

Courageous Christian
Novel
The Cross Penny

Christian Faith Fiction, A Clean
and
Wholesome Novel - Book 1

Linda L Culbreth

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Note: This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to an actual person or location or organization is coincidental.

It is highly recommended that you read this series in order as each book builds on the previous book.

Book 1 - *Courageous Christian Novel The Cross Penny*
Book 2 - *Kisses of Mercy*
Book 3 - *Precious Memories*

This book is lovingly dedicated to all who:

*Have ever felt abandoned or lonely

*Have been wronged by someone

*Have wronged someone

*Need healing

Jesus in speaking of Himself from Luke 4:17-21.

17 “And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

20 And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

21 And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.”

“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.”
Hebrews 13:8

Thank You to:

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“Thank you, Honey!”

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And to Joyce Kiefer for her encouragement in writing this and other books.

And to my readers, thank you.

Chapter 1

*(Spring Break, 1994, Campground,
Southern California)*

“You can’t get away from me now! I gotcha!” Mark hollered. He watched as the young man in front of him picked up his pace and started running.

The young man hit a slippery slope of rocks and came crashing down.

Mark caught up with him, pulled out his gun and fired a single shot.

Chapter 2

“Thanks, Dad. I really thought that rattlesnake was going to get me. I landed almost in the middle of him when I slid!” Rusty exclaimed.

“You’re welcome, Son. Enough of the race back to camp. We are still several really hard miles from camp. Are you able to walk?” Mark helped him get up.

“I think so. I might need one of your walking poles though.”

“Here, take one. You won’t believe the encounter I had with an older couple of Texans who live in Missouri.”

Rusty took the pole. “They’re a long way from home.”

“They said they are going to visit their son up in San Diego. The lady jumped up from their picnic lunch, went over to their car, and looked like she was digging for something. I really thought she was going to pull a gun on me and they were going to rob me. I even pulled my gun out and covered it with a piece of paper in my hand, just in case. But she only got up to get this cross penny and give it to me. She said it was to remind me that God loves me and sent His Son, Jesus Christ to die for me. The penny has a cross punched from the middle of it. See?”

“Wow, that’s a keeper!”

“I thought so. Since I have my original cross penny, I thought you might like to have this one, Son.” Mark handed the penny to Rusty.

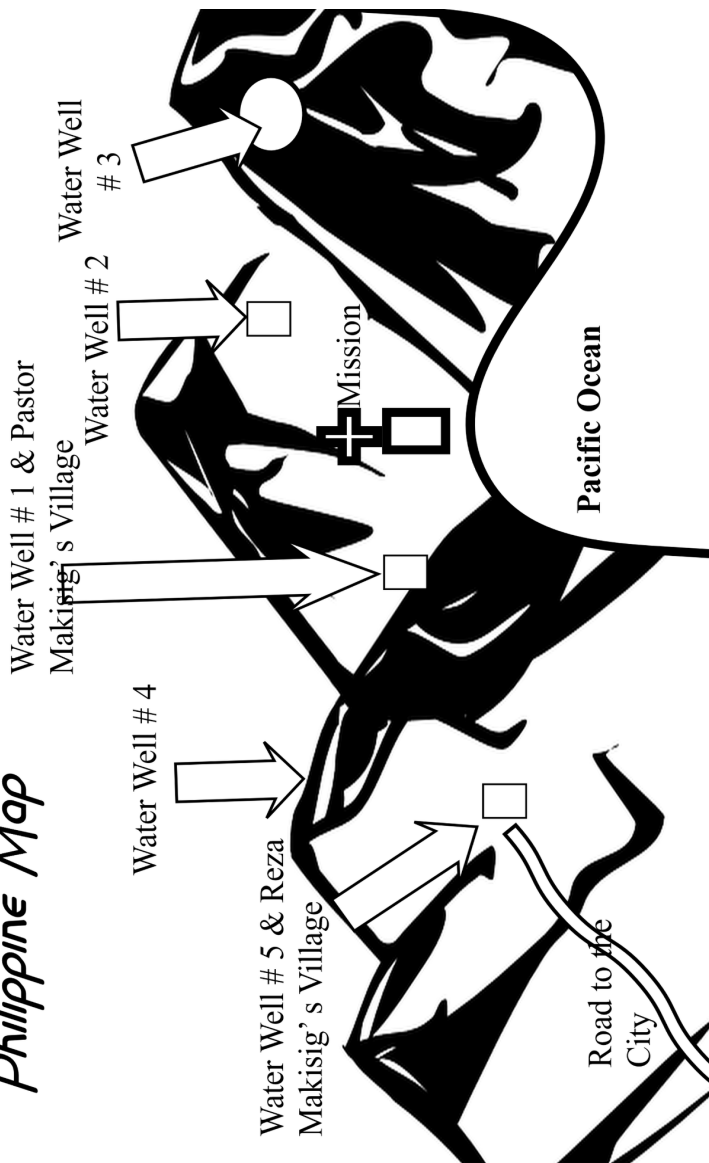
“Thanks, Dad! I would love to have this cross penny. So, what did you do when the lady gave you this cross penny?”

“I slid my gun back in my pocket and hoped they hadn’t seen it and stood there looking at this penny with my mouth wide open as they left. Then I thought about everything. And how each thing got me to where I am today, including my original cross penny, and about a gazillion pink crosses.” Mark helped his son navigate the rocky terrain.

“Tell me. I want to hear the whole story.”

“Okay, I’ll tell it as we head back to camp. It’s a long way and a long story.”

