross house!"

Every so often the police chief would come to the Cosendai's house for tea. He became such good friends with them that he invited them to a special reception in town when he received a promotion.

As they drove down the road toward Maroua, Aimé said to Madeleine, "I'll bet the liquor will flow at this party. We won't want to stay very long."

Madeleine looked up from her knitting. "I don't know, Aimé. Something tells me we might be in for a surprise," she said.

They were. At the serving table where they expected to see bottles of whiskey, beer, and wine, they saw instead lemonade and grape juice.

When Aimé moved to the front of the reception line to shake the chief's hand, the chief said, "You are surprised, are you not, Pastor Cosendai, that I am not drinking or serving liquor at my ceremony?"

Aimé stared at the gold buttons on the chief's blue uniform and coughed.

"I suppose I am," he said.

The police chief smiled.

"Your wife has been very kind to me by giving me the tea. It doesn't cloud my mind and make me do crazy things like the whiskey does. By the way, do you know that I used to listen to your radio program when I lived in the south?"

Aimé raised his eyebrows. "Is that so?" he said.

"Yes," replied the police chief, "and I would be so pleased if you could study the Bible with me now."

Aimé's mind whirled with the problems at Koza, but he was never too busy to help a thirsty man discover the Water of Life in Jesus Christ. He took time to study the Bible with the police chief and gave him some books. Although the chief didn't become

a Seventh-day Adventist, he remained a good friend of the hospital and treated Adventists with respect.

In time, Wallace Amundson, ADRA director of the Central African Union Mission visited Koza Adventist Hospital with his friend, Dr. Barry Wecker, health director of the Central African Union Mission. He carefully inspected Koza's water situation and said he would do everything he could to persuade ADRA International in Washington, D.C., to send funds so that Koza could drill another well.

Aimé also applied for a grant from a Swiss pharmaceutical company. The funds from ADRA and the Swiss company didn't come until after the Cosendais had left Cameroon, but because of Aimé's efforts, Koza was able to dig two brand new deep wells that now provide plenty of water for the hospital and the community.

As the time approached for Aimé and Madeleine to leave Koza, Aimé looked on his work with a sense of satisfaction. Relations were good between the community and the hospital now. Koza had a good doctor, and funding would soon make it possible to dig wells to solve the water problem. Just when everything seemed to be going rosiest, disaster struck in a very odd way.

Aimé and Madeleine were driving down to Yaoundé in their white VW bus for a committee meeting of the West Central African Union Mission. The sun shone brightly, and they talked happily of their many years in Cameroon. Then Aimé saw a raised hump in the middle of the road, but he was going too fast to slow down. The bus rocketed over the bump and slammed down on all four wheels, jolting the Cosendai's backs. Aimé braked to a stop.

"Arghhhh!" Madeleine screamed. "Aimé, my back. I can't move!"

Aimé looked over at Madeleine. His back hurt too.

"I'm so sorry, *Chérie.* I didn't see that bump until it was too late."

"Aimé, we've got to get to a hospital. Can you still drive?"

The ache in his back nearly crippled him, but he could still drive.

"I think there is a mission hospital just up the road."

Slowly and painfully, Aimé drove to the Protestant mission, but when they arrived they discovered that the hospital had just been closed! The people in the mission, however, were very kind to the Cosendais and let them stay there three days to rest. They also gave them some pain pills.

Then they started the long trip back to Koza. They stopped at

another Protestant mission on the way where the hospital was open. Madeleine lay in the back on a mattress while Aimé drove. Part of the way they had a good paved road, but then it turned into a dirt road peppered with rocks, and they suffered excruciating pain.

"I'd almost rather be dead!" Madeleine cried from the back seat. Aimé gritted his teeth and drove on. There was nothing else he could do.

At the hospital the doctor examined them and told them if they were younger they should have an operation.

"But you are in your seventies, and I don't know if the operation would help you that much. The best thing to do is lie down and rest until your backs heal," the doctor told them.

Back at Koza, Madeleine had to lay in her bed for three months, but Aimé recovered in just two weeks. Soon he was jogging around the Koza compound again in the mornings. Madeleine felt frustrated lying down and letting Moses, their domestic worker, do all the cooking and cleaning. But she was not idle. She spent her time rolling balls of woolen yarn so the women in the Dorcas Society could knit shirts for the newborn babies at the hospital.

Before long, Aimé had another accident. Responding to an emergency in the hospital, he jumped off the veranda and broke his arm, the same arm he had broken as a boy when he fell off the threshing machine.

It didn't slow him down, though. Once the doctor had put it in a cast, he drove the VW bus to Maroua with one hand.

At last the time came for the Cosendais to leave. They didn't want to go back. Aimé told Madeleine, "If they would let us go to Chad now, I believe we could do something there for the Lord."

Madeleine sighed and rubbed her back with her hand.

"I know, but I am barely able to walk now, Aimé. It's time to go to Switzerland and rest."

At the farewell party, hundreds of Kirdi people came. The church choir sang songs that brought tears to their eyes. And perhaps most touching of all, the hospital staff presented the Cosendais with an autographed gourd. Each staff member signed his name on the gourd. They addressed it to "Uncle Aimé and Aunt Madeleine."

No finer tribute could have been paid to the Cosendais for the many years of self-sacrificing love they had served in Cameroon. Truly, Africa had adopted them.

**Despite the many hardships** they encountered, including the loss of their daughter to whooping cough, the tragic death of a friend by a wild animal, and severe injuries sustained in an auto accident, Aimé and Madeleine Cosendai, Swiss missionaries to Africa, still count their years of mission service among the Cameroonians a privilege rather than a sacrifice.

This is a love story—not only the story of how a missionary couple comes to love and "adopt" the African people they came to serve, but a story of how the African people come to love and adopt the missionaries as their own—as people they knew really loved them. And as you read, you'll come to love them all.

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