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DEAR ED

From Anonymous, Earth

Reading Erika Skye's honest and touching testimony "Disclosure" (FZ 53), really proved to me how much our prayers can influence the tide of the battle and the life-changing decisions people make. Our prayers, our heartcries and tears, can make the difference between spiritual life and death for someone! And her life is so beautiful! Also her testimony, "As Diamond Tears" (FZ 46), was from the soul of a true missionary with a wonderfully broken heart from the Lord's hand!

The Final Stretch!



To everything there is a beginning ... and an end! The Free Zine, having started over four and a half years ago, is now coming down the final stretch; in fact, there is just one more edition after this. The ending of the Zine will make way for a new mag, though. — A new, exciting, highly illustrated comic magazine, with a mix of some existing publications as well as entirely new material! Also featured will be a new cartoon series by David Komic to kick off this new comic mag. There's a lot in store; stay tuned!

We're going to miss all of you. Well, not really, since we're still here, and we'll be redirecting our skills and energy into this new comic mag. It's the happening thing now! You've been great contributors and readers over these past years. The last Zine, reaching you in July, will be a farewell from all the current Zine team. Also included will be a history of the Zine—from its start to its end. Don't miss the concluding Zinetoon either!

Here's an excerpt of what the Lord had to say in regards to the Zine ending: "I ordained the Zine for a time and a season, to perform the work I destined it for, to fulfill its course. Now it has brought forth the fruit I desired, it has been the inspiration to those in need, and it is now time to look to new horizons, to begin something new. As the Zine concludes its time on the Family stage, I will open the door for new projects, for a new mag, and through other magazines and avenues I will continue to give the young people the material they need."

We'd like to put a plug in for any contributions that you would normally have sent to the Zine.—For now please do continue to send them to zine@wsfamily.com. Though the Zine will no longer be the Zine, the material will not be filed away and forgotten ... You never know what new and exciting things are just around the corner!! So please do continue to send your material to the above e-mail address. We look forward to hearing from you.

Love, your Zine team

In Need of a Policeman?

From DJ (of Davida), Russia

It was a cold November evening, below minus 20°C outside. My wife, Davida, had to call her parents in a different country. We're seven time zones away from them, so the evening made the timing perfect. I stayed Home with the kids and she went out with Joseph, our new disciple. They had heard from the Lord about going and had a prayer of protection for the trip.

Back at home, I was also praying for their safety. All was well, until two young teenagers entered the small shop where my wife was talking with her parents on the payphone. The boys were rowdy and soon got into an argument with the salesladies. They behaved disrespectfully and began smoking right inside the shop. After a while things were getting out of hand and Joseph politely suggested to the boys that they could continue smoking outside, as it was getting hard to breathe.

This rapidly turned into a conflict. The boys suddenly got very upset and lashed out at Joseph with cursing and provoking words. Though he tried to stay as calm as possible, the youngsters didn't want to hear any reason. One of them left and returned shortly with



a whole gang of young teens, provoking Joseph to go outside and have a fight with them. It was definitely a dangerous situation, as those rowdy 14- and 15-year-olds often carry knives and Jo wouldn't have been able to handle an entire gang on his own.

Davida's first thought was for them to leave immediately, but then she asked the Lord what to do, and He told them that they should just stay calm and wait inside the shop, as it would be unsafe outside in the dark all alone with this gang around. So they tried to do that and for the next 20 minutes the main leader of the gang was purposely pestering Joseph, trying to provoke him to fight. Finally Jo told him that he would call the police. This aggravated the kid even more and he began calling Jo bad names.

At exactly the same time this guy was unleashing all these derogatory anti-police curses on Jo, a huge special police-force officer came into the shop to buy something. The kid didn't see him, so he continued cursing. As soon as the policeman understood what was going on, he confronted the young gang leader. The gang instantly disappeared when they realized who this guy was and Joseph and Davida were able to go home safely! Praise the Lord.

This was definitely another reminder to us of the importance of hearing from the Lord. The team was in the Lord's will in that place, as they had asked Him specifically before leaving. Where we live, we often meet rough personalities. Several jails and prison camps are in our area. There was a general amnesty in 2000 in Russia and about 300,000 light offenders, especially youth, were released from jails, as there weren't enough funds to keep all of them there. This now contributes heavily to the situation in the faraway towns like ours being quite unsafe.

Nevertheless it was also a testimony of how the Lord can protect us even in the midst of adversity, by sending help, even in the form of a special force policeman.



From Natacha (17, of Isaac and Meekness), Reunion Islands

HOW I BECAME *a teacher*

How it began

I found myself in a big fix when my mother gave birth to twins and it was obvious I would have to take over the care of two of my younger brothers, Nicholas (3) and Philippe (5). I had done a lot of studying for the past four years and if there was something I didn't want to do, it was childcare!

I've oft told myself "I will do any ministry, *but* childcare!" I was determined to never apply myself with children and instead show myself bright in all other subjects. But, that's hard to do when your mom's having the eleventh and twelfth child, and you have six brothers and sisters under ten.

Reality dawned when I realized I would *have* to take over the kids. At first my idea was, "Okay, I'll fill in momentarily and wait till we can get some personnel to take over with them. Then I'll be free!" (Wasn't I terrible?) Actually, I was convinced I was absolutely right, I had been helping on kids part-time ever since I can remember, so it was only fair I get a lifetime break.

Thus it was for a few weeks, I was "with" the children in body, but my mind was light-years away, thinking of my future as a far-

flung missionary in China or Africa, or such things as the possibilities of modeling and using my artistic talents more. Then finally, my biggest dream, technology—I like computers. Why? Because, they don't question your commands, they don't have a potty to empty every few hours, or a grubby face every few minutes, or messes to pick up constantly.

