Long Man, Small Island: The Reluctant Student Missionaries of Majuro

Lynn Neumann

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Abstract

LONG MAN, SMALL ISLAND

The Reluctant Student Missionaries of Majuro

by Lynn Neumann

The problems and satisfactions a writer finds in narrative writing can best be understood through the production and examination of a sustained narrative. _Long Man, Small Island_ takes non-fictive events and characters and imposes an order upon them to abstract what one of the characters sees as significant in the events, and so makes a statement about the student mission experience and an emerging nation. The preface examines the scholarly aspects of creative writing, the genesis of the story, and the process and difficulties that emerged in the writing of this non-fictional narrative.
LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY
Graduate School

LONG MAN, SMALL ISLAND
The Reluctant Student Missionaries of Majuro
by
Lynn Neumann

A Thesis in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts
in English

June 1982
Each person whose signature appears below certifies that this thesis in his/her opinion is adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree Master of Arts.

Dorothy Minchin, Comm, Professor of English

Cordell Briggs, Professor of English

Anees Haddad, Professor of Sociology

Roberta Moore, Professor of Journalism and Communications
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1982
Preface

I. Creative Theses in Academics

When a student sets himself to the task of writing a thesis, a number of questions crowd into his mind. Why write a thesis? What is its place in the development of a scholar's life and vocation? When a graduate program presents alternate routes to a master's degree, what is the value of writing the long document known as a thesis?

The thesis presents an opportunity to pursue a subject of personal interest in real depth, to examine it until a new insight is gained—an insight that becomes an intensely personal and integral part of the scholar's understanding. The understanding and analytical abilities nurtured by involvement with a thesis are basic to a scholar's development as a creative, contributing member of his discipline. But why write the thesis?

Obviously, knowledge unshared will not contribute much to any professional field. The written word is the generally preferred method of scholarly publication, as it is more accessible than video tape and more quickly consumed than a cassette recording. To enhance the probability of sharing his insights and findings, the scholar should be able to write. And academic writing—especially in the field of English—does not mean stringing together loose sentences of pretentious "academese," as Richard Altick dubs the language of so many scholarly writers. Trade publishers as well as the general public crave lucid, organized, unaffected prose.¹

The writing of the thesis is in itself a valuable part of professional training.

The writing of a creative thesis effects the same growth in analytical and compositional ability as does the writing of a research thesis, but the focus is different. Rather than fixing the writer's attention on a specific period or author, the questioning, dissecting, refitting, and preoccupation involved in a creative thesis direct the writer toward an understanding and appreciation of literature from a writer's point of view. It develops respect and sensitivity for craftsmanship in writing in much the same way as building a table from scratch heightens a carpentry student's appreciation for the technical skill and detail of construction in Chippendale furniture. It is education by experience.

In a real sense, a creative thesis admits a student of literature into the world behind the page. It has permitted me to experience a writer's joy in creativity—the surprise of the mind finding its own answers, making pictures I didn't even realize were there. Writing a creative thesis provided me with the opportunity to delve into the writer's world—a world that "starts with the imagination, and then works toward ordinary experience," that tries to "make itself as convincing and recognizable as it can."2

While the creative thesis is engaging in a special way, it is as demanding as it is exciting. In most cases, the surprise of the mind finding its own answers is not one that overtakes the creator by sheer

accident. Creative people in many disciplines concur with the mathematic-
ical genius Jules Henri Poincare in his observation on "unconscious work":
"... it is only fruitful, if it is on the one hand preceded and on the
other hand followed by a period of conscious work." Rollo May expressed
the same idea about the relationship between unconscious labor and com-
mitment. He sees that unconscious labor occurs only in "those areas in
which the person consciously has worked laboriously and with dedication."4

This conscious labor involves not only thinking about a particular
problem, but a studying out of an academic discipline as well. Brewster
Ghiselin notes in his introduction to The Creative Process that a great
deal of conscious work must be done before spontaneous invention can be
effected. He cites the mastering of accumulated knowledge, the gathering
of new facts, observing, exploring, experimenting, developing technique and
skill, sensibility, and discrimination as some of the voluntary activites
that precede unconscious creative labor. This preparation is necessary,
for without craft, the creative power will have no shape and thus lose
its power.

The importance of craft becomes evident when the writer lays his work
aside for awhile, and the exhilaration and fresh significance of the work
has subsided. He is then left with a work that either has or has not value
within itself. Although a writer will often be his own severest critic,

3 Henri Poincare, "Mathematical Creation," trans. George Bruce Halsted
in The Creative Process, ed. Brewster Ghiselin (Berkeley: University of

4 Rollo May, The Courage to Create (New York & Toronto: Bantam Books,
1975), p. 46.

5 Brewster Ghiselin, ed., The Creative Process (Berkeley: University
the thesis committee provides a balance for any prejudice the writer may have toward his piece. In this way, the committee provides the writer not only with a consciousness of craft, but also with the experience common to publishing authors—analysis by an editor who either accepts or rejects the writing on the basis of its intrinsic merit.

As the writer of a creative thesis emerges from hours of labor, sleepless nights, and conferences with committee members (criticism still stirring his mind), perhaps one of the most lasting impressions he is left with is that writing is an act of the ego. Ultimately, a writer writes for himself. In the words of William Zinsser:

> Editors and readers don't know what they want to read until they read it. . . . You are writing primarily to entertain yourself, and if you go about it with confidence you will also entertain the readers who are worth writing for. ⁶

II. Rationale

What besides an inside understanding of literature motivated me to commit this particular act of the ego? Basically, the desire to publish and contribute to two areas in which almost no literature exists: student mission experience, and life in the Marshall Islands. To date, there has not been a narrative published on the student missionary (SM) experience in which so many collegiate Adventists participate. The books that have been published on student missions were relatively unsuccessful due, I believe, not to a lack of interest in the subject (the SM program is still alive and well), but to an unimaginative handling of the material. A collage of letters, shopping lists, and official General Conference forms lacks

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an identifiable personality to act upon, so these details are not pulled together into a concrete experience. The narrative form with distinct characters supplies that lack.

The second area that Long Man, Small Island deals with—the Marshall Islands—is as scantily represented in print as student missionary experience. Even the Bishop Museum in Honolulu which specializes in literature on the islands of the Pacific carries only two books/pamphlets on the Marshall Islands, neither of which is narrative. Long Man, Small Island is not so much a record of the Marshallese people and their traditions as it is a record of Western reaction to and influence upon the people of this emerging nation. I chose to represent this part of the Marshallese experience because it is the area with which student missionaries deal most directly, and it is the area which concerned and interested me the most.

III. Methodology

While an interesting story might be made at any point of a writer's experience, I wanted this to be a story that conveyed more than one SM's isolated experience. Over the nearly three years that have elapsed since my leaving Majuro, I have talked with many former student missionaries, gleaning the emotions, reactions, and experiences that are common to all college-age students who spend a year—or more—overseas. My inquiry grew out of personal curiosity and a desire to extract for myself the real, nameable value of the SM experience. I am perhaps more fortunate than most SM's who may try to synthesize their year abroad in that I took with me a member of my family who has a very analytical mind. My brother provided immediate and knowledgeable response to my theories and
observations on SM life and the impact of the West in the Marshalls while we were in Majuro, and when we returned as well. He also proved to be a valuable foil for the development of my ideas in the story. The distance in time and geography have helped me to be objective about many of the situations that I lived on Majuro, but the impact still remains to help me organize and attach words to the insights gained in my 1978-79 school year.

*Long Man, Small Island* has had a long gestation period, but in some respects it would have been easier to write if the period had been even longer. One of the difficulties of writing a non-fictive book for publication is that the characters presented by the writer will probably read what has been written. In representing the characters as real people with both strengths and weaknesses, a non-fictive writer runs the risk of losing friends who are highly esteemed and well-liked for those qualities that make them individuals. If or when this thesis is published, some names and incidents may be modified, but I have chosen to maintain the original names and identities in this writing because it seemed most natural for me to write about them in that context.

The order and organization of the chapters are chronological, and except for a few cases, the events did occur in the order presented. Each chapter is intended to highlight one aspect of SM life or an insight. As insights tend to evolve, an event that occurred during, say, the third month of my stay sometimes seemed to best illustrate an observation that I did not actually make until my fifth or sixth month in Majuro. I excuse the occasional manipulation of chronology by flashing an official poetic license.

Though the chapters now appear in chronological sequence, this
sequence does not reflect the order of their writing. "A Marked Man" appears basically as I wrote it two months after coming home from the Marshalls, and because of the great amount of time that elapsed between it and the next chapters, I do not consider it the inaugural chapter of my actual study. I wrote the chapter then because writing has for years been my preferred method of thought, and I wanted to sort out this experience that had significantly altered my life and attitudes. In a sense, this sorting was still my deep reason for writing the book, and now that I have organized my experience into a form meaningful to me, I can let it rest.

"Trouble in OK Corral" was actually the first and most difficult of all the thesis chapter births. It seems to me that this chapter had to come first because the event marked such a "coming of age" for me. After coming to terms with this episode--and rewriting it more than once--I was able to work around that core. Starting in the middle of the book helped me to know what I would need to introduce and include in the earlier chapters. It established the direction of the other chapters, and even though the episodes, order, and most of the chapter titles emerged almost whole in concept about two weeks later, this chapter still seemed to be my main reference point.

When I say that the episodes and order emerged rather suddenly, I do not mean that the labor suddenly became easy. There was an endless struggle with the words themselves (which I feel has not ended even in this final draft of the text). Each phrase seemed critical because it shaped the next. Clarifying transitions of time and place also absorbed much of my energy, but dialogues were almost invariably easy and enjoyable to write. This disparity between the writing of transitions and the writing of conversation is, I feel, due to personal development rather
than technical difficulty.

On some days, I must admit that I purposely chose to write chapters that I thought would be fun—generally, those where I expected to write a lot of dialogue. The order in which the chapters were written seems to show another tendency as well. It looks as if I first had to write about the crucial episode of my experience, and then as if to balance the intense emotions of "Trouble in OK Corral," I switched to a light "entertainment" chapter, "R_x for the Jungle Teacher," and dabbled in reworking the comparatively light "A Marked Man." Though each chapter has its light and dark moments, a survey of the order of writing seems to suggest progressive seriousness—a tone that reflects my change in attitude toward the value of the student missionary program. The order of writing is as follows:

Trouble in OK Corral
R_x for the Jungle Teacher
Finding a Place in the Palms
Tenderfeet on the Jungle Trail
Gilligan's Island
Long Man Casts His Shadow
The Trumpet Shall Sound
On The Road--To Discovery
Song of the Island
Disco Dancing for Jesus
An Elijah Prayer
Long Man Falls in Love
Song of the Island--Reprise

The chapters did not necessarily flow out as full chapters, especially in the beginning. Parts of Chapters II and VIII came into being by the ocean at Newport Beach, because at that point in my development of self-discipline I could not stand to be confined to my room for very long. "R_x for the Jungle Teacher" came into being as a revision of a sketch from my sporadically-kept notebook/journal. "Finding a Place in the Palms" is the last of my hand-written chapters; I discovered that my mental block
against composing at the typewriter was costing me too much time, and I promptly got over that idiosyncrasy. (I also learned to stay in my room for extended periods of time. I never have, however, understood my urge to leave work that was going well in favor of a trip to my mailbox.) Chapter XIII, or the summing up chapter, did come last, but was split and rewritten after a few weeks and a few comments from my brother.

While I did not keep a running journal, I did keep my camera handy. And I made a scrapbook that contains many evocative items. The letters I wrote to my parents and to my friends bring back the emotions I felt at the time of their writing. They supplement my memory, which has tended to retain mostly the very impressive details of my time in Majuro. Though all of my impressions do not find expression in *Long Man, Small Island*, the following pages are a sample that will suffice to represent an overseas SM experience—one that many former SM's will understand.

Acknowledgements

The interest, co-operation, and honesty of my committee members has made this thesis a positive learning experience for me. I am especially grateful to Dr. Dorothy Comm, my senior advisor, for the warm personal touch that pervades even her technical criticism, and to my mom, Elsie Neumann, for her support and weeks of typing.
To Henry--

Without your humor and cryptic comments

I would have found fewer reasons to write.
Magellan, Missions, and an Atoll called Majuro

INTO THE SALTY BLUE YONDER Magellan sailed to find gold, pearls, and exotic lands--and totally by-passed the Marshall Islands. Of course, occupying only 70 square miles of land in an ocean area twice the size of Texas, the 33 atolls are not hard to miss. Even knowing they were there, I searched the globe twice with a magnifying glass before I found the chain of tiny islands between Guam and Hawaii. The mild-mannered islanders of Guam were less fortunate than the Marshallese, though, and 1519 saw the first imprint of Western culture upon Micronesia.

Leaving Guam a little poorer, a little bloodier, and infected with new diseases, the Spaniard carried away tropical fruits, the satisfaction of discovery, and a small crew brimming with stories of fresh water falls where raven-tressed beauties bathed, powder-white beaches where palms glistened sleek black in the full moon's light, and life that was easy beyond the belief of plague-ridden Europe. The West had touched heaven --and neither shore could ever be the same again.

Occasionally in their runs between Mexico and the Philippines, the Spanish would sight a Marshallese atoll. The galleons generally gave them wide berth, though, to avoid grounding on the extensive reefs. Indeed, the islands themselves are hardly more than reefs topped by coconut palms. But this 200-year respite from major discovery ended when Captains Gilbert and Marshall bumped into the Marshall Island group on their way to China for tea. The two Englishmen desperately needed such a beverage to calm their nerves after their excursion to the New South Wales penal colony with a new batch of would-be Australians. (The first Australians, it seems, tended to be a rather unruly lot.)
Somewhere between Captain Marshall's island charting in the early 1700's and a preoccupation with the Bolshevik Revolution, the Russians developed an interest in anthropology. They dispatched Captain Otto von Kotzbue to befriend and observe the Marshallese. This he readily did. The whaling industry caught wind of his explorations and reports, and made a bee-line for the whaling grounds of the South Pacific.

After the whalers had earned themselves a hostile reception in most of Micronesia, missionaries from Boston and enterprising copra traders from Germany converged to patch up the situation and re-civilize the islands. From 1850 to 1930, Christian converts and dried coconuts were the only two commodities that stirred even a mild interest in the narrow, flat, palm-lined shores of the 33 atolls. Then came World War II.

After World War I, the great powers of the West had seen fit to strip Germany of her colonies. Japan became the industrious recipient of Germany's holdings in the Marshalls, and wasted no time in cultivating, colonizing, and later, fortifying the atolls for World War II. The strategic position of the two long island chains that make up the Marshall Island group plunged these mild Micronesians into some of the bloodiest battles of the war--Kwajalein, and Eniwetok. Later the isolated lagoons of Bikini and Eniwetok were to become testing grounds for the devastation of the atom bomb.

Thus this quiet island culture finds itself sometimes on the fringes, sometimes in the midst of the very disquieting 20th century. The Marshallese ask, as did I when I applied to be a student missionary: What are the commodities of real value on Majuro, this "Pearl of the Pacific?" What can the Western and Micronesian cultures offer to each other?
LONG MAN, SMALL ISLAND

The Reluctant Student Missionaries of Majuro

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The runway of Honolulu airport had just dropped away from under us, and our 727 jet began to nose its way out into the Pacific. "Aha! You're missionaries!" Slit eyes peered accusingly through thick horn-rimmed spectacles held up by a hooked nose and thick black moustache.

The definitive "No" on the tip of my tongue melted as I involuntarily kicked the purse containing my student missionary ID card from Southern Missionary College. Air Micronesia's Flight 65 to Majuro, Marshall Islands, wasn't even clear of Pearl Harbor yet, and the man in the seat beside me had pegged Henry and me as missionaries after about two sentences of conversation.

"Well, ah, yes," I countered and readjusted my seat belt. "I guess you could say that. My brother and I are going to teach in Majuro for a year."

The moustache snatched the admission in midair. Thumbing towards us, he turned to a news reporter across the narrow aisle to flash this last bulletin. "They're going to spend a year on Majuro! Can you believe that? I don't know how anybody could keep their sanity on such a God-forsaken speck of an atoll that long!" He turned his horn rims back on me. "I'm glad I'll only be there a week. Or less, if I can help it."

Oh boy, I thought, sinking into the not-so-cushy airplane seat. What a stroke of chance that two fresh-faced Canadians like Henry and me should get this particular flight jammed with newsmen from every major TV station and newspaper east of Majuro—even West Germany. What
a stroke of chance that the U.S. Navy should that very week be evacuating Bikini atoll a second time because of atomic radiation. And—I sank deeper into my seat—what a stroke of chance that my seatmate would be a wiry little newspaper man who could spot a missionary at 300 paces, even without his glasses.

What did missionaries look like anyhow? I checked my shoes. They were on the right feet. "How's my hair, Henry?"

He glanced up momentarily from his Fligltime magazine and answered with typical brotherly disinterest, "It's OK." Well, being a missionary too, he wouldn't notice anything strange anyway.

After breakfast the little bespectacled man settled back to play with his digital world-wide, time-zone computer. As I watched him become absorbed in his new gadget, his sixth sense about missionaries came to obsess my thoughts. How had he known? Despite the foreboding intensity of his concentration, my curiosity demanded satisfaction. "What made you think we're missionaries?" I blurted out.

"Anybody," he replied, still fiddling with his time computer, "who goes to Majuro for a year is either a government worker, a missionary, or crazy. And besides—are you Mormon? You didn't eat your sausages."

Well, at least he hadn't opted for crazy. I sensed, though, that being a missionary rated only about a half a step above it. "No, we're not Mormons. We're Seventh-day Adventists." So what, I thought. Better explain. "We don't eat pork, mostly for health reasons."

"Health reasons!" he croaked and plunged into a high-pitched lecture on the merits of the pig, then fell back to play with his time
computer, which had been momentarily neglected.

Maybe I should have told him about Leviticus 11, I mused, trying to sort out what it was in my approach that kept triggering these reactions in my seatmate. Maybe the *sola scriptura* explanation is really more authentically missionary.

"Better get used to it," Henry's bass voice whispered. "We're marked! I have a feeling everyone will be able to tell we're missionaries!" He winked, his deep-set eyes laughing at my seriousness. I had to smile too. This lanky 19-year-old had my same thick dark hair and blue eyes, but his moustache and sense of humor were all his own. "Man," he grinned wryly, "I'm still not sure I am a missionary. How did I let you talk me into this anyway?"

Indeed, I was beginning to wonder myself as I fingered my Canon camera. And now this dumb new lens didn't want to click into place! If I could just remember what the photography teacher at Southern Missionary College had told me about putting automatic lenses on manual cameras. Just how had I managed to get myself into this situation anyway?

A junior English major busy with classes and the school paper, I'd had no intention of going anywhere but SMC the next year. At least not until that day when my roommate, Rhonda, had come bounding in with blond hair flying and brown eyes sparkling. "Lynn, I just found this call for two to Palau. I was talking to a returned SM--that's a student missionary--and it sounds unreal! Wouldn't it be great if we could go together? Wha'd'ya say?"

"A call for two what? Where?"

"Two elementary teachers somewhere in the South Pacific. I've always
wanted to be a missionary—ever since I can remember, and just think of the sun and the ocean and the pineapple . . ."

"And the mangos?" I questioned hopefully about my favorite fruit.

"Why sure! They're having an SM display in the student center this Sabbath. Ron—he's the returned SM—said to talk to him then, Oh! I've gotta go to Ed of the Exceptional Child. Like fast! See ya at supper."

"And by then you'll have forgotten about it," I smiled to myself, Rhonda's lively enthusiasm always amused me, but of course she wasn't serious. With only one year till graduation and the new guy she had just met? No, it would blow over.

But it didn't. For three months we dug for information on Palau planned. With her specialization in early childhood education, I began thinking that yes, together we'd be dynamite. One day I met Ron on the stairs. "Hey," he grinned, "you passed."

"My 18th Century Lit test?" Then I remembered, "Hey, you're not in that class."

"No! The SM screening committee said you can go to Palau. Congratulations!"

Back at SMC after Christmas, Rhonda and I shared the remnants of homemade cookies and stories about vacation. Suddenly she turned rather somber. "Lynn, if I didn't go to Palau, would you still go?"

I hadn't wanted to hear that. Who would I go to for advice? For laughter? For a crying shoulder? I looked for clues in her eyes, but they were intent upon a yellow daisy in the patchwork quilt pulled up under her chin. "Yes, Rhonda, I would."
"Oh wow, I'm glad to hear you say that!" Her shoulders relaxed noticeably. "See, I'm just not sure I could handle it. Maybe I'm not mature enough. I don't know that much about teaching, really, and besides," she dropped her eyes, "what would happen to me and Tom? A year is a long time to be apart."

Rhonda chattered on while my mind mulled over alternatives. Should I try to change her mind? I tried halfheartedly. I knew Tom was important to Rhonda, and I knew Rhonda well enough not to press a decision she might regret. Should I forget being an SM? Was it just a romantic idea? Well, I knew when I applied that there'd be obstacles. And where did I expect the wit and will to work with those kids would come from anyway—Rhonda or God? Besides, I wanted Palau because I thought it would be hard, I decided.

I kept moving ideas around in my head. Then one day I came in from a lunch of the same old cafeteria food and flung myself across my bed. Life just now seemed too comfortable, the future too predictable. Next year I'd graduate with all these people I already knew, go home to teach in some church school in Alberta, and become an everyday, work-a-day part of the labor force, and put out my cat at 10:00 p.m. Boring, boring, DULL!

I wanted something different, something that would force me to use all my resources and be independent. I wanted something that... Hey—why not Henry?

I flipped over on my back and reached for the phone. "Operator, give me Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta. West Hall, please."
A vacuum cleaner droned in the background as I gave Henry directives about applying as a student missionary. "Speak a little louder, Lynn," came back his deep voice, "they're vacuuming the lobby here." He chuckled, "I thought you said something about me being a student missionary."

"That's exactly what I did say!"

"Hey," an astonished voice came back through my receiver, "I'm not even finished grade twelve yet!"

"You stayed out and worked for a year instead." I really wanted to be persuasive. "You could do it, Henry. I know you could!"

"Yeah, but applying this late in the year ..." While he paused, I listened to the hum of his brain calculating the odds. With sudden confidence he concluded, "OK, I'll talk to the SM sponsor tomorrow." Knowing my brother, I recognized that his suddenly-agreeable attitude meant he saw no real chance, or he would have discussed it longer. He knew the screening committee would laugh at the very idea of Henry Neumann, a student missionary.

The quick response of the screening committee came as a surprise to Henry and to me as well when he recounted the episode--two or three times. Two days after our conversation, the student missions sponsor had called Henry into his office and closed the door. With a grave gesture he motioned for him to sit down. Henry found a suitably-big chair and undulated his six-foot five-inch frame over it.

"I'm sorry," began the young political science professor, "but the committee has voted unanimously"--pause--"that you are the man to represent Canadian Union College in Palau next year." A smile broke out all
over his face, like teenage acne before a big date. "Congratulations," he beamed, pumping Henry's hand.

"But are you sure?" Henry sputtered, springing to his feet. "I'm not even finished high school yet!"

"We're confident that the year you worked outside school will stand you in good stead. You're older and more mature than many of our students. Have a good year in Palau."

Having a brother and sister instead of two girls presented a situation Palau wasn't prepared for, so when I called the General Conference office they suggested we go to Majuro.

"Majuro--what?"

"Majuro, in the Marshall Islands."

At the description of Majuro my heart began sinking into the salty Pacific, along with my visions of pineapples, mangos, and snorkeling on the Palau reef. A very small atoll, rather flat, with a two-room, eight-grade school, and a hot, hot, humid climate—not the paradise I'd psyched myself up for. "Oh boy," I sighed, hanging up the phone. "Is someone trying to tell me something after all? Like, 'Forget it'?" Nothing seemed to go the way it was supposed to. Nothing was definite, nothing predictable.

But here we were, Majuro-bound. Must be almost there. I picked up my camera again. Oh this dumb lens . . . maybe if I moved the pin to manual. After all, my camera didn't have an automatic setting. Beautiful fit! Why hadn't I thought of it before?

"Quick--give me the camera!" Henry grabbed the Canon out of my
hands. "There's some land down there!"

"On the left side of the aircraft is the atoll of Majuro, the Pearl of the Pacific," intoned the captain over the intercom. "Highest elevation--12 feet above sea level, width of 100-200 feet along most of its 30-mile length. We have started our descent and will be landing in approximately five minutes."

