

Miracles Among the Rubble

Bringing Convoys of Humanitarian Aid,
Hugs, and Hope to a War-torn Region



Carol R. Gray

Edited by Samantha Richardson
and Rebecca Johnson

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Summary: "Carol Rosemary Gray was a British mother and homemaker of seven children who became a recognized humanitarian leader in Europe and Africa. After receiving the all clear from her first battle with cancer at age 29, she made a promise to her Heavenly Father that she would live every single day to the fullest. This promise was exemplified years later when she began by organizing and transporting relief aid for victims of the Balkan War during the early 1990s, returning more than 34 times in the following nine years. She then went on to found Hugs International TLC, which, through Carol's efforts, funded the construction and operating of homes, a school, dormitories, a medical center and a sports field in Ghana for the next 10 years. Carol passed away in 2010 at age 66. This volume comprises a selection of heart-wrenching and inspiring experiences told in Carol's poetically unique style of expression. Her stories are a testament to the extraordinary achievements of an ordinary mother, who was able to do remarkable things with nothing more than unwavering faith, the help and guidance of the Holy Ghost, and her relationship with the Savior"-- Provided by publisher.

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Foreword

As I look back on how and when this journey started, the words that come to mind are: “It wasn’t planned; it just happened.”

I know for a fact that it was never my Mum’s intention to start a charity. Carol Gray was perfectly content being a good wife, mother, and grandmother. She was watching a television news report one night about what was going on in war-torn former Yugoslavia and the terrible things that were happening to innocent people over there; she then turned to Dad and said, “Why isn’t anybody doing anything to help them? I want to do something.”

Shortly afterward, whilst serving as the Relief Society president in our local ward, Mum got to work organizing the gathering of aid that would be shipped over by other organizations. When the company who were to transport the aid suddenly went bust, Mum’s response wasn’t to say, “Oh that’s it then; we have done all we can do.” She simply said, “Right, if there is nobody who is able or willing to take it, then we will do it.” I remember hearing lots of comments saying that she was not qualified, that it was too dangerous, or that she should stay at home and look after her family. But Mum simply saw people in desperate need of help, and nothing or nobody was going to deter her from doing whatever was necessary to help them.

At that time, I was in my early twenties and newly married. My dad was deeply concerned about Mum running a project that would require her to travel thousands of miles without him by her side to look out for her. Knowing there was little I was afraid of and that I was always ready for a new adventure, it made sense for him to come to me and ask if I would accompany Mum on her convoy so I could support her and “make sure she was ok.” Dad’s support for Mum during the years that followed was invaluable.

Looking back on those early convoys, I remember this incredibly gentle but fiercely strong woman. A juxtaposition, I know, yet I was introduced to a different side of the mother I knew and loved: she showed such compassion, mixed with a steely determination in the face



Carol being featured in a 1995 local newspaper.

of violent chaos and never-ending obstacles. Driving into a war zone was a new experience for both of us. I'm glad Dad asked me to go with Mum; he knew things would get really tough—which they did. And when those times came, I was there to say, "Come on, Mum, we can do this." Though she was enduring constant pain and fear, what shone through was her instinctive love for the people she met. Her complete



Embracing one of the many persons that Carol assisted through her years of service.

trust in and love for her Heavenly Father kept her going through the many, many difficulties and the seemingly insurmountable challenges she faced. It was this love that kept her returning again and again. During family discussions Mum would often say that she never intended it to go on as long as it did—she just couldn't abandon the people of Bosnia and Croatia.

Dad always said that Mum could not deny the voice that spoke within her, compelling her to go and do it and not to stop until it was finished. I know Mum did not find it easy to write this book: it was emotionally stressful and draining for her to relive the trauma she witnessed in such detail. I know there were many experiences she did not or could not write about because they were so painful. I also know that she sometimes wished she could have done more.

Her work in Bosnia eventually did come to an end, but that was not the end of Mum's journey.

Her determination and ability to get things done in Bosnia and Croatia under the most difficult of circumstances eventually brought her to the attention of The United Nations, for whom she became

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a special advisor. She was the recipient of numerous accolades and awards, including the 1996 Gold Medal Award for Bravery, the 1998 Britain's Woman of the Year Award, and the Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts Award that same year. She went on to do the most wonderful work in Ghana, setting up an ambitious housing and school program for children whose parents had died of AIDS and had been orphaned. Her dream was to educate and prepare the children for university so they could support and assist in the betterment of their own country. The Carol Gray International School in Accra, Ghana, is still running to this day and would have to be the subject of a whole new book.

As I reflect on her work and achievements, what stands out to me was her tireless efforts to bring hope to the hopeless combined with her unconditional love for everyone she met. She passionately believed that all the world's problems could be resolved through the expression of unconditional love in the form of a simple hug. As a teenager I remember resisting my Mum's constant hugs—I used to tell her how annoying she was being and tell her to stop. She hugged everyone; she was famous for it. She would hug my siblings and me all the time and constantly tell us how much she loved us. We were so lucky. What I wouldn't give for another one of my Mum's all-encompassing, healing, big squidgy hugs! :-)

My mother passed away in 2010 after finally succumbing to her thirty-year battle with cancer.

Samantha Richardson
May 27, 2020
Sheffield, England

Introduction

In 1980 Josip Tito, the president of Yugoslavia, died. His death eventually ended the cooperation between the republics of Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Slovenia, Macedonia, and Montenegro that had begun over six decades earlier when Yugoslavia was formed. In the unrest following Tito's death, Slobodan Milosevic saw a political opportunity. In order to gain power among Serbian nationalists, he deliberately declared the dream of a "Greater Serbia." This incitement of nationalistic feelings had been taboo during Tito's administration, and the move by Milosevic led to heightened and increasingly violent nationalistic feelings throughout the country. By 1989 Milosevic held power in two Yugoslav republics and two territories, giving him half of the votes in Yugoslavia's parliament. The next year, when communist leaders in the other republics refused to work with Milosevic in parliament, the communist party in Yugoslavia collapsed.

Thereafter, the republics of Slovenia and Croatia began the process of becoming independent from Yugoslavia. Serbs, in the minority in the republic of Croatia, began to fear for their safety. Milosevic exacerbated the situation in Croatia by reminding Serbs of the atrocities committed against their people during World War II by Croatian fascists. When Croatia declared independence in June 1991, the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army entered Croatia to assist Serbs in forming their own republics. As a result, war broke out.

In January 1992, after six months of war in Croatia, the United Nations called for a ceasefire. Fighting then shifted to Bosnia, which voted for independence in March 1992. In Bosnia, Milosevic fomented nationalistic feelings, inspiring fears among Christian Orthodox Serbs that the Bosnian Muslim majority intended to form a fundamentalist Islamic state. Serbs in Bosnia reacted by bombing and besieging Sarajevo, carrying out ethnic cleansing, and committing brutal war crimes.

