

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

#394

Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will deal with two men from the Amazon jungles of Ecuador. Their names are Mincaye and Tementa. Both have a unique relationship with our friend Steve Saint. The first helped kill his father, and the second is the son of the man responsible for the killing. Both are now Christians and were in Joplin, Missouri on Mar. 21, 2000 to record their testimony at Good News Productions, Intl. A link to this video will be included later. Mincaye, whose name means "Wasp," passed away of natural causes on April 28, 2020. He died at his home in the tiny village of Tzapino. Since he had no birth certificate we don't know how old he was but guess that he was between 88 and 91 years of age.

These two natives call themselves "Huarorani," which means "The People." Historically, every encounter with this remote tribe had ended in death. From the sixteenth-century conquistadors to the seventeenth-century Jesuits, to the nineteenth-century gold and rubber hunters, all outsiders found in their territory had been killed. The twentieth-century confrontation came from oil companies. The Huarorani not only killed oil company employees who ventured into their territory, they even slipped into their camps and killed the unsuspecting men in their own quarters. The killers were called "Aucas" by outsiders. This is a derogatory word meaning "naked savage." These stone age people were not only killed by outsiders, they also killed one another. In fact, anthropologists have concluded that 60% of all deaths among the Huaroranis were murders within the tribe. By 1955 their numbers had been reduced to about 500 and they were facing extinction.

It was at this time that five American missionaries felt called of God to preach the gospel to the Aucas. The missionaries were: Nate Saint, Jim Elliot, Ed McCulley, Roger Youderian, and Pete Fleming. All five were killed by the Huaroranis on January 8, 1956. The initial contact, however, between the missionaries and the natives had been peaceful. Gifts had been exchanged and Tementa's father, Nankiwi, had even taken a couple of airplane rides with Nate Saint. Nankiwi is the man the missionaries called "George." The missionaries took movies and photographs of George and two Huaronani women. These pictures have been seen by millions around the world. It was Nankiwi's duplicity, however, that caused the missionaries to be killed.

Nankiwi had fallen in love with the sister of Dayuma and followed her into the jungle. Since her family did not approve of Nankiwi an old woman in the tribe followed them as a chaperone in an effort to prevent bloodshed. These were three Huaronanis who had a friendly contact with the missionaries just before the killing. On the way back to their village these three met a hunting party. The girl's brother, Nampa, was there, flew into a rage, and threatened to kill Nankiwi. At this point, apparently to divert attention from his own indiscretion, Nankiwi said the white men were going to kill them and they were fleeing for their lives. This vicious lie sealed the doom of five innocent men.

A young warrior named Gikita orchestrated the attack. He sent three women across the river to divide the missionaries and divert their attention. Then he rushed the three left on the beach. He slipped on a wet log, however, and his spears made such a loud noise that the element of surprise was lost. The missionaries were armed, but had vowed to die rather than kill. One by one they went out into eternity. The last to die was thought to be Pete Fleming, as he was most familiar with their language. He could have fled into the jungle and saved his life, but instead he stood still calling out: *'We just came to meet you. We aren't going to hurt you. Why are you killing us?'* At this point Kimo waded out and speared him to death. This remarkable encounter with men who would rather die than kill haunted the Huaronanis and was a principal factor in their conversion.

The wicked Nankiwi was soon speared by members of his own tribe. In typical Huarorani fashion the mortally wounded man requested to be buried alive. Death beneath the ground was thought to prevent the spirit from perpetual wandering. He crawled into his grave and requested his daughter. The mother dutifully strangled her to death and placed her by his side. Then Nankiwi asked for his infant son. The distraught mother was about to kill him too when she realized she would have no one to hunt for her when she was old. That infant who was spared, is Tementa, the man who came to Joplin with Mincaye.

Mincaye has not only been forgiven by Steve Saint, but even accepted as a part of his family. When Steve's son Jesse graduated from High School, his only request was that Grandfather Mincaye be brought to the states to share in the celebration. To see the love between Steve Saint and Mincaye is to see what true Christianity is all about.

Charles Darwin was a staunch defender of missionaries. He rebuffed their critics with these words: *"They forget or will not remember, that human sacrifices and the power of an idolatrous priesthood – a system of profligacy unparalleled in another part of the world – infanticide, a consequent of that system – bloody wars where conquerors spared neither women nor children – that all these have been abolished; and that dishonesty and intemperance, and licentiousness have been greatly reduced by Christianity. In a voyager to forget these things is base ingratitude; for should he chance to be at the point of shipwreck on some unknown coast, he will most devoutly pray that the lesson of the missionary may have reached thus far. . .The lesson of the missionary is the enchanter's wand. The house has been built, the windows framed, the fields plowed, and even the trees grafted by the New Zealander . . . The march of improvement, consequent on the introduction of Christianity throughout the South Seas, probably stands by itself in the records of history".* (Taken from the Journals of Research by Charles Darwin, pages 414, 425, and 505)

The link to the interview with Steve Saint, Mincaye, and Tementa is:

<https://vimeo.com/490993245>

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce