

## Chapter 10 Changes at the Mission

“Father died,” Orno moaned. He handed the letter to Agnes. “He was buried day before yesterday. I wish I could have been there.”

Orno felt the pain in his heart for days. He hadn't seen the older Follett for a long time, but the ties of life held the two close together. But now he was gone, as the Bible says, “he was gathered to his people.”

The mood in the Follett household lightened a bit when Orno received an invitation to attend the Spring Council in Washington, D.C. to further talk over the work of the Mission. Orno eagerly accepted the opportunity and the month of April found him taking a long train ride east in the fragrant and balmy air of the lowlands. It was a pleasant break from the turbulent spring weather he'd left behind on the high desert.

When he reached Kansas he stopped briefly to visit the grave of his father. In Chicago he took time to see and photograph the new "flying machine" which was still a thing of wonder. Orno could see that the world was rapidly changing to the place where sin and decline were visible on every hand. A war raged in Europe and in the large cities the deteriorating condition of man was evident. For Orno, who had been so remote at the Mission, the change was a culture shock.

The Spring Council spent a great deal of time dealing with the problems looming before the church on account of the war in Europe and the advance of the Japanese in the south Pacific. The Council listened to his report and appeal for the Navajos, but it seemed to him that he was talking from the balcony, for his listeners were thinking of their loved ones and friends who were facing war in a number of places in the world.

Orno was only too happy to return to Navajoland. He looked forward to continuing his work among the people he had learned to love. About a month after returning, Orno made a hurried trip to Crown Point to fetch Dr. Childers—who came with him to stay the night at the Mission. Toward morning a lusty wail rang through the Mission house announcing the arrival of the seventh member of the Follett family. They named the new son Austin after Orno's brother. Full of sparkle and bounce from the start, he brought more than his share of life and mischief to the little home.

When fall arrived Mr. Lowry sent word that he had remarried and wouldn't be returning to the Mission. So once again Orno found himself scrambling to find a teacher for the little school. But they could find no one. The two missionaries saw no other alternative, if they wanted a school, than to teach it themselves. So, Orno and Agnes began the school year taking turns in the classroom. Part of the day Agnes took little Naomi and baby Austin with her and taught classes as best she could.

When Orno's duties allowed him to come back to the classroom, Agnes returned home to wash, cook and keep house. The grinding schedule wore away at both Orno and Agnes. One night Agnes literally collapsed into bed.

"I don't think I can do this for another day," she said. Orno, himself exhausted, took off her shoes and stockings and rubbed her feet, talking quietly to her all the while.

"There are so many people who thought we were crazy to try this. After all we've been through, do you think maybe they were right?" Agnes didn't say a word but the expression on her face showed what she was thinking.

"I don't think so either," Orno said to her unspoken communication. "The truth is we can't make the Mission on our own. But we always knew that. This is the Lord's work, not ours, and we knew from the start that we would have to depend on the Lord every minute of the day. We both knew that without the Lord bearing us up and making His work go forward, we couldn't do it in the first place, right?"

Agnes nodded, then slowly slipped off the bed and onto her knees. Their hands interlaced and they held each other close as they prayed in turn:

"Oh Lord," prayed Agnes, "give us strength to do the work you've called us to do. We've worked so hard, and our best just doesn't seem to be enough."

"And Father," concluded Orno after they had prayed for some time, "give us the wisdom to see what it is that you have for us to do . . . and do it through us by means of the all-powerful name of Jesus."

God answered their prayers and somehow they survived. The following months and years at the Mission gradually settled into a routine of victories and rejoicing, tragedies and disappointments. They interspersed these with trips to Loma Linda when ill health took its toll.

In those years every day at the Mission was a battle with heathenism, ignorance and poverty. It seemed the Indians were almost hopelessly entrapped in their little one room hogans. Hungry families gathered in circles around their pots of mutton stew. Those dying of tuberculosis dipped their fry bread until the stew was gone, but often they were still hungry. In their small quarters those with impetigo rubbed shoulders with those who had trachoma.

Water was too scarce and precious to be used generously for washing bodies or clothes. Newborn babies stood only a 50 percent chance of surviving their first year of life. Out over the barren, windswept land small children, poorly clad against the cold, herded sheep in the blowing snow, scarcely knowing what it was like to have full stomachs and warm feet—or what it would be like to live without a sore throat or a runny nose.

Orno, with his own throat aching, rode across the land day after day answering the calls for help. Many brought their sick to the Mission for treatment, but more often Orno was asked to visit the homes of the sick. Since the Indians had no more than horse and wagon for transportation, and Orno had a car, they expected him to make the trip. But in so many cases, Orno wasn't told of a sickness until called upon by people whose superstition compelled them to ask that he bury their dead. And after the funeral, Follett watched as they set fire to the hogan that had been home to the deceased.

Much activity took place at Lake Grove in those busy years. Besides the residence and the schoolhouse, they built a dispensary which they later expanded to a small hospital. This was Orno's original vision of what the Mission should be. And they erected a log cabin to house the boys and girls who came to the school, as well as to serve as the kitchen and dining room. Orno kept busy, always in thick of these projects, directing volunteers and workers, running to locate needed supplies and encouraging everyone with his kind words and prayers. All who knew him saw that he was truly in his element when it came to expanding the work.

The Mission always seemed to be abuzz with visitors. These included, among others, Elder and Mrs. H.M.J. Richards, a pioneer worker, and Edward and Helen McCabe, a well educated young Navajo couple who helped Orno at the Mission from time to time. Edward was an excellent mechanic and Helen taught school at Lake Grove for a time. Then of course, John and Lily Neil frequented the Mission and helped whenever they came.

Through eight long winters of sticky mud and blowing snow and eight summers which were far too short, the Folletts continued to throw themselves heart, body, and soul into the work. Then, in May of 1924, Orno received a letter from the General Conference granting the couple of a year's rest with full pay. But it proved a difficult decision to leave the Mission and their Indian friends whose confidence and love they had gained. But in spite of their reticence to leave, in September of that year they turned the work over to others and said goodbye to Lake Grove.

It took a week to drive to Beaumont, California, where they planned to spend the next year. They filled the year with physical tests and treatment—but also with many appointments to speak to churches and groups about the Navajo work. Orno found employment for some of the Indian men from the Lake Grove area who needed jobs, and made the arrangements for them to come to California. But at the end of the year they had been allotted for recovery, he still wasn't well. It was impossible for the family to return to the harsh climate and rugged life at Lake Grove.

The Follett children did well in their new environment and enjoyed mixing with those of their kind. But the missionary spirit had been early kindled in their hearts and they longed to return to their Mission home. Young Orno Junior, now 15 years of age, had dedicated his life to working for the Navajo Indians, but things weren't going well for him. He began to have severe headaches. Then visual disturbances added to his growing discomfort. Orno and/or Agnes repeatedly took him to Loma Linda for examinations, and he was finally admitted to White Memorial Hospital in Los Angeles. For a time he seemed to improve. But the old symptoms soon recurred and with them an increasing nausea and intolerance for food. Matilda, Orno's sister—a nurse— stayed with Junior constantly through those long days and nights of agony.

Above the pain which wore down his strength, his beautiful Christian character shone radiantly. His one great goal and passion in life, was to return some day to the Indians, to hold high the torch of the gospel where his parents had so nobly served. This was his main theme of conversation.

The doctors finally decided that Junior had a brain tumor, and they operated on January 30, 1928. He lost both the tumor and his life within hours of each other. Orno wrote in his diary on February 2, "Junior was buried today in Mt. View Cemetery. Loma Linda friends and others

made many beautiful floral offerings. Elder Hare was also present. Junior is resting, and thus is closed one chapter of our experience. God knows best."

Through the long days and nights of caring for her nephew, the impact of that radiant young life impressed Matilda Follett deeply. She had been a slack, careless Christian in the past, but now she made an about face. She accepted a call to work in China and served there as a missionary for 13 years.

The one year leave of absence granted to the Folletts stretched into five years, but Orno's health improved very little. From time to time he returned to Lake Grove for short periods to encourage the struggling workers. But with the continual turnover of personnel, it looked as if the little Mission might yet die.

In 1929 Agnes and Orno, with their two youngest children, Naomi and Austin, moved back to the Lake Grove Mission to resume the work. They added a small hospital to the dispensary, and the Mission again flourished: but only for a short time. A year after their arrival, illness again drove them to a lower altitude.

For two more years the work floundered. Orno continued to return to Lake Grove for short periods. Following one visit he wrote: "Without announcement or invitation 12 Navajos came to us the night we stayed at the Mission and requested a two hour Bible study 'like we used to do.'"

The interest was so great that it was midnight before he retired. Orno's visits to the Mission grew further and further apart and he was beginning to come to grips with the fact he would never return to guide the work he started.

One fall day in 1932 he sat on a boulder overlooking the Mission site and pondered the past and the future of little Lake Grove. A voice startled him: "Hello Pastor Follett. Yaahtey!"

Orno turned quickly to see who spoke and a wide grin covered his face. "Lilikai! How good to see you. How did you find me here?" He jumped up and they greeted each other with a "touch" handshake, and then sat down on the boulder to catch up with everything—good and bad—that had happened to them.

The conversation grew serious as Lily asked, "What do you think will happen to the Mission?"

Orno chewed on his lip for a moment then looked straight at her. "I really don't know, Lily. I hope it will go forward, but each time I return it is worse off, and it seems it may . . . soon . . . fail" Each word came to Orno with great difficulty. "I'm afraid I haven't been a success here."

Lily thought about Orno's words and spoke quietly. "I remember several years ago you told me success means doing what the Lord wants, not what the world thinks is good. In your own words, Pastor Follett, 'you may work your whole life and bring only one person to Christ. Then you are successful.'"

Lily paused for a moment. before she continued. "Well, you brought me to Christ, Pastor Follett, and I am grateful. And as for my people I will continue to work to show them the love of Christ."

Orno nodded and then smiled. "You are a special person, Lilikai, and I think the Lord will use you powerfully. As for my success, I will quote your own words to you: 'One is good, but I want all the

Navajos to love Jesus.' Lily, I think the work among the Navajo is now more on your shoulders than it is on mine. Are you ready?"

"By the Grace of God," Lily answered softly.

On July 4, 1933, Orno wrote to Elder R. L. Benton, then Southwestern Conference president: "No man knows the situation among the Navajos better than I do, and I know that there has never been a more favorable time than now for our message among them. If I could endure the altitude among them, I would not hesitate to offer to return to that field."

Not long afterward, in spite of long efforts to find workers who could replace the Folletts at Lake Grove, the Mission doors were closed forever and the property sold. Gradually the little band of believers moved, or passed on, until Lilikai felt like she was left alone to hold up the light of truth in Navajoland.

Orno Follett's work for the American Indians was by no means finished. Moving later to the warm dry climate of central Arizona, near Phoenix, he and Agnes in the years to follow started five chapels and a day school among the Maricopa, Yacqui and Pima Indians.

The Follett children, Naomi, Ira, and Austin, also continued the family legacy by working with various tribes in the Southwest and in Canada.

## Chapter 11 The Accident

Lily felt a shiver of nervousness go through her body as she waited for the Chapterhouse meeting to start. So much is riding on this meeting, she mused. We simply must get their permission tonight so we can move ahead. It had been several months since Lily stood on the hilltop in Tsaya and came under the conviction that a Mission should be located in this area. And now, at the request of the church members in Farmington, and as their representative, she was back in Tsaya attending the Chapterhouse meeting.

