

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

IN THE PRESENCE OF MY ENEMIES

INCLUDES
NEW CHAPTER
WITH THE
STORY'S EXCITING
CONCLUSION

A GRIPPING ACCOUNT OF THE KIDNAPPING OF AMERICAN MISSIONARIES
AND THEIR YEAR OF TERROR IN THE PHILIPPINE JUNGLE

GRACIA BURNHAM
WITH DEAN MERRILL



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Dedication

*This book is dedicated to . . . you.
If you prayed for Martin and me while
we were in captivity—even once—
then put your name here. It is because
of your prayers that I came out alive
and am able to tell the story. Likewise,
I hope to become one who earnestly
prays and cares for others who are
hurting. We truly need each other,
don't we?*

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THE CAPTORS' ROSTER

Of the dozens of Abu Sayyaf who guarded the Burnhams at various times, these were the most prominent.

POPULAR NAMES **"Moktar,"** "Abu Moktar" (see photo section)

OFFICIAL NAME Khadafi Abubakar Janjalani

ROLE Leader of the entire Abu Sayyaf (following the 1998 slaying of his older brother, the group's founder); late 20s, but looked younger; quiet; eventually "married" Reina

PRESENCE Met the hostages upon arrival on Basilan May 31, 2001; left them late September 2001

POPULAR NAMES **"Musab,"** "Abu Musab" (see photo section)

OFFICIAL NAME Isnilon Totoni Hapilon

ROLE Second-in-command of the Abu Sayyaf; knew little English; stern, headstrong; eventually "married" Ediborah

PRESENCE From the beginning through early May 2002

POPULAR NAMES **"Omar,"** "Abu Omar"

OFFICIAL NAME Bakkal Hapilon

ROLE Brother of Musab; eventually took Sheila for himself but did not formally "marry" her

PRESENCE Met the hostages upon arrival on Basilan May 31, 2001; stayed through early May 2002

POPULAR NAMES **"Sabaya,"** "Abu Sabaya" (see photo section)

OFFICIAL NAME Aldam Tilao

ROLE Spokesman to the media; negotiator with the government; known for his flair; very good English; eventually "married" Angie

PRESENCE With the hostages the entire time

POPULAR NAME **"Solaiman"** (see photo section)

OFFICIAL NAME Jainal Antel Sali Jr.

ROLE Prime liaison with the hostages for the first 3 ½ months, due to his education, command of English; late 30s; a former engineer from a very wealthy family

PRESENCE From the beginning through late September 2001

POPULAR NAME **"Mang Ben"**

ROLE Early leader of the Burnhams' subgroup; tall, thin, stately appearance; late 30s

PRESENCE From the beginning until killed in battle early July 2001

POPULAR NAME **"Hurayra"**

OFFICIAL NAME Jumadil Arad

ROLE Friendly toward the Burnhams; mid-20s

PRESENCE From the beginning through late September 2001

POPULAR NAME **"Moghira"**

ROLE Subgroup leader; eventually "married" Fe

PRESENCE Met the hostages upon arrival on Basilan May 31, 2001; left New Year's Eve 2001

POPULAR NAME **"Sakaki"**

ROLE Gracia Burnham's first designated guard

PRESENCE From the landing on Basilan until he went AWOL July 2001

POPULAR NAMES **"Bro," "Kosovo"**

OFFICIAL NAME Alhamzer Limbong

ROLE Classic warrior type; big, muscular, well-built, proud of his long, wavy hair; knew just a bit of English but willing to try using it

PRESENCE From the beginning through late September 2001

POPULAR NAME **"Zacarias"**

OFFICIAL NAME Toting Craft Hanno

ROLE Fun-loving; early 20s; Solaiman's assistant

PRESENCE One of the original trio to abduct the Burnhams; left due to sickness late August 2001

The title *Abu* means "father of." *Mang* means "uncle."

Other resistance groups operating in the southern Philippines:

- Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)
- Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)

Moro is an ethnic label for Filipinos who are Muslim. It traces back several centuries to the Spaniards, whose name for Muslims in their own country was "Moors."

