

## Chapter 23

### *A Call to Africa.*

What should I do now that I had time on my hands? My medication was working and I was sleeping a few hours each night. Physically, I felt well but my mind was still weary. Gradually four desires began to form.

I would like to do some volunteer work on board the Anastasis. It was now in West Africa but it would be good to take time out 'scraping rust' - or whatever else was needed.

Maybe I should go to Hawaii. YWAM had opened the University of the Nations there and I could go to a Crossroads School for five months. It would be nice to 'take in' instead of 'giving out' all the time.

I could go to Latin America to come alongside the missionaries there. I had already been to Mexico and had seen first hand the need for a pastor to the missionaries.

Maybe I should start a school in Victoria to teach the fundamentals of the Word and to train disciples for missions.

Two years before, I had been asked to serve on the Canadian Board of Mercy Ships, the maritime arm of YWAM responsible for the M/V Anastasis. This was simply a legal requirement to enable Canadian donors to receive tax deductible receipts. We were to hold annual meetings which could be conducted by 'conference call' telephone. Thus it was, in mid-October, that Don Stephens, president of Mercy Ships, conducted a one-hour conference call meeting, at the end of which I asked him to call me on a private matter. I wanted to know his thoughts on the first two ideas I have recorded. Could I be of any use on board the ship? Was there any value in my attending a Crossroads School? He said he'd call back. Don left shortly afterwards to visit S.E.Asia and my request was forgotten.

It was not until a month later that he finally called, by which time other circumstances made it impossible for me to either travel to West Africa or Hawaii - at least for three months. He apologised for his forgetfulness and then listened as I explained why I had requested his call. Then Don said, "I have another reason for calling. Last evening, our Council met and the present chaplain asked for a leave of absence. Would you and Anne be willing to come on board as our chaplains? Here is my fax number. Get back to me as soon as you and Anne make your decision"!

I called Anne at work, fully expecting a negative answer. There was no way she would be willing to leave our home, our daughters and grandchildren to live in community on board a ship in the heat of West Africa. I could not believe my ears when she said, "When do we leave?" I was sure I had the wrong number! She was as surprised as I was by her reply but we have found that the Lord always gives grace just when it is needed. Arrangements were made for us to join the ship in Rotterdam in May of 1991, just as it returned from its first trip to minister in Ghana, West Africa.

While waiting for the ship, we took the opportunity to attend a Crossroads School in Lindale, Texas, home of Mercy Ships. We had a wonderful, relaxing three months enjoying the teaching and fellowship. Later, during our first week on board ship, I was invited to teach at the Discipleship Training School (DTS) and then I realised that within four months I was doing all four things I had desired. However, here I was alongside not one missionary but over three hundred! I know how privileged I was to serve on board this ship but can only look back in amazement at the way the Lord led me in every step to bring me there. I know the valley of 1990 was very deep but He had brought me now to a mountain top that was very high. It is always true that deep valleys precede high mountains.

I have watched people come on board with grotesque facial deformities, having little self esteem and being considered a curse within their own society. I have watched the same people walk off with their heads held high after our surgeons had given them dignity. I have been to the medical and dental clinics and watched

hopelessness turned into hope as the dedicated volunteers served the needs of a people with no access to the medical care we take for granted. I can anticipate the blessings we have left in countries where we built a school or hospital wing or clinic; where fresh water and hygienic latrines help stop the killer diseases. My highest delight, however, was in the opportunity I had to minister to the missionaries and pastors in weekly seminars and conferences. As I watched unity grow between them and heard their expressions of appreciation for the teaching, I knew I have been truly blessed by the Lord. In Sierra Leone, for example, I was able to teach over 150 church leaders, three hours each week, for a total of eleven weeks! Even though I had never been to Theological College (which I regret), I taught all the leaders of the main denominations of that country - 23 men - for two days.

Change a pastor and you change a church; change 100 pastors and you change a nation!! What a mountain-top privilege!