I snapped out of my seat belt and leaned over Henry to get a better look. "That's it!" Then I did a double take. "Is that it? All of it?"

Until that moment I hadn't realized that an atoll is an island with all but the shore removed. I began to have visions of myself rolling over in bed and waking up in the ocean with the white-tipped sharks. Did that deep blue water flanking the narrow runway ever wash over it at high tide?

"Welcome to Majuro," came the captain's voice again. Reporters jostled baggage and equipment into the aisle. "We're 7 degrees north of the equator, and weatherwise we have a typical day--86 degrees Fahrenheit and 93 percent humidity." Groans all around, and an "Achte meine liebe!" from the German reporter at the rear. In the newsroom atmosphere of the plane my own brain started composing a news article. "Canadians Develop Techniques for Sauna Survival," the headline read. Well, Grandpa always did swear by a good sweat bath.

"We hope you enjoy your stay," the voice continued.

"The first rule of living in a sauna," I began outlining my article, "is to discard the wool cardigan occupying the side pocket of your suitcase. Pantyhose are also an unnecessary torture. Get rid of them."

The smooth voice broke in again. "We hope to see you again soon on Air Micronesia."
"And," I concluded my outline with a backward glance at the plane as we disembarked, "memorize emergency routes--just in case the sauna's too hot."

No tropical hurricane howled our alien status to the passive faces that hung over a wooden receiving gate, but it was evident enough. Henry's towering height and wool socks were a dead give-away amid the short, sandal-footed Marshallese. The pale pinkness of my blouse clung to my pallid flesh in the sultry dead calm. I envied the richly-brown tropical babies sleeping in the arms of jabbering mothers who were waiting for relatives to arrive. Explosive Hawaiian prints blasted all around my North American brown-suit-with-a-conservative-tie taste in clothes. I willed my five-foot-eleven-inch mass to wither down as my clothes already had done. Then I'd be less noticeable in the squat Micronesian crowd. All around me the ocean pounded, translating heat and raven hair and sliding Marshallese speech into one stark word; Foreigner.

I looked around for a buoy in the ocean of faces. All the newsmen seemed to be evaporating, and soon Henry and I would be by ourselves with our screaming foreignness and a tuba case.

Just then a pair of sapphire eyes connected with mine. A hand extended, and I knew we'd found our missionary. Horn-rimmed glasses and a black mustache hurried by on my left. Was that reporter's missionary sense contagious? I'd just picked out my first missionary --at 20 paces.
Chapter II

Finding a Place in the Palms

I shifted my weight closer to the door of the blue Toyota pickup and unstuck my moist flesh from Mrs. Barber's arm, "Look out for that sow," Mrs. Barber broke into Elder Barber's tour guide monologue. A massive brown and white hog trundled across the road to forage in greener coconut pastures, defacing yet another detail of my romantic island-life vision.

"That's the sixth pig we've seen," I observed.

"Oh yes," Elder Barber nodded his head, disturbing his thick white waves. "They're a favorite animal here--pets even. Very intelligent, I understand."

Why did all of Elder Barber's statements come off so sagely? Something in the deep, tanned lines of his face emphasized a penetration that showed through the cordiality in his blue eyes. Or maybe it was his gold-framed trifocals. Anyway, I found myself hanging onto his every pronouncement. Even if he did wear a Hawaiian print shirt and rubber sandals.

Reading my glance, Mrs. Barber clipped an answer. "You'll be wearing zories regularly too," she said, working her toes in the soft rubber sole and pulling back a gray lock that immediately dropped back onto her glasses. "The Marshallese call them 'zories' because the Japanese first introduced them to the islands. The Japanese occupied the Marshalls for years, you know." No, I hadn't known. Mrs. Barber seemed to have an explanation for most things too, though almost no literature on these islands existed.

"How long have you been here?" I asked.

"Ten weeks," she answered, still scouting the pavement for ambushing
pigs and palm branches. "And we've had twelve flat tires. Watch out for that palm frond, Walt."

"The best road in all Micronesia!" the Guam-Micronesia Mission president had written. "The Road," as it was always referred to, was a point of pride, according to Elder Barber. It seemed symbolic of—well he hadn't said of what. Was it change? The 30-mile stretch of asphalt linked the Bank of America and the plywood theatres showing Kung Fu movies in the town of Rita with the green, quarter-mile bulge of jungle foliage called "Laura." Or maybe The Road symbolized community. In the cooling dusk men and women congregated there, babies slung on their hips, to visit while sunlight remnants filtered down through limp, smokey air and coconut palms.

"Laura, Rita—who are these women, and why do they have towns named after them?" I raised the question, feeling quite confident that Mrs. Barber would have an explanation.

"Those are navy names," Mrs. Barber tugged her green cotton shift straight. "For convenience' sake in map reading, they referred to the left and right ends of the atoll by names that started with 'L' and 'R' --Laura and Rita." She laughed. "Laura and Rita are probably now living some place in Ohio with their ex-sailor husbands!"

As we drove into Laura Village at dusk with Elder Barber waving and calling "Yokwe" to the romping children, I felt my heart begin to pump a mixture of excitement, misgivings, and panic. It looked as if we were in the heart of Mission Compound Land. And I'd thought that jungle missions had gone out with David Livingston and three-masted ships! But no. Just
past the cement marker that announced mile 28 of The Road, a white sign confirmed absolute missionhood.

"Seventh-day Adventist Mission," the hand-made sign read. I envisioned a moustache and horn-rimmed glasses jumping out from behind the sign to snap my picture for The National Enquirer. I read the headline: "She's on a Mission, But Who Knows What Her Mission Really Is?" I blinked to banish the sight, but The National Enquirer question remained. Just what was a missionary, and how should I go about being one? I'd thought about it before, but now answers like "Just let your light shine," and "Let Jesus do the work through you," seemed too abstract. Here was the reality of soggy clothes, beautiful island children, and a language barrier 37,000 feet high. How could I be effective on an island where almost no one spoke English?

I looked back at the rusty blue truck following us. The two-year-old Mazda testified to the corrosive effects of Majuro's salty air, Through the cracked windshield I could see that Henry obviously wasn't overwhelmed by any sense of unpreparation. His hands competed with his mouth for the attention of his fellow SM's, Mike and Kevin. Those two looked as if their week in Majuro had been spent on the beach behind their apartment near the Rita-Dalap school. But I couldn't imagine Elder Barber letting that happen very often with so much work to be done before the new town school could open next week. And it did look as if the two curly-haired guys were actually attempting to hang a door when Henry and I strode into their lives. So maybe those tans had come from California. At least Kevin had mentioned Monterey Bay Academy and Pacific Union College. And Mike claimed to be the official representative of some little
California town called Escondido, but it was, apparently, nowhere near Disneyland.

The party in the Mazda continued, with Mike throwing back his blond head and laughing a big, open-mouthed laugh. Kevin lunged for something on the floor, adding more animation to the show.

"OK--what was the big joke back there?" I asked when we all piled out at the mission in the carport of the Barber's yellow stucco house.

"Oh, Delilah!" Henry slammed the rusty door shut with a laugh,

"What are you talking about?" I asked, confused by all the new data I was trying to take in.

Henry leaned against the Mazda's snub-nosed front, "This truck is called Delilah, and that one," he pointed to the Toyota, "is Sammy."

"What?" I could make nothing of this vehicle nick-naming.

"Samson and Delilah--you know. Only Samson's smaller, so he's Sammy. And this one," he patted an empty socket where a headlight had once beamed, "she's Delilah 'cause she'll do you in!"

"Yeah--" Kevin jumped down from Delilah's cab, waving his zories. "Almost lost these through the floorboards," he grinned. "You've gotta watch that lady."

How did so many curly-headed SM's get onto this little humid island, I wondered, as I watched Kevin's brown curls bobbing atop his wiry, mid-height build. His copper-frame glasses matched the copper tone of his tan. Copper mixed with clay--Kevin Clay. My weird word association made Kevin's full name stick in my mind.

Mike's broad shoulders easily packed a suitcase from the truck into


the mission house. He seemed quieter than Kevin. And very Californian, from his bronze tan to his off-handed greeting. "Mike Leoffler," he had stated simply when we were introduced, and extended his hand.

"Whoah!" Kevin's exclamation came from the truck shell. "Of all the things I thought of bringing to Majuro, I never dreamed of a tuba!"

Oh grief! Right from the time we checked in our bags at Edmonton International Airport that big black case has created all kinds of scenes, especially at Customs. "Well what do you say, Henry?" I poked him with my elbow. "Shall we open it right here in the carport and end the world's suspense?"

"Sure," he agreed. He threw open the lid to reveal a guitar, trumpet, accordion, trombone, two pillows, extra rope, and a Roger Whittaker record.

"Say, that's quite a collection of instruments you've got there!"

Elder Barber was musing again. Musing seemed to be his habitual way. His mind constantly toyed with life's jigsaw puzzle, fitting each new piece of information and happenstance into place. "If you play all these instruments--and you must, or you wouldn't have brought them--how about some special music for church tomorrow?" he suggested.

So this was part of fitting into mission life--doing things when you least expect to. This part of missionarying impressed itself deeper the next morning when we were six missionaries and seven Marshallese adults plus a handful of kids assembled to worship in the green cement block church in Rita. Elder Barber called on Henry to lead song service, and Kevin conducted the Junior Division lesson.

Then the superintendent rose. "It seems we've lost the mission story
quarterly," he laughed nervously, "Do we have any volunteers from the audience?" None. "How about our new teachers?" Henry and I looked blankly at each other. The irony of six missionaries without a story to tell made me squirm.

Then Mike jumped up. "I'll tell one!" he grinned and launched out in true jungle storyteller-style. So he wasn't as reserved as I'd thought!

By 1 o'clock we all felt that an attack on the church potluck being spread would be justified. A relatively tall, solid island man directed the traffic of women bearing kettles of rice, breadfruit, chicken, and variations on some American dishes—like breadfruit "potato" salad.

"That's Dr. Henry Samuel, Kevin nodded, whispering with obvious awe. "He's a big man on the island." Kevin took my smile as an acknowledgement of a pun on the man’s build. "I don't mean his size," he grinned, "I mean, he's iroij, a traditional chief." My look encouraged Kevin to continue. "As I understand it, he first heard about Adventists when he was studying in Fiji. He saw some Adventist singing bands in a hospital, and decided that they had the kind of spirit his island needed. So he built a school, translated The Bible Speaks into Marshallese, and asked for a missionary."

"He must be a remarkable man." I studied the doctor's calm, unlined face. Responsibility seemed to set naturally upon his aspect.

"And generous too. He's providing most of this food!" Kevin pointed to the three laden tables. "Let's get in line and show our appreciation!"

We started where a basket of coconuts promised to quench our thirst—right beside Mrs. Barber's obviously-American coleslaw, and a pot of spaghetti. I watched Elder Barber helping himself to the rice, spaghetti,
and breadfruit. He bypassed the chicken and fish. "You don't have to take the meat if you don't want to," Mrs. Barber had whispered when we went to bring the spaghetti from the truck. "We're vegetarian ourselves."

"Fresh fish," a young island woman offered with a shy casualness, "Just speared this morning," she added and politely turned to avoid pressing me. Mrs. Barber's eye fell upon me, then quickly turned away too. All the curious non-watching made me wonder about the significance of my decision. Would I be under judgment if I accepted the fish? I wasn't a vegetarian, and not taking some might look like a rejection of hospitality.

I took the fish. Mrs. Barber said nothing. I looked at the spaghetti and fish side by side on my plate. How much of being a missionary would be balancing between two cultures, between the Barbers' expectations and my own values and convictions?

Expectations, roles, values—questions rolled over in my head while I watched the waves rolling in on the way back to Laura. What is a missionary to the kids riding in the back of this pickup, so quiet and observing? "Thud, flop, flop." Our tire had been attacked by a frond on the road. Mrs. Barber hopped out of the cab, "That's the thirteenth one!" she cried in exasperation. "Everybody out. We need to get the spare."

"Everything under control?" Warm hazel eyes twinkled from inside a white Datsun pickup that just pulled up.

"We're fine, Dave, fine. Just another flat," replied Elder Barber. "But I'm just as glad you stopped. I want you to meet our new teachers." He gestured in a courtly manner. "Henry and Lynn, this is Dave Olsen,"
head of the Assembly of God Mission here. Dave, Lynn and Henry Neumann,"

"Glad to have you here," he smiled. "If you'd like to talk to the folks back home sometime, I'd be happy to set up a phone patch for you on the ham radio."

"You see," put in Elder Barber, "we have no phones on Majuro, so Dave is our emergency connection with the outside world."

"Thank you very much," I managed. "We'll take you up on it sometime." So there were two missions on this little island? At least the competition was friendly.

When we finally got to Laura Village, Kevin, Henry, and I decided to explore the uncharted wilds where we couldn't see both the lagoon and ocean simultaneously. "Let's walk around The Point," suggested Kevin. "Then we can wade in the water for awhile."

"Sounds great to me!" I agreed. "Just let me get my shorts on."

A city block away, a powder-soft, white beach eased between silent green palms and a warm blue lagoon. My South Pacific dream world revived in the 80-degree water, along a shore untouched by civilization. Not a house, not a car. Just two women squatting by a big red tub of laundry. Well, I should have expected it. Twelve thousand people have to wash clothes somewhere on a 30-mile ribbon of land.

Smile, I thought, even if you don't speak Marshallese. This morning I'd discovered what I thought was a key text for missionaries: "To do good and communicate forget not!"

"Yokwe." We offered the native greeting. Being "yokwed" by everyone in sight yesterday, already we knew that much Marshallese.
"Yokwe," the women flashed back toothpaste smiles. They exchanged knowing glances and snickered.

"Why are they laughing?" I asked Kevin.

His ten days on Majuro gave his conjecture a worldly-wise tone.

"Maybe it's your legs."

"Now just what does that mean?" I grilled him.

"Oh nothing--except that Marshallese women would almost as soon take off their blouses as wear shorts. The thighs," he patted his own bare leg, "that's real Marshallese sex appeal!"

"Great," I groaned. "By sundown I'll be known as The Scarlet Missionary. Kevin, why didn't you tell me before?"

"Well, you're not Marshallese." Kevin's tone betrayed little concern for my embarrassment. "They probably excuse 'Crazy Americans,'"

I headed for deeper water. What a way to start a missionary career--displaying 35 inches of long white leg! Oh no--a group of kids swimming. I'd have to make for the shallows or walk right through them. The laughing, splashing, and jabbering died as we got closer. Twelve pairs of black eyes riveted on us. Me in particular, it seemed. Not a sound but our sloshing until . . .

"BODY GIRL!"

The gleeful 10-year-old voice rang out again as a brown little boy skyrocketed into the air and splashed down into the water. "Body girl!" Screams of laughter followed our quick pace down the beach, while blood rose hot in my face. How could I explain that shorts are the native summer costume in North America? My Marshallese vocabulary so far consisted of Yokwe and Kwommol ta ta. Neither "hello," nor "thank you very much"
seemed appropriate.

Surprise! I'd stumbled onto another clue about becoming a missionary: Get off the Marshallese' toes, Lynn! Find out about their traditions and lifestyle before you really ruin your influence! And oh yes, learning a little Marshallese probably would be wise too.

Retreating from the beach, I thanked God for planting a jungle in Laura. True, getting lost in it would take some ingenuity, but it had palms and an undergrowth of pandanas, spider lilies, and broad-leaf greenery, and a path that took us back to the mission. Mrs. Barber was making grilled cheese sandwiches and rice for supper, and Mike had just wakened from his nap. "Quick Mike--tell me all you've learned about the Marshallese," I implored.

"Well, they're an hour late in doing just about anything." He stretched and yawned away the last of his nap. "It's a real laid back culture."

"They must have the same brand of watches as the Indians of Northern Canada then," said Henry, sitting down beside the grilled cheese. "In the Northwest Territories we'd be on the construction site at 7:00 a.m., and the natives would come at 10:00. And then go for a coffee break." He chuckled. "I guess it depends on your priorities."

Sudden inspiration gleamed in Elder Barber's eye. "So you've worked on construction before, Henry?"

"Yeah--for a couple summers with my Dad. He's a contractor," Henry answered between munches. Mike and Kevin exchanged conspiratorial glances. "Looks like we've found our man," Mike beamed at Henry, who was chomping on his second sandwich and ignoring the rice being passed around the table.
"Man for what?" Pure innocence shone out of Henry's lean young face.

Elder Barber drew a long breath and launched into one of his thorough explanations. He detailed the water system in Dalap, the periodic droughts experienced because of doldrum weather patterns, the problem with the rain catchment system at the new school opening this year in Rita-Dalap, and then he finally arrived at his conclusion: "So we're going to build some outhouses."

Henry was becoming a little uncomfortable beneath Mike and Kevin's benevolent looks. He put down his sandwich. "Who's going to build these outhouses?"

"Well, these boys have no construction experience, and your sister--?"

"Oh no! No experience at all!" I hastened to reply. Very few words fell idle on Elder Barber's ears!

The sun shone bright as ever the next day at the town school.

"Blast this heat. Blast outhouses! Blast the Northwest Territories!" Henry turned to blast in my direction. "Blast my big flappin' mouth!!!"

I laughed--but not loudly--as he banged an ill-placed wall stud off the outhouse frame and I sprayed another pane of glass with window cleaner. Our initiation into SM life had begun. We were finding our place in the Majuro palms.
Chapter III

Long Man Casts His Shadow

A scorched odor wafted from the stove of our apartment to the broken-down couch where I sat reviewing my first encounter with teaching. The only thing I remembered with absolute clarity was sticking name tags on desks, "telling the children my name, and mistaking several grade two's for grade one's. To them I would be "Miss Neumann."

One small hand went up near the front. "What is your name?" asked a miniature boy.

"Miss Neumann." He looked more puzzled, so I tried my full name. "Miss Lynn Neumann."

He thought for a minute. "My name is Junior," he said, and lowered his voice. "What is your real name?"

Puzzling it through, I remembered that the Marshallese never use titles or last names among themselves. The boy was simply Junior, and I was simply Lynn. "Miss Lynn," I replied. Advice had been to tag "Mr." or "Miss" in front of our names because we were such young teachers.

"Missy Lynn," Junior repeated, and seemed satisfied.

Someone was burning something royally, I thought, sniffing the air. The rice! I flew to the pot--but too late to rescue lunch. "Let's try that again," I encouraged myself, and dipped into the 50 lb. bag of California-grown rice. If we could get rice from California, why couldn't we get lettuce? Oh yeah--there was that slow boat ride in between.

A gecko lizard moved down from the ceiling to get a fly that lazed near eye level. Never did I expect to be happy about sharing a kitchen with lizards, I thought, but they did keep down the flies and roaches.
The fleshy gray lizard moved in to strike.

"Bang!" The homemade screen door crashed against the wall studs that would divide Henry's room from the rest of the apartment once we got the panelling up. Henry flopped his long body onto the sofa and fixed his gaze on a crack in the folding doors between our apartment and my classroom. "Tell me again, Lynn, how this is the best school on Majuro, the model for the Marshall Islands."

"You mean what Elder Barber told us in staff meeting?" I asked.

"Yeah. Tell me the part about how the school has been going for eight years without one certified teacher. And then remind me that all this is being done without any textbooks for English, or teacher's guides for math and reading." Henry stalked over to the stove and lifted the pot lid. "Have you seen my class library? I can appreciate that half of it went to Dalap, but one volume of The Bible Story, a McGufee reader, and social studies books from the 1950's are a little less than stimulating." He peered into the pot. "Rice again?"

"How do your students look?" I asked, veering away from a discussion of Henry's least favorite food.

"Rather human," he answered soberly.

"What did you do with them this morning?" I really was curious to know.

"Oh, I took record, gave them a Bible assignment, and told them my name. Now that was a subject for debate--my name." Henry rummaged through our single cupboard. "Didn't we buy a can of peas?"

"Yes--there in the back." I turned down the flame under the rice. "What was the debate?"
"The kids were all in desks when I came in. I thought I heard a
gasp, but no one said a word." Henry's voice suddenly took on its
familiar tone of inquisitive observation. "Have you noticed how much
shorter Marshallese kids are than most American and Canadian kids?"

"I've certainly seen the tops of a lot of adult heads," I re-
plied. I'd say the average adult man here is no more than 5' 6".

"Well," Henry tossed the tin lid into the sink," I introduced myself
as Mr. Neumann. And they argued with me!" Henry shook his head. "'Not
New Man,' they said, 'Long Man'." Henry's grin stretched across his lean
face. "At least they're on the ball! You know, in my class, there's the
king's grandson, an Assembly of God preacher's son, a legislator's daughter,
and a guy with six toes." He paused to spoon some peas into his mouth.
"Good thing Elder Barber's going in to Rita after supper. I need to
check Kevin's math guide so I can keep on top of that bunch."

On the way to The Road, we spied a paper pinned to the mission sign.
"It's Marshallese," commented Elder Barber, retrieving the sheet. "Some-
times this sign gets used as a community billboard." He tossed the paper
onto Sammy's dashboard and the unintelligible message disappeared in the
milieu of six SM's searching for chalk in two schools, and preparations
for the evangelistic meetings coming up in just three weeks.

The four SM's at Rita-Dalap looked weary, but not beaten. Mike
carted a load of books to Delilah. "Isn't this what teachers are supposed
to do?" he questioned with a grin, He jerked his head toward the school-
church. "The others are inside. Playing 'Janitor'."

Through the open double doors, I glimpsed Kevin and the two SM girls,
who'd arrived just three days before, reshuffling desks. "We've got 95 kids!" Kevin called out. "Look at the work your school at Laura's creating for us! Great reputation! Right, Miss Downs?"

"I guess so," Barbie tossed her straw-colored hair over her shoulder and threw all the energy of her long, strong back into arranging desks again. Short, blue-eyed Sheryl swept the cement floor with a narrow house broom. She wore the same island-print dress as when I'd first seen her standing on a rock by the ocean, wearing sun glasses and a camera, looking for all the world like a professional tourist.

Sheryl looked up from her sweeping. "This has been the longest day of my life. How can you tell a grade two kid from a grade three kid when none of them speaks English—or won't let on if they do!"

"A quick Washington girl like you? Why, Miss Edwards," Kevin winked, "I'm surprised you couldn't tell right off."

Sheryl wrinkled up her nose at the unaccustomed "Miss" in front of her name. "I'm just Sheryl! And I don't know what my home state has to do with this." She let her broom fall against the wall. "I need a break."

Her eyes lit up with anticipation, giving her small turned-up features an even more kiddish aspect. "When do we get to try out our snorkeling gear?"

"I'm afraid our tourist days are over," I sighed and leaned against the plain church door that had been transformed into a bulletin board until next Sabbath. "But Sunday's coming! We should have a picnic at The Point out at Laura and go swimming."

"Hey, sounds great! And you guys should stay in Dalap this Friday
night when you come for groceries," Sheryl suggested. "We'll have a good supper and discuss the week's casualties," she grinned. "I hope I'll feel more like a teacher by then."

Somehow it was just good to talk with these two girls from Washington about first-day traumas and confusion--good to know we all had the same fears and communication problems. I felt freer on the way back to Laura. I could even appreciate the wind whipping my hair around as I sat on Sammy's tailgate and watched the wild beauty of the surf crashing on the reef. There was so much potential for development here, so many new things to try and experience. It was kind of like the anticipation of a year-long Pathfinder campout. That reminded me . . .

"Henry, did Elder Barber say when we'd have the first Pathfinder meeting?"

His eyes stayed fixed on the first pages of the borrowed math key, "Nope. Sounded like it wouldn't be for a few weeks. We've got enough to do trying to figure out which kid is in which grade and where the chalk is stored."

The next evening I was rummaging through my supply closet, trying to find the picture cards I supposedly had inherited for teaching English vocabulary and wondering how Henry would take rice patties for supper. Suddenly a Toyota horn and adolescent laughter announced the arrival of visitors. I could tell they were Marshallese kids, They all have a short circuit to their funnybone. I looked up to see Barry, one of Henry's big boys, peering into the window. "Open the room, please." His big eyes smiled, expecting me to comply with his demand,
"The room? What room?"

"The Pathfinder room!" Irritation edged Barry's voice. I stuck my head out of the door and met the expectant gaze of fourteen teenage boys piled onto a Toyota pickup.

