



MORNINGSTAR

Santa Cruz

"I'm sorry, reverend Lewis. The visa cannot be extended. You must leave. Today."

So it was final. After 30 days of miraculous revival services in Tonga, the gospel ship Morning Star and her five-crew members - Brendon and Patty Baer, Mike and Susie McIntosh, and myself had only minutes to be our way out of the harbor. Two of us were suffering from dysentery, and I was carrying the symptoms of an island disease for which people were normally hospitalized.

Storm clouds began to gather almost immediately after we negotiated the treacherous reefs guarding the harbor. Waves that had been choppy and rough to begin with suddenly became like snapping jaws threatening to swallow us whole. The 52foot Morning Star that seemed so big and proud anchored in the bay was nothing but a tiny morsel in this ravenous open sea.

Mike and Brendon took turns at the wheel, desperately maneuvering the ship into the 20-foot waves.

Susie, Patty and I had already "crossed over" into violent seasickness. Patty recovered well enough to stay on her feet, but Susie and I were completely wiped out. Vomiting every 5-10 minutes, we both reached a point where we would gladly have died rather than feel another roll of the ship. First would come the "whish-whish-whish" of the whitewater against the hull, then the rocking blast of another monster swell battering the bow. Inside the steel hull of the Morning Star each wave reverberated like cannon fire.

On the deck, Mike and Brandon faced an impossible task. In order to keep the ship steady, it would be necessary to reef the mainsail - shorten the sail so that the wind couldn't catch it. In a high wind, it normally takes three or four people to do the job. Brendon would have to tackle it himself while Mike stayed at the wheel!

Our group has never been what you would call spiritually inhibited, but I have never heard such loud prayers, shouting to God of the Flood to strengthen Brendon, to steady the ship, to deliver us out of the maelstrom! Fighting the high, rolling seas, in danger of being flung overboard at any moment, Brendon somehow brought the sails down in a little over 20 minutes. If that wasn't a supernatural work of God, it'll do until something better comes along!

But the danger had only begun. Day and night, day and night, we swirled and reeled across the black, twisting ocean. I began hallucinating by the second day. Susie was throwing up great amounts of blood. The other crew members were so desperately exhausted and battered that they resigned themselves to the possibility - the likelihood - of death. We all knew the odds. Tonga is a chain of over 160 islands linked and hedged in by innumerable thousands of jagged, ship-murdering reefs. We had entered Tonga by a circuitous route that avoided the most dangerous shallows. Now we were lunging headlong over those very reefs. Would we bash aground at the bottom of the next wave? Statistically, we were goners. It was not possible that we could miss every single reef in that boiling ocean.

I can never preach about Jonah in quite the same way again. I think I know pretty closely what it must be like to be three days in the belly of a whale. Between seizures of delirium, I wondered why God had brought us this far, only to have the sea swallow us up. Had the Morning Star already accomplished all that God wanted? Or had this whole adventure been simply a fantasy, a delusion, and an amazing string of coincidences? Ever since we'd first begun talking about building our own missionary boat, people had begun telling me the idea was crazy at worst and useless at best. Now I was in the process, it appeared, of proving them right!

I was thankful for the people who weren't onboard, the ones who might have been with us, but had been spared this nightmare. I thought of Kathy Bailey Miller, the precious young Bible student who first had the vision for the Morning Star.

Kathy fell in love with the sea at age 16. That was the year that she received her first surfboard, and for the next eight years, she lived an "endless summer" lifestyle of surf and sun along the California and Mexican borders. Then she discovered sailing. She learned the art of sailing along the coasts of Costa Rica, Panama and Ecuador, and then journeyed to the French West Indies where she and a boy friend began building a "dream boat" that would take them around the world.

All those happy dreams ended, however, when a mysterious disease - which later developed in to a form of epilepsy - forced Kathy to return to her home town of Santa Cruz, California, for medical treatment. Disappointed and bitter because she couldn't continue her storybook lifestyle, Kathy began to retreat into herself.

Then, in 1971, Kathy heard about what was happening among the so-called "Jesus freaks". One evening she found herself at a meeting of Jesus people in Santa Cruz, and was beautifully saved and filled with the Holy Spirit.

