

My Life Story



Juan Salazar



Kay Lowder, Storykeeper

Acknowledgements

The Ethnic Life Stories Project continues to emulate the vibrant diversity of the Springfield community. So much is owed to the many individuals from Drury University-Diversity Center, Southwest Missouri State University, Forest Institute, Springfield Public School System, Springfield/Greene County Libraries, and Southwest Missouri Office on Aging who bestowed their talents, their words of encouragement, their generosity of time and contributions in support of this unique opportunity to enrich our community.

The resolve and commitment of both the Story Tellers and Story Keepers fashioned the integral foundation of this creative accomplishment. We express our tremendous admiration to the Story Tellers who shared their private and innermost thoughts and memories; some suffering extreme hard-ship and chaos, disappointment and grief before arriving here and achieving the great task of adjusting and assimilating into a different culture. We recognize your work and diligence in your life achievement, not only by keeping your families together, but by sharing, contributing and at the same time enriching our lives and community. We salute you!

Special acknowledgement to:

Rosalina Hollinger, Editing and layout design

Mark Hollinger, Photography

Jim Coomb, Mapmaker

Idell Lewis, Editing and revision

Angie Keller, Susy Mostrom, Teresa Van Slyke, and Sean Kimbell, Translation

Lee Lowder, Data Transfer and Storage

Heartfelt thanks to Kay Lowder who was responsible for organization and assembly of the stories.

Jim Mauldin

Ethnic Life Stories Project Coordinator.

The Ethnic Life Stories Project....

-giving the Springfield community a window to its diversity through the life stories of ethnic elders.

Liewe Se Storie Afrikaanse	Afrikaanse (2)
ŌSŌ GAY HĀY WŌ TAN	Apache
قصص من الحياة	Arabic (2)
Ga-no-du Ka-ne-he-lv-s-gi	Cherokee
自傳	Chinese (2)
Life Stories	English
Histoires De Ma Vie	French
Mayer rah-Khaan Knee-Hindi	Hindi
生きてきた道	Japanese
나의 살아온 이야기	Korean
ഇവിത കഥകൾ	Malayalam
Povestea Vie Ţii Mele	Romanian
La Historia de la Vida	Spanish (4)
Kuwento Ng Aking Buhay	Tagalog
געשיחטע פון מאן לעבען	Yiddish

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Janet Akaike - Toste
Kofu, Japan

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San Antonio, Texas

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Taj Farouki
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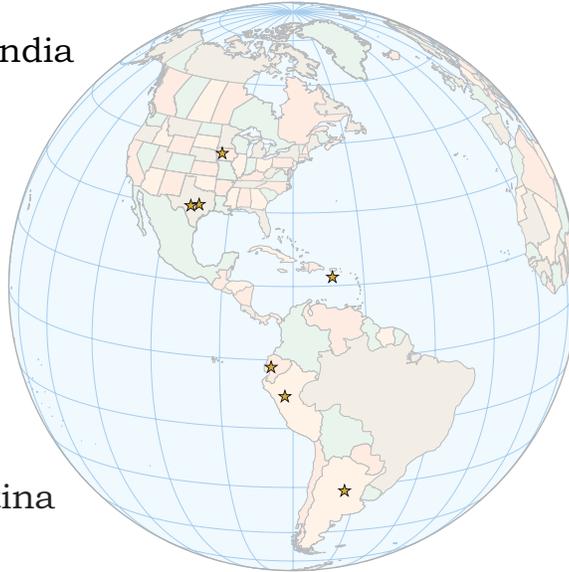
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Edward P. Ksara
Tangier, Morocco

Ioana Popescu
Bucharest, Romania

Josefina S. Raborar
Manila, Philippines

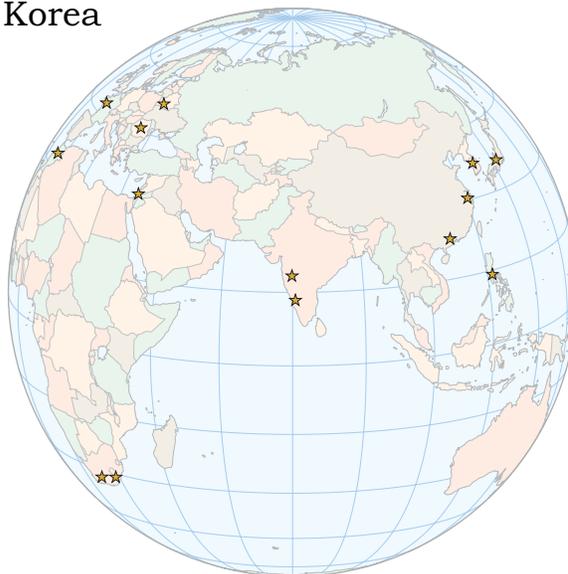
Juan Salazar
Tuman, Peru

Ruth Penaherrera-Norton
Archidona, Ecuador

Cyril Vermooten
Beaufort West, South Africa

Joy Vermooten
Nqaberie (Natal), South Africa

Tobby Yen
Chung (Zhongshan), China





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BOLIVIA

Juliaca

Puno

Lake Titicaca

Arequipa

La Paz ★

Tacna

Arica

CHILE

Juan Salazar
Tumán, Peru

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DEDICATION

I consider the history of my life is very simple, but who makes it important are those people that I love with all my heart. For that, I dedicate these lines with appreciation to my wife, Urcina, my parents Andres and Andrea, and my sisters who have given me their love since I was a young child. And, to my dear Story keeper, Kay Lowder, who has been able to reflect in her writings each of my thoughts.

Before I met James Mauldin, I never thought that the story of my life was something that others would like to read. After meeting, him, and finding out about his magnificent project, “Ethnic Life Stories,” James inspired me to tell my story, that’s why I deeply appreciate him and his great dream.

INTRODUCTION

Juan is a wonderful person. It has been a delight to hear his story. He is a genuine, caring person with a wonderful outlook on life. Juan has endured tough times, worked hard to accomplish things, traveled to many different places, repeatedly giving up everything to move again. Throughout his life he has maintained an optimistic 'can-do' attitude that is refreshing and inspirational. As a pastor, his work allows him to do what he wants the most – to help others and share his faith. I'm thankful I had the opportunity to work on this project and through it to make a new friend.

CHAPTER ONE: FAMILY HISTORY

My Birth

On August 21, 1958, in the small town of Tuman, a baby boy was born. With three older sisters already, my parents were hoping for a boy, so they were very happy to have a new son. They named me Juan Andres Salazar Purisaca, after both of them. My father is Andres Salazar and my mother is Andrea Purisaca. Children in Peru, the country of my birth, usually have two last names. Women do not change their names when they get married, so the child carries the last name of both mother and father. This has been the practice for as long as I know.

My homeland, Tuman, is in the northern part of Peru, in Chiclayo. Spanish is my native language. The climate is very warm in that part of the country. In Tuman, almost everyone works at the factory, it is pretty much the only place to work. When I was born, there were maybe 2,000 workers, now there are almost 5,000. Sugar is what is produced at this factory. There are thousands and thousands of acres of sugar cane.

My Parents

Like everyone else in town, my father worked at the factory. His job was doing paperwork and working in the office. Like me, he was born in Tuman. My father had a younger sister and a younger brother, but theirs was never a close family. I didn't know most of them too well. My father has lived his entire life in the town of his birthplace.

My mother was born in Jayanca, a small town located to the north of Tuman. Like my father, she is the oldest child, but hers was a much larger family, she has four brothers and four sisters. They were much closer to each other than my father's family. There were many differences in my parents, so many they eventually decided not to stay together.

I remember my mother as a nice woman, and very beautiful. She was fighter— always fighting to go forward. I think if she had been a man, she could have done anything. There weren't as many opportunities available for women at that time. It was much harder for women to work and do things. She has such a personality! She always wanted to move forward, to be the best, but she wasn't always prudent. The first present I ever remember giving to anyone was a rose that I gave to my mother for Mother's Day.

My dad was my favorite person. He loved us so much. He is the person who has had the most influence on my life. My mother was also very influential, and I admire her because she is a fighter. My dad is always quiet. He always thinks about what he needs to do before he takes the next step. My mom, she always takes the next step and afterwards thinks about it. In my opinion, I am a mixture of them both, sometimes doing things the way my mom did and sometimes more like my dad. As I get older, I really believe that the best way is thinking before doing!