"Oh!" I said, remembering the announcement pinned to the mission sign. "We didn't think you were coming tonight. Just let me get Elder Barber."

I ducked into the apartment where Henry sat, undisturbed, with a stack of math papers. "Henry, what do we do? What do they do? All the Pathfinders are here, and we're no Pathfinders! I've been on one campout and about 12 meetings--ten years ago."

Henry shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know," he replied and kept on working.

The mission house looked quiet and empty, but I rapped on the door anyway. "Come in," came a feeble voice from the bedroom.

"Are you all right, Elder Barber?" I asked lamely. Obviously he wasn't, or he wouldn't be in bed at 5:30 p.m. "The Pathfinders are here for a meeting, and I don't remember anything about Pathfinder meetings!"

"Well," replied the pale man, "I can't get out of bed--the flu, Erva's not home either. But it appears they've forced our hand with their enthusiasm." He thought for a moment. "Take that box behind the door--yes that one. It's got ropes, their membership list, everything for a meeting. They love to drill, and they'll know what to do."

That they did. Antibus, by far the most outspoken boy in school,
whisked the box from me at the classroom door, jabbering Marshallese, and exercising his assumed right to chew out the members who hadn't brought their dues. Taking a seat in the middle of the room, I became aware of the non-existence of girls at the meeting. I slouched down and let Marshallese phrases fly around my ears and over my singularly female, Caucasian head.

There was a lull while Antibus scratched his head about what to do after collecting dues and singing the Pathfinder song. "AH!" His eyes opened wide, and he jabbered something to Ronnie. In 50 seconds the troupe was outside in marching formation, doing precision drills the like of which I'd never seen. When it came to the drill down, one boy after another faltered at Ronnie's purposely-hard commands and was eliminated till only the crack three were left.

The remnant had nothing in common physically. Antibus--scrawny and loose-jointed with teeth as big as his face--headed the threesome in a yellow and blue striped T-shirt that almost covered the knees of his red pants. Soft stringy curls bounced in and out of his drooping eyes as he marched with rhythmic abandon. At the rear marched the tall, slim Barry. His long swinging arms seemed to wind him up like the key on a wind-up puppy dog. The anticipation that appeared to be a permanent part of his expression shone from his big round eyes and white smile.

Sandwiched between the two marched Anday, round as Pooh Bear, incurably gregarious and insatiably thirsty, according to Henry's reports. The sixth toe on his left foot did not impair his performance, for in the end when Mrs. Barber came driving up, Ronnie was calling drills to Anday alone.
"Who called this Pathfinder meeting? Mrs. Barber demanded.

"The kids sort of did," I replied. "They're all excited about Pathfinders. You should have seen them all drill!"

"Next time we will call the meeting." She got out of the truck and turned to the troupe. The boys hung back quietly, some of them wearing nervous smiles. "You can't just tack up an announcement and expect us to have something for you to do," she continued, hands on hips. "Right now school is just getting off the ground, so that's most important. We'll let you know when we're ready for Pathfinders, OK?" She paused to see if the message had gotten through. Apparently they read her clearly. They all loaded onto Ronnie's truck and drove away.

I ruminated about the side effects of Mrs. Barber's approach the next day after school while I chopped onions for fried rice. Somehow it didn't seem right to squelch such enthusiasm, but certainly we didn't have time to think about extra activities right now. I still hadn't found my English vocabulary cards, nor had I figured out the numerous levels of reading ability in my classroom. Would they develop a bad attitude toward school because it interfered with something they enjoyed as much as Pathfinders?

Scuffling and laughter in the school yard punctuated the end of classes for Henry's room. Obviously these kids hadn't heard about the energy crisis yet. Henry, though, shuffled into the apartment as living proof that the shortage is real for North Americans.

"Hi," I scraped the onions into a frying pan. A glance told me that further cheerfulness on my part would not be in order. His eyes regist-
ered incomprehension, and he was obviously shaken. His kids must be
mutinying already. Slowly, he drew a chair from the table and sat down.
Had his social studies project met with rejection? Had Anday drained
our drinking water supply during recess? Had the rice pudding this
morning been that bad? "What's wrong?" I asked, putting my dinner
preparations into the kerosene refrigerator that had quit working again.

"I think it's culture shock, Lynn," Henry hunched over, head in hands.

I gasped. "Is it something that happened in class?"

He shook his head. "Yes. I announced that we'd be dismissing
school at noon on Friday."

"And?"

Henry locked eyes with me. "They all turned their thumbs down and
began chanting. 'We want school, we want school!'"

I burst out laughing, but Henry was all solicitous brother now.

"But it's not normal! Lynn, what am I doing wrong?" Lines of care
creased his young face. "I don't understand it."

"I'm sure you'll work it out, Long Man." I took the rice and onions
from the fridge. "Think of it this way: It's not your fault that school
is a break from the everyday monotony of fishing, diving, and drinking
coconuts in the shade. You just came at a bad time," I patted his arm,

"Things will look better next month."

Henry brightened. "You really think so?" He pulled a chair up to
the wooden table. "I feel better already. What's for dinner?"

"Fried rice."

"Ohhhh!" His face twisted, and he clutched his midriff. "I think I
feel another cultural attack coming on!"
Chapter IV

Gilligan's Island

Two white seabirds executed dives and turns above the palms. An ocean-blue sky melted into the deeper color of a quiet lagoon, and I nestled deeper into my beach towel on the white sand, letting my mind drift with the lapping of the water. Could it be that only two miles away, across the lagoon, stood a yellow block school house where I lived and taught? Where I reaped laughter and confronted mountains of assignments and frustration? Impossible, I decided. Today we missionaries--both student and "regular"--were castaways on an uninhabited Gilligan's Island.

As a kid watching that TV series of adventures and misadventures, I'd wondered why the seven shipwrecked Americans even wanted to be rescued from their tropical island. Now, luxuriating on the warm sand, I really wondered why. Well, maybe I could see the movie star's point of view; Ginger's shimmering night club dresses looked like a second skin that deflected the sun. That kind of wardrobe would make anybody anxious to get out of the tropics! But for me in my bathing suit, the "rescue" back to a four-grade classroom would come far too soon.

Sheryl and Mike rose from the deep with trophies of coral and shell. "The snorkeling here is unreal!" exclaimed Sheryl, pulling her mask to the top of her curly head. "Now this is what being an SM is all about!"

A third dripping white body emerged from the surf. "I've just found a perfect spider conch specimen!" Mrs. Barber held out a mossy-looking shell, then pulled it back toward herself. "Where's Walt? He'll be so excited. Even when he headed the Angeles Nature Club back in California
we never found one like this!" Mrs. Barber squeaked off down the beach in her wet zories.

Mike watched her disappear around a point of sand. "They sure live for each other, don't they?" he smiled.

"Well, when you've been in the mission field for 25 years, away from family and friends, who else really understands the significance of finding a perfect shell?" replied Kevin pulling off his flippers. "Just like nobody at home can really understand what the six of us have been through these last few weeks in Majuro!"

"You're not kidding!" Henry nodded emphatically. "Screening committees ask you all kinds of questions like, 'Can you give a Bible study?' when they should be asking things like, 'How well do you tolerate heat stroke and rice?' or 'Do you read eyebrows?'"

"Have you run into that too?" Barbie questioned, looking up from her beach towel.

"Have I! For a week I could get nothing but raised eyebrows out of my class!" Henry plopped down on a towel. "Then one day Lisa asks me if she can leave the room. I raised my eyebrows to question why, and she just tore out of class. I was still wondering what I'd done when Marine comes up and asks the same thing."

Kevin grinned. "And I'll bet you raised your eyebrows again."

"Yep. Same reaction," Henry smirked. "It finally dawned on me that raised eyebrows are Marshallese body language for 'yes'."

"After your classroom emptied, that is!" Since Henry was treating the disastrous episode lightly, I decided I could too. "Incidents like that really make you appreciate having a group that knows your situation
and speaks the same language."

Mike's shoulders started to bounce, and he closed his eyes in Hollywood singer earnestness. "Oh yea, man, everybody loves my body sometime!" he sang a loose paraphrase of Dean Martin's old hit.

"Well, most of us speak the same language," I amended my statement. "Mike speaks South Californian, but it's pretty close to English."

Mike's firm hand squeezed my shoulder hard. "You mean you country girls in Canuk Land speak English? I thought you spoke Canajun." His crooked smile and blue eyes shifted slyly toward Barbie and Sheryl. "Of course, I'm not sure what they speak in that Walla Walla hick country."

Sheryl stuck out her tongue and grimmaced at him. "Watch it, Mr. Cool, or you'll be eating sand instead of Mrs. Barber's sandwiches for lunch!" she threatened.

"Did I hear you say something about food?" Sheryl hadn't noticed Elder Barber advancing toward us from behind her back. "Erva's spread the sandwiches and breadfruit salad just up the beach a bit, so come and get it."

"Follow that taxi!" Mike slammed the door on an imaginary cab, and he and Henry "drove" off down the beach after Elder Barber while the rest of us hoofed it. I watched Henry skid around the corner and shook my head at Kevin. "I hope Elder Barber's in the left lane. Henry's a maniac behind the wheel sometimes."

"Especially when he goes for the food." Kevin stepped up his pace. "We'd better shift into high gear if we expect to get any breadfruit salad!"

Henry heaped another spoonful of breadfruit salad onto his paper plate. "Suggesting this outing was a stroke of genius, Elder Barber."
The rest of us mumbled agreement through egg salad sandwiches. "It's been a long three weeks."

"Well, you all deserve a break. Erva and I figured a day like this might help you recover from your jet lag." Even in his swimming trunks, the white-haired gentleman radiated sagacity as he explained. "After about a week you don't feel so tired, but your body doesn't really adjust its biological clock for a month."

Henry and Mike exchanged looks of mutual understanding. "Now that's good news," Mike exclaimed. "I've been wiped out ever since school started. When classes are over Kevin and I just come home and crash until the girls start rattling their pots and pans in the apartment next door at supper time." He took a swig of Kool Aid. "Glad there's hope for the rest of the year!"

"Oh, I'd say there's plenty of hope. Plenty!" Elder Barber smiled. "Especially after hearing your 'men's' quartet singing 'Down by the River-side' on Sabbath. I can tell there's a feeling of community building in this group, and that's one giant step in the right direction."

"Yes, it was fun," I swaggered with a mock "macho" pride, "just us guys blending our voices." I turned to Henry. "I bet you were surprised at my baritone."

"Oh, we weren't concerned about your voice," Henry scooped up his last spoonful of salad. "We needed a tall fourth member, and you happen to be the right height." He swerved his body quickly out of my open palm's path and stuffed his plate into the garbage bag. "I think it's safer in the water with the sharks. Anybody else going in?"
"Hey, I am!" exclaimed Sheryl. "How about you, Lynn?"

"What? And scare the sharks? No, I've been in already, and I'll take another dip later. Right now I think I'll indulge in some sun."

Boy, if Pob could see me now! I chuckled at the thought of my friend's nick name--short for Picture of Beauty. She'd chosen it as a pen name one night when crazy notes were flying between rooms in our academy dorm. If I ever expected the famine state of my mailbox to improve, I'd have to write some letters. Nobody at home knew my address. I rummaged through my beachbag for the pad of paper I always carried to occupy my spare moments. It certainly wasn't Hallmark stationery, but so much the better. It would enhance the Spartan impression of life on Majuro, and maybe hasten a reply. I shook the sand out of my beach towel and repositioned myself to make sure my right side would tan as dark as my left.

"Dear Pob:

"Sitting under a palm the other day, eating bananas and sipping pineapple juice on the beach, I noticed a bottle that had washed up on the shore. Lo and behold, it was the distress note I'd set adrift last week, being returned for insufficient postage. After my initial indignation, I was comforted to realize that the U. S. mail extends even to the Marshall Islands. So I decided to let you in on the latest developments in this strange sauna bath we call Majuro.

"Actually, Pob, you don't realize what a rarity you hold in your two hands. I haven't yet had time to sip pineapple juice under a palm tree. I've yet to even find a pineapple here! Majuro isn't your typical tropical tourist trap, but it's got its own off-beat flavor. Finding
time to really discover it is a problem; I hardly even find the time to write home once a week. And I wouldn't even do that if I didn't know Dad was developing an ulcer worrying about Henry and me. This school business keeps me so busy and preoccupied! Maybe being an SM is going to make me the grown-up, responsible person everyone says it will. I don't know about that part yet, but, in the meantime, my kids are really getting to me."

Now where were my sunglasses? The kids get to me in several senses, but not like the glare of the sun off white paper! The last time I'd seen my sunglasses, Reles had been modelling them around the school. He'd instantly turned into a brown John Travolta.

"They really are such neat kids. I think about my students, worry about them--perish the unchristian virtue!--hope for them, laugh with (and at) them, and sometimes, I even pray for them. And I must confess, that as some people would rate SM prayer life--you know how SM's supposedly pray every hour on the hour for something--well, mine looks rather slouchy. I spend more time trying to figure out ways and means to help and motivate my kids than I spend praying for them.

"Maybe God just hasn't gotten through to me on that point yet, but I really feel He gave me brains and creativity for action, not just to think up new ways of saying, 'Bless the children.' And He is doing some great things. He gives me an idea for a lesson plan and reminds me of ways I learned important ideas. He's really expanding my little brain!

"Sometimes it's fantastic playing teacher to my 25 little Micro-nesians (especially when I'm lying on a white beach thinking about my occasional successes). But then there are times when I just crumple
onto my lumpy mattress and ask myself, 'Exactly what do I expect to accomplish here by spending one year listening to kids read about Dick and Jane in poor English? What can one SM really do?'

I put down my ball point pen and flicked the sand off my arms. One thing SM's can do real well in the tropics is burn, I decided. A warm blush had begun creeping over my knees and shoulders. Time for the sunscreen.

"See, Pob," I smeared my friend's name when I resumed writing with a dab of sunscreen still on the edge of my hand, "they've had missionaries here for 150 years already, But the Marshallese culture puts a new slant on everything. Here, you can't just fall back on your comfortable old habits and attitudes without re-thinking and re-evaluating them. Yes, we want our kids to know God as a friend, and to have Him make a difference in their lives. We want them to excel in every way--including Christian living. But how can we show them practical Christian living when such basic concepts as 'possession' are defined differently?

"Here's the thing: Everyone agrees that stealing is wrong. But traditionally, anything a man owns can be borrowed indefinitely--with or without permission--by any member of his extended family (which includes just about everyone on the island!). Stealing, as we think of it, doesn't exist in the traditional Marshallese mind. So how do you handle it when three of your students help themselves to the bread, marshmallows, and Cool Whip in the pastor's outdoor freezer--posting lookouts, no less!"

I reverted to my old habit of chewing on my pen while I pondered what I'd just written. The freezer incident wasn't serious to either my students or their parents. But it had disturbed us foreigners.
The fact that they posted lookouts seems to show that they knew it offended our cultural mores, but is that what the gospel is really concerned with—cultural differences? With changing their definition of "possession?"

I looked down at what I'd written. P-O-S-S-E-S-S-. . . Now was that how you spelled "possession"? Oh for my Harbrace Handbook and a dictionary! I should have followed my own instincts about what to bring rather than listening to those people who advised against bringing books 'cause they're heavy. How can an English major sleep at night, not knowing whether or not she spelled "possession" right? That—not hordes of mosquitoes, cold showers, and a kerosene fridge that worked only half the time—was the great trial for my kind of SM!

"OK, OK," Mike poured a fin full of water down my back, "that letter's long enough."

"Look who's talking," I squirmed out of the wetness on my towel, "The man who keeps the Bic pen company in business! But then," I threw a handful of sand at the matted wet hair on his legs, "I guess you'd get mail anyway." His girlfriend, Alison, wrote to him every day. The distance between his special girl and him seemed harder on Mike than on Kevin. Mike had slumped into depression last week when he'd missed one mail call. Really, I was amazed he'd been able to leave California at all!

Hard as it was on Mike, Elder Barber was, I thought, a little glad for the ties that Mike and Kevin had back home. It was a kind of insurance policy against romantic involvements among us SM's, and between us and the Marshallese. I had to smile when I remembered the people at
...home winking and teasing me about bringing back a "pineapple hunk." Now the Marshallese were taking good-natured swipes at my 5'11" height. Somehow, having a boyfriend climb half way up a coconut tree so he could kiss me good night didn't strike anybody as being particularly romantic.

Mike tried to brush the sand off his legs as he sat down beside me. "Alison is about the most thoughtful girl a guy could wish for. I showed you the ski poster she sent yesterday, didn't I?"

"Sure did. You got so nostalgic and dreamy I thought you'd grab your 'Ski Mammoth' T-shirt and hop the next plane to California!"

Mike laughed. "Hey, I'm not that gone." He paused. "It's only real bad when the mail doesn't come in or when I'm not very busy."

"Which looks like it will be almost never either way! But I know what you mean. Here a letter can be a real life saver sometimes."

"Speaking of saving lives, looks like Henry deserves a hero biscuit!" Mike pointed to a coughing, sputtering girl leaning on Henry's arm.

"Sheryl! What's the matter?" Barbie bolted upright on her towel. Sheryl continued to cough.

"The current got a little strong and was taking her farther away from the island," Henry thumped the girl's back. "She kind of panicked."

"I thought it was 'Goodbye, Majuro' for awhile there," Sheryl finally recovered her breath. "Good thing Henry has long arms." She looked up from her 5'2" height into the clean, chiselled face that crowned his 6'5" stature. "Hey, Long Man, I think you saved my life."

"Oh, I'm not that valiant," Henry patronized her with an infuriating pat on the head. "I think it's in my contract somewhere. And besides,"
Henry was already knee-deep back into the lagoon, "I think every giant should have his own personal dwarf."

Sheryl dropped on the sand with a moan.
Chapter V

Rx For the Jungle Teacher

I waited patiently. Day after day I waited. Every morning I said, "Maybe this will be the day. Maybe today will be the 'typical school day' that teachers at home have turned into a cliché." One particular November morning found me waking with the same old hope, only slightly dampened by the curtain of water pouring off the roof outside the window.

I pulled my sheet and cotton bedspread closer, and tried vainly to blot out the gray light of a dull morning. It was past 7:00 already and Junior wasn't at my door calling, "Missy Lynn, I want de ball." Small comfort, I winced while the finger I'd stuck in the fan yesterday throbbed. There would be a straggling few here at 8 o'clock, and I still needed to prepare the Bible lesson. And find something stimulating for English. Why hadn't I done my homework?

The trouble with rainy days, I decided, reluctantly leaving the womb-like comfort of my concave mattress, was that I never knew what to do for the first hour until most of the late-sleeping scholars had been washed off their pandanas mats, down The Road, and into my classroom. Then they would sit sullenly through worship and my enthusiastic rendition of "The Arky Song."

I gave the bathroom mirror my cheesiest grin and started rehearsing. "The Lord said to Noah, 'There's gonna be a floody, floody' . . ." I stopped. The steady sheets of heavy rain and nearby crashing waves beat the flooding possibility into my consciousness. And there wasn't even a mountain to climb! Forget the verses this morning. Try the chorus, I
thought, and struck out against my gloomy thoughts with vigorous hand motions and increased volume. "So rise and shine and give God the glory, glory . . ."

"For cryin' out loud, Lynn," Henry moaned from his bedroom, "if it's not Junior it's you!" His eyebrows knitted as he emerged from his confining cubby hole. "Everybody's got to be a ray of sunshine in the morning," he muttered to himself, pulling on his shirt--inside out.

"Missy Lynn." I recognized a much-subdued Junior peering through the screen door. "Missy Lynn, I . . ." He broke off his ritual request with a fatigued wave and sauntered away.

"So rise and shine," I hummed, trying to convince myself. Then I slammed my fan-injured finger in the screen door on the way to class.

Nobody wanted a ray of human sunshine, I decided, surveying the few lethargic students in my classroom. Rhanton watched the downpour, his chin in his hand. "Warrah!" he exclaimed, vocalizing his frustration in the way of a juvenile Marshallese. "Warrah!" Rhanton shook his head. "No pase pall!" I ignored his substitution of "B"s for "P"s. Little would be won by harping on phonics this morning. Even the big kids had trouble hearing the difference between the two sounds.

"OK--grades three and four, you're going to make new writing books," I announced when I tired of my prolonged solo in song service. We never had writing books proper; 20 sheets stapled between construction paper sufficed. "Here are the supplies. How grades one and two, come up to the bench for Bible."

"Today," I launched out enthusiastically, "we're going to learn about two brothers, Cain and Abel."
"Their is father is Adam?" questioned John. Bible stories stuck with him better than his English lessons did.

"Yes. But the two brothers were very different from each other."

"They did not play pase palle together?" John asked in surprise.

"Not likely. Cain liked to work in the garden, but Abel did not. Abel liked to take care of the little lambs."

Now the impetuous Joycelynn was puzzled. "Miss Lynn, what dat?"

"Lambs? They're little sheep."

"Oh yeah."

"Well, even though the two brothers lived in the same house and had the same mother and father, they grew up very different. Abel was very good to his little lambs; Cain kicked his dog. Abel liked to be kind; Cain liked to fight." The English major in me winced at casting the two characters in such simple hero/villain contrast, but my careful parallel was having the desired effect. "Abel," I said and noted the approving looks the name drew, "Abel liked to pray. But Cain,"--scowls and knitted brows--"Cain never liked to pray. When Eve asked Abel to get some fruit for supper, he said, 'Yes, I'll go!'" Nods of approval. "But if she asked Cain, he said . . . ."

"Warrah!" chorused the class in a collective expression of Marshallese disgust. They certainly had captured the point of the lesson! Even I understood their Marshallese version of Cain's response. Or were they just vocalizing the spirit of the morning?

A paper airplane circuited its way over the heads at the bench and landed at my feet. "Jerry, this is supposed to be part of your writing book!"
"Oh!" he exclaimed in too astonished innocence. Darrel snickered and kicked a squadron of paper fighter jets into the aisle from under Jerry's desk.

"Straighten them out and make them into a book, and do your writing assignment," I ordered. This was the part of the day I feared most. They were starting to wake up.

Depositing the remainder of our paper supply in the closet at the front of the room, I heard a small but authoritative "Touch!" followed by Darrel's irritated "Stop that, Preacher!" I wheeled around to see the grade two nicknamed "Japan" for his oriental eyes, with his hands on Darrell's chin and crown, giving the big boy's head another sudden jerk, "Touch!" he repeated the incantation.

"Preacher, what are you doing?" I asked in blank amazement.

Myrna, my fourth grader and cultural mediator, explained. "He is 'Touch!' Darrell's headache like the man at CBI." Preacher, now bracing Jerry's head, beamed.

"Sit down, Preacher," I laughed. Last night a faith healer had come to Calvary Bible Institute, Dave Olsen's parish, and Preacher had been sitting in the front row. The little boys often preached short sermons to each other, usually on Monday after a day in church. Now the faith healer provided an exciting variation on the old "preacher" game,

I finally recovered myself. "You don't have to live up to your name right now, Preacher. Sit down and we'll sing the ABC song. Ready, grades one and two?" Main clapped her hands, then settled her chin smugly on the heels of her palms. In six weeks she had nearly mastered an enchanting song in a language no one at home understood. She glanced
at Lynn Joseph, and the two grade ones lit up in anticipation while I got out my pointer to tap the familiar alphabet cards.

"Missy Lynn, sing it again, sing it again," suggested Riti from the grade three and four section while the others wagged heads in agreement. By the third round, their voices penetrated the two block walls that separated my room from Henry's. Egged on by an answering chant from next door, my kids went for a resounding round four, with an intensity that rattled the windows.

"Enough!" I cried when the sustained "Z" cord finally died. "Take out your math." I'd only just stepped inside the supply closet to get more chalk when I heard a small mutinous voice.

"ABCDEFG--" I dropped the flashcards in my haste to prevent another chorus. The windows simply wouldn't take it. "HIJKLMNOP--" At the front of the class stood Main, performing in six-year old virtuosity.

"What's the use?" I sighed, and sat out the remainder of the concert on the front bench.

