

Triumph and Tragedy



The story of Evangelist Federico Prieto Assmar

In the Fall of 1989, I was preparing to lead a Youth With a Mission Discipleship Training School in Juarez, Mexico. I received a call from a young man who was interested in attending the school, and he and I agreed to meet in our offices in El Paso, Texas the following day. Our conversations were all in Spanish, so I was a bit surprised when this young man showed up, because contrary to my expectations, he was neither Mexican nor Latin American – he was Dutch! Not only that, he looked rather like a vagabond; scraggly red beard, dirty clothes and an old, beat-up back pack slung upon his back. My curiosity was aroused. Who was this young man, and what was his story?



Henk Kaemingk had been in Mexico for nearly a year by the time we met, and preferred to be called by his Spanish name, Enrique. He told me he had only been a Christian for a relatively short time, so I asked him to tell me of his conversion experience. The story was quite fascinating! Tired of the routine on his family farm in Holland, Henk (Enrique) had cleared out his bank accounts and begun a traveling life. He was looking for meaning and purpose. Before leaving home, he accepted a Dutch Bible from his mother, who gave it to him in the hopes it would help him find what he was

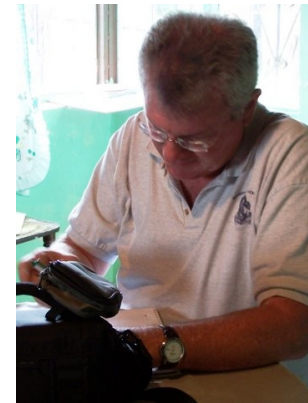
looking for. The family had always attended church in Holland, and had always been believers in at least a nominal way. Henk had believed in God, but his faith had never really affected how he lived day to day. He had never personally asked Christ to come into his life. Neither had he ever believed that only the Bible was the Word of God or that the Christian way was the only way to God. He did believe the Bible contained wisdom from God and was a good book, but that was about the extent of his faith in it.

After traveling for some time in the United States, Henk heard about the Tarahumara Indians of Mexico and made plans to travel into the areas where they lived. It seemed to Henk that these indigenous peoples, living close to nature as they did, would surely have more of a grasp upon the ultimate realities of life. He wanted to find them and spend time in their villages. This wasn't as easy as he had thought at first, for the Tarahumaras are a very reserved people and they live in very rugged areas of northern Mexico. How could he find groups of them and penetrate their culture?

In the beginning of his adventure, Henk traveled with a Dutch woman with whom he had only a casual relationship. Later, he came to Creel and they met another man who joined them in their travels. They went into the State of Chihuahua, visiting various towns in what's called La Sierra Tarahumara (the Tarahumara Mountains) By bus, train, on foot, and hitch hiking, they passed through such places as Creel in the mountains and Urique, a town located in the lower elevations. While staying in Urique, known as somewhat of a tourist area, he and his friends smoked pot and enjoyed a life of partying and social interaction with Americans and



other foreigners who were also in the region. They came to know a Mexican doctor there who agreed to take them to see the indigenous people of the area. From there they traveled to Batopilas, another town in the lower elevations. The Mexican doctor took them at times on backpacking expeditions to various locations where they saw Tarahumaras, but they never had any significant interaction with them. One



Pastor Warren Hoyt

day they hired a guide to take them up into the mountain country. Accepting their money, this man loaded their backpacks and other equipment onto the back of his little donkey, and the small group headed into the rugged uplands. But after only one day of travel, the man simply decided to renege on his offer, abandon the foreigners and return to his home. They pleaded with him, reminding him of their deal and his promises. They explained that they didn't know their way around and would be lost. But the man was completely unmoved and told them he didn't care about that; they were on their own! The group was dumbfounded, but there was no remedy for their situation. They were forced to try and make their way without a guide. After wandering about for one whole day, they came upon a Tarahumara Indian who agreed to guide them, and thought at last their problem was solved. But he also only led them for one day, for after hours of travel, his burro fell under the weight of their backpacks and refused to budge another inch! The Indian simply unloaded the backpacks and left the travelers. Once again, they found themselves on their own in the Sierra! Through various "adventures" of this kind, Henk learned about the difficulties of travel in the mountains and getting to know the Tarahumaras.

When he eventually separated from his two companions, Henk went first to a Spanish language school in the city of Cuernavaca. Some time later he moved to a small town back in La Sierra, and lived in a tent which he set up on a dirt floor on the inside of a warehouse. The warehouse was owned by an American doctor Henk had met. The doctor allowed Henk to stay there because his tent was no good for rainy weather, and the rainy season had begun.

While living there, Henk would sometimes visit with a group of young people, and drink tesquino, an alcoholic drink commonly consumed by the Tarahumaras. It was a crude sort of drink made from corn, which left broken pieces of grain in the teeth and beards of those who drank it.

The American doctor was an interesting fellow who helped the locals and even gave teachings or seminars on such common things as how to make peanut butter. People always came to his house, and Henk met various interesting people that way. One time, the doctor took him to clean out a source of water high up on a mountain. Henk traveled out of the area on short backpacking trips, but always returned to his tent in the warehouse. Being a rugged sort of individual, he was willing to live alone if necessary, but the desire to meet with Tarahumaras and spend time with

them never left him. He was told that they, more than any other tribe, kept to the customs of their ancestors and lived in the ancient ways. But the Tarahumaras did not welcome strangers, nor did they open themselves up to visitors. Instead, they tended to simply ignore strangers and remain aloof from them.

One day, the doctor asked Henk to go on an errand for him. He needed a liter of oil, and it seems the closest place to buy one was from some workers doing road construction in the mountains. Henk agreed to go purchase the oil and set off on foot. As he hiked along the mountain trail, he drew near to the area where the workers were widening a road with the use of dynamite and heavy equipment. Just as he yelled a warning at him were about to blast the spot, he made his way where, to his surprise, face with another man appearance caught tall and rugged-looking, beard and a bald head. that he was the son of Mexican woman.



stranger's appearance, Henk asked the man who he was and what he was doing there. It turned out his name was Federico Prieto Assmar, ("Lico" for short). Lico described himself as a Christian evangelist who traveled those rugged areas preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Henk asked if that included travel among the Tarahumaras, and Lico answered in the affirmative. "Would you be willing to take me to such places?" asked Henk. Lico somewhat hesitantly said that he would. So began their short (approximately three month) relationship.

From time to time, Henk would travel with Lico into Tarahumara country, often for 10 days to two weeks at a time. Both men carried backpacks and wore "huarachi" sandals made out of old tires and leather thongs. Neither cared much about appearances, so they wore plain, often dirty traveling clothes. They often walked single file through the forests and rough areas of the mountains, and usually spoke little among themselves. Lico was not a man of many words, and Henk was not yet

Americans or several Mexican families to take on his ministry! What a difference that could have made for him as well as the families he needed to care for!

But Lico either didn't know or didn't believe in waiting for such supporters. In those years, would it even have been possible to work in that way? Could he even have received the money down in those remote places? No one can be sure now.

And if Lico had delayed, waiting for a more "convenient" or "comfortable" arrangement, what would have happened to José and Lupe? To Henk? To Germinio? To the many others who heard the Word of God and came to saving faith through Lico's ministry? Would anyone have told them the way of salvation? Would they have lived long enough to hear the good news? Or would some of them be in hell today? Again, no one can be sure! We can certainly never judge this man or what he did with his life. Thank God, we are not called to judge – God is the only One capable of handling that.

What we can do is marvel, and praise God for the life of faithfulness and commitment Lico lived, and the people he touched. God certainly touched this former womanizer, drinker, and renowned sinner in a powerful way! We can let his life motivate us to serve the Lord in our sphere of influence with greater zeal. We can also pray for the unfinished work in his family. We can pray that God touches all of them, and shows them that He can be the Father they never knew, the husband they so needed. We can pray, and let our prayers be added to those of Lico, for I'm sure he prayed for them all. And we can also pray for the continuing advance of the work of God throughout the Sierra Tarahumara and other remote areas of the world. God is not finished yet! He is still seeking to save the lost in all such places. He is still looking for men and women who will leave it all behind to serve only Him!

the hurt, the sorrow, the confusion, the unfinished witness to all the children, brothers, and even Lico's own mother. "It's so sad really," I said.

"Not really," my friend shared back. "It's really quite typical. Many great men and women of God have sweet and sour stories like Lico's." And he proceeded to tell me of his own parents, and how God had used them in spite of glaring weaknesses. The conversation made me ponder even more.

In my view, Lico was totally wrong to leave his kids. God would have preferred him to love and serve them and win them to Christ, rather than abandon them to bitterness and sorrow. "What will it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his family?" is, I believe, an acceptable way to change a well-known Bible verse. True, the original verse doesn't speak about losing the family – it's about losing one's soul. But is the change really that improper? It doesn't seem so from my perspective and the way I understand scripture today. Couldn't God have provided for Lico's family

in such a way that he could fulfill his calling, and fulfill his obligation to the family (really several families) that he had brought into the world? I certainly believe so.

What about the American man who wrote to Silvia and spoke of supporting her? As an American missionary, I'm familiar with raising support. I know there are people "out there" who are willing to give money so others can serve the Lord. That's their calling, to support missionaries and servants of God. What if Lico had prayed for such supporters, and sought them out? He was used to getting by on very little. If only he'd found just two or three



very fluent in Spanish. So it was that they traveled hour after hour through the wilderness, and slept outside night after night around a campfire, or at times, in caves. Very little was said between them. Upon entering a Tarahumara village, Lico would bang pots and pans together and invite the people to come listen to the Word of God. He also sold items such as bolts of cloth, medicines, and the very pots and pans he used to announce his presence, or he traded these things for goats or foodstuffs. Sometimes



he served as something of a wilderness doctor, having knowledge of the rudiments of medicine. He could stitch up a wound, give injections, help in childbirth and prescribe medicines for basic needs. He preached everywhere he went, and Henk just listened without understanding much. Everywhere they went, Henk could see that Lico was highly esteemed by almost all the

people they encountered. Everyone respected him and welcomed him to the areas where they lived.

As they got to know one another more, Lico opened up and told Henk a few things about himself, though not many. He told about his life before becoming a Christian. He had been married and had been with various women besides his wives. He used to own cattle and a small ranch. He was of Arabic descent. He even told Henk that on two separate occasions in his life, God had actually spoken to him in an audible voice, calling him by his name. Upon his conversion, he had said goodbye to all these women except for one, his last wife and the daughter they had together. Eventually, he had left even them to follow the call to preach as a missionary to the people of the Sierra Tarahumara.

One night as they sat around the campfire, Lico looked at Henk and said, "Your whole life is nothing but vanity." He wasn't trying to win Henk over or convert him. He really didn't even like the fact that Henk was traveling with him. In fact, when Henk later became a Christian, Lico admitted to him that he would *never* have tried to convert him, because he (Lico) really thought Henk unreachable for Christ! He once told someone in Henk's presence that he didn't really understand why Henk was following him. So when he told Henk his life was vanity, he wasn't trying to convert him at all – he was just stating the facts as he saw them! Henk didn't really

understand Lico at first, but he didn't argue with him either. He just listened to his words and filed them away mentally. But he had to admit that even he himself recognized pretty easily the truth in those words!

