

## EITHER IT'S TRUE OR IT ISN'T TRUE!

On a rainy night in 1953, someone came knocking on the Bartletts' door. Vern and Joyce did not ordinarily invite strangers into their home, but this time was different. Upon reflection, they knew it had to be Divine intervention. The Bartletts were at a crossroads in their lives – their marriage was falling apart and they needed help.

Of course, they had not foreseen this misery when they first met in 1946. Vern, a native Nebraskan, had served in the 79<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in Europe and was now settling back into life in Yuba City, California, where he'd lived during his high school years.



Joyce, a Californian from birth, hailed from Pixley, but was working in a lovely little jewelry store right across the street from Vern's workplace. She might not have noticed the young man except that her sister secretly fancied him, and wanted Joyce to meet him. But once they met, it was Joyce in whom Vern took interest, demonstrated shortly thereafter by a stroll to the jewelry store to ask her out. After that, their relationship developed quickly.

When Joyce's birthday rolled around, she had gotten to know Vern well enough to predict what he'd do. She took her work partner aside, and pointed to a charming black and silver bracelet. "Even though Vern hasn't mentioned it, he is going to come over here and ask you if there is anything I



like," Joyce explained. "When he does, you tell him I like this," she laughed. That cherished bracelet still adorns her wrist today.

In 1947, Vern added a ring. Because he and Joyce were still quite young, her mother, aunt and uncle drove them to Reno, Nevada, where the two tied the knot in a pastor's office.

Once back in Yuba City, they settled into a typical American lifestyle. Vern got a job delivering bread for the Continental Baking Company and Joyce became a stay-at-home wife. Their family grew to six within the next six years.



And then their marriage began to suffer. Their hearts were searching for healing and for true meaning and purpose. They had no idea that the strangers they invited inside that dreary night brought along an Unseen Guest.

The Bartletts soon learned that Bob and Irene Nance were missionaries-in-training with New Tribes Mission, studying at Fouts Springs, but they were living in a migrant camp in Yuba City. The purpose was to gain practical experience “roughing it” – to see if they had what it took to become pioneer missionaries. A required part of their training was to go door-to-door witnessing.

The Bartletts found themselves fascinated that this couple would want to live in the migrant camp. They had heard stories about life there and knew it had to be difficult. But even more interesting was what Bob and Irene told them about God. Neither Vern nor Joyce were well versed in spiritual matters. That evening with the Nances led to a year of home Bible studies, during which time Vern and Joyce came to know Christ as their personal Savior.



Bob and Irene

Vern grew to cherish reading the Word of God. As he gained understanding, he began to be challenged in his personal life. His heart was pricked by verses such as 1 John 2:15-17: *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.*

“I saw that this world had me in its grip and that I was living for things that had no eternal meaning



whatsoever,” Vern said. “I realized that I’d been bought with a price and that my life was not my own. This had a profound effect on me.”

He and Joyce decided that they wanted to become missionaries. “I felt we should sell out and put ourselves in God’s hands,” Vern stated.

“We began to tell our relatives and some friends about this decision, and they thought we were crazy. We had a nice house, I had a good job, and they just couldn’t accept it. They asked, ‘How will you live? You’ve got four children!’ I pointed them to Matthew where it says, *Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things will be added unto you.*

"I was at a point in my life where I could say with conviction, 'Either it's true or it isn't true! And we're going to find out if it's true.'"

The Bartletts' step of faith was immediately put to the test. Their 3-year-old daughter, Jayne, had been born anemic, tired easily and had to lie down a lot. "Our family physician emphatically told us, 'This girl may die!'" Vern said. Her medication needed refrigeration, which didn't exist in the training center.

"So, one day, Joyce and I sat down and just spoke to the Lord. We said, 'Lord, will you please heal Jayne?' And He did just that!" Vern smiled.

