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## **Foreword**

### **by Helen Roseveare**

When I was sent the manuscript, and asked if I would write a paragraph of recommendation, I hesitated – could I really take on another task?

But then I glanced at the first chapter, and I was hooked! I simply couldn't put it down.

It was so exactly like reading my own story all over again. Lily went to West Africa just four years after I sailed for Congo. What she met was so utterly similar to what I met, I was fascinated.

'Can I have God's needle?' – yes! We both encountered the same utter confidence in the 'needle' that it was believed could and would heal any and every disease ... it didn't really matter what you put in the syringe!

Then, the overwhelming sense of personal incompetence – inadequacy – inability to cope. Everyone looks to you, as though you were God and that you had the answer to every problem. Added to that, the weariness

– the need for a co-worker to share the burdens with, to discuss cases with. All these things brought back such clear memories to me of my own early days in Africa.

But at the same time, the sheer joy of being there – the realisation of the needs and God's gracious love in sending you to meet those needs – especially the privilege of sharing the gospel with these dear people. What a privilege to share the wonderful story of Jesus – of His birth, life, death and resurrection – all for us – with a people who had never heard before!

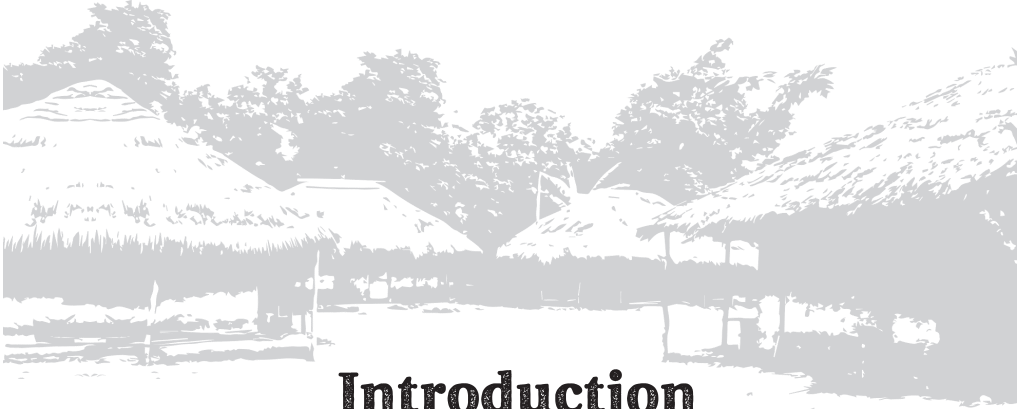
As Lily's story unfolds, may the Lord speak into every heart. Here is a picture, in vivid colour, of what God has been graciously doing through the past 100 years of reaching out to tribal peoples all over the world with the gospel – using ordinary people, like you and me. Throughout this story, we see the Holy Spirit at work, changing Lily into the person God wanted her to be – conforming her to the image of His Son, Jesus. All of us would say: 'Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on ...' (Philippians 3:12).

This picture is not accurate, perhaps, of today's missionary efforts – often in countries now liberated from different forms of colonialism, and with leadership able to cope with the basic needs of their peoples. But it is a wonderful record of what was achieved to give a solid foundation for today's efforts. Lily's outpoured love and energy for the Papel people have left them with a church

of believers, the basis of a medical service and the written  
Word of God. To God be all the glory!

**Helen Roseveare**

September 2012



# **Introduction**

## **by John Butterworth**

When I went to a missionary meeting in Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire in 2011, the last thing on my mind was to write another book. I was at the two-day WEC International May Day conference in Bulstrode, where I was helping on the European Christian Mission stand and also promoting my newly published book, *God's Secret Listener*, the story of how the gospel came back to Albania.

I talked to many new people, including Andrew Bowker, the then Publications Manager at WEC International, and I mentioned to him that I was a journalist. The next day he came to find me and asked me if I would I like to help write the life story of Lily Gaynor, who had been a missionary in Guinea-Bissau in West Africa for 35 years and whose dying wish was to see her story published.