During recess—which came sooner and lasted longer than usual—I watched the girls wash their hair under a cascade of rainwater from the eaves, with a bar of soap from the washroom. The family rain barrels must be leaky, I decided, and made an inspection of the windows. Only one slat was broken, and I thought it must have happened before the ABC's in stereo. I went next door under pretext of checking for damaged windows in Henry's room. Actually, I just wanted to watch Henry because he always seemed to have the situation in hand, and my morale needed a boost. Somehow, somewhere, there must be a model classroom. Somewhere there must also be an aspirin!
All was as I had hoped when I peeked in at Henry's class. With the foresight so typical of him, Henry had revised his seating plan. Two rows strung across the front of the room made it possible to watch the fire darting from one pair of eyes to another. "Now that's half the battle right there," I thought, my admiration for Henry's plan growing by the minute, "just having them all exposed." I hadn't, however, taken into full consideration the rain factor.

Inside every dark-eyed cherub that greets you on a hazy sun-filled morning, there's a Rowdy. The factors governing the appearance of this inner creature are: number of years spent studying teachers, the time of the school year, and the weather. Grade eights like Wilton and Antibus, who started at Laura when it had a kindergarten, specialized in SM teacher distraction. They know how long they can pretend to be illiterate before you send them back to grade three. And then about the end of the first grading period there's marked behavioral change in all the students. The studious loosen up, the frivolous get down to study—or else get wilder—and if the weather is rainy, out of them pops that dreaded creature, the "Rowdy."

Even just scanning the horizon for rain clouds, the Rowdy in your student can be trouble. But just add water—no stirring is necessary—and voila! No more angelic veneer. Just unplanned, unvarnished Rowdy, and guaranteed disaster.

The upper room's recess time neared. Henry sat at his desk, yard stick in hand, going over plans for the next class period while the kids worked math problems. Henry kept one eye on Wilton, as the class senior Rowdy walked over to the trash can, and innocently enough, made a basket
with his hook shot.

"Waap!" The smack of an open palm on a bare shoulder shattered the edgy peace.

"Wilton!" The Long Man leaped to his feet to bestow a menacing look from on high.

"She took one of my papers."

From the safety of my outside vantage point I watched the domino effect. Henry was in the middle of explaining to "Mohammed Ali" Wilton that slug dzieci could get him expelled. when Jane's enraged cry cut him short. She took the tacks from her chair and threw them at Ronnie, Wilton's seventh grade counterpart, who chuckled with delight at the success of his tack-planting espionage. Still smiling, Ronnie opened his binder. "Who stole my papers!" he roared.

Looking like Sylvester the Cat after swallowing Tweetie Bird, Antibus gloated over his newly-acquired ream of paper—until he looked under his desk. "Who stole my zories?" he screamed. Meanwhile at the pencil sharpener, oblivious to the riot already in progress, Reles prepared to finish off a shrieking Franklin with one last stab of his pencil.

Henry's eyes flashed, but the strain of the morning showed in the cords standing out in his neck. "Reles, sit down!"

"My pencil is broken."

"Sit Down!"

Reles slumped into his desk. His dilemma was clear: he needed a sharp pencil to finish off Franklin—or, as a last stop-gap against boredom to finish his math. But he couldn't get up to sharpen his pencil. His wheels of thought turned rapidly. They were well-lubricated by the coconut oil
dressing he'd applied to his hair before diving yesterday. Reles straightened in his desk, his thoughts screeching to a halt before the obvious solution: Franklin!

Reles sent his toothsome smile and pencil over to his recovering victim, with a few sweetly-intoned Marshallese words. Loosely translated, the message ran, "If I can't spear a mosquito with this pencil, I'll break your head." Franklin got up, sharpened the pencil, and returned it to Reles with a pin-point lead and warm smile.

An abrupt cessation of the rain made Henry glance outside. Spying me at the window, he decided to call an interlude. "Break time," he decreed, laying aside his yardstick, "We've got to have a break!"

Gluing myself to the wall I let the Rowdy wave swell past, then ambled over to the throne area, where the regent had collapsed into his chair. "They're animals--real animals when it rains," Henry shook his head.

I was about to ask him what he thought of taking the afternoon to teach them all about underwater basket weaving when a shadow in the doorway caught my attention. It was the class model of diligence and good behavior--who had, by contrast, been conspicuously absent this morning. Beaming cheerfulness and sincerity, the King's grandson inquired, "Time to go home?"

Henry stared uncomprehendingly at the bright face. "Yes, Kabua. Much past time. It's already 10:30 a.m."

Kabua disappeared with a happy smile. "Henry, you're not going to send them home now, are you?" I questioned, uncertain of his sarcasm. "Although considering the problems I had this morning ...."
My young brother cut me short with professional curtness. "Of course I'm not sending them home. As for your kid problems, sorry—I don't make school calls." He accompanied me to the door. "Now here's my advice," Henry said, patting my shoulder with doctorly patronage. "Take two aspirins and call me next year."
Chapter VI

The Trumpet Shall Sound

The purr of Sammy's motor outside our door announced Elder Barber's return from town. "Yokwe," his deep voice boomed from the back of the truck, where he wrestled with a substantial cardboard box. "We got a real windfall at the post office today." He thumped a mail sack. "Full of Signs from your church at home."

"Wow!" I exclaimed to Henry, who was emerging from his classroom with a sheaf of papers under his arm. "Take a look at this fan mail."

Henry pulled the bag open. "Now that should last for a couple days at the airport," he grinned.

"I'd estimate it won't last much longer than that, though." Elder Barber paused to extract insight from the observation. "We could fill the literature racks at the airport and hospital everyday. The color and eye-appeal of the Signs make them a real favorite."

I had to agree. Something about the magazine definitely appealed to the islanders. Only the other day Henry and I had filled the racks in an empty airport, hours before the Friday plane's arrival. Leaving the airport, I remembered that my purse lay on a bench back inside. I strolled back at a leisurely pace. No need to rush when there wasn't a soul in sight. Rounding the corner, I stopped abruptly. There, under another church's literature rack, a young island man squatted as he read the Signs.

"That's pretty neat," I nodded at the mail sack in the back of the truck at Elder Barber's feet. "Now the people we know have a personal interest in missions."
"Yes--and in that sense you SM's benefit your families and friends as well as Majuro. People at home are often just looking for a specific project to get involved in." Elder Barber set himself down on Sammy's endgate. "Putting money in the offering plate doesn't always satisfy the desire to do something personally. But a human contact will give them direct response." He looked over the top of his trifocals. "Now that's more tangible." Elder Barber pulled an opened envelope from his shirt pocket. "At least that's the way the Oxnard church in California feels about it."

Elder Barber unfolded the letter. "Erva and I worked in Oxnard for several years and, now that we're here, their Junior department has taken on our Juniors as a special project. They want to send us a movie projector."

"No kidding!" Henry's eyes bugged out. "There are some films I'd sure like to show in school sometime. That would be fantastic!"

"It will be some time, I'm sure, before those kids raise the money." Elder Barber jumped back into Sammy's home-made shell again and pushed a heavy-looking box toward Henry. "But here's something for you right now."

Henry and I scrutinized the return address. "From Uncle Robert?" I puzzled. We looked at each other. "No," I shook my head. "You don't suppose ...."

"But you did write him that we needed Bibles for Bible class, didn't you?" Henry knit his eyebrows in thought. "And he does belong to the Gideon Bible Society ...."

We tore open the box. "New Testaments!" I pulled out one of the small red books and opened it. "'There will be the shout of command,
the archangel's voice, the sound of God's trumpet . . . ' Looks like Thessalonians is here. Must be official."

"You'll have to write Uncle Robert right away." Henry informed me of "my" duty as he hoisted the box from the truck. The only letter he'd written since coming to Majuro had been composed at knife point the day we arrived: "Dear Mom, Dad, Blaine, etc., etc., etc.,: We are here. I am hot and tired and am going to bed, so I will let Lynn finish writing this letter. Love, Henry." So I had put away my knife and finished the letter. Henry was a talker, not a writer.

"Hey, you know," Henry continued, riffling through the box he'd set on the kitchen table, "there are enough testaments here to give one to every kid in school." His blue eyes fixed on a vision that appeared to be unfolding just above the kerosene refrigerator. "We should make a big production out of this."

"A big production?" I looked again but still couldn't see anything above the fridge.

"Yeah! A big party, a celebration, and present each kid with a Bible that has his own name in it."

"Oh I get it!" I caught Henry's inspiration. "How about giving them out at the Christmas party?" I suggested. "That's only a week from now."

"No, no," Henry shook his head. "That's a wild time. Never hand out Bibles and water balloons on the same day." His face lit up suddenly, and he turned toward me. His eyes grew wider and he wagged a finger.

"A birthday party!"
"But Henry," I hated to shatter his mystical experience, "the Marshallese don't keep track of their birthdates."

"Exactly. So we can choose any day, declare it everybody's birthday, and give them each a gift—their own New Testament. That's it!" Henry's eyes were back to normal. He crossed the floor and tossed up his hands, exulting in his own genius. "What could be more appropriate; To start the new year by giving them a New Testament on a new birthday. It's perfect," he said, swinging the box off the table and into his room. "We'll have the party on January 26."

"January 26—?" I started with suspicion.

"It is my birthday," the lanky dude grinned back from his doorway, "Just think, Lynn—35 kids with the same birthday as mine. That's 35 birthday cards I'll always remember to send."

The week before Christmas flew by, and before we had time to think again, Henry and I were standing in Honolulu airport. "I never dreamed our family would ever spend a Christmas in Hawaii," I remarked, jostling my flight bag onto my shoulder in the "Arrivals" area. "Do you think Dad decided to come?"

"Are you kidding?" Henry scanned the crowd. "Even the 40 below weather they've been having in Alberta couldn't prompt him to get on an airplane. But I know something that will."

"What's that?"

Henry smirked and winked at me. "I'll tell him I'm going straight from Majuro to Avondale College in Australia." He grinned. "That ought to fetch him. Hey, there's Mom and Granny now!" Mom waved enthusiastically and Granny smiled. "But where's Blaine?"
"Right there beside Mom," I pointed out a blond, six-foot, 15-year old. "He must have grown five inches in the last five months!" I waved, "Hey, Blaine!"

"Wow, man," Henry grabbed Blaine's now adult hand and shook it. "You just gave me the surprise of my life!"

"No I didn't--at least not yet. Just wait." The big-boned teenager grinned at Henry's puzzled look. "Well, let's not just stand around the airport till Christmas. Let's go!" Blaine grabbed my suitcase, and I trotted down the airport corridor after my two towering brothers, trying to keep up with their long strides and rapid conversation. I could tell that this was going to be a Christmas to remember.

Once inside our hotel room, Blaine could contain the "surprise of Henry's life" no longer. He pointed to two long wooden boxes of homemade origin. "Open 'em," Blaine instructed, handing Henry a claw hammer.

Henry wrenched the lid off the first box. "Hey, what's this?" He fingered the shining brass of a trombone. "It's a trombone," Blaine replied matter-of-factly.

"I know that," Henry replied impatiently, "but what's it doing here?"

"Look a little further," Blaine worked on the second box lid in the hall. "You'll figure it out."

A skeptical comprehension (or was it apprehension?) crept into Henry's eyes as another two trombones, four trumpets, a baritone, a snare drum and beginner's band books were disentangled from their protective wrappings. Blaine confirmed Henry's suspicions when he pulled a book from the last box and presented it to Henry. "It's all in here,"
Blaine patted the volume affectionately. "Everything you need to know about starting your own jungle band."

Henry slapped his hand to his forehead. He eyed Eric B. Hare's Treasure from the Haunted Pagoda with suspicion. "Now I know why they say kids need guidance in choosing books." He turned to Mom. "And I'm holding you personally responsible for letting Blaine get a hold of this dangerous story." Then the implications of the new windfall suddenly hit hard. "Blaine," Henry pled, "you know we're already teaching four grades each, and leading out in church, Pathfinders, singing bands, Branch Sabbath School..." Suddenly a question softened Henry's eyes. "Where did these instruments come from anyway?"

Blaine became animated at the question. "Pawn shops all over Edmonton. Dad took me downtown, and I looked around till I found some good deals." He picked up a gleaming Besson trombone. "This one started out at $85, but I got it for just $35! Hagglin's really fun."

I turned to Mom. "Where did he come from? We don't have any Jewish blood in our family." This couldn't be the same quiet adolescent who'd been too embarrassed to kiss me goodbye at the airport just four months ago. "What happened?"

Mom's blue eyes smiled with pride. "Oh, you know how he loves band music." Yes, I knew. My last Christmas had been filled with the blattering sounds of Blaine teaching himself how to play the school sousaphone --a difficult E-flat marching tuba. He's surprised us at the end of vacation with a rendition of "The Happy Farmer." Mom continued. "When he read about Eric B. Hare's jungle band in Burma, he just said, 'Henry's the kind of guy who could do that,' and he started looking for instruments."
Here was the element of personal interest again, I mused.

"Henry's the kind of guy who plays a trombone, not all these other things," Henry's shock had turned to a realistic analysis of the situation. "Anyway, how did you pay for all this?"

Blaine folded his arms in a self-sufficient pose. "Tuba lessons. Dad loaned me most of the money, but I'm giving tuba lessons, and I'll pay it back."

Henry looked at me for a long while. "Well, you play the trumpet, right? And I play the trombone. But Blaine," he faced the teenager squarely, "you're coming to Majuro to demonstrate the baritone!" Henry looked around the room. "Now that that's settled, where's the telephone? I've got a call to make to Dad."

Coming back from our wanderings around Oahu the next evening, we found Dad on our doorstep in front of the hotel. His blue eyes twinkled as he hoisted his large frame off the step and wound me up in a bear hug. Only the wish to see Henry and me had been able to overcome his oath to never set foot on an airplane.

"How was the trip?" I asked, and noted the tuba and bass drum beside him. "And how in the world did you wind up with Coralwood Academy's drum?" I pointed to the familiar mountain scene painted on one side.

"I told them Henry would come back and lead the Coralwood band next year," he winked. "Australia's no place for a born-and-bred Canadian!" Dad smoothed back his thinning hair with a large hand. "Actually, when the principal heard about Blaine's project, he told me to come and get it. Sort of a souvenir for all the years you kids played in the band there."
Henry rubbed the fine lacquer finish of the tuba. "And where did this come from?"

"You remember Mr. Auter?" Dad always took an interest in the person behind every story.

"The one that used to play in folk bands back in Germany?" I asked.

"Right. Somehow he found out about the Majuro Mission Band, and this is his own tuba." I observed Henry's face reflected in the tuba's big bell. Dad's words were making a thoughtful impression. "Imagine," Dad continued, "his own tuba! And that's no second-rate gift either."

On the flight back to Majuro after our short Hawaiian vacation, Henry, Blaine, and I planned our band introduction tactics. "We've gotta win 'em right off." Henry unsnapped his seatbelt and hunched toward me and Blaine. I could almost smell the popcorn and hear the roar of a football game crowd as the three of us huddled to detail our strategy. "First," Henry's index finger sliced the air, "we'll charm 'em with something catchy like 'La Paloma et Blanca'. Then we'll play something they know."

"Like 'I'm Gonna Sing'!" I suggested. "It's one of their favorites, and it's lively enough to fly even with just three instruments."

"And we gotta have some German 'Om-pa' music!" Blaine decreed. "That's the best band music." He made no attempt to hide his bias. "Especially with small groups. How about 'Mir san Mir'?"

"Why not?" Enthusiasm charged Henry's response. "And we'll follow it with 'Onward Christian Soldiers' and 'When the Saints go Truckin' In'."
"That's 'Marching' not 'Trucking' In," I reminded Henry. "And I'm not so sure how that would go after an om-pa song."

"Well," Henry conceded, "maybe the trombone slurs in 'Get That Tiger' would be more spectacular to end on anyway." His eyes twinkled, and he smacked his right fist into his left hand. "The trumpet shall sound in Majuro!"

Our three-piece band and the trombone slurs on "Get That Tiger" worked their charm. "Wow! Really loud music. Really good!" The kids cheered enthusiastically.

Ronnie, the school's "Mr. Cool," swaggered forward in his tall slimness and bushy afro. "I will play this one," he pointed to Henry's trombone. His eyes laughed along with the rest of the assembly even as he spoke. But his look changed to bewildered confusion when Henry held out the trombone to him.

"Go ahead--try it," Henry persisted. Silent stares crowded in around Ronnie as the class leader weighed the alternatives. If he couldn't make a sound, his cool, knowledgeable image would be blown before the entire school. But Long Man had called his cool bluff, and he couldn't back down without losing face. Even the sun taunted his hesitation by glinting at him off the polished brass of the bell. Ronnie's jaw firmed. He took the long slidey thing from the Long Man and put the warm silver mouthpiece to his lips.

"Blaaat!" laughter and applause broke out all over the room, and Ronnie blasted his triumph again and again. Wilton, another eighth grader, reached for my trumpet. "I want to play that one."
"Just a minute," Henry held up his hand for silence. "My little brother--" the class snickered at the misappellation, and Henry corrected himself. "I mean my younger brother brought a gift for Laura and for you." Blaine and I slipped out to our apartment and brought the instruments in two at a time while the kids cheered. "You," Henry continued, "will be the first Seventh-day Adventist band in the Marshall Islands!"

The whirr of saws and the bang of hammers filled lunch break as Henry, along with Currie and Tommy, the two native pastoral interns, created official SDA music stands from common plywood and 2 x 2's.

"Boy," Currie shook his head, grinning, "Laura has its own band! Since I was a boy in Laura Village, such a thing has never happened." Brushing the sawdust out of his afro, the tall, slim young preacher added, "The band will make our school grow!"

"Yes," agreed Tommy. The handsome young out-islander seldom voiced his opinion about events on Majuro because, though he carried great authority as a traditional alab on Namu and several other atolls, he had no authority on Majuro. But on this point he had to speak. "We Marshallese love music." A thought teased his smooth face into a warm smile. "I know what a band would do for the people on my islands."

Elder Barber drove up in Sammy to check on the progress of the carpenters. "No sir," he addressed Henry, who stood behind the first completed music stand, "this is not the first Seventh-day Adventist band in the Marshalls." Elder Barber's smile met Henry's unsettled look. "It's the first Seventh-day Adventist band in all of Micronesia!" He got into Sammy again and turned over the motor in preparation for his
daily journey to town. "This band will be big news on the island."

Blasts and squeals of varying intensity punctuated the hammering and sawing as Blaine and I refereed turns at the trumpet, trombone, and baritone. The new brassy sounds affected the villagers like a herald trumpet call. In fact, most of the sounds were trumpet calls. It brought children to Laura school who were much too young to be there, and also kids who should have been in their afternoon classes at the public school. Grandfathers with machetes came from their copra sheds, and grandmothers with toddlers in tow—all drifted irresistibly into the school yard.

"What is it?" one old man asked in Marshallese, his black-rimmed glasses sliding down his broad, flat nose.

"It's a band!" his grandson grinned from behind a trombone,

"A band? A band." The old man surveyed the happy din-makers,

"It is good. Laura has a band."

By the end of the day, every kid in school down to Main, the smallest grade one, had to try blasting out a solid note. And to our surprise they were, without exception, successful! Too successful.

"Don't their lips ever get tired?" I mumbled into my supper. Was it the spicy kimchi (pickled cabbage) that brought tears to my eyes or the brassy repetition of the C scale for the 92nd time that day? I spied the running shoes Blaine had left behind when he'd gone back to Hawaii last week—and left us alone with The Band. "What a legacy you left for me to live with," I scolded him in my mind. The monotonous brass serenade would only end when Elder Barber, in mercy, turned off the power generator and lights.
Henry steamrollered in through the screen door. "Boy, I've never seen such natural lip durability! And enthusiasm—why, they already know two songs by heart!"

"I know, I know!" I watched his Adam's apple bob while he gurgled down the glass of milk I'd poured for him when I'd called him to supper half an hour before.

"Wha'd ya mean?" The folding metal chair screeched as Henry pulled it up to the table, on what had become his "fast food" supper break.

"I mean," I explained, passing him the kimchi, "that's all I've heard for the last two weeks is 'Rejoice in the Lord Always', 'The Old Mare,' and the C scale!" My grip on the table tightened. "I started worship song service this morning by singing, 'The old gray mare, she ain't what she used to be.' Henry, do you think I'm all right?"

Henry choked on his rice. "Well, I dunno ... How did it go over?"

"They wanted to know the rest of the song so they could sing it with the band."

"It's too bad we don't have more instruments," Henry sympathized. "Then they could all practice at the same time instead of dividing them into two bands, and stringing out their individual practices like this. But," he took another gulp of milk, "we've got to get the band rolling while they're hot." His plastic glass hit the table empty. "Enthusiasm is the best learning aid."

Henry was right, I knew. And their remarkable dedication and progress did fill me with sort of a parental pride. It would just be nice to be able to get away from their progress for a few days.
Wilton cruised by with a friend. "John plays in the Assumption
School band," He thumbed toward the tall boy who attended the Catholic
high school in town. "He will show me a new song."

"Oh good!" I responded too enthusiastically.

Henry reproved me with a quick frown. "I'll get the baritone for
you in a minute, Wilton." He scraped the rest of his rice to the side,
The grating of metal chair legs on rough concrete announced that Henry's
supper break had terminated. He paused just before pulling open the
screen door. "Hey, I almost forgot . . . Have you baked the cake yet
for tomorrow's big birthday party?"

"I put it in the oven just before you came. I was planning to per-
sonalize the Bibles tonight." Strains of "The Old Gray Mare" wafted
over the palms and the setting sun—again. "Just make sure they're prac-
ticing 'Rejoice in the Lord' while I'm writing, OK?"

The next day—after the sacred hour of band rehearsal—we called
an assembly under the palms, featuring a stack of New Testaments and a
sheet cake with burning candles. While Henry detailed the significance
of birthdays, Bibles, and new years, the kids watched the candles, and I
watched the kids. There were 35 of them and only 20 candles. Simple
math and the anticipation gleaming in their eyes warned me that something
was up. They crowded around the cake, elbowing for a ring-side place,
"Let's bow our heads," Henry was saying, "and thank God for the new year
and for our birthdays."

Before the "n" melted on Henry's "Amen", a flash of hands denuded
the cake of candles, and 21 students danced about with the trophies of
their agility.
Twenty-one? "Main-ah!" Antibus grabbed his little niece by the shoulder. "What did you do?"

The six-year old's gleeful smile faded as the group's undivided attention fell upon her. Her eyes were at just the right level to study everyone's hands. Some hands were empty. Some held candles. Only hers held a gooey fistful of dark chocolate icing and cake.

Wild hoots of laughter rang out and pelted Main's little pig-tailed head. She plopped the mistaken trophy back into the hole she'd created in the cake, but the sticky evidence of her shame remained on her hand. Embarrassed, she wept, her tearful howls crescendoing.

"That's all right." I knelt before the bawling mite of humanity. Gleaning the intensity in the air, the anxious little girl had known only that something momentous was about to happen. And she would not be left out! My hand smudged the tears coursing from her big eyes and down her apple-round cheeks. "You'll get your cake," I promised as the sobs subsided.

Henry gave Main a wink as he trimmed her mangled piece of cake into a respectable shape, and grinned at me. We both valued the little girl's eagerness and drive. Those qualities would be what insured her success in the face of uncertainty and change.

"No, Main," I grinned, planting the reshaped prize in her open palm, "ain't nothin' ever gonna pass you by!"
Chapter VII

Tender Feet on the Jungle Trail

The kitchen sink sucked down the last gurgle of dish water while the rain beat in anger on the tin roof. This, I sighed above the rain and chugging generator, had been one dull Saturday night.

Early in the rainy season, we SM's had exhausted our downtown Rita sports—"zorie frisbee" (bouncing rubber sandals on the slick sidewalk), and "zorie sailboat" (setting someone's sandals adrift in the rivulets rushing down the street toward the ocean). Watching the weekend plane come in had potential as a diversion until Kevin reminded us of the wind that was sure to be blowing rain through the open-walled airport.

"Anyone for 'Rook?'" I'd suggested, thinking Mike's card-shark instincts would grab the bait. But no—he was in an "Alison Slump," and a wave of home-sickness carried him back to his apartment to write his girlfriend a long letter. Barbie and Sheryl had miles of papers to grade and nobody felt like going out to eat at the one good restaurant in town.

I stared out through the slatted glass of the kitchen window to the spears of water illumined by the outside lights. Life consisted of rain and papers and kids.

The screen door banging against the wall announced an entrance of Henryish aplomb. "Where have you been?" I spun around to face him. "I made supper hours ago 'cause you said you were hungry when you left...." I checked my interrogation when I saw Henry's unamused face and muddy-to-the-knee pants. His wet hair pasted to his head in newborn baby fashion, and his skin, looking a peculiar pink, added to his over-sized
"You left at 9:30 and now it's nearly 12," I tried cautiously. "What happened?"

