

He Gave It All Away

In Ernest Gordon's true account of life in a World War II Japanese prison camp, *Through the Valley of the Kwai*, there is a very moving story about a man who through giving it all away literally transformed an entire camp of soldiers.

Gordon (1916 – 2002), who spent three years as a Japanese prisoner of war, was a native of Scotland. He was an officer in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and became Presbyterian dean of the chapel at Princeton University following his military service.

In his book, he tells about Angus McGillivray, a Scottish prisoner in a camp filled with Americans, Australians and Britons who had helped build the infamous Bridge over the River Kwai. The camp had become an ugly situation. A dog-eat-dog mentality had set in. Allies would steal from each other. Men would sleep on their packs and yet have them stolen from under their heads.

Survival was everything. The law of the jungle prevailed – until the news of Angus McGillivray's death spread throughout the camp. Rumors were rampant in the wake of his death. No one could believe big Angus had succumbed. He was strong; one of those whom they had expected to be the last to die.

Actually, it wasn't the fact of his death that shocked the men, but the reason he died. Finally, they pieced together the true story.

The Argylls (Scottish soldiers) took their buddy system very seriously. Their buddy was called their "mucker," and these Argylls believed that it was literally up to each of them to make sure their mucker survived. Angus' mucker, though, was dying, and everyone had given up on him; everyone, of course, but Angus. He had made up his mind that his friend would not die. Someone had stolen his mucker's blanket, so Angus gave him his own, telling his mucker that he had "just come across an extra one."

Likewise, every mealtime, Angus would get his rations and take them to his friend, stand over him and force him to eat them, again stating that he was able to get "extra food." Angus was going to do anything and everything to see that his buddy got what he needed to recover.

But as Angus' mucker began to recover, Angus collapsed, slumped over, and died. Doctors discovered that he had died of starvation complicated by exhaustion. He had been giving of his own food and shelter. He had given everything he had, even his very life. The ramification of his acts of love and unselfishness had a startling impact on the compound.

(move)

As word circulated of the reason for McGillivray's death, the feel of the camp began to change. Suddenly, men began to focus on their friends and humanity, of living beyond survival, of giving oneself away. They began to pool their talents. One was a violin maker, another an orchestra leader, another a cabinet maker, another a professor.

Soon the camp had an orchestra full of homemade instruments and a church called the *Church Without Walls* that was so powerful, so compelling, that even the Japanese guards attended. The men began a university, a hospital, and a library system. The place was transformed, all because one man named Angus gave all he had for his friend.

It is an awesome illustration of the potential unleashed when one person unselfishly gives it all away – time, talents, energy, love.

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends (John 15:13 NKJV).

– Beecher Hunter