

FINDING JOY EVEN IN CAPTIVITY

On the afternoon of Friday, June 7, 2002, New Tribes missionaries Martin and Gracia Burnham huddled together for the last time in a hammock beneath a makeshift tent in the steep mountains of Southwestern Mindanao Island.

Members of the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group that had held the Burnhams hostage for 376 days were hastily erecting tents in the driving rain and eating rice – uncooked, since the guerrillas had abandoned their pots and pans in a recent skirmish. Abu Sayyaf knew the Philippine military was in pursuit, but the Muslim rebels didn't know they were under surveillance.

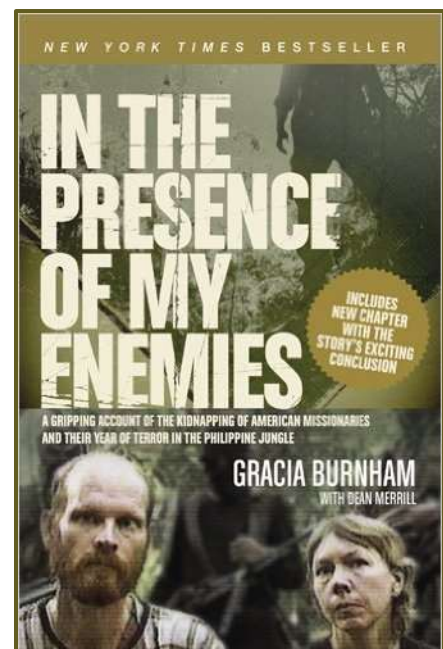
Only a few days before, the guerrillas had been forced to abandon their hideouts on the nearby island of Basilan, where they knew the territory and had the support of many residents. On Mindanao, they were constantly on the run, lost, hungry and running out of resources. Leader Abu Sabaya was alternately promising to release the hostages and threatening to kill them.

Talk between the Burnhams during the past year had often turned to the possibility of their deaths. Later, Gracia told a reporter, "We always looked at each other, and I'd tell Martin, 'I love you. I want you to know before I die.'" Martin comforted his wife by singing her to sleep. Before a nap on June 7, however, he suggested their time together was almost over.

"The Bible says to serve the Lord with gladness," said Martin, 42. "Let's go out all the way. Let's serve Him all the way with gladness." The couple prayed together, recited several Scripture verses they could remember and sang. Then, taking advantage of one of the rare times Martin wasn't chained to an Abu Sayyaf soldier or to a tree, they rested in each other's arms.

Pursuing soldiers had spotted the terrorists' camp and opened gunfire. Martin and Gracia rolled out of their hammock at the first sound of gunfire, slid down a steep hill together, until Gracia grabbed a tree branch. She had been shot in the leg. Martin, still lying next to her, had been hit in the chest. Martin was dead. When Scout Rangers – part of a Philippine military division being trained by U.S. forces at nearby bases – reached the Burnhams, they found Martin's body partially covering his wife's.

Four days and many hours of travel later, Gracia was reunited with her family and children as more than 1,000 people crowded the main street of Rose Hill, Kansas, welcoming her home.



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Gracia's unique story and the captivating way she tells it make her a popular speaker today for churches, conferences and schools. As she travels throughout the country, she talks about the spiritual lessons she learned during her captivity and how God has blessed her and her family since Martin's death.

If you ask Gracia about life these days, she will say, "The Lord's mercies are new every morning. Great is His faithfulness!"

Recalling the Burnhams' story, Dr. David Jeremiah, senior pastor of Shadow Mountain Community Church in El Cajon, California, wrote in his book *Turning Points*: "How can someone talk of joy while in deadly peril? Of serving the Lord with gladness while in captivity? It's because of God's wisdom. His infinite brilliance looks at everything with perfect understanding. God's wisdom is revealed in the Bible, and imparted to us by the Holy Spirit as we study His Word."

This was the wisdom Job discovered. "Overwhelmed with life, he had tried to sort out his troubles, aided by three friends whose insights were even more misguided than his own," Dr. Jeremiah added. "But after human wisdom was exhausted, God spoke to Job out of a whirlwind: 'Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?' God demanded. 'Who laid its cornerstone?'" (Job 38:4, 6).

We may not have all the answers to life, but the Lord does. We can defer to His wisdom and trust Him to understand the things that make no sense to us.

– Beecher Hunter