My mother was very close to her brothers and sisters. Being the oldest, she was the one they would come to anytime they had a problem. It seems like there was always someone extra at our home. My mom was a very extroverted person. My dad was definitely an introvert. I think it was a problem

for him, always having my aunts and uncles and cousins around. When I was seven, my parents decided not to live together any more. They did not get a divorce, they just separated.

In the beginning, I was angry with both of my parents, and after that, I was sad. It is a difficult thing for a child to go through. Now that I am older, I am neither angry nor sad, I think they made the best decision for themselves. As an adult, I can understand. I love both my parents and the new partners they have.

One thing that I think happened, at least partially as a result of my parents' separation, is that they were not very strict with us. They knew it was hard on us and were probably trying to make it up to us a little. In some ways that was good, but I believe it also caused us to make some mistakes we might have avoided if they had been a little harder on us. But they really loved us and they tried to do the best they could as parents. I love them very much and I admire them as well.

My Sisters

My first sister is fifteen years older than me, her name is Ana Salazar Purisaca. Carmela Salazar Purisaca, my other sister, is 10 years older than I am. When I was little, they would frequently take care of me. By the time I was 7, they were 22 and 17, well able to baby-sit their younger brother and handle the situation. I remember Carmela's boyfriend would sometimes give her money and say, "Give Juan this money and send him to the store, tell him to buy candy." He, of course, wanted to spend time alone with my sister without having to deal with her baby brother. That was fine with me – I liked going to the store and buying myself candy!

My mother has told me stories about when I was a baby, about two years old. Carmela would watch me sometimes, and sometimes she would use me as an excuse. My mother would tell her it was time to go school, but Carmela would say that she couldn't go. When my mother would ask why, Carmela told her, "I can't leave because my little brother is crying and needs me to take care of him." So my mother would tell her to take care of me. The truth of the situation was that I wasn't crying -- at least not until after my sister pinched me to make me cry so she could stay home from school! My sister and I are good friends now, but then she was lazy, pretending I was always crying for her, when really, I was crying *because* of her.

My youngest sister is only two years older than me. Her name is Clementina Salazar Purisaca. She was named after my father's mother, Clementina Guerrero. I never knew my father's father. He passed away many years before I was born. His name was Andres Salazar. My grandmother is still alive. She took care of me in many different ways. One thing I remember, she always had fresh coffee ready for me when I went to her house. She only had a wood stove, no kerosene, gas, electricity or anything like that. The same was true for my mother's parents also. They have always had a wood stove as well.

My Grandparents

We would call our grandparents *abuelitos*. The last part, *ito*, is a diminutive form. My name is Juan, and if someone were to call me Juanito, that would mean they were expressing special affection.

Abuelo (grandfather) and *abuela* (grandmother) are not bad words, they are just very dry, so we were using *abuelito* and *abuelita* for our grandparents.

My grandparents on my mother's side were very good grandparents. They didn't know how to read or write, but they had big hearts. My mother's father, Toribio Purisaca, worked in the fields. He had his own farm and he took care of the cows and horses. My mother's mother, Angele Suyon, took care of the smaller animals such as the rabbits and chickens. I spent a lot of time with them. Whenever I had a vacation I liked to spend it on their farm, and I usually got to visit them every two or three months.

My grandmother Suyon made *marmolada*, a type of jam. My favorite was made from *ciruela*, a fruit similar to a plum. She would make big batches, cook it in a large pot, then preserve it in glass jars. I *really* liked the *marmolada ciruela*.

My favorite meal was *arroz con pato*, which is rice with duck. Duck was relatively common, we usually had it for parties. My favorite dessert was *arroz con leche*, rice with milk. It is made with coconut milk. Coconut milk is not like regular milk. It is not good to drink like other milk, we use it only for cooking. For this dessert, they put the milk from the coconut into the rice and let it cook, then when the rice is very soft and there is not a lot of milk left, they put in cinnamon and raisins and mix this together. It is absolutely wonderful.

CHAPTER TWO: EARLIEST MEMORIES AND CHILDHOOD

Homeland History

Sugar reminds me of home. The big factory in Tuman was always smoking when they were processing the sugar. The factory operated twenty-four hours a day. You can always find people working on different shifts.

We used to have a special day in my homeland when the sugar plant was ready to harvest. If the harvest was good, they would have a special day when everyone would go to the station. Special meat would be cooked. Someone would dig a hole in the ground, and then make an oven in the hole. They would take stones and clean them, then they take banana leaves and clean those and put them on the stones. Then they put the meat on top of that and they cover it with more banana leaves. They leave it in the ground for a few hours, and then enjoy. It is delicious! They would use many different kinds of meat: beef, pork, lamb; everybody can choose the meat they want to eat. There was a lot of meat. It was one or two days of holiday for us, and everybody could come and eat as much as they wanted. That was many years ago and they don't do it anymore.

The area of Tuman started out as a small farm. The people who bought it were the wealthy people of the area. As time passed, they were buying other land. They were growing and expanding, and they came to be very powerful, basically owning almost all of the land in the area. Someone told me a long time ago that our first inhabitants were monks, Catholic priests. They were trying to share the gospel with the native people, but for some reason they had to leave and they sold the land to the Spanish couple.

The other story that is told regarding the beginnings of Tuman, is that originally the people who came from Spain built a small house and that they were bringing slaves from Africa. After that they were also using slaves from Peru, using them to work the land. I don't know for sure what the real story is, but those are the main ones I have heard.

There is a lot of variety to my homeland because of its location. It is in the middle of everything. Every time someone needs to go from the jungle, they go through my homeland. When someone needs to go from the town in the north to the south, they go through my homeland. When someone needs to go from the town in the south to the town in the north, they go through my homeland.

Food

We eat lots of rice. Rice with meat, usually fish, because we were close to the ocean, we were about twenty miles away. We did not eat lots of tortillas. Some people think that all Hispanic people eat tortillas, but we didn't. I can live for many years without tortillas, and this is not possible for some people from Mexico. There are many fruits that grow in my homeland, and lots of different kinds of potatoes.

My family was always trying to have our meals together. We sat down at the table to eat – no sitting in front of the television or taking your food to your room. Mealtimes were often a problem for me. I would use my left hand to eat. In my country at this time, that was considered a bad thing.

People believed that everybody needed to use their right hand and they were trying to teach me to eat with my right hand, but I could not do it. It was impossible for me, this is the natural way I am writing or I am eating, using my left hand. It was hard for me, because when I was eating with my left hand, my sisters were saying that only bad people do this. Now, I know that it is not wrong. I don't know why they wanted everybody to do the same thing.

Religion and Special Celebrations

My parents were both Catholics. I remember my father bringing me to the Catholic church, taking my sister also. We watched him, it had meaning for him. We would celebrate special days for the saints, for instance, Saint Paul or Saint Peter. When some saint had the festivity, my mother was preparing food for us to be in this place all day. We would walk, see the saint, go to the Catholic church, and my mother would bring food. We called it the Procession. The people from the town, they take the image of the saint out of the church, and they bring him over their shoulders from place to place to place. Many people walk behind them, trying to show their faith in this way. They carrying candles as they walk. Sometimes there is a band playing music. It can take as long as a week, bringing the image of the saint from place to place, because they are walking very, very slowly.

We also celebrated Christmas and Easter. On Christmas, we have the custom of the family eating together at midnight. Everybody can go here and there, they can eat, go visit relatives, giving their wishes for the best, saying have a nice Christmas and so on, but at midnight, you have to be at your home. After the family eats together, you can go other places again.

On Easter in my town, we went to the hills, actually they were smaller than hills, but there we found an archeological site, where people in the past had lived. The land has covered over where they were, but we knew that the people in the past had lived in this place and on Easter we have the custom to go where they were supposed to have been and we were trying to discover things. Not cities, but maybe houses. Sometimes we would find things, maybe bowls, or we might find necklaces or bracelets. They were not made of gold though, they were usually copper. We didn't hunt for eggs or anything like that. We didn't know anything about such things.