I met Kathy about a month later when she came to the "Church on the mountain," Global Youth Evangelism (GYE), located in Santa Cruz mountains halfway between Santa Cruz and San Jose. Kathy enrolled in our one-year intensive Bible School, and I recognized something special about her.

One day she came to me with a story that I thought was nice, but not particularly meaningful for our ministry or me.

"Last night," she said, "I was fasting and praying, and the Lord gave me a vision. I saw a boat, a big boat, in perfectly still water. No sails were up and there was a man on deck praying."

I knew Kathy's deep love for sailing, so I presumed this vision was just a comforting, personal message from God. Kathy would have none of that. From that moment on, she began pestering me to build a missionary boat, a boat for which she already had a name, for heaven's sake!

"It will be called **The Morning Star**" Kathy insisted. I already had my hands full with other work, and I needed a project like this imaginary boat about as much as I needed another trip to the hospital. I had suffered more than one physical breakdown during my ministry, and friends warned me I was heading for another. Our Bible training center was growing, as well as our Bible School in Guadalajara, Mexico. We had established another Church in the Northern Californian community of Grass Valley, and were in the middle of a building program there. I was traveling 50,000 miles a year by car on the evangelistic field.

And this girl wanted me to build a boat.

"Imagine, Brother Lewis, a crew of dedicated Christians, really strong in the word of God, sailing into ports never visited by missionaries! They'd be praying all the while as they traveled, interceding with God for revival wherever they landed. And by the time they got to each port, God's Spirit would already be moving among the people!"

For some reason, God waited until I went to Guadalajara to visit our Bible school before He made the vision real to me. When I returned to America, I came back with a full-fledged case of "Morning Star Fever." Suddenly, I could see potential for such a ship. One Sunday morning, while preaching at our Grass Valley church, House of Prayer, I made an announcement that even shocked me, the Lord allowed me to pronounce it so boldly.

"I see a sailboat in the future of Global Youth Evangelism," I pronounced. "And God is going to send a builder and sailors to run her!"

The whole thing must have sounded a shade frivolous to some of the people. A sailboat? Was Al Lewis wanting to live out some South Seas fantasy?

I guess I felt just a little silly after that service, although God has never given me a vision for anything that He has not fulfilled. But where would we get a boat? Who would train the crew? Where would we go? How would we finance the venture?"

As I was praying with some people at the altar, one of our men, a contactor named Jim McVicar, approached me.

"Brother, you won't believe this," he said, "but I think I have the plans for your sailboat." Quickly, Jim told me his story.

"Back in 1950," he said, "I bought some plans for a vessel that was going to be my 'dream boat.' I was a merchant seaman then, and my big dream was to build a ship that would be large enough to carry trade among the islands of the South Pacific. I never built that boat, but I still have the blueprints. She's a big boat, and she'll stand up to heavy seas because I plan to build her of steel!"

Jim had been the chief contractor on the very sanctuary we were standing in, so I knew he was a meticulous, hard-working builder whose trade was also his

ministry to the Lord. He was between jobs at the time, so we decided that his next undertaking should be the creation of **The Morning Star**.

Jim moved his family to Santa Cruz in 1975, and we rented a corner of a lumberyard right next to Highway 1, the Pacific Coast thoroughfare that carries millions of travelers each year along the magnificent California shoreline. Within weeks, the massive steel hull began to take shape. Visitors started dropping by the building site, curious to know who would construct a 52-foot steel boat, and why.

"We're building a boat to carry the Gospel to the South Pacific," Jim testified, "because Jesus is coming back soon."

Jim's boat-side preaching earned him the nickname "Noah," and *The Morning Star* became a silent sermon to passers-by on the freeway.

Meantime, the half-finished hull of a wooden trimaran, rotting and weather-beaten, provided a sermon of sorts to Jim and his workers. The pleasure craft had evidently been someone's pet project, but now it lay forgotten and incomplete in the lumberyard. Dreams and good intentions, preached the orphan vessel, are only the beginning. Without commitment and hard work, most visions disappear as a vapor. The difference between a visionary and a dreamer, someone told me once, is that the visionary knows when to wake up and go to work.