"The best thing is that He had already worked in our hearts," Joyce chimed in. "We knew nothing was too hard for Him. We just knew we could trust Him. We went to Fouts Springs in February. In May, we came back to have her tested. She was normal. And she's been our healthiest child. She never missed one day of school – ever!"



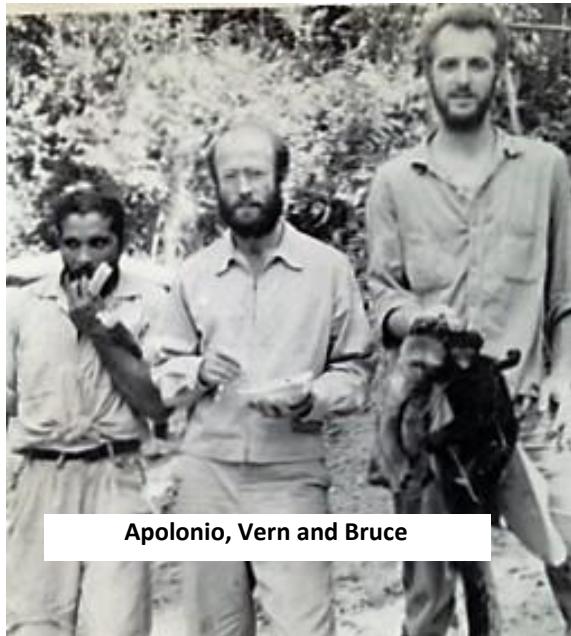
"I just want to say this," Vern added, "because I think of it off and on. What great mercy the Lord had on us! We didn't know anything. I think New Tribes wouldn't have taken us if they'd realized how little I knew," he laughed. "The one thing that the Lord put on my heart was a love for the Word, and that's what's seen me through to this day!"

Many times over during their missionary training, the Bartletts experienced God's faithfulness to His promises. It was the same as they prepared to serve in Brazil. They didn't know what ministry they would be involved in or what their material needs would be, but God did.

"When we were on our way to Brazil, we stopped at the 'boot camp' [missionary training center] in Oviedo, Florida," Vern said. "There was a fella there going to New Guinea and he had an Evinrude Outboard Motor. He said he couldn't use it in New Guinea and wondered if I wanted it. I didn't know if I wanted it or not," Vern laughed. "But the fella said he was going to overhaul it and mail it to me, which he did."

When the Bartletts arrived in Brazil, Vern learned that he would need to travel by canoe powered by an outboard motor in order to do the survey and contact work that he was assigned. He soon found a suitable boat for \$125, but he and Joyce were only receiving \$115-a-month income. Out of the blue, Vern's mother, who had not been supportive of his decision to be a missionary, donated the exact amount needed to buy that canoe.

And, when the need arose to build a house at Puraquequara – the mission's school base – an aunt sent money for the construction of the Bartlett's home. Vern wanted a safe and comfortable place for Joyce and the children to live during his absences. "I knew Vern would be gone a lot of the time," Joyce said, so she contently settled into a routine of being a mom and teaching Portuguese and English at the school.



