

# In the Line of Fire

Bullets were flying everywhere. Carl and I were on the ground, backs against the wall while shots were being fired all around us in every direction. We were definitely in the line of fire.

About six months earlier, we had been back in the States. After living overseas for six and a half years Darlene and I were guests of my parents for a few weeks, trying to hear from the Lord about our next move. To be honest, we weren't as eager as in earlier years to be 'road warriors' of a sort for Christ. As self supported missionaries, we were virtually penniless most of the time and though we always had enough, we were tired.

About a year earlier, our first boy, Lance had died from meningitis and septicemia while we were in Greece. Being too poor to pay the doctors and hospital, we went to the US embassy for advice. They, in turn, told the hospital to use the body for a training autopsy and then give us the child. Later, at the graveyard, the gentle man who helped us bury him peeked into the cardboard box and told me not to look at the remains – the rest is a blur.

So, we weren't really ready for 'another adventure'. But, when you love and trust the Lord, you can't just walk away. We prayed

and prayed for guidance. Then, there was a phone call. A couple with whom we'd grown close while in Europe had also had some trouble – Judy had experienced an ectopic pregnancy and nearly died. Thankfully, she had recovered and now, Carl and her wanted to go to Mexico to start a school for poor children. They knew I spoke some Spanish and asked if we were interested in joining them.

Well, we again sought the Lord and surprisingly got a 'green light' confirmation for this trip. So, with our little Chevy Vega loaded up, towing a trailer behind, we picked up our friends in Tennessee and headed south. Oh, did I mention that Darlene was about seven months pregnant?

Our destination was Acapulco – not the strip of luxury hotels and fancy restaurants but the town. At the time, like most of the vacation spots on the coast, Acapulco had its fair share of shanties and folks just barely getting by. Our hope was to minister to these dear people the love of Christ.

All the way down, I kept asking what to expect to pay for a small place to live. Each time, people would say, "Oh, about \$100 to \$150." Since we together had around \$400 to \$500 dollars, we thought we could get by for a couple of months and just see what the Lord wanted to do.

Pulling into the outskirts of town with our brakes burned out (try towing a loaded trailer 3000 miles and then down a steep mountain grade behind a Vega!) we could

hardly wait to start looking for a place to stay. Little did we know that a real surprise lay in store.

From one end of town to the other we searched and finally found a small cabana that we thought would work. The owner was happy to rent it and wrote up by hand the agreement. As he scribbled out the rent, I read, "\$150" and thought, 'Well, that's what we thought...'. But then, he followed with "diariamente" and I gasped. "Wait a minute!" I stopped him. "That says daily."

He looked at me as if to say, "Of course, you bozo."

I said, "We can't pay that!" after which he promptly escorted us out. Consequently, we looked at several more places and found out that indeed the rent was \$100 - \$150, but it was all per diem, all over town. Boy, were we disappointed and I was eating more humble pie than I had in a long time.

We spent now even more precious money on a motel room for the night and went to the Lord in prayer, thinking maybe we'd really missed the boat. Our answer was simply to witness on the street which we did for a day and a half. By the end of the second day, our finances were precariously low. We were out on the peninsula where, at the time, most of the nicer vacation homes were located. Carl and I had been sharing with a dear man named Jorge and he prayed with us to receive the Lord. We encouraged him to start reading his Bible and find a good church. He wanted

help with that, and though we desperately want to do so, we told him that we had to leave the next day as we were nearly broke; in fact, just buying gas for the trip was a stretch (kinda like now, huh!?).

He smiled big and said, "No problem! See that pair of cabanas? You can stay there as long as you like – no charge." You see, to our surprise, Jorge was the property manager for several dozen such residences, and so it worked out wonderfully. Of course, we praised the Lord for His provision.

That night, we thought we'd celebrate with a little spaghetti; so, we went to town and stopped at one of the two Italian restaurants, ordering some pasta. As we slurped down the last noodles, the waiter, Fulvio, came by and asked how the food was. We put our index fingers to our cheeks and said, "Multa buono!" He stepped back and exclaimed, "You're from the old country?!"

We laughed and answered that we had indeed lived in Italy recently. Carl and Judy were both pretty good with Italian. He ran and got the owner, a grey haired gentleman who came and sat with us bringing with him waiters with more food and, with a wave of the hand, some violin players. For at least a couple of hours, we enjoyed sharing with him about the "old country" and dining like kings.