I was intrigued and, as I was freelancing at the time, I went to meet Lily, who was living in Melling, Liverpool. I was so impressed by this humble Christian and what

she had achieved in her life – I thought it would make a brilliant book, so I decided to help.

For those struggling to place Guinea-Bissau on a map of Africa, it is one of the most westerly countries on the continent. It is bordered by Senegal in the north and, to add to the confusion, another country called Guinea in the south. It is slightly larger in area than Belgium, but its population of 2.015 million is only around a sixth of Belgium's 11.59 million. This former colony of Portuguese Guinea had one of the largest slave markets in the region based at Cacheu, which was known as the 'Slave Coast', in the north-west of the country. Now cashew nuts are its main source of revenue.

The country was not helped by an eleven-year war for independence from 1963 to 1974 and political instability since then, including a damaging civil war in the late 1990s. It is still one of the poorest countries in the world. Despite that, some intrepid tourists are beginning to visit the country, including the capital, Bissau, and the beautiful Arquipélago dos Bijagos islands, an archipelago that was declared a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1996.

But many years before twenty-first-century adventurers flew in to the country, a young, 30-year-old Liverpool lady, Lily Gaynor, arrived in the then Portuguese Guinea on Wednesday, November 20, 1957, after a ten-day boat journey from Portugal. She had spent the previous twelve months learning Portuguese to prepare her to work among the Papel tribe in the remote west of the country.

Lily went with WEC International, a missionary organisation that aimed to reach the least evangelised people in the world and whose motto is 'If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him.' WEC International was founded in 1913 by the England cricketer Charles Thomas Studd, who had played in the original test against Australia in August 1882 where the Ashes were first named.

After serving Christ in China and India, 53-year-old C.T. Studd felt God calling him to pioneer a new worldwide mission and, despite suspect health, set sail for Africa. Before he died in the Belgian Congo in 1931, teams of missionaries had joined WEC International to work in Central and West Africa, Amazonia, the Middle East and the Himalayan region. Today there are 1,800 workers serving all over the world.

Among those who followed in C.T. Studd's footsteps was Lily, who spent 35 years working among the Papel tribe, one of 27 ethnic groups in the country, and whose language had never even been written down. Despite failing her Eleven-plus, Lily became a highly qualified nurse and midwife and an accomplished linguist. She turned her back on a promising career in England to live in an African hut in the village of Ondame in the remote area of Biombo.

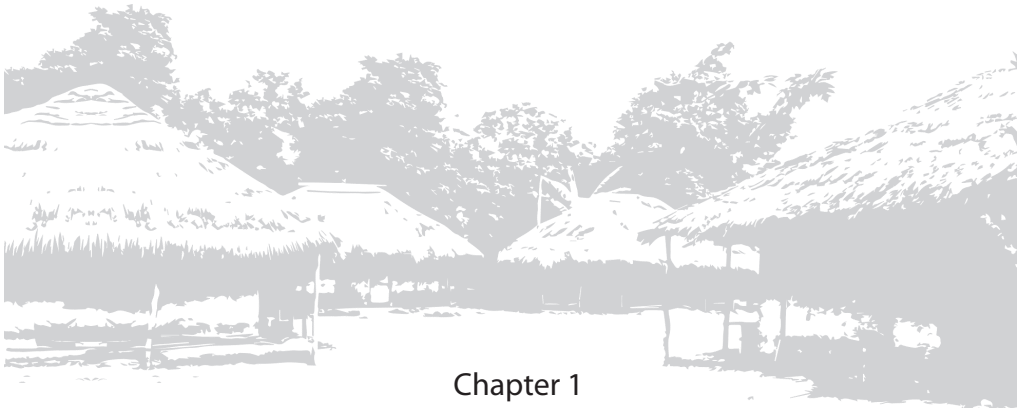
In the mornings she took a chair and table out under the mango trees where she held medical clinics six days a week that proved a huge success thanks to the penicillin injection or, as villagers preferred to call it, 'God's needle'.