THE HOSTAGES' ROSTER

Captured at Dos Palmas Resort on May 27, 2001

MEN

NAME	Martin Burnham	CAPTIVITY	1 year, 11 days
DESCRIPTION	American missionary pilot from Kansas; age 41; husband of Gracia, father of three		
CONCLUSION	Killed by three gunshots June 7, 2002		
NAME	Francis	CAPTIVITY	20 days
DESCRIPTION	Banker; age 50; husband of Tess		
CONCLUSION	Released June 15, 2001, after ransom was paid		
NAME	Chito	CAPTIVITY	38 days
DESCRIPTION	Salesman for a cell-phone company; 30s; married, father of three		
CONCLUSION	Released July 3, 2001, after ransom was paid		
NAME	Reggie	CAPTIVITY	7 days
DESCRIPTION	Former newspaper executive; VP of a construction company with many government contracts; late 40s		
CONCLUSION	Released June 2, 2001, after ransom was paid		
NAME	Buddy	CAPTIVITY	7 days
DESCRIPTION	Publisher of a travel magazine; husband of Divine		
CONCLUSION	Abandoned June 2, 2001, after being wounded		
NAME	R. J.	CAPTIVITY	7 days
DESCRIPTION	Buddy and Divine's 8-year-old son		
CONCLUSION	Released June 2, 2001		
NAME	Guillermo Sobero	CAPTIVITY	16 days
DESCRIPTION	American contractor from California; age 40		
CONCLUSION	Beheaded June 11, 2001		
NAME	Sonny Dacquer	CAPTIVITY	6 days
DESCRIPTION	Dos Palmas cook		
CONCLUSION	Left behind, then beheaded June 1, 2001		
NAME	Armando Bayona	CAPTIVITY	6 days
DESCRIPTION	Dos Palmas security guard		
CONCLUSION	Left behind, then beheaded June 1, 2001		

NAME	Eldren	CAPTIVITY	6 days
DESCRIPTION	Dos Palmas security guard		
CONCLUSION	Left behind June 1, 2001; survived a botched beheading attempt		

WOMEN

NAME	Tess	CAPTIVITY	7 days
DESCRIPTION	Wife of Francis; a “mother” to Gracia while on the boat; religious and caring		
CONCLUSION	Released June 2, 2001, in order to arrange ransom for her husband		

NAME	Janice	CAPTIVITY	7 days
DESCRIPTION	Coworker of Chito; 20s; full of life		
CONCLUSION	Released June 2, 2001, in order to arrange ransom for Chito		

NAME	Riza	CAPTIVITY	7 days
DESCRIPTION	Girlfriend of Reggie		
CONCLUSION	Released June 2, 2001		

NAME	Divine	CAPTIVITY	7 days
DESCRIPTION	Wife of Buddy; mother of R. J.		
CONCLUSION	Abandoned June 2, 2001, after being wounded		

NAME	Angie	CAPTIVITY	5 ½ months
DESCRIPTION	Sister of Divine; early 30s; single; worked in the family business (travel magazine)		
CONCLUSION	Ransomed in late August but not released until November 15, 2001		

NAME	Lettie	CAPTIVITY	7 days
DESCRIPTION	Chinese-Filipino businesswoman		
CONCLUSION	Released June 2, 2001, in order to arrange ransoms for her daughter and niece		

NAME	Kim	CAPTIVITY	20 days
DESCRIPTION	Daughter of Lettie; early teens		
CONCLUSION	Released June 15, 2001, after ransom was paid		

NAME	Lalaine	CAPTIVITY	38 days
DESCRIPTION	Niece of Lettie; early teens		
CONCLUSION	Released July 3, 2001		

NAME	Fe	CAPTIVITY	5 ½ months
DESCRIPTION	Fisherman's daughter from Palawan; age 20; fiancée of Guillermo		
CONCLUSION	Ransomed in late August but not released until November 15, 2001		
NAME	Gracia Burnham	CAPTIVITY	1 year, 11 days
DESCRIPTION	American missionary from Kansas; early 40s; wife of Martin, mother of three		
CONCLUSION	Wounded by one gunshot during June 7, 2002, encounter, but evacuated		