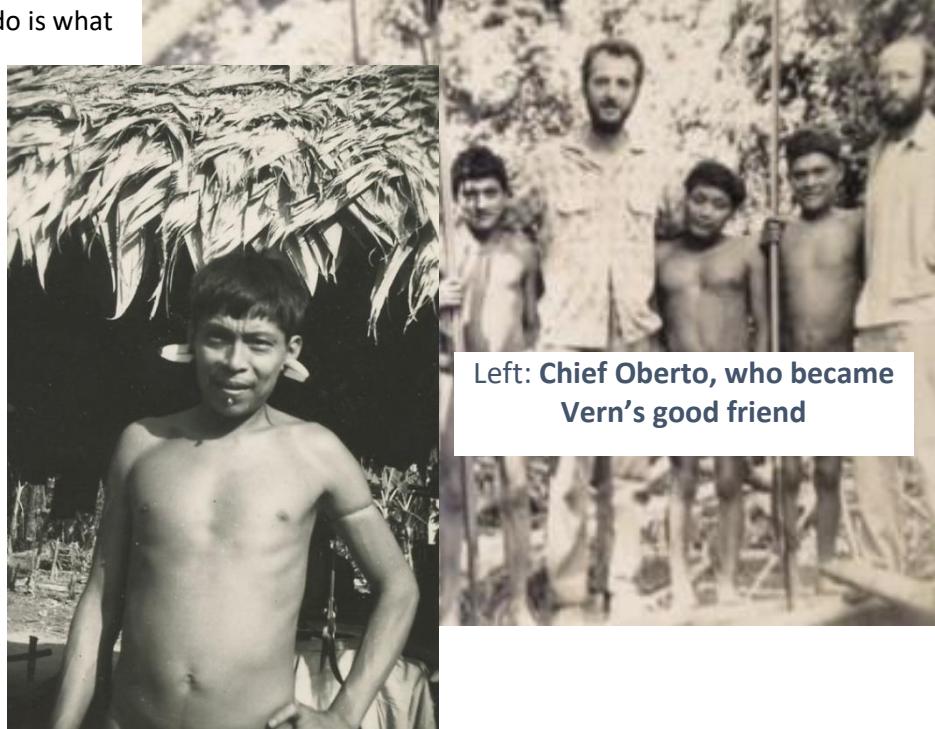
As for Vern, life was anything but routine. When he and two of his missionary colleagues made their initial trip to Guaica-land, it involved navigating approximately 20 rapids, and Vern didn't know how to swim. To get interior, he, Bruce Hartman, Keith Wardlow and a Brazilian named Apolonio, traveled the Amazon, Negro, Demini and Tototobi Rivers. Somehow, Vern ended up being the *motorista*, with absolutely no experience for guiding the canoe through those violently swirling waters. "We'd get through one set of rapids and then come around a corner and see that white water and I'd say, 'Oh, not again!'" Vern laughed. "Sometimes we'd stop at a sandbar to gas up and Apolonio would lie down on it, exhausted. He was the one who knew the river systems and was our guide. Our inexperience was quite a strain on him."

Even though the rapids were the cause of much stress, it was also stressful to come face to face with the Guaicas. These people were known as fierce warriors. An added



concern was when the missionaries discovered that the very items they carried as trade goods were a danger. The tribal people considered the much-coveted machetes, knives, scissors and fish hooks as free for the taking, without the owners' consent. Vern, Bruce and Keith were put in harrowing situations and needed to stand their ground. Even though they tried not to show it, their insides were shaking. "We were scared out of our socks!" Vern confessed.

But the missionaries' bravado is what caused the Guaicas to respect them. One of the most-feared chiefs became Vern's good friend. "It turned out that he was an intelligent man and a natural leader," Vern smiled. "We became buddies and would go hunting together. You wouldn't believe what that guy knew about the jungle! We had some good times together."



Left: **Chief Oberto, who became Vern's good friend**

During the 12 years the Bartletts lived in Brazil, Vern made many survey trips with the purpose of opening up new works. He also served on the field committee. One time he was gone from home eight months, and he gives Joyce a lot of credit for how she handled that. "She did a beautiful job," he said.

When their second term ended, the Bartletts remained in the country. "After school is out, that is usually when missionaries go on furlough," Joyce explained. "We heard a knock on our door and our coworkers, Ron and Elaine Lotz, asked, 'How come you're not leaving for your furlough?' So we had to say, 'Because we don't have the money.' The Lotzes didn't have any more than we did, but they came back and gave us the money to go. They told us it was their tithe." This was another example of God's amazing and faithful provision. The Bartletts only had to figure out where to settle down in the USA.

Fellow field leader, Macon Hare, Sr., suggested that Vern and Joyce stay at the New Tribes Bible Institute in Waukesha, Wisconsin. It would not only provide a place for them to live but also give Vern the opportunity to be a much-needed teacher. "I had never taught! Walking up those steps to the Bible school was almost worse than [attempting to contact] the Guaicas," Vern chuckled. "I thought, 'What

am I doing here?" But the Lord blessed me and the students liked me. I taught Old Testament History, Missions, and 1 and 2 Peter. Boy, you talk about burning the midnight oil!"

