

Turn Back Time in Guyana

Charles and Mary Love

THE END OF THE EARTH” MIGHT have meant “the end of the river” for missionaries Charles and Mary Love. Travelling by land rover, ferry, speed boat, and even canoe, the Loves did not let Guyana’s wild and wet terrain stop them from bringing the gospel to the Guyanese.

Mary said that Baptist missions considered Guyana “new work” when the Loves arrived in 1965, so they focused on evangelism and church development. Charles helped develop a theological training program for native Guyanese Christians who became the pastors of church plants. Mary cared for the Loves five children and worked alongside Charles in ministry.

The Loves learned the best way to build trust was by visiting families in their homes, which often involved hours of trekking to remote villages. In some families, men beat their wives and children if they came to church. The only way they could attend church was if the father had gone out

drinking on the weekend. For these situations, the Loves strategically visited the families and encouraged new believers in the safest way possible.

Young Believers

The Loves learned that children and teenage ministries were great ways to build the church. One of Mary’s favorite events was conducting a children’s nativity program every Christmas. She saved scraps of clothing throughout the year to make the children’s costumes. Even though Christmas was during Guyana’s rainy season, people came drenched in water to be a part of this tradition. “They were so excited, and their non-Christian friends and family would come,” Mary said. “The Christmas plays were visual, and those kids don’t ever forget that.” Charles lead children’s summer camps, where he witnessed many young people give their lives to Christ. The primitive camp was carved out of the jungle on a wide river, which also served as the

campers’ bathtub. Charles said there were piranhas in the river, but they stayed on the river’s other side. “So nobody worried about that!” he said. “No one ever got bit by a piranha.”

The Loves found that children were most open to attending church and learning about the gospel, so many new believers were young. “One of the problems was that these were first generation Christians,” Mary said. “They were children and teenagers, and it was very hard to reach the adults. Sometimes they made their kids stay home, and we would pick them up or they would walk to church. It took a while to build trust.”

Investing in Individuals

Over the years, many Guyanese children developed into strong Christians, and some work in ministry today. The Loves still keep in contact with their closest Guyanese friends. Mary shared a story about one student in her Sunday School class with whom she shares a special bond:

Gulie was a teenager who came from a poor Hindu family who worked in the rice fields. Gulie and her siblings attended church, where they all became Christians. One day Mary learned that Gulie was in the hospital. When she visited her, Gulie was so sick that she could not even hold up her head. “I took her to a cardiologist,” Mary said, “and he said, ‘Young woman, you are going to die if you don’t get a pacemaker. And you can’t get one here.’ Gulie began to cry, and the Lord put it on our heart to make inquiries.”

Determined to do all they could, the Loves contacted missionaries in Texas. They arranged for Gulie to have surgery at M.D. Anderson—if the Loves could get her there. Still desperately ill, Gulie travelled with Mary to Miami and then to Texas, where an ambulance was waiting for her. Within 24 hours, she had a pacemaker.

Gulie has kept in touch with the Loves, and in 2015, she and her husband, an orthopedic doctor from Cuba, came to visit them in the United States. Gulie and her husband live in Guyana and lead a house church. Gulie is just one example of the Loves’ life-long impact on the people of Guyana.

Trying Times

When communist leaders took over the Guyanese government, they were hostile to foreigners. Race relations between Africans and Indians was a constant issue, and the government

tried to convict the Loves of showing favoritism. They tapped the Loves’ phones and made them report the races in their churches.

“The Lord just made it so that they were well balanced out,” Charles said. We ran about the same number of churches [among each race] . . . so we managed to stay during the difficult time.”

At one point, the government did not allow missionaries to enter the country. Three missionary couples who worked with the Loves had gone to the US on furlough, and they were unable to return. Nevertheless, the Loves never desired to leave.

“We never really felt fearful about it,” Charles said. “We knew God was going to protect us, and we were going to hang in there.” During this time, the Guyanese supported the Loves and truly served as their family. “The Guyanese are a joyful sort of people,” Charles said. “They’re positive and enthusiastic. I think we just experienced with them the joy of the Lord. We trusted in the Lord and were having a good time, in spite of what was going on.”

Unexpected Journeys

Even though the Loves moved back to the United States in 1993, the Lord was not through using them for missions. They moved to the island of St. Lucia in the Caribbean for 15 months, serving for a missionary family on leave. There they met Chinese young adults who were working 12 hours a day in a garment factory without air conditioning. The manufacturer was exploiting their work, and the Chinese were exhausted and homesick. The Loves befriended the



Charles Love, Mary Love, Ruby Collina (volunteer), Dr. Bob Becker (dentist volunteer), Guyanese pastor

workers and opened their home as a safe haven.

“They’d come over to our house every night,” Mary said. “They were so lonely.” The Loves played games with them, let them use their showers, and eventually started a Chinese church. “Some of them have become really strong Christians.”

The Loves’ experience with Chinese in St. Lucia led them to serve three years in China, where they taught English at a university. During that time, the Loves had special visitors: the Chinese friends whom they met in St. Lucia. “It was very emotional the first time they met us in China,” Mary said. “When they came in the room, we all started crying because we thought we would never see them again when we left St. Lucia.”

The Loves currently live in Abilene, Texas, and although retired, they still actively engage in missions. Every Sunday they work at their church mission, which ministers to the poor, homeless, and ex-convicts. They help serve breakfast, and Charles sometimes preaches. “We’re just very missions minded,” Charles said. “We just try to do outreach wherever we are.”



Guyanese youth meet at a Baptist convention.

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