Lico preached in every tiny town or village he entered, sometimes going door to door and other times preaching on the outskirts of the town. He would invite the people to a "talk," saying later in the afternoon he would speak to them the Word of God. Never did he say an exact time preferring instead to just say, "later on" . . . Frequently Lico would pray in Henk's presence, in a loud voice calling upon God. He would often say things Henk didn't understand because of both the spiritual and language barriers, some of which Henk interpreted in comical ways as children do their parents' prayers. Still, the important thing was, Henk heard those prayers and saw the lifestyle of the man praying them. Lico repeated his evaluation of Henk's lifestyle various times, saying always, "Your life is just vanity. You need to seek God." Henk sensed it was true, but didn't really understand or know what to do about it all. He believed there were various concepts of God which were all true and it didn't matter which religion one believed as long as he/she was sincere. Henk knew some things from the Bible, but had never seen the common thread between all the stories or understood what its point really was.

The strange thing is, Lico didn't really pursue Henk's evangelization. He simply lived the Christian life in front of him, setting a really strong example of dedication to a cause. Henk was intrigued, so he dug out the Dutch Bible his mother had given him and began to read it on his own. He had never really read it before, though he already believed in God. He just didn't know how to experience Him in his daily life. He particularly liked John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." But he had always thought of it in New Age terms, not truly biblical ones. He had even told some friends back in Holland that he was going to the States and to Mexico to find "the way."

Somehow, mysteriously, faith began to dawn in Henk's heart, the very same kind of faith Lico had. He experienced what's known as "the new birth" basically on his own, just by considering these verses in the gospel of John. He knew that Christ and His way of life was exactly what he had been looking for. He also knew instinctively that to believe in Christ meant also to serve him, and he had promised God exactly that some time before. He remembered on one occasion praying, "If you

a sense of humor, but we could quickly tell that he had no real comprehension of his father's ways or what had made him "tick." In reality, he had no childhood memories of his father. He had only come to know him that day in Urique, just days before his wedding. In one sense, he was glad to have met him. But at the same time, his father's past absence from his life left him without any real feelings for the man. He was willing to get acquainted and start a relationship it seems, but that simply never really happened.

"All my father ever talked about with me was God," he told me. "He never really talked about anything else." I asked him what sort of things his dad had told him about God. Lico Jr. shrugged. "He just said that God was everything, and that I needed to seek Him and have a relationship with Him." Needless to say, Junior just wasn't that interested in such a relationship. He didn't care much to hear about religious things from a man who, in his view, had abandoned him and his sisters at an early age. "I don't know why my father did what all he did," Jr. told me. "I only know that I would never treat my children the way he treated us. I would never leave my kids."

My comrades and I felt sad hearing these things. We prayed for the family after eating, and gave them all hugs before leaving. They really had received us as if we were long-lost family members. It was quite special. Once again, I was overwhelmed with the bitter-sweet reality of Federico's story. It truly was a story of both triumph and tragedy!

It took many hours to drive north through the desert and cross the border once again into the United States. We had lots of time to think and to talk, and let the things we had discovered "percolate" in our souls. Upon my return to our church, I shared the story with our Spanish-speaking congregation and with those who asked me about it. It was difficult to even explain what we had found out.

Some time later, I spoke by telephone to a seasoned missionary, the man who originally told me I should write this story up. "What did you find out?" he asked me. "Well," I said, the story wasn't as great as I had hoped." I proceeded to tell what I knew – the great news of Federico's self-sacrifice and dedication to God's call, the souls who had come to Christ because of his ministry, the churches planted, the eternal destinies changed, and the terrible news as well. I told of the families left abandoned,



in a local river when his future wife first saw him. “But the only gold he found was me!” she said with a mischievous smile. A spunky sort of woman in spite of her age, she knew nothing of Lico’s conversion, a fact which made me sad. The same was true of Lico’s younger brother. Though I desperately wanted to share the gospel with the two of them, the circumstances didn’t allow much to be said.

We talked for about 30 minutes or so, and were off to Lico Jr.’s house once more.

Once there, the man threw some firewood into a pit and started making us “carnitas” a typical Mexican meal of grilled pork with tomatoes, onions, lettuce and cilantro, along with corn tortillas and cold cokes. They were a very hospitable family and treated us very warmly.

“Junior” was a man in his forties, with the stout build and the rough hands of a construction worker, a big moustache, and the typical cowboy hat and big belt buckle commonly worn by men of that part of Mexico. He was friendly and open, with



allow me to know you God, whoever you are or whatever your name, I will serve you.” When the light finally dawned and Henk believed, he remembered that commitment and pledged to make good on it.

After opening up his heart to Christ, Henk was only destined to travel and spend time with Lico a short while longer. But he shared his conversion experience with Lico, and submitted himself to water baptism at the Lebanese/Mexican’s hands in a river in Chihuahua. This was a significant event, and the people who had come to know Henk came to see him baptized. That such a one as he had given his life to Christ made quite an impact upon all who witnessed his baptism. It was a powerful testimony in that region.

It was only a very short time after this that Lico told Henk he would be leaving that area and traveling to the south, to a place called La Palma. Henk asked Lico if he could go along with him, but Lico flatly refused him, saying it was a dangerous area of marijuana growers and criminals.

A short time later, Henk heard of a large Christian gathering scheduled to happen in Ciudad Juarez, on the US/Mexico border just across from El Paso, Texas. In his past in Holland, he had gone once to such an event, but had found it to be totally boring and irrelevant. However, this time, various circumstances conspired to make him feel he was to go. The conference was a yearly event called “Visión Juvenil,” and it was said that thousands attended it every year. Henk caught rides, and took a bus and a train, finally arriving in Juarez after a long journey. On the way he met another preacher, a Tarahumara man named Luis Osorio, who would later play a role in his ministry and help him work with the Tarahumaras.

Henk was quite impressed by what he saw there in his first experience with a huge number of Christian young people. One day, as he visited with some of them, a young man reached down and picked up a crumpled brochure off the floor. Scanning it quickly, the young man handed it to Henk, saying, “This looks like something that would interest you.” That brochure was written by me. It was announcing our DTS (Discipleship Training School), to be held at a date not too far in the future, in the very city of Juarez! As he read that crumpled piece of paper, Henk concluded that God was speaking to him through it, and giving him guidance for the next step in his Christian life. He would attend the school and learn about becoming a missionary!

Henk attended the DTS I directed for 5 months, listening to the teachings of various traveling Bible teachers, spending time daily in meditation, prayer and intercession, doing chores around the base and learning of God's missionary endeavors in the world. He also met his future wife there, Edith, with whom he would later have 4 children and start a missionary base in Creel, Chihuahua. At the conclusion of the school, I asked him to go with me to South America, and we traveled together for over a month in Peru, Colombia, and Venezuela.

Upon our return to the US, Henk joined up with YWAM and returned to La Sierra Tarahumara. He lived in various places, learning as he went along, and endeavoring to minister to Tarahumaras. Often his life was quite rugged. For three months, he was forced to sleep on the concrete floor of a small school and live with only the barest necessities. He gave classes in the Bible to a Tarahumara woman in the tiny town, with the permission of the woman's husband. Later he stayed in a stone house with no roof, helping another man put a new roof on it, and then in a cabaña made of wood. Eventually he would work with YWAM in Juarez again, as staff of other discipleship schools. He helped with the day-to-day running of those schools, and traveled with them on their outreaches. He and Edith got married during that time. These experiences were good training for him. But his heart was in La Sierra, and he eventually returned there full-time to start his own YWAM base.

I have since visited him there several times, to teach in his training schools and see what the Lord has done with him. There are now many buildings on his property, and he has a discipleship school every year there. Many have been trained to work among the indigenous of Mexico at that base, and I continue to feel very proud of Henk and Edith, their family, and their ministry in that place.

But what of Lico? What I had learned of him through Henk intrigued me, and I wondered if there might be a way to learn more. But life went on and I was busy, traveling here and there in my own ministry, working in YWAM and in a local church, and raising my family.

A year or two later, I took a small team from my local church down into Mexico again, to a small town called Cuahtemoc, Chihuahua. We worked with a small Assembly of God church there, doing door-to-door evangelism and speaking at the church in the evenings. The young pastor, a man named Herminio, struck me as a true servant of God. He was



experiences could easily fill them with resentment and hurt, and serve as a permanent hindrance to their faith in God.

Leaving their home, we headed toward the west, toward Hermosillo, our last point of contact with Lico's family members. Our old car gave us problems more than once on the trip through mountains and deserts to Hermosillo, but thank God, we did finally arrive and get settled into a hotel before midnight that evening.

The next day, I called Lico Jr., Federico's only son, and was pleasantly surprised to be able to reach him and make arrangements to meet. He and

his wife drove to our hotel shortly after receiving our call, and led us back through the city to their home. Once there, we conversed for some time in their living room before traveling a few miles to where Lico's mother and younger brother were currently living. From Lico's mother, who was at that time about 96 years old (it seems her exact birth date is not known!), I learned few new facts, for at her age, it was hard for her to stay on subject. We did hear about Lico's Lebanese father, and how he and his mother met and got married. It seems that the Arab man was panning for gold



take the only tortillas we have in the house and give them to another family instead of to my own.” We all understood and agreed completely.

“I told Lico,” Silvia went on to say, “Look, I’m not criticizing you or speaking against you. I respect you; in fact, I admire you greatly. Your dedication and commitment are really impressive, and I know you’re doing a great work for these people here in the mountains. But you aren’t helping me. You aren’t taking care of your daughter. We should be your first obligation.” Alas, Lico simply didn’t see things that way.

Interestingly, Silvia told me that at one point, when her husband was still alive, a certain American man heard of him and his ministry, and heard about his wife and daughter left behind. This man actually sent a letter to Silvia, in which he told her that he knew of her husband’s work, and felt



led of God to begin sending her money so that she and her daughter would be taken care of and have what they needed. “I don’t even know the man’s name,” she told me, “because it was written on a letter I kept, but those letters were destroyed by rain at one time. I don’t know where he was from or anything, and no money ever came as a result of his letter. But at least we know that one person wanted to do something of this kind, even if he never followed through.”