Philippine Map



In the Philippines

Just a Cup of Water Mission Team:

James, the leader

Mark Tompkins

Rusty Whitaker Jr, unable to go due to motorcycle wreck

Tony Vozzolo, lousy with tools, has a toolbelt, great at swapping, trading, & organizing

3 other young men

Sponsoring Native Pastor: Pastor Makisig

his wife, Palma

his eight-year old daughter, Amparo

his two cows called bakas, Ricci & Mutya

his bull, The Toro

his brother, Reza. He uses his water buffalo, the kalabaw, to deliver things to the area communities

Chapter 3

*(Summer, 1979, Remote Mountainous Area,
The Philippines)*

Each member of the mission team was sound asleep for the night. The wind rattled the mission building and windows as rain pummelled the tin roof. It was even louder than the snoring of the six young men from Southern California, sleeping in their kamas.

There was a soft knock on the door. The knock became louder and louder until it was a banging and pounding. Someone was yelling, "Please! Please! Wake up! Help me! Please!"

James, an experienced well driller and the leader of the mission team, was in his bed, kama, closest to the door. Although not a light sleeper, he slept lighter than anyone else in their kamas in the room.

James sleepily got up and rushed to open the door. He was surprised to see Amparo, Pastor Makisig's eight-year-old daughter all alone and dripping wet.

"James, sorry wake you. Tatay need help."

"What's wrong with your dad? Is your mother having the baby?" James asked.

"No, not sanggol. Me so sorry bother you tonight. Tatay need help. Bakas and the toro out fence. Tatay says too dangerous for me help. Tatay send me get help. Ina no help - she's very soon have sanggol - uh, baby - soon!" Amparo's broken English was spiced with Tagalog.

By this time, even the soundest sleeper in the room was awake." Hey, do any of you guys know how to wrangle bakas and the toro?" James asked.

"Bakas and toro? What are those?" Tony asked.

“Moooooo,” Amparo replied, putting her hands upon her head like horns. She had learned to act out things she needed to communicate with these guys over the last few weeks.

“Cows and the bull!” Mark correctly guessed. “Yes, I did a lot of wrangling bakas and toros back on our ranch in Southern California,” he answered as he reached for his boots. “Amparo, I will help your tatay with the bakas and his toro. You guys go back to sleep. I’ll just spend the night at Pastor Makisig’s house. It might be really late when I get through wrangling. Sounds like the fence is going to need some fixing too. Amparo, did you come over here by yourself in the dark? Sounds like the storm’s getting worse.”

“Yes, we help. Bakas and toro very important for family.”

Quickly, Mark put on his white t-shirt and his boots. He grabbed his flashlight.

“Hey, Mark!” yelled Tony.

“Yeah, Tony?”

“Here, take my toolbelt. It might come in handy.”

“Thanks.” Mark took the coveted toolbelt and put it on.

“Take good care of it, okay?”

“I will guard it with my life!”

“You better! Remember, it’s got the spare key to all the drilling equipment.”

Mark grabbed his yellow rain slicker, a garbage bag and a clean yellow t-shirt. “Amparo, here, take this yellow t-shirt and go to the other room and change. You are soaked!”

“Thanks. Not raining until here.”

Soon, Mark covered a dry Amparo with the garbage bag, tied it with some twine around her middle, hitched up the yellow t-shirt and plastic above her twine belt, and ripped out some holes for her eyes and for her thin, brown arms.

Outside, the wind was picking up even more. Obviously a storm was kicking in from the ocean front. The mission was almost at the bottom of the steep mountainside on a small plateau facing the ocean and was taking the brunt of the furor.

Mark turned to tell the men, “This storm will surely slow us down on drilling water well #3. It looks like the rainy season

is coming soon. Get some sleep now. I'll see you later when the bakas and the toro are wrangled and the storm's stopped."

"See ya."

"Be careful out there."

"Will do. Good night, guys."

"Good night." The five tired, sleepy men lay back down.

Mark closed the door, then stopped. "Wait, Amparo. A couple days ago someone at the well drilling site gave us a couple of rolls of barbed wire for your tatay. They said he spends too much time chasing his bakas and toro! Let me grab them."

Mark went around to the other side of the building and grabbed the rope attached to the wooden tow sled holding the two 80-pound rolls of barbed wire, a metal pipe and packages of staples and crimp sleeves. "Great! There's a wire stretcher here and a carrying pole, too!"

"Well, Amparo, this is heavy! Glad I don't have to carry it! It's sure raining harder."

With that, Mark started the long, dark, and muddy trek with the brave little dark-haired girl to help her tatay with his bakas and toro.

Chapter 4

Amparo was right. The storm stopped just as soon as they crossed behind the trees on the other side of the mountainside. It was dry there, but they could see the lightning and storm over the mission and that side of the mountainside.

Mark was relieved. He was also hot and took off his slicker, then put it on the tow sled. It had been a real struggle just to trudge through the muddy pathway, much less keep Amparo from falling, and drag the heavy weighted tow sled. Thankfully their journey on the dry path was really quick.

“TATAY! TATAY! Mark here! Help with bakas and the toro!” Amparo shouted when she saw her dad just outside the broken fence.

“Thank God! I am so glad to see you, Mark. Amparo, go on inside with your ina. She’s been really worried about you traveling alone in the dark. What are you wearing - a garbage sack?” Pastor Makisig asked.

“Storm by mission. Clothes wet. See?” She grabbed her wet clothes and showed her dad. “Good night, Tatay! Good night, Mark!” The little garbage-sack clad girl raced inside with her wet clothes to her waiting mom.

Mark inspected the broken-down fence. Between the trees it was mostly a makeshift collection of rocks, pieces of tin, and a few old boards. What wire was there was not barbed at all. “Whoa! I can understand how your bakas and the toro broke through. Where are they now?”