*We need their permission to get land in the area and start a Mission.* Even though it wasn't necessary in the legal sense to ask permission of the Tribe, Lily knew that this was the way of the Navajo, and if they wanted to succeed they must first have the blessing of the local elders. The Navajo network of families, clans and chapters, had methods of working out problems that had proven trustworthy through the centuries. And almost nothing could be achieved without a long discussion of pros and cons, private consultations, contemplation, and finally . . . consensus.

*If we do it the right way, Lily reasoned, it will make land available to us for sale and will create the backing of the Navajo community.*

"That's why I'm here," she said aloud. One or two glanced her way, but no one questioned her right to speak. The room filled slowly as people shuffled in and quietly proceeded to greet others in the room with a touch handshake and a few soft spoken words. Lily knew she came to the meeting from a position of high honor. However, tonight she did not come as a member of the Tribal Council: she came as a member of the Farmington Seventh-day Adventist Church. And she didn't know what the outcome might be.

At last the meeting started. Lily was introduced to the members of the Chapterhouse, and the talking began. In accordance with Navajo custom anyone who wished to speak was allowed to do so while others listened thoughtfully and respectfully. People spoke on both sides of the issue.

"We need to remember," put in one counselor, "that the Adventists are the ones who came to us during the big snow and helped us with food and clothing." Many heads nodded approval.

The meeting continued until about midnight, when the elders held a whispered consultation and made their decision. Lily, still nervous, wasn't positive they would encourage a mission in the area even though many people spoke in favor of it. The consultations finished, the chapter president sat up straight and addressed Lily.

"We will let you start a mission here." Her heart leaped with joy for it was really going to happen. But the elder continued and Lily's apprehension returned. "Only it must be a mission where there will never be a bar or a dance hall. It must be a mission where our children will be taught practical things such as how to repair a car or build a house."

"There will never be a bar or a dance hall at the Mission," Lily assured the Chapter House. The meeting adjourned with smiles and great expectations on each side.

"Wonderful," cried Veda Scholder, "we can move forward. Now all we need is a piece of property and we can begin!"

But deciding to start a Mission and actually doing it proved to be different things altogether. The little Farmington group started to scrape together a meager supply of funds and made frequent inquiries as to the availability of property in the area. The Navajos of Tsaya were as eager to have a Mission in their area as the Adventists were to start one. They helped wherever they could. But months dragged by without any suitable land coming on the market.

"I often pray about the Tsaya area," Lily told the little church one Sabbath. "And I believe that God will open the way for us to build a Mission there." She paused and smiled. "And I believe as well that it will be the real start of the *Circle of Light*."

But Lily hadn't been able to give as much time to the project as she would have liked. The president of the Navajo Nation found in Lily a reliable and effective representative and negotiator. So he frequently called on her to perform tasks that were far beyond her normal duties as a member of the Tribal Council.

Lily drove on a mission for the Tribal Council President. He asked her to go to Salt Lake City and to make an important presentation there to a Native American meeting. Lily yawned as she nosed her pickup into the predawn darkness, pointing her headlights in the direction of Shiprock. At that point she would turn north onto the highway that would eventually take her to Salt Lake City. She reached down to the dash and turned up the heat a little. *The thermometer this morning said two degrees above zero, she mumbled, and the chill seems awfully slow in wearing off.*

Lily rubbed her eyes and yawned again. She had been up late the night before, first at a council meeting, then to prepare notes for her meetings and presentations today. *That made two nights in a row, she mused. She had worked right through New Year's day, and now, on January 2, 1952, she was still working. Most people, Lily reflected, are just now thinking about ending their holiday vacation, but I never got a chance to stop working.*

Lily's eyelids seemed to get heavier as the effects of exhaustion became more and more difficult to shake. The air in the cab heated up, and encouraged her body to relax. The road rolling by in the darkness, the hum of the engine, and the hum of the tires on the pavement—*I've got to stay awake. The meeting starts first thing in the morning.*

The lights of Shiprock made her rally a little and sit up straighter. But soon she was again alone on the two lane highway leading north to Utah. Her eyes got heavier. She rolled the window down a bit. *Maybe the chilled wind will help.* But it didn't. She slapped the side of her face, bounced up and down on the seat as she drove, and tried to whistle. Nothing helped. Her eyes just refused to stay open. She slapped her thigh, shouted, sang . . . nothing seemed to help. She rummaged in her purse and found a cough drop. Sucking one it and rolling it around in

her mouth seemed to help, but only for a few minutes. Her mind became cloudy, and it occurred that she was aiming the truck rather than driving.

She stopped on a pullout and got out of the truck. She stomped around in the snow, taking in deep breaths of frigid air. Back in the truck, she seemed more alert, but the effect quickly wore off. For the first time she wondered if she had been wise to make the trip alone. But she brushed off the fears. *Ha!* She thought. *I've always come through sessions like this before. I'll soon lose this drowsiness.*

The lights of the oncoming cars seemed to cause her eyes to want to shut completely. And when a driver failed to dim his lights, she felt as though she was blinded for a few seconds. It was difficult for her to stay on her side of the road: the lights seemed to draw her in their direction. She thought about the old adage of using toothpicks to hold her eyes open. She giggled. *I could use half a dozen right now.* She mentally envisioned herself with such contraptions *keepin' open my peepers!*

Lily was dreaming as her pickup sped down the highway, its driver asleep . . . at the wheel. . . . Lily awoke with a shock! The pickup was going much too fast, and the right tires had dropped off the main road surface onto the shoulder. She stepped on the brake and tried to steer back on to the highway. But her pressure was too great. The tires slid on a patch of snow . . . and the pickup . . . slid sidewise into a snow bank . . . and flipped . . . over. Still moving at high speed, the pickup rolled over several times. Windows shattered, slinging glass shards in every direction. Once shapely metal crumpled like paper in the fist of agony. Lily was thrown about in the darkness like a rag doll, and when her door flew open she took flight . . . outside . . . tumbling into a snow bank . . . the pickup following her like a big black bear until he had her in his jaws!

At last the sound of grinding came to an end, and the pickup came to rest upside down. Lily lay in a heap, pinned underneath the vehicle in the small space created between the hood and the crushed cab. It was about 5:00 in the morning. The lonely stretch of road lay silent in both directions. The temperature had risen to six degrees above zero.

The hands in the small clock on the wall of the Shiprock hospital registered 8:00 in the morning. The phone rang and a stranger spoke to the receptionist. "You'd better send an ambulance out," he suggested. "I saw a wreck on the highway about 10 miles north. But don't hurry," *Don't hurry!* "The Indian woman who was driving is dead." The receptionist sighed and thought, *just another drunk-driving accident. There seem to be so many of them—especially on holidays.* She picked up the phone and dialed the ambulance company.

When the ambulance crew arrived they found the scene just as the stranger had reported it. "I wonder how long it's been since the accident?" mused the driver aloud as they came to a stop by the upturned truck. "Don't know," mumbled his partner as he got out and began looking around. "It's been long enough for someone to strip the truck of its seats, and spare tire." *And all of Lily's personal belongings.*

After a wrecker moved the pickup, Lily's body was taken to the Shiprock Hospital so the doctor could pronounce her dead. The police identified the car by its registration number, and everyone who listened to the police band recognized Lily's name . . . she was well known in the area.

The authorities asked her local friend, Esther Yazzie, to come and identify the body. The doctor examined Lily but didn't linger long at his task: parts of Lily's body were frozen solid. *There's no doubt she's been dead for several hours, he mused, if she wasn't killed outright in the accident.*

The doctor assigned the body to the morgue and turned it over to her grieving friend. Esther volunteered to take the body to a local mortuary until final arrangements could be made. "It's the least I can do for my friend." Esther wheeled the body down the hospital corridor, preparing to meet the hearse at the main door.

But she suddenly stopped: Lily let out a sigh. *Is this something a dead person does?* she wondered. *Does this happen because the body is thawing out?* Then Lily gasped as she inhaled and Esther knew . . . *she's alive! Alive!* But so many precious moments had passed. *Is there still time? Can they still bring her back?*

Esther flew back to the emergency room and insisted that the doubting doctor examine Lily again. Reluctantly he agreed . . . and was shocked to find a faint pulse and very shallow breathing. Afraid, embarrassed, and yet convinced there was no hope for Lily anyway, he ordered her transferred to Fort Defiance—a facility some 150 miles away. The nurses packed hot water bottles all around her, put her into an unheated army surplus ambulance, and—with her broken bones still unset—sent her over the ill-maintained, rugged road to Fort Defiance.

Lily remained in a coma for 47 days. No one at Fort Defiance expected her to live. If she did, they believed, she would be severely brain damaged. The Navajo people felt differently. They fully expected that she would one day mend and serve her people once more. So during the 47-day coma, her people reelected her to the Tribal Council!

God was not finished with Lily as yet. He still had a purpose for her, and He watched over her. And John didn't give up on his Lily either. During her coma, John spent every minute with her except to sleep. After Lily was released from the hospital, John was constantly at her side, helping her through her difficult and painful rehabilitation.

Over a period of years, Lily regained most of her physical and mental abilities though she never regained the sharpness and preciseness that characterized her life before the accident. In many ways Lily's light burned even brighter for her Lord, and she served as an inspiration to the members of the Farmington Church in their efforts to start a Navajo Mission. At the church, a small group of dedicated volunteers worked incessantly to get the mission going. From time to time they visited with Lily in her home to discuss the work and the plans to move the Mission forward.

Dr. Wetzel Williams, Eryl and Violet Cummings, Vida Scholder, Ed Davis, Harold and Frankie Christensen and others from the Farmington Church worked on the project. Vida

Scholder developed an especially close relationship with Lily and kept her abreast of developments in getting the Mission started. Though the work of finding land seemed to drag, occasionally the little group did have something to get excited about.

Violet Cummings had been giving Bible studies to an Indian from the Tsaya area and one day the man gave her some interesting news. "I know a man named Little Billy Bicenti who has some land for sale in Tsaya." He stopped to consider it further.

"It was once a trading post and some of the stone buildings are still standing," he continued. "It's right in the area where you want to put your mission." He looked at Violet and added, "I think I can help you get it for a very reasonable price."

The Mission Committee, as the backers of the mission called themselves, were excited by this news, and a delegation was sent to look over the land. It was just like the man had described. The group decided to try to buy the land, even though they had no idea where the funds would come from.

Unfortunately, when they contacted Little Billy Bicenti to start negotiations, he had already sold some of the land to another Indian and the rest of the land was under Tribal litigation. This was a serious blow, as Tribal land was never sold and even long term leases could be terminated on a moment's notice, making leased land unsuitable to build on. The committee, it seemed, was back to square one.

## Chapter 12

### Doors are Opened

Lily, crippled by the accident, had regained a good part of her strength and mental agility. But due to the accident her brain was damaged and left her a victim of recurring small strokes. And with each stroke came a loss of abilities to do things. This continued until, over time, she became helpless, confined to a bed, and unable to communicate actively. The only one who seemed to understand her was her husband John, who stayed faithfully by her side during this time of distress.

