

Not One Was Lost

By Julie Wright

“The boy will surely die,” said the man who brought him to *Children’s Rescue Center*.

His small stomach was severely distended from starvation with his arms and legs sticking out like little twigs. He was just beginning to walk but, weak from hunger, his thin legs wobbled unsteadily. His eyes glazed over with blurred comprehension as he fought for consciousness.

“He has no name,” the man continued. “His father was shot. His mother ran into my house seeking refuge where she too died. I didn’t know them. Here’s the boy.” Rose Clark, the Mother of *Children’s Rescue Center*, took the tiny boy in her arms.

Conviction and resolve stirred in her heart as she held the sickly child. “This child will live,” she declared. “His name shall be ‘Prosper’. For by God’s mighty grace he will not only live but he will prosper in this land.”

That was 1991. Little Prosper did indeed live, nursed back to health by the love and care of the Clark family. Today Prosper is a bright eyed, energetic, faith-filled 13 year old. He, along with seventy-eight other children, survived Liberia, West Africa’s brutal civil war through the care, commitment and dedication of Rose and Alexander Clark.

The Call to Purpose

Children's Rescue Center began as a call in the heart of 10-year-old Rose Appleton, a native girl growing up at a mission in Konolah, Liberia. One of fifteen children from an impoverished family, Rose and some of her siblings were taken to the mission school when she was 8.

One day while she was cleaning, Rose happened upon a meeting with the Mother of the mission and the older girls. Rose, shy but curious, felt compelled to quietly enter and partake in the assembly. The Mother, as the lady of the house is always called in Liberian tradition, was foretelling that she believed God had told her one of them, in that very room, would some day carry on the work of ministering to needy, abandoned and orphaned children. It was at that moment that Rose first heard God's call on her life.

At 18, on a trip home from the Mission, she met Alexander Clark. He was two years her senior, a friendly and humble man. The fifth of nine children, he had been taken into a foster family when he was just four years old. Extremely poor, growing up he was taunted by others and told that he wouldn't amount to anything. He went to school on a scholarship, only the second in his entire family to learn to read and write. Despite his circumstances, he was joyful and found favor with everyone he met. God would use this character trait throughout his life to protect and provide for the lives of a future generation.

Rose and Alexander were married in 1970 and moved to Nimba County in northern Liberia. Alexander worked as a mechanic in the iron ore mines and they started their family, eventually having eight children. The mines were very dangerous and accidents were frequent. It was a lonely and anxious time for Rose as Alex labored tirelessly determined to feed and provide for his growing family.

One hot day in 1973, Rose was fasting and praying. As she prayed she was caught up in a dream like state. A man came to her in a vision with some children and said, "Take care of these children." Again the man came to her, this time with more children but the same authoritative voice. "Take care of these children." Then a third time he came with many more children and commanded, "Take care of these children." She awoke and knew God had spoken to her heart confirming the purpose He had for her life.

She consulted Mother Dukley, a respected, elderly lady in the church, and shared the dream with her. Mother Dukley said, "God has called you, now you must go and do the work." Rose recounted the vision to her husband and he too felt a call to work with children. They prayed for the Lord's direction and resolved to obey whatever He called them to do.

Small Beginnings:

Rose took advantage of every opportunity to minister to children in her village. She invited the needy children off the streets to come and share meals with them in their home. The Clarks began to take risks to follow God's call to care for His little ones. Rose traveled to a neighboring village, teaching the children about a loving God who created them and cared for them. Travel between villages was extremely dangerous as the threat of capture by "heartmen" was very real. These tribal men practiced forms of magical arts, witchcraft and ancient rituals requiring the sacrifice of humans and their organs. They worked under the auspices of "escorts" to help one travel "safely" from village to village. In reality, they kidnapped these unsuspecting travelers to use them for their rituals. Once Rose was unknowingly escorted by them, but God warned her that they were heartmen and provided a means of escape. Despite these dangers, with her husband's prayerful support, she pressed on with her work.