Captured at Lamitan hospital on June 2, 2001

NAME	Sheila	CAPTIVITY	5 ½ months
DESCRIPTION	Nurse; married, mother of one son		
CONCLUSION	Released November 15, 2001		
NAME	Reina	CAPTIVITY	4 months
DESCRIPTION	Nurse; early 20s; single		
CONCLUSION	Released in September due to pregnancy		
NAME	Ediborah Yap	CAPTIVITY	1 year, 5 days
DESCRIPTION	Head nurse; mother of four		
CONCLUSION	Killed by gunshot June 7, 2002		
NAME	Joel	CAPTIVITY	4 ½ months
DESCRIPTION	Hospital orderly; early 20s; single		
CONCLUSION	Escaped during firefight October 14, 2001		

Surnames of surviving Filipino hostages are withheld out of respect for their privacy.

All dates in this chart, and throughout the book, are local time. Central time zone in the United States (e.g., Kansas, Arkansas) is 13 hours behind Philippine time in the summer, 14 hours behind in the winter. (The Philippines, being close to the equator, has no need for a daylight savings time arrangement.)

FOREIGN TERMS

Abu Sayyaf: “father of the swordsman”

Al-Harakatul Islamia: the Islamic movement

alimatok: leeches

“Allah akbar!”: “Allah is the greatest!”

apam: Muslim version of a pancake

banana-que: ripe banana pieces rolled in brown sugar and toasted

banca: a small boat

bianbons: roasted banana mush

bolo: knife; Philippine equivalent of a machete

cafgu: civilian deputized to help the Philippine troops

carabao: water buffalo

Cebuano: Filipino language

chinelas: flip-flops

CR: “comfort room” (Filipino abbreviation for bathroom)

hajj: pilgrimage to Mecca prescribed as a religious duty to Muslims

halo-halo: crushed ice with sweetened condensed milk and mixed-in fruit

Ilocano: Filipino language

kalaw: duckbills—beautiful, big birds with bright red bills

langawing: from Tagalog for “housefly”—obligation to share something with others if they want it and ask for it

malong: wraparound skirt made of batik material

mujaheed (pl., *mujahideen*): fighter in Islamic holy war

pantos: pants (like pajama bottoms)

Sabaya: “booty of war”

sabayaed: when a captive is “wedded” to a captor

“Salam!”: “Peace!”

“Salam alaikom!”: “Peace to you!”; standard greeting among Abu Sayyaf

sayyaf: Arabic for “the swordsman”

sindol: hot coconut milk that can be mixed with fruit

sundalo: soldiers

Tagalog: Filipino language

tirung: head covering, head shawl

tolda: multistriped plastic awning thrown over a rope between two trees for shade

viand: anything that goes on top of rice, such as a sauce

INTRODUCTION

This is my story, but it's not my whole story. The whole story would take too long to write and would be too cumbersome to read. My coauthor, Dean Merrill, and I wrote and revised the manuscript and made cuts and more cuts. Unfortunately some of those cuts involved people who are near and dear to my heart, who worked incredibly hard to support me during and after my ordeal in the jungle. To these people I say, you were not left out because you aren't important. I hope you know what a special place you hold in my heart.

My goal in writing this has been to tell Martin's story. I hope we've done it well.

CHAPTER 1

SEIZED AT DAWN

(May 27–28, 2001)

Bang, bang, bang!

Martin and I woke with a start. It was still dark outside and we couldn't see a thing. We could only hear the pounding on the wooden door of the beach cabin where we were celebrating our eighteenth wedding anniversary.

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!

Ugh—they want us to move to the next cabin, I thought. During dinner the night before, a member of the resort staff had said something vague about wanting us to change rooms but then had dropped the subject. I yelled to the person pounding on the door, “It’s too early to move!”

Bang, bang, bang!