After eating with the two women, we asked if we could pray with them. I asked God to continue to provide for them, and to help them through their difficult situation in Arivechi. I so desired that the Lord would heal their hearts and bless them to draw near to Him, realizing that their negative

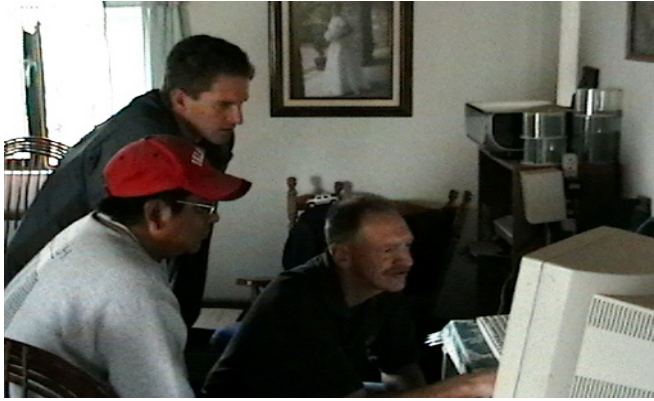
about my same age. One day, as we walked along, I asked him to tell me about his calling as a pastor and how he had gotten to the place where he was. As he began to tell me his story, my jaw dropped – he had been disciplined by Lico! After accepting Christ, he had prayed and asked God to help him learn and become a true disciple. One day he saw or heard of Lico, and suddenly, he felt within himself that God was speaking to him. He sensed that God was telling him to follow this man and learn the ways of Christian ministry through him. Thus began a several month long training period for Herminio. He described to me what life was like with Lico. Much of what he told me was already familiar. The huarachi sandals. The endless days of hiking through the mountains and sleeping outdoors. The few words. The strong example of Christian life and ministry which Lico lived out before him day after day. The burros. The pots and pans. The preaching in tiny villages in the open air or ministering one on one. The selling of cloth, medicines, pots and pans, and produce. The medical work. Herminio stayed with Lico for a short time, and then, just as suddenly as it had begun, he felt his time was up, and he returned to city life, later becoming a pastor.

But Herminio added one detail to the story I hadn’t heard before. He told me of Lico’s death. According to the young pastor, the rugged evangelist had been shot to death while praying for someone in an area where marijuana was cultivated. Herminio had heard that drug lords or drug growers had murdered him. Now I was even more interested in the story and wishful that I could find out more and perhaps someday, write about it.



In 2003, I traveled to visit Henk and teach at his DTS in Creel, Mexico, in La Sierra Tarahumara. Accompanying me were my wife and two of my daughters. During my week-long stay there, we talked about

Lico some more. I asked Henk if he knew how I could get more information about him. He quickly looked in a small notebook and gave me a telephone



number of a relative or associate in a place some hours away from where we were. I called these people, and was told they would be happy to speak

with me and give me more details any time I wished. But my wife and daughters had been on the road with me 5 weeks by that time, and they were not at all thrilled about continuing still longer, traveling the rough roads of Mexico to get information about some obscure evangelist. So, reluctantly, I had to put my curiosity on hold and return to the States and then to Florida, where we lived at the time.

In 2006, I accepted the call to pastor a church in El Paso, and my wife and I moved back there. During my years in Florida, I had come into contact with a man who had an unusual ministry among the indigenous of Mexico. This man, Dave McMullen, had spent almost half of every year for 30 years, traveling recreational vehicle, with his wife in a beat-up old spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ among the Indian peoples. His modus operandi was to go to areas where they worked as migrant harvesters and visit their camps. Each night, he and his wife, along with others who would accompany them from time to time, would show the Jesus movie and distribute CDs to all who would receive them. These CDs were recordings of the Bible and presentations of the gospel in every Indian language of Mexico. Over the years, Dave and his wife became self-taught experts on the languages and locations of these tribes, and they sought to not only reach them themselves, but to motivate others to do the same.



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One day in 2008, I received an email from Dave which caught my attention. He recounted how, years before, he had once traveled with a Mexican pastor to a very remote village in the mountains of Chihuahua or Sonora, Mexico, (the border between those states isn't clearly marked)

patient, and he had a really brilliant mind. He was very intelligent. My only complaint about him would be that he didn't support us. Of course," she added, "I suppose he thought that the ranch he'd left would supply us with what we lacked."

"You see," she explained, "My husband owned a small ranch, and he told me once in a letter to rent it out and live off the money. But I had big problems with his family and I couldn't do that. They felt the ranch belonged to them."

At this point in the conversation, Miriam began to set the table in front of us, and she brought plates of hot Mexican food for all of us. We paused to give thanks to God, then continued the conversation as we all ate.

Silvia went on to say that the family did not in any way want Miriam to rent Lico's ranch. There was quite a bit of wrangling about this matter, but in the end, the family sold the ranch, and never sent any of the proceeds to Silvia. "But what could I do?" Silvia asked. "All his brothers were US citizens, and had more money and connections than I. They sold that ranch and I was left with absolutely nothing."

At this point I couldn't help interrupting the story to explain to the two ladies what we thought about their situation. "With the understanding we have today," I began, "We see things very differently from how Lico would have seen them. With the knowledge and experience he had, he felt it was necessary to leave you and serve God by preaching the gospel to other people who hadn't heard it yet. There have been other great Christians of the past who have done something similar," I said. "For example," I continued, "Saint Augustine. He actually put his wife in a convent, so he could become a monk and a pastor, and serve God full-time. We in our day consider this an error. We believe the family must be the first priority, and a person called to ministry still can and *must* take care of his wife and family. The Bible itself says that a person who doesn't take care of his own family is worse than an infidel (1 Tim. 5:8). But unfortunately, your husband just didn't see it that way."

"The truth is," I went on, "Your story and that of your husband is a sad 'sweet and sour' mix if ever I heard one." She nodded in agreement, instantly understanding exactly what I was saying. "We believe in helping people, in being generous, and in reaching out. If we have tortillas and see someone who has none, we're willing to share with them. But if my own child needs something to eat," she continued, "I can't in good conscience

spoke to them about him had only glowing praise for him. He was a great man, and great pastor, a great servant of God for them. They all loved him, and they were all very thankful to Silvia for “allowing” her husband to be among them and minister to them. “Your husband was a very special man,” they all told her, “and we all highly respected him.”

“Why did this man kill him then?” she asked them. Then various of the local people proceeded to tell Silvia the same story we had heard before. They spoke of the demonized woman, and how her father went looking for help for her. Then Lico agreed to go and pray for her. But this jealous husband told him not to come around. Lico insisted that he was only there to pray, and the man did not need to fear or be suspicious. Some extra details about the moments before the shooting were added – the jealous husband struck Lico repeatedly with a stick, prodded him, told him he was going to kill him, and so forth.

A government official of the town gave Silvia the document on which the details of Lico’s death were recorded, and advised her to leave the area as soon as possible. “The people here are very bad,” he told her. “They are ignorant and they are suspicious. The brother of the killer knows that you are here. He knew that you were coming. He knows you’re going to want justice. You could get yourself into a lot of trouble, and there’s no point in it. Please, just leave.”

“But this is all so wrong,” Silvia answered him. “I just want to know what happened, and why it is that the person who killed him can get away with such a crime? My husband was only doing good for the people, bringing them the Word of God, bringing medicine, sharing food with them. It’s just not right!” Still, the official told her that most of his fellow city officials were at that moment in Chihuahua City, the capital of that state, so there was no one around to help her or to back up her claims. She eventually took the man’s advice and returned to her home in Arivechi, Sonora.

“That’s about all I can tell you,” she said as she wrapped up the story. “My husband was a wonderful man in many ways. The only bad thing about him was the way he abandoned me and Miriam, and left us without any support. But other than that, he was always a great husband and father. I am the best person to tell you about him, because I lived with him longer than anyone, and I was his legitimate wife. We loved each other, we always had good communication between one another, and really, there were no problems between us. He was a great man really – very respectful, very

with the intention of sharing the gospel there. However, upon arriving, they were surprised to find quite a few believers already living there. How in the world did these people come to Christ in that remote place? Upon investigating a bit, Dave and his Mexican companion discovered that an itinerant evangelist used to visit the area. The man was rugged and traveled alone, wearing huarachi sandals and sleeping out of doors at night. Rumor had it the man had been shot by drug lords. Dave told the story as a way of sharing encouragement and motivation to preach the gospel. But of course, I was interested in it for other reasons as well. I arranged to meet Dave, (who lives in Bisbee, Arizona) in a place called Alamogordo, NM. We met for coffee there and talked for a couple of hours. Dave urged me to find out all I could about Lico and write up his testimony in both Spanish and English, and I told him I was keen to do that very thing.

When my wife made plans to be out of town for a week in September of ’08, it seemed a good opportunity to begin my investigation of the life of this unusual man. Borrowing an old beat-up car from a friend, I asked a couple of members from my church to accompany me. I preached two services on a Sunday, then led a leadership meeting and ate at a church potluck. As soon as we finished those activities, we loaded up our little car and were on our way, stopping for the night in a little town called El Terrero, Chihuahua. A third friend, a missionary living in El Terrero, had agreed to take us further in his four wheel drive Suzuki Sidekick. The next day we traveled to the town of Madera, Chihuahua, where we were told some people knew Lico, and where, to this day, at least two of his daughters and perhaps one of his former wives also dwell. A local pastor there, whom I had met before, agreed to let us spend the night at his church, and told us he could put us in touch with these people.

While in Madera, we met two of Lico’s daughters and a lady named Lucy Rascón who had also met him during her childhood years. Lucy was our first contact for an interview, but since she had only known Lico years before, when she was still quite young, she could add little. She told us some details about his height and appearance, and told of his medical expertise and sales of cloth and other items. She knew him before his conversion to Christ, and knew of his reputation as a hard-partying man and womanizer. She also had been around him after his conversion, and she described him as a man who was very obviously a sincere Christian, very devoted to the ministry.

Leaving Lucy's house, we crossed the small town to meet Josefina, daughter of Lico by his third "wife" (the two were never legally married but lived together). While Josefina's own children milled around, she told



me what she knew of the man, admitting from the start that he had abandoned her and her mother when she was only two. She said she had seen him again after his conversion, when she was about 17, and then once again for the last time when she was 19. All Josefina knew about her father was that he was a womanizer and drinker, and a man known as

a doctor by the local people. She also knew he had been married to other women, and in fact, she shared with me that from time to time she had met with them and others of her siblings by these wives. Josefina seemed sad about her father, and only vaguely understood anything at all about his Christian life. I asked if I could pray for her and her family before we left, and she agreed to that. It seemed to me I was aligning myself with the prayers her father must have prayed for her and her mother before he died. Josefina told me that her mother was a very unforgiving woman and had no desire to even speak of Lico or have anything to do with anyone who did. For that reason, Lico had never been able to share the gospel very much with her or her mother.



Our next interview was quite a contrast. Yesmin was the oldest daughter of Lico by his first legitimate wife, a woman named Monserrat or "Monse," (pronounced "món-say"). Whereas Josefina radiated a sense of sadness, Yesmin was very joyful and talkative. I shared with her that I had gotten tears in my eyes when speaking with her half-sister. She warned me that

"Oh sure," she responded. "I used to go with him to places around here. I would sing and he would preach. We rode on horseback to different towns and villages all around this area." At this she showed me a photo of herself and Lico on two horses, with other people and horses in the background. It looked like a scene from some Western movie, but the two of them looked happy.

At this point in the interview, Miriam asked us if we'd like to eat with them. I was embarrassed, not wanting to impose, but they insisted, again demonstrating that great Mexican hospitality which I have learned to appreciate.

"I don't know what else to tell you about," Silvia said, returning us to the subject at hand. "I've told you just about everything I can think of." Then she continued, "We got the news some time later that he had been killed in San Ignacio, near Batopilas, and we were told his body was being taken to Madera. The mayor of Arivechi loaned us a little car, and we drove there, myself, Miriam, and my mother-in-law. It was the rainy season (August) so we had some hard times driving. At one point, we had to ford a river, and the water was so deep that it came up even with the hood of the car. But we made it to Madera and attended the funeral, then laid his body to rest."