To sum it up, I was planning an egocentric future, and I was determined to have it. Wait! I had another logical excuse, I had no males on this island, and I haven't had any for over a year. Why, it was time I get out of here and enjoy myself. I wasn't even 17 and wouldn't even think about taking up semi-motherhood.

Because of the entirely half-hearted care they received, the kids soon began to worsen, till they came to the point of terrible. They didn't obey anything I said. They had no respect for me. I couldn't even get them to sit still for two minutes of school. I couldn't get them to do anything! I was totally discouraged. Each day became a living Calvary and each evening, by 8 PM I'd collapse with exhaustion from my strenuous activity of chasing them around for hours non-stop.

Turn around

Obviously something was going wrong, and I think we all knew who was to blame. My parents told me to decide for good what I wanted to do. "If you feel like you'll only be happy in China," they told me, "then we'll start working towards that goal!"

I never felt so ashamed of myself as I did then, when I realized what I was doing to my own little brothers. I was willing to sacrifice their training and spiritual up-bringing to make way for my own dreams and desires. It was fairly clear to me as to what was "my will" and what was "His will" and I simply had to choose. And that I did.

When it came down to it, I couldn't turn my back on my sweet mother who relied on my help so much, nor on my little brothers who just needed a real teacher and shepherd to guide and train them. Most of all I couldn't turn back on the Lord, when I knew very well that this was *my* job for the moment. I had to really pray for His help and make a solid commitment to put my all into this ministry until the Lord called me to do something else, even if it required sacrifices, which it did.

So, there I was, on the first day of actually being “with” the kids in mind, heart and body. I was still lost, as I knew nothing about schooling toddlers and YCs. In the past, whenever a CC mailing would come out I would never read it. (A big error, as I had to spend a lot of time going through all the books!) I was caught with two Leo boys, totally wild, suiting up exactly to the image of their sun sign (imagine a crowd of wild, untrained lion cubs, and you’ll get the picture), and I had a head of 0.00 ideas for activities or school.

I had to get myself moving. And that’s when I gave up all hope of free time (first sacrifice), no time to primp, no time to dream. That would have to wait till 11 PM, when silence had settled and sleep finally conquered their little heads. I quickly pulled my act together and all free moments were spent planning their days, schedules, and schooling.

Controlling rascals

The first thing I had to do was gain back their respect, and that was very, very hard. They clearly thought I was weak, and definitely unable to run after them when they’d take off for rounds in the garden to escape punishment. From their past knowledge of me, they didn’t think I meant business.

At times, they had a hard time getting along for play, but when it was time to be naughty, they were close-knit partners, the best of buddies for mischief and teaming up against me.

Number one, I resigned to *never* make an empty threat—never promise punishments that I wasn’t going to give. Whatever punishment I warned them about receiving, I had to bring it about, even if it meant running three times around the property to catch them.

The Lord gave me a wonderful idea, though. He told me that for three days straight, I needed to crack down on their behavior, show them that I meant business, and that “no” meant exactly that, “no!” Believe it or not, it worked! Sure, it was hectic for a day or two, but after that they began to obey quicker and respected me.

I came to the point, though, when I was afraid of winning their love or being too sweet with them, as I feared losing the respect I’d built up. But I found the balance by making it clear to them that obedience gets rewarded and disobedience doesn’t.

I set up the Mountain Man Chart, which

inspired them to progress. Even the three-year-old was determined to get to “de top of de mowntan,” as he put it. When they’d do extra good, they’d be rewarded more as well, like they’d get to make a pie or cake with me for their night snack. I found it very important to emphasize the positive more than the negative. Like, even though I cracked down on them, I really pushed for the shiner prizes and special treats when they were good.

Like all kids (especially Leos), they needed affection and love, so it helped keep the victory if I cuddled them here and there, to make them feel better. When I didn’t, the crankiness set in and it was quite hard to get them inspired again. As important as it was to keep the respect in, love was even more effective in motivating them to obey.

Schooling kids of different levels

Another turmoil erupted when I began regular school with them, because I had a hard time schooling both of them at the same time—preparing their exercises, reading with them individually, doing extra math with one, or the other, etc.

After asking the Lord about this, He showed me that it was absolutely

necessary that I plan and prepare the exercises beforehand. Things also went better when I separated their schooling to different times.

For the morning, I usually do Nicolas’ schooling first, while Philippe does coloring, art, cut outs, etc. (something that doesn’t require much supervision). Then I alternate and do Philippe’s schooling while Nicolas either watches a *Teach Me Time*, *Kiddie Viddie*, *Treasure Attic*, or simply colors. This way I can concentrate and supervise the one being schooled more fully. Then, they do about half an hour of flashcards together and an activity, usually art related.

For the afternoon, I do a longer activity, usually science/geography based, experiments on nature and learning its cycles, etc. Then I often take Philippe for extra studies while Nicholas does some educational game such as play dough, lotto cards, puzzles, etc. We generally have two hours of play and exercise outside. This way they get a balance in their education and don’t have to space out in boredom. That’s also a main thing for little kids, never let them have a moment free for boredom. They must always have something to do, someone to watch them, as if not, boredom leads to mischief.

Conclusion

All that to say, here I am, I’m happy and fulfilled as I know I’m doing the right thing with my life for the moment. Thanks to the Lord’s counseling, a not-for-me ministry has turned into an inspiring experience to learn the art of loving and shepherding children. It’s taught me more than just the raw facts of teaching. I’m not naturally a big affection star, but through these last months I’ve learned a lot along those lines and have had to replace my toughness with tenderness, my dictatorial attitudes with the gentle ways of training a child, my harsh temper with the pure patience that only He can give.