We were awake and working. Man, did we work! The project that was originally estimated to cost \$30,000 and take one year to complete actually ended up with a price tag of \$100,000 and 20 months hard labor. Jim McVicar never missed a day of work during that entire time, despite a couple of on-site accidents. Twice his shirt caught fire from the welding torch, and once he cut his hand with an electric drill and had to go to the doctor to be stitched up. Still, he worked six days a week, sometimes 12 hours a day.

We had not entirely settled on a destination for our missionary ship, but the Lord began to impress me with the idea that we should go to the Marshall Islands. My own acquaintance with the islands began in 1967 when I was pasturing a little church in Northern California. Sam Sasser, an Assemblies of God missionary to the South Seas, was going through town with an entourage of royalty from the Marshalls when their bus broke down. The sheriff's office called our church, and we gladly took the group in. They were only with us a short time, but our church developed a genuine love for those people. The leader, King Namo Hermious, invited me to come and conduct revival meetings in the islands. His invitation seemed sincere, but I'd never taken him up on it. Now, perhaps, the Lord was using this past association as an open door for **The Morning Star**.

When I mentioned this possibility to Jim, he took on the same expression he'd worn that first morning I announced GYE would build a sailboat.

"You know, Brother Al, several year ago I was working with a missionary who planned to sail to the Marshalls. I bought the charts for him, but the trip never came off. I've been carrying those charts around with me ever since, though!"

We announced our intention to send the ship to the Marshall Islands, and I began making some initial contacts. One day, a missionary to that region paid a visit to the ship.

"Where did you get the name, The Morning Star?" the missionary asked. I told him about Kathy Bailey and her original vision for the ship.

"You mean, you weren't aware that the first missionary ship to the Marshalls was also called The Morning Star?" he probed. I assured him that we didn't know anything about any other ships that had gone to the Marshalls.

"I've just finished reading a history of the islands," the missionary told me. "The first Morning Star sailed out of Boston in 1856. It was financed by donations from children in America and Hawaii, under the auspices of the Hawaiian Missionary Society. It sailed among the islands of Micronesia for eight years, and then was replaced by a second Morning Star. There have been seven Morning Stars in all, and it looks as though God is putting together an eighth!"

We were amazed at the continuing string of "coincidences" surrounding The Morning Star. But the topper came when we discovered that the ensign we had designed for the ship - a star, with a dove descending - was nearly identical to the ensign of the original Morning Star!

In the Marshalls and other islands of Micronesia, we learned, The Morning Star is more than a boat. It has become almost a symbol of God's blessing. Islanders pray for the return of the "great white ship." Micronesians have regarded the seven Morning Stars as symbols of the Christian faith, and when a new Morning Star sails into sight, the people crowd the shores and sing as though Jesus Himself were returning!

We had no idea up to this time of the import of our work. It was a real lesson to me in how Christ, the Head of the Church, coordinates His Body on earth. Although there may at times be little outward unity in the things the Church is doing, God has us all tied together in a supernatural way.

As the ship neared completion, we were faced with the task of moving her from the lumberyard to the harbor, a distance of about one mile. With 33 tons of ship to move, some people figured we had painted ourselves into a corner. No truck rig was big enough to handle the craft. We even called the National Guard to see if they could lift the ship by helicopter, but there were no choppers around that could lift that heavy a load.

Finally, we designed our own special carrier and essentially welded a set of wheels to the ship's hull. As we started out the lumberyard gate, the California Highway Patrol stopped us and asked if we had a permit to float that thing on dry land.

After some fast footwork to city hall, we obtained the necessary permission, and the parade began.

All along the route, people rushed out of their houses to see the boat. It took us almost two hours to tiptoe down to the harbor. Inch by inch, we crept down the street, with two of our boys standing on the deck lifting electric wires out of the way with wooden poles. Once we got to the harbor, the experts took over, and the glistening white vessel was lifted off its carrier and into the water with a powerful crane.