Independence Day was a very special celebration. On July 28, every school would march, each wanting to prove that they are the best school. This was when we would have parades. We would celebrate Carnival in the summer. In the Carnival, we have the custom that if people are walking in the street, anybody can throw water on them. You cannot say anything, or complain about it, because this is the time for people to do this. If you are using public transportation, the people who are working, they can also throw water, or some people put water in balloons. In my country they have small balloons and they do not put air in them, they put in water. Now, this is happening during the hot season, and sometimes you feel like they are doing you a favor when they throw water on you, because we don't have air conditioning. Sometimes, we are saying "thanks to God", because it is so hot and the water feels really good. It is not at the same time as Mardi Gras is here. The seasons are different here. For example, it is summertime here now, but I am leaving for Peru in just a few days, and it will be wintertime there. It does not get cold in the wintertime because we are so close to the equator. You can stay in light clothes all winter. In the summertime it rains more, but now with the current of the Nino, the hot current in the ocean, it runs along with my country, and it changes the atmospheric conditions sometimes, and you can find that the rain is coming differently.

When I was little, I didn't think birthdays were very important to us, but as I got older, we would make a point to spend time with our mother on her birthday. Usually parents have a special ceremony for a boy when he turns nineteen. At that age, they are no longer children, they aren't boys now, they have become men. The parents have a party for the boy and invite all of his friends, to let everybody know that he is not the boy of the house anymore, he is a man of the house now. I did not have a celebration like that because I was already married before I turned nineteen.

In my country, people have two weddings. One is a civil wedding before a judge, after that we go to the church for the religious wedding. The civil wedding always takes place before the religious wedding but most people believe that the couple are not really married until the priest says they are husband and wife.

Funerals are always hard. It is hard to understand that death is a part of life. We all know that someday we will die, but we are never ready when that day actually comes. Knowing that you will never see someone again is a very sad thing. Most people, at least in the area I was from, did not use funeral homes. When someone dies in my homeland, the family takes care of the body at home. Tables and benches are set up with food and coffee, and people come to sit with the family. Strong drink is also served. It isn't whisky, but it is a very strong alcoholic drink. The body is kept in the home for one night. The next day, the body is taken to the cemetery. When I was a child, the cemeteries were as far away from town as possible.

Special Memories

One special memory that I have of my father, is of my father, my sister and me walking on the beach in my hometown. My father was in the middle and he was holding our hands. My sister had long hair at that time and I remember the wind was blowing it. That was a good day for me, a happy memory.

Sometimes, my father and I would play like we were fighting. My father was a strong man, he is old now, but he was very strong then, but sometimes he would let me defeat him. I always liked spending time with him. He is one of my favorite people. He loved us very much and that is very important to a young boy.

When I was maybe five or six, I was very, very sick. I never knew what disease or what type of sickness it was, but I remember my mother bringing me to many doctors in different places. This is one of the memories I treasure most of my mother. In order to pay for the doctors and the treatments I needed, she had to sell her house. It meant so much to me that she was willing to do that for me. I was more important to her than anything else. Even when you know someone loves you, seeing them do something like that makes you feel so special.

Arequipa

When I was seven, my sister and I went with my mother to the south side of the country, to a town called Arequipa. Each year my mother sent us back to Tuman to visit my father. The distance

between Arequipa and Tuman was more than 1000 miles. My father was always sending money to help take care of my sister and me.

My mother was always traveling. She's very independent and she was doing business, selling clothes, selling everything that she could sell. She was going to this place, to another place, to another place. I don't know exactly the circumstances, why she went to Arequipa, but she decided to go back there to live. I never talked with her about it, I respect her decisions. I think it was after maybe one year there that she met this other man.

It was very different in Arequipa. Before, in Tuman, I knew the people. As a child in Arequipa, I was trying to find friends, but they were always trying to reject me. It is very different when we speak Spanish in the north and Spanish in the south. When you moved from one place to another place, people would know you were coming from some place different, and they would be critical. If you speak different from them you are not one of them, and they reject you.

Life changed when we moved. I was trying to do it my way, and my sister, she was doing the same thing, because she is female and needs to find other girls. My mom put her in a Catholic special school where the girls can study and parents only go to visit them. So my sister was in this place. I think that she was not happy.

School

I started school in Tuman when I was six years old. When we moved to Arequipa, I went to a Catholic school. The first year I was in Arequipa I got a certificate at the end of the year. At this time, they were giving certificates to the good students in every class. They gave certificates to the best and the second student. In my case, I was taking the certificate for my behavior. I was taking care about the other new students, trying to help them to be good students. They gave the awards out in front of all the students in the school.



Age seven, receiving an award.

My teacher was a good teacher, but he was very strict. In my country at this time, the teacher has the authority to hit the students if they don't do their homework or don't do some task that they were given. The teachers can punish the student however they see fit, including hitting. If a parent went to the school to ask the teacher why he was punishing their son or daughter, the teacher would tell them that that he is teaching the student and that the child needs to learn that the teacher is the authority and also needs to know

that if he is not doing a good job in the class he will be punished.

I got punished a few times, mostly for causing problems in the class. Sometimes it was because I was playing, like many kids, but if the teacher only saw me playing then he would only punish me and not all the class.

Soccer, Swimming and Summer Fun

I started playing soccer when I was six. No one else in my family played soccer. At the school in Arequipa, I was on the school soccer team. My job on the team was to make goals. Everybody who was on the team was happy to know they were on the soccer team of this school. In order to be on the team, we had to show the coach that we are good players, because the coach was thinking always that we are the best school in the city. We won some, and sometimes we lost the games. But, I think we were good players.



Here I am with the soccer team. I am on the first row, the second boy from the right.



Here I am at age nine, at the beach with some friends. I am on the left.

In the summertime, I would go frequently to the beach. It was very close to my home, maybe ten minutes of walking. Sometimes I would go alone, or occasionally with my friends. At the beach, they have many vendors trying to sell things like drinks or ice cream. They had stands, called *Puesto de Venta*, 'stands for sell', where they would have the things they offered for people to buy.

I never went fishing there, only swimming. I really liked to swim. I also enjoyed picking up rocks and shells. Sometimes, when we were swimming in the water, we would find *caracol*. These are called

'snails' in English. We would make a hole in the *caracol* and pass a very tiny rope through and then put it on our necks to wear. We did not eat the snails, we just took the animal out and used the shells to

make necklaces. The beach where I went swimming was not a dangerous place. There were no sharks or dangerous animals. Although in the wintertime, the waves got big and we had to be careful then.

When I was eight, I got my first bike. A friend of mine taught me how to ride it.



Eight years old, receiving communion. I am the last boy on the right, in the second row from the bottom.

Return to Tuman

I only lived in Arequipa for five years. I was unhappy there. Eventually, I ran away from home. Once, when I was trying to go into my room from the window, my stepfather closed the window on my fingers. I decided to leave. I knew I would have to have papers to travel, so I went to the police station and told them the story I made up. I said that I needed to go see my father, that my mother had sent me to get the necessary papers. I told them that she did not come with me because she was sick. When they told me that they couldn't give me the papers without talking to my mother, I told them they could go and see her, but that she was in the hospital, a long way away from there. They finally gave me the papers. I don't know exactly how, but I finally made it back to my homeland, to Tuman. It was a very long trip, over 1000 miles. I know it was a very crazy thing for a young boy to do and I am not proud of my behavior. I know that my mother spent many days looking for me. After that, my mother moved back to Tuman. She knew the reason I escaped from home was because of the difficulties with my stepfather.

When I came back to Tuman, things were a lot different. When I went back to my homeland, I went to public school. Someone was always trying to show who is the strongest. There was fighting in gangs, things like that. I don't know how it is now, but when I went to school it was rough. We did not have guns or blades, it was only with the hands that we fought.

I think I was a good student. Only, for a time, they were always writing notes under my paper, "He doesn't like to follow instructions, he wants to do everything in his own ways." I don't know if this is bad or good. I don't know if they meant I was in trouble or if I was a good student, just thinking my own way.

My Home

My home was a nice brick house. I had my own room. I had dogs as pets. The dogs that I had were usually German Shepherds. I like that kind of dog, because they are very loyal. They are with you, they are good to you. I remember that my first dog I had, he was running away, playing, and a car

came and hit him. He died after one week. It was hard for me to accept. Always I was thinking to have my own dog. Now I have two, a little one, a Rat Terrier, and a big one, a Saint Bernard. I like the dogs. The little one is inside, the big one is inside, but in the basement. I take him outside, but I don't leave him there because he is a strong dog, and he could run away and scare someone. The little one, the terrier is called Todd, and the Saint Bernard is named Lion.