Though I frequently fail, I just seek the strength from Above to keep me going in this wonderful job. It really pushed me to apply “ask Me everything.” As I daily seek the Lord’s advice for the problems that arise, I have been surprised, more than once, at the great keys He gives for each of them personally. It has become indispensable for me to hear from Him daily concerning my care of Nicholas and Philippe.

That’s my tale of how I became a teacher. I guess it took a lot of sacrificing and yielding to get me here, but I made it, and I know others can too.

Presented by the makers of SLURP!
ZOO TOON
ZOMBIE BABY!

by David Kottic



In order to "GET THE FULL STORY" & "BLOW the WHISTLE" on the 'NAMING the BABY 2' PHENOMENON



Dr. Hans Heizenbeamer*, for his expert opinion Without a moment's hesitation he formulates one of his trademark 'ON-**THE-SPOT**' theories, which he coins (with his characteristic brand of lexical dexterity) **HEINZENBEAMER'S LAW**.

HEINZENBEAMER'S LAW states:

When the parents (x) of the baby (y) choose a name (N) for the baby (y), then the parents of the parents (x) of the baby (y) ... also referred to (r²) as the grandparents (z) of the baby (y) ... will invariably be (b) **SURPRISED** (?!#) of the choice (C₁) of name (N) chosen (C₂) by the choosing (C₃) parents (x) of the baby (y)

In formula form:
$$X + \frac{Y}{Z} \times (X \div b \times \frac{C_2}{n})^3 = N?!#$$

or
$$C_1 + C_2 + C_3 \div (r^2 + bz) - XYZ \neq X C_3 10U2$$

Note: The degree of surprise expressed by the grandparents will vary according to to INTENSITY and NATURE of the name, e.g. MILD SURPRISE → "Elmo"
 SEVERE SHOCK → "Zanzibar"
 "Woof Dogg"

* 57 Varieties.



Hooked on Mor Lam

Blonde, blue-eyed, she is the antithesis of the *look thung* singer, but Christy Gibson gives her all on stage.

la femme



BY PIMAPORN WONGRUANG

There's nothing like a Mor Lam performance at the National Theatre. It was the first time that a group of people singing in a traditional style had been introduced into the auditorium to perform a concert. This folk tunes and catch the eye of the choreography.

Yet there was something different about this show. For one, among the chattering spectators waiting for the curtain to rise on *Karnleethat* were several *fanng* faces - a rarity as not too many *fanng* are *look thung* devotees.

The second clue that appearances can sometimes be deceptive came a few minutes later, after the lights had dimmed and a troupe of graceful dancers dressed in traditional attire had woven their way through the auditorium to the stage. The gasps of admiration gave way to a collective sigh of nostalgia as they performed a series of folk dance numbers. *Koyoyedphat* played and the curtain rose to reveal the first of the concert's stars, Swedish singer Jonat Andersson, a young man who has won the hearts of many Mor Lam fans countrywide with his energetic performances and soulful lyrics and two traditional songs.

But the main attraction was yet to come. *Look thung* fans were treated to a performance of two songs by a young woman whose appearance fell silent. Her name was Christy Gibson, a blonde female vocalist dressed in traditional attire.

Enter a young woman who is the antithesis of the essence of *look thung* - blonde hair, blue eyes, and a Western *fanng* face. With her blonde hair and blue eyes, she is the antithesis of the *look thung* singer. With her blonde hair and blue eyes, she is the antithesis of the *look thung* singer. With her blonde hair and blue eyes, she is the antithesis of the *look thung* singer.

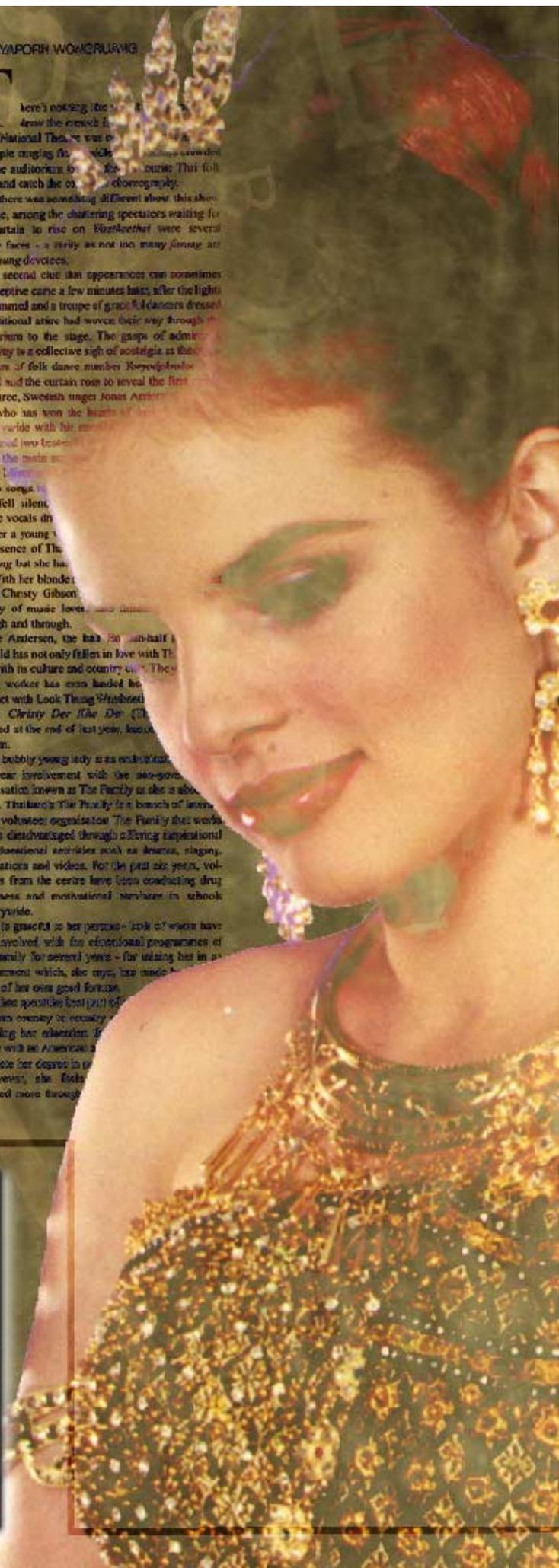
Like Andersson, she has an English background. The 25-year-old has not only fallen in love with *look thung* but also with its culture and country. She has been a *look thung* fan since she was a child. Her father, a *look thung* fan, introduced her to the music. She has since worked as a *look thung* promoter and has a contract with Look Thung *Witthong* to release her debut album *Christy Der Like Der* (This is My Love) at the end of next year. Her debut album is expected to be a success.