Peeling off his soppy Rugger shirt, Henry hissed between his teeth: "Reles."

I braced myself. Despite an education that qualified us to grapple competently in the American Dream society at home, we ranked as tenderfeet in this tropical frontier. And Reles had seen enough SM's in his 18 years to know it.

"You know Kevin and I took Reles and the other kids home after the Bible study filmstrip," began Henry. Well did I know. I'd suggested it when the kids had invaded our apartment, looking for amusement afterward: "Well," Henry continued, "Reles told us to take a backroad--with gigantic, truck-eating mud holes."

Henry's color deepened. "First Kev pushed, then I pushed. The motor got wet and wouldn't turn over, so I went to enlist Reles' help to push. There was the cab, wide open, and no Reles." Henry twisted his Rugger stripes with a vengeance. They wept little wet puddles on the living room floor.

"He's probably laughing up his grubby T-shirt sleeve right now, with every one of his big white teeth," Henry muttered, and kicked off his wet zories into the corner behind the door. "I have half a mind to extract his bicuspids and have them analyzed; they've got to have metal components, the way he opens pop bottles with 'em. You know what they call that mud-hole we tried to drive through? The Road to Death. It will be The Road
to Reles' Death if I catch him smiling at me Monday morning!" Henry threw his shirt against the bathroom door and collapsed on the couch. The green and white T plopped to the floor.

I could picture Reles in his green and white striped T-shirt behind a pandanus tree, black eyes smirking beneath thick blunt-cut hair, and smiling his trademark smile. Actually, I hadn't noticed his smile for its frequency or its warmth. It had neither quality. My survival instinct, though, told me clearly what to do when Reles flashed his ivories; either think fast—or run for cover.

My instincts were reinforced by an early encounter when I'd entered Henry's classroom with the intention of getting some chalk. Slouched in his desk, snapping a wad of gum behind a math book, Reles discovered that the new National Geographic worked well as a pillow on his metal desk seat. "Reles," Henry had snapped, "what are you doing?"

"I make my math."

"I mean, what's that you're sitting on?"

"Oh, this good book--picture of nice girls." He proceeded to show Henry an island girl bathing in a waterfall.

"Reles is a spring fever boy," deduced Antibus, his outspoken classmate.

"Never mind spring fever now." Henry's eyes remained on the Geographic mutilator. "Reles, did you hear what I said this morning about taking care of school property?"

"Yes," came the subdued reply.

"Well look at this cover--it's torn off the magazine, it's crinkled, it's messy . . . What's it good for now?"
An inspired look came into the rascal's eye as his thick lips drew back from denture-perfect teeth. Taking the crumpled *Geographic* cover from Henry's hand, Reles chomped down the table of contents. "Taste good," he affirmed with a toothsome grin.

I picked up Henry's sorry green and white T-shirt and hung it over a folding kitchen chair. It wasn't as if Reles went out to make life miserable, exactly. Sometimes he could be downright nice. In fact one night, as a special favor, he'd shown us his favorite shelling spot. What a haul we made--perfect seven-inch spike shells that outshone even Elder Barber's specimens. And of course, Reles had shared our excitement, peering over my shoulder, when we unearthed the specimens four weeks later.

"Look at these, Reles--Reles?" I scanned the ground in a complete circle before I noticed him running barefoot up a bowed coconut palm. When he got to the upright part of the trunk, he grasped the smooth bark with his hands.

"I'm thirsty," he tossed back from near the top of the tree, and scrambled on up into the nest of fronds. Remembering his wild abandon when harvesting nuts in the past, I carefully transferred all our shells to the protective base of a distant tree, while Reles, totally absorbed in his task, wrestled with a firmly-attached coconut until it broke free. My heart sank as I tracked the path of the first coconut bomb--right to the base of my tree of refuge. Reles grinned an unconcerned apology.

As we surveyed our shattered prizes, one fact of island life became clear: though Reles giveth, his spontaneity taketh away. If only the fuse between his thought and his reflex were a little longer! It seemed his heart
had just two big chambers, one for mischief and one for mishap. And his smile never betrayed which one was the source of his actions.

Thinking about it again, I realized that his smile always did seem ambivalent. I remembered the smirk of superiority that had spread across his face while watching Henry husk his first coconut—backwards. Three quick movements later, Reles thrust a clean nut into Henry's hands with a sly-dog sneer and sauntered off in his green and white T-shirt to the volleyball game, where he spiked the ball into Jeklok's head. Reles' T and Henry's were almost the same, I noted, looking at the shirt on the chair. Except the green in Reles' was brighter.

"Then," an exclamation from the couch told me that Henry was rallying, "then I walk a mile and a half back to the mission in the pouring rain to get the other truck to pull Sammy out of the lake." He shielded his eyes from the traumatic vision with the back of his hand, and went on. "Of course Elder Barber has the keys, so at 11:30 p.m. I'm pounding on his door. No one answers, but I can't just leave the truck there all night, so I call: 'Anybody there?' Then comes this tired voice from the back bedroom: 'No.'"

I started laughing, but the edge came back into Henry's voice. "Then," his blue eyes warned against further mirth, "as if I hadn't already committed the unpardonable sin by getting the man out of bed to look for tow ropes—then Elder Barber gets into Sammy's driver seat, starts the truck on his first try, and drives it out of the mudpuddle."

"What did he say then?" I modulated my voice to a sober tone.

"Nothing. Not a word. Through the whole episode. Nothing." Henry paused thoughtfully. "I don't think he even said 'Good night.'"
Somewhat purged of his anger, Henry remembered his appetite. "Are those hashbrowns I smell? Where did you get potatoes? For weeks I've been dreaming of real potatoes. Bring 'em on! Now!"

"But Henry—"

"I don't care if they're cold, so long as they're potatoes."

"Henry, they're all gone."

His face convulsed, and I thought tears were coming to his eyes.

"Gone? Where have they gone?"

"You were gone so long, and they were getting cold, so I gave them . . ." Should I say it? "I gave them to Reles."

"What!"

"See," I jumped to my own defence, "he came by to play the guitar about an hour after you left. Sang me all kinds of Marshallese songs, so I thought I'd give him a sample of American food." Were Henry's eyes glazing over? "He really did seem to enjoy them," I attempted weakly to justify my generosity. "Maybe next month when the boat comes in again . . ."

"My potatoes. You gave Reles my potatoes!" Henry muttered, moving zombie-like toward his bedroom. "Twelve years in school, and I've been outsmarted by an eighteen-year-old surf jockey!"

"What's education got to do with it?" I tried to console my hungry, disillusioned brother. "Living in the Marshalls just requires another sort of education."

Henry rubbed his stomach thoughtfully. "You've got a point. Book learning has little to do with survival here." A malevolent sneer spread beneath his wet-baby hairdo. "Monday after class, I take Reles spear fishing!"
Busy recess sounds tumbled into the classroom through a quietly-opened door. I turned from the math assignment I was putting on the board to see Preacher whispering in the doorway with Rhanton and Junior. "What's up, guys? Tired of playing stickball?" The question was half a prayer. Already this season I'd donated three tennis balls and a kitchen knife (for cutting "bats") to the advancement of island league sports.

Preacher ambled forward with a characteristic smile spread over his smooth Oriental features. He paused before my desk, digging to dislodge a bulge in the pocket of his too-tight pants, and put the contents into my hand.

"Oh--what a beautiful map cowry!" I fingered the curved brown-and-white perfection of the glossy shell while Preacher beamed silently. Rhanton and Junior snickered to each other in Marshallese. I held the shell out toward Preacher and he shook his head. "You want me to keep it?" His black eyebrows shot up almost into his hairline, then he bolted for the door to rejoin the stickball game, and smacked into Mrs. Barber.

"Slow down, there," Mrs. Barber smiled, absorbing the seven-year-old's impact. "You'll need all your energy in the ball game."

"A teacher's apple," I grinned, holding up the prize. My shell collection was growing in spite of my own uncanny ability of finding nothing when I went shelling.

"Nice," Mrs. Barber replied with a distracted glance at the blackboard. "Why don't you have your schedule on the board yet?" she demanded.
Here we go again, I sighed. Somehow she'd gotten the idea that covering a quarter of my only teaching aid with a schedule that less than half of the class could read would greatly increase learning. "I need the space to write grade four exercises on," I tried the worn-out explanation once more. Why was I trying to explain my rationale again? The other SM's had avoided confrontation either by complying with the decree or by simply ignoring it—and thereby estranging themselves from Mrs. Barber. Neither seemed like a good solution for my situation, I knew that I needed the board space, but I also knew that Mrs. Barber had provided help and information before, and I would need more of it.

"I'm not going to tell you again," she delivered the final word from her customarily-distant stance. "The General Conference educational inspector will be here in three days, and I want a schedule on that blackboard. Do you understand?"

That afternoon, after the last breadfruit leaf had been picked up in the yard by after-school-chore "volunteers", I flopped down on our slip-covered couch. Henry sat by the kitchen table, carving up one of the two papayas Mrs. Barber had delivered that morning from their tree. "I can appreciate that woman's thoughtfulness in some areas," I nodded at the evidence on the table, "but this insisting that I cover my board with a schedule sure doesn't consider our textbook and worksheet shortage."

Henry scraped the round black papaya seeds onto the table absently. "Her boss is coming, and this is her first year of being a principal." He squeezed a slice of fresh lime over the mellow orange fruit. "It's the old 'control-equals-security' syndrome. Just part of being a new administrator."
"Yeah," I punched the pillow beside me, "but does that mean I have to conform to some foreign import of an idea that works in the States where they have blackboards and books to spare?" I shoved the pillow back in its place. How could I appease Mrs. Barber and still maintain my own rights and effectiveness in the classroom? "This visible schedule notion is one Western convention that just doesn't apply over here," I declared. Sticky juice and seeds spread further across the table as my lanky brother skinned the last of the pulp from the papaya slice with his teeth. "Henry," I chided, "you could use a dish, you know."

He wiped his hands on a fresh white tea towel, "Foolish American convention. Doesn't apply over here."

"Yokwe," a soprano voice sang out in recently-initiated Marshallese, "Anybody home?" A blond wearing a sundress and very white skin stood expectantly at the screen door.

"Come on in, Carol Ann." The homemade door wobbled on its hinges when the new "part-time" SM pushed it open. Too bad she only had eight weeks to spend here during her winter quarter. Planning parties and programs and photography excursions with her was fun. We saw the other SM's on Sabbath, but now I realized how much I missed daily contact with society. "I see you're armed to stalk the wilds of Majuro," I pointed toward her camera.

"When those wild coconut palms start rushing us, I'll be ready for 'em." She dropped the camera off her shoulder and struck a ready-for-action pose.

I pulled my black camera bag from the closet. "Then let the safari
"Can't chance it without a loaded camera," he stretched a pre-hibernation stretch. "Besides, I need to recover my strength for tomorrow's attack. Judging from the kids' restlessness today, we must be headed toward the rainy season again."

"OK," I patted my camera and opened the door, "but the trophies will be all mine."

"I guess there's only one place to start, right?" Carol Ann observed as we headed down the mission driveway.

"Right," I replied. "Let's hit The Road."

Walking The Road with a newcomer reminded me of those first few weeks when I'd canvassed The Road every day for clues about the people and their culture. Sometimes I'd walk in the middle of the day with steamy heat rising from the hot asphalt and wet jungle, when everyone napped or worked quietly in the shade. I ached to strip off my whiteness and fall into conversation with old women weaving palm-plait baskets and the young mothers squatting at red plastic tubs, their knees spread at shoulder level and backs rod-straight, doing their daily laundry. But my Marshallese deficiency, I discovered, was a real barrier to such familiarity. A "Yokwe" and smile had to suffice.

At night I would walk past the plywood and tin shelters where families sat illumined by a single kerosene lantern, "storying" and partaking of their 9 p.m. fish and rice. Occasionally I would see Jawan, Darrell's father, who spoke fluent English, in his roadside store. We'd "story" for awhile, but by 10:30 or 11:00 only the stars lit Laura Village, and only the lagoon waters "storied" with the beach.
Today, though, Carol Ann and I walked in the late afternoon cool, past a group of teenagers who'd strung up a volleyball net. "They play with a vengeance," Carol Ann winced at the quick "thwack" of the ball being spiked into the ground.

"National sport," I replied, freezing an action shot with a fast shutter speed. Remembering some of the games at our school, I added a caution: "If you really value your life, don't play against Reles. He's murderous on the volleyball court!"

Two teenage boys strolled by, arms about each other's shoulders and laughing. "Now that's something you don't see much of at home." Carol Ann aimed her camera for another shot.

"Yeah, they're a very affectionate community." I recognized the two boys as Henry's students. "Walter and Aimon might be even closer than most because they happen to be brothers--though they live with different parents."

"What?"

"Walter lives with his natural parents, and Aimon was adopted by his uncle."

"You mean Aimon's parents gave him up?" Carol Ann's incredulity reminded me of my first reaction. "Why?"

"Oh, it's just the Marshallese way." I couldn't resist repeating the same frustrating answer I'd received for months. "Actually," I softened at the confusion on her face, "it was good PR once upon a time--maybe even still is. Family connections and children are very important here. Adopting a child insures good will between the concerned parties."
Also," I nodded at a teenage boy playing with a 10-month old baby, "children are the delight of every Marshallese heart, so people share their 'bundle of joy'," The calmness of my explanation and my altered viewpoint surprised even me. But then, about a quarter of my students were "adopted", and didn't seem to be suffering. "In fact," I heard myself saying, "it might be an advantage at times. Adopted kids generally know their natural parents, and have rights in two houses. It's more like sharing a child than giving him up."

"Still--letting someone else raise your child..." Carol Ann shook her head. "The idea would not go over well in the States."

"No, but this is a different kind of culture and a different kind of adoption." We stopped to watch a family husking coconuts for copra. A good portion of the $30 a sack they earned would go to put gas in the new Toyota pickup beside the plywood house. I often found myself speculating on such cultural curiosities. "I guess the culture is changing too, trying to weave busy, modern American ways into their laid-back island traditions. You know the island cliché," I shrugged. "Everything's 'For a better future life.' They know there's a world outside Majuro, and change is inevitable."

Carol Ann looked back at the volleyball game under the palms, and the white beach beyond. "It's too bad—-in a lot of ways."

Seeing breadfruit baking on coals beside a house, I pictured Barry in his fashionable American ski jacket, baking breadfruit for lunch at school—-in 78 degree weather. Antibus had tried the jacket on, but Barry wouldn't give up his status symbol for long, no matter how much
he sweltered. "It must be very confusing too," I thought aloud, "trying
to mesh two cultures. What to take, what to leave?"

"Yap, yap, yap." One of the tediously-yappy island mongrels finally
noticed us and came bounding from where the family was husking nuts. No
wonder the Marshallese regarded their pigs with more affection than these
muts. Interbreeding had resulted in genepool that had potential only for
motley cowardice in a skinny, mid-sized package of mustard, rust, or gray
manginess. A middle-aged island man looked up from his husking stake.
"Hello," he smiled.

Carol Ann and I blinked in surprise at the formality of his greeting,
"Let's investigate," we silently agreed, and walked into the shady yard.
Couldn't let this opportunity for conversation go by! "That looks like
hard work," Carol Ann offered.

"Yes, it is," the man tossed aside a husked nut and turned to con-
verse with us. "It's hard work, but the price is good now. The new free
association agreement with the U.S. has been good. Amata Kabua had a
good idea. He will be a good president."

"He will be the first president!" I was surprised to find a villager
who discussed island politics in English! "May first will be a big day.
The Marshall Islands will become a country with their own flag."

"And a better future life, we hope." He wiped his brow with the
back of his hand. "You are teachers at the SDA school?"

"Yes," I smiled, but without surprise. So few Americans lived on
the island that the girls at the counter in Reimer's store had called me
by name the first week of school.
"I am a teacher too, in the Marshall Islands High School," The man reached back his right hand, and a little boy snuggled up close to study us and smile from the security of his father's protective arm, "I would like to send my children to your school next year. The SDA schools have a very good reputation, and," he explained, "my children will need to learn English."

Just then Dave Olsen, the Assembly of God missionary, drove by. His two children, Steve and Andrea, jabbered in Marshallese to the villagers from the back of the pickup. A warm smile of recognition crossed the high school teacher's face. "Those two speak Marshallese just like I do," he said with obvious affection and regard.

"What about Dave and his wife?" I was curious about the link between language and acceptance. I'd watched so many smiles fade when I answered "jab"(no) to the question, "Kwas in Marshall?" (Do you speak Marshallese?).

His smile faded some too. "They are very nice people," he began with typical Marshallese caution, "but they do not speak Marshallese very well." His face brightened again as he added the positive endnote. "Steve and Andrea though—they speak very well."

Carol Ann poised her camera again. "Can I get some pictures of you and your family making copra?" she asked. While our gracious host demonstrated each stage of the process from husking to smoking, my eyes wandered down the Road to Netlan's house. I'd dropped in there one evening, with Currie acting as my interpreter. Netlan's mother and father were warm, rather traditional folk, older than most of the parents I'd visited.
Our "chat" had been a success even though we exchanged not a word except through Currie. My departure was slowed by a shower of gifts. "That is the Marshallese way," Currie explained, as they piled papayas and fresh eggs into my arms.

While Carol Ann sampled the moist sweetness of sprouted "sponge" coconut with exclamations of delight, I mulled over my visits to other parents. With the younger ones--the more "Americanized" ones--there seemed to be a more self-conscious apology about not speaking English and about having only a folding chair to offer me. It contrasted sharply with the spontaneous fun that Carol Ann, Kevin, and I had met with on Sabbath when we'd discovered the only thatch hut on the island. The old couple inside shared their food with us, posed for our cameras, and laughed at the contortions we went through to find the perfect photographic angle. To them we presented no cause to feel embarrassed or inferior because, as our students later informed us, they refused to examine or adopt anything outside their tradition. Their minds were finally and comfortably closed to new ideas. It was mostly the young, facing the reality of a bigger world, who grappled with two cultures. They had to sort out something workable for their situation.

I glanced down The Road again to see Netlan puzzling over the open hood of a truck. Just behind the boy, his father tended Laura's most famed taro patch with the unhurried calm that comes with the acceptance of old routine. Netlan banged something on the motor and tried to start the truck, without success. Uncertainty is a part of being open to the new--at least a temporary part of finding a solution.
"Lynn, just taste this sponge coconut," Carol Ann's voice brought my attention back to the copra demonstration. "It's so sweet, no wonder that sow looks so well-fed." She pointed to a rotund pig munching on the discarded portion of the copra nuts, flanked by eight piglets.

"Why, they're so cute!" I heard myself exclaim. Now I knew my trained North American response system was breaking down. A pig, cute? But somehow foraging there in the shady green of a late afternoon sun, they really didn't look gross and dirty like North American pigs, "I've got to get a picture of this."

Carol Ann took one distant snap of the mother and children, but there was one black and white piglet I just had to get in a closeup. If I got down on all fours, I could catch that contented little face at just the right angle with my zoom lens. "There now, baby, say 'Cheese,'" I crooned.

"Honk, honk!" The miniature blasting of a Toyota horn sent my porky model scurrying after its mother just as I was about to snap the picture.

"Lynna, Lynna!" Netlan's mirth exploded above the noisy purring of his pickup. "You are praying to a pig?" He drove on, with Franklin and half a dozen other students in the back of his truck all laughing, "Lynna, Lynna!"

Carol Ann snickered at a discrete distance, then doubled over when I began to laugh. I laughed so hard that I got an idea.

Early the next morning—even before Junior came calling for the ball—I was in my classroom working over a big piece of cardboard. Maybe laughing at yourself lets you step away to get a new perspective, I thought while drawing a grid on the cardboard with a felt pen, Maybe laughter is
the best medicine. At any rate, it had given my brain the relief it needed to sort out a means of accommodating both Mrs. Barber and myself.

"Missy Lynn," the outspoken Joycelynn stood between me and my most quiet grade one, "Lynn Joseph wants to say her memory verse now."

"Now?" I queried, turning from the huge cardboard schedule I'd just tacked up on the door—beside the blackboard. "It's not time for school yet." I studied little Lynn's serene yet eager face. If she had indeed learned Hebrews 13:2, this was a major breakthrough. Verbal English just did not seem to be one of Lynn's many creative talents. It would be her first time ever to recite the week's Bible verse.

"OK, Lynn. Remember what a stranger is?" I wanted to refresh her mind to insure success. She nodded her head emphatically and pointed to the supply closet where I tested the grade ones and twos individually each Friday. "All right then, let's have your test."

She marched proud and erect into the closet and waited for me with her hands clasped behind her back and resolution in her eyes. I shut the door behind me and looked down on the willowy, earnest little girl. She enunciated the words slowly but confidently: "Remember to welcome teachers into your homes. Hebrews thirteen, two."

I smiled and she smiled, and my smile grew bigger. Stranger equals white person equals teacher. Little Lynn had made a breakthrough not only with English, but also in analyzing her experience and making a practical application of her memory verse. The Bible in living Marshallese! I smiled broadly to myself. Who knows? Maybe she'll even invite me to her house sometime.
"Five?" she questioned me about her score before she would leave the closet.

I pushed the mahogany door open for her. "Five out of five Lynn," I assured her. "That's a big A plus!"
Chapter IX

Disco Dancing for Jesus

Sammy purred along into the heart of Rita's clustered family dwellings toward the Branch Sabbath School breadfruit tree. "Henry, Henry!" the small children called out, smiling as they ran with our slow-moving truck. Long Man stretched his arm out the window, and a ten-year old boy grabbed his hand in greeting as we rolled by. Only a few weeks ago when we'd first started coming here, the cry had been, SDA, SDA!" Somehow, the Long Man had a special appeal to these kids, and the "SDA's" had begun to take on individual identities under the spreading shade of the breadfruit.

Lisa jumped out of Sammy's homemade shell as soon as we stopped and held out my guitar as she ran past me to the tree's beckoning cool. I checked the instrument for tuning. The guitar ranked Number One on the island list of popular entertainment, and whenever our kids got a hold of my precious classical edition, they'd play it right out of pitch. Yep, the D string sounded crass.

"Reles," I turned to one of the students who'd stayed after church to help us with singing bands and Branch Sabbath School, "let me hear your D cord." It seemed to me that figuring out the unique Marshallese chord and rhythm patterns had been Reles' most constructive use of energy. The T-shirted teenager broke away from the group of Laura kids we'd brought along. I tuned my guitar to his, and started singing.

Every Sabbath afternoon the same large breadfruit tree hosted between 40 and 80 children when we unfurled the Bible story picture rolls and sang "If I was a Butterfly." Branch Sabbath School was the most
stereo-typically "missionary" thing we did, yet somehow I always felt detached from it. Branch Sabbath School in this day and age? While my form strummed and sang to the wide-eyed children, I stood as an objective observer on the side, watching Mike hypnotize his audience with Marshallized versions of "Jonah and the Whale," or "The Prodigal Son." Occasionally Tommy or Currie would translate the English words into Marshallese, but Mike's stories seldom needed interpretation.

Surveying the crowd from my observer position, I watched a young man in his late teens turn and head for a nearby house. Had something offended him? Certainly Mike had never been accused of telling a boring story. My eyes remained fixed on the house--looking for clues. The shaggy-headed town-dweller emerged quickly with a Kodak pocket camera and snapped a picture. Forever Mike and his picture roll would stand beside me and Reles with our guitars, frozen for posterity on Kodak paper. Twenty-five years from now the teenager's grandchildren would scrutinize our loose cotton clothing and strange hair styles, and giggle at his tales of a time when Americans came with picture rolls under their arms to tell Bible stories.

The camera could work both ways, I decided, thinking about the rolls of "primitive" pictures I'd sent home. Kevin caught my eye and pointed to a big stereo cassette recorder beside one of the boys, taking down Mike's every word. Without a doubt Majuro and missionarying were in a state of transition.

What is the new missionary's role? I found myself asking the question before an over-priced cassette recorder in Reimer's "department" store a
few days later. This is a changing world. What are the most effective ways of reaching people? And just what are we trying to offer them?

"Going native?" Kevin's teasing voice came from behind me.

