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I Forgive My Husband's Killers

A missionary's wife tells how he died bringing the word of God into the jungle

By Mrs. MARILOU MCCULLY

As told to David Enlow

[This is a two-page spread with text and images distributed between both pages.]

I remember that Sunday afternoon, last January 8th, in every detail. I sat by the radio in our little missionary home in the jungles surrounding Arajuno, Ecuador, with our three-year-old Stevie on my lap and our year-old Mike in his crib near by. And I could feel, occasionally, the blessed proddings [sic] of our unborn child deep within my body.

At 4:30 p.m. we missionary wives were to get another radio report from my husband, Ed McCully, and his four fellow missionaries, waiting on the beach of the Curaray River for a rendezvous with the Auca Indians, the fiercest of the South American tribes. The Aucas, totally uncivilized, had killed all those venturing into their domain.

It was a thrilling time, for I knew how the hearts of our husbands were singing at the prospect of bringing the Lord's word to these Stone-Age people. They had made a previous contact with two women and a man of the tribe and now they were on the verge of a history-making mass introduction.

"All is going well," their 12:30 radio broadcast had told us. "While flying over the Auca houses we saw about ten Auca Indians headed for the beach. They had already traveled about three-fourths of the day's journey from their village. We judge they will be here for the afternoon service. We'll report again at 4:30."

For the afternoon service! That was the way Ed and the other men thought. They hadn't even met these killers of the jungle yet and already they were planning to include them in prayer service.

But 4:30 came and went with no word. A feeling of uneasiness swept over me. I remember telling myself I couldn't stand it if Ed didn't come back. At that very moment, we found out later, Ed lay dead beside the plane and the other missionaries floated lifeless in the turgid current of the Curaray River, their bodies speared and hacked by the aborigines they'd gone to befriend.

Now that I've had time to think, I know I was wrong when I thought I couldn't stand it. My newest son, Matthew Jay, born last February, has never seen his father. Stevie may have a vague memory or two, but to little Mike, like Matthew, Ed McCully will always be only a shadowy story until that day when they meet in heaven. But what a wonderful story! Walking with his memory alone is a comfort and a strength to me. It was that way from the beginning.

I met Ed McCully in 1950 at a young people's banquet at the First Baptist Church in my hometown of Pontiac, Michigan. I was the church's youth leader and choir director. Ed was a

six-foot-two, 190-pound ex-football stat at Wheaton College. A year earlier, in San Francisco, he'd won the Hearst national oratorical contest in competition with more than 10,000 students.

We met again at the Founders Week Conference at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, and had a few dates after that. On June 29, 1951, we were married. I don't think any two people were ever more in love.

Ed talked of missionary work, feeling a special calling for the Indians of Ecuador. In September we headed for California, where he enrolled in the Missionary Medicine course at the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. In April 1952, our first son was born. In June Ed finished his studies and we returned to the Midwest.

The long-awaited day came on December 10, 1952, when we sailed for South America. We spent the next 11 months in Quito, Ecuador, while Ed learned Spanish and made exploratory missions among the Quechua Indians. In October 1953, a Mission Aviation Fellowship plane flew us to our new home in Arajuno, among the Quechuas.

It was a wonderful thrill to Ed and the other missionaries in the area – Nate Saint, a pilot, Jim Elliot, Ed's Stateside friend; Pete Fleming and Roger Youderian – so see the Quechuas absorb their teaching. But suddenly tragedy struck. The savage Aucas, dreaded by all other Indians, speared a Quechua woman and her two children to death. It was both a warning and an invitation. The missionaries felt they were being directed by God to bring His word to this unapproachable tribe.

Jim Elliot discovered an Auca slave girl in a hacienda and from her learned some of the Auca language. He passed it on to the others. When the Quechuas told Ed fearfully that they heard the weird sounds of the Aucas in the distance he would march up and down the airstrip yelling in the Auca tongue: "I like you. I want to be your friend."

Then a wonderful thing happened. Nate Saint, flying off course one day, spotted a settlement of Aucas only 12 minutes flying time from Arajuno. There was wild excitement...

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...among the missionaries, of course. A plan was devised to contact them. Nate would fly his plane in slow circles over the Auca village, lowering a gift-laden rope which would be held to a tight circle by a gravitational pull.

On the first try an aluminum pot filled with trinkets was dropped. The Aucas stayed out of sight. On the next few flights machetes, kettles, shirts, trousers, and bright buttons were dropped, with the Aucas appearing in larger and larger numbers until the whole village of 35 to 40 watched the operation with evident glee. Then they began sending up gifts of their own, via the rope system.

It looked like the ice had been thoroughly broken. But how to make physical contact? The answer came on January 3rd last. Nate flew right in to a firm landing on a Curaray River beach, closer to the Auca village. Nate left Ed there while he returned for Jim and Roger. In following flights Nate brought in material for a tree-house and other supplies. They all slept in the tree-

house that night, a Tuesday. On Wednesday Pete joined the party and he and Nate flew over the Auca village, shouting through a loudspeaker: "We want to be your friends. We like you." But that day and the next there was no word from the Aucas.

On Friday all five missionaries yelled in the brooding jungle, hoping for a contact. Then the miracle – (Continued on following page)

[Illustration of Ed McCully greeting a Waorani man. Illustrated by Sam Bates].

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[Photograph of Jim and Betty Elliot, Ed and Marilou McCully (with Stevie), and Pete and Olive Fleming].

...at 11 a. m. there came a gruff voice from the other side of the river and an Auca man about 20, a woman about 30 and a girl about 15 appeared. They seemed calm and relaxed. They understood some of Ed's language. Ed gave the man, whom they nicknamed "George," a model plane. The woman showed no fright; the young girl childishly flapped her arms in imitation of the aircraft. "George" even traveled as a passenger on a short flight over the Auca village.

The missionaries invited all three to sleep under an aluminum shelter on the beach that night, but at about 6:30 p. m. the girl left, vanishing into the jungle, the man followed close behind and the woman, after another half hour, departed too. Surely, the missionaries now thought, there would be another contact.

On Saturday, Nate flew over the Auca village several times. "George," clad in the Navy blue sweatshirt they'd given him, waved exuberantly. Two other Auca men bowed down and pointed to the beach, as if to say, "We are going there." But they did not come that day.

On the next day – the fateful Sunday of January 8th – came the joyously message from the men, promising a meeting in time for the "afternoon service." Then followed the significant silence and – at last – the dreadful discovery.

Then whole world knows what the search parties found – Ed's broken body beside the stripped plane (a faithful Quechua brought his watch back to me), the bodies of the other four missionaries floating down the river. Their mortal remains will not last long in the streaming jungle, but their spirits will commune with God forever.

I do not hate the Aucas, nor do the other missionaries' wives. Some persons may wonder why five intelligent men risked their lives to bring the word of God to a few uncivilized natives. The answer is simple. They were seeking treasure, much as the gold hunter and the oil prospector brave perils for a promised prize. Except that the treasure they sought was the Divine revelation that lies in all human hearts – even those of uncivilized savages.

I do not think that their deaths were in vain. On my last flight to Arajuno before returning to the United States to give birth to Matthew, I sighted two newly made green clearings in the jungle.

After landing I found that the Quechuas knew nothing of them. I believe they were Auca clearings, made by those of the savage tribe who remembered the big bird and invited its return. If that is so – and I pray God it is – my Ed McCully and his confreres have planted a seed, however shallow.

I think that when my sons grow up to the inquisitive stage and press me for a description of their father, I shall answer them:

He was a sower of the Lord. He cast his seed on fallow ground, and lo, there were fruits thereof.”