The bubbly young lady is an active member of a nine-year involvement with the non-governmental organisation known as The Family in the area of *look thung* music. Thailand's The Family is a branch of international volunteer organisation The Family that works for the disadvantaged through offering educational and educational activities such as lessons, singing, publications and videos. For the past six years, volunteers from the centre have been conducting drug awareness and motivational services in school countrywide.

She is grateful to her parents - both of whom have been involved with the educational programmes of The Family for several years - for making her in an environment which, she says, has made her realise the need of her own good fortune.

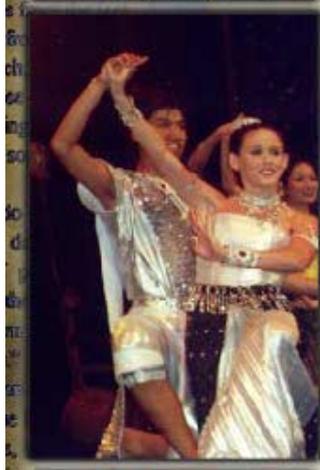
She has a special love for *look thung* music. She is a fan of the music and has been singing since she was a child. She has been singing since she was a child. She has been singing since she was a child. She has been singing since she was a child.

However, she feels that her love for *look thung* music has been acquired more through her own experiences and the influence of her parents.

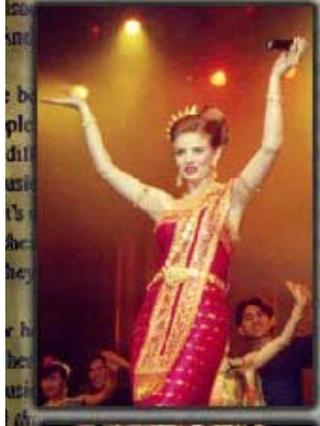




It must be preserved. *Look thing* comes from the heart. To sing it well, you have to feel it. the same with *Isaan* folk songs, the *mor lam* songs. If I hear one on the radio, my mind is immer-



...flooded with the sights and smells of... Again, it's not so much the songs as the... goes into them. I have... there, the songs make... er professional career... because of her involve... ation project *Faring Ra*... field of entertainment... ethai and distributor of her... or one to do things by half... unity of being part of the project... thing and *mor lam* inter... was an unacceptable... easy task.



...ew the songs, I had... But to sing them profes... The intensions are... something than con... enhance her... with a...



...I can anything but an... these songs to show how much I love Thailand, its culture and the people from whom I have still so much to learn. I guess it's also my small way of saying 'thank you to the people of this wonderful country,' she says. She learned about the *Waeethea* ...ant while in India. "I was involved in a... Association of the Blind. I... about the con... to take part. It was... as soon as I go... Netherlands a few... daughter. "They all... from them all the... to 'keep up the good work'... two days after my first... He kept asking if that... laughing Gibson also... Thai fans. But despite... and interpretation, she is... a professional vocalist. ...to leave the country she has... 'I'm happy with my life. I... the future. Besides, I'm far too... many things to organize for The... future holds though, it will involve... work. It's been part of my life for so long that... without..."

"Christy Der Kha Der!"
Christy's album *Christy Der Kha Der!* (This is Christy!) was released on February 20th, 2001. The album features mainly *moh lam* songs, in dialects from the northern regions of Thailand, though there are even some songs in Khmer and Laotian—which needless to say, aren't very easy to sing, even for Thai people. From what we've heard, the album is selling very well with most record store owners saying they're sold out.—The sky is the limit!



13



By Anaik
(25), Earth



It all began at the airport in my home country, Australia, just before I turned twelve. The words, "It's not fair! It's not fair! It's not fair!" were all I could whisper bitterly under my breath, as I stood alone and watched the plane take off. The only Family teenagers in the country were flying away to the Philippines YES. A month later they returned with stories of new friends made, new foods tried, the new country, new experiences, and fun activities with other teens. I was too young to go—by just a couple of months.

Twelve wasn't so bad. I mean, other than the fact that embarrassing things always seemed to be happening to me. Once I was playing with some other twelve-year-olds, and I stepped backwards and tripped over a low flower garden fence, butt-first into a thorny rose bush. I always laughed it off, along with the other kids, of course, but it felt so weird that things like this happened to me on so many occasions.

Or there was the time when I was on the school bus (I went to a small Christian school for a couple of years) on the way home from an outing. The trip was long and there had been no bathroom breaks, and just ten minutes before the schoolyard came in sight, I couldn't hold my bladder any longer. It was so humiliating,

13 the worst

especially as the cute guy I had a crush on was sitting at the front of the bus. The kids weren't too mean about it—after all, they were Christians and decent enough, I suppose—but the snotty principal's daughter who happened to be in my class, Fiona, just had to ask me several times the next day, in a high-pitched voice of fake concern, "Have you gotten over your little *incident*?"