Instinctively I touched the plumeria lei my industrious grade four, Myra, had crafted for me that morning. Being adopted by her grandmother had given her a wealth of skill in the traditional crafts. "No, just honoring the national arts," I smiled, "although I must admit 'going native' has some real appeal since we spent the weekend camping with the Pathfinders." The fussless efficiency of the girls who cooked and cleaned by their pre-American method made Western housekeeping look cumbersome indeed. "I'll just have to get Jane to teach me how to build a coconut shell fire and coal-bake breadfruit."

"The campout was a high-point on this year's Pathfinder agenda all right," Kevin pushed the glass door open, and we stepped into the sulky mid-day heat outside the air-conditioned store. "We need something kind of special at the next meeting to follow it up."

We sat down on the bench beside the store's ice cream vending window. "Ice cream. Now that would go over real well! But what are you thinking of, Kevin?" I shuffled a zori on the wooden sidewalk. "You're not planning to make candles again, are you? There's still a parafin trail on our cement floor from the last time the Pathfinders melted wax in my kitchen."

Kevin shifted a little uneasily at the reminder. "No, no candles. Dave Olsen got a movie for his church, and he said we could use it." He pushed his glasses back up his nose. The copper frames corroding in the salty island humidity left green marks where they had been. "It's called 'Peace Child.' About some missionaries in New Guinea."
I looked back at Kevin from the corner of my eye. This movie didn't sound like a Pathfinder thriller to me. He shrugged his shoulders. "A movie's a movie. Dave says it's good!"

"Oh, it is." A dark-haired, bearded American on the bench beside me turned toward us with a smile. "Pardon me, but I couldn't help overhearing your conversation. I'm Father Tom from the Catholic mission." He extended a soft, olive-toned hand. "You're from the Seventh-day Adventist mission, aren't you?"

"Yes--er, I mean, we teach at the Seventh-day Adventist schools," Kevin stammered.

The priest's toes wiggled in his not-yet-broken-in zories. He must be new, I decided. His clothes still had a "Made in Hawaii" look. "How long have you been in Majuro?" I asked.

"Oh, just a couple weeks." His brown eyes seemed solicitous. "I'm from New York. Just learning the language and getting to know the neighborhood," he smiled.

"I'd say you're getting to know it real fast!" Only two weeks and he already knew who the other missionaries were. I motioned toward the dogs and children playing on the main street. "It's not New York, is it?"

"Oh, that doesn't bother me." He shifted to face Kevin and me more squarely. "What I miss is a good after-dinner discussion." His eyes darted from us to the street and back. "Perhaps we could go out for supper sometime, you and your other friends. Maybe Wednesday?"

Kevin and I questioned each other silently. Dinner with the new priest? Why not? "That's our town afternoon," I said. "Henry and I will
be coming in to duplicate material anyway, so we might as well make it a real occasion."

"Wednesday's fine with me too," Kevin replied. "We'll see what Bilco's Restaurant got in on the last boat." Whatever else they'd gotten, we both knew the un-appetizer would be chicken tail soup.

"Fine!" Father Tom rose from the bench with a push. "See you Wednesday at 5," and he was off down the sidewalk, speaking in what seemed to be awkward Marshallese to a man with a fishing rod.

There was no need to worry about running out of dinner conversation Wednesday night. The gregarious, balding priest kept an eye on civic affairs, and some very historic events were in process on the island. Witnessing the signing of the new country's constitution had sparked Henry's interest in international law, and the two speculated on what it and Amata Kabua's May inauguration would mean for the Marshalls.

"Getting a health care system going will be a major concern." Henry washed down his chicken-fried rice with the brackish town water. "That old navy quonset they use as a hospital is a big project in itself."

"But your mission is working on that angle, isn't it?" Father Tom's remark stopped Henry's next forkful of food in mid-air. "It's a small island," the priest shrugged by way of explanation.

"It's all very vague," Kevin jumped in to ease the uncomfortable surprise. "All we've heard is that Col. Evans from the navy and Elder Barber talked to Amata about it once."

"Speaking of hearsay," Mike practiced the art of conversation switch, "I understand you're the disco champ of Majuro."
"Well," the priest momentarily transferred his weight from his chair to his arms on the table, "that's not quite right. I came second."

We all laughed. Now here was a Jesuit with a difference! Father Tom bent a toothpick into a "z" shape. "One night a week down at the 'disco' they have Adult Night." His fingers made two little quote signs in reference to the odd brick building that housed Majuro's latest recreational craze. "It's a time when folks our age can socialize and let down the cultural barriers on the dance floor. It's a good place to start becoming one of them."

Our age? One of them? The table talk rambled on, but Tom's comment touched off a series of questions in my mind. The priest seemed very aware of the politics and public relations on the island. Was he discoing as a representative of his organization, to make it more acceptable? Was he discoing to increase his personal popularity? I tried to picture Tom in his Hawaiian shirt moving with a dark-eyed island girl on the dance floor. Was he disco dancing for himself, for his organization, or for Jesus?

I watched his soft animated face across the table without hearing his words. Engaging in his enthusiasm, his interest in people and life, the undeniable reality of the priest's 30 odd years of wide life experience still put him outside "our age" bracket. His thinning hair attested to the fact. I wondered if his New York-accented Marshallese would strike the islanders as incongruous as well. Of course, people go native in different degrees, but just how much of your own culture could you submerge without arousing suspicion?
The Road twisted long and familiar on the way back to Laura.
"Henry," I questioned out of the gathering darkness, "what do you know about Col. Evans and the hospital?"

Henry gathered a thoughtful breath. "Col. Evans is in the U.S. Navy, and as you know, they run the hospital and everything else official on Majuro." I nodded silently in the dark. Henry's explanations were beginning to rival Elder Barber's for thoroughness and information. "This colonel also happens to be the only man who spoke up for the Marshallese in some political crisis years ago, so they have a great deal of respect for him. He also happens to be a Seventh-day Adventist."

A quick mental reconstruction of Col. Evans brought back a short, quick man who'd carried a leather Bible smartly under one arm as he surveyed the Majuro school/church as if he was on one of his inspection tours. This fellow would be unswervingly himself in any situation, I'd thought--a man used to giving commands. "So he ordered Amata to work with the Adventists on the hospital?" I speculated.

"No. He suggested the possibility to him and to Elder Barber. The Adventists have a lot of know-how in foreign medical care, and a developing nation like this needs that kind of know-how," Henry laid out the logical pattern. "Dr. Henry is one of Majuro's most respected government legislators, and rumor has it he will be the new Minister of Health. He, too, knows the Adventists have the right kind of experience for the job." We swerved to miss a fallen palm branch. "Elder Barber is a realist and a diplomat--he and Dr. Henry could work out the mechanics of a feasible proposal. But it's Col. Evans"—even the name rang non-
conformist—"and the respect the Marshallese government has for him that makes the suggestion possible."

Sammy's motor whined, and Henry shifted gears. "A man just doing his job—and being a missionary while he's at it."

"A missionary?" Barbie and Sheryl replayed my reaction to Kevin's film suggestion the next night at Pathfinders in Laura.

"Well, do you have a special feature you'd like to give yourselves?" Kevin was getting a little defensive about the movie. Coming up with something "just a little bit different" every week would tell on any leader after awhile. Barbie and Sheryl sat down with bored indifference. Kevin called out a somewhat frazzled, "Roll it!" and Henry, for the first time, clicked on the brand-new projector that had just arrived from the Oxnard Junior Sabbath School Division.

After a few minutes the gum snapping and wisecrack parallels between the naked New Guineans and various Pathfinders subsided, and I found myself engrossed in the story of two missionaries. From Alberta, Canada, no less! Their goal was to translate love into actions a cannibal tribe could understand. I looked for details in the film to relate to my own experience, but found few. Finding the key for transforming savage hearts into loving hearts had been the essence of their mission, but one glance at Jeklok leaning on Jane's shoulder as they whispered about the movie gave evidence that Majuro wasn't the same kind of mission. The Marshallese already understood a lot about loving and caring for each other. What, then, I asked myself, did missionaries have to offer this culture right now?
The lights flicked on during the movie credits, offending my unaccustomed eyes and breaking my reflective mood. The kids, too, seemed to be stirred pre-maturely. "Good movie," I heard Jane say during the credits, but Kevin didn't want to give the kids a chance to initiate any unplanned group activities.

"Now let's divide up for crafts," Kevin announced from his position at the light switch. "Girls go to the grade 1-4 room for macrame, and guys," Kevin swallowed and looked out the window, "will make sand candles tonight."

I crossed my arms, legs, and eyes at Kevin in defiance. "This will be the last time," he stood before me apologetically while the Pathfinders filed past. "It was so popular the last time, I just wanted to make sure we had something special tonight."

The projector cord whipped my still-crossed legs. Antibus and Franklin had jerked it out accidentally while crossing the room, engrossed in conversation. "Warrah!" Antibus chastised himself for being so clumsy. "Are you all right?" He patted the new machine better with comical apology calculated to disarm any anger on the part of either Kevin or me. We laughed a good-will laugh, and the two island boys resumed their discussion on their way out the door.

Antibus put one arm over Franklin's shoulder. "Those people in New Guinea are really wild people!"

"Yeah," Franklin nodded his assent. "Maybe we could take an offering in the church next week." He threw his arm over Antibus's shoulder as they stepped out into the glow of the mission's yard light. "They really need missionaries over there."
Chapter X

Song of the Island

One cup shortening, two cups brown sugar, four cups oatmeal, three cups flour . . . "Please pass me the flour, will you, Jane?" I called above a gaggle of laughter and a transistor radio that poured out Marshallese love songs.

"What? Oh, the flour." The slim teenager pushed a container across the table to me. "I will buy five cookies and one cake at the picnic tomorrow, Miss Lynn," announced Jane.

I smiled. "Are you sure you'll have enough dollars? Maybe the cakes will cost fifteen."

"If I don't have enough," Jane looked slyly at the girl dicing potatoes beside her, "I'll make Mariné speak in Marshallese and get her dollars!"

Mariné jabbed her. "No, you won't! Remember when Mr. Henry took us on a walk and we met Santo and Sharon? I didn't even speak in Marshallese then, so you can't fool me."

"Oh yeah?"

"Ah, jab je roro." Mariné threw back the Marshallese equivalent of "Shut up."

Jane shrieked with laughter. "See--you spoke in Marshallese! A dollar please."

"Warrah!" frowned Marine, "I'll give it to you when we have the bake sale at the picnic." I had to smile at the success of Henry's scheme for encouraging English in the classroom. Word from on high forbade any Marshallese in class, but neither threats nor punishment did any good, so Henry had come up with the "Majuro SDA Dollar."
We'd gotten the local printer to roll 700 "green backs" in black and white, with the face of Elder Barber smiling where George Washington usually frowned, and my own modest sketch of the school on the back. This novel currency generated some financial disagreements, but now the students policed themselves and English predominated in class. At the school picnic and bake sale tomorrow, they'd see some immediate benefits of keeping an English tongue in their mouths.

"Oh, Miss Lynn! Make the radio louder. They're playing 'Silver Bird.'" I obliged. At least this one was in English. "Silver Bird, keep on flying . . ." All six girls harmonized while they mixed ingredients for a real potato salad. The guys outside echoed the tune while they prepared chicken with the special barbeque sauce.

"Silver Bird" was a song I could identify with too. For weeks I'd been drooling over the Barbers' Pictorial of Micronesia, dreaming of Easter break when we'd get on a silver bird and jet off to Ponape, Truk, Saipan, and Guam. January and February had seen some low times, when Majuro no longer glittered with novelty, the drought had cut our daily showers, and the sameness of every-day routine had settled in. Oh, Carol Ann's eight-week stay had been a great boost, but all the same, the island was getting pretty small.

The smallness of Majuro came to me again the next week when Henry, Sheryl and I passed the forlorn and forsaken truck, Delilah, on the way to catch our west-bound plane on Good Friday. There in a mechanic's yard, getting rustier by the day, she'd already served a three-month penance for her last and final display of rebellion. She'd staged it just before Christmas, I well remembered.
"Now here are the keys to Delilah," Elder Barber had dropped the key ring into Henry's hand. "Since we'll be gone to Guam for conferences before you leave for Hawaii, we're making Delilah your ward. Treat her with respect now. She's got quite a temper."

Mrs. Barber came bustling in with cans and packages of spaghetti. "The Cramer brothers will be coming the day before you leave, so you can take Delilah into the airport and bring the visitors back to the mission."

She set a box in the middle of our kitchen table. How that lady managed to bed and board every Adventist who came through Majuro quite amazed me. I often wondered if they realized just how busy she was. "Now here's some vegemeat," she began pulling cans out of the box, "and spaghetti sauce so you can make supper for the, and ...."

Yes, yes, yes, I nodded agreeably to all her directions. I could play hostess for a day—especially if it meant getting Delilah for a week.

"Let's go into Rita before the plane comes," Henry suggested on the morning of the Cramers' arrival. "I'd like to get a fishing spear before they sell out."

"Good idea," I agreed. "We're out of powdered milk too, and we should lace the apartment with rat pellets before we leave." I shuddered. Yesterday while I'd been shaking what I thought was sand out of an extra-heavy snorkeling fin, a lively brown rat had dropped out at my feet and scurried off.

"I think your sister wants you," Elder Barber had commented to Henry at my shrieking from the other side of the compound. For sure we'd have to get some rat pellets. Tourists wouldn't be able to handle that kind of crisis.
When we got to town it only took a few minutes to purchase our goods. Reimer's, the nearest thing to a department store on Majuro, had somehow "organized" powdered milk, fishing spears, and rat poison all into the same department. "Now let's get to that airport before the plane comes in," said Henry, jumping into Delilah's driver's seat. He backed her into the street and turned the steering wheel—which came off in his hands.

Henry slammed on the brakes while I clutched the dashboard and put one foot through the hole in the floor. "I know Delilah's prone to jokes like this," I said, "but a major breakdown is in poor taste right now."

"Especially when she's our baby." Henry pumped the brakes. "Elder Barber is going to love this."

I could see his brain working already. "So what do we do now?"

"We'll park 'er on the side, catch a taxi to Mike and Kevin's, and get the other truck." I got out and was about to wave down a taxi. "Not here!" Henry pushed my arm down, and started walking away from Delilah. "Down there," he pointed into the vague distance. "I don't want the whole town to know."

One of Dr. Henry's taxis went by. Full. The new red Datsuns topped by yellow RMD signs were by far the newest and most attractive of the taxi fleets. A "Yokwe" taxi bypassed us as well, with three adults and one little crew-cut boy peering out of its hot pink, hand-painted body. Finally a "Smiling" taxi, already toting three passengers, pulled over. Henry tossed the driver the 25-cent flat fare, and we folded ourselves into the back seat beside a portly Marshallese man. "Long Island," Henry directed.
In silence we rode the two and a half miles to the SM apartments, making an intermediate stop at a plywood-and-tin house to deposit a three-year old girl and her mother. "Let's try the airport," Henry averted his gaze moodily toward the deserted apartments. "The truck's not here anyway."

"Just as I thought," Henry pointed out the blue Toyota in the airport parking lot. "They're probably eating at the restaurant. The fresh tuna's in again."

Mike came striding out with a contented smile on his face. "So Delilah broke down on you, huh?"

Henry's eyes popped. "How in the world did you find that out?"

"Oh, the waitress in the restaurant told me."

"The waitress! But it happened less than 15 minutes ago and at least eight miles away!" Henry's eyebrows knit in question. "We didn't say a word to anybody. How did she find out?"

"She heard it on the radio." Mike grinned broadly. "It's a small island, Long Man."

But that coup d'état of Delilah had happened months ago. Or, I asked myself as I mounted the stairs onto the Air Mic jet, had it been years? Funny how refereeing the enthusiastic purchasers at the school picnic bake sale had aged my memory! But, I chuckled, remembering the tightness of my face as the ocean water dried in salty white patches on my skin, getting thrown into the lagoon by roughhousing students every now and then would probably keep me young.

I pointed out the rebellious blue dot in the mechanic's yard to Sheryl and Henry as the west-bound airplane made one low pass over Majuro.
"Bye bye, Delilah," I waved. "See you much later!" I sank into my seat. "Bye bye, small island, and hello Guam!"

Flying over the indigo-blue vastness between Majuro and Ponape, I marveled at the nautical sensitivity that the Marshallese had cultivated over the centuries. Guided only by their knowledge of the currents and wave patterns, these seamen had traveled the distance from their flat atolls to the fruit-laden high island of Ponape. They'd crafted the outrigger canoes which many archeologists still consider Micronesia's greatest technological achievement. But nowadays the "silver bird," not the outrigger, is the marvel of Micronesians, who dream of a "better future life"—somewhere.

The wild charm and variety of the several island-districts in Micronesia are matched only by the hospitality of their missionaries, I decided after our island hopping had taken us to Ponape, Truk, Guam, and Saipan. Now we were back in Guam, sipping real orange juice and lounging royally in the living room of a Guam clinic doctor. Henry stretched full length on the sofa, attended by Dr. Gains' two tall, slim, teenage daughters, Gerrilynn stood fanning his face with a Bali fan while Dainna waltzed between living room and refrigerator with juice, cookies and ice cream.

"And then," Henry took up his account of our adventures in Saipan, "the dentist and his wife lent us the mission car to take the island tour," Henry paused when the older Gains boy knelt at this feet to begin a pedicure. "That won't be necessary, Darren... Where was I? Oh yes, The doctor's wife told us to just take the only highway, that all the points of interest are marked, and the first sight is the Bonsai Cliffs,"
"Is that where all the families jumped into the ocean for the Emperor?"

Dainna bustled in with a plate of Oreo cookies.

"Right!" The Long Man swung his feet to the floor and sloshed the ice cube around in his juice. "We spent three quarters of an hour at the first turn off by the ocean and used half a roll of film. There were a lot of rusty cars and stuff lying around, but we're used to that on Majuro."

"Yes," Dr. Gains' blue eyes laughed. "When we passed through Majuro, I wondered if the rusty cars out-numbered the people there."

"Well, they certainly did on that site in Saipan," Henry replied, "When we got back out on the highway, Lynn turned around to read the sign posted on the other side of the road. In big letters it read, 'Island Dump.'" Henry slapped his thigh and rocked on the edge of the sofa with laughter, almost spilling his juice. "The doctor's wife forgot to tell us that the signs are only posted going one way along the road."

Gerrilynn stopped her fanning. "You mean you toured Saipan in reverse?"

Henry recovered his composure and nodded. "We went around once the wrong way, and once the tour-sign way. We didn't miss a thing!"

Laughter bounced off every wall. "But half a roll of film!" As a dabbler in photography, Dr. Gains could appreciate my waste of Fujichrome. "Ten pictures of a dump!"

"Oh, I got some great shots," I set down my juice for safety's sake. "In fact, I'm thinking about making a slide presentation: 'Great Dumps of Micronesia.'" I laughed in spite of myself. "I've got a good one of the Majuro dump. In the middle of cans and bottles and car bodies, there's a sign that reads, 'Island Dump--Keep Area Clean.'"
"And no one's paying any attention," Sheryl broke out laughing.

"Speaking of slides and island tours," Mrs. Gains subsided into a chuckle, "you should have no problem with vespers on Sabbath."

We three SM's looked at each other. "What do you mean?" Henry asked, "While you were in Saipan, we called Mike on the ham radio," explained Dr. Gains, "and told him to bring slides of Majuro. His mother is visiting him there for a few days, and they're coming out to Guam."

"So," Mrs. Gains picked up the explanation, "we volunteered you as the vesper program this week."

"Oh, we can handle that," grinned Henry.

"No problem" I agreed. "Henry and Mike love being tour guides, and Sheryl can sing Kevin's part in the Majuro SM quartet. Right, Sheryl?"

"Oh sure," Sheryl replied, gazing at the floor. Dull disinterest sat in her eyes where moments before humor and involvement had sparkled. She set her juice glass on the coffee table. "I'm going to bed," she announced, and left.

That Sabbath evening Sheryl offered opening prayer and retreated to a back corner seat in the school auditorium. There she remained through the talent program that followed. Why, I wondered, sitting in the front row with Mike and the four other talent judges, would anyone choose to disengage themselves from the action as Sheryl had? Was it the last-minute notice that shook her? But the unexpected was becoming a welcome part of our life-style. Only 10 minutes before, Mike and I hadn't known we'd be participating as judges in the fun of skits and original music. And it wasn't just the new surroundings. These sorts of withdrawals happened on Majuro too.
"Your vesper program was good," Mike's mother was perhaps extra-appreciative. "But what's wrong with Sheryl?" she asked as we drove home from the talent show. "She doesn't seem at all happy."

"I don't really know," I sighed. "It's awfully hard to get her to participate sometimes." I thought of the Saturday nights when she'd stayed alone or with Barbie while the rest of us had gone out to eat or play games or just shoot the breeze.

"We coax kids to participate in school all week; when it comes time to relax, after awhile you just don't have the energy to beg people to join in."

Mrs. Loeffler thought for a moment. "Someone should talk to that girl." She paused and added softly, "She's not going to have a happy life."

I chilled suddenly. Sheryl could sparkle and laugh, and then she'd cried when the mission dog died. What a waste it would be if she closed herself off from life in the middle of a bunch of blind missionaries. What was that verse in Hebrews I'd discovered my first Sabbath in Majuro? "To do good and communicate, forget not."

Somehow Sheryl beat everyone to the Gains house that evening. I could see her through the living room window as we drove up, writing out postcards in her red island-print dress. Though the cut was American, it seemed timidly displaced in the modern American living room. It would be great on a white sandy beach, or under moonlit palms. "Hey, Sheryl," I addressed the stoic-looking little girl after the living room had emptied. "There's a big full moon out, and it's too early to go to bed. Why don't we go for a walk?"
She put down her pen and a Tamuning Beach postcard. "OK," she said, slipping on her zories. "It is pretty early."

The warm ocean breeze in my T-shirt reminded me that I lived in a world very different from the one my folks were now experiencing in yet another Canadian winter. "Do you ever feel like part of you isn't really here?" I asked, then laughed at the absurdity of the question. "I mean, sometimes I feel like I'm a different person on Majuro than I was at home. You meet so many new experiences and people when you're an SM that you can hardly be the same."

"Yeah, you're really lucky. You live out at Laura with all that beautiful beach, and your brother, and Mrs. Barber never gets on your case, and," Sheryl looked into the velvety black sky, "you four have each other."

"Which four?" My mind tried various combinations.

"You and Henry and Mike and Kevin. You all sing together, you work together in Pathfinders and plan things; you just seem to click right." Sheryl shrugged her shoulders as if resigning to Fate. "Barbie and I just don't. We're quieter—Walla Walla hicks, like Mike said."

The slapping of our zories in the silence that followed felt like a physical slap on the cheek. Barb and Sheryl were quieter, I knew, but no... there was no point to explaining how we'd interpreted their actions and inactions. The tone of Sheryl's admission and silence assured me that we hadn't understood them—not really. It's one thing to absorb cultural differences when people have slanted eyes and speak a different language. You don't expect them to have the same outlook as you do. But when people listen to the same music as you do, laugh at
the same jokes, and burn just as red as you do in the tropical sun—then it’s harder to see that they’ve brought with them a very different experience and different ways of handling loneliness and pressure, different ways of having fun. Maybe there were more differences than I’d thought,

"I’m just a prairie farm girl, according to Mike," I finally offered sheepishly. "We all come from different parts of North America and have different expectations." Now I shrugged. "I guess I always thought you’d jump into things like I do—you know, sort of act now, think later?"

I scuffed my zorie on a piece of coral and laughed. "It saves a lot of nervousness—but maybe not much embarrassment."

A jet’s thundering interrupted our rhythmic zorie-slapping. We watched the red and white lights moving slowly in the direction of Majuro—miles away. "Silver bird, silver bird keep on flying," we both started to sing.

"Silver bird, silver bird, my heart’s dying," Sheryl finished the line. "I wish we didn’t have to go back so soon, Lynn," she sighed.

"Sheryl," I tested her mood cautiously, "you know we all paid every cent of our way from home to Majuro—the mission’s only giving us room and board. And we missed so much in Ponape." Her face was open and reflective in the moonlight, so I continued. "We have no set number of days we have to teach, and no real curriculum. My education is important now too, and I’ll never have the chance to see those mysterious basalt ruins at Nan Madol, or to watch the sakow ceremony at the cultural show if we fly straight back . . ."

Sheryl’s blue eyes had caught my vision. "If we just stayed two more days, we could see it all!" Excitement twinkled in her voice.
"And everyone here says it would be no big problem. This is a laid-back culture, you know." Was I trying to convince Sheryl or myself? "We've worked hard, and it's our own money. Two days either way won't matter a bit to the kids."