In response to the Clark's petitions for direction, the Lord said to Rose "Go to your father's land and take care of the children." The call required moving their family of eight children to an undeveloped village, leaving their vocations and livelihood to venture out in faith and trust in the Lord's provision. In March of 1986, without any means of support, the Clarks left their families, job, schools and friends. They moved to her father's land in Barkley to begin a work among the children.

The First Barkley Mission:

In Barkley, they built a four-room thatched structure and opened the *Appleton Memorial School*. They met with the leaders and chiefs of the surrounding area, shared their vision, and within weeks, the little thatched school was bursting with over fifty native children.

A dedicated provider, Father Clark labored to build a larger school on the property to accommodate the growing number of children. A missionary from Sierra Leone provided some assistance to the Clarks to help build a permanent school building and the first dormitory. The mission thrived for the next several years, expanding to teach adults in the evenings.

The first orphan came to the Clarks in 1986. Four-year-old Edwin began a continual stream of orphans and abandoned children who joined the Clark family. By late 1989, *Appleton Memorial School* had over 100 students. The Clark's *Children's Rescue Center* housed 78 orphans.

The Liberian Civil War Begins:

On Christmas Eve 1989, the first war broke out in Nimba County in northern Liberia. By July 1990, the rebel army, led by Charles Taylor, was drawing closer to Monrovia, the

capitol city. Looting, ethnic cleansing, indiscriminate and targeted killing followed the rebels into the Barkley area. The chief of the area, Chief Zoue (zoo-oh) whose two children attended the Clark's school, provided the rebels with "The List" of persons in the area recommended for "extermination." The Clark family and their 78 orphan children were included.

On The Run:

Early in the morning on July 19, 1990, Rose Clark woke suddenly to a voice in her head shouting "Go!" She immediately woke her husband, the urgency within her spirit growing stronger every minute. Unaware of the chief's betrayal or "The List" but trusting and responsive, Father and Mother Clark hurriedly woke, gathered the children and ran to the main road. In the distance, they could hear the sound of gunfire growing louder with each passing second. Desperate, danger and fear rising in their hearts, they prayed for deliverance. Help came in the form of a car and a driver named Moses. They filled the car to overflowing with the smallest children and urged him to go.

They ran along the road hoping to reach the home of Rose's sister 6 miles away. The car returned for them several times and the remaining children were carried to safety. They reached the house in Gardensville, hungry and afraid, but grateful to be alive. News of looting, killing and destruction trickled in with each new person escaping from the wave of violence descending upon the city. The very morning God had instructed Rose and

Alex to flee, rebels entered the Barkley mission property. Enraged at finding the facility empty, they set fire to the entire Mission. The school, the Clark's home and all their earthly possessions were consumed by the fire, but they and the children had escaped with their lives.

On The Run Again:

Seven days later, a national holiday, the family eagerly anticipated a rare feast of chicken soup when the sound of exploding gunfire shattered the calm. The rebels were charging the city. Without time to recover the precious food, the Clarks and the children fled once more. This time there was no transportation and no clear destination. They just ran.

They trudged through the bush, swamps and streams, avoiding the main road at all costs. Sometimes walking, more often running, over 100 adults and 78 children pressed on looking for safety and freedom. In the end, they traveled seven miles to Dixiville. Exhausted, hungry, feet swollen and bleeding, they collapsed in an abandoned, six-room house.

The house, overflowing with more than two hundred displaced people, was caught in heavy crossfire, surrounded by the government army on one side and the rebels on the other. Nighttime was the worst as missiles soared overhead and exploded nearby shaking

the foundation of the house. People slept everywhere, bodies pressed to the floor. The tormenting sound of gunfire and explosions filled the night. The house shook, the windows rattled and the Clarks prayed. One night, a month later, the glass in the windows of the house exploded with gunfire. Everyone crawled frantically to the other side of the house, but the windows on that side shattered too! Bullets flew everywhere. The group huddled together, pressing into the floor, praying to escape the raging bullets all around them.