In the afternoons she visited the villages to learn Papel, where she came into contact with the greatly feared witchdoctors. In the evenings she invented a written alphabet so she could translate the New Testament into their language.

Today the country, renamed Guinea-Bissau after independence, has one of the biggest national churches in West Africa.

This is Lily's story, or as she prefers to say, this is His story.



## Chapter 1

# Please give God's needle to the dead mum

'Senhora! *Senhora!* *SENHORA!*' Each time it got louder as it penetrated my sleep.

'What is it?' I shouted.

'It's bad, very bad, she's had the baby but it is bad. Come quickly.'

I fished under the pillow for my torch, crawled from under the mosquito net, pulled on my plastic sandals and a dress over my nightdress and lit the small paraffin lantern. I collected my midwifery bag, left my mud hut and went out into the moonless, hot African night. It was well after midnight in the little-known republic, now called Guinea-Bissau, on the west coast of this great continent.

Outside, two anxious men were eager to move off. Each was barefoot, wearing only the usual loin cloth and carrying a vicious looking machete. As I walked between them along the narrow bush path, my lantern

was giving out a feeble circle of light, enough to see the rough stony path, but I worried about the snakes and the hyenas.

On the other hand, such night trips always gave me a thrill; the stillness, the continual chorus of crickets and frogs, the beat, beat of drums in the distance telling of another funeral and the occasional mating laugh of a hyena. This fleeting pleasure was sobered by the fear of what awaited me and the abysmal inadequacy I always felt in these emergencies.

After a half hour's walk, we entered the small, round mud hut in a remote village near the coastal area of Biombo. The only light was from a flickering wood fire in the middle of the room. My eyes were smarting from the smoke, but I was able to make out several women seated on the floor, leaning against the bare mud wall. There was complete silence except for a grunt from a pig in a corner, and a flutter from the hens perched overhead. Then I saw a girl, presumably the mother, sitting on the dirt floor in a pool of mud and blood. She was leaning back, held in the lap of another woman. A baby lay face down in the quagmire between her knees. I picked the baby up, realising that he was alive, though very cold. The cord was still intact, so I separated it quickly, wrapped him in a towel and pressed him against the bosom of one of the ladies. She tried to refuse, but I had no time or patience to argue!

I turned to the mother; she looked young, probably about fourteen. Her face was grey and as I laid my hand

on her arm I felt, with horror, the cold stiffening flesh of someone who had been dead for a while. I looked up at the two men who had brought me, and round at the other women. No word was spoken, just complete silence. I could hardly speak.

'She has been dead for some time,' I ventured. 'Did you not know?'

'Yes, Senhora,' one of the men replied, 'but we wanted you to come.'

'What can I do now? You should have called me earlier. I might have been able to save her then,' I said, though I knew this reasoning was hopeless.

'O no Senhora,' he said emphatically, 'please give her "guja Kristu" [God's needle and penicillin] and bring her back to life.' What could I say? Desperation overwhelmed me.

'Only God can do that, only Jesus can give life,' I stammered, fighting back the tears, but words were not enough. As the men kindly accompanied me home, walking in the darkness now seemed so oppressive and overpowering. I argued with the Lord: 'Why am I here? It's all so hopeless. I am totally inadequate.'