It was in late 1992 when Carol Gray felt that God had relief work for her to do, and she earnestly sought in prayer to know His will. When the charity that should have delivered the donations that she

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collected went bankrupt, Carol bought a truck so that she and her daughter Sammy could join a convoy to Zagreb, Croatia. In what would be the first of many convoys to these devastated regions for Carol, they travelled through villages along the border of Croatia and Bosnia, delivering blankets, warm clothes, food parcels, hygiene items, toiletries, baby formula, and diapers.

During the following three years, Carol took convoys to Croatia and Bosnia more than twenty times, visiting refugee camps and orphanages, rebuilding schools and hospitals, and clearing land of mines to allow people to plant donated seeds, using donated shovels. In Karlovac in Croatia, Carol visited orphanages. On the Dalmatian Coast of Croatia, she and other convoy members rebuilt a school in Rovanska and delivered supplies to suffering civilians on the front line in Zadar. In Sarajevo, Bosnia, she delivered surgical equipment to a hospital. Also in Sarajevo, her convoy members renovated and furnished a school for orphans. In Kupres, Bosnia, Carol's convoy worked with locals to clear the city of trash and renovate the hospital. Impressive as the work projects and donations are, Carol maintains that the most important service she and other convoy members gave is their love, manifest through hugs and readiness to listen.

In a 1996 interview for The James Moyle Oral History Program, Carol said,

There are two forces in the world. There's a force for evil . . . [manifest as] brutality, abuse, heartache. However, there's another force which is equally as intense and more wonderful . . . which can change the course of history and everything. And that is just showing a little bit of consideration, looking at the other person's point of view, sitting around a table and talking and showing a little love.¹

After the war in Bosnia ended in December 1995, Carol carried on taking convoys of hope. With her last convoy in 2001, she had been to Croatia and Bosnia more than forty times.

1. Carol Gray, interviewed by Matthew Heiss for The James Moyle Oral History Program, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, 1996, 11.

The Dream

Nighttime shadows without, anxious thoughts within, as I lay awake reflecting upon my strangely detailed and realistic dream. It had been a long and tedious night, anticipating the test results after weeks of worried speculation moving toward quiet resignation. My fingers gently followed the growing lump that had disrupted my comfortable life. The lump on the side of my neck was growing quickly and beginning to affect my health. Not only had I suffered a constant stream of styes and boils, but also I seemed to be stricken with a weariness that I was unable to conquer. I was only twenty-nine, with four beautiful little daughters, the youngest just six months old, and yet some days I felt so ill and weary that I imagined I was much older.

The silence in the room was broken only by the sound of my husband's steady breathing as he slept. I slipped quietly out of bed hoping not to disturb him. I knew he was worried about me, and I had tried hard to stay positive and normal, but as my health had begun to deteriorate over the last three weeks, my insecurity and apprehension were beginning to surface. Now I was preparing for the day that would bring answers. The darkness faded, dispelled by the coming sun, and my heart seemed to lighten.

A few hours later, I was walking up the long driveway of the hospital with my Mum to receive the results of yet another batch of tests and entered a scene that came right out of my dream the previous night. Walking into the consultant's office and receiving the subsequent outcome was a *déjà vu* I will never forget. It was indeed cancer! It was cancer of the thyroid, only it had spread quite considerably, and I was to be admitted into hospital the following morning for an operation to remove as much of the cancer as possible.

Devastating as the news was, it brought with it the realization that a wonderful, thoughtful, and kind Heavenly Father had heard my pleas for strength and peace. I had seen these events already unfold in the dream that had come the past night in answer to my searching soul. That dream had taken me on a journey—it seemed to lead me gently

through a perfect picture of all that I would have to go through, all that I would feel and struggle with over the coming weeks.

We returned home to prepare for the operation the following morning. At the end of the day, as I sat surrounded by my family, I listened to the comforting, emotional, and humble words of my husband and father as they sought the healing power and attention of the Lord on my behalf. Their hands, trembling and gentle, rested upon my head and bestowed upon me a Priesthood blessing. The following day, an experimental operation performed by a wonderful consultant to remove my thyroid, jugular vein, and muscle tissue, left me internally and externally with a mass of metal plates, pins, and plastic tubing. The doctors gently conveyed the message that my time left in mortality was very limited. In fact, I was to be sent home with a nurse to spend my remaining time with my family. “Just twelve weeks,” they told us. I tried to look beyond their words, and somehow my dream came back to sustain me.

What a remarkable time it was as we as a family focused only on the present. Every day became a wonderful one filled with love, laughter, and occasionally tears. Every moment gleaned from each precious day was filled with those memories that really mattered. Our home truly became a little piece of heaven. Slowly the weeks went by, and instead of deteriorating, my health improved. Rising within us was the hope that my comforting dream would become a reality and all would be well.

As my strength increased, I was treated at a cancer hospital with radiotherapy and radioactive iodine. My twelve weeks became twelve months and then eventually the years rolled on, filled with the joyous privilege of life, raising my lovely daughters and centering our lives upon those things that really mattered. My life was richer by far from the whole experience! Hope in the future had gently but purposefully been turned into that special gift called faith, and the deeper answers given to my searching soul had come in the form of an understanding of life itself.

Who could have imagined that life with all its remarkable experiences had become for me my university of learning. The lessons of quiet motivation and gratitude all those years ago live brightly today within me as yesterday's challenges became today's accomplishments. I am forever grateful for having learned the “joy of the journey” and a promise of inner peace.

Small Beginnings

The daily news bulletins on the TV were heartbreaking. Day after day, the documentaries portrayed in graphic detail the atrocities, the destruction, and the mindless cruelty unfolding in the former Yugoslavia.

From the safety and comfort of my sitting room, I became engrossed in yet another disturbing program of the conflict arising in the Balkans, one of the sort that engendered trauma and disbelief in the hearts of people across Europe. An advertisement by a charity appealing for goods and money came on the screen. Reaching for my checkbook, I felt both at a loss as what to do to help and dismayed at my feelings of inadequacy. Signing a piece of paper and sending it on its way did not relieve my need to do more.

A few days later I was galvanized into action by witnessing a close-up picture of a young woman, desperate and panic-stricken, running like a terrified rabbit caught in the hypnotic glare of the car headlights. Clinging to her three young children—half-dragging, half-carrying them all—she ran from tree to tree, from mound of rubble to shell hole, desperately trying to shield and protect her precious family from the onslaught of bullets, shells, and fire. The sight of her wide-open and pain-filled eyes as she, for a fleeting second, looked straight into the camera lens, will haunt me forever. I was filled with a desire to help, to physically be of use. I knew it could just as well have been me. I imagined what I would do in her position. What would I hope for? My heart beat faster as I realized that I would hope that someone like me was watching and that they would be moved to help. An idea began to form, and my commitment to act filled me with courage and immense enthusiasm and energy. All of a sudden I was stepping out of my comfort zone, and it felt right.