"I wanted to bring his body back here to Arivechi," she continued, "But I didn't have the money. The pilot charged me for bringing his body up to Madera, and I had to sell some bracelets I wore, just to pay those charges. There was no money left to bring him back here."

After staying in Madera for three days, the women made their way back to their home in Arivechi. But Silvia only stayed there three days before leaving for Batopilas, accompanied by a brother of Lico's and another man who agreed to help them drive. They felt they had to go there to investigate and understand more about Lico's death. Their time in Batopilas was not very satisfactory however. It seemed the people were still frightened about what had happened. They were suspicious of outsiders, not knowing who they were and what they really wanted. Knowing the assassin's family lived around there, they weren't sure if Silvia and her family might be relatives, or what their motives might be for asking questions.

The one positive aspect of their experience was the many complimentary statements the people there made about Lico. All who

in that field here. But nevertheless, she got her education and could do it if she really wanted to. We survived and prospered by God's help."

"Three years later, we borrowed a car one time and returned to Urique, looking for Lico, but we couldn't find him," she went on. "I found people who knew him, but they told me he was a 7 day journey on horseback up in the mountains. We couldn't go there to find him – we didn't have that much time, and besides, I couldn't take my young daughter way up there on horseback! Sleeping in the woods and all that, it would have been too difficult and dangerous for us. And so," she explained, "We had to return without ever seeing him again."

A month passed before Lico even became aware that his wife and daughter had tried to visit him. He was very sad to hear that he had missed them, and wrote Silvia a letter expressing his sorrow over the whole incident. Because of his constant travels to visit the various tiny towns and villages scattered over that mountainous region, getting in touch with him was just impossible during those times. But Lico told Silvia in the letter that he planned to return to Madera for a visit soon, and asked that she come there with Miriam so they could have some time together. Unfortunately,

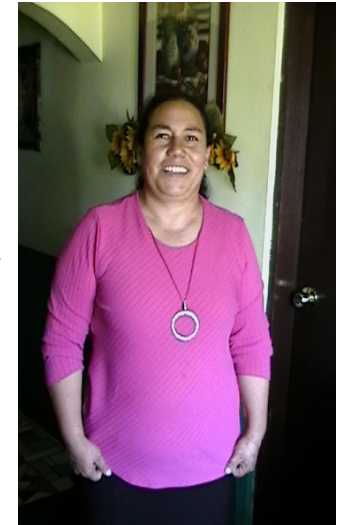


that reunion was not to be, for shortly after that, Lico was to meet his death at the end of a gun barrel.

"I want to ask you about the earlier days of Lico's ministry, when he was just getting started," I said, looking for some clarification. "Did you and he ever travel together to minister in churches, maybe here in Sonora?"

we were likely to all have tears in our eyes as she told me her stories about her father. I braced myself, and turned on my digital recorder.

Yesmin told the same story of her father's early life as the others had; the many women and families, the abandonment, the drinking, the medical work, the traveling. Her father had another woman before he married her mother, and another child by her. He also had various "affairs" while married to her mother, and some children by these women, some of whom Yesmin knows and has contact with to this day. It seems she and her brother were taken away from their mother while still very young, (she was two or three, her brother still in diapers) and carried from place to place with their rambling father. Yesmin broke and wept even telling of their separation and divorce.



Her father took them to a ranch called "El Salto," where they lived for some time. At times he would leave them with their uncles or aunts, with neighbors, or with friends of their father, so that he could travel to different towns and villages and ply his trade as an itinerant doctor and salesman. Life was very hard for Yesmin and her siblings. During one period, the

children lived with an uncle near a river where people caught large fish and cleaned them right on the shore. The children mostly went about without any shoes, being very poor in those days.

Once when her father was gone for a lengthy period, she stepped on a fishbone which pierced her foot very deeply. The wound became infected and gangrene set in. As the



swelling increased, it seemed she might not survive. Her uncle decided to travel to another small town where he thought he might get some medicines or medical advice, his brother not being present to help Yesmin. But upon arriving in the other town, the uncle began to drink and soon forgot his little niece. The situation was becoming desperate.

Out of nowhere, her father returned, riding upon his horse. He later told her that he had been riding for three days before arriving there. But her situation was so desperate, he scooped her up in his arms, mounted his horse once again, and took her to a place where he could get the antibiotics she needed. That horse had to carry both of them an entire day, which was very exhausting for all concerned. He lamented that his own daughter would be in such shape while he tended to other families' needs. After a full day on horseback, they arrived at a place where he could get some antibiotics and inject her. Her body quickly began to heal, and in one more day she was restored.

At that, her father left her there with a family he knew, and traveled on. He had a girlfriend in that area. From that point, Yesmin did not see her father again for some years. Her mother came to get her in that place,



though Yesmin does not know how she came to know of her presence there. Monse already had her other sister and her brother Lico with her.

But Yesmin told me her father

was exemplary. "I'm not saying this," she said, "because he's dead, and it's what I *should* say. I'm saying it because it's true." Her memories of the years with her father are mostly very happy. Whereas other family members I met were somewhat bitter about their early lives and how their father had treated them, Yesmin spoke of him only with admiration and respect.

he would give away to them." She continued, "May God forgive me, but I couldn't help feeling some resentment for all of this. Here we were, practically starving ourselves, struggling even to make a decent place for ourselves to live, and yet Lico was adamant about staying where he was and not helping us. His entire focus was on the people over there."

She recounted to me how she had taken her daughter on one of those trips, and they had traveled first by train and then by hitching rides, all the way to Urique, where they stayed for 15 days with Lico. It was an arduous journey for Silvia, having to take care of her young daughter, not having money, and being forced to ride for hours on the train, then stand along the roads looking for a ride. She was glad to be reunited with her husband of course, but the situation there in Urique was very sad. The people lived in desperate poverty, and indeed, there was no one there who could minister the Word of God to them except for Lico.

After being there a while, Silvia pleaded with her husband to come home to them. "Look," she said, "You have to come back with us. Here there is nothing for you. Your life is difficult and you can't get any money to live on. And our life without you is worse. We need you! You know how much Miriam loves and needs you. She cries all the time for you. Please, you've done what you could – now think of your family and come back home!"

At this Lico responded very firmly without a sign of wavering. "I have made a vow to God," he told her. "No longer will I even touch a woman – I live only to serve the Lord." But Silvia answered back, "I'm not looking for physical affection on anything like that. I just need your support to make it and raise our daughter."

Nevertheless, Lico would not be persuaded. "I have made this vow," he repeated, "and besides, now there are all these people here who depend upon me. I can't leave them." Silvia understood, though it pained her greatly. "My husband and I understood each other," she explained. "We never really fought or argued – we just discussed these things and accepted one another's opinions. But I have to say that we really suffered because of all this." Then she continued, "But thank God, we made it through, Miriam and I. I was able to make a living and build this house and our little business. And look at Miriam – she's a young lady now! She got her education, even getting a degree in English and becoming a teacher. She's not able now to practice that profession, because there's no work

he added to her insecurity and sense of self-doubt. But in his letters and when he was in her presence, Lico tried to assure her that this was not the case at all. He still loved her, and she was the only woman for him. It was the call of God that motivated him, nothing else.

I interrupted her just for a moment. “How long had you been married when he came to the decision to leave like this?” Silvia paused and asked her daughter how old she was when her father left. Miriam answered right away, “He left when I was nine,” she said. “Well then,” Silvia quickly responded, “we had been married for 11 years.” “So then,” I went on, “did he start off by taking short term trips, just leaving for a while and coming back?” “No, no,” she replied. “He left for good the first time. He would call me from time to time from wherever he was, and tell me what was going on. He would ask about Miriam – ‘How’s my little girl?’ he would ask. And two or three times he sent money, but that was all.” After that, he never sent money again.”

Silvia went on with her sad and difficult story. “He left me with just three tiny rooms here. We didn’t have a door yet, or any windows. I had to put suitcases or boxes in front of the opening, so no wild animals would come in at night. I slept in front of the doorway, because I was afraid someone might come in at night and attack us. We had no electricity, only an old flashlight, which I would use at night to watch for scorpions, afraid they would sting Miriam. We suffered so much in those days! I had to speak with the mayor of the little town of Arivechi. I asked if we could have a little restaurant here, so I could sell meals and try to make some money for myself and my daughter, and he gave us permission. The mayor gave permission, saying he would give her 90 days to see if the restaurant could survive, and if it did, he would register it officially as a business. We made it day to day, and my clientele grew. As they came to eat here, they saw the dire straights we were in, and some were generous and contributed building materials so we could finish the house. Gradually we purchased windows and a door, put in wiring and electricity, and made ourselves a decent place to stay. But life was so hard in those days!”

At this point, Miriam spoke up, “And we made some trips to see my father over in Chihuahua,” she added. “Yes,” Silvia agreed, “Twice we went to be with Lico. But we saw that where he was, there was even less money than where we were, so there was no way for him to ever send us any – the people there were so poor, that what little he received in offerings,

As she grew up, Yesmin passed through various phases of life, a few years with her father, the next few with her mother, then back with father again, back with mother, and so on it went. From the age of 12 – 22, she lived with Monse, and never saw her father at all. When she was 13, the family received news that Lico had died, and they were all grieved. However, some time later they learned that this had been a false alarm, he was still alive.

At 14, Yesmin heard the gospel and accepted Christ as her Savior. Her life was transformed and she began a new life with God at its center. But she so desired that her father, whom she had always loved, would also find the joy she had found in Christ. To that end, she began to pray fervently and even ask others to pray with her. Her sincere prayer was that her father would come to Christ. She pleaded with God for this day after day. She even made plans to go on horseback to visit her father, though such a trip would have been arduous. This didn’t work out, but she continued to pray. And she added one further request – that not only would Lico become a Christian, but that God would so work that she would be able to know that he had.

Yesmin met and married her husband, and found that she then had even a greater desire to see her father, and a stronger wish that he would become a Christian. She had sent a letter to her father inviting him to her wedding, but he never came. Her first child was born, and still, her father didn’t come. But when her second was born, Lico finally came to see them. This was a great surprise and blessing, but he wasn’t yet a Christian at this point, and disappeared again. Yesmin continued to pray faithfully and diligently. Meanwhile, her brother Lico (Jr.) was going to get married, and he wanted his father to attend the wedding. Yesmin sent a letter to their father, inviting him to the wedding, but not really expecting him to come.