In spite of this setback the efforts to begin a Navajo school in Tsaya went on unabated, as the members of the Farmington Church continued to work toward this goal. As word got out that they planned to start a mission to the Navajo in Tsaya, their ranks began to fill out, and even people in other states became interested in the effort. Prayers were answered when a young physician, Wetzel Williams, settled in the area and quickly became a member of the Mission Committee. His medical experience would be crucial when planning and operating a clinic at the planned Mission. The committee studied several mission services and designs. First they would build a school, then a clinic, then an orphanage, then a hospital. But it always came back the same thing—they needed land! Patiently the little group moved forward and continued to gather funds for the eventual purchase.

For all their plans though, the project seemed to be going nowhere until one day in 1959. The Little Bicente property went back on the market. It consisted of 180 acres of excellent land. At least it was as good as 180 acres of sand, sagebrush and mesa could be expected to be; but it was topnotch land by local standards.

Negotiations started immediately with the Bicente family and in true Navajo fashion the negotiations proved to be a long, drawn out but cordial affair. The committee members weren't concerned by the long negotiations. But they knew that once they ended bargaining they would have to meet the stipulations with a down payment, and they still only had a pittance of the cash on hand.

Urgent requests flew via letter and phone to interested individuals and churches scattered across the country. Slowly at first, but then more and more rapidly, the money came in until at last there were enough funds on hand to make the \$2,000.00 down payment on the property.

This was nothing less than a miracle to the Mission Committee. As they rejoiced over the income of funds, they began discussing a name for the as yet unborn mission. They decided on the name "La Vida" (The Life). So, as soon as the negotiations for the property appeared to be finalized a date was set for the papers to be signed by the Bicente family and the committee members at Dr. Williams' office. The appointed day for signing arrived and one by one the committee members filed into the waiting room of Dr. Williams' office. The hour for the meeting past, but the Bicente family had not yet arrived. Could this be a sign they had decided not to sell the property? This was possible since the Navajo had their own way of negotiating and carrying on business. Still the committee members stayed and waited.

“Many things could have delayed them,” suggested Ed Davis. “It’s a long drive from Tsaya to Farmington.

Vida Scholder, a woman of action, was especially fidgety during the wait. *It has been years of waiting*, Vida thought to herself, *to get this far and Lord, oh Lord, it just has to get started*. Vida had trekked across the reservation so many times to give Bible studies and visit the Indians in their hogans. She knew the need for food, clothes and medical help in the Tsaya area.

She was also aware of the hunger for spiritual food and spiritual medicine. *A mission just has to get started*. She knew the need, and she knew Lily’s vision almost by heart. Only a few days earlier she had visited the Neils and took care of Lily while John was gone. Lily was bedridden, not able to speak a word, because of her many strokes. Vida knew Lily didn’t have long to live. *Oh, where are those Bicentes!*

Lily couldn’t talk as to be understood, but John said he was able understand her. Lily could hear and discern what was being said, and Vida had told her all about the property they wanted to buy. She had promised to tell Lily as soon as it was accomplished. It would be the first strong ray of the Circle of Light.

Back at Dr. Williams’ office, Vida couldn’t stand the delay any longer and began pacing the crowded waiting room floor, glancing out at the road every time she turned. Some felt that if this wait lasted very long she might wear out the carpet.

Vida was fast coming to the place where she was about to give up, when two cars pulled into the parking lot. One carried the Bicente family, and the other was driven by Violet Cummings. Vida didn’t know what this meant since Violet planned to stay home to do some work. She was supposed to be waiting for a call telling her that the Bicente family had arrived.

The Bicente family, somber and dignified, filed into the waiting room and the church members stood to greet them. The regular patients shot curious glances at the assemblage as the group walked into the X-ray room to conduct the meeting.

“What happened?” Vida whispered to Violet as they paused before going in. “They couldn’t find the office and so they came to my house and I brought them here.”

Vida shot her a glance and asked, “What would have happened if you hadn’t decided to stay home and wait for a call, Violet?” They breathed a prayer of thanks as they hastened to join the others.

A tense atmosphere prevailed in the room for nothing was sure until the papers were signed. The Bicentes could have come to tell them they had changed their minds or raised the price. The room hushed as Little Billy Bicente spoke, his words being translated by his son a tribal judge from Crown Point.

"We have decided to let you have the land you want for your mission," the judge translated, "and at the terms you can afford. Because you are going to use it as a mission for our people, we will not charge you any interest."

Everyone brightened and relaxed and suddenly the room came alive with energy and joy. God had granted them a place from which the Circle of Light could shine. There were many details to get straight, and papers to sign, but eventually the business was over, the mission treasurer made the down payment, and all agreed that they would pay the balance in one year.

Vida, her heart singing, fairly flew out of Dr. Williams' office and hurried the few blocks to Lily's house. John met her at the door, surprised to see her.

"Vida, I didn't know you were coming today. His voice trailed off as he tried to fathom the reason for her sudden visit.

"John," Vida blurted out, "I've come to see Lily. I have good news, wonderful news." John's face broke into a broad smile.

"Well, come right in. I'm sure Lily will be glad for the company." Vida sat beside Lily's bed, held her hand and talked close to her ear.

"Lily dear, I have some good news for you. The Mission, your Mission, is going to start! We bought the land and signed the papers today! The Circle of Light, Lily, is beginning to shine and your vision is being fulfilled. Do you hear me, Lily? The Circle of Light is beginning to shine and La Vida Mission has been started."

Lily's eyes flickered and her mouth curved into a small smile. John smiled and looked at Vida. "She understands and she's very happy."

## Chapter 13 New Occupants

Neal Scott grunted as he pulled at the door of the old stone shack, but it didn't want to budge. *Maybe that sand is keeping it closed* he thought as he kicked away the sand pile that been blown in front of the barrier. This time he was able to force it open, its rusted hinges squeaking in protest.

"Sure is dark in here," he commented as he stepped inside.

"It sure is," Returned Tillie, Neal's wife, as she peered over his shoulder. "Smells kind of mildewy too. So," she asked, "how does it look?"

"Wait till my eyes adjust," Neal replied. "I can't see much yet." He took a step inside, stopping short at the low rock ridge in the floor. Picking up a pebble he dropped it into the void, satisfied with the splash it made a split second later.

"Tillie, get my flashlight, will you? I put it down when I was trying to open the door." He stooped down as he spoke. "There's water here and I want to see how far down it is." Tillie stepped hesitantly into the windowless building a few seconds later and turned on the beam of the flashlight. Neal took it from her and they both peered over the rock wall and into the basin of water some 8 feet below. The walls of the well were lined with rock down to 15 feet and a rock shed had been built over it to keep animals out.

"I'd guess that they built the well house here on the bank of the Chaco Wash, because the ground water level would be close to the surface," Suggested Neal.

"Makes sense to me," replied Tillie. Neal leaned over the edge and sniffed the air carefully. "The air smells good in here," he observed, "in spite of the fact that it's been closed up for over a year." He stopped to think for a minute. "That means that this is much better than any of the other wells in the area. This area is notorious for it's foul water—but we have the goodness of the Lord to thank for good smelling water. He played the flashlight beam around the 10 foot square well until a lump floating in one corner caught his attention.

"Ugh," said Tillie, "what's that?"

"I think . . ." Neal leaned closer for a better look. "I think it used to be a rat."

"Oooh," Tillie made a face and shivered. "And this is our drinking water. Yuk! Is this the only water around?"

Neal made a face and said, "I guess we'll just have to boil it. This is the only water on the property. It's several miles to another well and it would probably be a lot worse than this one." Neal looked at her sideways. "I thought you said you were ready for the hardships that spreading the gospel out here would involve," he said teasingly.

"I am," Tillie said stoutly. "But rats . . . yuk!" They pulled the wellhouse door shut.

"I hear that Chunky' Tanner built this in 1941 when he lived on the property." Neal drew from his research on the area. "Tanner installed a pump and tried to use the well to irrigate about

five acres of corn and squash. It worked, but not very well. He also opened a trading post, but the well established Tsaya trading post was just across the wash, so Chunky's didn't survive. Tanner eventually sold the property back to Little Billy Bicenti from whom he had originally purchased it.”

“You seem to know an awful lot about it.”

“Just been reading a few books,” was all he said. “But one thing I'm thank for: There's electricity at the well. It shouldn't be too hard to string wires to other parts of the property.”

Neal and Tillie threaded a path through the brush from the well house to the rock structure that had once been the Tanner Trading Post. As they walked away from the pump house, Neal noticed a road that led to the structure.

“But it's so grown over that a roving Russian thistle could block the view!” He laughed at his own joke, but it wasn't far from the truth.

Dr. Wetzel Williams and Ed Davis, board members of the fledgling La Vida Missions Inc., waited by the old trading post, eye judging the Scotts as they made their way back.

“What do you think, Wetzel? Now that they've seen the place, do you think they'll head back to California?” asked Ed Davis.

Dr. Williams glanced around the property, then thought for a moment before speaking. “They won't have any electricity until they can string the wires from the pump house. The roof of the house,” he motioned to the squat rock building behind them, “needs to be completely rebuilt. They have no way of communicating with town in case of emergency, except to drive down to Lake Valley School. Their vehicle is unsuitable for these roads and they have two little boys to watch over and protect.”

“They do have good water, at least,” put in Ed, always looking for the positive side of things.

“That's true,” replied the doctor. He kicked the dirt with his toe and sighed. “But as much as we need to have someone out here and get this work started in earnest, I think the sacrifice is too big now and I don't think they'll stay. And I wouldn't blame them at all.”

Only a short while before this, the Scotts heard that the property had been acquired and that a mission would be started soon. They were living in California, and Neal was going to Pacific Union College at the time. But they had gotten married in Farmington and the Navajo work was very close to their hearts. Their initial inquiries ignited a flurry of phone calls, and they set a date to see the site. The board had taken pains to describe the extent of the hardship but this hadn't deterred the Scotts.

Now they were getting a firsthand look at the magnitude of the challenge before them. Actually, when the Scotts went to Farmington, they had already decided that they would

take the job. They had no intention of returning to their former home. Neal stopped in the trail when a large sagebrush blocked the sight of the waiting board members.

He faced Tillie, his eyes questioning her. "Well, are you ready to say we'll do it? Are you ready to start a real actual Mission or do you think it's too much?"

Tillie gave him a little smile, "Is anything too hard for the Lord? Let's go tell them we're even more eager to get going." She flashed a smile to Neal.

Then they headed toward the old building to formally accept their responsibilities as the founding staff members of La Vida Mission. It was a modest start for La Vida and one that didn't even hint at its importance for the Circle of Light.

"The Mission has the enthusiastic support of the Colorado Conference," Dr. Williams explained, "but it's entirely a lay ministry. La Vida was and is a faith ministry. It had no savings account, no 'deep pockets' backer and no frills in the budget.

"Frills," Ed explained, "include things like salaries and benefits. Everything that gets done will be accomplished with donated labor and supplies, or with used materials and plenty of sweat."

When Dr. Williams saw that the Scotts would not be swayed, he smiled and put his hands on his hips. "Well, would you like a tour of the place? You should get to know it well since you'll be calling it home."

At first glance the Mission property was only 180 acres of sagebrush and sand rising from the Chaco Wash to a low mesa. Since the property was unfenced, the Scotts had to use their imagination a little when trying to discern just where they were on the property. But with Williams and Davis giving the tour, the land seemed to come alive with plans and possibilities.