Had someone told me then about the sacrifice and adventure that would change both my and my family's lives, I would have laughed at them and maybe even failed to rise to the challenge. I find it both incredible and wonderful that an ordinary wife and mother has been

allowed the privilege and blessing of such miraculous experiences. As each of us forges ahead, climbing the hills and descending the troughs of life, steadfast and committed to our journey, success is not just for those endowed with a high IQ, those born stunningly beautiful, or those blessed by a gifted birth. It is for each and every one of us. The power is within you.

At that time ten years ago, I was serving as a president of our local Relief Society, a women's organization of my own church—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. I was in an excellent position to encourage the women to lose themselves in service, for a short while, for the people of Bosnia. With permission received from my priesthood leaders to begin my appeal and to use the basement of the church house for storage, we began in earnest, and the results were astounding. What started out as a local project soon became a regional affair and eventually grew into a national humanitarian project. Nothing could have prepared me for the explosion of goodness and giving.

The national newspapers, moved by the idea of a mother of seven children spearheading such a project, became involved. Nationwide appeals went out on television, inspiring people to do their bit for Bosnia. Within four weeks our humanitarian aid had reached forty tons: a colossal collection of new blankets, warm clothes, food parcels, hygiene items, toiletries, baby milk, and diapers. Every noble work exacts its price. That price was time and effort, taken in sorting, packing, listing, and sizing. Many people came together in an outpouring of friendship and unity. People of all ages, walks of life, cultures, and faiths sang together, chatted, laughed, and toiled with one heart and one mind: a common desire to serve and to ease the burdens of those in Bosnia. The sight of forty tons of newly boxed aid was impressive, both a balm to my weariness and a source of some worry. The church building was full to exploding.

We arrived at church on the last Sunday in November 1992 to find that a Royal Mail wagon had left a huge pile of aid in front of the church doors in the early hours of the morning. Arriving with my husband and family to check that all was tidy and pleasant for the women in the Relief Society room, I stopped with a sinking feeling. There was nothing to do except to move the aid. Almost two hours later, battered, bruised, dusty, and shattered, we all slumped into our seats for the

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Sunday service. Needless to say, the children and youth were happy to have missed their Sunday lessons that day, but my bishop and other Priesthood leaders were not.

That evening I phoned the charity that had promised to take the aid over to Croatia and Bosnia. I told them the trucks that would transport the goods down to their warehouse in London would be packed by Tuesday night and on their way the next morning. The silence on the phone filled me with apprehension. They had been so eager just a few weeks before to take our aid. I had phoned just last week and all was well. Surely there was not a problem.

My goodness, was there a problem! They had run out of money and couldn't take the aid. I considered options for escape: suicide, fire, and disappearance all fleetingly sounded more comfortable than the position I found myself in now. Panic and sheer disbelief stirred my soul. My brain was incapable of thinking anything positive and ceased to work. It must have been only seconds before a voice on the other end of the phone apologized profusely and hung up. Sitting down on the chair by the phone, I was stunned by the enormity of the dilemma. What was I to do? For what seemed like an eternity I sat in silence. The laughter and giggles of my family somewhere in the distant rooms of my home brought my thoughts back to the present and with them came a plan—an exciting and challenging plan. Somehow I would take the aid myself.

It was out of character. The one who would do something like that—someone strong, courageous, and adventurous—that wasn't me. I really had no idea how far away Bosnia was, so the contemplated journey from the UK across the Channel, through Europe, and into Bosnia (some 2,500 kilometers) didn't faze me at all. Those horrific pictures of people caught in the trauma of war suddenly didn't seem to fill me with fear. Quietly and naturally the picture of all I had to do fell into place. Bosnia and its remarkable people were beckoning, and somehow I was going to rise to their call.

Speaking to my husband that night about my desire to distribute the aid myself did not secure the reaction I had expected. Looking at me as though I had completely lost my mind, my usually very thoughtful and caring husband simply said, "No." Somewhat miffed by his uncharacteristic reaction, I decided to leave it till the next morning. Each

day taking a fresh look at life had always been my motto. Filling each day with new resolve often dispelled my worries of the previous day.

All night my mind was busy with ideas. Energy and commitment relegated sleep as unnecessary. In the morning I dropped the children off at school, college, and work. As I journeyed home I had time to think about how I could approach the subject of Bosnia with my husband. Over and over again, I rehearsed the thoughts and things I wished to tell him. A bright sunny November morning filled me with a renewed desire to express to my lovely Stuart the dearest wishes of my heart.

Running our own property business from home meant that my husband Stuart was often around. We had always shared the responsibilities of raising the children and managing the home and business. It worked well for us. We enjoyed each other's company and life was great. Wasn't this the perfect basis from which to go out and do something for others? How I wished to be of use to the people suffering from the war, to feel that for once in my life I had stepped out of my comfortable world and given out of my storehouse of time, substance, and self. With a heart full of huge prayers, I had sought the gentle intervention of my Heavenly Father for most of the night. I hoped that He might bless my husband with the patience and insight to listen to my innermost feelings and to understand why I needed to do this. I had received the peaceful confirmation that all would be well.

Perhaps it was my imagination, but my husband seemed much more receptive to what I had to say that morning. Maybe it was a good sleep that had softened him, but as I glanced at his kindly and understanding eyes, I knew that somehow the Lord had reached him too. Once his initial concerns had abated, we agreed it was the right thing for me to do, and I proceeded then to purchase the truck for the aid we had collected. Phoning around that evening, speaking to many of my friends about my approaching adventure into Bosnia, I was amazed at their offers of trucks and money for diesel and even offers to go themselves. Sammy (my daughter) was fueled with excitement at the thought of such an adventure with her mum.

The following week was quickly taken up with preparations for the journey: packing clothes, food for ourselves, a cooking stove, and utensils. Acquiring sub-zero sleeping bags, ski jackets, and warm boots

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was essential. Spare tires and oil for the vehicle were my husband's first concerns. Several injections, advised by the medical board against the various diseases possibly encountered in a war-torn area, were duly suffered with dignity.

A few days later we joined a convoy of one hundred and ten vehicles leaving the shores of England, traveling by ferry to Calais in France, there to begin our long and exciting journey through the towns and cities of Europe. Filled with wonderment and excitement, my daughter and I embarked on our adventure of a lifetime!