At home, I was always the one sent to do the buying. Because I was the youngest, whenever somebody needed something, they would say, "You can go to the store." Not only am I the only man, I am the youngest of the family, and Hispanic people are always looking for the youngest to do the things they don't want to do themselves. So I was always going to the store, buying things, -- the sugar, the rice, "Oh, we need more..." I would say, "Why me?" They would answer, "Because you are the man, now go!"

When I was little they used to call me 'blind'. That was my nickname, Blind. They called me that because I was always squinting. I had to really focus on things I wanted to see. I was 14 years old when I first started wearing glasses.

When I came back to my homeland from Arequipa, I was talking like people from Arequipa. Everyone asked me, "Why are you talking this way?" I would say that I am speaking like always I have been speaking. They would say, "No, you are speaking different." In Arequipa it was difficult to make friends because I was different, but now, I think in Tuman I made more friends this way, because they all want to listen to the way I was speaking.

Recreation

I spent most of my time playing. There was one game, I don't know the name in English, the Spanish is Cometa. Cometa is this kind of toy, you take some paper and put it over the wood, and you have a tail. You can put a long string on it. The wind is blowing and you pull, up, up, up. Now the game is, if you can fly your cometa the highest, you are the best. But, many of the people were in the same place and sometimes the cometa is mixing with the others. Also, the bad guys, (maybe sometimes I am one of them,) they put a small blade like you shave with, a razor blade on the tail. If the other person has his cometa in the same area, you can pull on the string of your cometa and make it go higher, and when it is going higher, the blade cuts the string and the other kid is losing his toy. If he wants to recover his cometa, he needs to see where it is going and follow and find it, or else to find another cometa. It was not a good thing to do.

One of my uncles was only three years older than me. His name is Walter Purisaca. Before I lived in Arequipa I was too young for him, because I was seven and he was ten and he was interested in different things, but after I came back it was different. I was twelve and he was fifteen and we were closer, we wanted to do the same things. Now I was spending most of my time with my uncle. We would go fishing together, or sometimes play soccer. Occasionally we would go to a movie, and once we had a farm job, cutting trees.

CHAPTER THREE: THE TEEN YEARS

I did not date a whole lot, I did go the movies occasionally, and sometimes I had dates. Dating was mostly controlled by the parents. I played soccer with my friends. We went to other cities for competition. We went every weekend for competition, we played maybe two or three times a week for fun, for training. We would take public buses to go to other cities to play. Sometimes, someone on the team would have an old truck and everybody would go in that. The players on the team were between maybe 14 and 20. I did not have a special nickname, they just called me Juan. The name of the team was Sport Tuman. There were 18 people on the team.

Transportation

When I was a teenager, I first had a bike, and after that a motorcycle and then a car. I was thirteen years when I got my motorcycle. I liked to drive fast. I remember on the motorcycle I had to accelerate with my hand. My pleasure was to do all, (to turn the handle all the way back as far as it would go). If I can do all, that's okay, never I was thinking to do it only a little. As fast as possible, this was better for me. I had some accidents, I fell off the motorcycle, but this is the usual way we can learn to drive motorcycle. Sometimes I hurt my knees or my arms pretty badly, but it's okay.

Once, I did have a pretty bad accident while I was riding on my motorcycle. It was at night and I was riding on the highway and there was a bright light coming towards me. The light was very bright and I was blind for a few seconds. When the driver passed me and I could see forward, I saw the bridge and I went under the bridge. I hit my head. The bridge had a small cement rail. All I remember is I hit with my head. It was hard. I had to have stitches on my face. My cheek still has a scar from that.

I did not have to have a license to drive the motorcycle because it was a small town and everybody knew who everyone was, so we didn't need to have a license. When we were living in the other place, in the city, then we needed to take the test and have a license, but it usually was not necessary in the small town.

Television, Music and Friends

When I was a teenager, I liked to watch television some. One program that I watched a lot of times was an American program, we called them, *Tres Chiflados*. It as about three guys that make many funny things to each other, the names were Larry, Mo and I don't remember the other one. *The Three Stooges*. We say *chiflados* because we call *chiflados* to the person who is not in his mind, is making crazy things. Always they were hitting one of them, because he was making mistakes, always mistakes.

There was another program I watched sometimes, *The Jinete Solitario*. *The Jinete Solitario* is also an American program. It's about a guy in the old west, he put a mask over his eyes and had an Indian with him. *The Lone Ranger*. The programs that were on television when I was a teenager were about clean fun.

My favorite thing to do was go walking, maybe with my friend, talking and walking. You know, when I was little, we didn't have money to go to restaurants or to go to the good movies in the theater. We had enough money to buy food and clothes, but we didn't have money to spend on lots of other

things. For instance, the kids here, they can say, “Oh, we can go to the mall.” They go to look at clothes or maybe go to a movie or out someplace. For us it was not like that. We would say, “Oh, do you want to walk with us?” We were walking, maybe we would go to the public park and take some ice cream. Or, we would say, “We can visit the other friends,” and we would go walking to where they were.

I listened mostly to regional music, called Vals, and Marinera. I never really wanted to be in a band, although always I was thinking someday I would like to play guitar, but never I had the opportunity to do it, not until I was 25. Now I play sometimes at the church or for myself.

Dreams

When I was little, I didn’t have exactly one dream of what I wanted to be when I grew up. Only in my mind was the idea that I would like to do everything differently. I was thinking I would like to do everything different than I was living then.

I didn’t really have an actor or government person that I looked up to. I think I was always thinking to be myself. I had many situations to resolve in my own life, so I didn’t have time to see who is the president or the mayor.

Parties and Girls

In my hometown, we would sometimes have something similar to a block party. The street would be closed to traffic and a music group would come in and play. People would use the street for dancing.

Because Tuman was a small town, everybody knew who was dating who. The families would sometimes be involved. If the brothers or sisters of the person you were dating didn’t like you, they could make trouble for you. You also had to be careful of who the last boyfriend was. If a girl stopped seeing someone and he was angry about it, he might try to hurt the new boyfriend. Usually, you want to walk with your friends and not go out alone. I don’t know if it is still that way today, but when I was a teenager, that’s how the dating scene worked.

Work and School

When I was 13 years old, I stopped going to school. I think because my parents said to go, I didn’t want to go. I started working *soldando*, (sautering), when I was 14 and a half years old. I did that for one year. I was always living with my parents, moving back and forth between my mother and my father. In my country, people do not move out and leave home. It is too expensive to and you cannot find someone to share apartment like here.

After that I went to electrician school for three years. Also I was going to the adult school to complete my high school. I did both things in the same time. From eight until five, I went to school for electrician, they paid me like a job, and from seven until eleven I went to the adult school. It was

difficult. It took a lot of my time, reading and writing. I don't do the best writing, but I was reading everything that was coming into my hands.

When I was 17, I finished both schools. I was an electrician, and I also finished my high school. When I finished my electrician school, the Air Force needed someone to work with them, so I applied and I started working with them when I was 17 and a half.

CHAPTER FOUR: ADULTHOOD

Marriage

While I was going to the school for adults, I met Urcina, my wife. Urcina Isabel Urbina Mazzei is her full name. Physically, she is a nice woman. She was the person that attracted all the people around her. At first, I was thinking that it was impossible for me to have some relationship with her, because we had never met before, never were we talking together about anything, and at the same time I was very busy studying. But, for some reason she couldn't make her homework and she was talking to me about it. After a few times of working on homework, we felt we had an interest in each other and it was the beginning of our relationship. We had different ages, she was about seven years older than me. We had different friends. My friends were younger than hers, but when she had a party with her friends, I would go. I was there, thinking, "Fine, I do not feel fine." Also, when she was with me, my friends are younger and I think she does not feel fine. Maybe this is one reason we decided to marry so soon.



Our religious wedding, September 18, 1982



Our civil wedding, March 16, 1977

On March 16, 1977, we got married. It was just a year after I knew her. We did not tell our families, or anyone. No one knew until after it was over. We went to the judge and had a civil wedding. Five years later we had a religious wedding. The first wedding, the civil one, because I was not an adult, I had to lie to the judge so we could get married. My mom was not happy. She said it was not legal. I told her to go talk to the judge if she wanted, but I would only be waiting a little while then I would do it again. Finally she said okay.