Other than several such *incidents* at the age of twelve, I made it through all right. Boys didn't pay any attention to me, though.—I was a skinny, flat-chested, gangly thing, and it was my lovely older sister who was always being chased. I didn't particularly care; I was a tomboy and more into riding a bike, or climbing a tree with a good book and an apple than anything else. But you know how, in a movie, the main character can be driving down some peaceful road, blissfully unaware of some catastrophe that's just about to catch up with him or her? Well, that catastrophe for me was turning thirteen, and it was spread out all year long.

First of all, we moved to a larger house. I stopped going to that Christian school after grade six, and did a correspondence course at home. Along with that I took care of a group of four little toddler boys almost full time. They were called "David's Mighty Men." They often stretched my patience to the limit with their endless energy and naughtiness. Yet I loved the responsibility of taking care of them all by myself.—Many thanks to their parents for entrusting me with such a responsibility, as it helped me feel grown up and needed—two desperate needs in my life.

I had two little bunk beds in my room and they slept in there



“ i can't forget, that was the first year i got a bit of "sex education." ”

with me on weeknights. There were many times during that year when I took a gut-wrenching dive on the roller coaster of life, and in retrospect I see that some backup in the "David's Mighty Men" department might have been very useful. Then again, maybe it was the responsibility of caring for them day in and day out that held me together.

At the time my parents lived in that house. Soon, however, I heard that the focus of the Home would change, that it would in fact become a Teen Home. Unfortunately, I did not yet qualify, and it looked like I would have to move from this "happening" place to a nearby house with my parents. It was my mother who saved me from that "fate" and asked that I be allowed to stay in the new Teen Home.

(Funny, I can still remember at the age of eight or nine discovering that when children grow up they leave their parents. At the time I remember laying on my bed and declaring to the walls with tearful conviction, "Never! I will *never* leave my parents!" Well, heh, the condition commonly dubbed "being thirteen" changed that conviction drastically for me.—Varying conditions including "being eleven," "being fourteen" and "being fifteen" can also have that effect on individuals. For me it just happened to be thirteen.)

So I'd made it. I was in "*the* Teen Home"! That was when I remember doing my first Open Heart Reports. Truly, between the million deep questions of life that were springing up within me and relating the mentally nauseating emotional ups and downs of my life, I never lacked things to write.

That was the year my friend, Faithy, and I both had a crush on a fifteen-year-old named Jamie. Besides my oldest brother, he was the only fifteen-year-old around. He

year of my life

was like a god to me. So knowledgeable. So confident. So handsome. I wrote a secret note to him and thrust it into his hand one moonlit evening, confessing my love for him in a torrent of confused words. Faithy and I wrote the corniest love song ever, with music and all. I still cringe to think of it.

Later that year, I had a high-pitched argument in the kitchen with Faithy, while we were wrapping up dinner dishes. I thought she was being a snob, and I can only imagine what she thought of *me*. I can't even remember what we argued about, but within the course of about fifteen seconds we were each trying to talk—or rather shout—at each other at the same time and I decided this unfruitful communication needed to end right then ... with a smart slap across her cheek. She looked shocked for just a second before she lifted the plastic disinfectant spray bottle high over her head, but when she tried to strike me back I was too quick, and I stopped her arm.

My brattish victory was short lived, however, as another teen that had overheard our little catfight called our teen shepherds—one of which was Faithy's father—who asked us to write up our account of what happened. I was totally unrepentant and wrote just what I thought of Faithy, in sordid detail. I've no idea what she wrote about me, but it wasn't long before we were sitting down and receiving a short lecture, after which we each received further punishment. This infuriated my now-stinging adolescent ego. I stomped out of the room immediately afterward and the other shepherd had to call after me that we weren't done yet. We still each had to pray a prayer asking the Lord to forgive us.

Somehow in my adolescent mentality I felt the whole punishment was unjust, though come to think of it now, Faithy received the same punishment as I did, and

13 the worst year...

I sought comfort in the Word during my adolescent “tribulations,” but often found myself looking up at the starry, night sky, demanding God to explain to me how in the world should I do things like “hold on” amidst the emotions that seemed to tear at my soul. I frequently asked my shepherds, on those wordy OHRs, how it was possible for a person to “let go and let God.” It was beyond me! There was some kind of magical letting go that brought a person happiness, and in my emotional quandaries, it was far beyond me as how to do that. I was frustrated. I hated not being able to grasp something that seemed so essential to my happiness.

Once, after a particularly wordy OHR, a shepherd walked up to me the next morning and suggested I read “Hold On—the Victory Is Just Out of Sight” in one of the little GN books. It was perfect. That Letter became my favorite, and it was one which I read often for many years after. The “holding on” was such an elusive thing for me, but somehow reading that powerful dose of optimism over and over—that good things eventually happened as a result of holding on—comforted me.

Sometime during that year my whole world was transformed. I had known every teenager in the island-slash-continent practically since birth, and suddenly we heard news that an American family including about four teenagers was going to be passing through. One of the girls, Sia, was also thirteen, and a fellow Cancer to boot. Another girl, Myrth, was almost sixteen that year. Then there was a guy, Victor, also about fifteen, not quite related to their family but traveling with them. They had a big impact on me that year, with mixed results.