"We plan to erect some greenhouses, so even the winter months could be fruitful," explained the Doctor. There would be a school building, a dormitory and a cafeteria. Yonder would be an orphanage and further over, a clinic. Perhaps someday the clinic would become a small hospital. And on the edge of the mesa, overlooking the Chaco Wash, would be a church. But more important than the buildings, the Mission was to be a place where missionary and Navajo spent time and studied together, slowly bridging the cultural gaps that hindered the spreading of the good news. It was to be a place where the young Navajos grew up in the knowledge of Christ and carried that light to their families and home communities.

It was a grand vision and the Scotts were caught up in it. When the tour ended they were all standing on the site set aside for the future church. From that vantage point they could see all the property as well a good share of the surrounding area. They were struck by how desolate it was and how truly alone they were.

Neal Scott spoke first, "Well, it seems there is a lot to do. Some of the plans may take time to develop." Dr. Williams looked at Scott and smiled. "Yes, they will take time and I don't want you to feel pressured to get more done than is possible. But I do want to show you something. Come over here with me."

Together they walked to the edge of the mesa where the land sloped down to the canyon bottom in front of them. Dr. Williams pointed to a lone power line snaking over the hills across the Mission property and off into the distance. “When we first acquired this property about a year ago the nearest power line was about 25 miles from here. This property was chosen not because of any outstanding characteristics but because it was adequate and the Lord seemed to will it. It was only a few weeks after we bought the land that the Rural Electrification Agency approached and asked if it was all right if they ran a line through the property.

“All right? I should say it was. And now we sit on some of the only land around with electricity available. God knew just what He was doing in getting this land. I guess what I'm trying to say is that it's the Lord's work and He'll see it through. So don't let the size of the task get you down.”

Neal nodded and let out a sigh as he surveyed the property. “I appreciate that, Dr. Williams. It certainly is a privilege to be working at this stage when things are just getting off the ground.”

He started to turn back to the others, then frowned and turned back to the land below them. “I just noticed something. You say that cleared out area is a runway for small planes, right?”

Dr. Williams brightened, happy to talk about one of his favorite subjects. “Yes, it's only a very inadequate runway of course. We built it in only a couple of days with a bulldozer that was loaned to us. But it does the job and I have flown my plane out here many times. Soon we will start holding a medical and perhaps dental clinics here once a week. I and others will come out for that.”

Neal pursed his lips, “Uh huh, but from here it looks like that power line crosses the runway about one-third of the way from the end.”

Dr. Williams' brow creased for only a second. “Yes it does. That power line was a mixed blessing. It seems as though the power line could only be there and the lay of the property dictates the runway should be there as well. So I guess they must coexist.”

Neal looked at him wonderingly. “You don't mean to say that you use that short little runway with the power line there? It must be only 20 feet from the end. How do you do it?”

Dr. Williams shrugged. “Well, I just fly over or under it. Sometimes I have to decide pretty quickly which one it will be. It's tricky but we just make do out here.” He smiled and sauntered back to the others, leaving Neal to ponder the runway below.

A few days passed before the Scotts moved into a 14 ft. trailer by the pump house where the electricity was located. Then they set about making the old trading post livable, and with the help of many volunteers—among them Dr. Williams, Ed Davis, Chauncy Beebe, the work progressed rapidly. But the large amount of work it took to revamp the trading post into a dwelling, seemed like play to Neal and Tillie.

“This is nothing compared with the work it will take to put up a school, a clinic or any other structure on the Mission,” mused Neal. “But I'd rather be here than any other place on earth.”

“Me too,” returned Tillie with an enthusiastic grin. And if there was any single priority for the Mission, it was to get a school started. In fact, the Pioche family hadn't sent their six and seven year old boys to school the year before because they wanted them to start school at the Mission. Both Neal and Tillie knew that before they could seriously think about a school, there were many smaller challenges to take care of—including simply moving in.

Tillie sighed as she leaned against the whitewashed mud wall of the rock house. *It's just impossible*, she thought to herself, *to clean a house that was built on dirt, whose walls were plastered with mud, and painted white. Something*, she thought to herself, *is going to have to give*, and she knew it was going to be her housekeeping standards.

The old trading post had been fitted with a “new” roof and a coal burning stove, and a couch, all of which had been donated. Eventually it would serve as both a school and for Sabbath School and Church—until these buildings were erected.

Mr. Bowen helped Neal build a sink and cabinet at his house, and then helped install it at the Mission. Neal put in shelves over the sink, and helped to place their own furniture where it was needed. Neal had been gone most of the day to Farmington to meet with the board and begin detailed planning for the Mission. But Tillie couldn't keep her mind off what she knew was going to be discussed at that meeting.

She surveyed the room before her, then pushed the couch to a different corner and moved the chair opposite it. It still didn't have the desired effect and her mind wandered back to the meeting in town. *How can they make any concrete plans with no money and few real resources? On the other hand, how could they fail to make quick progress with the expectations of their Navaho neighbors so high.* She was about to try another arrangement with their sparse furniture when she heard Neal drive up. Rushing outside she met him as he was still getting out of the car and summed up all of her thoughts in one question, “Neal, what happened?” Neal smiled, then stretched out after the long bumpy ride home. “Well, for starters, we're going to have a school this fall!”

## Chapter 14 Resources for the Mission

Tillie's jaw dropped when Neal announced that they would build a school.

"Where did they find money to do that?"

Neal smiled again. "They didn't find any money. They found a form to make brick."

Tillie gave him a blank look.

"I will start making bricks and we will use them to build a school. There's plenty of sand here, we have water, so all we really need is cement—and the Board is hoping to get some donated."

Tillie took a moment to digest this news. "Okay, but can a building be finished by the time school should start?"

"Probably not," admitted Neal, "but we will try to build a shell, a building with walls, roof, and windows. We can start school in that and finish the work as we go along. If that doesn't work, and there's a chance it won't, then we'll have a much smaller school here, in our home." "

Here?" Tillie asked incredulously. Then her brow furrowed as she considered the option more fully. "Well, I suppose it could be done. We could use the large room as the classroom during the day as long as we move the furniture out of the way, and we could make a hot lunch for the students. . . . My goodness," she sputtered, "there's a lot to be done if we're going to be running a school this fall." Tillie turned to go into the house, absorbed in her thoughts.

"And," said Neal. Tillie stopped in her tracks.

"And?" she asked turning around again.

"And we're going to pour the foundation for the school in two weeks. We're going to drill a well—600 feet if we have to—right near the school, and I'm going to start on the bricks this week!"

Tillie beamed. "Praise the Lord! This work is really going to get moving!" She threw her hands up over her head as she shouted. "Let's start planning on how we're going to outfit the school and what we'll need to have on hand for the children." She started toward the house again.

"And," said Neal with a slight smile on his face.

"And?" Tillie turned around again.

"And the Board is very excited about your idea of having a garden out here. They want you to make it a large one, and they want you to try all sorts of crops the first year." He paused

as he looked around. "It's mid-May now and we're just past the frost-free date, so you could plant any time now."

"Good, it will be nice to have some fresh vegetables." She turned back to the house, still thinking aloud. "How will we preserve things though? Hmmm . . . I guess we'll have to bottle them on the coal stove this summer." She shrugged her shoulders.

"Have you given any thought to how we'll irrigate the garden? Do you think we can get that old pump to work?"

"And," said Neal, leaning against the car and smiling broadly. Tillie stopped dead in her tracks, then slowly turned around again.

"And?"

"And Dr. Williams has found a tiny camp trailer that he wants to tow out here and use to start a clinic once a week. He has talked to Dr. Hendrickson who will come out and do dentistry. He wants you to help out until he is able to find a nurse who can speak Navajo. Are you willing?"

Tillie beamed at the thought of a medical work at the Mission. "Why, of course I'm willing! She turned to go into the house, then stopped and looked back at Neal. "Anything else?"

Neal grinned. "Not for now."

The boys had discovered that Neal had returned and came running down the hill to greet him. "Hey, fellows," quipped Neal as he scooped both boys up in his arms and gave them a bear-sized hug. "We're going to build a school. How do you like that?"

"Whoopee!" they shouted. "Can we help too?"

"Sure."

The following weeks were busy ones for the Scotts—as well as for just about everyone in Farmington who was connected with the Mission. And of course life at the Mission wasn't just building and preparing. Several times each week the whole Scott family made friendly calls on their Navajo neighbors. Before long they were getting to know the Begays, the Freelands, the Pioches and many other families in the area.

At first it was a shock to the Scotts each time they were ushered into one of the dark stone hogans that smelled strongly of mutton: no electricity, no water, no bathrooms, no walls to divide and give privacy. The cultural disparities were sometimes overwhelming. But after a few visits the Scotts became accustomed to the differences in culture. They sought to form true friendships and give whatever physical and spiritual aid they could to their neighbors. With each visit they left some needed food or some Dorcas clothing with the family. And if Neal and Tillie felt the time was right, they initiated a discussion about Christ and sometimes extended

an invitation for a Bible study. Before long as many as 20 people were coming to the Scott home each Sabbath morning to join in worship. Still, Neal and Tillie found witnessing to the Navajos slow-going because of the language and cultural barriers.

Tillie began to realize how hard it would be to teach a school where no one spoke English. *Obviously*, she thought to herself, *the first several months will be dedicated to teaching the children the basics of the English language.*

Characteristically, the board decided to build a large school building with two classrooms. This way there would be room to grow. They also decided that the brick machine was not practical, so they used cement blocks instead.

By early August, Neal could see that the building wouldn't go up without a mighty push. "What we need is to have many volunteers come out for a week of fulltime effort," he observed. "Then we could finish the block work on one long, hot Sunday." He looked at the unfinished building. "Some parts of the building need only a few layers of concrete blocks, but" he swung his hand the other direction, "the west end of the building is less than half up. It will need more than a dozen courses of concrete blocks and mortar."

It was nearly dusk on the Sunday when the work was finally completed. But as a strong wind had arisen there was no inclination for celebration among the tired workers. Instead, they dispersed rapidly, making their ways back to Farmington—tired, yet happy with the way their work had turned out.

The dust storm increased in intensity as day turned into night. The wind whistled around the little rock house and Neal stopped to listen to it as it continued to increase. "I've never known the wind to blow so strong," he mentioned to Tillie. Tillie retired early for she had worked as hard as everyone else on the school building. Neal was nearly exhausted, because he not only had worked hard, but he had taken over supervising the work of others. But he couldn't rest. How would the building—with its still wet cement—fare in this wind? So, rather than retire, he felt he should check on the building. He hesitated, torn between the almost overwhelming yearning for rest, and the equally strong obsession to make sure everything was all right at the school.

At that moment a terrific gust of wind seemed to shake the rock house, and he made up his mind. Grabbing a flashlight and cinching up his robe tightly, Neal staggered out into the gale. The warm wind drove sand and dust into his face and tore at his robe. He had never experienced anything like this. He found it difficult to progress up the hill to the other end of the property where they'd built the school. He navigated more by instinct than sight since he needed to keep his eyes closed against the sand. Before he realized the distance he'd traveled, he saw the ghost of the school building looming up in the darkness straight before him. He quickly scanned the building and immediately noticed that the wind had blown down the west wall—despite the fact it had been well braced. At first, he couldn't believe it. But as he examined the building, he discovered that the damage wasn't limited to that wall for in collapsing, it had wrecked both sides of the school. He woke Tillie as soon as he returned to the rock house, and the news gushed out in such a stream of words, and with such wild gestures that Tillie had to stop him and ask him to start over.