“Down the mountainside a little ways. I can get one baka in, but then it escapes again when I go to get another one,” Pastor Makisig replied.

“I see that. Oh, a couple of days ago, someone gave us some barbed wire fencing for you. I’ve got it on this tow sled. And there’s all the stuff we need to put it up except the poles and

we can use the trees for that.” Mark showed Pastor Makisig the sled and items.

“That’s good. No, that’s great - but, uh, but . . .” Pastor Makisig hesitated.

“What’s the matter, Pastor Makisig?”

“I, I uh, don’t know anything about putting up a barbed wire fence,” Pastor Makisig admitted.

Mark answered, “But I do. I helped my dad all the time on our cattle ranch. We were either putting up fence or fixing fence, sometimes in the middle of the night. Will the cows wander off too terribly far?”

“They never have. Mark, most of our income comes from those bakas and the toro. And both bakas are like my wife, very pregnant!”

“Even more reason to keep them close by. Well, you have the floodlight out here. Let’s get started on the fence. They will never stay in without it.”

Surprised by this sense of urgency, the pastor agreed. He really thought the young man would want to sleep and tackle the fence in the morning. “I see you have Tony’s toolbelt on. Did you - uh, did you . . .?”

“No, Pastor Makisig. He offered it. I didn’t steal it. It’s funny, but I don’t think he really knows how to use a single tool in it.”

The pastor just laughed. Although he dared not say it out loud, he had never seen Tony correctly use a single tool in it, either.

“Hey! Look!” Mark exclaimed. “There’s a couple pairs of leather gloves on the sled with the barbed wire. Here, Pastor Makisig, put them on. You’re going to need them. Go check on your bakas and the toro while I figure out the best way to do this fence job.”

“Okay, I will.” Pastor Makisig grabbed the gloves and went to check on the two bakas and the toro.

Chapter 5

The two men worked through the night, stapling the barbed wire to the trees. Mark positioned the wire on the inside of the trees where the cows couldn't break it down when they pushed against it. Mostly, Pastor Makisig held wire as Mark hammered the staples, stretched the wire, and put in the cinches to join wire together. Every so often, where the trees were further apart, he put stays of barbed wire in between to strengthen the fence.

“Well, Pastor, I believe we have enough done to get your bakas and the toro. We'll finish up after we corral them in. Your milk cows are friendlier than the beef cattle we had. Ours were wild and mean, not used to anybody and really hard to wrangle.”

“My bakas are so gentle even Amparo is safe around them. Ricci even lets Amparo milk her. The toro is gentle too. I started with one baka, Ricci, and I didn't know she was pregnant. I traded her heifer calf for my brother's, Reza, heifer calf. He traded another heifer calf for her.

“Later, someone who didn't have any bakas gave me the toro. They didn't want to bother with him anymore. Reza and I share him. Our bakas aren't kin to him at all. I have milk for my family with some to sell, plus they give me fertilizer for my garden. We even have vegetables from our garden to sell. And fertilizer to sell. So does Reza. We will have even more milk after Mutya has her baby.”

“This is Mutya's first calf?” Mark asked.

“Yes. Oh, Mark, Reza is going to be taking the team to the next drill site, that is site #3, several miles from where you are working now. It's a ways through rough terrain and you will have to set up sleeping camp there. When do you think you will be finished with well #2?”

“Pastor Makisig, we got through earlier than we thought. I guess we've finally figured out how to work together instead of fighting. We actually finished it yesterday. We were going to rest

up today and they were going to catch up on their laundry. I did my laundry, like I do everyday, last night after I showered.

“I was going to then bring this barbed wire to you tomorrow, and pick up the casings and screen for well #3. We left the equipment all locked up at the current site knowing it would be closer to the next site. Come to think about it, I accidentally left one of my bags in that trailer. Hmmm.”

Pastor Makisig responded, “It’ll be fine. Hopefully Reza can get you there before the rainy season really starts. He’s already moved the casings, screens, and well disinfectant there with his water buffalo. He will bring his water buffalo back to move the drill wagon. You guys sure don’t want to pull that thing by hand!”

“Well, Pastor Makisig, if last night was any indication, I would guess the rainy season has already started at least on the other side of this mountain.” Mark pointed in the direction of the mission.

“I hope not! There are so many mudslides during the rainy season and those folks a couple of slopes over really need clean drinking water. They get so sick and some of the babies even die from the dirty water.” He shook his head.

Pastor Makisig continued, “The church is growing but the people are poor. They can’t afford to pay me, so these bakas and the toro are my livelihood. Thank you for helping me and my family.”

“You’re welcome. Glad I could help.”

With a handful of food, the bakas and the toro were easily enticed to go inside the strange looking fence. Mark looked at the cows and examined their bellies. He noticed both were lying down and then getting up often, like they were very uncomfortable. “Wow, they are restless because they will be delivering calves soon. Both of them! Ricci’s smaller. Mutya’s bigger. Better tie the toro up, away from both bakas right now.”

“Okay,” said Pastor Makisig as he took the heaviest rope he had and tied the toro to a tree on the other side of the fence, away from the cows. He brought a bucket of water over to him.

“That explains the breakouts. Plus, the fence was really bad. I have so much to learn about the bakas and the toro.”

Mark ignored the comment about the bad fence. He knew the pastor had done the best he could with what he had. And, he couldn't figure out how any cow, much less the bull, had stayed inside the old fence even for an hour! “We'll make a gate here to finish up, if that's okay, Pastor.”

“Yes. That would be nice.”

“What did you name the bull?” Mark asked.