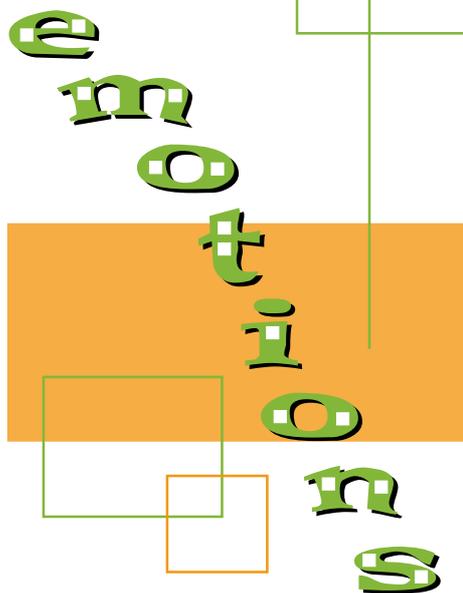
“We all know the saying
“When it rains, it pours.”
Well that year was monsoon
season for me.”



Early teen years are naturally rebellious ones, and we were no exception. We sometimes joked that our interactions with the adults were like preparation for the Great Tribulation.—Our covert activities included listening to System music, keeping special white shirts that we wrote our nicknames and various other messages on, writing stories of stealing away to an island on a yacht with only young people, and so on. My nickname was Angel Dust. I found out it was a drug and decided it was a cool-sounding name.

I was so devoted to our secrecy that eventually when I decided to get rid of my own “autographed” T-shirt, I took it downstairs late at night when everyone was in bed and, rolled it up in a tight ball, and thrust it deep into the full kitchen garbage bin. Then I quickly soaped down my whole arm and washed the grime away. That was my tomboy side coming out again—not afraid to get dirty if it was for a good cause. In other ways I was letting go of the tomboy image. I was wearing makeup, and mini-skirts—a fad of the moment since the other girls were doing it.

The boy I’d had a crush on became Sia’s boyfriend. Just like that. It was a bit tough, but I kept my tears to myself, as in so many other moments during that year. In a fit of despair, I chopped my hair one evening, trying to get it straight in the mirror. Once someone had straightened the haircut out, it was above my shoulders. The new hairstyle didn’t suit me and I hated it, but it was a good seven or eight years before it was long again.





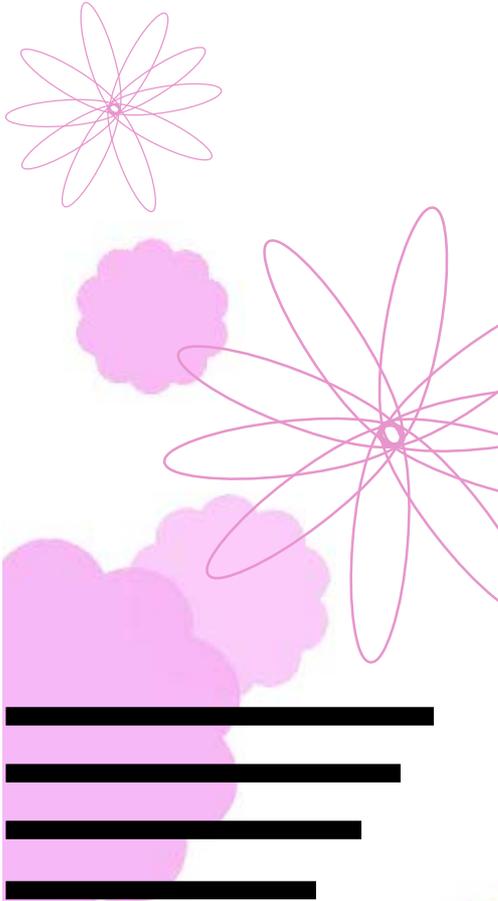
i don't usually think about
my thirteenth year—it's
kind of a repressed memory.

I had to do something about myself. I was beginning to care that I didn't have a boyfriend. The teens from the U.S. and some of us put together a little singing group. We would go down to Circular Quay where the ferries were based in Sydney Harbor. We'd sing on the boardwalk as well as on the half-hour ferry trips across the bay. I was still awkward around boys. One day after busking at Circular Quay, the American guy who tagged along with their family, Victor, suggested maybe we could go out and see a movie together sometime. I was tongue tied, and kicked myself later that I hadn't accepted the offer of such a simple, boyfriend-girlfriend-type thing, and from such a cute guy! Before I knew it, he was gone.

I wasn't a stranger to sickness. I seemed to magnetically draw stomach bugs and other various sicknesses to myself. Once that year I burst a blood vessel under the skin near my mouth, as a result of vomiting so much—the kind of vomiting where you have to lean over a toilet and heave your guts out even though you have no food in your stomach, and you have to quickly drink water after every bout so that you don't *actually* spew out your insides. It's kind of tiring.

On another occasion, when I had some unknown sickness that left me in bed with a fever, I was plagued by a nightmare that made me run, half awake, all the way through the house down the stairs, out the back door, into the backyard, then over the fence into our neighbor's backyard and on through two more empty lots, scratching my legs on bushes and thorns all along the way. (Thankfully, the weather was slightly cooler and I was wearing a long nightshirt.) By the time I was truly awake I was already covering in our backyard, but the nightmare was as real as ever. Once I had gotten a grip on my fear, through prayer, I walked back home and into the bedroom where I awoke an astonished teen shepherdess. I didn't have a clue why it had happened. No scary movies or anything else to trigger it. I was used to having bad dreams as a child, but as a teenager they had lessened. It was just another attack of the Enemy, yet something that made me aware of the need for angelic protection and keeping my spiritual guard up.