Living on Lipton

When daybreak brought a pause in the fighting they ran again, this time about three miles to Coldwell. There they found another abandoned house. They were now in the territory governed by rebel leader Prince Johnson a very wicked man. The children's stomachs and legs were puffy and swollen from starvation. They survived on "green soup," a mixture of miscellaneous green leaves and a small ration of Lipton Tea. There was no clean water. Many children were sick. The Clarks cried out to God in desperation, wondering how they would provide for the children. They were determined to endure. They would not give up. God had called them to these children and they knew He would prove faithful. But the provision would come from a most unexpected source.

It was October 27, 1990, Mother Clark's birthday. To celebrate, she determined to go to church. She had to take the road as rebels had planted mines along the shoulders and in

the bush. This required her to go through several “gates” or checkpoints, each heavily guarded by hostile rebels. To pass through, Rose must satisfy the interrogation and demands of the guards or join the piles of dismembered, beheaded or bullet-ridden bodies decomposing on the road. Held at gunpoint, threatened and questioned several times, Mother Clark miraculously made it to church.

The rebel chaplain, who unlike his leader was a kind and Godly man, appealed for help during the service. After a day of fighting and killing, the rebels would round up the newly orphaned and drop them at the church. The chaplain was alone in caring for them. Many were dying.

Though she had her own hungry children to care for, Rose was moved with compassion and conviction. Rose felt she must help, remembering that God had called her to “take care of the children.” The next day, she again made the perilous journey through the gates to the church’s hospital. She bathed and dressed the children and fed them the meager rations provided by rebel looting. She prayed over each child and devoted herself to their care. The chaplain was so moved and appreciative of her sacrifice that he gave her a small ration of food and supplies to bring home to her own children. Each day for three months Rose carried out this precarious work at the rebel hospital while Alexander remained to care for the 78. They prayed for God’s protection as she passed through the

volatile checkpoints and rejoiced each night when she returned home safely with provisions for the many children in their care.

Liberia's President, Samuel Doe, was killed by rebel leader Prince Johnson at the end of 1990 resulting in a temporary cease fire in January of 1991. The Clarks left the rebel area and traveled back to their sister's house in Gardenville only to find that, like most homes, it was completely looted and stripped bare of everything; windows, doors, tiles, even the plumbing. Only some of the concrete blocks that formed the foundation and walls remained. They found another abandoned house and stayed there for several months until the owner returned and forced them out.

Reprieve

Homeless again, the Clarks and all of their children wandered five miles to Paynesville, looking for shelter. In May of 1992, they found an abandoned home on Duport Road where they took up residence. In August they were evacuated by ECOWAS (West African Peacekeeping Forces) during the pinnacle of fighting and put under protective guard. After five months, they returned to the home on Duport road and there the Clark "family," consisting now of 80 plus children, lived for the next seven years. Those years, despite the continued war, were blessed and relatively peaceful. In 1999 the homeowner returned with plans to take the house back. After they were requested to leave, Father Clark, joyful in all circumstances, wrote a gracious letter of appreciation and gratitude to

the man for the time they had spent in his home. In spite of their personal tragedy and constant uncertainty, the Clarks continued to trust the Lord.

Deceived

Through the recommendation of a friend in the United States, a church in Monrovia, Liberia's capitol, took them in. The church was run by a Bishop from Ghana. Things went smoothly for the first four months. Then the undercurrents of some unidentified trouble and a sense of alarm began to grow within Father Clark. Unbeknownst to the Clarks, the Bishop was maneuvering legally and relationally to take over the Clark's orphanage and exploiting the children for his own financial gain. The Bishop suppressed the children, withholding food to force compliance. Despite the supply of food, the children showed signs of starvation.

The Bishop's intentions were inadvertently discovered when Father Clark stopped by a government office for a friendly visit. The government official casually asked Father Clark why they were changing the legal status and ownership of their orphanage into the Bishop's name. Shocked and confused, the Clarks faced an intense conflict over the ownership of the orphanage and guardianship of the children. The Bishop attempted to incite the children against the Clarks, using threats, hunger and lies. But his efforts to erode the children's confidence in the Clarks failed. Not one child cooperated with the Bishop. Their love and loyalty ran deeper than their stomachs.