He slowed, but merely continued. “All of the blocks will have to be cleaned of mortar. The damage will have to be repaired—the whole school will have to be rebuilt.” He stopped to catch his breath. Tears were forming in his eyes as he sat down on the edge of the bed. “I guess we’ll have to cancel the truss and roofing crew that are supposed to come out in a few days.”

Tillie sighed. “That means school will have to start in the rock house, and it might have to stay here all year.” Neal look around, wishing they had more room.

Then his thoughts returned to the school building as he shook the sand from his pajamas. “Well, I guess there’s nothing we can do as long as this wind keeps blowing.”

Sick at heart, the two went to bed. But Tillie found it impossible to sleep. Her mind raced as she made plans and devised ways to use the little space they had as creatively as possible. Yet one thought kept coming back to her as she planned. *What will it be like to have these little boys and girls from such a different background, not just in my school . . . but in my house?*

## Chapter 15 School Finally Opens

Sterling Pioche, a third grader, and his two brothers, Calvin and Lorenzo, stopped by the side of the road and turned their eyes toward home.

“I don't want to go to school,” remarked Calvin, “even if it is a 'nice school'”

“Yeah,” agreed Lorenzo. “Even if Mother says so.” “Why can't we stay home with our brothers and sisters,” put in Sterling, “and run through the sagebrush, ride horses, and play games.”

This was the first day of school at the new Mission.

“I've been at the rock house before,” he continued. “I like the nice lady, but I'm sure that school won't be any fun.”

That morning, just as the sun was peeping over the mesa, Sterling's mother had pulled the three boys up off their mats, dressed them in their best clothes, and pointed them out the door, and down the trail for the two and a half mile walk to the school—a short distance by Navajo standards. The boys stretched their walk out as long as possible.

“Why don't we just sit in the shade of that rock over there,” suggested Lorenzo. “Then we could go home this afternoon. No one will know that we haven't gone to school.”

“No!” Sterling knew their father all too well. “Father will find out. He said we must go to the Bellagonna mission and learn the language and the teaching of the Bellagonna.”

He kicked a stone at a rabbit sitting beside the road. It struck the animal broadside and sent it scampering into the sage.

“Father is a powerful man in the community. He knows everything that goes on in these parts. If we don't show up at school . . . .”

“Father will punish us when he gets home.” Calvin finished his sentence. “I guess we have to go. That's what Father wants us to do.”

The three gave a big sigh—almost in unison. Sterling turned to take a long look toward home, and then, without any further words, the three shuffled the last few hundred yards to the rock house that would be their school.

That morning there were nine students, not counting little Tommie and Steven Scott. Tillie would have had a fulltime job just taking care of her boys, but now she had *nine* students as well. All of the children had gone through experiences similar to that of Sterling and his brothers—each one different only due to the difference in personality. *Six boys and three girls.* Tillie's mind almost screamed the number. *How can I do it?* Neil had gone out for a bumpy 20 mile auto jaunt to pick up most of the students. Only the Pioches lived near enough to walk, but in winter they, too, would need a ride.

Now the students had settled together in the room they would call their "classroom," for many months to come. They sat at their desks and looked at their teacher expectantly. *Who is the pale lady*, they wondered, *and where did she come from?* Tillie stared back at the black haired, brown eyed, deeply tanned faces looking up at her. *Only three of them know any English at all*, she argued with herself. *But it's not just the language that separates us. . . .* She knew that they had come from homes where spiritualism and superstition owned the very air they breathed. *If they get sick, their parents will call the medicine man long before they even consider the white man's medicine*, she reasoned.

Tillie was well aware that some of her students had been to squaw dances during the past few weeks, and that sent a shudder up her spine. A squaw dance was a ritual celebration held in the late summer and early fall every year. There was always plenty of liquor at the all night celebration, and the affairs were often known to turn ugly. Reports told of drunken husbands selling their daughters and wives to other men. All this in the full view of their children sitting around the perimeter.

Tillie felt the weight of responsibility settle on her shoulders. *The light of truth and hope has to shine forth from this little Mission*. She felt very determined. *It just has to!* Tillie squared her shoulders and lifted her chin. Then she addressed the class.

"Welcome to the La Vida Mission School," she smiled. "I'm so happy you've come today and that you will be my students this year."

Nine blank faces looked back at her. Tillie knew they hadn't understood a word she'd said, but she drew a deep breath and went on.

"We'll start today, in the same way that we'll start every day . . . with prayer." Tillie bowed her head, folded her hands and prayed. "Dear Lord, I pray that Your Spirit will come here to dwell in this room, touching the hearts and minds of these precious souls. And Lord, please give me the strength, wisdom and patience to lead these students to you. Amen." Tillie opened her eyes to see nine pairs of curious eyes staring at her.

She smiled and said, "Our subject today and for the next few months will be 'English.'"

The months dragged by as the students sought to form the words of the strange tongue. But soon the young people were acquiring a small but effective vocabulary. And the Scotts learned a little Navajo as well.

The days grew colder and shorter. Tillie and her class worked away in their small room, learning their lessons slowly, but forming the kinds of relationships that allowed Tillie to tell her students about Jesus and His love.

Little by little the students began to show an interest in the Bible stories, and they asked more and more questions about Jesus. Learning about the plan of salvation wasn't limited to school. The Scotts established a Sabbath School in their rock house

"Come visit our Sabbath School," they invited everyone they met. "Saturday morning, in the rock house." The progress seemed slow, but their small Sabbath School grew until more than

30 people attended each week. And as time advanced the Navajo people began to look at the mission church as their church. The Lord blessed the work, and people were beginning to walk in the Circle of Light.

As winter approached Tillie began thinking about Christmas. “Wouldn't it be nice to have a Christmas program,” she remarked to Neal one day.

“Good idea,” he mumbled, engrossed in some other part of their work. So Tillie began to plan for the Christmas program.

“How would you like to have a Christmas program,” she asked them one morning in late November.

“What is a Christmas program,” asked several students in unison. As Tillie explained the idea, her charges caught her excitement. And so they spent part of each day, for several weeks, working on the program. The program was a success in every way. . . . During Christmas break Tillie and Neal were able to read an account of the Christmas program that Board member Violet Cummings had written for one of the earliest editions of *Navajo News*, the La Vida Mission newsletter:

Nine wiggly, bright-eyed little Navajo were trying, but not too successfully, to divide their excited attention between the gaily decorated packages under the tree and the tall red-haired, some -what frustrated young man in front of them.

“No, no, Amos, that's not quite right. Come on now, let's do it over and do it better. A little louder this time—that's right—that's fine.”

In the background hovered Tillie, their teacher, anxious that this, her first Christmas program at La Vida Mission, be successful—waiting for the visitors who were expected.

In one end of the pocket-sized schoolroom, a tall fragrant evergreen, gaily decorated by the pupil's skillful fingers, dominated the scene. The children's fascinated gaze wandered again and again to its loveliness. Would their fathers and mothers think it was pretty too?

A sudden commotion at the door. “Visitors already? Why, it isn't even noon,” panicked Tillie. “The program doesn't start until one o'clock. There isn't enough lunch for any extras!” Never mind, we'll just go ahead as usual.

So while mamas and daddies visited happily around the old coal heater in the schoolroom, the children were shepherded into the kitchen and quietly fed.

“Cram them in, jam them in, there's more to follow. . .”

The old school jingle had never been more appropriate as streams of visitors poured through the door. Everyone, it seemed, had come to the Christmas party at their new Mission. Proud parents, grandmas, and cousins, many of them festive in colorful scarves and gaily striped woolen blankets, all in a happy holiday mood. The little stone house threatened to burst its seams as 50, 55, then 60 crowded onto the backless benches and a few chairs.

Where would they put another one? Children had long since filled every available inch on the floor at the grownup's feet. But still the visitors came. Latecomers peered hopefully through the door, then with wide grins, wedged themselves in beside their accommodating neighbors. Seventy people all told, when the final count was taken! These were squeezed into a space, no larger than 14' x 24', and they never had so much fun and anticipation before? This was their Mission, and their children's program. Who were *they* to mind a few discomforts?

"Silent night! Holy night!" The lovely notes from the pump organ stole softly over the suddenly hushed room. Little strangers had entered from somewhere and were gazing with childish adoration at a Babe in a manger. Little shepherds that were somewhat familiar in the peaceful pastoral lives of the Navajo who watched. Then with Neal's quiet voice narrating the story, wise men followed a star. As the children's voices rose and fell in the age old carols, one could almost feel the presence of the angels of God in the warm, crowded room.

Now it was Steven's turn to say his piece. Such a pint-sized missionary as his clear sweet voice recited a Christmas poem, his fair skin and blue eyes contrasting strongly with his more dusky hued companions.

In the kitchen Tillie surveyed the refreshments doubtfully. *Will there be enough to go around?! And the toys! What if there were not enough toys?*

Miraculously everything worked out all right. But now that it was all over, no one seemed in a hurry to go home. The songs had been so pretty, couldn't they sing them again? So the organ rang out the old familiar favorites once more. And though there were not many who could actually sing them, their radiant faces reflected the joy and happiness within.

It seemed like a long time after Christmas that spring finally came, and shortly after spring the heat of early summer was upon the Mission. As it turned out school remained in the little rock house for the entire year. A combination of weather and a lack of funds was the little Mission's nemesis from the very start. The Scotts relied on donations of every sort to feed and clothe not just the families in need in the Navajo community, but also their own family as well. Friends of the Mission worked doggedly in raising donations of money and materials.

The Lord blessed the work so that, in the third year, the Mission not only had a school building but found it possible to convert to a boarding school. The boys stayed in the classroom at night and the girls lived in the very crowded rock house. The Scotts decided to vacate the house in favor of a donated trailer.

Barbara Starrett, a young practical nurse, came to La Vida to be the girl's dean. A few months later her parents, Vic and Doris Starrett, arrived, helping Neal and Tillie carry the burden of operating the Mission. Running the mission as a boarding school meant that the staff members could spend more time with each student. They drew from examples in the life surrounding them to press home lessons about Christ which the children were learning in school.

The members of the mission staff decided that the students should stay at the Mission for two weeks at a time. Then they would go home for a few days before starting the cycle anew.

This allowed the staff to form closer friendships with the students and lead them to Christ by example as well as instruction.

“This is working well,” commented Tillie soon after they started the program. “This two week cycle is good for us . . . and good for the students as well.” Yet the Mission was too crowded—at least by way of sleeping facilities. The school could have held twice the number of classroom students were not so much of space taken up in sleeping area.

At the end of the school year, the Scotts left to return to school. Meanwhile the committee worked on the clinic for use as a girls’ dorm and a cafeteria.

“There's just no getting around it:” exclaimed Vic one day when he was talking with Ed Davis. “The Mission needs a dormitory.”

“But we need to construct a proper one,” returned Davis, “two stories high with a cafeteria attached. That's a very expensive proposition. Right now,” he continued, “it's just a distant dream.”

“I suppose so,” returned Starrett. “For the meantime, the number of students will remain relatively small.”

He scratched his head. “Money and supplies are always scarce here at the Mission, and a dormitory will need plenty of both.” From the start Vic Starrett spent a fair portion of his time chasing down needed materials and donated supplies for the daily operation of the Mission.

La Vida was every inch a faith ministry. The mission board made plans prayerfully, and then pushed ahead, not knowing where the required resources would come from, or how the Lord would get them to the Mission. It was always a temptation to hold back, to doubt that the needed money or equipment would somehow surface. But Vic never seemed to give in to pessimism—especially when it came to talk of building a dorm.