"She floats, all right," the harbormaster said drolly. She did more than float, though. On our first test run, Jim was amazed himself at how well balanced she was, how beautifully she ran. When the insurance surveyor came out to assess The Morning Star, he proclaimed it a "masterpiece," perhaps the most beautiful piece of seagoing art he'd ever seen. A government inspector lauded her as one of the finest ships he'd ever appraised. The flanging - the shaping of the steel - was the best he'd seen, superior even to the Navy ships he inspected on a regular basis.

The insurance company valued her at \$200,000, but she was worth millions to us! Although The Morning Star was built to go to the Marshall Islands, upon completion it seemed that the Lord was leading us to go further south first. In the spring of 1978, I flew to Pago Pago, American Samoa, where I was greeted immediately by an Assemblies of God missionary temporarily stationed there.

"Brother Al," he enthused, "you're an answer to prayer! I've had an emergency come up at home, and I've been asking God to please send someone to relieve me here."

That meeting began one of the most exciting ministries I had ever participated in. I ended up as fill-in missionary and pastor of the church in Pago Pago until the new missionary arrived. Meantime, The Morning Star sailed in to Pago Pago and we began putting it to use in evangelizing the islands.

Kathy Bailey was engaged now. Her fiancÈ, Dan Miller, had given up a lucrative position with the "Holiday on Ice" road show shortly after his conversion and enrolled in our Bible school in Santa Cruz. He met Kathy there and they were wed about a year later. "Morning Star fever" hit Dan too and he was one of the crew aboard The Morning Star when she sailed away from California on her maiden voyage.

Samoa is divided into two sets of islands, American Samoa and Western Samoa. American Samoa continues to be governed as a trusteeship of the United States under a treaty devised in 1899. Western Samoa became an independent country in 1961. The two groups of islands integrate western culture, Samoan customs and Christianity in a way that is sometimes confusing and often comical when viewed by outsiders for the first time.

As you drive down the roads of American Samoa, you pass hundreds of open fales, the thatched huts that have been the standard architectural design for island

luminescence one sees in every American home. TV has come to paradise.

Standard church attire is long dresses for the women, shirt, necktie, and sport jacket for the men—usually worn with a bright wrap-around cloth, called a lava lava, and sandals. A little America, a little Samoa.

Because of our identification with the gospel ship, we had to be extremely careful about the way we dressed. The sailing crowd, or "yachties," must have had a number of good laughs at our crew as they boarded tiny dinghies, dressed in their Sunday best, to be ferried from The Morning Star to shore. Particularly if it happened to be raining, the crew would arrive at church drenched and disheveled—but wearing the proper clothing nonetheless!

From American Samoa, we went to Western Samoa. I had been invited to minister on the island of Savaii, the largest and westernmost of the islands. Savaii is perhaps the last purely Polynesian island in the area. There is no intermarriage at all there and the people are less affected by American customs than other Samoans. The island only recently began generating electricity and Savaii is the closest thing to Paradise that I have seen. (Don't tell your travel agent.)

All 13 churches on the island greeted The Morning Star when she pulled into Savaii. We had to send someone to the top of the mast in order to negotiate the treacherous coral reefs. It was not a harbor I would want to enter at night, or in a storm.

We greeted the people from shipboard and then someone - I wish I knew who! - said "Come aboard." Immediately, 150 Savaiians clambered on deck. The Morning Star handles 14 comfortably at sea and I suppose 30 to 40 would not be too large a tour group for us. But with 12 dozen people atop her, The Morning Star began to list nervously. Somehow we were able to steer everyone ashore safely, but not until most of the kids had gotten a drink of Morning Star water to see if it tasted different than theirs.

I was especially interested in one village in Savaii where the people were all awakened at 4am each day to pray. An empty acetylene tank served as a church bell, and we would all arise from our straw mats and walk in the darkness to the church fane. This was no traditional church custom. The people were desperate for God and I will always remember the little children, tears streaming down their faces, arms raised in worship, praying as earnestly and fervently as any mature Christian.