The conflict escalated and the Clarks had no alternative but to leave with the children and search for a new home. With the aid of a government escort dispatched on their behalf, the Clarks safely left the mission. They were homeless again, but free.

Destitute But Hopeful

In April 2000, the Clarks found an abandoned building in Thinker Village. Ravaged by the war, the roof, or what was left of it, leaked everywhere. The children huddled in corners and under tarps to get out of the rain. They were cold and wet for that six month rainy season, but by God's grace, not one child got sick. Despite the hardship, the Clarks continued to instill faith in the Lord, proclaim confidence in His goodness and radiate joy, peace and thanksgiving.

Visitors to the displaced *Children's Rescue Center* were greeted with warm smiles, dancing eyes and joyful singing of children who recounted, with great admiration and affection, their journey with Father and Mother Clark. Their young hearts exuded hope, trust and confidence in a faithful, mighty and loving God.

Again they faced homelessness when the owner of the building returned unexpectedly intending to throw them out. His anger instantly transformed into affection as he looked

into the face of Alexander Clark, the man who years before had rescued the homeowner's children when he fled for his life. Months later he was reunited with his children who had survived unharmed under the faithful and protective care of Father and Mother Clark. Shocked to find them here, his gratitude for the Clarks overflowed and he offered them his building for as long as they needed it.

Returning Home:

In 2001, Father Clark felt a call to go back to their land in Barkley. Nothing remained except a few burned out foundation blocks. The land was overgrown from eleven years of neglect. Father Clark traveled to the site every day and working to reconstruct a home for their family of over 80 children. He labored tirelessly and enlisted help with his persuasive, friendly personality. "Do me a favor...." he would ask. His winsome, enthusiastic smile compelling all but the most hardened to give what they could. His joy was contagious and his passion for God and love for the children hard to resist.

In January 2002 the Clarks and their children, after 12 years of wandering, returned home. They had faced and overcome war, hunger, homelessness, corruption, and danger, by God's miraculous provision, their unshakable faith and an unwavering commitment to their calling. In all of this, not one child in their care had died.

A Double Home Coming:

Father Clark, along with his prayerful, courageous, resourceful wife, had managed to bring their children home. The new school stood bursting with children, where sixteen years earlier the Clarks began their labor of love at the Appleton Memorial School. Youthful voices of praise and thanksgiving rang out of the new chapel.

On July 1, 2003, at age 57, the Lord called Father Clark home. After commissioning his dean of students to “Look after the woman. Look after the children,” in his wife’s presence, he passed from this life into the next whispering “Thank you Jesus, thank you Jesus, thank you Jesus.” His mission was complete. His children were safe. God’s purpose for him fulfilled... he entered into eternity.

Legacy:

Alexander Clark was buried July 19, 2003, the same day the third war in Liberia broke out. He did not live to see that war, but his legacy lived on providing for his children. During a time of intense need and hunger in 2003, it was grateful graduates of *Children’s Rescue Center* that gathered together to help the orphans. Once orphans themselves, educated, loved, cared for and equipped by the Clarks, these children were now grown, married, working and lovingly indebted to the Clarks. They rallied and brought food to their “family” at *Children’s Rescue Center*.

Over one hundred and fifty children bear the last name *Clark* because they call Alex and Rose Clark their Father and Mother. Like their contemporary, Prosper, they all not only lived through the war but were able to prosper because of the love, care and commitment of the Clark family. Not one orphan was lost during the twelve year journey. The remaining seven biological Clark children are now grown and play active roles in the orphanage ministry of *Children's Rescue Center*.

Today *Children's Rescue Center* sits on the Barkley land and the Clarks carry on without their beloved Father. A son, following in his father's footsteps, serves as the "Father" in his papa's absence. Recently, Mother Clark invited two other homeless orphanages to settle on the land with dreams to develop a shared area consisting of a school, medical center, playground, fresh water well and toilet facilities. The vision of Mother Clark and the passion of Father Clark live on in the lives of hundreds of eternally grateful orphans in Liberia.

"So do not be afraid, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God.

I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand"

Isaiah 41:10