The Pontoon Bridge

Over the last ten days, Sammy and I had been deeply moved by all that we had witnessed and all that we had done. We had laughed and cried together with those we had met in our now beloved Bosnia and Croatia. A new excitement arose within those towns and villages as they worked together for a common good; in the process they became strong, courageous, and in control of their own lives. Their feelings of helplessness and fear were dispersed as a new resolve took hold of their hearts.

A new day dawned. We arose having slept fitfully in the back of our truck. It was freezing. Icicles clung to the roof of our vehicle. The sleeping bags were stiff and damp and had not kept us very warm during the night. We had decided to sleep in our salopettes, ski jackets, and fur-lined boots. With our teeth chattering like castanets we had giggled most of the night, out of sheer tiredness, numbness, and cold. As the sun peeked through the clouds, we saw there would be no brushing of teeth or a nice wash; all of the water was frozen. Oh well!

It took an hour of traveling before we had thawed out and were feeling comfortable again. By now the sun was glowing brightly. In my heart was the knowledge that our adventure would soon be finished: our family back home was anticipating our return, our aid was fast disappearing, and we had only two deliveries left. We were entering into yet another area known as a front line crisis area, but this time a military escort was needed to secure our safety. We were soon to be met by a Croatian commander and several vehicles of war. Sammy was fairly bristling with excitement. There seemed to be no fear in her heart, as it had apparently all taken residency in me. My tummy rolled into giant knots as I watched the armored vehicles overtake our stationary trucks, with their large gun butts rising into the sky and sending a shiver down my spine. The huge rumbling tanks sent shock waves through the ground, causing our large truck to shake uncontrollably. I had never been so close to such ferocious-looking beasts before.

Suddenly the scene changed as the soldiers emerged from their vehicles. We were surrounded by smiling and happy faces, accompanied

by hands eager to shake ours and make us feel welcome. The young Croatian soldiers, dressed in military combat gear, could not have been more thoughtful and eager to dispel my nervousness. The commander, a young, dark, handsome fellow, could speak perfect English that helped put us at ease immediately.

He told us that we would be journeying to an area called Polinska Polyana, just a few kilometers away. There were just two little problems. We would be traveling over a pontoon bridge and through a minefield. He assured us, however, that we need not worry and that we would be okay. “Pontoon bridge” and “mine field” were the only words I could remember out of the whole conversation. I quickly stifled a rather unladylike squeak of alarm. Having never seen or travelled through either situation before, my imagination ran riot. I did not feel too comforted by his assurance that we would be okay. A pontoon bridge meant that at some time we would be crossing over water, which was not a happy thought for me.

I learned to fear water when I was very young and took a swimming class. I had wanted to do as I was instructed. In my six-year-old imagination, I would dive into the beautiful blue water and with the ease of a dolphin glide through, barely making a splash. My little heart longed to please my stern teacher. In stark reality I would stand by the side of the pool in terrified silence, my feet bolted to the floor as if I wore lead shoes. No matter how much I tried, how many times I counted to three, or how many people showed me how easy it was, I just could not leave the side of the pool or raise my other foot off the floor.

In desperation, after several weeks of failed attempts to entice me into the water, my frustrated swimming instructor threw me into the pool, thinking that I would swim out of necessity. She had not bargained with my fear. Instead of rising to the challenge, I sank to the bottom. A few seconds later I was dragged unceremoniously from the pool in greater dread of water than before. My swimming lessons were put on hold indefinitely.

Once again, the fear of drowning brought on another challenging moment in my life. Despite the travels of our convoy seeming to be full to overflowing with challenges, I had been able to face them all with what I thought was courage and resolve. But a pontoon bridge? I had read somewhere that they were quite flimsy affairs, spanning of-

The Pontoon Bridge

ten large and fearsome rivers. Memories of that childhood swimming class surfaced: the awful feeling of numbness and helplessness as I sank into the unrelenting water, the feeling of drifting in a dreamlike slow motion, among the air bubbles, the gurgles and splashes. The words “pontoon bridge” brought those memories flooding back.

There were army tanks to the front and rear of our trucks. We slowly began our descent into a small village, where the homes bore the scars of heavy sniper fire. We distributed our food parcels and prepared to leave, but an elderly lady noticed my lovely teddy bear sitting in the corner of the cab and took it into her arms. Soft and cuddly, “Bear” had become our mascot and encouragement during the last ten days. She cradled Bear in her arms like a tiny child. I wanted to explain that Bear was not part of the package, but as I looked at her I realized that comfort often arises from the most unexpected source. The woman held Bear out to me as we started the engine and began to pull away from her home. “She is yours now,” I whispered. “You keep her.” A lasting memory for me was the look of love and gratitude that lit up her countenance as I waved goodbye.

We were approaching a fast-flowing river. It was swollen from the winter rains, and as we journeyed along its banks, I could feel the panic begin to emerge within me. “Don’t worry, Mum,” Samantha comforted me. “We will be okay.” My daughter, aware of her mother’s fear of water, had sensed my alarm. The heavy presence of soldiers and dug-ins was the sign that we had reached our crossing area. The original bridge, only a few meters away, had been totally destroyed. A few mounds of rubble and rusty steel bars were all that was still visible above the surface of the teeming water. Next to the ruins of the former bridge, two heavy tree trunks had been sunk into the ground. Spanning from them was a wonderful weave of heavy ropes all attached to floating oil drums and a bridge of thick wooden planks. I glanced across the flowing mass of water to the other side and saw two more tree trunks and the same weave of rope. I was amazed and full of admiration. The pontoon bridge was a masterpiece of ingenuity and skill and appeared more robust than I had previously thought.

With my fears calmed a little, I watched the first small vehicle cross with skill and ease. The next vehicle, larger and heavier, carefully turned its wheels onto the bank where the bridge began. Each wooden

plank was roped to the next, as well as to the oil drums that bobbed about on the water. The bridge hung about a meter above the water. Very slowly the heavy military truck inched its way onto the bridge. Standing on the bank, I watched the careful negotiations and heard how the co-driver shouted directions. The first vehicle had negotiated the bridge easily, but the heavier truck went much slower. It wasn't until it had reached the middle that I realized with a measure of panic that its wheels were treading the water. The weight of the vehicle was obviously a determining factor in "how wet one's feet got" in crossing such a bridge. I needed no diploma in weights and measures to realize our truck would have the same problem.

In silence I gazed at the scene before me. It was our turn to cross, and true wisdom called me to be bold and not fear. But alas, those same leaden shoes that had years ago bolted my feet to the ground at the side of the pool restrained me still. Standing beside one of my worst nightmares—the fast-flowing, dark, deep, and endless water—I couldn't move. I needed a miracle, and I needed it fast. My heavenward pleas for reassurance, strength, peace, and agility were answered immediately, filling me with humble gratitude. One of the benefits of adversity is that we usually draw closer to the Lord during times of trial.

