

Mission Miracles

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with David and Becky Gates



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Volunteers Are Special People

Nothing disturbed Jodi's sleep. Not the insects chirping, not the owls hooting, not the sounds of distant cattle moving about in the night. Not even the ever-present bats, chattering and arguing in the open rafters above her bedroom. Exhausted by a long day of teaching, she didn't hear the occasional crash of mangoes and coconuts falling on the tin roofs of homes across the river. She didn't hear the "song" of the frogs that filled the forest with a noise like chainsaws revving up their engines. Jodi McDaniels slept quietly after a strenuous day of dealing with sixty students at Kimbia Mission Academy beside the Berbice River in Guyana, South America.

Her husband, Warren, the school administrator, had gone to Georgetown, the capitol of the country, and would be returning soon with Melissa and Gilbert Sissons, who would be leading out in medical work up and down the river. The Sissons were not new to the area. Gilbert and Melissa, both graduates of Loma Linda University, started mission work in Guyana in July 2001. Though Gilbert has a master's degree in speech-language pathology, he had spent three years helping with construction projects and studying the Bible with the local people in Guyana. He helped construct the main school building on campus. Melissa served as the nurse for both the school and the community. Like the McDanielses, Gilbert and Melissa Sissons are volunteer mission workers.

Suddenly, high-pitched screams cut through the jungle sounds and caused Jodi to sit straight up in bed. Girls were screaming somewhere outside, and over the screams of the girls, she thought she could hear a baby crying. Quickly, she jumped out of bed and started running toward the commotion.

At the same time David Hossick also heard the screams and woke up. An ADRA volunteer, David spends three months a year in Guyana doing all types of maintenance. His first thought was that someone had been bitten by a snake. He leaped out of bed and down the stairs, ready to help. As he reached the corner of the building, he met Jodi running full speed. David joined her.

The night was pitch black; no moon cast its glow. By now the entire campus had awakened. Even the villagers across the river heard the pandemonium. Near the pit toilet, Jodi and Dave met a group of hysterical girls, all yelling. "It's Julita. She's had a baby—and it fell into the toilet!"

Sure enough, they heard an infant's piercing cry from the muck beneath. There was no time to try to sort out what had happened. First, the baby must be rescued immediately from the six-foot abyss. And the young mother needed help.



Julita and her baby. The circumstances surrounding the birth caused quite a bit of excitement.

Julita had come to Kimbia Mission Academy from Kopinang, a mountainous village west of the Berbice River region. Fifteen years old, she was barely four feet tall and had the classic Amerindian petite frame. Julita was a wonderful student with an addictive, bubbly giggle. Yet, she was quiet and shy—never one to push herself forward. Quietly and bravely, she concealed her developing pregnancy, never asking for help, never complaining, and never telling the nurse or any faculty member of her condition.

The day she went into labor, she had worked hard in the school garden, digging irrigation trenches as diligently as her male classmates. That night she cried into her pillow in her bunk bed in the dorm until someone heard her and called the girls' dean. Assuming Julita suffered from gas pains, the dean went to

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boil her some tea. Julita did not want tea. Instead, she got out of bed and walked with some friends through the inky darkness to the toilet. As they stood outside the stall, the girls could hear her moaning. Then they heard a final groan, a heavy splash, and the cry of a newborn baby. Julita had delivered her child!

“Julita,” they screamed, “what is going on? Is that a baby crying? Tell us, Julita, what happened?”

“I don’t know; I don’t know,” Julita mumbled in confusion.

When David and Jodi arrived, David’s mind instantly went into high gear. He’d faced a lot of things in his years of mission work, but he realized that it would take divine intervention this time for a life not to be lost. He began shouting in his excitement, “God, please help us to save this baby!” Then he turned and commanded, “Get me a chain saw—quick! And two rakes to scoop up the baby! Hurry! Hurry!”

He heard Jodi crying, “Lord, help us! Lord, help us!”

Then he beamed his flashlight down deep into the hole of the toilet and saw a tiny infant lying on its back, crying. “Praise the Lord!” he exclaimed. “It’s on its back. The umbilical cord snapped during the fall.”

Jodi held the light while David maneuvered the two rakes down and around the infant’s body. Unfortunately they were cheap rakes, and the heads of each had broken in half—opposite halves. This made it much more difficult for David, but slowly, carefully, he began to bring the baby to the top. As he worked, Jodi shouted orders



The outhouse at Kimbia Mission Academy in Guyana where Julita’s baby was born—and nearly died.

left and right. “Get hot water! Get towels! Someone get Pearl, the health worker!” Another person ran to get clean clothes. Everything seemed utter chaos. Numerous prayers continued to ascend to God.