On every trip Vic made to Colorado, Utah, Arizona or even California to pick up food, clothing, and other donated items, he made it into an opportunity to tell everyone he met about the Mission and the need for a dormitory. Slowly but surely his efforts and those of many others brought in supplies and a respectable amount of money for the dormitory.

Vic's success convinced the Board to start construction of the dorm the following summer. The students became more and more excited as they thought about a large building with real beds. The staff dreamed about the many new students who could find accommodation with the extra room the dormitory would provide.

The grass roots effort to fund and supply the Mission and to raise additional funds for the new dorm began to grow at a faster pace. Good news came with the holiday season: A group of churches in California had decided to collect food and clothing, and to raise money for the Mission. Their efforts proved successful. So, Vic and Doris Starrett volunteered to take the Mission truck to California over the Christmas vacation and bring back the supplies.

Starrett intended to make the most of the trip, talking to as many people as possible about the Mission and about their need to build a dorm. After their fellowship with many Christian brothers and sisters, Vic and Doris loaded the last of the donated goods onto the truck, and pulled out on a Sunday morning, bound for northwest New Mexico. It was slow going from the start. The truck and trailer were heavily loaded and the highway generally followed an uphill track all the way to Arizona. Vic stopped several times along the way to check the load and the tires to make sure everything was all right. It ate up time, but helped assure a successful journey.

As day turned into night Vic decided to keep pushing, hoping to make it to Winslow or even Holbrook. That would leave a reasonable drive for the next day — making a three day drive in two days.

Vic passed through Tempe, happy to leave the uphill climb behind him. He still wanted to watch the load, especially since the roads would allow him to drive at higher speeds. He had been monitoring his load with the mirrors, but when the darkness made his mirrors useless, he decided to pull over on the side of the highway once again to check the load and the tires. The tarp over the trailer had loosened at the back, and Vic retied it. A motel was across the road, and as Vic crossed the road to check on staying for the night, a drunk driver flew over the hill and hit Vic, killing him instantly! It was the first tragedy—the first martyr—for La Vida Mission.

The Mission lay in a state of shock over the death of one of its most dedicated workers. Expressions of sympathy came in from across the country. And at home, the fallen worker received a great honor: The new dorm he so wanted to see was named in his honor. The dorm grew into a fact over the next two years. Both Doris and her daughter Barbara remained at the mission and helped to build it. And still every corner of the campus echoed with memories of their lost loved one.

For Barbara Starrett it was not only a time to deal with her profound personal grief, but it also gave her opportunities to discuss the meaning of death with the students to whom she had grown so close. In particular she found herself drawn into many long conversations with Elizabeth and Irene Henry from the Whiterock area— about 10 miles from the Mission.

Death, as a subject, ran rife with taboos and superstition among the Navajos. Elizabeth and Irene were seriously drawn to Christianity and had many questions on the subject.

"Barbara," said a little brown eyed girl one day, "When they buried your father what did you send with him?"

Barbara let a smile slip over her face then quickly covered it up. She knew what the little girl meant by her question. When a Navajo man died he would often be buried with his saddle, his gun, his silver jewelry and his favorite possessions. They believed he would use all these things in the Happy Hunting Ground to which the Navajos believed he would go right after death.

Only a few weeks previously a man had been buried near the Mission. They led his favorite horse to the grave, shot the poor animal in the head, and left it lying on top of the grave. Soon afterward they dropped the man's saddle in the grave and put his rifle in the grave as well.

Thinking the dead took things provided with them, the little girl wanted to know about the supplies with which Barbara had outfitted her father for his afterlife journey. Barbara explained the subject to her.

"My dear, we didn't put anything in his casket with him."

The girls gasped and some put their hands over their mouths.

"That's not the way the Navajos do it!" said one.

"Didn't they bury anything with him in his grave?" put in another.

Barbara knew what the little girls were saying and smiled. "You see, my father made preparations for death while he was still alive. He served Jesus and claimed forgiveness for sins from Him. The Bible tells us that the dead are only asleep, awaiting the return of their Lord. That is what my father is doing, sleeping in Christ. He has no need of any saddle or horse or truck or gun, so we didn't send any along."

One wide-eyed girl looked at Barbara: "You mean your father is buried, but not dead, just sleeping?"

Barbara chose her words carefully. She was touching on some of the deepest superstitions of the Navajo. The wrong words could evoke images of menacing spirits, "skin walkers," and dark acts practiced by evil medicine men.

"My father is dead and buried," said Barbara. "But he has not left the grave to go anywhere, and he will not know anything until Christ calls him out of the grave to go to heaven. It is the same with everyone who has died. None of them have gone anywhere or awakened. And none of the dead will leave their graves until Christ comes."

The discussion that followed gave Barbara a chance to once again go through the plan of redemption and the story of Jesus in simple terms. Slowly but surely Barbara and the other Mission workers made progress in bringing Navajo youth to Christ. But every soul had a hard fought spiritual battle that didn't stop at the baptistery. All of them needed plenty of nurturing and follow up work in order to keep them in the fold. One thing the Mission workers quickly discovered was that for the Navajo to make a change in their religion was no simple matter.

The Navajo religion and superstition permeated every aspect of life including family ties, work, eating, play and even dreams. For the Navajo their interaction with life and surrounding events usually had deep spiritual meaning. To convert a Navajo meant not only a change of beliefs but it also meant a complete change in the way they looked at life. It could mean the loss of family and the loss of cultural identity.

For the Navajos the decision for Christ was bigger than for most Bellagonnas, and the temptations to backslide were equally large. And yet the little company of believers grew, one by one. First, students, then their families and finally community members joined the fellowship at La Vida Mission. Each church member made large sacrifices to join their lives to Christ but each member of the little congregation rejoiced all the more that they had found their redeemer.

Sabbaths were a celebration of faith as students, staff members and constituents gathered in the school, dormitory, or cafeteria to worship together and give testimonies to the power of Christ in their lives. Each Sabbath was filled with stories of how Navajos who had given their lives to Christ were tempted by former friends, shunned by family and slighted by the community. All of this only served to strengthen their faith in Christ. Sabbaths were also filled with the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit at the Mission and among the Mission staff.

## Chapter 16

### **Pioneer Days at La Vida - Barbara's Story**

In the early spring of 1964 Alice (my Navajo foster sister) and I arrived at La Vida Mission. Here we would join the pioneers in their endeavors and struggles to expand the work among the Navajo. When we arrived we were shown our quarters in an ancient rock house.

Other modern humans had inhabited it previously, and survived, so we decided that we could too. The rock house did have some features that elevated it above the native hogan—a sink with running hot and cold water, electricity, a stove, a refrigerator and a bed for each of us. Two old wood stoves assured us that we would survive the cold winter. We also had a "path" which led to the outhouse. Washing and bathing facilities were missing but we were issued a round galvanized tub so we could have at least some degree of cleanliness.

There were a number of things which told me that housekeeping would be interesting: the worn linoleum on the kitchen floor; the splintered wooden floors in the rest of the house; the cardboard ceilings; the mud walls. The first rainstorm introduced us to one of the many facets of our lives at La Vida. Somewhere on our flat roof was at least one leak. There were more leaks, of course, but we never did find them. The roof unloaded its liquid cargo at the point where the wall and ceiling met. Each "overflow" formed its own river down the inside of our mud walls. But we pulled the beds to the center of the room, and let the flood flow. After the deluge, we shoveled out the deposit of mud which had accumulated on the floor, and life became somewhat normal again. Frequent sandstorms struck our area, and the flying "real estate" filtered through every crack and seam of the house, and made housekeeping discouraging.

When autumn arrived, Alice left for the Adventist boarding school at Holbrook, Arizona, but the rock house didn't remain quiet for long. Parents arrived from all directions to enroll their children in the new day school, some came by wagon and some by car.

One mother brought her youngest daughter, Cynthia, a seven year old who spoke no English. She asked that we board Cynthia throughout the school year rather than sending her home at break-time. Since the rock house was the only place available, the staff decided she would stay with me. Although I spoke very little Navajo and Cynthia spoke no English, we managed somehow to communicate. She had a delightful sense of humor and a cheerful disposition.

I had been appointed to drive the bus, and as we traveled the long route each day, we laughed together and sang—as we bounced over the rough road. With the coming of fall, the torrential rains again pelted the landscape, and we had increasing difficulty in busing our students over the dirt/mud trails. We crossed the Chaco Wash and drove northeast, traveling several miles each way up a side canyon to pick up Erna—a six year old granddaughter of medicine man, Charlie Jim. About a mile below their place we had to cross an area which became a bog in wet weather. When we failed to show up on time to pick up or return Erna, Charlie and Ella Jim hitched up a team of horses and came to where they were sure to find us, bogged down in the mire. Charlie Jim, though about 100 years old, was still strong and

straight as an arrow. But, we felt that it was unfair for us to expect him to continue this service through the cold of approaching winter.

It was time for us to take Erna to live with us in the rock house as well. Erna, a Spanish/Navajo mixture, spoke no Navajo, but Cynthia, who was learning English rapidly, closed the communication gap fast.

Up the Chaco Wash about three miles away, Calvin and Lorenzo Pioche lived, and we picked them up each day for school. The road to their house was often muddy, and we soon added them to the growing family in the rock house. We soon found that we needed to make a place Arthur, too, a seven year old from down Chaco Canyon. So for the rest of the school year we had five small boarders at the school.

The rest of the students lived in more accessible places, so I loaded up the five boarders twice a day and took them with me as we brought the others to and from school. Many times during the remainder of the year, we found ourselves stuck in a sand dune, or a mudhole, or sitting in the middle of the road in a broken down vehicle waiting for help to come to our rescue.

The situation at the mission were not always easy, but a house full of children is never a dull place. Cynthia, with her sense of humor and merry laugh, Calvin and Lorenzo, full of life and mischief, and the most serious and sensitive Erna and Arthur left us no room for boredom.

There were other things about life in the rock house that kept life interesting. We had no washing machine, and while washing clothes by hand wasn't impossible, I hadn't reckoned with the monumental task of washing bedding by hand. One day as I struggled to wring enough water from a sheet to put it on the clothesline, some visitors drove up. Seeing our plight they determined we should have a washing machine. Two days later a wringer type washing machine arrived from Farmington. Luxury of luxuries! We set it on a platform outside the kitchen window, and on wash days ran a hose from the kitchen sink out the window to fill the machine and the galvanized rinsing tub. This arrangement greatly eased the difficulties of washing day.

The rock house served as the campus kitchen as well. We had to cook the food for the noon meal and haul it up the hill to the schoolhouse each day. And we still bathed in round tubs beside the wood stoves, and we still had no indoor toilet facilities. In all of this we found a closeness and warmth of fellowship which more modern and spacious quarters—that were to come in later years—did not afford.

Soon after Christmas that year my parents—Vic and Doris Starrett—arrived from California to join the staff at La Vida. And it was good that they came. You see, more parents were begging us to board their children at the school. A clinic had been under construction for some time and the board decided that we should finish it. They also decided to use one end of the clinic temporarily as a girl's dormitory and dining area, until they could build a dorm. My father worked energetically to complete the clinic, but by September there was still a great deal to be done before we could move into it.

The busing system with all its complications led us to decide to house all of the girls in the rock house with me, and all the boys in the front half of the unfinished classroom. My parents

set up their mobile home behind the schoolhouse so they could care for the boys. The boys ate two meals at my parent's trailer, and the girls ate at the rock house. We continued to bring them their food at noon as we had done before.