You can imagine the pleasant surprise she felt one day at the age of 22, when there came a knock at her door, and there stood her father! Not only had he answered her letter and agreed to come visit, but after 8 years, Yesmin’s prayers had finally been answered. Lico declared to her that not only was he a believer now, but he had dedicated his life to Christian service, and had in fact been traveling and preaching for five years. He was convinced that God was calling him to be a full-time missionary, and was to leave their area to travel somewhere else. He claimed that God

had shown him that he would go to a place which would be made known to him by his son. The invitation to his son's wedding Lico took as the sign from God. He traveled by train down to Urique, Chihuahua for the wedding, and upon arriving there, became convinced that was the area the Lord was calling him to. He stayed in the only hotel in the area for days before revealing himself to Lico Jr. During those days, the father observed his son, knowing who he was, and yet Lico Jr. had no idea who the man he saw around town was. The son was concerned that his father, who he had invited, had not shown up, never realizing that in fact he was staying in a room right next door. One day they all went for a swim in a nearby river, and Lico's father was also in the same river. One of their

company said, "Look at that bald man over there," not realizing it was a relative. Soon after, they all went to a store. The son entered the



store, and the father waited outside, determining whether or not this would be the time he would finally go ahead and reveal himself. Entering the store behind his son, Lico senior tapped Lico Jr. on the shoulder, and said "Son." Turning around, Lico Jr. looked at him without any recognition whatsoever. The father saw his puzzled look and spoke to reassure him. "I'm your father," he told him, and they embraced one another for the first time in many years. In the remaining days before and just after the wedding, there were further opportunities for father and son to converse and get to know each other, at least to some extent. After the wedding, Lico Jr. and his new bride left the area and eventually ended up in Hermosillo, Sonora. Lico Sr., after attending his son's wedding, was sure that area was the place God had called him to. He remained in that part of the Sierra for the

and decided to seek out a local church where he could go and hear more. It "happened" that one of Lico's sisters was a believer, and she and her husband, when they heard of Lico's interest in the radio program, invited him to visit their church in Arivechi. Together, he and Silvia started going there regularly. It was in that local church that Lico finally bowed his knee to Christ and accepted His salvation.

Lico took the things of God very seriously, and attended the church very faithfully. He studied his Bible every day, asked questions of his pastor, and began to learn all he could. It wasn't long at all before he began to preach the Word himself, in Arivechi, and anywhere else God opened a door for him. Silvia wasn't sure exactly of the time frame, but she thought that it was only two years after his conversion that Lico came to her one day and told her he had taken a very serious decision. He had decided to serve the Lord whole-heartedly, and to preach His Word. Not only that, but he was going to do it in La Sierra, not there in the Arivechi area. "There is a precious seed that must be sown," he told Silvia, "and it's the Word of God. There are many areas out in the mountains, where the people have no knowledge at all of the Lord or His Word. I must go to them."

This news was not very happy for Silvia. Their house at that time consisted of only three little rooms, and they had intended to expand it and build it more solidly. There was no work in their town, and Silvia had no work or way of making any money. The evangelistic work Lico was considering was certainly not a paying proposition, for the people to whom he would go had less than he and his family. Not only so, but their child, Miriam, was still quite young. How could this be a wise plan?!

But Lico was insistent. He would go and he would preach. "Don't worry," he told Silvia, "I'll send you money whenever I can." Silvia certainly did not want to hinder the call of God or interfere with something He might be doing in and through her husband. But at the same time, she was very concerned, and many negative thoughts flooded her mind. "Maybe he wants to get away from us," she thought to herself. "Maybe he no longer loves us, and this is his way of getting out of here." She never spoke any of this to Lico, but kept it all inside. Still, the whole situation was very, very hard for her to take. She had to endure long periods of time without her husband, and she often thought that perhaps she just wasn't the woman he really desired to be with. Being much younger than

first called her, and if it had not been for Yesmin who called her and vouched for us, she would never have consented to the interview at all. “You see,” she said, “We didn’t know if you were maybe from the family of the man who murdered my husband. A person can’t be too careful these days. The man was crazy, and we have heard rumors that he is out of prison and might want to punish us for the time he had to serve.”

We could certainly understand Silvia’s concerns, but we explained that ours was a spiritual interest. We were believers, interested in Lico’s Christian testimony. I explained that furthermore, I was a pastor in Texas, and wanted to write up his story in order to share it with any who might be interested, and I had been specifically asked to write it up by a missionary who traveled in those same areas of the Sierra Madres. The two ladies warmed up considerably after that, and began to speak freely about their husband and father. I set my digital recorder on the table, took another sip of orange soda, and we began the interview.

“When did you and Lico get married?” I asked. “In 1975,” she responded, “In a mining town called ‘El Porvenir.’” “Were you Christians at that time?” “Not at all,” she answered. “Well then, how did you and he become believers?” I asked. “Do you know how Lico got saved?” She responded in the affirmative, and I became excited – no one to this point had been able to tell us this! “You see,” she began, “My husband and I used to live on a small ranch, and during that time, we started listening to a radio program put on by a preacher named Brother Galvan.” It seems that Lico himself heard of the program, and he began to listen to it of his own accord, remarking to Silvia about how interesting it was. He urged her to listen to it as well.

She was quite pleased by this development, because she knew of her husband’s past life, the many women he had been with, and his hard-drinking, partying ways. She had always been insecure regarding his love for her because of this history of his, and had always feared he might be unfaithful to her. His interest in a Christian radio program was a very positive thing in her view, and she hoped that it might influence him toward settling down and living a life of faithfulness and goodness. She wanted to be the last woman in his life.

This was exactly what happened, because Lico became a very committed listener to Brother Galvan’s program every day. As he listened, he became convinced of the truth which the radio preacher expounded,

next five years of his life, traveling about as an evangelist, preaching and reaching people for Christ.

Of course, Yesmin was thrilled to see her father again, now as a dedicated believer in Christ, and her relationship with her father was reestablished on the day he first showed up at her house. Over the next few years, she and her father would be able to visit one another only rarely, but they did exchange frequent letters, one of which she shared with me. Lico was able also to see his former wife, Monse, and the two of them spoke amicably, and asked each others’ forgiveness now that both of them were believers. Both had new spouses by this time, but they were able to treat each other with respect and wish each other the best.

Interestingly, Yesmin knew the record of all her father’s wives, lovers, and children. She recounted to me all the names of her siblings in their order of birth: Lidia, Betty, Yesmin, Lico (Jr.), Estela, Olivia, Josefina, Lourdes, and Miriam. Thus, there were nine children at least, the youngest of which is now 32 years old. There was one lover before the first wife, then Lico married Monserrat. Later he was with a woman named Candelaria, but he never married her. There were various affairs with different women over the years, and then the last wife was Silvia, a woman Lico married when he was over 40 and she only in her early twenties.

Yesmin’s recollections of her father’s ministry years were all very positive. She told me that she never saw him without a smile on his face, and never heard him complain about life in the ministry. He was, in her opinion, truly “a man of faith,” who spent much time in prayer, often alone



in the mountains. He would pray out loud for hours, and often fasted, sometimes because he had no food, and other times for spiritual reasons. She recalled that he had once fasted for 27 days. But there were many other fasts of shorter duration, during which he ate nothing and drank only water.

His life as a servant of God was very difficult, for it required him to travel constantly, often on foot or on horseback, sometimes with a burro in tow. He would carry what few personal items he owned with him in a backpack, and would usually sleep outdoors. He made his own tortillas and washed his own clothes in the local rivers. The letter Yesmin showed me told how at various times he had known the Lord to do little “miracles,” such as preserving his tortillas, and making them stay fresh long beyond the normal time, (up to 8 days) because they were his only food supply.

On one particular occasion when he had gone to higher than usual elevations, the weather turned far colder than he had expected or packed for. It seemed he would freeze to death one night. But he prayed and asked God to give him warmth, and somehow, his body felt warmer and he was able to make it through that night. It was as though God Himself covered him.

Lico would walk for days, and he would never pass by a place of human habitation without at least trying to reach the people for Christ. He would take risks and hike down into valleys or up mountain slopes to reach people wherever they might live. Many would welcome him and accept his message, but many others would not. Sometimes he would suffer abuse or persecution. There were many death threats. Sometimes people would spit upon him or throw rocks at him. On one occasion, a family allowed him to speak to them, and the time came for them to eat, so they invited him to join them. But the woman of the house made a clear distinction between how she treated him and her husband. She gave good food, including meat, to her husband, and only beans to Lico. But he didn't complain or say anything about it. At night on some occasions, when he was trying to sleep outside, people would come around and threaten him. Sometimes he would be aware of people lurking in the shadows, watching him and seemingly plotting to do him harm. Yet none of these things ever stopped him from carrying out the ministry to which God had called him. He was faithful to the end.

however, than the engine once again died and we were forced to remain there another 40 minutes until the capricious little vehicle finally started up again. I used that time to walk around and take some photos of the washed out bridge, our car, and some of the scenery of the area.

Once the car started again, I drove it up the hill, with my companions Rick and Frank running along behind me. The car didn't have the strength to carry their weight up the hill! Once we reached the top of that rough and steeply inclined dirt road, I took them aboard again and we proceeded through lower and hotter country toward Arivechi. In spite of all our mechanical problems, we did finally arrive there around 4 in the afternoon, stopping at the home of Lico's last wife Silvia and their daughter Miriam.

Silvia and Miriam welcomed us into their home and promptly provided us with cold drinks, in a typical display of Mexican hospitality. But I could tell they were a little suspicious of us. Sitting at the dining room table with my companions, I began the conversation by thanking them for being willing to talk with us about Lico.



Silvia did the talking at first. “Look,” she said, “We’ll be happy to talk with you, but first, we’d like to know who you are, and why it is that you want to know about Lico in the first place.”

I proceeded to tell her my reasons for being there, how I’d heard about her husband, how the idea had come to me to write about him over a process of several years, where we had started, what we had learned, and who we had met with to this point to learn about Lico. As I explained these things, she seemed satisfied, and I could see both her and Miriam relax. She confessed that in fact, she had been a bit uneasy when I had

little car had some sort of electrical problem which made it stop running every couple of hours or so. We tried all sorts of things in an attempt to rectify the problem, but we never did have any real success. The car would run just fine for an hour or two, or maybe even three. Then suddenly, it would simply die and we'd be stranded, sometimes in very inconvenient places! There was nothing for it however. Our only recourse was to simply wait for 30 minutes to an hour until the car would start up again and take us on for another couple of hours before repeating its little break-down ritual.

We traveled this way through the mountains, into the state of Sonora. There were various military checkpoints we had to pass through and various turns we had to make. At one point we thought we were lost, so we parked at one of these checkpoints to speak with the soldiers there. After spending time talking with the military commander and poring over maps, we finally concluded that in fact we were still on the right road, so we traveled on. We hadn't driven an hour beyond that check point however, before we came to a place where a bridge had been completely washed



out and it seemed all our trials had been in vain! We would surely have to turn back! As I tried to start up the engine and turn us around, it had another of its problems and wouldn't start!

As one of my companions did the usual things in an attempt to get the motor running, the other noticed that there was a dirt road leading down from the bridge to a place where it appeared we could ford the stream. Apparently others had come along that way, and not wanting to accept defeat, had driven down the embankment and crossed the river at another place, in order to continue their journeys. We decided to take a risk and follow their example.