Pastor Makisig laughed. “We just call him The Toro.”

Mark laughed. “That works for me.”

Mark fashioned a workable, but simple gate with a board for the pole and barbed wire. He set it in place and closed it with a wire loop made from a piece of short barbed wire. The two men took off their gloves, wiped their brows and tossed the gloves back in the tow sled. There was some wire left and staples and cinches. Mark tossed in the wire stretcher and the metal pole. He re-holstered the hammer in Tony's toolbelt.

“Pastor Makisig, it still needs a couple more strands. But since we didn't take down your old fence, I think the bakas and the toro will stay in for now. We'll put up the other strands later on, if that's okay with you.”

“Mark, that would be fine.”

The men were admiring their hard-earned fence and gate when Amparo came out of the house and down to the pasture area. “Good morning, Tatay and Mark. Ina wants know you ready breakfast she cook.”

“Good morning, Amparo,” the men both replied.

Amparo hugged her dad and he hugged her back. “Let's go, Mark. A big tall fella like you. I know you're hungry!”

“I won't deny that!” As the three of them started up to the house, Mark turned and looked back at the two cows happily contained inside a brand new barbed wire fence. The bull was munching grass under the tree where he was securely tied. “They should stay put now,” he said.

“Yes, I agree. Amparao, what do you think about the new fence?”

“Tatay, beautiful! Noooo chase bakas and the toro so much!”

“We just have to remember to keep the gate closed,” Pastor Makisig warned.

“I will, Tatay. I will.”

The smell of silog was a welcome invitation into the kitchen. Palma, Amparo’s mom and Makisig’s wife, greeted the two tired men.

“Good morning, Mark, thank you for your help. I think the bakas and the toro will stay in now. I hope you like silog.”

Palma made a rather odd expression and her face turned red about that time. Mark noticed it but Pastor Makisig was busy washing his face and hands with his back turned and did not see it. Mark said nothing but thought she looked like she was going to explode at any minute just like the two cows.

“Yes, I like silog. Thank you,” he answered.

“Good. Amparo, fill a big plate and put it in front of Mark. Then fix one for your tatay. And give them two, no, three eggs each. I will be back in a few minutes. Please start without me.”

Amparo heaped both plates with the garlic fried rice and three sunny-side-up eggs. She placed bottles of several different kinds of sukabre (vinegar) on the table. One was mild, one was spicy, and one was very, very spicy, which Mark knew from experience not to try again.

When the pastor finished, Mark also washed his face and hands and then sat down. Amparo joined them. Pastor Makisig thanked God for the food, the new fence and especially for Mark’s help, and for all the soon-coming babies.

Chapter 6

“That was delicious, Pastor Makisig, I’m going to rest a little bit out there close (Y-A-W-N), ‘scuse me, to your bakas, just to make sure everything goes smoothly with the babies.(Y-A-W-N), ‘scuse me.”

Mark sure hoped that would be the truth. He was certain the newest cow was carrying twins and there’s always a higher risk of trouble with first-time moms and anytime with twins. Together, it could be a disaster waiting to happen.

“Good, I’m going to rest some myself (Y-A-W-N), ‘scuse me, must be contagious,” said Pastor Makisig with a tired laugh.

Amparo started to clear the table. “Tatay, I do dishes. Ina resting too. Oh, Mark, me get t-shirt. Thank you getting me dry last night.”

“You’re welcome. Thank you, I will put it on later and I’ll leave it here for right now.” Mark yawned again and so did the pastor. Even Amparo yawned.

They all laughed then Amparo went to her room and got Mark’s slightly worn shirt, the garbage sack with holes, the still wet twine, and a rolled up pallet. “Here, make good kama for you sleep.”

“Thank you. I appreciate that. Tell your Ina how much I enjoyed the silog. It was great!”

Mark nodded his head toward the pastor, picked up the bedding bundle, twine and the garbage sack. He went outside and spread his kama under a tree close enough to the cows to watch them through the fence, but not close enough to interfere in their space. The cows were obviously even more uncomfortable. The wait could be minutes or a few hours. But baby calves were going to happen really soon.

As soon as he lay down under a shade tree, he fell asleep. As the sun moved so did the shade over his bed.

Chapter 7

“Mark! Mark! Wake up! Baka Ricci!” It was Amparo. She was not only yelling, but she was shaking him too.

Mark woke up with a start. He felt sunburn on his arms, part of his neck and one side of his face. He had only been asleep about an hour and a half, maybe two hours. He looked over at the cow and sat up. Amparo sat down next to him.

“Yes, Amparo, she’s having her calf. See, the front hooves are coming out. Pretty soon there will be a new baka or toro,” Mark said.

“Ina’s having sanggol - baby too! Tatay sent me tell you.”

“Wow, that’s great!”

“Mark, there! See!”

“Yes,” Mark replied. “The baby calf has been born. Watch, it’ll get up real quick and stand on wobbly legs and drink some milk from Ricci.”

“Mark, look! It have no face!” Amparo pointed to the lifeless calf, lying on the ground.

“Yes, it does!” He charged through the gate to the baby calf. “It just needs some help!”

Amparo followed quickly behind. Mark bent down and jerked the clinging membrane off the little heifer’s face. He opened her mouth and pulled out some mucus. “Come on, little girl, you can breath. Come on, breathe.” He rubbed her hard and made her mad.

Ricci was not very happy with what Mark was doing to her baby, either. The Toro was getting restless and Mutya was mooing loudly. Mark wasn’t sure if The Toro’s rope was going to hold.

The calf made some noise and started breathing. The noise drew Ricci’s attention back to her baby and off Mark and Amparo. Ricci nuzzled her baby, licked her, and urged her to get up on those wobbly legs and nurse.