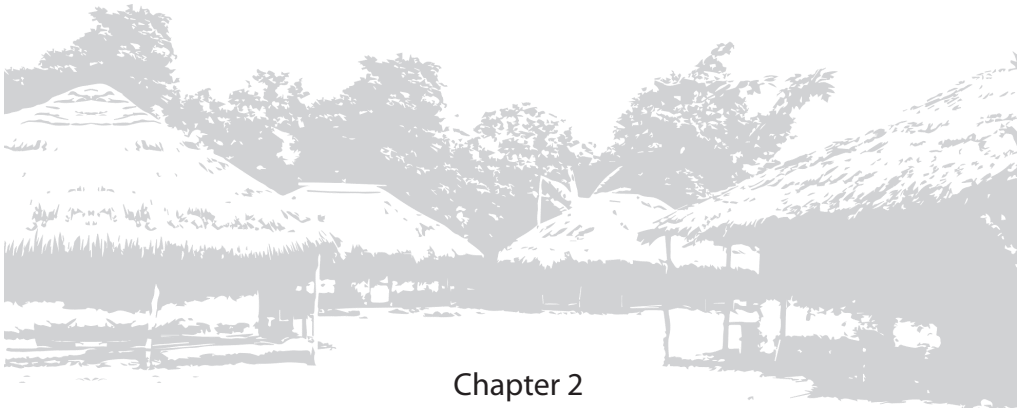
'What about the baby?' I continued. I knew that no woman would take him as they think the dead mother will need the baby to suck on her swollen breasts and so will curse anybody who keeps her baby from her.

'Has he to die, as so many babies and other mothers die so needlessly?' I cried out in the darkness. God, where is the fulfilment of your promises to me? All these people

ever want is Christ's needle. Why is there so little response to the gospel?'

I had no idea at that time that Alexander Fleming, the inventor of penicillin, and the 'guja' or needle, was a vital part of God's plan for one tiny tribe in this practically unheard of country.

It was 4.30 in the morning when I eventually returned to my bed. I was totally exhausted. A mosquito had managed to get under the mosquito net with me. But I was too tired to find and swat it as I stumbled back to sleep wondering why I had swapped a comfortable Merseyside home for a mud hut in Africa.



## Chapter 2

# Long-haired lass from Liverpool

‘Mummy,’ I cried, ‘how do you make soap?’

‘I don’t make it, I buy it’ she replied. ‘Why do you ask?’

‘A missionary taught the African chief how to make soap and they all became Christians,’ I explained. ‘So, I want to know how to make soap, because I’m going to be a missionary when I grow up.’

It was 1935 and I was eight when I came home excitedly one day from the little church, Orrell Park Presbyterian, opposite my home in Bailey Drive, Bootle. Today that church is St Stephen’s United Reformed Church. It had been a special meeting, where a missionary had shown magic-lantern pictures of Africa. It was so exciting!

I had been at the church since being on the ‘Cradle Roll’ when I was three years old. Though my parents, John and Edith, never went to church themselves, they insisted that I did. So I was sent to the 11am service, which

included a children's talk; Sunday School at 2pm and a 6.30pm gospel service which I really liked. The singing was led by Miss Mayman who played the piano. I was fascinated watching her play the choruses from different music books, thinking: 'How ever can she do it?' The words didn't mean a thing at the time, but it was there that my journey to faith began.

Times were hard in the 1930s. Dad, in the building trade, was often out of work. In order to get some money, he would push his handcart with his ladders up to ten miles to the other side of Liverpool to paper and paint a room for a pittance.

I had two early lessons in how precious money was then. Firstly, as a youngster I was always saying 'I want ... buy me ...' when out shopping with my Mum. Eventually, she said angrily: 'We haven't enough money for food. If you say 'I want' one more time I'll smack your bottom.' I did and she did. She pulled my knickers down and slapped me there in the street. I've never been so humiliated!

My second lesson in money came from our neighbours. The man next door always seemed so posh wearing a trilby hat and a suit and carrying a mackintosh and an umbrella. One day my Mum discovered the respectable man's wife next door lying on her bed, dying of starvation. She was shocked to find that there was nothing to eat in her house. Mum made her have some porridge, and then persuaded her to take the nine shillings (45 pence) a week dole money, which she had been too proud to apply for previously. Life then improved considerably for the neighbours.

\*

On the whole, my childhood was a happy one. I was possibly spoilt because I was an only child and because I had suffered ill health. When I was seven years old, I spent three months in hospital where I had scarlet fever, diphtheria, measles and then appendicitis. It didn't help that visitors were allowed only on Sundays.