The second wedding, the religious one, was very different. It was on September 18, 1982. Our families and friends were there, about a hundred people. My father was the *padrino*, the godfather, sort of like the best man, and my wife's sister, Antonieta Urbina, was the *madrina* which is the godmother, like the maid of honor. They stood up with us. My niece and nephew carried the rings. Our families helped us with the food and things. It was a special day. We were looking for a fresh start in our marriage. We learned that we still had to work at it. Today, we still are not perfect, but we have learned to talk when there is a problem.

We never had any children. My wife lost one child, while we were traveling. She was making a long trip, we didn't know, we knew after 24 hours, she felt something was wrong with her body. When we went to the doctor, we found out that she had lost the baby. She was never able to get pregnant again. The doctor told us that it was a problem with my body.

We learned, in a way, that it was better for us not to have children. We had more freedom than other couples. My wife could go to her mom's house anytime, I could go from my job after work to other places with no problem. Without kids, we can travel anytime. I think it all depends on how the couple wants to handle it. It can be a good problem or a bad problem.

My wife's father died ten years before I knew her. Her grandfather was from Italy. That is why she and her sister have names that are not usual in Spanish. She had four brothers and four sisters. She was not the last one, but the next to last one. She is sweet. She is good at sports, a good athlete. Many times she was playing basketball. I think that she had good friends. Her family, many of her brothers and sisters were good players. They were, but they are old now.

My wife did not work in an office or anything like that, but she was helping me with the economics. She would sometimes sell things, especially when we went to the border of other countries. Some Air Force stations, units, are close to the border with other countries. When I was working in these places, Urcina would go with me and she would buy things from the other countries like Chile or Guatemala. When she returned to our city, she would sell them. People seem to like to buy things that are from other countries, things like jewelry or clothes, lots of different things. She was thinking to buy everything she can sell. She would tell her friends that she was going to the border and ask them if they needed anything. They would tell her what they wanted and she would buy it.

The Air Force

I was working with the Air Force for almost eleven years. I was working with war airplanes, called "Mirage 2000". My job was to take care of power plant, because the airplanes need current,

electricity to prove the instruments. I was taking care about the power plants, and the other technicians were working with the instruments.

The Peruvian Air Force has different bases, and different bases have different airplanes. The different airplanes are designed to fly in different conditions, and for this reason, many times the airplanes from the north are flying to the south to make exercises there. When they were doing that, we had to go also, because we needed to bring everything the airplanes required, because the airplanes of the south don't have the same equipment as ours. This was the reason I was traveling, going to other Air Force stations.

Sometimes we were in conflicts with Guatemala or Chile and we were making exercises like we were at war. It was hard for me to see how the old soldiers treated the new recruits just coming into the service. They had the wrong idea that if the new boys could take hits now, they will be better prepared when the time for the war is coming. I think that is the wrong idea because if somebody has courage, nobody needs to hit him to see his courage.

I only want to say that the feelings, the real feelings of the courage, sometimes they leave when people are in difficult situations. Once, when we were in conflict with Ecuador, the neighborhood country, our airplanes needed to go to Ecuador and fly close to the border. If it was necessary to fight, they needed to do it. But, I remember one case where the Capitan asked us if everything was ready on his airplane, and we, the technicians told him yes. The plane went up, he left, but after about five minutes, he was back. He told us that there was something wrong with the instruments, that we needed to check the airplane again. We said okay, that we would do it again. We checked the airplane, every instrument, and everything was fine. We told the Capitan that the airplane is ready and everything is okay. He took the airplane and went out again, but when he was given the order to fire, he reported other problems. He came back and we checked the airplane, but again, nothing was wrong. Finally we knew that the Capitan didn't want to go and was using the instruments as an excuse.

There was another example when Argentina was in conflict with England, about the Falkland Islands. Argentina was asking for help from the other South American countries. Peru has a good relationship with Argentina, and Argentina was asking for the military to come. Well, the Peruvian Air Force flies close to the border with Argentina, and Argentina said well, standby for maybe five to ten days and then we will ask for the person who wants to come with us. I was there, close to the Argentina border, but other people also were there. Some of them were the brave ones of the Air Force. Well, we were listening to the news on the radio, we would hear, for example, that England sent two ships with airplanes, some shot down two or three airplanes, many people died, news about this airplane, this ship.

Well, one day we went to the cantina, the military cantina, and I saw my friends drinking. After they had had two or maybe three beers, they were crying, and these were the brave ones of the Air Force. I watched them, then when we went to the dormitory, I asked some of them why they were crying. They said that it was because they were thinking of their wives, their sons, their daughters, or their parents. Many of them were writing letters, to let their wife know, for example, "You know I love you, if I do not come back, you know that always you will be with me," something like this. I say, where is your courage? Because they always were saying, "Oh, we will do everything, give our life for our country," and when the time arrives, the people show their real feelings. Well, finally, we did not need to go to Argentina, because the conflict finished fast.

University

When I was working in the Air Force, I saw the new generations going to university and I thought, I cannot go to university, because I felt like I was too old, but finally I made a decision, and I applied for the university. Now, the system in my country is very different to the system here. In the university there are only, for example, one thousand vacancies, for the different studies, the people who try to get one of these vacancies are ten thousand, fifteen thousand, and you need to pass the test with a very good average. It is hard to go to university, because you need to fight mentally with many, many people. I was studying to be *Ingeniero Agricola*, it means I was thinking to work in the fields, building bridge, building house in the fields, and things like that, working in the fields.

It was hard for me, especially in the beginning. I had been out of school for maybe seven or eight years, and at this time I had lost the discipline to study. If you don't have discipline you can't do too much. For me, it was easier to go to classes, to be there for school, but after that I don't have time to study. The first semester I needed to know it was a different situation. I needed to take my time, especially for this.

CHAPTER FIVE: LIFE MISSION

My life changed when I was 23 years old, because at this time I was feeling my life was empty. I felt emptiness, I was trying to fill it with different things, anything. I was going to parties with my friends and my wife, drinking, partying, but always the emptiness was present in my life. One Sunday I was listening to a preacher and he asked the people who were listening who wants to accept Christ as their Savior, and I raised my hand. After that my life was changing. Little by little. I am not perfect, I was not perfect, I think I will not be perfect, but I think everything is going better.

After that, I was going to the church every meeting, every time when they were calling for the members to gather, I was there. I felt it was not enough time. My wife and I were talking about this point, and we agreed to donate fifteen days of my vacation to other churches. It didn't matter what church, how far away the church was, we would go there to help them, doing things like teaching Sunday school, preaching or making the discipleship. For three years, we donated fifteen days of vacation to churches and used fifteen for ourselves. The fifteen days for ourselves, we would go and see our family.

Seminary

After that we felt again that it was not enough, and we believed that God was calling us for some task. We didn't know exactly what kind of task, but we felt that we needed to be prepared when God gave us the task. We made a decision to go to seminary in Trujillo. Trujillo is almost 150 miles from the city we were living in, Chiclayo, which is the city closest to our hometown, Tuman. This is where I was working in the Air Force and going to university. Trujillo did not have an Air Force base, and the University Teological did not have the program I was studying in the other city. But, '*es una de esas cosas*' -- it's one of those things. So I resigned from the Air Force and the program at the university and we moved to Trujillo to go to seminary.

We had saved money to be able to go to university for three years, but because of devaluation, the money that we saved for three years was only enough for one year. The devaluation was terrible. I was thinking to find another job, to save money and to go back to the seminary, but it was not necessary to do. We received a letter from some of our friends in the United States. They said they felt like God was telling them to donate money to us. They had sold their house and they said, "Well, we have money, we can help somebody." The letter said if I had something, tuition, books, apartment, I only needed to sign and they will pay for it. They did this for two years. The only condition was for me to be a student. Urcina was a student also. We were in the same promotion, the same class. I was studying theology, she studied Christian education.



Urcina and me in Chiclayo, shortly after coming to Jesus.

The Jungle



Here I am getting ready to leave for the jungle.

While I was in the seminary, a small church located in the jungle invited me to come there for three months. This was still part of my seminary training. They were willing to hire me after graduation. Urcina went with me. The church that invited me was in a city in the jungle and they had other missions, small missions in the jungle. So we worked in the jungle, but we lived in a house with electricity and running water just like in the city. During this time I was working in the church in the city and also going to places in the jungle.