Mark backed away with his arm in front of Amparo. "Let's let Ricci do what bakas do with their new babies. Wow, that was close. I am so very glad you woke me up when you did. That little girl needed some help!"

"But she no face! How you find face?" Amparo asked.

"Well, I saw that happen a few times back with my dad's bakas. Sometimes it looks like they don't have a face, but it's just covered up. But that covering has to come off so the little calf can breath and eat. Let's go back on the other side of the fence. The Toro's not too happy and might break his rope and try to come inside the fence. Mutya's going to have her baby soon and she's maybe a little dangerous right now too."

Mark pushed the little girl behind him as he slowly backed his way to the gate. "Stay behind me, Amparo, and don't move quickly." He inched his way back to the gate watching the bakas and the toro.

"Look, Mark, sanggol baka stand. Get milk."

"Yes, she is. Ricci makes a fine ina, doesn't she?"

"Yes. I tell Tatay and Ina sanggol baka!" Amparo raced off to the kitchen door.

Mark washed his hands with the laundry soap outside by the water barrel. "I wish I could take a shower and put on all clean clothes. I don't mind getting dirty, I just don't like staying dirty and sweaty," he muttered to himself. Mark peeled off his dirty, at-one-time white t-shirt and began to wash it in the laundry water. "At least, I can put on a pretty much clean shirt. I don't think Amparo got it too dirty last night. It's cleaner than this one, anyways."

As he slung his wet t-shirt over the clothesline, Amparo came running out. "Mark! Mark, Ina's sanggol no face! Find please?"

Mark didn't know he could move as fast as he did. The kitchen door slammed behind him. He raced in the direction he saw Palma go earlier.

"That baby's in trouble, but another one is coming. Amparo said you found the face of the calf. Can you find his

face? He's turning blue!" Pastor Makisig asked while he was catching another baby.

Mark said nothing but grabbed the tiny, lifeless, blue baby. He quickly peeled the stuck membrane off the baby's mouth and nose, swept a finger inside his mouth and removed a plug of mucus. "Come on, little man, breath. Come on, you can do it."

Nothing. The only crying in the room came from Palma and Amparo.

He turned the tiny blue baby upside down and watched as strings of mucus tumbled out. Mark said, "I told you to breathe!" He then popped that tiny blue-brown behind, as Amparo watched in horror.

"Mark, no hurt him! He little, he brother!" she sobbed.

Before Mark could answer, the blue-brown baby cried and the blueness began going away.

As Mark handed the baby to Palma, they heard another cry. Pastor Makisig cut the second baby's umbilical cord and tied it just like he had done the first baby. He handed the second, perfect little brown baby to Palma.

Then he sat down on the floor next to the bed and wept, thanking God for the two little baby boys. Soon, he was fast asleep even before he could say "amen."

Mark took Amparo by the hand and led her out of the room. "Come on, Amparo, let's go check on Mutya. Your baby brothers are both okay. Look how happy they are in your ina's arms."

She willingly followed but asked why he spanked the tiny blue baby.

"Amparo, I had to make him mad enough to cry so he would breathe. Just like I had to make Ricci's little calf mad so she would breathe. I wasn't trying to be mean and I would never hurt the baby. Okay?" He grabbed the slightly worn t-shirt on the chair and put it on. "Ouch, my sunburn hurts," he said as he slid it over his arm, face and neck.

Amparo giggled. "You red one side! Understand why hit brother. Look, Mark! Look!"

His eyes followed her outstretched hand. He saw Ricci nursing her calf and Mutya nursing two calves. The Toro had calmed down and was busy munching grass.

“Would you look at that! Mutya’s had her baby too. But it was twins, just like your ina had.”

“Twin boys?” she asked.

“No, twin girls.”

“So today we got two boys and three girls?”

“That’s what it looks like. What a long, busy two days and night. Go tell your tatay about the twin girls and tell him all three calves and their inas are fine. No, don’t wake him up. If your ina’s awake, whisper it to her quietly. Your tatay is very tired and needs to rest too.”

Mark moved his kama back in the shade and sat down on it. He meant to stay awake but couldn’t resist lying down. As soon as he did that, he fell asleep in the cool breeze.

Chapter 8

“Mark! Mark!”

“Amparo, why are you shaking me?”

“My tatay, I get you come. Uncle Reza here, kalabaw.”

Seeing where the sun was now located, Mark realized he had been asleep for a few hours. He glanced out at the bakas and the toro. Makisig and Reza were admiring them. Mark quickly got up, went out the gate, and shook Reza’s hand. “Good to see you again.”

“And good to see you too, Mark. The calves look fine. Thank you for saving Ricci’s little girl,” Reza said.

“Tatay, tell him Mark hit brother?”

Reza looked at his brother and then at Mark before anyone could answer. “Well, I know the baby was born, I heard him crying when I brought the kalabaw around to tie him up.”

“Uncle Reza, not one brother, two brothers.” Amparo held up two fingers. “One brother no face. Mark find face. Hit him, make cry!” The excited little girl spoke quickly.

“That’s right. Come, my brother, and meet your nephews. And you come, too, Mark.” Makisig motioned for all to follow him into the kitchen.

Palma was there, holding both sleeping babies. She had just finished nursing them. “Well, hello, Reza. Welcome to our house. I’m sorry, I have no food prepared to offer you.”

“I think you have been quite busy. I will cook for everybody after I meet these two little ones. What are their names?”

Palma answered as she nodded toward one baby, “Our oldest son is Gabriel Mark. Mark gave him a mouth so he could speak as God’s messenger.”