One step at a time, I returned to the truck where Sammy waited. Unlike me, she was smiling and ready to begin our adventure on the pontoon bridge, unaware of the silent battle I had just fought and the remarkable miracle that was about to take place. It was time for us to take our turn on the hastily-prepared bank that lead to the bridge. The engine roared into activity, and slowly and carefully we drove our truck onto the bank to prepare for our crossing. Inching the wheels onto the first wooden plank, we realized that we had little room to maneuver on either side—just a few inches spared us from tipping our truck into the water. Backing up on to the bank, we decided one of us should drive and one of us should walk on the bridge ahead and direct the wheels of the truck. Summoning up all the strength and determination I could muster, I got out of the truck. My daughter's safety was the only thing I could think of as I prepared to walk ahead of the wheels. Sammy was hanging out of the window so she could hear my shouts of "left a little, right a little, and straight ahead" above the sound of the roaring water. Clutching the heavy rope that served as a rail, I steadied myself as I

The Pontoon Bridge

began my treacherous crossing. With a humble and prayerful heart, I sought the strength to succeed. Once the task was begun, each tentative step was easier, each call of direction more confident. Because of water lapping through the wooden planks, I slipped off my shoes and socks and hoisted my skirt higher around my legs. The water was freezing and numbing my feet, but my adrenaline was pumping so strongly that I hardly noticed. Safety on the other side was beckoning, and I knew we were halfway across and soon we would be on dry wooden planks again. Focusing on the wheels as they tread the water, with my heart lodged firmly in my throat, I guided Samantha as we navigated plank after thick plank. Never once turning around to see how close we were to stepping ashore, I concentrated only on the direction of the wheels and my daughter's face straining to hear and watch my animated signals and shouts. Samantha was amazing, and I was so proud of her. The skill with which she controlled the truck was impressive.

Suddenly I felt the soft, damp, and welcoming bank under my feet. We worked as a team, my Sammy and I, a team that was to step ashore to spontaneous applause from the watching military, much to my relief, embarrassment, and gratitude. Resisting the urge to burst into tears of relief and kiss the solid ground, I hugged my triumphant daughter as she emerged from our now-stationary truck, full of excitement and exuberance. She danced around the shores of the river. "That was the best experience ever. Wow, will we do that again?" she asked the amused commander and his young Croatian soldiers. The reply came, "We will have to: it is the only route into and out of Polinska Polyana and all the surrounding villages of the front line."

My experience of the whole episode was slightly different to Samantha's. I felt total and utter relief that it was all over. The young commander, aware of my relief, quietly put his arm around my shoulder. "Brave Mama," he said. I felt a tear course down my cheek. Why couldn't I be one of those people, who love to dice with death and feel the thrill of the challenge? I had never been as adventurous as my daughter, who was always trying out things that made my hair curl with fear. I was in fact a bit of a wimp. "Wimp or not," I argued with myself, "today was the day the Lord and I conquered my fear of water." Suddenly my heart felt light and full of sunshine. I had persevered in the face of adversity, and in my own heart I had become a hero.

Miracles Among the Rubble

These last ten days I had done so many things that had taught me so much. My bank of learning moments, both spiritually instructive and physically empowering, was full to overflowing. I was indeed blessed from the whole experience. Standing on the other side of the river, watching the water flow by, I glanced at the wet footprints—my footprints of conquered fear. I wanted to take them home and frame them. I had conquered my own complex world, and when I feel uncertain in the years to come I will remember my footprints on the pontoon bridge. To me they were footprints for mankind, as it was to bless mankind that I crossed that bridge to get to the other side.

None Goes His Way Alone

When we arrived in Starigrad Paklenica, the welcoming door to Maria and Ante's home was always open, and Maria would hurry out with cool drinks after our long and dusty journey. Gazing from their home out over the blue sea, watching the tiny fishing boats bobbing on the water, it was hard to believe that danger was so near. The stop at Ante and Maria's usually meant a refreshing dip in the bay, but today was a little different; we were expecting the Dom to arrive with a special request. Chatting amongst ourselves, we waited, enjoying the warmth of the sunshine. A battered car screeched around the corner and skidded to a dusty stop in front of our trucks. A smiling Dom greeted us, happy and full of enthusiasm, and introduced his lovely companion, a young lady who was acting as his interpreter for the morning.

The Dom's mood changed, and he began to speak earnestly in Croatian. His face saddened and filled with seriousness as he spoke of the people who were under his spiritual guidance as a Catholic priest. The young interpreter, with tears spilling from her eyes, related in English that the villages around the main bridge had been occupied. The Croatian inhabitants had been brutally tortured and killed. The children had been subjected to terrible crimes of injustice and violence. Many had been forced to watch as their parents and grandparents were killed in the most inhuman way, held helpless and screaming as their parents and families died before their eyes. The stories of horror filled us with revulsion. How could a civilized world reconcile itself to the evil actions of those who were far removed from humane behavior? In the struggle for power, prideful people were acting without feeling, without respect for life.

The stories I heard that day filled me with appalling sadness, but I had anguished over similar stories before. Sometimes at night when I close my eyes to sleep, the people who have gone cry to me in my dreams and fill my nights with sadness. But in the morning, I am reinvigorated with the desire to act and to do more on their behalf. My

attention returned to the interpreter, who explained the desperate need for a few of us to travel across the pontoon bridge, a makeshift structure replacing the old bridge that had been destroyed a little while ago. It was a very dangerous bridge, she told us. Three people had been killed trying to cross it a few days earlier. But those that lived in fear and loneliness on the other side of the bridge needed soap, clothes, and food.

Realizing that I had no right to ask the convoy members to put their lives at risk, I took them to one side and explained that they must search their own hearts for their decision. Many of the men had much depending on them at home. Their decision to go into a war-torn land meant that all insurance resting upon them had already been made null and void. To go into such a delicate area, where the peacekeeping forces were not present and where daily atrocities and fierce fighting still prevailed, would seem almost foolhardy. They must decide for themselves whether it was right for them to venture onto the bridge, knowing it was a target, to reach those who needed help on the other side. They need not feel that they had let anyone down if their decision was to stay here at Starigrad Paklenica. We would all meet again in thirty minutes with our prayerful decisions.

Walking towards an area that was particularly beautiful, I sat down on the stone that had been my seat of thoughts many times before. Often when difficult decisions had troubled me, I would sit on this rock by the side of the sea, gaze into the clear water, and watch the life below the surface: colored fish, scurrying crabs, flowing seaweed, and squidgy sea cucumbers. Somehow, sitting here in quiet reflection with my Heavenly Father, I would receive the confirming answers to the sometimes unbearable responsibilities I had taken on over the years. Quietly but comfortingly, the answer usually given to my searching soul would be one of acceptance and confirmation.