At the end, he begged us to come back the next night to meet a friend of his and, with a little

gleam in his eye said, “my treat”. Being the ‘culturally sensitive’ (and always hungry) folks we were, we heartily agreed.

The next evening, they rolled out the red carpet and blew our minds with a seven course meal and our own personal violinist. The manager and waiters hovered over us like mother hens, just looking to make sure everything was perfect. After, we were done, the manager introduced us to his old friend, a white haired Siciliano who called himself Pipo.

Pipo sat and talked with us for an hour or so and asked us to join him at his home the following week for more conversation. Upon arriving there, we could hardly believe it – the estate had its own rail car that transported visitors down a cliff to where the mansion was built into the side of the peninsula overlooking the bay. It also had its own pool.

Pipo was so happy to share about Italy and seemed quite open to know more about the Lord. As a consequence, our relationship with him blossomed and I’d estimate that over the next several months we met with him two to three times a week. Each time, he’d generously host us somewhere and clearly became more and more open to the Lord’s Spirit.

Meanwhile, the ministry to the people of Acapulco bore great fruit. From the folks in the market place to the cliffs of La Quebrada, many people got saved and their children just loved learning English, taking guitar lessons and

getting Bible stories. And Darlene had a baby boy – Michael!

One night, after months of ministering to Pipo, we were invited to the Princess Hotel for dinner. Afterwards, he asked Carl and I to step outside and speak privately. It was a beautiful evening and there outside the hotel, Pipo told us that he’d given his heart back to the Lord. He said that he couldn’t tell us what he did for a living but that it was wrong and he was ashamed of it. He said that he was leaving to go back to the old country and wanted to thank us for being his friends and sharing God’s love with him.

Being the clueless guys we were, we had no real idea of his enterprises. It was clear that he was a powerful man and quite wealthy, but we were very, very naïve. The next day, Carl and I went into town on errands and when we arrived, we saw people running everywhere. One guy who we recognized from Pipo’s house saw us as he rushed around a corner and waved emphatically for us to get out of our car. We jumped out and with bullets whizzing by, ran to where this fellow was now hiding behind a sheltered wall.

“What’s going on??” I asked him.

“Man, you guys are here at the wrong time! You need to get out of here as fast as you can!” he replied.

“Why? What’s happening? Why all the fighting?”

“You don’t understand,” he answered. “Pipo has left!”

We looked at each other kind of matter of factly and responded, “Sure. We know. He told us last night he was leaving. But...”

With a pitiful look on his face, as if to say, ‘man you guys are really dumb’, he said, “Yeah, but now there’s this huge play for power going on – a war. See, Pipo was the number two mafia man in Central America. He was responsible for moving all the drugs to America and now that he’s gone... well, you can see. It’s war.”

Needless to say, we were amazed at what God had done without our even knowing it!

You can’t walk by faith and expect to have a proverbial ‘leave it to beaver’ life. Oh, nothing against June and Ward and the boys. Many, if not most of you already know this and will agree – the person who sincerely trusts the Lord and truly attempts to walk by faith in Him will often times find this ‘walk’ an unexpected one filled with amazement at what God does. And the glory for any good goes to Him, doesn’t it. We’re sometimes just clueless children.

And sometimes, this walk is seemingly filled with grief and disappointment. God doesn’t do the miracles we want or expect. He does things His way and though His way is always right and ultimately good, when it’s not our way, we can stumble in faith. But God is faithful. Whether He chooses to wow us with the

miraculous or deepen us with the tempestuous, He draws us onward and ultimately upward to His perfect presence.

When Jesus sent out His disciples to the surrounding towns and villages to preach the gospel, it was a faith-walk of sorts for them. No provisions in the backpacks, no second pair of sandals. But they came back beaming. They were so amazed that Jesus had to admonish them, *“Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.”*

Nevertheless, this obedient faith and its fruit wonderfully pleased Jesus. The very next verses say, *“In that hour Jesus **rejoiced** in the Spirit and said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.”* And, *“Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, “Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it.””* (Luke 10)

What they saw was the power of God at work. What they heard were the words of truth. What they experienced was the presence of Christ. So will anyone who in obedience to His Spirit steps out into the line of fire by faith.