Mark was surprised.

“And his younger brother is Dakila Crisanto because he will be a great follower of Christ,” Palma added.

“Congratulations on your little boys and your three girls!” Reza shook his brother’s hand and Mark’s hand. “We will celebrate with a feast!”

Mark had no idea what was served, but he stayed away from the extra spicy vinegar.

After the meal, Reza asked Amparo to clean off the table and do the dishes, which she willingly did. By this time Palma had laid the twins back in the crib by her bed and lay back down herself.

“Mark, let’s be going so we can get to the mission before dark. We’ll get an early start in the morning. I brought the kalabaw to pull the drilling sled. Are you ready to drill water well #3? James tells me you are going to be the boss on this one.”

“Reza, he tells me that, too, but I dunno about that. Yes, let’s go.”

“I will pray for us before we leave.” The three men and the little girl held hands as Reza began to pray.

Then Mark grabbed his clean and now dry sorta-white shirt, his slightly used garbage bag, his yellow rain slicker, twine, and Tony’s toolbelt off the tow sled, and followed Reza to get his kalabaw.

Chapter 9

“Mark, you really did an excellent job on this fence. How did you learn to do that?” Reza asked as the two men walked through the outside gate.

“Well, I grew up on a small beef cattle ranch in Southern California. It’s real hilly and rocky terrain. We didn’t have any ranch hands and if something needed doing, we usually did it ourselves or at least tried to. My folks taught me how to use all sorts of tools.”

“Like those in Tony’s toolbelt?” Reza interrupted, laughing as he jangled the toolbelt around Mark’s waist.

“Yes,” Mark laughed, “and even more. My parents both knew how to use any kind of tool and how to figure things out. The three of us stretched many miles of barbed wire together. I went from watching them do it, and, no doubt, getting in their way, to learning how to hold it, and then to doing it myself. It was a big rite of passage for me when they sent me out alone with tools to check the fence and fix it.”

Reza laughed. “They probably just wanted to be alone but it’s good for a family to teach the little ones how to do things. So, who’s helping them on the ranch now?”

“Sadly, we don’t have the ranch anymore. My dad died when I was sixteen. Because of high taxes, Mom had to sell everything really quick. Plus, she didn’t want me to drop out of school to work on the ranch. Looking back, I don’t think I could have done both.”

Chapter 10

They walked out the back gate where the bakas and the toro were, down by the marshy stream filled with giant reeds. “Reza, what would have happened if you put your water buffalo in with these guys?” Mark pointed to the cows with their calves and the bull.

“I don’t know! My kalabaw weighs about a thousand American pounds and I didn’t want to take a chance. He does a great job in our rice fields pulling sleds and then moving supplies from one community to the others. My community is about three miles past Makisig’s community. But we are the only one with a road that leads out, eventually, in the direction of the city. All the few special supplies come to me to deliver out to the surrounding areas. But my kalabaw’s never been around regular cows, much less the calves, before. Come to think of it, I don’t think he’s even seen my bakas.”

“Is that why the mission building is located where it’s at? Is that about the center of these small communities?”

“Yes, it is. Makisig wanted to preach and minister to all of them, but spent too much time traveling back and forth to make a living and preach. That little plateau on the mountainside made for a great location. It split the distance to every community. More people could come,” Reza answered.

The two men and the water buffalo quickly made the journey on the well-worn path to the tree line. They stopped in disbelief at what they did NOT see.

“Where’s the mission?” Mark yelled as he started running toward where it used to be.

“NO! STOP!!” Reza grabbed Mark and tackled him. “The mountain may collapse on you! Looks like there was a big mudslide that tossed the building and everything in it down to the rocky shoreline. Did it rain?”

“Yes, but way more than just a rain. It stormed really bad. We would call it a gully-washer in California, when Amparo

came and got help last night. We were all sleeping and she woke us up. But this is unbelievable!”

“Mark, they’re gone. All of them. High tide came in before daylight this morning. When the tide went out, it washed everything out to sea. We can’t do anything. Neither can anybody else.”

The two men sat there in stunned silence staring at the partially drying mud. It was as if the building and its occupants never even were there. The magnitude of the loss of lives of the water drilling team hit both of them as hard as the mudslide hit the mission building.

Chapter 11

Still stunned, Reza finally reached for Mark's shoulder. "Come on, Mark, let's go back to Makasig's house. In the morning, we'll go to my house and you can stay there. I have plenty of room."

The two men got up in silence and started walking with the kalabaw. They both looked back at the muddy, empty mountainside just before they got to the tree line.

"Look, I see something!" Reza said as he pointed to something caught around the bottom of a tree.

Mark recognized his laundry. The wind had blown it and neatly wrapped it securely around a tree. "It's my laundry. I washed my clothes when we got through with water well #2. I don't believe it!" He rushed over to find his clothesline, still tied to a broken limb, his socks, a pair of underwear, a pair of pants and his red plaid shirt. The clothes pins were even intact. Mark gathered his treasure, including the small limb anchoring everything down.

"Storms do some really odd things sometimes, don't they?" Reza watched as Mark gathered his possessions.

"Yes, but now I at least have a change of clothes!"

"That's a good thing. You are so much bigger than anybody in any of these communities. We would all be willing to share, but you couldn't fit into anything anybody's got."

Mark had noticed he was like a giant compared to every Filipino he had met or seen since he entered the country a few weeks back.

Chapter 12

Mark rolled his clothes and clothes pins into a bundle inside his yellow rain slicker and tied it with the clothesline. He slung the limb over his shoulder. As in a daze the two men with the kalabaw made the journey back to Makisig's house in silence. The only sounds were the footsteps, the occasional snort of the kalabaw, and a sob from one of the men.