The first time when I went to the jungle, somebody said to me, “Juan we will go to a small village, we need to walk out. Are you ready for tomorrow?” I said, “Yes, I am ready.” The next day, I put on my boots and got my umbrella. They said, “Juan we need to go.” I took out my umbrella, and they asked me where I was going. I said, “With you.” But, they said, “No way, you cannot go.” I asked, “Why?” They told me that the umbrella is out. I said, “But what if it rains?” (It looked very dark, like it would rain a lot soon.) They said, “Don’t worry about it.” One of them said, “First let me do something for you.” Then he cut a big trash bag, (it was clean). He cut the corners for my arms and the middle for my head, and said, “This is yours. Take away the boots.” I said that I could not go without the boots. He asked me if I had sandals. I said, “Yes, but what if a snake bites me?” He said, “Don’t worry about it.” Well, we started walking, and the jungle was so very close and thick, you could not walk like you are walking in the street. Also, many times you have to use two hands to go up or go down. You could not use an umbrella like in the town. The mud was thick, the water was mixing with the dirt, it was thick, if you had on boots, they would get stuck in the mud and you could not get them out, but with the sandals, you can take your foot out and just reach down and pick up the sandal, and then find some water and rinse them off. Now you know why they were taking away my things.

I remember one special place that I had to walk for almost ten hours to get to. When we arrived to the place, I was expecting to see many small houses, but we went to only one house. The owner of that house told me that this night I needed to preach. I said “Yes, that’s okay, because I am coming to do that.” Then I asked him where all the people were. He told me that even though I didn’t see anybody now, they would come in the night. He said that they do not live close together, because their fields, their land is big. Everybody has maybe fifty to a hundred acres and everyone needs to take care of his own field. I understood that. Then the person that was taking care of me, he told me that he had studied and he had been living on the coast. He said that when he was living on the coast he was driving a truck, but the money was not enough because he had a wife and seven children. He said that the best option for him was to go to the jungle, buy some land and live there. I asked him how, if he’s not earning any money, how he can buy food or things like this. He told me that he doesn’t need to buy

anything because he plants everything that he needs, rice, potatoes, many, many things, all different kinds of plants. I asked him what he did about oil or salt. He told me that for oil, he has pigs and when they are big, he can kill one and take out the fat, and this will last for at least two or three months. And for the salt, there was a cave where he could get the salt. I asked him about meat, and he told me that beside the pigs, he also has chickens. Then he told me he wanted to show me something. He brought me to a place, we were walking maybe five minutes to get there. There was a stream, with water running, and a deep hole. There was wood, tall wood all the way around the hole. I asked him why he was putting this wood all around the hold this way. He told me that he was taking care of his fish, because in this hole are his fish. The water was able to flow through, but the opening was too small for the larger fish to leave. This way the fish have fresh running water, but they are kept right there, ready for whenever the man wanted to have fish to eat. The big wood all around the hold is because wolves come during the night. They can jump into the hole and get the fish, but if he has high wood around it, they are unable to reach his “storage area”. He tells me that tonight, for example, we will eat fish, and we only need to come here and to take as many fish as we want to eat and then cook them. The human can do many, many things when they try.

When the night had almost arrived, maybe 6:00 p.m., the man told me that we needed to go to the temple. I agreed and we walked to where the temple was. The temple was only four columns, with a ceiling. The ceiling was made only of palm tree branches. I thought, well, that’s okay, because it is very hot here. I looked around, I raised my eyes and I saw the lights. Small lights coming down, and as they got closer I could see that it was families, coming with the light, flashlights, coming to the temple. We waited for maybe ten or fifteen minutes for everyone to get there, then we started our worship. Everything was fine until the program director said that it was now time to give our offerings to God. I was asking myself how they would put in any money if they are not earning any money. But, you know, they didn’t give money. They brought food, fruit, different things. Some of them brought a chicken. It was still alive. They put it beside the place where I was going to be preaching. I was thinking that I will preach and maybe this chicken, when I am speaking, it will cry out or make noise, but, no, it was not this way. Well, I was thinking, it’s okay. Everything was different. I felt that God was very, very close in this place. I didn’t know what they were going to do with all the things they brought, but after the worship, the next day, they told me, “Pastor, everything that everybody gave last night, it is for you.” I asked them why. I didn’t need these things. I had enough. But, they told me that I needed to take it, because everybody knew that when they were giving it they were giving it to God, and God sent me to preach to them and they were grateful for it. So, everything was for me. I felt God was working in a wonderful way in their hearts. It was very good.

I only preached to those people two nights. During the day I was reading the Bible, and in the afternoon, I think almost every afternoon, they were coming together playing soccer. I cannot explain it, how God is using my favorite sport to bring me into the lives of people who also like it. And, the sports opened many, many doors, many hearts. They asked me if I played soccer, and I told them that yes, I did. I would play with them, and it was like I was in touch with the people and they felt that I was a friend and we could do many things together and then after the game we can make comments about every goal, every move and it’s a good time. And they opened up more to me because of spending this time together this way.

I was not frightened walking through the jungle, only it was very exciting for me. I am Peruvian, but for me this was a new place. I was curious to be in the jungle, to know what it means to be in the

jungle. I have good memories of the time I spent there. We never had any bad encounters with animals or things in the jungle. We saw some snakes, but didn't have any problems. We were listening to many, many stories about different kinds of animals, about different noises that you can listen to in the jungle. We never knew for sure what was true and what wasn't, the people told the stories as if they were true. I think some of it was only legends, but we really couldn't be sure. The jungle is a very interesting place.

One of the others I remember about the people in the jungle, is that so many of them were poor, very poor. Many of them were living in the jungle, growing fruits and then selling their fruits in the market. Before they went to market, they came by my house. It was on their way to go to the market, and they would come and tell me, "Pastor, I will work, I will try to sell it, and this is for you." I would tell them that I didn't need it, because my wife and I, we are the only two there and we have enough, but they would say, "No, Pastor, I am sure that I am doing the right thing and God will bless in my life." So, I told them that if they really feel this way then go ahead, but it is more than I am needing and that I will share what is being given to me with some other person. They would tell me that this is fine, they are giving it to me and whatever I want to do with it is fine with them. After four or five hours they would come back. They would say, "Pastor, I sold everything!" I said, "This is not from me, this is because God is blessing you, because you have a good heart."

Graduation and Beyond

After three months working with the church in the jungle, we went back to the seminary to finish our last six months of study. Urcina and I both graduated together. When we graduated from seminary, we went to a restaurant to eat pizza. It was a good celebration. Everybody was glad to finish the classes and to be ready to take responsibility for some church. Some of those who graduated with us went right to a church, but Urcina and I were, planning to study more, maybe to have the masters degree. We felt that after everything we did in our country that something more was coming. We wanted to go to Spain to study, but we didn't have enough money to go together to Spain. We agreed for me to go to Argentina and for Urcina to go to Spain. In 1991 I went to Argentina, Buenos Aires. I could find work in my country, but at this time Argentina had a strong economy and it was easier to work there and to save money than in my country. Urcina went to Spain. In Argentina I was working in construction. I found somebody in the church who asked me if I wanted to work for him. I agreed. He told me that he had a workshop, and that I could go with him and work. I was there for almost one year.

While I was in Argentina, I was living in – not exactly a hotel, more a family house. They had a big



Seminary graduation

house for the family, and then rooms for other people. I rented it for a long time. It's cheaper than a hotel, and better to be in a family home. They have a kitchen that if someone wants to do something fast, they can use it, but usually everyone is eating outside because we don't have time to cook there. Also, we were many, many people that were there. Buenos Aires is a big city, and you are going to work, many times you leave early in the morning and come back in the night tired, you need to take your shower, maybe drink some coffee or something like this and get rest for the next day.



*Here I am in Argentina, relaxing
for a moment.*

CHAPTER SIX: LATER YEARS

Spain

During this time, Urcina was working with elderly people in a home. She saved money, faster than me, and she sent me the money to join her in Barcelona. We lived for two years and half in Spain. My first job in Spain was selling vegetables, after that I was working as a pastor. When I first moved there, I was working, but not in the church. Before I work as pastor, I wanted the people to get to know me, to see me and then I became pastor.