Martin yelled this time: “What?”

“It’s a guard,” came the reply.

I’ll bet he’s drunk, I thought, thinking that maybe the guard had been drinking during his overnight shift and was now out raising a ruckus. Once again, the banging resumed.

“Martin, I think the guard is drunk.”

“No, I think something’s wrong,” he replied. He got up and started to head for the door.

“Honey, wait—you need to put some pants on first!”

Martin grabbed some knee-length khaki shorts, the kind with baggy cargo pockets, from beside the bed. Meanwhile, I sat up and began to gather my clothes as well—a pair of shorts and a gray T-shirt I had worn the night before.

Just as Martin reached the door, it burst open. Three guys holding M16s charged into the room. All were short, and one was very young—probably in his teens. Another was perhaps twenty-three or twenty-four, with long black hair. I could tell the third man was somewhat older. All wore long-sleeved black shirts; two had camouflage pants. But there were no uniforms, no masks or sunglasses; we could see their faces.

Immediately, they swept Martin out the door, while the older man began yelling at me, “Go, go, go!”

“No, no, no!” I replied, clutching the sheet up around me. “I’m not dressed.” I didn’t know how much English he knew, but I was not about to obey him in my present state regardless. Shaking, I began pulling on my shorts.

“Okay, okay,” he answered. I continued dressing.

One man had taken Martin outside, while the third one began to rifle through our belongings. He found our camera and our cell phone.

“Move, move, move!” came the order again. As I was hurried out the door, I grabbed our thong *chinelas*, the common flip-flops that everyone wears in the Philippines. There wasn’t time for me to grab my purse or anything else.

The young guy who followed me out wanted me to walk faster, even run. I knew from previous training that in the first few moments of a kidnapping, you’re supposed to comply with orders in every way you can, until everybody’s adrenaline calms down. But I was just so mad at this kid—I was *not* going to run!

“Faster, faster!” he said, jabbing me in the back with the barrel of his weapon.

With a calm voice I replied through clenched teeth, “I’m walking fast enough.” I kept my pace. He jabbed me again, and it did hurt, but I was determined to exercise my will.

Once I got to the dock, a speedboat maybe thirty-five feet long with three massive outboard engines—the kind of boat used for drug running—was waiting. Four or five frightened hostages were already sitting on the floor of the boat. Martin, still shirtless, let out a sigh of relief to see me, having been forced to leave me in the room not fully clothed. “Oh, I’m so glad to see you,” he said. “Did anybody hurt you?”

“No, no—I just had to get dressed.”

Naturally, he was without his contact lenses, which made his vision a blur. Fortunately for me, a couple of years before he had encouraged me to have laser surgery on my eyes in Manila. So I was in good shape to see distances, even if he was not.

As I sat next to Martin in the boat, we watched as others began to arrive from the various cabins. Dawn was just starting to paint the eastern sky.

Some of the people started showing up with suitcases! One rather chic-looking couple came not only with suitcases but a big cooler of water. *My goodness*, I thought to myself, *I really didn’t have to run out of the room so fast. I could have dragged my feet a little more and gotten some stuff together.*

I stood up and announced, “I’m going to go get Martin a shirt!”

“Sit down,” barked one of the captors. “We’ll get him a shirt.”

I promptly obeyed. But I took notice of the fact that his English was quite good. *At least we can communicate with this one*, I thought. We later learned his name was Solaiman.

“I have our *chinelas* here,” I said to Martin, holding them up. I was really proud of myself.

“Yeah,” he said. We didn’t put them on our feet, however; we

just held them. Martin was quiet as he looked around the boat, first at the men with guns and then at the other hostages. I could tell that he was trying to size up the situation, trying to figure it all out. This wasn't easy, however, since nearly everyone else on the boat was speaking languages we didn't understand. Occasionally, someone would throw an English word into the conversation and we'd be able to piece together some meaning. For the most part, however, we simply had to watch faces and listen to a person's tone of voice to figure out what he was saying.