With my decision made to drive one of the trucks, I felt at peace and comfortable as I walked back along the path leading to the slightly subdued and nervous group of drivers. Eighteen of the men and women had decided to travel into the front line. Three members of the convoy stayed back with one of the trucks to deliver elsewhere. Our parting from them was quite an emotional affair as we bid farewell to each other.

The Dom had prepared a leave-taking for us as well, calling an impromptu gathering of the local people to offer prayers for those who were going to cross the bridge. As our trucks lined up outside the little church, a group waited outside the doors to welcome us. Eighteen candles flickered on the altar, each bearing the name of a convoy member who was to venture beyond the bridge into Zadar. The golden haze of the candles blended beautifully with the Croatian hymn the local people were singing for us. My heartstrings reverberated, and I felt happy and at peace; we would not be traveling alone!

Our courage fortified, we returned to our trucks. We faced the struggle of negotiating the potholed road, strewn with rocks and stones, large chunks of roofing, and shattered glass. I felt apprehension that we had not brought enough spare tires with us. Then, a loud ripping noise rent the air around our truck and through our mirrors; we saw others frantically waving. A large piece of twisted steel from a shelled home had sliced through the waterproof canvas sides of our truck. We quickly mended the torn canvas with duct tape and carried on.

Slowly descending a narrow road that led to the sea, we passed the jetty; there, a large ferry lay half submerged in the waves. The water lapping around it caused it to creak and groan in the swell. Several other boats lay along the water's edge, looking forlorn, their sides torn with gaping holes. The sight of this destruction filled us with foreboding as we prepared to travel the pontoon bridge one at a time. We trusted that the bridge itself, though makeshift, would prove sturdy enough. It seemed to consist of thousands of old tires piled on top of each other. Big black oil drums bobbed about in the water, apparently roped to some kind of anchor. Lying over the mountain of tires were heavy metal sheets that had been used to make the roadway.

We were the first truck down to the bridge and would be the first to cross it. I was driving and felt my heart begin to beat with the same erratic movements of a cornered and desperate man. I spotted a well-camouflaged soldier, standing in the bushes, covered from head to toe in twigs and green leaves and carrying an oversized machine gun. "He has the best deal," I thought to myself feebly. "At least he looks like a tree; I am going to cross this bridge and stick out like a sore thumb!" My two companions in the truck had lowered themselves down in their seats. I tried to imagine what they were feeling, and from the look

in their eyes I could guess what they were thinking, “If we can’t see them, they can’t see us.”

Swallowing hard and desperately trying to control my spastic nerves and muscles, I placed a shaky foot on the accelerator. The resulting erratic movements of the truck reminded me of someone learning to drive. I had seen a car driven by a learner leap down the road like this and then shudder to a halt. Three huge leaps forward, and I was on my way across the bridge. Eyes focused on the steel sheets ahead, I sped across the bridge to the other side. Pulling up in the clearing surrounded by trees, I sat in my seat and took time to calm myself and reconnect with my driving companions. What an experience we had shared! One by one the trucks crossed the bridge, and with each safe arrival we were filled with humble gratitude.

The havoc we saw and the appalling misery of the people we visited were heartwrenching and yet gave rise to some of the most heartwarming moments I have ever experienced. Thousands of wonderful food parcels, fresh fruit, bread, butter, and eggs were distributed. Warm clothes and blankets, hygiene items, and toiletries were also given out. Hungry, lonely, and fearful, the people clung to us for consolation and comfort; their tears flowed freely and without embarrassment. They knew we had come in the spirit of love. They knew our risk had been great to reach them. The five hours we spent with them went so quickly.

Within me grew the realization that of the sweet gifts in life, the best are the warmth of a spontaneous smile, the comfort of a loving hug, and the peace that comes to a suffering soul when another lends a listening ear. Thus we gave a portion of ourselves and brought to them the renewing power of hope and the desire to carry on. When it was time to go, to travel the road back to Starigrad Paklenica, the scenery of life had changed and we were no longer afraid: we had stood in the midst of war and all its trauma with those who taught us about endurance, forgiveness, and friendship. I promised to return, and I was to return time and time again as I journeyed to Bosnia on various convoys.

Crossing the pontoon bridge on the way back was accomplished with speed and ease. Gone was the fear we had felt earlier in the day when passing the half-submerged ferry. In the dimming light of the approaching evening, we no longer felt alarmed as we drove through the familiar debris of the road home.

Miracles Among the Rubble

Slowly the darkened shapes of the homes of Rovanska emerged into our view. We were almost home. Shimmering in the light of the starry sky, the sea looked enchanted. As my eyes accustomed themselves to the view ahead, my gaze rested upon tiny flickering circles of light that seemed to line the roadway. “Fireflies,” I thought, though I had never seen them before. It wasn’t until we drove past the hovering lights and heard the haunting sound of music that we realized that the village people lined the road, holding up candles and singing hymns. They had held a vigil throughout the day to pray for our safe return. Their faces glimmering by the light of a hundred flickering candles were tearful, and so were ours as we drove past them, reaching out, clutching their hands as we passed.

Overcome with emotion, I felt gratitude for the day that had passed. How tempting it could have been with a limited outlook to have missed that day—to have missed the humble but joyous church service given to a loving God by the local people of Rovanska and Starigrad Paklenica for the safe return of eighteen English friends. We were not of their faith or culture but were joined with them by the presence of one unifying God. “None goes his way alone” is the lesson we learned, and all hearts were full of gratitude for that which was achieved and the glorious friendships that were sealed because of that day.

As I Paused

In midwinter at my home in England, I curled up beside the roaring log fire in the dining room, blissfully safe from the cold biting winds and intermittent snow showers outside. Transfixed by the flames as they flickered and danced, listening to the sparks and crackles, I noticed how relaxed I felt. Bogie, our aging, longhaired cat, pushed his way onto my knee. Settling himself down into a comfy position, he began to purr his contentment. I heard the children laughing and chasing each other upstairs and the constant, low sound of my husband Stuart's voice in conversation on the phone in another room. The door opened and a rather preoccupied and slightly apprehensive husband beckoned. The mayor and another official from a town called Kupres in central Bosnia were on the phone and wished to speak to me. My feelings of contented bliss fell to my stomach and lodged there like a heavy brick. My time at home with my family was very precious to me. For the last few years, my life had been turned upside down with convoys and nationwide appeals, and although the efforts I was involved with for the people of the Balkans was wonderfully worthwhile and very special to me, my family was my life and my priority. Having just returned from a convoy and a heavy work project in Bosnia, I was not in the right frame of mind for more Bosnia talk. My heart was longing for normality, be it just for a few weeks.