I think this is the side of my mom in me, that she would do something before she thought it through. When I went to Spain, I needed to find some job, but it was not easy to find a job because in Spain many people think that if you are coming from some other country you cannot do anything for yourself. Many times the jobs that are available to you are the low jobs. Well, I knew that situation is for everybody in the same way. I said, “Well, I am here, I need to find a job.” There was a man that asked me if I want to work for him. He told me, “I have many, many restaurants, which are my clients, they call me during the day and leave messages on my answering machine, they tell me what they need for the next day, maybe carrots, onions, tomatoes, potatoes. After I get the message, I take a truck to the market to buy the things they have asked for, then I take the vegetables to the city, to the restaurants who ordered them. My job was to go with him to the market and load the vegetables there, then to unload and deliver them to the restaurants. It was very hard work, especially the first day I had to do this.

Things were difficult at the church also. Most of the people there were not interested in hearing anything from me. They thought they knew everything and didn’t need my opinion. I thought, “Okay, I will be silent.” After a few weeks, they started asking me for my opinion about different things in the Bible. A little later, they asked me if I wanted to work in the church. They told me that they needed someone. I said that I was ready.

We went to the church, but only the building was there – no people. I learned that in the past there had been some problems within the congregation until finally the people had decided to go to other churches. My first task was to raise up the membership. The leaders of the church asked me if I thought I could handle that job. I assured them I was capable.

I began visiting people, some of them former members. Finally two families agreed to come the next Sunday. When they came, they sat on opposite sides of the church, only then did I realize they had been in opposite groups before. Well, what could I do? I started preaching and God blessed the work. Those families made peace and others began coming. By the time we left nearly two and half years later, there were around 60 people attending.



Playing my guitar at the church in Spain.

In Spain, they think that our Spanish is not good Spanish. Maybe for them it is not, but I think that if I can use it, and it useful for me that's fine. Maybe the people from England think the same thing about the way Americans talk.

Some things changed drastically when I changed jobs. My former boss was a Christian, and he and some other Chinese people were using the same church building as the Hispanic people I was now pastor over. Now, everything the Chinese pastor needed had to go through me. When he found out who the new pastor was, it was a big surprise for my ex-boss. No longer was he saying, "Juan do this, come here, go there," now he was saying, "Pastor," and being so different toward me. My question is, if everyone can be kind depending on the situation or the moment, why are we not just kind? Why do circumstances have to change for a person to treat someone nicely?

Back in Peru

We had saved some money, and we were missing our family, so we went back to Peru. Everything that we were doing in Peru was, it's hard to explain really, it was not bad, but the things that we were doing were not reaping the fruit that we were expecting. We made the decision to sell everything that we had and apply for a visa to come to the United States. We filled out all the necessary paperwork, and they gave us the visa. We decided to come to the United States, because, outside of this country, everybody sees this country like a dream. I think many people, they want to come here, because they think that in this country they will find many things that they don't have in our own countries.

Many times we had to give up our things. When we first went to seminary, my wife and I agreed that although we didn't know what we would be doing after we finished our education, we did know that we couldn't keep all the things we had. We sold everything that we could sell. During the four years we were in the seminary, our apartment gradually filled up with things again. We were already wanting to go to other countries, so once again we got rid of everything.

When I was in Argentina, I didn't collect much, I knew I was only there for a short time and I was living by myself. The two and a half years we spent in Spain, however, we did acquire a few things. Again, we sold it all to go back to Peru. Here we were getting ready to go to the United States, and we knew we couldn't bring all our things with us, so in what was by now a familiar habit, we once again sold everything in order to move.

When we came to the United States, we were first living in New Jersey. Upon deciding to come to Springfield, we continued our pattern and sold everything again. I don't know if we'll need to sell everything here, maybe someday we'll move on or perhaps this will be our home for quite a while.

After moving and getting rid of things so many times, we have learned to live with less. Buying things now seems to me as if it is tying us down. For example, we don't own a house here and we don't have lots of things in our home, only the necessary things. Some day I will make the decision to live in one place and stay there, but this is not the year, this is not the moment. I think we still need to know more about what is coming before we can make that decision.

Life in the United States

When we arrived in New Jersey, we went to a church there for three months, but it was not a church in our denomination. The pastor suggested that we try to find one that was in our denomination so that I would be more able to find work as a pastor. We did, and I was helping in the new church in any way that I could. Those were such lovely people. They were able to get a religious visa for us, so we could work without a problem with the immigration department. They didn't have enough money to pay us, and they already had a pastor, but they helped us to that whenever another church wanted us to come there and pastor, we would be able to do that. They really helped us so much.

At this time, I received a call from St. Louis. The deacon in a church there told me an interesting story. He said that the church really needed a pastor and that he had been praying about it. One day while he was praying, he received a phone call from a missionary who told him that he knew they needed a pastor. The missionary told him that he knew of a Peruvian pastor living in New Jersey, and gave the deacon my phone number. The deacon asked me if I would be willing to come for a weekend and preach, and meet the congregation. He said that since he was praying and God gave him my name, he thought I was the man God was sending to them.

I made the trip to St. Louis, I preached that weekend and the people told me they would give me a final answer in fifteen days. After just one week, I received another call, this time from a pastor in Springfield. He asked me if I would come here for a visit. I told him that I would like to, but that I was waiting on the decision from another congregation. It didn't seem fair to me to have the Springfield church pay for me to come all the way out here if I was going to the church in St. Louis. The pastor appreciated my candor.

Finally, the deacon from St. Louis called. He told me that after much deliberation the congregation had voted to bring in another pastor who had come to visit them after me. I told him that was fine, and I proceeded to call the pastor in Springfield. He said they were still interested, and we made the arrangements for me to come visit.

About a year and a half later, while I was at a meeting with other pastors, I asked the missionary who had given the deacon in St. Louis my phone number how that other church was doing. He gave me some sad news. He told me that the congregation doesn't even exist any more. There were problems with the person they had chosen to hire and eventually, after about a year of not having a pastor, the congregation was no more.

CHAPTER SEVEN: MY SPRINGFIELD EXPERIENCE

When I came I was thinking that it's a new step in my life. It was my first regular job in Springfield. I did not speak English, only Spanish, but when I came I thought I would find many Hispanic people like in New Jersey. I thought, "Well, I don't need to know so many things." But that is when I made my mistake. This is a nice city, but four years ago it was not like it is now. Now we have more Hispanic people, then there were very few Hispanic people in the city.

A Pleasant Surprise

The first time I came to Springfield, it was wintertime, and very cold. There was nobody in the street. I thought, "I don't know if anybody is living here. But, well, if God is calling me to this place, it's okay." I went back to New Jersey, and I accepted the invitation. When I came back, it was in May. I saw a very different situation. The first day of my job as pastor was on May 1. After a few days we wanted to celebrate Mother's Day. The people of the congregation told me that we could go to the lake. So we went to Stockton Lake. It was a nice lake, but very different than what I had become accustomed to in New Jersey. In New Jersey if we wanted to go to the lake, it took maybe two or three hours of driving, and there were always many people there. It was hard to have a good day. There were always problems, because when we would leave the lake, many cars are in the way making traffic difficult. Well, after a few days, I was thinking that it was a good decision to come to Springfield. Now I know that it was good decision, I'm for sure.

In my job here, I read in my functions manual, and it says that I need to preach and to take care of the people, besides that, I do everything I can to help in any way I can for the Hispanic people. Part of my job is also to help them find apartments, or to try to help them finding jobs. But my main task is to share the gospel, to let them know that if God changed my life, God can do it for them, for everybody who wants to accept Jesus as their Savior. Urcina works with me. She's usually giving classes for the Bible.

I did not take English classes when I got here. I was always trying to find documentation for myself, but there is a person, a person that I love so much, who helps me when I have questions about English, but I never took regular classes, but I think I need. Urcina, my wife also speaks a little English.

Acceptance and Opportunity

I never felt discrimination, because when I am going someplace, I am going as simply one more person, as part of a group. Also, sometimes I think we are getting confused about what is discrimination or what is bad humor. Sometimes the person is in a bad mood, maybe they had a bad day, or maybe they are having problems. Then when they are dealing with other people, they perhaps don't treat them as well as they might, but I am thinking maybe it is just not a good moment for her or him. I never felt discrimination in any direct way. If somebody tried to discriminate against me, I never knew it.