I glanced down and the shine of my wedding ring caught my eye. *These guys are not going to get my ring!* I vowed. I pulled it off, along with a turquoise ring I was wearing on the other hand, and slipped them into my shorts pocket when no one was looking.

"Don't you think you should give me your wedding ring?" I asked Martin.

"Oh, no, we'll be fine," he answered, ever the optimist.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, it'll be okay."

::::

This whole romantic getaway at Dos Palmas Resort had been my idea, a fact that weighed heavily on my mind as I sat there shivering in the boat. It came about after Martin was offered a promotion with New Tribes Mission, the group with whom we had served in mission aviation for fifteen years. The agency wanted him to become chief pilot for the entire organization, which would mean moving back to Arizona and overseeing all flight programs worldwide.

Although he was flattered by the offer, Martin really didn't want the position. "I just want to be what I've always been: a line pilot," he told me. Martin was never happier than when he was flying the mission's little red-and-white Cessna into jungle airstrips, bringing groceries and medicine to our missionary colleagues, or helping ferry tribal people out to medical appointments.

Nevertheless, Martin's extraordinary piloting and ability to work with people kept moving him higher and higher up the organization's chain of management. In fact, he had turned down this promotion several times because our three kids were still young and he didn't want to do all the required traveling.

I kept telling him, "You know, I don't want to move back to the States any more than you do. But the truth is, you're the right man for this position. You really are!" I loved the Philippines, but to be honest, I didn't care where we were or what we were doing, as long as we were together. Martin would just smile and shake his head at me.

About May 10, Martin left for a two-week trip to the United States so he could meet with the senior New Tribes leadership team. While he was away, the mission pilot on the western island of Palawan was called home due to a death in the family, leaving the island unmanned. Through e-mail, Martin and I concluded that as soon as he returned, Martin should go to Palawan to fill in; after all, the missionaries in the tribes needed flight service. Plus, a translator was already scheduled to come and do some tribal work on those particular days. He'd need a pilot.

As I went over Martin's schedule in my mind, I knew he would be returning to the Philippines tired and jet-lagged—and would immediately take off for a week's duty on Palawan. I also knew that he would put in long days on the island and that he'd have to cook for himself. It didn't seem right. I knew he needed help.

My schedule was packed as well, with visitors coming through—but then, oddly enough, a couple of things canceled. *I can go along with him and help him out*, I thought. Plus, with our wedding anniversary coming up on the twenty-eighth, if I went along I could at least be with him on that day. *Maybe we can even do something special while we're there. We've never had time to really enjoy the sights of Palawan.*

I called one of our coworkers on the island and asked her, "Where's a good place for Martin and me to celebrate our anniversary? He'll just be back from the States."

“Oooh, you should go to Dos Palmas,” my friend said. “It’s a wonderful resort on an island all its own; you can only get there by boat. The food is terrific, and they have two kinds of rooms—garden cottages on land and cottages on stilts over the water.”

“What would you recommend?”

In the background I heard her husband call out, “Over the water! Those are the nice ones.”

“Okay, why don’t you go ahead and book one for us for Saturday night the twenty-sixth?” I said. After that, I arranged for our neighbors, Bob and Val Petro, to take care of the kids. I began cooking ahead and freezing some meals for them to eat while we were away.

When the Dos Palmas reservation came through, I looked at the price—10,000 pesos for the two of us (\$200)—and got cold feet. Yes, it covered lodging, activities, and all meals, but still . . . that was an awful lot of money for our budget. Would Martin be upset with this extravagance? What would our donors think if they knew? *Maybe I should just call my friend back and ask if there’s a nice place in town instead*, I thought.

If only I had. . . .

::::

I looked around and counted: there were seventeen hostages in all packed onto the floor of the speedboat. Up on the deck, ahead of the pilot wheel, a group of our captors stood, while a few others stood back by the motors. Conversation flowed, in both English and one or more other languages I didn’t recognize.