The deep voice on the other end of the phone, speaking perfect English, explained very movingly the reasons for the call. With an uneasy heart, I listened to his urgent appeal for my help. He told me how the enemy had occupied their lovely town of Kupres. Many people had been killed, including children. Now that their town was safe and free from Serbian guns, they would not be allowed to stay at the camps because other families, caught up in the fighting elsewhere, would have to take their places. Thousands now would be returning from the refugee camps to a scene of total devastation with their burnt-out and shelled homes. They would return home to Kupres having no water, no means of cooking or sanitation, no roofs or windows, and no medical facilities or schools.

I thirsted for the inspiration to find gentle and understanding words that would not offend or destroy as I sought to explain that I was so tired and needed to be home with my husband and children. The callers must have sensed my struggle and decided to call back later in the evening, after I had had time to consider their request. It was a special time for me and Stuart both as we talked over our desires to help, misgivings, and apprehensions. Mindful of each other, we showed our love by talking together. I listened to the wise and understanding council of my husband, who had supported me over the last few years in all that I had done, and my feelings of unease evaporated. Pondering upon my mixed feelings of agitation and empathy, I awaited the return call. My husband jumped out of the rocking chair to respond to the phone as it rang.

Stuart's suggestions on the phone were received with enthusiastic thanks and expectation. The date and accommodation, satellite phone for communication with home, and an armed escort and military vehicle were secured. It was still necessary to arrange the flight using military and authorized planes into Zagreb and then on to Split, and I needed to find a female companion who was willing to travel with me into such a delicate and war-torn area. We believed the government official who told my husband our safety and well-being was of utmost importance and that he need not worry about us. I had travelled on similar fact-finding missions before, and the officials had always made sure I was safe and comfortable.

Three weeks passed quickly. My companion Yvonne and I had tickets to travel to Zagreb on Croatian Airlines. As usual, Manchester International Airport was heaving with business travelers and holiday-makers. The faces of those walking towards our ticket desk were quiet and unsmiling in contrast to the rest of the buzzing excited travelers. It was always hard saying goodbye to my family, but once I had left them, the task ahead became my priority and filled my heart with a purpose: to do my very best to help the people who had requested my assistance. The flight was full of interesting people, many like myself, who were involved with NGO work and humanitarian aid. It was enlightening to speak with them and learn the latest news. Yvonne was both excited and apprehensive. I had tried to explain to her and her family, in great detail, the trauma of it all before she had decided to accompany me. However,

in my heart, I knew nothing could ever prepare her emotionally for walking through and meeting with the people of a war-torn country. A hushed note of respect filled the plane as we prepared to land in Zagreb airport. All of us silenced in our own personal grief and memories of those we had helped and grown to love but who were now gone.

On our arrival in Zagreb we saw thousands of young men with machine guns strapped to their backs, all dressed in the differing combat gear of their own countries yet each wearing the blue beret that meant that they were part of the wonderful peacekeeping force being drafted into Bosnia and Croatia. What a remarkable spectacle it was—the countries of the world working together to usher in peace.

Our next plane, only half-full, took off for Split, an airport 135 kilometers from Kupres. Apart from the flight attendants, the only people on board were Yvonne and I and a group of hardened news reporters and photographers. As our small plane hit the air pockets, it dipped and bobbed. I thought of birds that fly into buffeting air pockets in order to use the winds to their advantage, rising higher and higher to reach their destination. We can take a lesson from the birds and learn to use buffeting winds and challenges in our life to power and direct our journey, to fuel our stumbling efforts, and to make splendid things come to pass.

Spring's wonderful panorama of fresh green leaves greeted us as we arrived in Split, on the Dalmatian Coast in Croatia. The sky and sea alike were a beautiful blue. How tranquil it looked, and yet here we were in the middle of a country torn apart with war. Our escort and very official-looking car were waiting for us at the airport. I felt conspicuous—two English women being briskly negotiated through the small airport and bundled into a car bearing flags and the insignia of Bosnia and Kupres—and was grateful for the darkened windows. Running my fingers over the lovely leather seats, I assessed that the car was in good shape aside from the two tiny holes I had seen that had pierced the rear end. Turning to squint through the bright sunshine that streamed through the open window, I looked out on a group of burnt-out homes as we sped through village after devastated village. I was becoming quite drowsy. Leaning back into my seat, I closed my eyes.

Suddenly I was thrown back fiercely into my seat, and I saw trees and bushes whisking by. We were traveling so fast that I glanced over

to the speedometer. Was it really necessary to be driving so recklessly? Almost as though the driver had read my thoughts, we slowed down to a sensible speed and I relaxed. But it didn't last, and soon we were driving at breakneck speed again, only to slow down once more a few minutes later. This little exercise of madness repeated itself over the next half hour, leaving me in no doubt that our driver was either very drunk or quite mad. Neither assumption pleased me, and both were far from correct, as I was to learn later that week. Each of the frenzied dashes in the car was due to snipers.

Darkness had come, but our headlights remained dimmed; the area we were traveling through was obviously dangerous. Our visibility was down to just a few feet, but still we travelled on. Yvonne and I waited nervously in our seats for our nightmare journey to end, until at last we emerged into some kind of clearing and stopped. A beacon of light came slowly toward us. Never had either of us been so happy to see a paraffin lamp, linking us with some form of reality. We realized that we must have arrived at our destination in Kupres.

Our eyes, slowly adjusting to the light of the lamp and the beautiful starry sky, could just make out the far-off black shapes of hills, distant trees, and the mass of buildings that surrounded us. We were guided towards an entrance in one of the darkened buildings, and a young man in full military attire proudly threw open the door which lead into our room. Paraffin lamps and a flickering candle lit the room. A scratched chest of drawers held a slightly cracked bowl, a white jug full of clear water, and a worn, clean towel. A huge wooden bed almost filled the room. One single paraffin lamp hung from a cord attached to the ceiling. The only window was covered with a thick piece of blackout material, barring the escape of any adventurous light. A little bowl of wild flowers graced the bedside cabinet, and I wondered which one of the Bosnian/Croat army had picked them for us. Was he thinking of home, his mother, or maybe his wife? My heart leapt at the sight of them: they were so beautiful, and I was touched by their thoughtfulness.

Sleep did not come easily that night. Tanks and armored vehicles intermittently rumbled past our broken window from dusk to dawn, and the sound of distant gunfire and shelling was constant. Lying awake for hours, listening to all the commotion, Yvonne and I had a chance to talk. With the arrival of daylight we went to the window,

pulled the blackout curtain to one side, and gazed into the beautiful orange sunrise. All was silent, the tanks had gone, the trundling sound of the vehicles had withdrawn, and the sound of gunfire was silenced. A solitary armed soldier stood perfectly still by our window and turned to smile at our curiosity as we hung out of the window and greeted him. With the arrival of the bright sunlight, everything looked lush and green and we could see tree-capped mountains. The scenery was quite breathtaking. But the evidence of mass destruction filled us with disbelief: large apartment blocks without roofs, walls torn open, and windows shattered. It was then that I realized that Yvonne and I were living in one of the few apartments that was still intact.