After serving at the Waukesha Bible school for one year, the Bartletts were asked to help start NTM's Bible School in Jackson, Michigan. Vern became the Dean of Education, and for seven years he and Joyce ministered there.

Next stop – Matlock, England! NTM had found an old building where they decided to begin a new training program and establish a European office. The Bartletts were asked to help get that underway.

"I think I can say that I've always gone where the men asked me to go," Vern stated. "We've spent approximately 10 years in each of the different places and, at every one of those places, I have learned things about myself that I really needed to learn. I was the one learning as much as anyone else! During our stay in Matlock, I had to do some studying, I'll tell ya! I'd never taught [the book of] Hebrews."

Life in England provided some humorous learning curves. "We were working with an English couple and they were good about clueing us in on things," Joyce said. "One day I referred to the 'garbage' and learned that the actual stuff you throw out is not called by that term. When I asked what term is used, I was informed that it's just not talked about," she laughed.

Vern came to understand that his green and white checkered pants, popular in the USA, did not meet with approval in that part of Europe. A different culture thrust them on the Lord for His help.

Ten years later, the Bartletts moved to Baker, Oregon to serve as mission representatives in the Pacific Northwest. "Speaking isn't a natural thing for me," Vern admitted. "In high school I'd taken bad grades in my English class because I was too timid to get up in front of people." And now, once again, he was out of his comfort zone. "I didn't know any churches in the northwest. I sat holding my head and said, 'What am I going to do? I don't know anything about this!'"

But God faithfully came to Vern's rescue and helped him secure meetings.



"The Lord gave me the right things to say," Vern said, "And, finally, we were busy almost every Sunday. We had to drive long distances sometimes – to Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana and California."

"We did that for 10 years," Joyce added.

"But it got to the place where I was 73 and the weather would get bad up in the mountains," Vern explained. "I felt that I wasn't capable to do those roads anymore. So, we turned in our saddle."

The decision to retire was one thing, but knowing where to go was another. The Bartletts learned that no housing was available at the NTM Retirement Homes in Sanford, Florida. It would cost them \$25,000 to build, which was out of their reach, but not for God.

"We had a friend who used to visit us at the Jackson Bible school," Joyce said. "He was a young man at the time. We had meetings with his parents when he was still a boy. He used to come to the school and talk with Vern."

The young man stayed in contact with the Bartletts over the next three decades. "One day," Vern shared, "he called us up and said, 'Listen, why aren't you retiring? What is it? Money?' I told him 'yes'."

The teen, now turned successful businessman, told the Bartletts, "Twenty-five thousand is in the mail!" He kicked in another \$10,000 to furnish the home. "I never dreamed back then that this 18-year-old boy was going to do this kind of thing!" Vern stated, still astonished at how God chose to provide.

The Bartletts – now 90 and 87 – take life at a much slower pace. They feel blessed and thankful for the years God's given to them. Their troubled marriage was a lifetime ago – before they knew Christ. Today, their love and commitment couldn't be stronger.

Even though Vern speaks softly due to a problem with his larynx, and lives with the discomfort from failed open-heart surgery, his eyes light up when he gazes at his petite, spunky wife, who has a ready laugh and friendly manner. He is quick to produce a photo of her taken when they first met. "She was some little chickadee!" he grins. Not to be outdone, Joyce points to a photo of her soldier, a handsome young fellow who still resides within the man she's loved into old age.

In spending time with the couple, one realizes that they have a wealth of stories to tell of a shared life overflowing with the goodness and faithfulness of God. And, for sure, no one leaves their home without being convinced that Vern's slogan – **Either it's true or it isn't true** – is true!



*By Pam Rasmussen*

International Ministries Office