The whole loading process had taken maybe twenty-five minutes—all the hostages had been taken from the cabins over the water,



May 27

2:00 A.M., Rose Hill, Kansas: The phone rings in Martin’s parents’ bedroom with news that their son and daughter-in-law have been kidnapped.

none from the garden cabins. At the last minute, somebody said, "Wait! We need a cook." Quickly, one of the kidnappers jumped out of the boat and ran up to the top of the hill to abduct the resort's cook; his name was Sonny. Two security guards were nabbed as well. Obviously, they were no match for the raiders.

With Sonny and the guards, our hostage count rose to twenty.

The engines powered up, we pulled away from the pier—and suddenly one mystery was solved. The entire group of fifteen or so captors began to pump their fists in the air as they chorused in unison, "*Allah akbar! Allah akbar!*" ("Allah is the greatest! Allah is the greatest!") Instantly, we knew who we were dealing with: the dreaded Abu Sayyaf. They were the only ones with the audacity to do something like this.

I didn't know a lot about the Abu Sayyaf, other than that they were terrorists. Throughout the southern Philippines, people were afraid of them. We learned later the meaning of their name, which set the tone accurately: *Abu* ("father of") *Sayyaf* ("the swordsman").

This was the same group that had taken Jeffrey Schilling, an African-American Muslim who had come to the Philippines to marry a Muslim girl the year before. Upon hearing about the Abu Sayyaf, he thought he could go to them, as a fellow Muslim, and explain that their tactics violated the Koran. His attempts at reeducation backfired immediately; they said he was a CIA agent, turned him into a hostage, and demanded one million dollars in ransom. Jeffrey was held for seven and a half months. We had heard he finally escaped by slipping out of his handcuffs, made possible by his weight loss.

I turned to Martin with a heaviness starting to press down upon my shoulders. "We are in big trouble," I said.

"Yeah, we are," he quietly agreed.

I watched as the white cabins of Dos Palmas grew tiny on the receding horizon, and soon I couldn't see any land at all. We roared out into the Sulu Sea, heading who knew where? The ride across the open water grew rough, and we found ourselves bouncing into the

air and slamming down onto the floor again and again. The boat was seriously overloaded with thirty-five bodies aboard. We bumped ahead regardless.

I wasn't crying or shaky yet; all that would come later. I was steeling myself to stay calm, trying to stay focused as each event unfolded. I was also working to recall a class I had taken back in the late 1980s, when New Tribes Mission had sent their contingency planner, Guy Sier, to prepare the missionary team for hostage situations.

"The first few moments, when everyone is being rounded up," he had said, "is when the captors are the most trigger-happy. So do what you're told. But soon after that, begin to make eye contact with your kidnappers. Start to become a real person to them, not just an item. Go ahead and let them know what your needs are. That helps establish your individuality in their minds."

What else had he said? I hadn't really been paying full attention that day, and neither had Martin. Kidnapping was something that happened to other people, not to us.

I decided to put into practice the part I remembered. When the driver throttled back just a bit, I caught Solaiman's eye and announced with a firm voice, "We need a CR" (the Philippine abbreviation for "comfort room," or bathroom). After all, we'd all been pulled out of our beds and hustled straight onto the boat. "Where can we go?"

"Yeah, yeah," the other hostages agreed, nodding.

"There's no CR here," Solaiman declared.

That wasn't good enough for me. "Well, we need to go to the bathroom, so we're gonna go," I retorted. I got up and headed for the stern of the boat.

One of the other hostages volunteered to hold up a *malong* (the big Philippine wraparound skirt made of batik material) to give us women a bit of privacy as we squatted, one after another, right on the floor. When this process was complete, the engines powered up again, and we were off.

As we sped through the sea, the spray of salt water came flying over us from time to time, leaving us drenched and chilled. An older man began to visibly shake with cold, and someone passed him a shirt to wear.

A young woman sitting near me was almost hysterical. I began talking with her and learned that her name was Divine. She looked at me with terror in her eyes and said, "Our family has no money for ransom! We don't have anything!"

I put my hand on her shoulder and said, "You know, it doesn't matter if you have money or not. Money won't do any good right now anyway. The Lord's the only one we can trust. Try to calm down, and let's just think about getting through today."