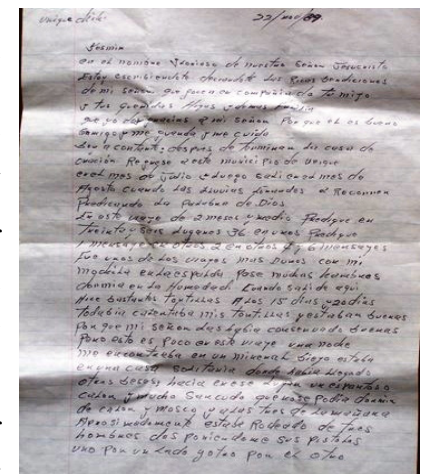
It took some doing to get our little car started again, but once it did, I drove it down the dirt road and across the small creek. No sooner was I on the other side

Yesmin told us what she knew of her father's demise. He was not killed by drug lords or marijuana growers after all, as pastor Herminio had told me years before, but rather, by a jealous husband. It started when he traveled to an area in the south of the state of Chihuahua. Coming to a town called La Palma, he preached in an area near the river, where people were washing their laundry. As he preached, one of the women said, "What that man is preaching is what we need around here." Lico took this as a sign that he was in the right area and needed to remain there endeavoring to advance the Kingdom of God. He stayed there for some time and was able to plant a church and raise up a young pastor. We met this pastor and his wife later on, and that story will come later. But according to Yesmin, the church grew to over 50 people, and from there Lico ranged out further, preaching and reaching people for Christ, and baptizing new converts. During that time, he went to an area called "Los Llanitos." It was there, in a part called "San Ignacio," that Lico would meet his end.

Interestingly, Lico seemed to know his time on earth was coming to an end, or at least his time in the Sierra. In the letter Yesmin showed me, he told of how the Lord had shown him he would soon face "a great trial," and that he would be leaving that area where he was working.

In an area some 6 hours south of Batopilas, Chihuahua, Lico received a call from the father of a demonized woman. This father asked Lico to pray for this woman, his daughter, because she was wild and seemed to be out of her mind. Lico had never met her or her husband or father before, but he agreed to come there and pray for her. However, to prepare himself, he felt it necessary to fast for three days. This he did, in company with two Christian brothers. Then the three of them traveled to the home of this woman and prayed for her deliverance.

According to Yesmin, the woman was in fact delivered from demonic oppression. However, her husband, who had been absent during the time of intense prayer, was greatly agitated that another man had come to help his wife and had been in their home. The man had a reputation of being



very dangerous, and in fact, it was said he had killed others before. The exact time frame was not made clear to me, so I am unsure whether the husband confronted Lico on the very day of his wife's deliverance, or whether it happened on another occasion.

But Lico came to this woman's house again, with two Christian brothers accompanying him, and knelt in front of a chair to pray. But as he prayed, the husband came home and was enraged. He confronted Lico, shouting at him and prodding him with a short stick, demanding that he rise up. Lico answered that he was praying and would rise soon enough. After praying for nearly two hours and enduring much abuse and scorn, he finally rose to his feet and went outside of the house with his persecutor. Kneeling down on the ground, he lifted his hands to heaven and, declaring himself to be ready, began to pray. The angry husband did not delay, but raised his rifle to shoot the evangelist.

At that moment, the woman who had been delivered, the wife of this jealous man, ran in between him and Lico, pleading with her husband not to shoot. But he threatened her, screaming that if she didn't get out of the way, he would shoot her. Knowing his ways, she did move out of the way, and her husband shot Lico through the head, spun on his heel, and ran off.

Apparently the other brothers were not in the immediate vicinity, but on the periphery, observing what took place. They left the scene and returned to their village of La Palma, where they reported Lico's death to the authorities. An investigation was made, Lico's body was brought back to La Palma, and then



and I started out in his dilapidated tow truck (I wondered if the tow truck might need to be towed!) But as we reached the edge of the town, there was my car! My traveling companions had attempted to start it, "just in case," and to their surprise, the engine cranked right up! They drove into town and parked on the outskirts to watch for me. Thank God, I did see them, to my utter shock! Together we turned around and returned to the mechanic's shop, located outside of his home.

The man thought our fuel pump was the problem, so he sent me walking to the nearest parts store to buy one. As he dropped our fuel tank and



replaced the pump, I was able to share the gospel with his aged and crippled mother, who told me she had been in a car accident two years before and still had a lot of pain and very reduced mobility in her right leg. Others in the family listened as I spoke with her, and she also allowed me to pray for her healing.

By the time the mechanic had replaced the fuel pump, it was dark, and we felt it was too late for us to proceed to Arivechi. We decided to spend the night in a hotel after first eating some good Mexican food in a local store/restaurant. As we were settling in for the night, the mechanic banged on our door. He had come to borrow money! I was rather uncomfortable speaking with him, because I sensed he was drinking and wanted the money for more liquor. But the only way to get him to leave was to give him a couple of bucks, so I finally relented and did so.

The next day we continued our journey, but it was to be a very long day! It turned out that the fuel pump was not the problem after all. The

a service. Yet by God's grace they have not surrendered to fear or discouragement, but have continued to believe and to follow Christ and lead others to Him.

We were very blessed to have been able to meet them, and promised to remember them in prayer. As we finished our interview, we walked together to one of the few restaurants in that small town of Batopilas and ate together before returning to the hotel and helping them get a room for the night. Before leaving them, we all bowed our heads and hearts in prayer, asking God to protect them and to continue to use them in what to us was a remote and difficult place.

It was already dark as we left Batopilas, and started the long, slow drive back along the curvy dirt road to Samachique, where we spent the night in a small shed. The next day we drove on to Creel and visited a couple hours more with Henk and Edith and their family. Around 10 am we left them and drove to a place called Guerrero, where we ate with Tim and his wife and traded cars. Saying goodbye to Tim and Susie, we headed west toward Arivechi, Sonora, intending to arrive there late that afternoon. It was not to be however, for as we wound our way higher and higher into the mountains between Sonora and Chihuahua, our little car let us down,



dying suddenly along the road. I forded a little creek and walked to some nearby farmhouses to ask

where I might find a mechanic, but none were to be found there in the mountains. As a result, I was forced to hitch a ride back to the last town and find a mechanic. A pickup truck with a tire store's logo on the side picked me up, and the driver, who turned out to be a new Christian, took me back to the last town we had left and helped me find a mechanic. He

carried by small plane to the city of Madera where it was laid to rest.

After we talked with Yesmin, she had one of her sons guide us to the cemetery where Lico's tomb is located. Yesmin said that her father had



told her he would never return to his homeland of Sonora, but that his family members in that area would instead come to him in Madera.

Eventually, the murderer was arrested and spent time in prison (some 8-10 years). He was released in '98 or '99. So it was that the life of Federico came to an ignominious end. But he died serving His Lord. And just as he had said, he would not be staying long in that area of the Sierra. God would be moving him on, and would take him far away. Lico didn't



know where, but he told Yesmin that he knew he would be going far away, where Yesmin would not be able to see him any more. Even hearing that news, she felt a tremor in her spirit, and thought, "What place would that be which would be so far away that she could never see him again?"

The only place she could think of was Heaven, and as things turned out, that's exactly where Lico was going.

He had been gone for some time, and the family members were beginning to believe it was time for him to return to visit them. However, Yesmin had a premonition that he would never return. One day, she was making bread when a pastor from the area came by to visit. He did not tell her straight out that Lico had died. Instead he said, "I have some bad news for you." She asked what that might be. The pastor told her that her father was very ill. This was a Mexican way of breaking bad news as gently as possible to family members, so as to not be too abrupt.

A telegram had been sent to a town near Madera, and then carried by train to Yesmin that she should go to see her father. Her heart sank upon hearing this. She asked, "Is this true, he's very ill?" The brother then broke down and told her the truth, "Your father is dead." Everyone wept upon hearing the terrible news. Lico's body arrived shortly thereafter by small plane. He had served God five years in Sonora (with a few trips to the area of Madera, Chihuahua), and five years in La Sierra Tarahumara. He had known and served God for a total of only 10 years. Now he was in glory with Jesus Christ.

We ate with Yesmin and her family, and then left her home to return to the church where we were staying. Later in the evening however, she came by again, to bring us a cassette tape of her father's preaching and explain a few more details. We were so glad to have visited with her, and we appreciated her openness with us in sharing the sad details of her father's life and the life of her family. I later listened to the tape, and got a feel of her fathers preaching style, which was very Pentecostal, very strong and very bold.

Leaving Yesmin and the area of Madera, we headed south and east to the town of Creel, Chihuahua, where we spent the night with Henk and his family. I interviewed him for more than two hours, recording everything he said. He filled in more details than I had known about his experiences with Lico. One thing he said was that Lico had greater success with mestizo people than with Tarahumaras, and admitted that openly. He nevertheless never gave up on the indigenous people, but always tried to reach out to any of them that he could. And never in his ministry did he ever see great numbers of people respond to the gospel – always there were only a few.

on any longer as I am. Things are so bad, so desperate. Please, answer my prayer, and help me to continue in your ways."

The people of the little church were all in doubt about God. If He was so almighty, why had this terrible tragedy happened to His servant Lico?



Could He not protect His own? What good was it to serve God if there was no benefit of it in daily life, if one could not even expect his life to be protected? It was during that time of prayer that he suddenly felt that God spoke to him in a significant way. It seemed the Lord was speaking a verse of scripture directly to his heart – Revelation 14:13. Since he had no Bible there at the church, José rose up and went to his house, where he grabbed his Bible and looked up the scripture. Upon reading the verse God had given him, his soul was able to find rest, for the scripture said, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them." José realized that Lico had died "in the Lord," and was resting from his labors. He would receive his reward, for his works would follow him. But since in Spanish the word for "follow" also means "continue," the verse also encouraged José to believe that the work which Lico had started in La Palma would also continue, and he would be able to succeed as pastor. Somehow, he knew God would be with the little flock there, and things would be alright. From that spiritual encouragement, José rose up, and has continued the work of the Lord where he lives for more than 18 years, together with his faithful wife. They have gone through very difficult times and even faced persecution in their small town, recounting to me a time when angry locals actually fired shots into their little church building during

reduced visibility and storminess. José told me that the pilot expressed doubts about the possibility of making it through to Madera. Nevertheless, together they loaded Lico's body onto the plane and took off, the pilot, José, and a brother of José's, along with Lico's dead body in a coffin. On the way, they encountered huge black clouds, and it seemed they would have to turn back. As rain began to pelt the plane and the winds began to buffet it about, José and his brother began to pray. To their amazement, the clouds seemed to part directly in front of and around the plane and allow them to pass through in a sort of bubble of protection, while everywhere else remained in tumult. It seems that even after his death, Lico enjoyed the favor of God in allowing his body to be brought back home to Madera.

After leaving Lico's body with his family in Madera, José returned to La Palma with great sadness in his heart. He had only known the Lord for about one year. Lico had been his guide and mentor in everything, and José had always looked to him to lead him and his family in the things of God. Now, he would have to find his



own way with God, and lead the little flock forward in the Christian life. But very quickly, the other believers in La Palma began to fall away, discouraged by what had happened to their leader, Lico. José himself felt very discouraged and isolated. He came to a point of desperation, in which he was about to throw in the towel and give up all ministry. But one day he felt so low that he went to the little church building they had erected there in La Palma, and spent time in intense and fervent prayer. "Lord," he said, "I have to hear from you today. I need you to speak to me! I just can't go

But this did not apparently discourage him. It was something he just expected and took as part of the difficulty of preaching the gospel.