"But it will to Elder Barber." Sheryl was backing down.

"Yeah, but everyone else here at mission headquarters thinks we should stay. It really would be educational." I dangled a last tantalizing morsel before her, "and we could sleep in that neat thatch hut again by the ocean."

"OK, Lynn!" she finally exclaimed. "Let's do it!"

"Silver bird, silver bird," we sang together on our way back to tell Henry and Mike, and interspersed our duet with wild giggles and excited chatter about what we'd do every minute we spent on luscious Ponape.

"Silver bird, keep on flying," I hummed into my pillow. Even if Mike didn't want to stay with us, Henry, Sheryl, and I would have a great time at Ponape's cultural show.

"Silver bird, silver bird ..." I drifted into a sound sleep. Later on we'd face the other music.
Chapter XI

Trouble in OK Corral

My voice rose and fell in the brief interlude of early morning quiet as 25 heads bowed in my classroom for prayer. "And help us to learn to be kind like Jesus and learn our lessons in school today, Amen," I concluded aloud. "And," I continued silently, "get me through this morning."

Only two weeks intervened between this day and the annual school program, which threatened to become village extravaganza. The excitement of the band's debut and the new school uniforms made just for the program had been overwhelming. Re-enacting "Noah" with Polynesian stick-tossing and traditional Marshallese dances had turned the kids antsy and given me nightmares. "Just this morning, Lord," I prayed, "We'll discuss this afternoon's program practice during lunch."

The shuffle of children settling down for their morning chunk of writing and Bible subsided as I launched with exaggerated enthusiasm into the grade two English assignment. "The word for today's story is 'school.' What can we write about school? Paulina..." Heads twisted backward toward the door. No response. Following the general gaze of the class, my eyes fell upon the shift-clad form of Mrs. Barber bristling in the doorway.

"Good morning" stifled in my throat. Ever since our late return from Ponape Island, pleasantries had become harder to exchange with that lady. The line of her lips this morning decreed that business would be short. "You didn't write how many copies of these pages you wanted."

"But I did write..."
"I've told you a dozen times," she punctuated her words by thumping the offending pages with her right index finger, "write it on each side of each page. Can't you take directions? You've got to learn to follow orders if you're going to get along!" Her voice crescendoed to the waving of phonics worksheets in jerky orchestration. The finale, a doorslam, left her frustration on one side of the yellow brick wall and me on the other with a class stunned to silence. The pickup's trailing whine told us that Dalap would receive her shortly.

Before I could wonder how much smaller than the first graders I now appeared, Junior, my smallest boy curled his lip and glared. "That principal no good." His voice grated on the words while his eyes first flashed indignation and then softened to a question. "Crazy?"

"Yeah," I pounced on his silence breaker. Shock and hurt obliterated any thought for Mrs. Barber's reputation. I needed my class on my side, especially now that all Barber-wise communication seemed to have collapsed. Losing their respect now would destroy anything of lasting value that the class might have learned--so ran my panic-stricken thoughts. "Anyone who yells and screams is crazy," I continued. "At least for awhile. OK--time for recess."

"No writing?" puzzled Junior.

"After recess. Junior, your row can leave first."

Antibus's loose-jointed form bobbed past the window toward the drinking fountain, and scenes buried under months of papers and snorkeling began to emerge. I flashed from Antibus's now-curious glances at my students whispering on the playground to the angry confusion that had smoldered in his eyes when Mrs. Barber had shoved him toward a cluster
of desks. "Line these up," she'd snapped when the teenager had offered to help clean up the room after an evangelistic meeting, "And don't get in the way."

Yes, Mrs. Barber had been under a lot of pressure, but that didn't take the sting out of Antibus's words the next Sabbath as he embraced a cool green church pillar. "You know Uncle Bus and Aunt Flo?" he asked, gazing at the gray-haired woman bustling through the church pews to pick up hymnals. "They were very kind," he reminisced. Slacking his hold on the pillar, he slapped it and walked away. "They were not rough."

Antibus hiked from the fountain and into my view again toward his little niece, Main, who was scratching a marble game circle into the hard-packed ground in front of my classroom door. I recalled yesterday's marble match and the silence with which my little girls had tolerated Mrs. Barber's presence before breaking up their contest. The same ready-to-move-on silences had come to punctuate the exchanges between Elder Barber and me too. Now those silences crashed in upon my consciousness in shattering waves.

Eight months of sunshine bands, teaching without books, drinking warm powdered milk, falling hard into bed exhausted day after day hadn't really counted for anything. Two days in Ponape had proved to the Barbers that we were beyond redemption, as useful and dispensable as paper cups, tolerated only because nothing else was available. We tolerated each other, went on with the business of being Christians, smiling each Sabbath and singing "I've got peace like a river and love like an ocean." Suddenly the coldness of external form without real human caring chilled me.

As long as I had been comfortable I had rationalized about form. All
the duties we performed, all the confrontations we avoided, I told myself, would keep the mission running smoothly. As a natural result, loving and caring would grow in the climate of unselfish dedication. Ha!

What had gone wrong? We were still the same people, still dedicated, Mrs. Barber still went to Dalap every day to make sure the new school ran smoothly, and I still got up every morning and had prayer before classes. We were both still the same dedicated people—but after eight months we were still the same.

After eight months, instead of growing closer to Mrs. Barber, instead of finding more meaning in my Christian duties and forms of religion, the forms seemed to be emptier. The stony cold of mere form was touching me, and frustration nettled my shame.

For eight months I had touted Christianity in Majuro like a pregnancy, and now given birth to a stillborn unreality. My picture of God's way of working had been all wrong. I wanted God to invade human rights. But He didn't. He didn't keep me from impatient words when little John's fear of spelling made him fail the same test four times, nor had He kept Mrs. Barber from shoving Antibus that one fateful time. Good deeds are scanty cover for a core of self-centered thought. This God, I discovered, didn't live inside missionaries just to protect His reputation.

He might not even be living inside me at all.

I had no more front to keep up, no more "kind missionary" line to maintain, I had watched my children's pain and embarrassment often, and this morning we had all viewed mine in technicolor. By just being missionaries the Barbers and I proclaimed, "We're real Christians, look and
see." Meanwhile, we'd built an ice mountain that somehow froze harder in
the sultry heat of Majuro. I'd wrapped myself in a cloak of classroom
involvement and tried to ignore the changing climate. But I'd been wrong,
I wasn't facing reality. Lynn Neumann was failing to live God's love
toward the Barbers.

But it would go on tomorrow and next week, and, I thought, next
year. The thought propelled me past the stickball game, past the volley-
ball palms, past the marble game, and past the little group where I knew
Henry's students as well as mine were kicking around bloody, gossip-
size pieces of Mrs. Erva Barber.

"Elder Barber," I began when I faced the man in the familiar blue
aloha shirt, standing on his living room carpet. A half-finished letter
in Mrs. Barber's handwriting lay on the table beside the picture of their
son and his family. So she was old. So she missed her family and home.
So did I! "Elder Barber," I began again. "There are some things I think
you should know.

"When your wife storms into my classroom and yells at me, she berates
me in the eyes of my kids, and berates herself as well. More," I plunged
on, "because they know me and they love me. When a stranger attacks me,
naturally there's trouble, and who do you think they side with?"

Elder Barber's cool blue eyes took in every detail of my nervous
rage. "Sometimes it's necessary to give instructions even with students
present. Are you ___ she yelled?"

"Yes. I can handle it for another four or five weeks till I leave,
and maybe it won't matter a whole lot whether my kids think I'm a good
teacher or not." I trembled with hot tears and frustration. "They'll
have a new teacher next year, "But Mrs. Barber is going to be here a lot longer, and what they think about her matters a lot." I just couldn't articulate my deep thoughts. Only Junior's words came, "They're saying, 'That principal no good--Crazy!'"

Elder Barber's eyes narrowed as I turned to leave with my step less steady and my reality shaken. God, missionaries, me—I had been quite wrong.

I stepped into the brilliant daylight and left a mistaken idealism crumbling in the seasoning Marshallese sun.
Chapter XII

An Elijah Prayer

Spring comes even in the perpetual summer of the tropics. Plumeria trees blossom full and white, and ferns and flowers not seen before May begin appearing along The Road and in the black tresses of the older girls. I listened to the sleek brown birds that had paused on the atoll to mark the commencement of Spring, and the beginning of basket ball season at the school.

"Missy Lynn," Junior's familiar morning greeting danced into the apartment along with streaks of sunlight. "Missy Lynn, I want . . ."

"The ball," I finished, opening the screen door and tossing out a volleyball. Let the sun and a few shots at the hoop nailed to a palm tree absorb their Friday morning energy! With less than a month till the end of school, and little more than a week till the big school program, they'd have to buckle right down when the clock struck eight.

A few quick passes across the table with a wet dish rag removed the sticky traces of a papaya that Mrs. Barber had surprised us with yesterday. "The trees are really bearing." Her mouth had tugged into a smile at the door. "You might as well have some." Though we never spoke of my confrontation with Elder Barber over her PR tactics, I had noticed extra efforts on Mrs. Barber's part to be generous and pleasant, and I'd noted a carefulness to phrase her demands more thoughtfully as well.

I rinsed the dish rag under the faucet. The kids had picked up on the change in Mrs. Barber too. That was the best part. They'd been warming up to her slowly this last while, even beginning to ask her questions. I glanced at my watch. I had a couple things myself that I
wanted to ask her before class started.

I crossed the edge of the volleyball clearing where Main and Karlyse played marbles, and I thanked God silently for opening my eyes to Karlyse. Most of the year I had let her plod along in silent isolation, dropping books, asking for explanations three and four times in a voice too husky and stilted for a seven-year old girl. Why, I wondered one particularly trying day while explaining a math problem for the fifth time, could she read as well as any grade two, yet she never seemed to care about anything else in the classroom? I had loomed over her desk with my hands on my hips. "Karlyse, what's wrong?"

Her joyless eyes clouded over, and she threw down her pencil. "Me no good!" she cried hoarsely, shattering the short-sighted lenses through which I had viewed her. More than my repeated math explanations, she needed me to see her as lovable and valuable, a little girl of worth.

But now Karlyse was winning the marble game. Main jabbered at her and Karlyse laughed. Her eyes actually smiled. She was winning at more than marbles these days, and participating in recess games. Moreover, she's gotten top score on yesterday's math test. "Time?" Karylyse asked, expecting class to start any minute.

"No, not time yet," I continued my stride to the Barber's front door. I knocked. No answer. Probably in the bedroom getting ready to go to Dalap. I'd leave the bread money on the endtable just inside the door since Mrs. Barber knew I always needed a loaf for the weekend. Poking my head inside, I saw her lying on the carpet in her nightgown. Strange, I thought. But, it's her house, I realized. Elder Barber appeared, fumbling
with the buttons of his blue aloha shirt. "Elder Barber, could you pick up a loaf of bread in town for me?" The concern on his face had not registered with me yet.

"I've got a sick woman on my hands," his voice boomed. He dropped to his knees and began massaging her heart. "I've got to get her to the hospital. It's angina."

The transfer from house to Sammy's canopy blurred in my mind. Suddenly I became an integral part of this scene. "Why now, God?" My nails dug into the flesh of my palms as my grip on the steering wheel tightened. I shifted gears wildly and swerved to miss a huge hog. I felt the weight shift in the back and heard a thud against the inside of the truck's shell. "Why, God, now? Elder Barber needs her so much. The schools need her. Don't let her die, God. Now now."

I hit the rut a block away from the hospital hard and felt them bounce. Elder Barber would have made the trip more smoothly, but I'd taken his place at the wheel and he my station at her side when we were half a mile out of Laura. I slammed on the brakes and backed up to the emergency door, still seeing Mrs. Barber's ashen face in the gloom of the truck shell, still hearing that long sigh of life expiring only a half a mile out of Laura.

"No, God. Not now," I shook my head at God in disapproval while the medics draped her face with a corner of the old blanket we'd wrapped her in at the mission. Elder Barber gripped the top of the shell and rested his head heavily on his arm with a moan. I stood under the shadow of the overhanging hospital roof. "No God! Not now. No!"

I turned my eyes from the cruel-bright reflection of the sun in the
truck's window while the acting hospital administrator led Elder Barber away. Elder Barber tottered blindly, despite Don's supporting arm, into the cool shelter of the administrator's office, leaving me to question God by myself.

Now, God? Now, when Elder Barber's plans for the Marshall Island Mission finally seemed to be coming true? When Don Wilson's coming from the Florida Medical Center had made the Majuro Hospital take-over seem so possible? When church services had started swelling? While the schools were growing, and the students starting to reach out to Mrs. Barber? Now, God? Now?

My lips told the Dalap SM teachers the news. My hands somehow guided the truck back to Laura. My ears heard Currie say, "The funeral will be tomorrow," and, "We will watch with the body in church all this night." It was Marsallese custom, he was saying, and we did not have to come, Someone should be at the mission. My head nodded in agreement. Yes, Henry and I would stay at the mission.

Kevin greeted Henry and me when we arrived early the next afternoon for the memorial service. "There's no music," Kevin folded his brown arms on the driver's door and looked in through Henry's open window. "They'd like you and me to play a sax and trombone duet."

"Jump in," Henry shifted Sammy into a lower gear. "We'll have to make a flying rip to Laura for my trombone and a practice."

Mike emerged from the gloom of the church, shading his eyes. "Hey, I'm coming too--wherever you're going." The three of us scooted over without hesitation to make room for Mike. Packing four into the Toyota
cab confirmed that we still had each other, even though Elder Barber would leave for California tonight.

Henry hit a speed bump too hard. "Slow down, man! It's not your truck!" Kevin exclaimed. Henry hit another asphalt ridge. "Henry, slow down!" Kevin reiterated more authoritatively. "It's the mission's truck, and you'd better take care of it."

Henry looked hard at the SM he'd worked with so closely and easily for eight months. "Yes, I know. It's the mission's truck, not yours."

Mike and I tensed. Death was taking away people from the unit we had come to depend upon. Did it have to fragment the group that was left?

"Hey, you guys," Mike's voice betrayed his fear, "we've got to stick together. Especially now."

Returning from Laura, Henry turned off the motor, and we watched the brightly-clad islanders whispering with somber faces outside the church. A still air hung about the sanctuary, trapping the silent cries of Elder Barber's sorrow inside. Kevin pulled on the passenger door handle, then paused. "I don't want to go in, but..." We troupied into the church like weary soldiers. We had a duty to perform.

"You know your duties." Elder Barber delivered his parting words just before sunset that evening as he joined the flood of Honolulu-bound passengers at the airport departure gate. "You have schools to run. Finish out the year, and tie things off in June."

"Duty. Duty. Duty." Elder Barber's words repeated themselves over and over. Late that night they played in an out amid scenes of the islanders offering handicrafts, money, and soap as they processed by
the coffin at the funeral. I saw again the dull blue of Mrs. Barber's twisted nightgown on the way to the hospital, and then my small students at the airport silently waving good-bye to the sad, slow figure crossing the airstrip to a 727.

My mind's eye replayed the brooding in little John's dark eyes as he straddled the wooden departure gate at the airport. "Elder Barber will come back?" he asked, never taking his eyes off the retreating figure.

"I don't know, John. Maybe not." I replied. "Once he gets home, his children may not want him to leave."

"But Majuro is his home!" John frowned. "He loves the Marshallese children!" The nine-year old jumped to the ground and stormed off. "He will come back."

In my sleeping and waking dreams I kept seeing Elder Barber's white head bent to watch the asphalt as he plodded out to the plane while air cargo attendants loaded the long gray coffin in plain view. He looked thinner and lonelier than ever in his black suit. I'd never seen him wear it before this occasion, and he carried a small suitcase that seemed too heavy to bear.

For ten months that now-weary figure had shaped the future of the Marshall Islands Mission, counseling with Dr. Henry, laying plans, and winning the people of Majuro. "Duty. Duty. Duty." Perhaps he'd finished what he came to do. A cargo attendant closed the baggage hatch with a heavy push. Perhaps his duty was more than fulfilled. I, for one, would require nothing more of him.
"Duty. Duty. Duty." The words stirred me into hazy consciousness on Monday morning. The rituals of washing, dressing, and getting Junior a ball mobilized my body and turned my thoughts to the imminent realities of math and reading and practice for the school program. Now I was especially glad that Ronnie, Wilton, and Reles had contracted major responsibilities for the big drill routine entrance, and the music for our rhythmic production of "Noah's Ark." The stick tossing routines and traditional dances would be impossible without music.

"Warrah!" That cry and the force of a volleyball rattling the wire window coverings split the morning calm. I stepped outside to see Junior running after the ball and scolding Ronnie from a distance.

"What's going on?" I directed my question to the back of Ronnie's army fatigue shirt. The eighteen-year old turned slowly with a silent, sullen stare. He walked away, without a word, toward Wilton, who sat with a defiant smile in his truck on the sidewalk. "Move it, Wilton." A lump rose in my throat even as I spoke. "You know your truck doesn't belong there."


The screen door flew open, and Henry stood beside me, buttoning his shirt. I watched his keen blue eyes assess the situation. They were the "big boys," the leaders of the school, and he was the Long Man—the only authority figure that still remained to challenge their control. The uncharacteristically-grim line of his mouth reminded me that though the Long Man had several inches on them in height, he had only one year more in age. Henry turned toward his classroom. "Death brings many a strange
twist," he murmured.

I pondered what this new twist would mean to our spring program while Henry and I walked down The Road a few days later, in the evening cool. Henry bent a twig and flung it into the unkempt grass. "No way can we have a program in two days." His voice was cool, but the strain of the authority showdown on top of new responsibilities at the mission was hollowing out his eyes. "We'll combine it with graduation."

"And what about the big boys?" I knew they were his big concern right now.

"They've got Reles now, too. All they do is disrupt—when they show up." His eyes searched out a distant point of The Road. "As I see it, we've got one recourse."

"Missy Lynn!" I recognized Karlyse's husky voice and stocky form as she jumped up from the grass and grabbed my hand. She patted it, smiling. Such a change from the girl of a few weeks ago! I smiled back.

"What's our recourse, Henry?" I asked. Karlyse walked along with us swinging my arm.

"I talked this out with Dr. Henry. He's a traditional chief, and he knows these kids. What he says goes."

"Missy Lynn," Karlyse interrupted our sober discussion again with her anxious words and smile. Without breaking step she looked up. "You are really good." She repeated the words again, eyes shining. "You are really, really good."

"At least you know you're doing something right." Henry watched the little girl scamper back to her nest in the grass. "I'm not so sure about what I have to do."

"Which is?"
"Expel three of my boys." He picked up a pebble and winged it into the gathering shadows. "But I've tried about everything else. Looks like the only way."

Our zories scuffed a background for our thoughts. If we expelled them, we would lose touch with three of the characters who'd added spice and humor to our lives in Majuro—three talented guys that the younger kids looked up to. "They can write their examinations if they choose to," Henry broke the silence, "but they won't be able to attend the last couple of weeks of school."

"Or the school program." A new horror dawned on me. "What about the band?" A debut without some of the key players seemed disastrous.

"We've got two weeks," Henry struck his palm with his fist. "We'll just teach some of the other kids to play their parts." He did an about-face. "I'm going to hit the sack. Tomorrow's gonna be the longest Friday ever."

Friday afternoon I crumpled onto the couch and surveyed the task yet before me. Dirty dishes cluttered the tiny kitchen counter, laundry flowed out of the tight cubical dominated by Henry's unmade bed. Elder Himano had come from Guam this morning with a commission to oversee mission affairs, so I'd invited him for Sabbath dinner.

"Dumb idea!" I chided myself while I rummaged through the box of cans in the corner. Henry had promised to make a shelf for these cans ages ago. And the fridge had absolutely given up the ghost last month. I dropped a can of tomatoes back into the box and reached for a broom to sweep the ceiling.
A big brown spider and its web over the door caught my eye, so I began my ceiling sweep there. Henry came in under my broom--and under fire. "Can you please take out the garbage I asked you to take out three days ago?" Annoyance put a knife-edge on my every word.

"Yeah, yeah." Henry waved a deprecating hand and sat down on the couch.

"Henry!" My impatience was already ignited. "I teach every day just as long as you do, so I don't think it's too much to ask you to carry out the garbage."

Several heated exchanges later, Henry and Sammy roared off to the other SM's. "I guess five SM's can sing tomorrow instead of six," I grinned weakly to myself, but I really saw little humor in the situation. Barbie and Sheryl had actually suggested that we all sing for special music this Sabbath, and I wanted very much to be part of that group right now. More than ever.

"To do good and communicate, forget not ..." I'd discovered that text my first Sabbath in Majuro, and now it mocked me. I still couldn't speak Marshallese, and my talk with Sheryl on Guam revealed that I hadn't really heard her and Barbie for months--even though they spoke English! And now even communication with my own brother seemed fragile. So we were under stress. Why, after so many months and prayers, was I still self-centered? Last Friday I hadn't even noticed that Mrs. Barber was dying on her living room floor! Could God really accomplish anything at all through someone who was so blind and fearful? And feisty? Someone who'd gone as an SM almost on a whim?

"God, you must have been real hard-up to fill this SM spot!" I
laughed bitterly. "I've really failed, I'm really no good. You might as well quit wasting your time on me."

I sat by the kitchen table and let the gloom of two Fridays gather about me as the sun hid its light deep in the waters on Majuro's west side. Not even the stale heat of the apartment could entice me to move or turn on the fan. Nothing could stir me--except the timid knocking on the screen door.

I smoothed my frizzy hair and grinned hugely once just to get my facial muscles working again. I opened to a small, middle-aged, red-haired woman who smiled an embarrassed smile.

"Excuse me," she began, "I teach at the Congregational mission down the road." This was news! There was a third white teacher in Laura? Not many people stayed that well-hidden on this small island! "I wasn't sure you were home," she apologized over the top of her bifocals, "but I was just so lonely tonight, I had to talk to someone."

Talking to her over soup, I realized again just how important the other SM's really were. "It's so good to be able to communicate with someone who understands," Margaret kept saying. "You even understand the frustration of trying to teach English here!" She sipped the broth from her spoon. "I don't know what you're doing that's different from other schools, but your students really stand out."

How ironic that she should say that on the day we expelled three of our "stand out" students. "How do they stand out?" I pressed for detail.

"Oh, they just seem to have a healthy attitude toward life. They're confident, and well-mannered and disciplined--generally, they just seem
like the cream of the crop." Margaret giggled. "I don't know, they're just different!" She finished her soup and put down her spoon. "Well, I really must be going." Where, I wondered? "It's been so nice visiting with you," she continued, "I should have come sooner. Maybe then I wouldn't be leaving next week."

"Next week?" I leaned forward in surprise.

"Yes, well, it all gets to be a bit much for an older person here all alone," Margaret rose from the table, "and certainly your Elder Barber shouldn't come back by himself." She looked at me and smiled a small smile. "But for you it's different. You're young and energetic, and you have your brother, and a group of friends who understand," She gathered herself up and paused at the door. "Your church," she crooked her head, "had great vision when it started your 'Amateur Missionary' program."

I closed the door still grinning at her appropriate version of the church's official title. We were amateurs, all right, falling down and making mistakes on a grand scale. But we were trying to do something, and occasionally, we did that something right.

"You are really, really good." Karlyse's smile and chubby pat on my hand came back when my eyes fell on her most recent contribution to my shell collection, a handsome, intricately-patterned tiger cowry.

"Lord, I don't know just how you're working on this small island, but I know you're working on me," I plunged another plate into the tepid dishwasher and started scrubbing away yesterday's stains. "Just don't ever stop."
Chapter XIII

Long Man Falls In Love

A 2:00 p.m. June sun laid bars of light on the homemade footlocker that I was packing. School was over, over, over, and the spring graduation program had played to a house packed with appreciative islanders, with again as many spilling out the doors and peering in through the windows. When the band took its formation, with three girls in the trumpet section, I thought I heard a button pop off some father's ample aloha shirt. Without knowing, we'd done something right by giving the girls equal place with the boys in this matriarchal society.

"Assumption High School has a band, but we have a band with girls!" Currie explained later. "You see, in the Marshallese custom, women are very important. They give good leadership." He winked with a smile, "The SDA band will be strong."

Chad and Emma, our Filipino friends agreed. Chad turned his eyes to the instruments on the stage. "I have been to many programs, but your students put an extra quality of life into this one today."