When school opened we had twelve little girls and eight small boys staying with us. The whole situation was fraught with difficulties, frustrations, and exhaustion. But as we look back on that time, we find that those days bring the most pleasant memories to our minds. Some of these children became workers for God among their people.

One day the father of nine year old Irene, came to us requesting that we take his thirteen year old daughter Elizabeth as well. The father was an intelligent Christian gentleman, a tribal councilman. He wanted his children to have a Christian education and live in a Christian environment. Our rock house was full, but at last we agreed to find room for one more, and Elizabeth joined our family.

As December rolled around, the clinic was nearing completion. By the time school let out for the holidays, the building was ready for occupancy. My parents made plans to go to California to spend Christmas with my brother and sister and her family. But somehow the prospect of moving into a clean, new roomy building was more attractive to me than spending Christmas with the family. It was a decision I have regretted. It was the last Christmas my father would be with us. Two days after Christmas, his unselfish life came to an end (see chapter 15). After laying him to rest in a California grave, my mother and I returned to La Vida.

The new clean quarters were like a mansion after our experience in the rock house. The boys continued to live in the schoolhouse for some time and all meals were served in the new clinic building. Life became easier in some respects, but money was always scarce. Because the Mission was unable to hire and house more help, the staff was often overworked.

When the Scotts returned, they both taught school while living behind a partial partition between the boy's half of the school room and their own half. They served together in the responsibility of boys' dean, putting in 24 hours a day contact with the children. While they did this, they tried to maintain some semblance of family life for themselves and their two boys.

Enrollment increased each year and there were now too many children in one classroom. Neil taught the upper grades in the entry way to the schoolhouse. In the clinic where I cared for 15-20 girls, I cooked three meals a day for students and often cared for patients who drifted in for medical attention.

Once a week Dr. Williams flew in to hold a clinic, bringing with him a dentist, usually Dr. Burton Everett or Dr. Earl Hendrickson from Aztec, NM—near Farmington. Later, Dr. James Dunn of Grand Junction, Colorado, joined the staff of flying doctors and these men alternated every other week with Dr. Williams.

In the early days at La Vida a small one room trailer served for a clinic, and the dentists used a small adobe room to care for patients in cold weather. In fair weather a straight-backed chair set up outside served the purpose better.

When the clinic was finished, one end was used for its intended purpose and the doctors generously let us use the other half for the dormitory. People came from far and near, using whatever mode of transportation they had, to receive medical and dental care at the clinic. They often received clothing that had been donated by friends of the mission.

As we had hoped, the people of the community were coming to depend on La Vida for many of their needs. In the 1960s there still existed no pavement across this section of Navajoland.

The Mission property bordered on the formidable Chaco Wash and no bridge spanned its breadth. Thirty miles to the south, the dirt road met pavement at Crown Point. To the north, 50 miles away, near Farmington, the gravel trail again met asphalt. In between, on this 80 mile stretch of temperamental mud, sand and clay, lay the Mission. Far from civilization, it was often isolated for days and often weeks by the vicissitudes of nature. When it rained anywhere between us and the mountains to the north and east, the washes ran raging and became impassable for whatever length of time it took the water to move to the San Juan River. It wasn't unusual for cars and wagons to be lined up on both sides of the Chaco for hours, waiting for the water to recede enough to make the crossing safely. Quicksand made the wash even more treacherous.

From time to time, someone brave, or foolhardy, or intoxicated, would venture forth to blaze a trail for those waiting on shore. If the action was taken too soon, the person stalled his vehicle in midstream and it would gradually sink into quicksand. The Mission stood on call 24 hours a day at such times to rescue these unfortunate victims. Because of the fickle roads, town day was an all day affair. And staff members found it discouraging to make the 100 mile round trip over rough and often muddy roads; then to round a bend into Chaco Canyon on the way home only to see the lights of the Mission reflected on the waters of the Chaco. It usually meant sitting on the far bank until daybreak or longer. Of course, they could return the 50 miles to Farmington, go west 30 miles to Shiprock, then traverse 100 miles to Gallup, and then another 90 miles east and north to the Mission. On this route there was still a chance that it had rained on the 30 miles of dirt road between Crown Point to the Mission. In that case, the unfortunate travelers would likely face lake-sized puddles on the road, sections that had been washedout, and mud, mud, and more mud.

The Mission had no phone and we could only guess what lay ahead. Life was never monotonous. Sometime in the late 1960s someone decided to build a temporary bridge across the Chaco at a narrow place about a mile downstream from the mission. When they drove the pilings into the sand, the poles sometimes sank in the quicksand. At other times they hit an underground current which produced enough force to pop it up again. After repeated attempts they finally succeeded in stabilizing enough pilings at the same level to span the hazard. At last the obstacles were surmounted and it was a day of triumph when people could come and go at will.

The bridge ended another phase of pioneering at La Vida. No longer did people anxiously study the ebb and flow of the Chaco. In time the mighty wash, which had challenged our best laid plans and governed our contact with the outside world, came almost to be ignored by newer workers at the Mission. There were those of us, however, who still have a healthy respect for the

great twisting, winding ribbons of quicksand and water. In the early days some of the pioneers had stood on its shores and watched helplessly the fate of people whose only crime had been that they had waded the treacherous waters of the Chaco. We knew what it meant to attempt to reach home when it was impossible to cross by car. We knew the fear we felt at the sight of the first stream of water as it came tumbling down the wash after a torrential rain, ever widening and swelling, until at last becoming a maddened, raging river with the fury of a tyrant. We had seen it ebb away again into a trickling stream and sink once more beneath the surface. Each time the water came and went, we lived again the experience of the past and gratefully with almost reverent tread, crossed the one lane bridge which connected our world so easily with civilization. Little by little the old gave way to the new, the primitive to the modern.

It is called “progress.” Life became easier, for the most part, but there were still many challenges to meet, and obstacles which tried our patience. Crises came, calling for earnest prayer. Plans often fell prey to failure— only to be laid again, adjusted, examined and readjusted again—so the Circle of Light might continue to widen until its radiance should cover the whole of Navajoland.

Lack of funds continued to prove an ever-present problem. At times the outlook seemed so bleak that we thought we’d have to close down the work because there was no money to pay either the bills or the small stipend the workers received. On those occasions we witnessed that God sent money just in time—from people who had little idea of our needs—they only had an interest in the work for the Indians. And so, we were able to continue.

After the death of my father a fund was started in his memory for the building of a dormitory to house the children. Several years later the walls of the new spacious dormitory and cafeteria began to rise. There were those among the students who had stayed in the rock house with me, and now shared our dreams of a new dormitory.

Some of these girls neared the end of their grade school days at La Vida. We watched anxiously to see whether the new dorm would be finished in time so that they could enjoy it before graduation. Little by little, money came in so progress could continue until at last the day arrived when the workers had laid the last carpeting, painted the last wall, and installed the last faucet.

The plans called for the upstairs portion to serve as the girl's quarters. We had long since outgrown the clinic building though we greatly appreciated the kindness of the doctors on the Mission Board who shared it with us through the years. Now everything was ready for the girls to move in—except the bunk beds, which were under construction, and the donated chests of drawers. But the girls could wait no longer. We got permission to lay the new spongy mattresses on the clean red carpeting, and we made ourselves at home Indian style.

We lined up our shoes inside the entryway to keep dirt out of our new paradise. The girls rolled and tumbled in glee enjoying the softness and luxury. La Vida was about to become a full-fledged up-to-date comfortable boarding school with many of the conveniences of modern civilization.

## Appendix

### Spread of SDA Church through Navajoland

Today, nearly a century after the work among the Navajos began at Lake Grove Mission, there are converts scattered all across Navajoland. In 1941 at Holbrook, AZ, Marvin and Gwen Walter established a mission school on the southern border of the reservation. The school has grown to include a high school and today young people still go forth from the Holy Indian School, carrying the light of the gospel to their people.

At Chinle, AZ, in the heart of Navajo country, is a church and grade school; a feeder school to Holbrook.

Monument Valley once had a thriving church and grade school. In the early years the mission included a clinic and hospital but with the coming of paved roads and better transportation the government hospital now takes care of most medical needs of the people who were once so remote from medical care. Now the mission has lost their lease on the land and looking to rebuild in the future.

Gallup, on the southwest corner of the reservation, has a nice church to accommodate their rapidly growing congregation.

At Ft. Defiance, Kayenta, Waterflow, and Kinlichee, bodies of believers meet each Sabbath for services—led by their own native people.

The light of the gospel is shining all across Navajoland—here and there—but there is still a large work to be done. Church schools are needed in places where there are companies of believers, and in other places as well. Pastors and Bible workers are in short supply. The Harvest truly is plenteous but the laborers are few and funds are not in sight for the work, which needs to be done so Jesus can return.

Notes from Tillie Scott:

We are just incidental to the beginning—a drop in the sand, so to speak. As I read the manuscript, I hear and feel so much of the emotion of a few words you present. We really began in the 14ft. old blue house trailer that Veda, or someone, had taken out there. There was a big fenced garden area, and a fence between Freelands and the mission. We used an electric hot plate to cook, etc., even in the trailer.

Sad to say, there were few "volunteers" to start the mission. People came as they could. On big days—such as foundation pouring, the beginning of block laying, etc., a work day was called and many willing hands gave of their backbreaking talents to the project. Mr. Beebe was the most faithful. Wentzel and Ed Davis came sometimes on a Sunday, but they had jobs too. Mr. Rowe was hired for two or three weeks to work with Neal on the rock house. We didn't mind. We enjoyed the "joy set before us," the challenge, the vision, the work. We were young and healthy. Full of life. We never weighed the pros and cons or were hesitant in any way—it was a wholehearted commitment. God just used us to lay a bit of groundwork, to get the ball rolling.

Bless him, Ed Davis was our God-sent encourager. Mr. Beebe was our main moral support and helper. Marty Hester brought out the cabinet C.B. Bowen and Neal built. When C. B. was going to take the cabinets to the mission, he couldn't remember Neal's name and called him "Boy Missionary" (he often called him that ever after). Neal looked so very young.

#### Growth in Gallup

In 1998, Gallup had two congregations—the Gallup church of 18-20 members and a Native American family which met at a hogan church. When Pastor Gladstone Simmons arrived, he suggested that the two groups join together. In March 1999, the congregation was accepted by the conference committee as the Gallup All Nations Church. Late that summer, with funds made available from a special offering, a new paved parking area was created as well as landscaping around the hogan in preparation for an evangelistic crusade. At the close of those meetings, 77 individuals were baptized, the majority being Native Americans from the Navajo Nation. Attendance jumped from 15-20 to over 60 each Sabbath.

The hogan church was now too small, and the church began to make plans for a new worship center. While the building committees met, improvements continued on the church property. An illuminated sign, a 3000gallon water tank, fencing, and a cattle guard were installed. In addition, a PA system, a video projector, and satellite equipment were purchased.

In 2003, the church received funds from the North American Division's Sabbath School Investment program. That was added to the church building fund that had grown to more than \$100,000. Church members have committed to giving over \$2,000 per month for the building project. A \$300,000 loan from the union revolving fund gave them over half of the projected \$650,000 cost so the church is moving ahead in faith.