Chapter 13

Close to sunset, Makisig and Amparo were out looking at the baby calves.

“Look! Tatay! Uncle Reza! Mark! Back! Not spend night?” Amparo pointed toward Reza as he was tying up the kalabaw around the tree by the stream.

“What’s the matter, my brother? Why do you both look so sad? Are you both crying?” Makisig asked, as he ran toward them. “You are crying!”

Reza and Mark silently shook their heads.

Finally, Reza was able to compose himself enough to speak with broken, sobbing words. “Makisig, they’re gone. They’re all gone.”

Makisig furrowed his brow and asked, “What do you mean, *they’re all gone*? What’s *all gone*?”

“Everything. The mission. The rest of the mission team. Everything,” Reza sobbed.

“How, my brother?”

“Mudslide. Must have happened a little while after Amparo got Mark. Everything washed down into the rocks and high tide . . .”

“Came in before daylight and washed everything out to sea when it went out,” Mark finished the sentence.

Makisig fell to his knees and began to weep. “Oh, God, why? They were Your servants. Why, God, WHY?”

All four of them sobbed until just before dusk.

Chapter 14

Reza took a couple of boards and painted a warning about the mudslide. “Come, help me, Mark.” Mark followed Reza to the mission path just past Makisig’s pasture and pounded the warning sign into the ground with Tony’s hammer. “No one can go there, it is too dangerous. Once a mountainside has a mudslide, it usually has many more slides, and it doesn’t even have to be raining to trigger them. We will need to go on the other side and warn them with signs.”

“Yes, my brother, but it’s too late and dangerous tonight,” Makisig warned. “It’s a very long way around the mountain. Spend the night here, and you can leave early in the morning. It will take you all day just to get there. But it must be done very soon.” Makisig replied. “Come, we will find something to eat and I will tell Palma the sad news. Mark, you said you left the drilling equipment at water well #2. Is that right?”

“Yes, Pastor Makisig. It was not at the mission. Hopefully, it will be okay,” Mark answered.

At daybreak the next morning, Mark emptied the small tow sled with the barbed wire and fencing supplies. He watched Reza hook it up behind the kalabaw. Then Mark, Pastor Makisig, and Reza put the remaining warning sign, some food supplies, water, Mark’s yellow slicker bag of clothes, and some of Makisig’s clothes on the tow sled. Even though there was several years age difference in the brothers, they were both the same size.

“Hop on, Mark. My kalabaw will be very happy to pull both of us on the sled. It’s a day-long journey and very rough terrain just to get to the spot to post this warning sign. That’s why everybody cuts through by the mission path,” Reza said. “We will then take the drilling equipment to the next site and leave it for a few days.”

“No, we will drill the well and bring the equipment back with us,” Mark insisted.

“Okay. If that’s what you want to do.” Reza agreed.

“Makisig, tell my helpers to take care of everything. We’ll be gone for a long time while drilling water well #3.”

“I will take care of it, my brother. God go with you.”

Chapter 15

It was a very bumpy journey the long way around to the small community that was enjoying fresh clean water, thanks to water well #2. Reza called everyone together and made the announcement about the mudslide. Everyone watched as Mark pounded the warning sign at the beginning of the path the short distance to the where the mission used to be.

The community watched in silence as Mark took the spare key out of Tony's toolbag and opened the locked box on the drilling sled.

"Yes! I have it!" Mark was overjoyed when he pulled out his small canvas duffel bag buried among the drilling tools and the manual for how to drill a water well. "It's got my tickets, my ID, my traveling papers, my money, my picture of Gwen, a piece of a comb! I was thinking I left it here - but I wasn't sure!"

Everyone clapped and cheered for Mark's discovery of the drab green canvas bag with a shoulder strap. His mother had bought it for him at the army surplus store to take on the trip. He undid his yellow *hobo* package and put the contents inside the duffel bag. He also put in the broken limb.

As the sun was setting, Reza unhitched the tow sled. A very grateful woman came over to Mark and thanked him for the water well. She disappeared to her house and came running back. "Mark, you may need this. I want you to have it."

It was a giant bar of homemade soap. He hugged her back and thanked her. The other villagers thanked him too.

Reza and Mark spent the night under the stars, close to the kalabaw.

Chapter 16

At first light, Reza hitched up the lighter tow sled behind the drilling sled. Then they started the bumpy trek to water well #3 wellsite with Reza's kalabaw towing both sleds.

The villagers were very surprised to see just Mark and not the whole team when the kalabaw pulled up next to the other well supplies Reza delivered a few days ago.

Reza called everyone together and explained. With the promise of clean drinking water, all of the men and older boys volunteered to help use this strange equipment. They knew their water supply was making so many people sick. Mark went through the dog-eared drilling manual and got everything organized. Reza translated when needed.

This small community had no school and was too far away from other communities for the children to travel back and forth. Many of the villagers had never been to school and had never learned English.

The work went slow without a trained team. Mistakes had to be fixed. Mark knew this process would be the same at the remaining well sites. And it was.

Weeks later when water well #5 was finally finished, Mark found himself on a ten-hour bus ride, alone, and heading back to the airport. His drab green duffel bag was stuffed with Tony's toolbelt, his well worn change of clothes, and a small sliver of his prized homemade soap. The half of a comb now had more teeth missing than teeth remaining in it. The limb, long ago discarded, as well as the totally worn out, once-white t-shirt, were missing. So was the torn yellow slicker.