My basic image was intact. I still had my friends, Myrth and Sia. But the day came that they had to leave the country (incidentally, they wrote me from the States for a few months but later I heard they had decided not to serve the Lord any more). After visiting their house to say one last goodbye, I cried my eyes out on the way home. My world was shattering again and the future loomed like an empty, dark canyon in front of me. Who was I going to become? What was I going to do? Those were constant questions in my mind. Soon afterwards my idolized older brother, as well as Jamie, went to Macau. Again I was crushed; I felt stuck and left behind. By then I was well



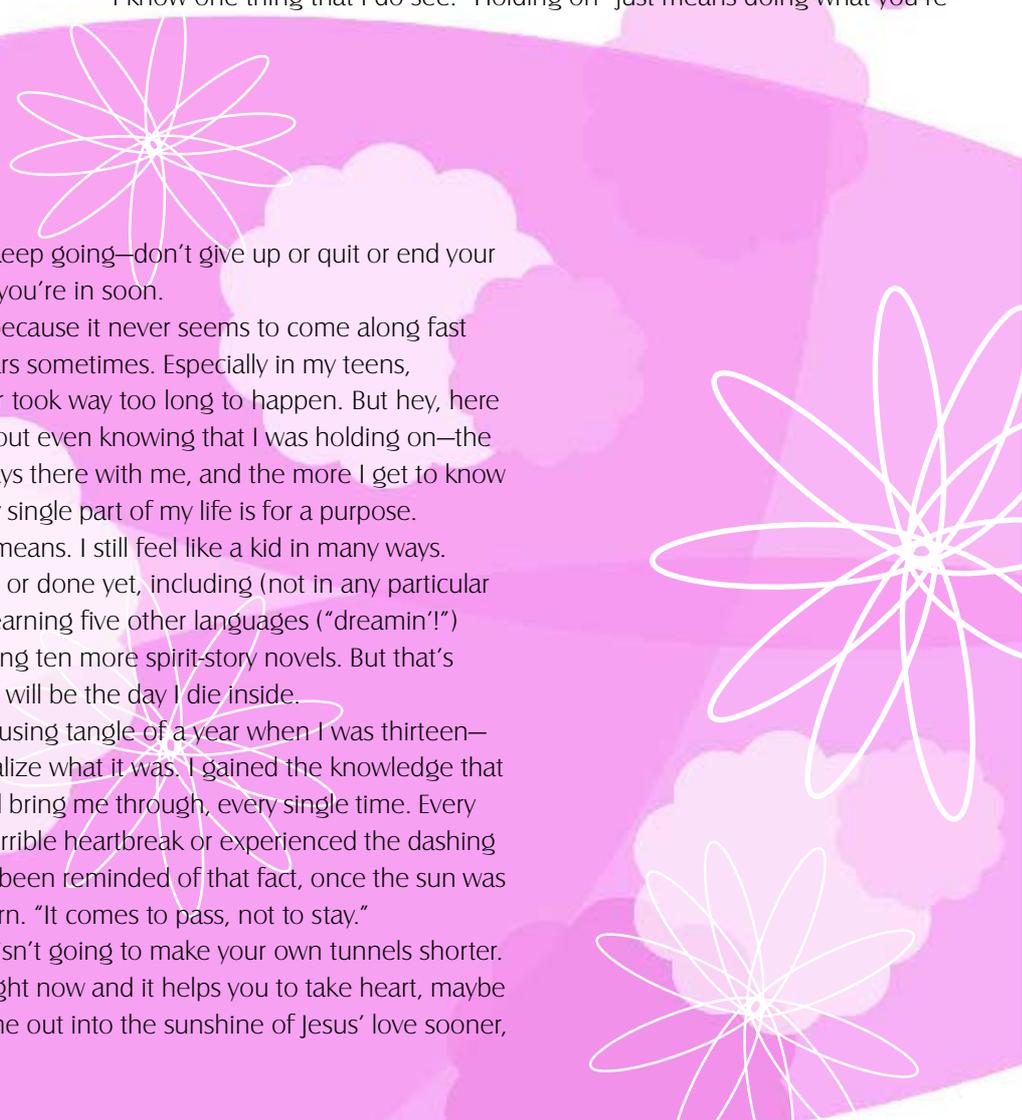
into fourteen, with many adventures ahead.

This isn't one of those sob story accounts where the bitter person decides that the entire world is to blame for every cloud that ever darkened the horizon of her life. I don't even think my life at thirteen—speaking of physical circumstances—was all that bad. I was a tough kid! There were bright spots and fun moments. So why drag you through all the above? I don't think I have the market on rough times, by any means. I'm sure lots of former-thirteen-year-olds could top my stories if they sat down for a minute to think about it. Or maybe your "worst" year was a different age. Maybe you're experiencing your worst year right now.

The point of all this is that now that I'm a bit further up the mountain (and yes, I know that when you're thirteen, someone who's twenty-five seems like an ancient of days, but believe me, being thirteen is still fresh in my memory), I can look back down and see that yes, there were some long stretches of dark tunnel in that bit of the road. There were long stretches of dark tunnel further up the road too—for example 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21, and yes, even the last few years, have all had their share of hardship. But what I see now from my vantage point is that no tunnel lasted forever. I always came out into the sunshine sooner or later. Somehow I think those tunnels were timed and spaced just right, too.

I don't usually think about my thirteenth year—it's kind of a repressed memory—but for some reason I was reflecting on it recently. I asked myself, *Since thirteen really was the worst year, how did they get better? And now that I'm through that particularly long stretch of tunnel, what do I see in retrospect?*

I know one thing that I do see. "Holding on" just means doing what you're



doing. It means trusting that if you just keep going—don't give up or quit or end your life—you'll come out of the dark tunnel you're in soon.

I've always hated the word "soon" because it never seems to come along fast enough. A month can seem like ten years sometimes. Especially in my teens, everything I wanted and was waiting for took way too long to happen. But hey, here I am! I have survived. As I held on—without even knowing that I was holding on—the Lord came through for me. He was always there with me, and the more I get to know Him better, the more I believe that every single part of my life is for a purpose.