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At last the baby was right near the top of the hole. But Jodi and David couldn't reach the infant because of the angle of the rake handles. In horror they watched the slippery little body slide away and plunge back into the darkness—face down!

Devastated, Jodi cried out, "If we can't get that baby in the next minute, I'm jumping down inside there myself."

"Let's give it one more try," David urged. At the same time he yelled, "Start up the chain saw in case we have to cut open the toilet and dive in. In what seemed like an eternity, they slowly brought the baby up again with the rakes. This time Jodi grabbed it and held it securely, ignoring the smelly muck that covered its body.

From birth to rescue, the whole incident took less than ten minutes, thanks to God and the angels. Jodi swaddled the infant, a baby girl, and rushed it to her home to clean off the sewage. The health worker arrived and attended to a shaken and traumatized young mother. She clamped the cord and cut it. With the health worker's assistance, Julita finished the delivery of her placenta.

No one slept the rest of that night. Many stared blankly into the moonless sky. What had happened? How would this change life on Kimbia Mission Academy campus? What would become of Julita and her

new little daughter?

Later, when volunteer nurse Melissa Sissons arrived on campus, the baby and mother received a full assessment. Amazingly, not one complication could be found. The baby weighed three and a half pounds and was seventeen inches long. She had a full head of black hair and had no trouble learning to breast feed.



Construction goes forward on the school buildings at Kimbia Mission Academy as local individuals work with student missionaries from the United States to complete the needed facilities.

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Melissa Sissons took young Julita and baby to the Georgetown Hospital. Eventually Gary Roberts, a volunteer pilot for Guyana Adventist Medical Aviation Service (GAMAS), flew her back to her home village. The staff and students continually pray that Julita will stay close to God who loves her and her baby and that He will give her wisdom as she starts a new and challenging life in her village. What a wonderful God we serve! He is a God who is always with us to deliver us from the muck and mire of this sinful world.

The story of Julita and the miraculous rescue of her baby is just one of the thousands of miracles David and Becky Gates have witnessed since they gave their lives to God in volunteer mission service. In 1996, David, Becky, and their five children landed in Kaikan, Guyana, ready to serve. And God has continually answered their prayers with miraculous evidences of His care and leading. Back then, the entire village of Kaikan, all 150 villagers, met the new missionaries at the airstrip. Today, this dedicated couple still rejoice that they can work as volunteer missionaries, without a salary, trusting God completely, and accepting His abundant miracles of grace. And He has blessed their work far beyond anything they imagined at the beginning.

During those early years, David, a licensed pilot, established the Guyana Adventist Medical Aviation Service (GAMAS) to carry on medical evangelistic work in the remote jungle villages of Guyana. Lives were saved—both physically and spiritually. “I’m so glad we chose to step out in faith, depending wholly on God,” Becky recalls. “He supplied the needs of His precious Amerindian children. God more than kept His promises. Not only did



A person needing medical attention is carried to a waiting GAMAS airplane. The Guyana Adventist Medical Aviation Service saves lives physically and spiritually in remote areas of the country.

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He provide for all our needs—and theirs—but His blessings enabled us to introduce them to a God they didn't know.”

When God provided another airplane, David begin looking for an experienced, willing volunteer pilot to help him cope with the urgent calls GAMAS was receiving. That is when he came in contact with Gary Roberts—a meeting that David considers anything but coincidence.

Born in East Africa, Gary spent the first fourteen years of his life in Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo, where his parents were missionaries. He helped his mother, a nurse, in the medical clinic and flew in the small mission airplane with his dad, who was a pilot and mechanic. Gary grew up speaking four languages—English, French, Swahili, and a difficult tribal dialect of the local area. When he turned fifteen, his family moved to Indonesia, where he learned a fifth language—and obtained his pilot's license.

While Gary was in college at Southern Adventist University, taking nursing and working at the Collegedale airport doing airplane maintenance, David came in contact with this young man. Both are convinced that the meeting was God's doing.

“During my freshman year in college,” Gary recalls, “I was praying for God to lead me into an opportunity to serve as a mission pilot and nurse.” When he met David and learned of the need for just such a person in Guyana, he told David that he would be ready for the job as soon as he graduated from college.