When I went back home, I used to enjoy going to the store at the back of the nearby market where I could gaze at the lovely puppies for sale. One Christmas morning, as the gifts were spread on my bed, Mum said: 'Go and see what Father Christmas has brought you downstairs.' In the kitchen I found – joy of joys – a puppy, which I called Timmy. When we trudged through the snow to Nana and Granddad's house round the corner in the afternoon Timmy had to go too. He added to the chaos of cousins, aunts and uncles in their small semi-detached home. From that day on I have never been without a dog.

On my eighth birthday on July 12, 1935, when Dad was out of work again, my parents gave me a new Brownie uniform. Of course, I didn't realise at the time just how much it cost them and all the love that was wrapped up in that brown paper parcel. It was the beginning of years of excitement through Brownies, Guides and Sea Rangers. We enjoyed summer and weekend camping trips, and rowing a six-oared boat on the dirty Leeds and Liverpool Canal, accompanied by naughty boys running on the footpath shouting and throwing stones in the water.



Despite the economic hardship we still had a family holiday every year when we went camping at nearby Formby for five weeks in the summer. It meant a train journey and a one-and-a-half-mile walk at the other end, carrying all our equipment and food. Timmy came with us, but my Dad visited us only at weekends as he had to work in the week.

In 1938, I took the Eleven-plus scholarship. On the day of the exam, I came home at lunchtime and told my Mum I didn't feel very well. She insisted I went back, but when I returned home that evening I was covered in spots and discovered I had chicken pox.

Not surprisingly I failed the exam and so couldn't go to the local grammar school. Mum was sad because her hopes of her only child rising above the poverty of the working class were dashed and I was upset because I was going to be separated from my best friend, Joyce Nelson, who had passed the Eleven-plus. Sadly, Joyce and I fell out. I started it by calling her 'stuck-up', to which she would reply: 'You're only jealous!' Doubtless, she was right.

At the same time, I was feeling unhappy. I couldn't sleep at night because I was ridden with guilt and shame. My school work suffered, my health deteriorated and when I went into the senior elementary of Roberts Council School, I came 35th in a class of 40 girls. My Grandmother said it was because my strength was going into my long hair and I should have it cut.

I knew it wasn't because of my long hair; it was because of my guilt and shame after a seventeen-year-old youth had assaulted me a year earlier.

But then a few months later, on April 12, 1939, my life changed forever! I was in bed trying to get to sleep. I recited poetry to myself; I sang songs we learned at school and choruses from Sunday School, but sleep didn't come. Then, unexpectedly, something far more wonderful did! I sang the chorus:

*Rolled away, rolled away, and the burden of my  
heart rolled away.  
Every sin had to go beneath the cleansing  
flow. Hallelujah ...*

It was like a brilliant light suddenly being turned on, I realised what those words meant. It was as if, in an instant, all the teaching of years in Sunday School fell into place. Jesus became real. I just knew what the cross meant, Jesus died – and it was for me.

Forgiveness! To be made clean! In floods of tears, I leapt out of bed, knelt down and cried: 'Take it away, God please take it away.' He did – and I knew it. The guilt and fear had gone. I felt washed clean. I went to my window and there saw the night sky as I'd never seen it before. It was glorious, rapturous. Everything was new and wonderful.

I needed no counsellor after the assault, though in those days that sort of help wasn't available anyway.

Jesus was my Counsellor. I had fallen in love with Him.  
No more insomnia.

In fact, my Mum couldn't make out why I was now in a hurry to go to bed – it was because it was then that I talked to Jesus. I didn't know then that prayer could be at any time of the day or night.

At the end of the summer term at school I was top of the class, and stayed in the top four for the rest of my schooling. This was despite being evacuated to Southport, well away from the Liverpool Docks which were a target for the German bombers now war had broken out. But my Mum missed me so much she brought me home early, interrupting my schooling even more.

I was sad my education finished when I was fourteen. But I was glad I never had to have my long hair cut!