I bent over the footlocker and began packing again, revelling in the pleasantly-distracting scenes from our program. The kids looked so good in their red, white, blue, and green border prints, and they'd really hammed it up in the skits. I had to laugh out loud when I thought of Jane swaying with her trumpet in "Get That Tiger."

"What are you chortling about?" Henry looked up from the closing school report he was writing. "I thought you hated packing."

"I do," I affirmed, straightening instantly. "And packing for a 12-day ocean voyage besides getting all our stuff ready to go home is pure
pain! But," I folded the sun dress Lisa's mother had made for me, "I have pleasant memories to distract me."

Henry rose from the sofa and peered into the footlocker. "Do you think fourteen packages of Milkman will be enough?" he asked. "We don't want to run out of the elixer of life in the middle of nowhere."

I crumpled onto the floor beside the fourteen packets of powdered milk. Tommy had invited all the SM's to come with him on his holiday from the mission. A cruise to five of the neighboring atolls on a working ship sounded like a once-in-a-lifetime adventure to me, but the $8 deck passage tickets that our island friend Tommy had purchased for Barbie, Sheryl, Henry, and me didn't cover meals, so we were packing some essentials—which for Henry meant milk, primarily.

"Silver bird . . ." The Number One song in the Marshalls came on Radio Majuro again. Henry hummed along until a comment occurred to him. "I think Mike and Kevin were crazy to pass up a chance to see the outer islands just because their girl friends write mushy letters and tell them to hurry home." He ambled over with six more packs of Milkman. "No way is any girl going to tie me down before I'm twenty-eight!"

Two of the foil pouches flew out of his grasp and across the room when the lanky nineteen-year old waved his arms in emphasis. "Just think of what those guys are missing—a live Marshallese equivalent of Roots! We'll be able to see what a real traditional village is like, and how they lived before Americans came." Henry tossed the remaining four milk packets to me. "Better take extra just in case Tommy's relatives don't give him enough coconuts."

"Isn't that something?" I took out a bag of granola to make room in the box for the extra milk pouches. "Tommy oversees his clan's land
on all those islands! I didn't realize that he carried so much clout behind that calm, reserved exterior."

"Yokwe." That American voice was becoming more familiar. Being in his early 20's, Dave Kinney had naturally gravitated toward the SM's when his family had lived at the Assembly of God mission down The Road. Since his arrival last week for a visit, this returning "native" had adopted us and taken it upon himself to enlighten us on various aspects of island life. His fluent Marshallese gave him an enviable edge in gleaning the latest village news and affairs. "Ah--oatmeal cookies. My favorite!" He sniffed the air while seeing himself into the apartment.

"What's the report today, Dave? All quiet on the Marshallese front?"

I offered him a plate of cookies and sat down in our homemade suspended chair.

"Actually, " the curly-headed reporter munched on a cookie, "the news is Elder Barber."

"What?" Henry started up from his inspection of the food box.

"Well, it might be more precise to say his wife's Marshallese funeral." Dave clarified his statement. "The people are very impressed that Elder Barber permitted them to pay tribute in their customary way. Not many missionaries do that." He rubbed his grizzly chin. "In fact, I know none of ours would!"

"You mean," Henry probed, "that by respecting their customs, Elder Barber did himself a favor?"

"Exactly. As far as the Marshallese are concerned, he's now head and shoulders above the other missionaries on the island," Dave dusted
his fingers on his blue jeans. "If he were to come back, what a reception he'd get!"

"So that's the talk of the island, eh?" I mused.

"That, and the fact that the fieldtrip boat came in an hour ago."

"The fieldtrip boat!" I jumped to my feet. "Dave, you know we've been waiting for more than a week for that boat, and you didn't tell us!"

I threw a cushion at his curly head.

"Hey, it's all right!" He blocked the flying pillow with both arms. "It won't leave for another four or five hours. I'll help you pack."

In a couple of hours we shut the storage closet door on the three boxes that held all our possessions. We planned to be back in plenty of time to catch our plane home, but considering the flexibility of Marshallese schedules, we'd decided to have everything ready to go onto the plane.

"Oh--there's one more," I remembered as the lock clicked shut, I wrestled one last box marked "Fragile" out of the apartment. "I don't want any of those beautiful baskets we got at our Yokwe 'damaged,'" I explained, using the native word for the farewell party they'd given us. "You couldn't ever replace that tray Jane made with all the ring cowries woven into it."

"Right, right, right." Henry unlocked the door for me hastily, "Let's just get to the dock before the ship starts its rounds without us!"

On board the Micropilot, staking out our claim on the common sleeping area with our mats, Sheryl and I watched Tommy and his thick afro move casually among the passengers, greeting many of them by name. That afro and regal, athletic grace distinguished him from the average wavy-haired
Marshallese. "You sure have a lot of friends on this boat!" Sheryl observed when Tommy returned with an armload of donuts and pop he'd gleaned in his mingling.

Tommy smiled his warm, quiet smile. "It is the Marshallese way," he shrugged his broad shoulders. "When they have, they give." Tommy turned to the glassy-flat ocean, the kind of mirror waterskiers usually see only in dreams. He clicked his tongue. "Really good sailing weather," he smiled. "We will get to Ebeye-Kwajalein quickly." My face must have fallen at the prospect of trading one "Americanized" center for the other. Ebeye was even smaller and more densely populated than Majuro. Tommy added quickly, "Oh, we will stop along the way to pick up passengers, and on the way back we will stay at the islands."

The boat caused a flurry whenever it pulled into the quiet outer island lagoons. Children raced along the sand, dogs barking excitedly at their heels, while Ebeye-bound travelers loaded into small boats to ferry themselves out to the Micropilot. The women, too, stood on the white beach waving excitedly. When the copra was purchased on the return trip, they would have money to buy the luxury items stowed on board the ship--new zories, combs to wrap up their long hair with, and canned meat to feast upon. It had been about two months since the "store" had anchored in the lagoon.

Tommy greeted the boarding islanders like old friends, "Half this island must be going to Ebeye!" I remarked at one stop. "Why does everyone want to go there?"

"That man--" Tommy pointed to a young couple spreading their mat a few feet away from us. The woman, noting our attention, tossed Tommy a
freshly-baked breadfruit. "Kwommol," Tommy replied with a smile. "That man," he began again, "is my cousin. He is going to Ebeye to get his tooth fixed."

"Is there a dentist on Ebeye?" There were none on Majuro. Getting one had been part of Elder Barber's vision of Adventist health care in the Marshalls.

"No, there is no dentist," Tommy smiled. "He will probably have it pulled. But it's a nice trip, and he wants to eat ice cream."

"Ice cream?" I questioned. That's what the teenage boy on the next mat had liked best about Majuro too!

"Ebeye!" a scout on third deck shouted out the alarm that set passengers scrambling. Almost before the gang plank touched the dock, the Micropilot was deserted. "This must be some Promised Land," I commented, following Tommy through the quiet ship.

"They all think Ebeye and Majuro have 'the good life.' There is television, and movies, and"--I knew what he would say next--"they have ice cream." After we'd spent the day wandering over small, parched Ebeye and sampling the icy Australian ice cream, Tommy surprised us by announcing that we would see some real traditional Marshallese dances that evening. King Kabua, respected traditional ruler of the islands, would be entertaining guests from Naru, and the decree to celebrate included dancing,

"Won't the king mind us crashing his party?" I asked, uneasy at the sight of less than a hundred chairs in the party auditorium ."

"No, no. The whole island will be here," Tommy assured me. "It's just that not everyone sits on chairs. But you," he motioned at the four
of us SM's, "they'll expect you to sit on chairs because you are American."

"OK," tall, blond Barbie scanned the open room with her large green eyes, "but let's find a place where nobody will notice us."

"How about those chairs on the far end?" I suggested. "They look far enough away from the main crowd." So we settled ourselves into the quiet hall.

We didn't have long to wait. Soon the sound of processional cheers romped in from the street, and the hall filled with giddy, excited Marshallese who, confirming my hunch, chose seats distant from our small section. "See," I whispered to Henry, "we'll hardly be noticed at the end here, and we still have front-row seats. No one will--"

"Shhhhh!" Henry silenced me. "Here come the big guests from Naru." His look changed from excitement to mortification. "And we're sitting in their places!"

Sure enough. The distinguished group stood in the middle of the floor, looking first at us, then at King Kabua. The eighty-year old man was hobbling toward a chair at our isolated end of the hall, shooing children out of his way with a handsome wooden cane.

My finger nails cut into my palms as the king lifted his gaze to the four of us sitting in frozen formation on the front row of his guest section. I'd heard many stories about the wrath of this fiery old ruler. Who would be able to stand?

Kabua studied us for a long, terrible minute. A smile worked its way across the leathery brown face. The king waved to us, and took the
special padded chair brought out at his command.

The next hours swirled by amid the shuffling beats and languid movements of old and newly-evolved dances.

"Tommy, we loved the show," Henry leaned on the Micropilot's deck railing while Ebeye disappeared in a trail of ocean foam, "but you'll have to fill us in on Marshallese manners and protocol!"

"Yeah," Sheryl agreed. "I about died when some of the Marshallese gave up their seats to the people from Naru."

"It's all right," Tommy's grin looked sheepish. "You're Americans. The Marshallese don't expect you to know our customs."

"Well, I for one would like to see some of the old customs in action."

I watched the birds following the ship. "When do we get to your home island?"

Tommy brightened. "We'll be at Namu today. My uncle the magistrate wants to talk with you."

Some hours later while wandering past neat thatch huts, down the smooth, well-packed Namu road where copra wagons and pedestrians are the only traffic, I questioned Tommy again. "Why would anyone leave this to live on hot, crowded Ebeye?" I asked.

Tommy shaded his eyes to look down the road. I already knew the answer, "For a better future life, sometimes. And," he smiled, "for ice cream." Nodding toward a copra-cart-turned-limosine, Tommy grinned, "That is my mother's mother. Through her I inherit my traditional position."

Tommy waved to the white-haired woman and the 12-year old "chauffeur" pushing her in the cart. She called out a greeting and asked him
if he was married. No? He should be. She knows some nice girls. How long has he been on Majuro? He's losing his Namu accent. He should not lose his accent! When is he leaving? Tonight? They will have baked breadfruit and fish and coconuts for him to take on his journey. Goodbye, Tommy watched the cart disappear. "Tradition tells us that Namu is the home of the Ralik people." I visualized a map of the western chain of the Marshalls distinguished as the "Sunset" islands from the eastern Ratak chain. "My grandmother," Tommy smiled, "always reminds me that we are Namu people."

"Does every atoll have a different accent?" I wondered.

"No, most don't. But Namu people do. My grandmother is proud. She does not like change. But come," Tommy waved us down the road, "we must see my uncle."

The magistrate's home stood a short distance from the beach, a few hundred feet away from a white board church that appeared to be suffering from neglect. Unlike the church, the wooden house—a rather outstanding home among the regular thatch—stood firmly. A framed picture of men in Karate outfits hung in the entrance. "That is my uncle." Tommy surprised me by pointing out a gentle-looking man on the front row.

"I thought the Marshallese didn't like to fight." The summons to appear before a magistrate sounded less friendly now that I knew the man had a brown belt in Karate.

Tommy laughed and the magistrate's wife brought us drinking coconuts. "See—he's a peaceful man, This is our traditional welcoming gift. My uncle wants to talk to you about starting a school on Namu."
The magistrate appeared and led us to the cool shade of a tree by the house. Looking at the two men conversing in Marshallese, I thought they could have been twins except for about five years difference in age. They had the same bearing of men who plan, and decide, and lead. An old man, to whom the younger men deferred their places in the shade, joined the Marshallese discussion. Tommy turned to begin his role as interpreter.

"These men control all the land on this island. They say that you should choose a spot, and they will build a school."

Henry's eyes reflected my own surprise. "We're just student missionaries. We can't promise things like that. But we are very honored!"

Tommy continued. "It would not cost the mission anything except what they want to put in. The parents would pay tuition in copra, and bring you all the food you want. We have plenty of bananas," He pointed to a cut stalk leaning against the house. "My uncle says those are for us to take on the boat."

"But why do they want an Adventist school?" I wanted to know.

"My uncle has seen the other schools on Majuro," The magistrate put in a Marshallese comment, and Tommy continued. SDA school children are different from the others. You see that church?" he pointed toward the ramshackle building by the beach. "My uncle wants SDA missionaries to preach there." His uncle interrupted again, "He says you can use that church. Or, if you want, they will build a new one. A new church and a new school. Just bring the teachers."

Barbie, Sheryl, Henry, and I sat in awed silence. I wanted to
promise that someone would come, but I couldn't. Not only because I had no authority, but also because our mission's life was totally dependent upon SM response. "We couldn't run these schools without you SM's," Elder Barber had once remarked, "and I mean we couldn't operate them at all. The Far Eastern Division hasn't got the money to put another full-time missionary in the Marshalls, so we depend solely on kids in college who will share one year of their lives with us."

And who'd heard of the Marshalls let alone Namu, I asked myself, looking at the broken white church against its background of warm, glinting blue. The new mission supervisor might not be a visionary like Elder Barber. Moreover, it had been a pinch to get six SM's this year anyway. So what if the people of Namu did build a school? Would there be anyone to take up the challenge of teaching there?

Our continued silence stirred more Marshallese discussion. "The preacher in this church now," Tommy jerked his head toward the beach, "tells them that if they come to church that's all that matters." He shook his head. "But my uncle sees the alcohol and drugs destroying so many young Marshallese. That's why he wants the SDA's. Because, he says, you do something for our children."

"You do something for our children." In the days that followed the magistrate's words turned over and over in my mind, even when we were snorkeling on the reef, or swimming in the unique half-fresh, half-saltwater lake on Lib island. I had seen other "mission" schools on Majuro, some parochial and some secular. They had all started with the aim—the missionary aim—of "doing something" for their students, and
they'd done it with personnel at least as competent as me. In what did
the success of the SDA schools lie? Did it have something to do with
an outlook, an attitude—a religion?

Turning this question over again while ambling around the lower deck
of the Micropilot at sunset, I came upon a guy that looked amazingly like
Henry, except for a sober expression and a certain distant gaze. I paused
at the railing that the young man leaned upon. How had he managed to
get a hole in his green striped Rugger shirt in exactly the same place
as Henry had? Maybe it was Henry!

What could have brought about this sudden change? The last time I'd
seen a guy look like that was when Mike had talked about his girlfriend.
Oh no—it couldn't be. Henry had only just met that beautiful Peace Corps
girl. And his twenty-eighth birthday wasn't due for another nine years!

"Henry," I leaned over the railing and peered up into his face.

"What is it? Are you in love?"

His eyes remained reflective. "I should be," he sighed. "I really

should be."

I righted myself on the deck side of the railing. "What gives,
Brother?"

"Remember when I went to tell Ronnie's mother that Ronnie was expelled
from school?" I nodded. "She felt so bad that tears came to her eyes,
and she began to talk about her son—just aching—and I began inching
toward the door." He winced at the memory. "But Currie grabbed her
hand and started telling her how glad we were that Ronnie had come to
school, and that we wouldn't lose touch with him." Henry's mouth pulled
into a sidelong smile as he continued to watch the horizon. "He almost had Ronnie's mother laughing when he remarked that he liked 'problem' boys best because they're the most fun to work with." The almost-smile disappeared from Henry's face. "I should have been the one who took her hand."

"But of course it was an uncomfortable situation that you'd never faced before." I studied his pensive face. "You're not a total failure because of just one very unusual encounter. You've worked hard for your kids."

"That's not it." Henry straightened up off the railing and faced me. "I mean, what's it really all about, this missionary business? Teaching them discipline and leadership is OK, but where does the love come in?" Henry's usually firm-set chin seemed to be softening as the evening light melted into liquid gold and floated on the water around the ship. "Currie showed love in a tough place," he said in a low voice. "Sometimes I wonder who is missionarying who?"

A flock of seabirds began circling above a school of yellow fin tuna. "See," Henry shifted his weight to one leg and leaned on the railing again, "the Marshallese are already such a deep-loving people. You know how affectionate the kids are, and how tolerant the Marshallese are in general." His eyes opened wide. "Can you imagine any king besides Kabua who'd simply wave at the foreigners who decided to crash his party?" I laughed in agreement.

"And think of all the big events happening here right now--new government, new schools, new health care system. Why," Henry threw his
hands up, "if the Adventists decide to take up the government's offer to run the health care system, it would be a chance to show the world what our concept of practical Christian medicine really is. These islands would be a showcase for the world!" The flock of seabirds began screeching in excitement as Henry gathered momentum. "With their natural ability to show love, the Marshallese could rock the world."

Henry's zories flapped rhythmically as he began to pace up and down the deck. "Schools and clinics and churches on every island—what an opportunity!" He stopped to wag a finger in my face. "To be asked to be part of such a phenomenon—helping to build a new nation..." The long, agile teenager resumed his pacing, but with an upturned face. "I can see it now—someday, even a high school on Majuro that will give its students the vision and skills to go beyond any goals they now dream of."

"Hey, Henry," I sensed the visionary in him rising, "you really sound excited about all this."

"Well, Lynn, you can't get close to the fire without getting warm! There is no place in the world like Majuro—no place with just the same opportunities and excitement." His two open palms seemed to cradle Majuro and the outer islands. "This is where the action is right now!"

I began to tingle at his enthusiasm. "It sort of makes you want to come back, doesn't it? I wonder how many SM's return as missionaries?"

"I don't know, but then not everybody goes to Majuro!" Warm zeal burned in Henry's eyes as he smacked his open palm with his fist. "I'd like to start this year all over again and really do it right!" An amazed look struck his face. "Lynn," he paused, "I think I'm in love!"
"Now, Brother," I laughed, "if this affair is really meant to be she'll still be here, waiting in the South Pacific moonlight when you finish college. It's not as if the Marshall Islands are going to disappear inside of four years!"

Henry laughed and recomposed himself, but even in the darkening shadows I could sense his growing philosophical determination. "Like the atom bomb exploding on Bikini atoll--like the bathing suit fad that rocked the world and shares the Bikini name..." Henry pointed an index finger toward the deepening purple sky. "This new fusion of human love and divine power in the Marshalls could rock the cosmos."

I settled back against the railing to smile through Henry's dramatic monologue. Once he started drawing abstract parallels and symbolism, there was no damping his ardor. I looked at my watch, seven o'clock, "Like the Golden Gate Bridge that links men across one expanse of water..." Henry's voice trailed on into the darkness. It would be a long night, I knew. "...thus releasing the potential within the tiny atom..." But then--I reminded myself to smile and listen intently. After all, your little brother's first love comes along only once in a lifetime.
"Silver Bird, Silver Bird, keep on flying . . ." The hit tune sang out again from a new transistor radio above the Micropilot's chugging. "Look!" Henry pointed to what appeared to be a wave breaking in otherwise-calm ocean. "A whale!"

"Wow," I tried to muster more enthusiasm than I actually felt. "What kind is it?"

"The kind you probably won't see again after we leave the Marshalls," Henry replied, knitting his eyebrows. "What's with you today?"

"Hearing that song blaring all over the ship, I guess I'm just a little anxious about catching our 'silver bird' home tonight." I gathered my long hair and held it over one shoulder to keep the wind from blowing it into a disheveled halo. "This leisurely extension of our trip is making me nervous. And if it's extended again by yet another day, we'll miss our campmeeting appointments back home."

My fears were not much allayed when the Micropilot eased into the dark Majuro dock only two hours before our plane for home was to leave.

"Just hold on here at the dock," Henry called over his shoulder as he ran toward the town. "I'll see if I can raise Don Wilson to drive us out to Laura."

Twelve minutes later the hospital administrator's pick-up screeched to a stop in front of our footlocker at the dock. "Your plane leaves at midnight?" he queried, throwing the wooden box into the back of the truck. "We might just make it."
The pickup headlights searched out the pavement to Laura Village while we jabbered quickly and nervously about our 14-day trip. "Oh--I almost forgot to tell you," Don shifted down to gain speed on a straight away. "There's news about Elder Barber."

I looked at his face for more information, but the darkness obscured any clues that might have been there. "Well?" I demanded, "What kind?"

"He's back."

"He is! Really?" My shrill voice hurt even my own ears. "You know what this means to the mission?"

"Now, he's leaving on the plane tonight--with you," Don continued, "because his children made him take a solemn vow to return to California when he'd packed up his belongings here." Don chuckled. "So he packed, but he's leaving the stuff here and coming back in two weeks to Majuro."

When we squealed into the airport, there stood Elder Barber in his black American suit. "I took on a whopper of a job when I came to Majuro." The white-haired gentleman smiled and hugged me hard. "I don't see as I can desert the island now."

Together we checked our baggage and boarded the plane. We weren't even airborne when Henry started up suddenly from the seat beside me. "I'm going to sit with Elder Barber. I've got to tell him about Namu and the outer islands!"

The glow of his first love was still in his eyes as he scrambled over my feet and into the aisle. I can hardly wait to see Henry's reaction when he discovers girls, I thought. His hasty departure left me with toes ground into my zories. It also gave me solitude for untangling my emotions as best I could.
"You do something for our children," "Your students are different." The magistrate's words mingled with those of the quiet red-haired missionary. I knew I certainly couldn't take the credit. My year in Majuro had been only one small part of my children's experience in the SDA school. Other SM's before me had taken time to participate in the lives and laughter of my children, and we'd all been different. My cheeks warmed just thinking about some of the bloopers I'd pulled while on Majuro. Their other teachers had goofed too, of course. But we all had one thing in common.

"Fasten your seatbelt, please," the Micronesian stewardess touched my shoulder. I clicked the belt around me. Yes--there was one link between me and every other SM. We were Adventists, with a unique way of looking at God because we see Him in His law as well as in the gospels. It's a view that molds daily attitudes and actions. It's something that is caught as well as taught in the classroom.

Karlyse's shiny, brown-spotted shell threatened to fall out of my open carry-on. That little girl had been such a revelation. Whatever I'd given her, she'd more than returned. Her pat on my hand had told me about God's love just when I needed it most.

Funny, I thought, pushing the cowry back into my bag, how much of being an SM is sharing--receiving as well as giving. I fumbled in my carry-on with the shell lei that Myrna, Vange, and Sandy had hung around my neck one day at the school. Such a clever artistic use of natural materials! And by such young girls too. Now I could see wisdom and ingenuity in a new dimension. My culture is not the final word on wit or proper manners, or art, or even philosophy. The Marshallese know
a lot about the wisdom of love and acceptance too.

Rummaging through my purse to make room for my plane ticket and passport, I pulled out a little red New Testament like those we'd given to the kids on their "birthday." I laughed, thinking about Main and her anxious grab for the cake. That's the way God wants us to respond to life, I smiled--with enthusiasm. I just hope that there'll be someone there to let my kids know just what they're grabbing when they reach out for all those fascinating new items of American life. Finally, I just pulled the shell lei out of the bag and wound it around my wrist. Now there was room for my passport.

"Silver bird, Silver bird, keep on flying . . ." The favorite song of the islands ran through my mind again as I sat fingering the tiny, smooth money cowrys of the lei. If they could see what I had learned to see in their islands, the Marshallese would not sing and dream so enviously of leaving on a big silver bird.

I shivered in my seat. So quickly I'd passed from the warm, humid Marshallese night into the air-conditioned cold of a modern 727--all without the chance of saying goodbye to anyone on Majuro! But then, maybe goodbyes weren't necessary. I was taking so much of Majuro with me. I fingered the shell lei again. Indeed, I'd received more than I'd given.

"You must have been in Majuro for some time." A businessman across the aisle broke into my thoughts. "You're all tanned, and you've got a whole bag of souvenirs," he motioned at my bulging carry-on.

"Yes, my brother and I taught in the Seventh-day Adventist school here for a year."
"Missionaries?" He lifted his eyebrows at the little New Testament in my lap.

I laughed and put it back into my purse. "Yes," I replied, struggling with tears of laughter and exhaustion. "You see, our church offers college students this fantastic opportunity to live and work overseas."

"Oh?" He put down his newspaper.

The cold atmosphere of the 727 seemed to warm as I shifted in my seat to tell him about my new perspective on the world. "It's a super way to put college book-learning into real life situations. Find out what's practical—before it's too late!"

The businessman removed his Christian Dior glasses and smiled. "It sounds like a mutually-beneficial way to learn about the world."

"Oh it is!" The shells on my arm rattled as I snapped open my seat belt. "It really is great. It's called the Student Missionary program."
Selected Bibliography