James Stevens, conference president, LeeRoy Chacon, conference secretary, and David Freedman, conference treasurer, joined the church members at a ground breaking ceremony on July 21, 2004. It is projected, if funds are available, that the new facility will be ready by January 2005.

A full evangelistic series is planned for March, 2005 in the new facility. Pray for Pastor Simmons and the members of the Gallup All Nations Church as they work together to share the gospel. If you would like to help with this special Native American mission project, contact the Texico Conference office. *Southwestern Union Record*, September, 2004, p. 28

#### Miscellaneous Articles

A mission for the Navajo Indians was conducted at Thoreau, New Mexico, for some years, beginning about 1916, with Orno Follett as director, under supervision of the Southwestern Union Conference. Many Navajos, Isletas, and Zunis live in this area. A special camp meeting for the Navajos in 1935 had an attendance of 75. *SDA Encyclopedia*, Article: "Texico Conf."

Navajos. In 1916 Orno Follett and his family opened work among the Navajo of the southwestern United States in the Smith's Lake region, north of Gallup, New Mexico. Two years later the General Conference Committee appointed a committee on the "American Indian Mission." The same year (1918) the Texico Conference bought 640 acres (260 hectares) of land

at Lake Grove, in New Mexico, on the Navajo reservation. A small school, a two-room dispensary, and other buildings were erected.

Falling victim to the influenza epidemic, the first teacher died a few days after arriving. The wife of a second teacher, B. W. Lowry, likewise fell victim and died after being there only a short time. The school term was finished by a Navajo teacher, Helen Begay, and later by Mrs. Follett. This school continued to operate until 1927. Follett worked among the Navajos until 1924, when his health broke, and he was replaced by O. W. Wolfe. After about three years the Wolfes were forced to leave for the same reason. The Folletts, who in the meantime had regained their health partially, returned and directed the mission from time to time for the next four or five years. During this time the Folletts opened missionary work among the Maricopa [Indians] of Phoenix, Arizona.

*SDA Encyclopedia* Article: "Native Americans"

FOLLETT, ORNO (1882–1960).

Missionary to the American Indians for 40 years. He studied nursing at the St. Helena Sanitarium. In 1909 he married Agnes Wammack, and for several years engaged in evangelistic work in Kansas. Having had two bouts with tuberculosis, he took a five month trip in a covered wagon to look for a location for an Indian mission, and in 1916 established a mission among the Navajos at Thoreau, New Mexico. A mission home, school, and dispensary were built, and later, a small hospital. He spent 15 years working among this tribe, and aided in translation of parts of the Bible into Navajo. He also established several missions among the Indians of Arizona.

*SDA Encyclopedia*. Article: Follett, Orno.

Maricopa Indians: Until a few years ago Indians and Mexican Americans comprised a large percentage of the population in Arizona. In 1933 the first Indian from the Maricopa Reservation, 15 miles (25 kilometers) southwest of Phoenix, was baptized, during a series of meetings held by John Ford in Phoenix. The next year the Orno Follett family began work among the Maricopas through public meetings. Later a school and church were established and work expanded to several other Southern tribes.

*SDA Encyclopedia*, Article: Arizona Conference.

Nelson, Edison and Deborah Tso:

Edison and Deborah Tso have been leaders in the LaVida Mission Church. They teach the Navajo class each week and Edison is an elder and translator. Edison was on the staff at LaVida and both teach a class in Navajo to the students. Deborah is a certified teacher. She graduated from Southwestern Adventist College (now Southwestern Adventist University). Edison went to school at LaVida when he was a boy. Nelson Tso also went to school at LaVida when his brother did. He and his wife are church members at the LaVida Mission Church, but live a considerable distance away. They attend church when possible.

Deborah Tso:

I was a young lady in my early twenties when I came to LaVida Mission. Elder Leroy Moore was the director. I had a job in Gallup when he contacted me and asked me to come and see the place. He convinced me with my family that I begin working in the fall of 1977. I started working in the office, and then became assistant girl's dean, with the director's wife. A few years later I found myself in the classroom as teacher's aide, with Margaret Goode. Margaret Goode became so ill that the family moved away. I was selected to finish the school year, since I knew

what was going on. I'd learned much from Mrs. Goode, an excellent teacher. Also learned much from the students' Bible lessons. I was asked to give the adult Sabbath School lesson for my people. I felt small in my heart, but consented to do so. Then I started giving Bible studies in the community to individuals and families. I went with a few of my students that wanted to go with me. I took different ones each time they had a part in the Bible study, like opening and closing prayer, sing a song, read scriptures. All this learning and growing spiritually I was able to face my adult Sabbath School class and give Bible studies.

Then I needed to read Navajo. I've always spoken but never tried to read or write in the language. I took a class on it and with some struggles I could read and write. It's like learning piano: I had to practice. I've learned to read well, but can only write some. I had to learn because we read in Navajo in Adult Sabbath School Class and prayer meetings. At one time before I went back to school to complete in elementary education, I had my SS class in the main church. One side was 3/4 full and it made me nervous to teach such a big class. All those older folks are gone; only the young then are still coming. I've experienced what the Lord can do through you when you stay close. Now, I'm married and have a family of four children. My older girls are attending Holbrook Indian School. The boys are in school here at LaVida. I became ill for a year. I'm more careful on myself, just substituting a couple of days was enough, but I'm recovering well.

Edison Tso:

My mother put us in school at LaVida in my early elementary school years. She wanted us to know the Lord and be workers for God. She took us in a wagon to many different revivals in the evening and we didn't get home until early in the mornings. I didn't make an effort to learn English and I got in trouble speaking my language and someone always told on me.

I ran away from home for good one day. Then I went to school in Crownpoint, but I was going to come back and help LaVida someday. The rest of the school years I often thought about what I've learned at LaVida and I read my Bible. Then I started praying for a spouse. I told the Lord I needed a Christian companion. The Lord answered my prayer and blessed me with my niece's teacher. One day my niece was late to go back to school at LaVida. I was to take her back. When we arrived I saw a Navajo lady praying with her class. I asked my niece who that lady was. She said: "She's my teacher." I told her "I'll marry your teacher." She got mad and said "You don't deserve my pretty teacher. Just go home." With the Lord's help, it became a reality: I married that young lady. We have four children, two girls and two boys. The girls are attending Holbrook Indian School and the boys are at LaVida Mission. I'm also working at LaVida with my wife, teaching our language to our people, the students. I've always spoken Navajo but never read and write. Now I've learned to read and write some through adult Sabbath school class and prayer meetings. I learned much from teaching Sabbath school for my people. The Lord has blessed me with many opportunities to teach His words to others.

Sophie's Angel (Sophie is the youngest daughter of Edison and Deborah Tso. She attended Holbrook Indian School.):

One day, as Deborah Tso and two of her children rode on one of the many unimproved roads, their pickup truck mired in the sand. Deborah tried everything to free the truck. She dug sand

from around the wheel. It only spun in more. She placed flat rocks in front of the tire. The truck sank deeper. For two hours she toiled to free the truck, but to no avail. "Momma," said five-year-old Sophie.

"We haven't prayed."

"I'm sorry," returned Deborah. "I guess we haven't."

"Jesus will help us out," announced Sophie.

Momma and her two children held hands—a triangle of faith in the sifting sand—and Deborah prayed.

Then Sophie added her own prayer. "Dear Jesus, please send an angel to push our truck out of the sand. It doesn't matter which angel. Any angel can do it. Amen."

Deborah felt tears running down her cheeks at the faith of her little girl. But she hadn't even opened her eyes before Sophie was jumping up and down.

"Let's go Momma," she squealed, tugging on Deborah's hand. The trio climbed into the truck, and Deborah started the engine. She put the truck in gear, and . . . and *drove right out*.

"I knew Jesus could do it," Sophie smiled as they drove home.

## The Vision

Lilakai (Lily) Julian Neil, a full-blooded Navajo, was born near Crownpoint, New Mexico, in 1900. At eighteen she began working in the home of a Seventh-day Adventist missionary couple, Pastor and Mrs. Orno Follett, at Lake Grove Mission. In their home, Lily studied and eventually accepted the Adventist faith.

Lily became increasingly influential among her people as a result of her untiring efforts to improve the lives of the Navajo—she even became the first woman elected to the Navajo Tribal Council. But her greatest dream was to build a permanent Seventh-day Adventist mission near her birthplace at Crownpoint, close to the Tsaya-Lake Valley area.

One night Lily had a beautiful dream. She saw a big circle of light with Jesus standing in the center, clothed in shining garments. As she gazed at Him in adoration, He turned to look at her and smiled. Then Lily heard footsteps—many, many moccasined footsteps—marching endlessly in the darkness, just outside the circle of light.

Then the scene gradually changed. Soon she saw more moccasined feet, but this time they were young, dancing feet. Many of these smaller feet paused and turned, then walked into the circle of light where they were gladly welcomed by the smiling Savior. Lily understood that the vision depicted the young people and children of her tribe as the hope of the Navajo Nation, and that many of them would turn from the old ways into the light and happiness surrounding the Jesus she loved. From that time on, all her energies were dedicated to this cause. Due to a terrible car accident that permanently impaired her health, Lily didn't live to see her dream come true. But she did see the birth of La Vida Mission.

## The Name

Veda Scholder was another woman instrumental to the creation of La Vida Mission. She and Frankie Christensen made the drive from Farmington to the Tsaya area many times to put on Vacation Bible School and give Bible studies. La Vida Mission is named in Veda's honor; in Spanish, la vida means "the life."

## Realizing the Vision -- a School, Medical Clinic, & Church

The property of La Vida Mission was once an abandoned trading post owned by Little Billie Bicente. In this one-room trading post, the little mission was born. School was held for six students in the crumbling, mice-infested building by Neal and Tillie Scott, who lived in the school building with their two tiny sons, Steven and Tom. Each day Tillie drove the rutted reservation roads to pick up her students, then returned them to their hogans at the end of the day. Their first year was a success.

The next year, Vic and Doris Starrett and their daughter, Barbara, arrived to share the burdens and responsibilities of the growing Mission. The school was moved to another rock building and the trading post, mice and all, was converted to a dormitory for the students so that they could stay at school all week. the concern and generosity of people who felt compelled to share the message of Christ with the Navajo.

A medical clinic was held for students and the community by flying in doctors and dentists from nearby Farmington and from Colorado. In 1964, the clinic moved into a small, donated trailer.

By 1966, a clinic building was built by volunteers—just as every building at the Mission has been built by volunteers. This building also served as a girls' dorm, kitchen, and dining room. That same year a new school building was built. It housed two classrooms and a boys' dorm. Though there were times the Mission struggled, it survived because of the concern and generosity of people who felt compelled to share the message of Christ with the Navajo.

Over the next few years, a new dormitory and a cafeteria were built to house the increase in students attending the school. Many of these Navajo students accepted Christ and brought their families into the Church as well. It soon became necessary to expand the school building by adding a library, a preschool and kindergarten room, a music room, and a solar collection room to facilitate heating.

It was a joyous day in 1978 when La Vida Church was completed by a Maranatha group. The church was named to honor the original dream of La Vida Mission: the "Lily Neil Memorial Chapel" has seen hundreds of baptisms, as the feet walking into the circle of light grow more numerous.

In addition, eight other buildings have been built: two for staff and guest housing, two for housing students in a loving home environment, four staff housing duplexes, and a gym for children to play in during the winter. All of these buildings were built by volunteer groups who gave generously of themselves to help the work at La Vida Mission.