

Ambassadors Fellowship, Inc (AFI) African American Missionary Devotional

**Missionaries Elder Ward Byron and Min. Cynethea Cunningham**

**Liberia, West Africa July 1985 – September 1988, Zuo Mission**

**Letting nothing stop them from getting to the field.**

**Scripture Readings: Isaiah 43:2, Philippians 4:7, Mark 10:28-31**



Missionary Cynethea recalls, “In 1984, the Lord called us to serve Him as missionaries in Liberia, West Africa ... In preparing our hearts for this journey of faith, one of the words the Lord gave us to stand on was Isaiah 43:2 which says, “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.” (KJV) On January 24, 1985 what we anticipated being another ordinary morning turned into something completely different for our family. We would encounter one of life’s major storms that would shake us to the core and turn our world upside down. Our lives would be greatly impacted that Friday morning and the pain and heartache resulting from this life altering event would be healed by the Lord and with the passing of time. It was a new year and the four of us were scheduled to leave the country in seven months. We would spend the ensuing months excitedly preparing for this new season of our lives and in mid-July. Ward, 15-year-old Andre’, 8-year-old Brandon and I would board a PAN AM 747 destined for Liberia, West Africa – 5,000 miles away from our family, our friends and all of our familiar surroundings. Our new residence was at ZUO Mission Station in the Western province of the country, a very rural area. Excitement and anticipation permeated the air as we looked forward to life in this new country. We were a new missionary family, and it was in this new setting, with these new people that we would spend the next three years. It was here the four of us anticipated living among, serving, and growing to love the Gola people. Little did we know it, but the Lord had another plan for Brandon. He would not be taking this journey with us. It was that January morning while on his way to school when tragedy struck, and Brandon was killed by a young man driving a speeding automobile. We did not see that storm coming. How could we have foreseen something of this magnitude!

As I rushed to the scene, as I looked at my 8-year-old son, even though I knew in my heart that he was dead, my mind did not want to accept it. I reached over and touched the attending officer on the shoulder and asked, “*Is he dead?*” Not knowing who I was, he replied, “*Ma'am, we're doing all we can.*” I remember immediately thinking to myself, “*What can they*

*do now?"* Shocked and devastated, I stood transfixed gazing upon Brandon's lifeless body and observed that there was a look of peace on his face. He looked as if he were only asleep. Standing there void of feelings and unaware of the rush hour traffic and the commotion going on around me, time stood still for a period of seconds, maybe even minutes as I sensed an angelic presence hovering overhead. Not able to take my eyes off of him I heard the following words: *"He wouldn't have made it in Africa anyway. You have lots of other children in Africa."* Instantly, the angelic presence was gone, the traffic noises returned and the shock of all that had taken place came crashing in on me. As we were transported to Holy Cross Hospital, I remember crying, *"Please God don't let this be true!"* I had never dreamed in my most distant imagination that anything like this would ever have taken place. But, in the midst of this storm, the Lord, our Jehovah Shalom, overshadowed us with His presence and His peace and the promises from His word gave us strength to keep moving forward. We were reminded of Isaiah 43:2 ... "When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you." (NLT)

Standing on the promises of God's word and daily strengthened by the fervent prayers of the saints of God, the three of us made the journey safely to Liberia. Upon arrival we found the country in the midst of civil unrest and under strict military rule. And, due to the turmoil taking place Andre' remained with us for only 6 weeks after which he returned to the U.S. in time to start the school year. Yet grieving the loss of Brandon and now having to experience a lengthy separation from our oldest son was heart wrenching indeed. But even in the midst of our tears we experienced the Lord's peace, the Philippians 4:7 kind of peace. We knew the Lord's call was upon our lives and that death and separation does not stop God's work. For 3 years we stood on the word of God and the promises of Mark 10 verses 29-30. It was with great sacrifice that we answered God's call. But we loved Him with all our hearts because He first loved us. And through everything we had experienced thus far we still had no doubt that He called us and no doubt that He would keep us. And, for three years He showed Himself faithful. He never failed us, and He wrought miracles mightily. He blessed us and the work and greatly and added souls to His Kingdom for which we give thanks."

Cynethea worked as the mother/registrar for the mission school, was dean of girls and taught first and second grade and Bible. Ward was the superintendent of the mission and overseer for the 4 village schools, 7 village churches and Pastor of the mission church. He was also the Bible instructor for the pastors. As we left the mission for the last time, driving away in our Jeep, scores of children came running from every direction, following behind the Jeep, and yelling, "Mother, Come Back!" God was true to His word, He walked with us and He gave us many a hundredfold children in Africa.

Have you offered up to the Lord houses, lands, brothers, sisters, wife, and children for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel? Do you believe that the Lord can provide a hundredfold back in this lifetime? In what way will you walk into the deep waters or hot fires trusting the Lord?