I think that Springfield has many opportunities. This is another part of my job, to let the Hispanic people know that Springfield has good places, for example the library, the zoo and the Discovery Center.

I think my position as pastor has opened many doors in the city, the pastors of other denominations treat me with respect. They are good people, they don't make me feel that I am different. I have problems when I am speaking with them in English, but they know that it is not a problem with my mind, this is problem with my mouth. When I came here it was hard for me because this is the first city where I really, really needed to speak English. When I was in New Jersey, or when we were in other countries, I did not need to speak English to communicate with people.

There are many more Hispanic people in Springfield now than when I first came here. I think they are coming because they know that Springfield is a good place to find a job. The best communication for Hispanic people is the mouth. If somebody is here and he finds a good job, he tells someone else, then that person comes and they tell someone else. They are making a chain. Many of them do not read the newspaper, because it is in English, so they don't learn about the jobs that way.

Springfield as a city is a nice city. The inhabitants are good people. They are doing a good job of accepting the Hispanic people. I apologize for the Hispanic people who make mistakes, because the bad guy doesn't have a place in any country. It is not only in Springfield, if somebody is going to my country or to my city and he's making mistakes, for example he's using drugs or something like this, it does not matter where he is going, he is breaking the law and he needs to know it and to pay the result. This is not about Hispanic people or American people against the Hispanics people, it is rules against people who break them.

Differences

One big difference between here and my country is that here I don't see so many people on the streets. In my country, you can see people all day. Maybe here in the big, big cities you can see people walking in the street. But for example in Springfield, in the summertime, you can see more people, but usually you cannot see the multitude in the street. If you are going to the mall you see lots of people. When I came, I said to myself, "Where are the people?"

Another thing that is different, is in Peru, people can drink in the streets. They can drink anyplace. I think this is a bad thing. There is a big difference in the legal system here and in my country. I was visiting somebody at the jail in Peru. Sometimes they don't have food. The family needs to bring food to them in the jail. They don't have facilities. For instance, they don't have television, or many times even beds. Many of them are sleeping on the floor, covering their body with maybe a sheet. It is hard.

Hope for Peru

Illegal drugs are a problem in my country. In the jungle is it big, big problem. The reason is because the people who work in the field and jungle, it is very hard for them to bring their products to market. If they are harvesting, for example, rice or lemons or coffee, for them it is very expensive to bring it to the coast. They don't have good roads, they don't have good highways. It's very expensive to transport. It is easier for them to plant other kind of plants (drugs) and the people who want it go there and they pay and they take care about how they can bring this kind of plant out of the jungle. It would be better if my government, my president, would do something with the roads, with the highway. They also need to pay a good price for the produce.

It is hard when you are in this place and you see many poor people. Many times the poor people will give whatever they have to their sons or daughters, and leave only a little for themselves. Sometimes there is only fruit in the jungle. Sometimes they are having only a banana for breakfast and then a banana for supper. When I was working there, we had a program to feed the children, but we didn't have enough money. If we want to reach more children, somebody thought that we had to ask them to bring small wood for cooking, to prepare the food. I remember kids, four, three, even two years old bringing wood, carrying it over their shoulder, coming for breakfast. That was sad watching them.

I think countries like the United States can do more, they need to be conscious about it, but the problem is who will take control of it. Many times they know that the donations are coming from other countries, this is a donation from people in foreign countries, possibly they are not giving it to the poor people, sometimes they are even selling it. This is the big problem. We can get help, but the next problem is how can we do it so that this help goes directly to the people who need it.

I saw somebody in the jungle who was bitten by a snake. His friends were walking with him for twelve hours through the jungle. They took some wood and a sheet and they made a stretcher, and they were walking with him for twelve hours, because in the jungle it is not possible to go with donkeys or horses or cars. They brought their friend to the hospital. When they got to the hospital, the doctor told them that they don't have the antidote for that snake bite, for that poison. They had to go to another hospital, to the big hospital for the antidote. The person lived, but he was suffering so much. It was hard. How, how can we get the help and do it so that it goes directly to the people who need it? That is hard.

I think the Peruvian people need to have more opportunity. In my country, the government makes big mistakes, and this is one reason why people don't trust each other. If the government is not doing a good job, they think everybody else is the same way.

Reflections

The best time of my life is when I was saved. I was crying, and at the same time that I was crying, it's like I was washing all my body clean. I was not crying because I had pain or because I didn't have anything or because of a problem, it was just that tears were going out, going out. You know when I am troubled again, when I have the temptation to say, "God I cannot go there," I have to remind myself about this day. I have to say, "Well, on this day I was saying the truth, if I said the truth then, I cannot say no now, because I have lied to Him, it is better for me to go forward only."

When I accepted Jesus, my family, they didn't believe my change. Because they said, not my dad, but my other family, "Juan it is impossible for you to change." I said, "Well, I am changed, it is different." They said it will not happen. Well, after that, my life didn't change overnight. I made mistakes, but, always somebody was there to say to me, Juan, you need to go on.

The lowest point in my life is when I was mad with God. One day I was very mad with God. I said, "God you are not working in my life, you know me, you know what is my necessity, why you are not working? If you cannot do anything in my life, I will work for myself. If you don't need me, I don't need you, if you don't have any interest in my life, in many necessities, that's okay." But I was

mad with Him, I was not going to church, but then I began to think. This is the side of me that is like my dad, thinking before taking the next step. Finally after one week or so, after meditation, I knew that God was working in my life, but for some reason I could not see it. Finally I went back to church, I said, "Okay, I'm here again." That's good. It was hard because I felt that everything in my past came before me and that I was going nowhere. It was hard, I was younger than I am now, because when you are thinking that you are going and going and going, maybe you turn around the corner and you find that you are in the same point that you started, I felt this way, I said, "Well, I don't know what I was doing." Finally I said, "I need to walk the step and walk straight." And sometimes I say to God, "Wait for me, You are walking too fast." I am grateful to Him, I am grateful.

My purpose in my life is to share the gospel. It is to let people know that everything is not finished in this life, always something is coming, it all depends how you want to receive it. Always I think hope is present. I work with people, many people think hope is not there. In my opinion this is short vision, it does not matter your age, your sex, this is not important, if you want something for yourself, the happiness is close to you, you have to fight for it, you need to know for sure that you are not a loser, you are a winner.

I think the thing that has helped me most to do my job in life is my past. In the life of everybody the past can be a good help I think. Many things in my past help, because I know when I am speaking of troubles, but also I know when I am speaking of hope. I don't want to say only an empty sentence, when somebody says, "Pastor show me," I can say, "Yes, because in my life it happens and it can happen in yours."

My wife and I were talking about retirement, and we are not sure what is going to happen in the future. Now we have some connection with our Hispanic country, but after 20, 25 years, whenever we retire, maybe the connection will not exist anymore. Our friends will be here, and we don't know exactly, maybe we want to go to Peru for visit, but not stay there. There we don't have medical insurance or a house. We came in our middle age in this country, and we are thinking that our last years may be here. But, I think it will be a long time until I retire. Also, like I said before, I think something more is coming,

My wife is very good to me. I think for my personality she's letting me do many things, she thinks that I can do many things, she says – "go ahead" this is the good side, but on the other side, I think this is a big responsibility for me, because you know I will not exist forever, you don't know, maybe tomorrow, maybe next year, maybe fifty years, but sometime I will not be here. What will happen if it is soon, if I am not here, what will happen with her. I don't want any trouble for her when I am not here by her side.

What I wish for most in the human side, I would like for my family and my friends, good status, this when I say good status, I mean things, I pray for them, for the things, food, clothes. The spiritual side is for them to have Jesus Christ.

The other thing I can say is that I don't believe in predestination. I think that everybody is responsible for what he is doing, you cannot blame the past, you cannot blame the people who are there. Because sometimes we are part of the problem and sometimes we are part of the solution. It is our

decision to be part of the solution, this way we cannot blame on anybody. In any situation we can find for ourselves, opportunity.

Thought for the New Generation

My thought for the new generation is to say that any country is not a perfect country, any culture has good things and bad things, I think the new generation needs to learn that they can pick up every good thing of every culture, that is the best thing to do. Not only to try to think that his or her culture is the best, because every culture has good things.



jnmaul@pcis.net

jnmaul@juno.com

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