She clung to my hand and seemed to settle down a little.

About an hour into the trip, one of older Abu Sayyaf leaders, Mang Ben, a bearded man in his thirties, leaned over toward Martin. Looking down at Martin's hand, he announced with a stately air, "I want that ring!"

Martin could do nothing but hand it over.

I looked at my husband and whispered, "What did I tell you?" I couldn't help remembering the day back in 1985 when I had bought that simple gold band. I'd paid fifty dollars for it at Service Merchandise in Raytown, Missouri, outside Kansas City. Now it had been stolen in broad daylight. I tried to remind myself that we could get another ring. *It's just a gold ring*, I told myself. *A ring can be replaced*. I gripped Martin's hand even more tightly.

Occasionally, another boat would come into view on the horizon. Whenever this happened, the captors herded us together so they could cover us with a tarpaulin in order not to be noticed. During one of these times, we heard the engines throttle back, and another boat come alongside. A conversation ensued in a language I couldn't understand. Apparently it had to do with getting food, because the other crew tossed the Abu Sayyaf some kind of packet.

Once the boat left, the food was passed under the tarp to us. It

was cassava, something I'd never eaten before, although I knew it was grown by some Philippine farmers. I later learned that cassava is poisonous if eaten raw, but it can be peeled, boiled, and then drained for eating. Or it can be pounded up, mixed with water, and put into banana leaves for steaming. It comes out like a hard paste.

My first bite was very vinegary. "Is this okay to eat?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," one of the other hostages replied. "In fact, once it's fixed like this, it can last for days and days."

I hadn't realized how hungry and thirsty I was until we began to share the cassava. The couple who had brought the big water jug passed it around so the rest of us could have a drink. That helped a little—but I couldn't help but think about the delicious peanut M&M's I'd left in the room, and I mourned the loss.

As the day progressed, the sun grew hot and the tarp was rigged up to provide some shade. The captors said nothing about where we were headed. We studied them, trying to figure out their names and who were the bosses. One of the men quickly stood out for his colorful personality and ability to turn a phrase. Sabaya was short and stocky. While everyone else wore army fatigues or baggy pants, Sabaya wore tight red stretch pants, looking oddly out of place.

We found out later that his name, and most of the others', were not their given ones but rather their "jihad names," chosen to evoke their new personas for battle. Sabaya, for example, meant "booty of war." Others' names had equally vivid meanings, of which they were very proud.

Around two or three in the afternoon, Solaiman came to the group of hostages with a Big Chief pad of yellow paper to start interviewing us. He began by saying, "We're the Abu Sayyaf. Some peo-



May 27

Paul and Oreta Burnham ask New Tribes Mission personnel in Manila to evacuate the children to their home in Rose Hill, per Martin and Gracia's standing instruction.

ple call us terrorists. We want you to know, we're not terrorists. We are simply people whom the Philippine government has robbed of our homeland, and we just want it back. No one in the government will listen to us, and so we have to do things like this to gain notice."

He asked us our names and what our jobs were. One by one, he wrote down the information:

- Francis, an older gentleman and banker, and his wife, Tess
- Chito, a sales representative with a cell-phone company, and his coworker Janice
- Reggie, who was well connected to the power circles of Manila, and his girlfriend, Riza. This was the couple who had brought the suitcases and the water jug.
- Buddy, a publisher of a travel-guide magazine (for which he had been scouting an article on Dos Palmas), his wife, Divine, and their eight-year-old son, R. J.
- Angie, Divine's sister, a young woman who appeared to be in her early thirties
- Guillermo Sobero, an American contractor, and Fe, his young fiancée
- Lettie, a Chinese businesswoman, and her daughter, Kim, who was perhaps thirteen or fourteen, plus Lettie's niece, Lalaine, also a young teenager. Lalaine had been staying in the garden cottages with her own family but had gone down to the water to spend Saturday night with her aunt and cousin.
- Sonny, the Dos Palmas cook
- Eldren and Armando, the two Dos Palmas guards
- Martin and me

All but Guillermo, Martin, and I were Philippine citizens, and well-off enough to afford a place like Dos Palmas.