As a direct result, I believe, we experienced tremendous services in Savaii. The anointing of God came on me in a special way as I preached and several people reported healings. One miracle in particular that stands out in my mind is the case of a young man who had been deaf and mute for many years. During one of our services, God touched him, his ears were opened and he spoke his first word! I am looking even now at a beautiful necklace that the young man made for me as

(Because healings are so difficult to verify, particularly in that kind of locale, I have downplayed the miracles we saw in Savaii, as well as other parts of Samoa. However, we witnessed a great number of tremendous miracles there and I believe that God was moving among those people in a super-supernatural way. While we were still in Samoa, a number of Bible students from Western Samoa went to the island during a semester break to minister. According to missionaries and pastors in the region, a crippled baby was healed, a lame man was delivered, a drowned woman was raised from the dead and many other miracles occurred. These events were confirmed by two Assemblies of God missionaries who journeyed to Savaii, specifically, to verify or disprove these reports.)

I also had an opportunity to minister in an "outcast" church - a church which had not yet been recognized by the local matai chiefs. The pastor of the church had been given an old hog pen for a building site, and the people turned that pigsty into a paradise!

During one of our services, the town drunk was delivered of alcoholism and saved. Word travels fast there, of course, and almost immediately the whole area knew what had happened.

One morning as I sat in the church fale with the pastor, I was alarmed to see a procession of men marching our way in ceremonial regalia.

"Those are the Matai chiefs," the pastor told me. We got up to greet the men and I was more than a little concerned with what they intended to do to us. I knew of one man who had been stoned out of his own village after encountering Christ in a life-changing experience. His "fanatical" new faith differed so greatly from his previous "churchianity" that his neighbors and family thought he had forsaken the Christian religion! He moved to another part of the island and within two weeks had brought together a faithful group of believers.

I didn't see any rocks in the chiefs' hands, but that didn't mean they were happy with us. The pastor spoke with the head chief, then came back smiling.

"Because you are our guests, and because you have brought The Morning Star to Savaii, and because of the man who was healed of alcoholism, the Matai chiefs wish to hold a Kava ceremony to recognize our church," the pastor reported.

A kava ceremony is one of the highest honors that can be given in the islands. I was initiated into the village family amid a great deal of splendid speechmaking and then the Matai chiefs had me present the pastor and church to them for formal recognition in the village. After the ceremony, as we concluded in prayer, there was a drenching downpour. The chiefs were elated, for they believed the rainstorm was a seal of God's blessing on the new church!

After that, we were taken to one of the main areas of the village and allowed to conduct a church service. The chiefs stood guard to be sure that no one

We returned to American Samoa and continued to experience significant revival wherever we went. But the peculiarities of Samoan life continued to present our missionary crew with daily challenges.

One thing that is hard to get used to in Samoa is that the people laugh at everything! They laugh when a song leader or singer is off key, they laugh when the speaker makes a blunder, they laugh when someone falls down. Riding her little motorcycle one day, Kathy ran into the back of a car and fell into the street. She wasn't hurt badly, but the reaction of bystanders was not what she expected. They laughed hilariously! They helped her up and got her on the road again, and by the time she recovered, Kathy found herself laughing as hard as anyone!

If an auto accident provokes this kind of mirth, you might expect that a funeral would put the whole island in stitches. That isn't quite the case, but Samoan funerals are indeed spectacular.

While we were in the islands, one of the most renowned men in Samoa died and his funeral lasted three days. People bring gifts to a Samoan funeral and are given gifts in exchange. Those who brought presents to this funeral and attended the graveside services were treated to dinner at one of the best restaurants in Samoa.

Other types of funerals are elaborate in a different way. A paramount chief, one of the highest officials in a village, died during our stay and some of the people on the island returned to ancient ways in paying honor to him.

In the old days, when a paramount chief died, warriors would go ahead of the funeral procession chopping down anything in the way, including people. For this funeral, 50 men with machetes walked in front to cut down the jungle and 50 men followed behind with rifles and shotguns, shooting into the air. The men with machetes hacked down stop signs, trees, gardens and fences. Since the Samoans don't care much for the Koreans who live there, some of the men used the occasion as an excuse to chop up the grounds around a Korean restaurant.

Many of the Samoans, especially the born-again Christians, deplored what happened during the funeral and the authorities did their best to keep anyone from getting hurt. The elaborate celebration was another demonstration of "compromise" between the old Polynesian culture and the new Western culture.