During Gary's senior year, David invited him to take part in a jungle survival course to be held in Peru the last three weeks of Gary's final semester in college. The university rules for nursing students stated that any student missing more than two days of classes would be automatically dismissed. Gary prayed about the situation. Then he wrote the faculty a letter explaining that he intended to join GAMAS after graduation to serve the Amerindians in unentered regions of Guyana's interior. He pointed out how the jungle survival course would be vital to his plans. His dedication and pleas—along with the influence of the Holy Spirit—impressed the nursing faculty to grant his request.

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Wendy, Gary's fiancée, shared his dream and his dedication. Together they pledged themselves to be willing volunteer missionaries, trusting God completely. David was thrilled when he learned that the university had given Gary permission to attend the jungle survival course in Peru. But Gary didn't have the money for airfare to South America. He told Wendy, "If God wants me to go, He'll supply the airfare."

During the Christmas break of 2000–2001, Gary and Wendy flew to the Northwest to visit his grandparents. As they waited for their flight, they heard the announcement, "This flight is overbooked. If anyone is willing to give up his seat and take a later flight, the airline will give that person two thousand dollars in airline vouchers." God had provided the means to pay for not one, but two, round trips to Guyana—another mission miracle!

Gary joined the GAMAS team in July 2001, while Wendy stayed in the United States to work off student loans and wait until Gary became established in Guyana. Then, after getting married in the States, they both would return to South America.

When Gary arrived in Guyana, David arranged to spend several weeks flying with him. "The authorities here require that new pilots have at least three hundred hours of jungle flying in the country before they receive permission to fly alone," David told Gary. "But because of your flying in Indonesia, I'm sure they'll waive that requirement. We'll know in two months."

In Georgetown, Gary stayed in a small apartment. He was usually out of bed by 4:00 A.M. so he could get to the airport, load and fuel the plane, and be in the air by sunrise. Then he flew all day until sunset. For about a year he worked in Guyana without Wendy. He determined he would never bring her to live in the apartment where he was staying; so, in his spare time, which wasn't often, he looked for a place to rent. He couldn't find anything suitable. Eventually, he worked out a deal with Davis Memorial Adventist Hospital in Georgetown to stay for a while in one of its small apartments. He would have preferred not living in Georgetown at all but in the interior. But he knew that someone had to live in the capital in order to purchase supplies, host volunteers, and care for all the government paperwork and permissions that required ongoing attention.

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In July 2002, Gary flew back to Collegedale, Tennessee, for a simple, but beautiful, wedding ceremony. For Wendy, who had been an active ICU nurse, living in Guyana meant losing much of her independence. Drivers in Guyana seemed erratic and frightening to her—plus they drove on the left side of the road! It wasn't safe for her to walk alone or even to take a taxi by herself. With Gary flying all day, she was alone much of the time. One day, returning late, he called her on the radio, saying, "What do you need at the market? Since it's late, I'll stop by on the way home."

"Please!" Wendy was almost in tears. "I've been looking forward to getting out of this apartment for four days. And today is the day for fresh fruit and vegetables in the market. Please come get me!"



Gary and Wendy Roberts have dedicated their lives to volunteer mission service. They witness God's miracles on a daily basis.

Slowly, however, Wendy began to regain control of her life. She made herself learn to drive amid the chaos of Georgetown traffic. With Jeremiah 42:3 on her lips—"Show us the way in which we should walk and the thing we should do"—she ventured out to find activities and areas where she felt safe. Wendy found that nothing

was easy in Guyana compared to what she was used to. Even shopping for groceries was complicated. After she found the items she wanted to purchase, she would have to take them to a worker who would write up the bill. Then she needed to go to the cashier to pay. Next, she would take her purchases to a third location in the store to be checked and stamped as paid. Finally, she would stop at the door for her receipt before being able to leave the store. And since most shops sold only special items—not a wide variety—this process had to be repeated again and again in different stores. All this absorbed huge amounts of Wendy's

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time. But she continued depending on God for strength and power, growing more confident and experienced. And soon she was purchasing supplies for twenty North American volunteer workers at the Davis Indian Industrial College in Paruima and Kimbia Academy and for twenty-five Bible workers in eight villages. Gary delivered the supplies by plane and picked up mail.

Wendy and Gary found that Jesus was beside them as they dedicated themselves to His service. Mission miracles? They experience them on a daily basis.