Even though large numbers did not convert under his preaching, the people always viewed him with high esteem and thought of him as a person who really typified what the Christian life was supposed to be like. Once an older man, upon seeing Henk with Lico, asked him, "And how many days do *you* fast? Because brother Lico has fasted 21 days! Do you do that?" All other ministers apparently were measured by Lico's standard. It wasn't that they all became Christians upon hearing Lico, but they did respect him.

Lico himself told Henk once how he had been called to pray for a young man who had swallowed some kind of poison and was dying. Lico went and prayed, but told the family that the Lord had shown him that unless they all repented, the young man was going to die. The people refused to repent, and the young man did die, just as Lico had said. Again, all the stories and evidence agreed that Lico was a tough individual who said what he believed no matter how the people responded.

Henk also told of how in his last days and weeks with Lico, he often heard him tell the people that he would not be much longer with them, for the Lord had called him to another place. On one occasion, Henk traveled to Madera with Lico to meet his daughter Yesmin, and he told her the same thing in Henk's presence. One further detail Henk shared with us was how, after all his time with YWAM, he had thought to visit Lico one more time at least. But before he could ever do that, one day a letter came to him from an unknown source that the man had been killed.

When I finished the interview with Henk, he allowed us to use his telephone to call La Palma, some 8-10 hours south of Creel, and speak with Pastor José Medina. José was a man who had come to Christ through the influence and witness of Lico, and like Henk and others we'd talked with, had actually traveled with him and seen him minister. He and his wife Lupe told me they would be happy to answer any questions I had and share with me what they knew of the life of the rugged evangelist.

In small towns like La Palma, the people don't have their own phones. So it's necessary to make a first call to the town phone and tell whoever answers who it is you wish to speak with, then make a plan to call back. The person who answered the phone then runs to the home of the person called and tells them the message and has them come back to the phone at

the prearranged time. So I had to call back some 15 minutes later and speak with José. He agreed to meet with us in the town of Batopilas, located some 5 ½ hours to the north of La Palma and approximately 4 ½ hours south of Creel where Henk lives.



Having made this plan, my friends and I left Creel around 10:30 am and drove south toward our rendezvous with José. The road from Creel to Batopilas is quite rough in places. It is a single dirt lane, which winds through the canyons and mountains, and crosses a small river in more



than one place on very narrow bridges. Along the way we saw quite a few Tarahumara Indians in their distinctive clothing and huarachi sandals either walking or squatting along the road. There were also sheep and goats, and many donkeys. We had to travel at speeds of only 25-30 mph

At this point, the crazed man grabbed hold of his wife and took her out behind the house. “I’m going to kill this man,” he told her angrily. “No!” she cried, “don’t kill him! He’s the one who got me healed,” she said. “It’s because of him that I’m well now.”

“No, but I’m going to kill him,” her husband again insisted. “But why?” her wife pleaded. “I’m telling you that it was he who healed me. Can’t you see that I’m well now? Why would you kill a man who only helped me?”

But her crazed husband simply would not listen. Turning on his heel, he went back into the house to confront Lico. Lico, with his Bible in his hand, again tried to reason with the man and proclaim the gospel to him, but it was of no avail. Seeing he was getting nowhere, he again knelt to pray. Removing his glasses and placing them upon the Bible, he bowed his head and prayed fervently. The furious husband drew his .357 magnum pistol and fired a shot directly into the top of Lico’s head and he fell straight to the ground, dying almost instantly.

The Christians who witnessed his death said it was very swift. Curiously, Lico himself had said in the presence of José that when he died, he wanted it to be a swift death, “Like a bolt of lightning,” was the way he had expressed it. And that is exactly how death came to him, like a bolt of lightning.

Grabbing his wife, the man fled the scene, seemingly unconcerned that he had done his dastardly deed in the plain sight of many witnesses. These Christian brothers sent word right away to José, informing him of the terrible demise of his spiritual father and mentor. Filled with sadness, he traveled to where his body lay, and brought him from there to San Ignacio. Some time before his death, Lico told some of the brothers of that area that when the Lord took him from there, He was going to take him out in an airplane. José had heard this story himself, and had wondered at it. “How could that possibly be?” he asked himself. “Trips on an airplane cost a lot of money, and Lico has almost nothing!” And yet, circumstances turned out exactly as Lico had foretold them, for it happened that the city government paid for the flight which took his body from San Ignacio to Madera, where he was finally laid to rest!

And it happened that even his final flight was something of a miracle. It took place during the rainy season in Mexico, so there were some doubts even before takeoff that the flight would be possible, due to

With that, he and two other brothers took their leave and headed for the place where the demonized woman was staying. When they came to the house and entered the room where she lay, Lico felt within himself that this was the “heavy trial” God had been warning him about. He went to prayer for the woman, and she became furious, screaming and cursing him and literally foaming at the mouth.

“How do you know all this?,” I asked. “Were you there with Lico?” “No,” he replied. “I stayed behind at home.” “The Christian neighbor who was there at the house when Lico arrived, he told us this later, after it was all over.” With that he continued.

Seeing the difficulty of this woman’s case, Lico left her and gathered what believers there were in that area, asking them to join him in fasting and praying for her for three days. He himself spent those three days alone on a hill near that tiny town. At the end of that period of fasting, he returned to her house to pray for her deliverance. She was apparently delivered in a relatively short period of time, and was once again calm, normal, and in her own sound mind. There were various members of her family staying with her at this time, and they were keeping her in a room by herself. Lico was never alone with her.

Some time after the deliverance session was all over, the woman’s husband came home. He had come in search of her from the place where they lived. Walking up to a group of brothers who were gathered together with Lico, he greeted each of them, shaking hands. But when Lico extended his hand, the man refused to take it and refused to greet him. “Because of you my wife was crazy,” he said. “Your preaching and the foolishness of what you believe caused her to go insane.”

Seeing how the man reacted, Lico turned and knelt in front of a chair and began to pray. The infuriated husband, with a stick in his hand, began to prod him and to strike him with it. “Get up!,” he bellowed. “Get up!” Lico arose, and began to speak to this man of the gospel, preaching to him in a very direct way.

“Come with me to the arroyo,” the man demanded, referring to a gully some small distance from where they were arguing. “No,” Lico answered. “If you have something to say to me, say it here.” Whereupon the man again began to accuse him and insist that his preaching and his beliefs had been the factor which triggered his wife’s insanity.

for the entire distance, for there were many potholes and rocks, and many hairpin turns. We finally arrived around 3 pm, parked our vehicle, and



went to the prearranged meeting place, a hotel located near the central plaza of the old Spanish town. José and Lupe were nowhere to be found



when we first arrived, so I sat down in the meeting place, while the two men with me agreed to wander around and see if they could find them somewhere else. Later they traded places with me and I wandered a bit.



Batopilas was fascinating! It was founded in 1621 by the Spaniards, and was located in a canyon, along a small river. As I strolled around, I came upon a suspension footbridge which bounced and swayed as people



crossed it. I stood on the bridge for awhile, watching some young men and boys throw themselves into the rushing water of the river and allow it to carry them swiftly downstream to a point where they climbed out again.



Several of them were doing this over and over. Meanwhile, nearby, there was a group of women who were washing clothes in the same river, pounding them on rocks and stretching them out on the riverbank to dry.

We had waited some time, and were about to give up, when suddenly, a pickup truck with a special platform in the back for passengers rolled up to the corner of the plaza and a group of passengers climbed down. I

“Yes,” they said, “you could tell that God spoke to him and revealed things to him.”

At this point in our conversation, José asked if I would like him to tell me what he knew of Lico’s demise. I assured him that I would, so he began. “A few months before his death, Lico began telling us that God was going to take him somewhere else,” he explained, “and he told people this everywhere we went.” Not only that, but he also told José that God had showed him he would face a “great trial” in the very near future, though he didn’t know exactly what that trial would be. Two or three months after saying this, the two men were picking and eating mangos from a tree near José’s house. As he stood back and glanced toward Lico, José thought he saw a sort of glow around Lico’s head and face, and a light beam of sorts shining out from him. “What are you looking at?” Lico asked, noting that José was staring at him. When José explained what he was seeing, Lico told him that this vision of sorts had a significance, a meaning from God. “It has to do with the trial I’m about to face,” he asserted. God had told him that a very heavy trial was coming his way.

About three months after this incident, it happened that there was a demonized woman in a place some five hours away from La Palma called San Ignacio. This woman was so crazy they had to keep her wrapped in a sheet of sorts and tied between two poles, because she would not keep her clothes on. She constantly tore them off and threw them from her. Not knowing what to do with her, they brought her to a place called Los Llanitos and left her at her father-in-law’s place. It happened that he had heard of Lico, because a neighbor of his was a Christian, and Lico would stop by there when he was in that area. So he told them, “Let’s send someone to get brother Lico in La Palma. He prays for people, and I hear they get healed.”

Some time later, these men arrived in La Palma and told Lico of the situation and the need. He determined to go and pray for the woman, and José gave him a few pesos to cover the cost of a ferry which would get him across a river to that town. Before leaving, Lico gathered a few of the people from the church there, with José, and he gave them what would be his last exhortations. “Please don’t stop congregating and seeking the Lord, brothers,” he said. “You must always continue to meet together.” Pointing to José, he added, “This man is going to be your pastor now, I’m leaving him in charge.”

he did not experience fear in those times. God gave him confidence and peace.

After these first experiences, José and Lupe came with Lico to Urique and stayed there a while. Then they made other trips with him. On one of those, they finished their day's travels at a place where there was a huge ant hill, an above-ground colony made of mud which are common in some parts of the world. "Here's where we're going to sleep," Lico told them, as he spread a blanket on the ground above the ant colony. "But what about the ants?" José asked. "They're of a kind that is very dangerous. Their bite really hurts a person!" "What about them?" Lico said. "Where's your faith?" He said. "You need to trust God more. You've got a lot to learn. He's not going to allow those ants to touch us." And so, they spread their blankets on the ground, had a time of prayer, and lay there all night. Just as Lico had said, the ants caused no problems at all, and they slept peacefully through the entire night!



"You have to understand," José told me, "Lico was a very rugged man, a hard man. He wasn't concerned much about his own comforts and such, nor about other people's feelings. When he preached, he told people the truth, straight out, letting the chips fall where they might." José told me that often Lico would call someone out of the congregations where he preached, and tell them of their sins publically. For example, he might point out a man in the audience and say something like, "You're in an adulterous affair, and you need to repent." And most often, his assessments were absolutely accurate. "So would you say he was a sort of prophet?" I asked.

walked quickly over to see if perhaps José and his wife were among enough, they were. Being a "gringo" I stood out in the crowd of Mexican



people, and they quickly noticed me and came over, asking if I was in fact, the person who had called them. We walked from the plaza to the old hotel we had originally agreed to meet in, and sat down on some wooden benches in the patio. I placed my recorder on a small table and after our introductions and explanations, they began to tell me about their experiences with Lico.

José and Lupe looked to be in their forties. Lico had died in 1990, 18 years before. So the story they were telling me had taken place quite some time previously. But they remembered it all as if it had happened yesterday. I could tell by their demeanor that they highly esteemed the man they were



talking to me about, and were very sorry he was no longer with them.