Our people occasionally found that their ignorance of Samoan customs even caused them to violate religious traditions. Kathy was standing outside a laundry one afternoon when an old man inside began waving a stick at her angrily. She noticed that she was the only one on the street, and realized that she had violated the village's *sa* time. This is a short afternoon break designated for prayer, and anyone caught out in the street or doing any kind of work during that time is in danger of being beat up or harassed by the "religious" people of the community. It is hard to believe that true Christians could so violate the Spirit of the Law with the letter of the Law, but it just shows what can happen when tradition and customs replace the Spirit of Christ in the

Our trip to Tonga had been yet another exercise in culture shock. Tonga is more of a closed island than either Western or American Samoa. The royalty there will allow very little outside influence, which in many ways is good. There is no television, no business conducted on Sunday, no sale of manufactured toys, and no preaching allowed by cults such as the Jehovah's Witnesses.

I believe we really caused a stir in Tonga. People's hearts were changed during our services, and we saw many people save and baptized in the Holy Spirit. But a few people didn't like our being there.

In one of our first services, right as I was speaking, a woman came into the church and began shaking her finger under Brendon's nose.

"Why don't you people get out of here? Why don't you go back where you came from?" she shouted. "We don't need you here! There are no sinners here! Nobody here is a sinner!" She carried on for awhile and then walked out. It was the first such opposition we had encountered, and I had a distinct impression that the woman was demon-motivated.

Night after night our meetings continued. Then, Susie and I came down with dysentery, and I was also experiencing symptoms of an island disease which some said could be fatal. I was taken to a local hospital, but our 30-day visa ran out before I could be fully examined. Immigration officials insisted that we leave Tonga, and that was why we were now in the middle of what seemed like a storm of hurricane proportions.

Some of these things ran through my mind over and over again as I lay in my Morning Star bunk, drifting in and out of delirium. For 40 days, the sea battered against the hull of The Morning, and I am convinced that a lesser ship would have been broken in half. Jim McVicar's inspired workmanship held together though the sea was trying to take us apart bolt by bolt. It was no comfort, though, to recall that at least three of the seven previous Morning Stars had gone down at sea.

After 40 days, the seas calmed and the sun broke through enough so that Brendon could get a navigational reading. He discovered that we had been driven over 400 miles, surging above hundreds of great reefs. But we had not run aground once, and we were exactly, perfectly on course!

Susie was still deathly ill, but I was well enough to take the wheel and give Brendon and Mike a rest. Brendon collapsed in sleep by the helm, and I steered a course for American Samoa.

Why had God caused us to go through such an awful nightmare? I asked myself. Couldn't He simply have made the immigration people extend our visas?

I had been hallucinating for days, unable to distinguish fantasy from reality. And suddenly I saw something that I knew had to be a hallucination. But I didn't care.

I found myself in such a state of ecstasy that it just didn't matter whether I was imagining things or not. I don't know if I was in that state for 10 seconds or 10 minutes. But finally, I felt that I had to know for sure. I kicked Brendon sharply on the foot, and he awoke with a start.

"What's wrong!? What is it!?", he said, probably fearing that the storm was beginning again.

"Brendon, look!" I half-whispered, pointing at the sky. "Tell me— what do you see?"

Brendon followed my pointing finger with his eyes, and gasped. "Brother Lewis! I see the Lord!" Clearly outlined in the clouds was a figure that looked just as you would imagine Jesus would look. I felt like Noah must have when he saw his first rainbow. And in my heart there came a calm assurance. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee— Jesus doesn't always take us out of the storm. Sometimes He takes us through it.

Even though none of us would ever have chosen to go through that awful experience, somehow we were all bonded closer to one another and closer to the Lord. It was as though we had died anew to ourselves, and risen again with the Lord.

When we reached the port of Pago Pago, Susie went to stay with some missionaries for a short recovery period, and I flew back to the States.

Since I returned, I have seen God move in and through Global Youth Evangelism in greater fashion than ever before. God has given us a concept for "mini-Bible school" courses based on the studies taught in our Bible training centers, and today over 500 churches in the United States are conducting Bible classes using our materials.

Meantime, The Morning Star is back in California after serving for a total of two years in the South Pacific. It is being outfitted for another missionary journey.