Our morning wash in the water that they had provided was an early wake-up call. Invigorated by the freezing water, we prepared for the day ahead. Fortifying ourselves with a heartfelt prayer that we would not be overwhelmed by all that we would see, we opened the door to begin our adventure in Kupres. Our walk that day was amongst the ruins as we stepped around broken toys and over bloodstained rags, and through huge mounds of foul-smelling, festering rubbish that I dared not scrutinize. Scrunching under our feet was the broken glass that littered every walkway and garden. Cars and buses which had been blown into the air by exploding bombs lay haphazardly on the streets, in the trees, and even in roofless, destroyed homes. My heart slowly sank under the realization of what needed to be done. I did not have the knowledge, the funds, or the time necessary. Never before did I feel so helpless, so out of my depth and such a fraud. Who on earth could have put my name forward for such a project? My rebuilding programs were small and reachable in comparison to this.

At long last we reached the office of the mayor of the town of Kupres. A colorful Bosnian flag flew proudly over the door, alongside the flag bearing the insignia of Kupres. The two flags flying side by side spoke of the future, looking forward to happier times, peace, and freedom from occupation. Entering through a door peppered with small holes and fragmented wood, I noticed that though a few windows had been replaced, most of the building matched the destruction surrounding it. Deep in thought, I walked down the dark corridor leading to the mayor's office. Never before had I gone on a fact-finding mission without knowing exactly what I would be asked to do, so my entrance



War damaged buildings in Kupres.

into the office filled with local dignitaries was somewhat nerve-racking. After all the welcoming hugs and handshakes, I sat attentively and quietly in my seat. Perhaps it was my imagination, but I was very aware that every word and all the eyes in the room seemed to be inclined in my direction. It was then that I realized that they had brought me here in the hope that I would help rebuild Kupres for them. Looking into the shadowed eyes of my interpreter as he struggled to express the hope of all the hearts in the room, I felt overwhelmed by their faith in my ability to help. Never before had I promised to do something I could not do. These wonderful people needed action, not promises. They had received many promises and had been let down painfully so often before. My heart would not allow me to raise their hopes only to dash them again. I felt so inadequate and cross with myself that I had not informed myself as to the extent of their needs before I left England.

Looking back in hindsight, I realize that, had I known, I would not have journeyed to Kupres, and I would have missed one of my most treasured experiences. I realize it is not always wise for us to know what lies ahead.

Humbly aspiring to help, I vowed to myself that I would not be defeated before the day had begun, and I listened intently to all that was said. "Somehow I will find a purpose in today's activities," I wearily thought. With the morning's meeting concluded, we all piled into



A bombed church in Kupres.

the army vehicles for a guided tour of the town and its surrounding dependent villages.

The sun warming the journey and casting a shimmering glow on all the beautiful countryside belied the terrible dragon that lurked beneath the ground. Mines! They covered the area indiscriminately. They lay active and ready to maim or destroy anything or anyone who should step unwittingly upon them. Deactivating the mines entered into the list of projects to do. The water plant and all the underground piping was fractured from the onslaught of shells. All the electricity and communication lines were down. The list went on and on. By the late afternoon we were touring the site of the church. All that remained was the old iron cross. Someone had tried to prop it up on the spot where it had once regally declared its Christian faith. A church had stood on this site for over six hundred years, and now it was all gone, with only a mound of rubble remaining. The Dom's home had fared no better: it, too, lay in ruins. Checking that the grounds of the former home were free of mines, I requested some time alone to ponder on my thoughts. Sensitive to my needs, they left me alone, leaving a guard to watch over my safety. My heart longed to be of use, but accompanying the longing was the pain of not knowing how. Glancing around the overgrown garden, my eyes were drawn to a statue of the Virgin Mary. Standing several feet tall, she must have once been quite an imposing

sight as she stood cradling the Christ child in her arms. Even now as she stood lonely and disfigured amongst all the debris, she still gave comfort to those people who had lovingly placed flowers at her feet. As I noticed that her adorned head and one arm lay unceremoniously on the ground a few feet away, I picked them up and replaced them as best I could. I searched around the rubble looking for the Christ child and laid him at her feet.

Perhaps because I was already emotional and feeling very alone, I knelt in private communication with the Lord I love. I begged his attention for the people of Kupres. My whole being was thirsting for the inspiration I needed to be of use and for the blessing that my mind might be enlightened with new ideas and the vigor to implement them. I do not know how long I knelt in quiet solitude amongst those simple but heartbreaking reminders of the war that wearied and tortured mankind, but I stayed there until I began to feel that wonderful peace that surpasses understanding. How strange it is that we often find the answers we seek in life by those small and sometimes insignificant means. With this thought in mind, I felt inspired to turn around, and my eyes rested upon a beautiful, perfectly formed red rose, growing though the mounds of rubble. Straight and tall, it seemed to speak to me of brighter tomorrows. At sight of the rose, a wonderful panorama of activities and work projects flowed into my mind, highlighting those needs pertaining to Kupres which I had never thought of before and which filled me with humble aspiration. I had found my purpose in today. I had found the answers I sought.

As I paused in joyous amazement at the perfection of the red rose that was growing before me, I marveled that such a beautiful and delicate thing had pushed its way through dense and inhospitable rubble to fulfill its destiny. Was it possible that the feeling of well-being that filled my very soul, as I looked at the rose, was really happening to me? Sensing the need to turn around again and face the statue of Mary and the tiny Christ child lying at her feet, I felt the words, "Do not worry. All is well. I am still here. I may be covered by rubble, but I am still here." Deeply moved and spiritually uplifted, I had witnessed and felt the comforting arms of the Lord as I paused amongst the ruins of Kupres. This was for me a very personal and spiritually rewarding experience, which I share only in the hope that someone somewhere,

As I Paused

just as I did, will find that peace that defies all understanding in their troubled moments.

Rising from my knees, the feelings of peace, enlightenment, and being in control of myself accompanied me for the rest of my stay in Kupres. The scale of all that was needed to do now felt reachable. My feet received new energy and walked with gratitude. My soul was filled with happy thoughts and empathy. My strength revitalized and my hope for the future received new understanding. The renewing power of the Lord's love was with Kupres. They would be fine, of that I was quite sure.

Flying home a few days later, I was filled to the very brim with ideas pertaining to Kupres. I had made no grandiose promises, and they had not expected it from me. But I had promised them I would return again and again until their Kupres was well again. They had paused for a moment, even as I had a few days ago, and felt at peace with my promise. All would be well in Kupres!