José had been a marijuana grower. It seems many who live in his area grow marijuana as it is the crop that produces the best financial return for them. Apparently he himself did not smoke any of his crop, preferring

alcohol to pot. But he carried weapons as all the growers in the area did, and he made his living primarily from the illegal marijuana. He and Lupe also grew beans and some other food producing crops for their own use.

But it was the marijuana crop that brought in what little cash they could make. Interestingly, they explained to me that the marijuana growers in that region really don't make much money at all from their work.



The big profits come to those farther up the chain, those who cross the border with the stuff and get it into the US.

Life was hard and unpleasant for José and Lupe. At that time they had only one small child, 6 months old, and José drank all the time and was abusive to his wife. She felt sad and desperate, but saw no way out of her difficulty. And she often feared for her husband's safety, knowing the business he was in and the prevalence of weapons in the area. The feeling you get in that region is very much like being back in the Wild West, for it seems that many take the law into their own hands and police don't dare enter there very often. The rare times that they do, they only come with adequate backup and reinforcements. One particular time, José went out with some friends, all armed, to steal marijuana from another grower. These kinds of activities filled Lupe with worry and fear.

Some time after her marriage to José, Lupe had gotten a Bible and begun to read it from time to time. She was also able to hear a gospel broadcast from time to time on the radio, and she very much liked hearing the Words of God and the songs that were sung. Some times she would pray at the head of their bed at night when José was asleep and unaware of what she was doing. Her mother-in-law had given Lupe a statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe, telling her to pray to her when she felt afraid. After staring at the Virgin for some time, Lupe did begin to pray, but when she prayed to the Virgin, she just knew within herself that to do such a thing was not correct, and would accomplish nothing. Instead, she turned her

between their bodies to protect her from wild animals that might come by at night. They would travel as far as they could make it each day, sleeping wherever they stopped, in whatever accommodations they could find. At one point, Lico, a 54 year old man at that point, appeared to be very tired. "You know what?" he told José, "You're going to have to carry this back-pack of mine sometime soon. I'm getting very tired." "Besides that," he told them, "God has shown me that I won't be here much longer." Again, this was taken as a sort of prophecy, and it turned out just as he had said.

Taking a slight detour from the story of their first evangelistic tour with Lico, José took time to tell me about what happened with his marijuana fields after his conversion. "I just knew I had to give that whole business up," he said. "I told my partner he could have my share of the fields." The partner was shocked and told him he would share the profits with him anyway. "No," José told him. "You can keep it all – I'm just not interested in any of that any more!" After that it would be their crops of beans and corn which would sustain them. Life would be harder than before in economic terms, but they had the deep satisfaction of being in right relationship with God.

Lico was an unstoppable evangelist. As José and Lupe continued the story, they told me of the many hardships and dangers the man regularly faced. "One time," José recounted, "as Lico preached, a man came up and said, 'Listen old man. If you don't shut up, I'm going to kill you.'" Lico paused only briefly as the man walked off. Then, while he was still obviously within earshot, the preaching started right back up again. The hostile man returned and reiterated, "I told you I'm going to kill you if you don't stop this preaching!" But Lico would not restrain himself. He kept preaching without even pausing. Somehow inexplicably, the threatening man took no action, but simply disappeared. This kind of thing happened often. There were occasions when people threw rocks or fruits and vegetables at Lico, or spit upon him, or cursed him. At one small village, no one listened to him as he preached. No one would draw near. All were hostile. That night, as he tried to sleep within the walls of an old abandoned house with no roof, the people of the village came around to throw rocks and other objects at him and curse him. Yet none of these things ever kept him from preaching the gospel and going forward with his mission. He simply refused to be daunted! In fact, he shared with José and Lupe that

he said. Lico showed him what he needed to do to receive Christ as Lord and Savior, and José followed his lead, surrendering his life to Jesus.

The couple had an old Bible which someone had given to Lupe, and José began to read that Bible eagerly. He spoke to his wife about it. “Look, how beautifully the Bible speaks!” He said. Shortly after that experience, José and Lupe just knew they had to travel with Lico, to learn more about the ways of God. At first he told them he usually traveled alone, and wasn’t really looking for any companions. But they pleaded with him to take them, recognizing as they did their own lack of knowledge and experience. Lupe said to Lico one day, “Please, teach us about God! We see you pray out there in the woods for long periods, and we don’t even have any idea what you’re doing or how you do that. We so want to learn! And you’re the only person we know who could teach us!” Finally Lico consented, saying that he could use their musical talents. José played the guitar, so Lico told him to bring that along. “Your wife will sing gospel songs to the people for us,” he said.

Lupe told me that looking back, she really couldn’t even imagine now how she did that in those days. They were so poor, and she had to carry a 6 month old infant girl on her back as they traveled day after day, mostly on foot, through those rugged areas. Along with the child, she carried diapers, baby clothes and all the other things a baby needs, all on her back. But they felt compelled to be near the man of God so they could learn about this new way of life.

The first trip they made with Lico took them 22 days. It was an evangelistic tour of several tiny towns or villages with names like San Ignacio,



Refugio, San Vicente, and Morelos and back to La Palma. Mostly they walked, though at times they accepted rides. The food ran out, but they walked all day without eating. They would sleep in the open fields or in the forest. Often they would lie upon a bed of pine needles, placing the baby

back on it, and prayed to God directly, asking Him to protect and help her and her family. Even though she was not yet a Christian, intuitively she just knew God had all power and was her only solution. On the night that her husband and brothers went to steal the marijuana from others, she prayed specifically that God would block them from finding it, so they would have to return home without achieving their goal. That was exactly what happened!

One day, a strange man entered their small village, a bald man with a big, bushy beard. How he came there they would learn later. It seems he had awakened one day in Urique and spent his usual time in prayer, and had sensed God calling him to a place called La Palma. He didn’t even know there was such a place, or where it was, but he set about asking people in the area. When he had finally ascertained the general location and direction, he made up some burritos and set out on foot, traveling some 5 or 6 hours to get there. When he came to the first house, he inquired whether in fact he was in La Palma yet, and was answered affirmatively. Then he asked permission to spend the night outside the house in some trees, but the woman of the house refused him, saying he should move further along. Eventually he came to a place he found suitable, which was not far from most of the houses, so he sat down to eat his burritos. As he finished his dinner, he arose and unpacked a bullhorn from his backpack and began to announce to everyone that he would be preaching the Word of God that afternoon in a nearby gully (“arroyo” in Spanish.) He invited them all to come hear the Word there.

Lupe was excited to hear the invitation and pleaded with her husband to let her go, but he was totally against the idea. She was disappointed, but had to submit to his orders. While she was forced to stay home, almost all her neighbors went out to hear the preaching. Lico also prayed over the sick. But the invitations didn’t stop with that one occasion. The next afternoon, Lico again began inviting the people of the town to come hear the Word of God. This time, annoyed, José allowed her to go. When she returned, she was very enthused, and told him that he should have gone. “He preached about Lazarus,” she said, “and it was very interesting!” José snorted, “Who in the world is Lazarus?!” Later, he and a friend had to carry a quantity of marijuana to their purchaser, and happened to pass by the place where Lico was preparing his supper over an open fire. Just to scare the man, José drew his pistol and fired two shots to the side of

him. “I was hoping to let him know we didn’t want him around, and make him go away,” he told me. But day after day Lico continued to preach, and Lupe pleaded with her husband to be allowed to go to the meetings. Sometimes he allowed her and other times he refused, becoming more and more annoyed by her requests and speaking against the evangelist. “What good will it do to listen to this guy?” he asked her. “It’ll just be a waste of time!” But Lupe didn’t give up. She just felt a strong desire within her to hear what the stranger had to say, and didn’t cease to ask permission to go out to the arroyo and listen.

José let her go again out of desperation. He was tired of her constant pleading. But as she left the house, he conceived of his own plan. He would follow her to the arroyo, with his pistol in his belt. He would watch and listen, and after the meeting was over and the people had gone, he himself would shoot the evangelist and be done with his preaching once and for all! Loaded pistol stuck in his belt behind his back, he went out to the place and hid among some trees and rocks. But Lico preached with a booming, strong voice, so José couldn’t help but hear the message as he waited. And that was the downfall of his plan!

It seemed that Lico had inside information about José’s life! He preached things that were so applicable and so pertinent, that José began to feel anger rising up in him. “That woman of mine – she’s gone and told this man all about my life!” he fumed. He was even more determined to kill Lico, when suddenly, it seemed as if a voice spoke within his head, telling him to get out of there. He looked around to see who it was who was speaking to him, but of course, no one was there! Not really knowing why, he decided to do just as the voice had told him, and returned to their home. When Lupe came home, she enthusiastically told him again that he should have been there, and told of the message Lico had preached. Of course, José already knew about the message, for it was permanently etched into his consciousness. The part that had stood out the most was when Lico had said, “There is someone who can change our hearts and make us new.” This was something José knew he needed. He told his wife, “The next time you see that man, tell him to come to our house. I want to speak with him.”

But Lico left La Palma and returned to Urique before José’s message could be conveyed. He stayed there a few days or weeks, and prayed for the people of La Palma. “Lord,” he said, “Those people have nothing!

They need your Word!” It wasn’t long after that that Lico again sensed God telling him to return to the area of La Palma and continue spreading the gospel in the surrounding areas.

At this point, I interrupted their story to ask some questions. “Let me get this straight,” I asked. “Lico just came into town with a loudspeaker and invited people to hear the Word of God, and they came?! Did he offer them anything, tell them he would sell them anything?” Lupe spoke up first, “No, he just told us he would be preaching the Word of God.” I was curious, “How many people would come out? Would they have to stand, or was there a place to sit?” She told me that usually about 20-25 people would come. Some would stand, others would sit upon the large rocks in the arroyo. I was somewhat amazed that, using such direct methods of evangelism, Lico could get anyone to listen. Lupe explained that at that period of time, in the recent weeks and months just before Lico’s coming, the situation of their town had been quite grim. In fact, only a week or so before Lico’s first visit, three young men had been dragged out from a house where they’d been found, shot to death. Because of these sad events, people were much more open to hear some good news. They were so fed up with the way life was going for them in that area, that they longed for something better, some kind of way out. As people heard Lico preach, they were pleased with what he had to say and wanted to invite others. Lico also urged them to tell others, and in that way, the word quickly spread through-out La Palma.

Finally Lico returned to La Palma, and Lupe was able to tell him of her husband’s interest in meeting him. He obliged and showed up at the house, where José quickly invited him in. “What is it you want from me?” Lico asked. “Well,” José responded, “I understand that you change people, and I want you to change me.” Lico was straightforward, “Listen, I don’t change anybody!” José was disappointed. “I thought you changed people! I want to change!”

“The One who changed me is the One who changes people, and He can change you as well,” Lico answered. “Well, who is that?” José asked. “Jesus Christ,” Lico answered, and began to share the gospel message with José in greater depth. As he did so, José became convinced that this was exactly what he had been looking for. “Well, what do you think?” Lico asked. “What are you going to do about these things?” Lico asked. “Do you believe?” José assured him that he did. “I want my life to change,”