Chapter 17

It had been four days since Mark said goodbye to Reza. After walking a long way to catch the bus, which broke down and quickly turned the ten hour-bus ride into fifteen or sixteen hours, Mark finally made his way to the Philippine airport.

The smell wafting from the food court prompted his mumbling out loud to no one in particular: “I am so hungry! But at least I’m not puking and running to the non-existent bathrooms. It was nice of Reza to offer me some food for the trip but I sure don’t regret saying *I can’t keep it cold and I would rather be hungry than sick*. I still remember the three days of food poisoning caused by food that had spoiled from not being refrigerated. And it didn’t even taste bad or smell bad. Yep, being hungry is bad but way better than being as sick as a dog!”

Chapter 18

Mark's airplane tickets were open-ended and easy enough to turn into boarding passes at each airport once they found someone who spoke English. It seemed like every segment of the long journey back to Southern California was one delay after another.

One flight left late, causing him to miss the connecting flight. That was repeated a couple of times. He slept on the floor, washed up in the men's room but had no deodorant, washed whatever shirt he was wearing with his sliver of soap and laid it over a chair to dry at night while he tried to sleep.

When he flew during a meal time he was able to eat whatever was served. When he didn't fly during a meal, he ate the small snack of cookies or a tiny bag of peanuts and drank a soda the stewardess served on the plane.

Yesterday had been one of those snack-only flights. Today his flight was too late for breakfast and too early for lunch. After deplaning, Mark walked through the food court on the way to catch his last flight, which was stand-by.

"Man, I wish I could buy anything to eat!" He stopped and pulled out his wallet and counted his money. "Well, it's still \$13.00 - like it was going to magically grow since the last time I looked. Better not spend any, I've got to have every penny for the bus ticket from the airport out to the boonies. Why did Mama stay so far out from the city?"

As he put his wallet back in his pocket, he watched a teenager throw a perfectly good hamburger into the trash and shout at his mother: "I told you I didn't want any cheese. You ruined it, now order the right one this time!"

"I would have eaten the hamburger with or without cheese. I can't believe his mother is letting him get away with that. Mama would never let me talk to her that way and I would have just gone hungry throwing it away." Mark realized he had said

what he was thinking out loud when a passing traveler chimed in with a “me too.”

Mark quickly found the terminal and the gate for his flight only to hear the gate agent tell him, “I’m sorry, but this flight looks like it’s going to be full. If someone doesn’t show up to board, I can get you on. If not, I will change your stand-by to a confirmed seat. But the next plane doesn’t leave until 9:37 in the morning at this gate, although that might change.”

“Well, that’s what happens with flying stand-by. Thank you,” Mark politely responded, then sat down to wait. He glanced around and spied a quarter up against the wall underneath a chair. “Oh, yeah!” He crawled under it to clasp the quarter. Sitting back down, he smiled and watched the gate agent pick up her microphone.

“Come on, come on, call me up!” he whispered.

“Last boarding call for flight 2930 to San Diego.” She looked at him and shook her head “no” but did motion for him to come to her. By the time he got there, the gate was closed and she was already creating the ticket for his next flight. He settled down for one more hungry night in an airport.

Chapter 19

Mark grabbed his drab green duffel bag and pulled out his last boarding pass as they called for boarding his flight to San Diego. “Thank You, God, almost home.” He breathed a sigh of relief.

“Excuse me, I have the window seat,” he said to a mom and her little boy. She turned her legs and he scrambled over them, shoved his bag under the seat in front of him and sat down.

Staring at him, the little boy blurted out, “You’re big. Really big.”

“Yes, I am,” Mark responded as he settled in his seat and fished out his seat belt. “Have you been looking out the window? What’s out there?”

“A bunch of men doing a bunch of things! Look, there’s that funny little truck pulling a wagon with suitcases. I wonder if mine’s on it?”

“What does your suitcase look like?” Mark asked. “We’ll look for it together.”

“It’s bright green and it glows in the dark!”

“Then let’s look for a bright green suitcase. That funny little truck is called a belt loader. See, the luggage handlers toss the luggage on that big belt and then the belt moves and takes the luggage up inside the plane’s cargo section. Men inside the cargo section of the plane then put the luggage where it belongs.”

“Oh, I didn’t know that. Belt loader.” The little boy turned his head toward his mom and asked. “Mama, did you know that was a belt loader?”

“Look, is that your suitcase?” Mark pointed to a bright green suitcase that was the last piece of luggage on the conveyor belt. The three of them leaned toward the window and watched as the airplane swallowed the bright green piece of luggage.

“Yes! Yes! I see it. Mama, the plane can leave now - it’s got my suitcase on it!”

Soon, the stewardess read the required safety warning and Mark felt the pushback tug push the plane out from the gate.

Mark's stomach rumbled as he helped the small boy quickly latch his seat belt.

"Mister, is your bear growling?" the small seatmate asked.

"My bear?"

"Yes, your bear. Is it growling?" He pointed to Mark's hairy stomach poking out through a hole in his well-worn, well-faded, but clean, and nearly-dry, yellow t-shirt.

It was the t-shirt the water well drilling team wore. They were given four each with their names, a water pump, and a cup of water screen-printed on it. Mark's was the only one left, except for Rusty's brand new ones.

Right where the water was supposed to be coming out of the pump there was a hole. It was one of several, including under both arms on the much-worn shirt.

"Shhhh, Son," the boy's mother warned. "Let the man alone. It's not polite to point."

"Well," Mark looked down and felt his face get hot. "No, no bear. Just my stomach growling."

He put his hand over his *bear* and turned again to watch as the plane taxied down to the runway. He sighed and mumbled to himself, "This is going to be a long flight and I'm already tired and hungry. I can't get home soon enough."