I'm not a complete human, by any means. I still feel like a kid in many ways. There are so many things I haven't tried or done yet, including (not in any particular order) a trip to the Mideast, skydiving, learning five other languages ("dreamin'!") getting married, having kids, and receiving ten more spirit-story novels. But that's okay. The day I stop learning new things will be the day I die inside.

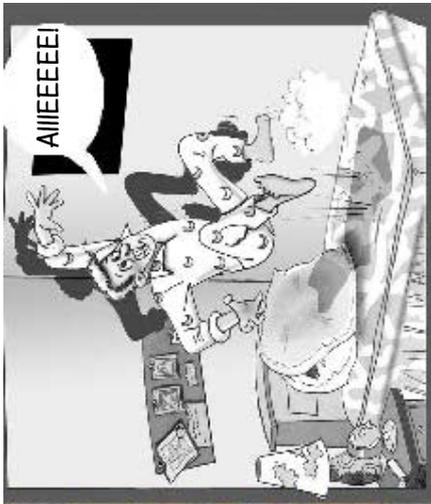
I did gain something from that confusing tangle of a year when I was thirteen—even if it took me about ten years to realize what it was. I gained the knowledge that the Lord does keep His promises. He will bring me through, every single time. Every year since thirteen that I've had some terrible heartbreak or experienced the dashing to pieces of my hopes and dreams, I've been reminded of that fact, once the sun was shining again. Now, finally, I see a pattern. "It comes to pass, not to stay."

I know just my telling you this stuff isn't going to make your own tunnels shorter. But if you're in the middle of a tunnel right now and it helps you to take heart, maybe even to speed up a little so you can come out into the sunshine of Jesus' love sooner, well, I'm happy. ■



POSTCARD FROM PORT HARCOURT

By TIM E. (22)



The African Vacuum

I don't know about you, but prior to coming here, my idea of spiritual activity in Africa was something along the lines of creepy rituals with the local witchdoctor. But I am happy to admit I was wrong. In fact, I can assure you, that if you were to come here you would not be greeted by a voodoo priest with a bone

through his nose and a bad hairstyle, sniffing you as you step off the plane. But you will most likely be awoken before dawn just a few days after your arrival by a Christian preacher with a megaphone and a burden for your soul.

This is because, as the Bible states, "Where iniquity doth abound, grace doth much more abound." So as long as

there are still voodoo priests and creepy rituals in Africa (which there are, although not at the airport), you can bet there will be many more Christian preachers with megaphones outside your window at 5 a.m.

This phenomenon, known as "the morning call," normally occurs on Thursday, although it could happen any day of the week provided you're still in bed trying to sleep. I tend to classify this as being "instant out of season." The local people don't seem to mind; in fact, they actually seem to enjoy it.

This is because of what is known as "the African vacuum," which is a very great vacuum the people of Africa have for the things of the spirit. Granted, it does suck up a lot of superstition and spiritual paranoia as well, but the negative it takes in only increases its appetite for the positive, so this void is never filled.

I got a pretty good idea of what the local

church scene is like while sitting out on our front porch on Sunday morning and trying to pray. However, this is not a case of the Lord revealing a mystery to me, but rather the result of very large loud speakers mounted on the roofs of every church in town, each broadcasting a different sermon at the same time. On Friday night, which is "all-night vigil night," those who wish to sing and cast out demons all night long over a powerful PA system may do so.

Unfortunately, singing ability, or a lack thereof, doesn't necessarily determine who gets to hold the mike. Men usually do the morning call, but when it comes to marathon midnight solos, women are often the ones singing through the night. Many a Friday night I have lain awake wondering what

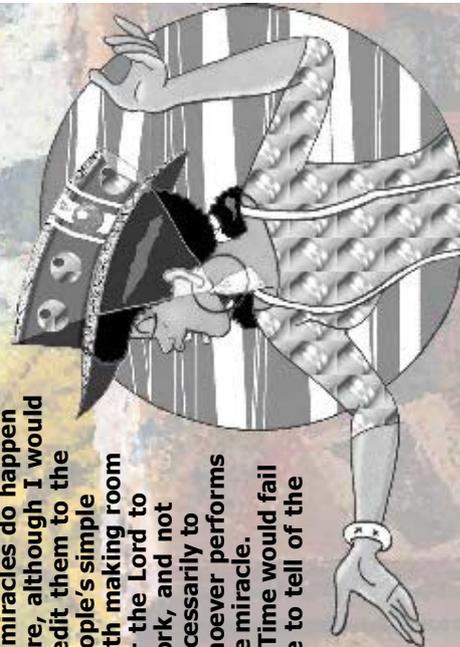
happened to Paul's spiritual admonition to "let the women keep silent in the church." It seems the only

requirement for women in church here is that they wear a hat. These may range from "My Fair Lady"-style hats to traditional African head wrappers, but no matter what the style, every woman has to have one.

Besides hats, Nigerians are also really into miracles. Every day you can see tons of people get healed on TV before audiences that would make Madonna envious. I tend to be a bit skeptical about such things, as it seems to turn church into big business. A lot of miracles do happen here, although I would credit them to the people's simple faith making room for the Lord to work, and not necessarily to whoever performs the miracle.

Time would fail me to tell of the

people who have gone into the wilderness to fast for forty days or jumped into lion's dens, never to return alive. Or the countless taxi drivers who I've had to ask not to read the tract I gave them while driving, lest they crash and die before they get to the Salvation prayer. But suffice it to say, the African vacuum for the spiritual and the people's hunger for the Word is very great. And that, my friend is the happy ending!



Yes, my brothers and sisters. I will praise de Lawd.