When Solaiman got to us, Martin replied, "We're American

missionaries with a group called New Tribes Mission. We try to help the tribal people. We live up on Luzon.”

A cloud of disappointment came across Solaiman’s face. He had hoped that we would be European—or at least American—business types, whose company would readily pay to get us back. Mission groups, on the other hand, were (a) poor and (b) on record with standing policies against ever paying ransom.

“Missionaries? Did you know Charles Walton?” he asked. We did. Charles was an SIL (Wycliffe Bible) translator who had been taken hostage on the island of Mindanao some ten years earlier. He eventually got out alive, but not before spending weeks in a cramped cage up off the ground.

“Yes, we know him,” Martin replied. “He’s a friend; he works for an organization much like ours.”

“Well, some of us were there,” Solaiman answered, with a touch of mystery.

Then he returned to our case with this ominous announcement: “Yours will be a political ransom. We will make demands, and we will deal with you last.”

Uh-oh, I thought to myself. *We’re going to be in this a long time.* I immediately thought of the promise I had made to the kids: “Dad and I will be on Palawan for just a week, and then we’ll be back home again.” I felt sick at heart, trying to imagine how they would feel when they learned what had happened to us. I leaned toward Martin and murmured, “How long did they hold those Sipadan people?” referring to a group of twenty-one tourists captured the year before from a resort in Malaysia.

“I can’t remember. Three, four months?”



May 27

Lynn Burggraft, New Tribes missionary and close family friend, is assigned to break the bad news to the Burnham children, Jeff, Mindy, and Zach.

I tried to guess in my mind what “a long time” would actually be. Six weeks? I tentatively set my hopes on two months at the very outside. *Worst-case scenario, we’ll spend the summer with these guys and be out by the time the kids go back to school*, I told myself.

Meanwhile, the other hostages were already busy figuring out how much money they could raise. It seemed that everybody knew this was the name of the game. Muslim advancement may have been the announced overall goal, but cash was the necessary fuel. The bargaining was in full swing.

“Maybe my family could come up with one million [pesos, or \$20,000],” said one person.

A more middle-class fellow said, “We might be able to raise 250,000 [\$5,000].”

Solaiman kept writing down the amounts. (We learned later that this was the first time he had been allowed to handle these negotiations, and Sabaya was not happy with how it had gone. “You don’t let them set the amounts,” he told Solaiman, “you just look at them, size them up, and tell them how much to pay. If they have a Chinese last name, that means they’re wealthy, so—10 million pesos [\$200,000], end of discussion.”)

After Solaiman worked through the list, the conversation ended. The engine roared, and we moved on.

At one point that afternoon, Solaiman said to Martin, “You know, people think we’re a third-rate, primitive group out here. Actually, we’re very modern, high-tech. See our satellite phone? See our GPS? We know what we’re doing!”

(I couldn’t help smiling, however, at the fact that somehow the Global Positioning System device hadn’t helped them very much in finding our resort. We had pieced together their conversations enough to know that on their trip to Dos Palmas, they had gotten lost and had had to ask a fisherman for directions. Obviously they didn’t know how to use their GPS!)

I kept scanning the horizon for land. None appeared. Everywhere

I looked, I saw open sea. I now know that the nearest islands of any size were more than three hundred miles to the southeast. It was probably better for me not to know that at the time.

After a full day of bouncing across the water, we were terribly sore. At sundown, we came up to a larger fishing boat. Here, another ten to twenty Abu Sayyaf, plus the fishing crew, were waiting. We joined them. We were relieved to get off the speedboat. At least we were be able to stand up without being jarred onto the floor. We hoped this move would be more comfortable for us.

A bamboo “lead” no more than five inches wide was laid down from the speedboat up to the fishing boat, and I realized I was going to have to walk across maybe eight feet of open water to get there. It scared me to death. *I can’t do this!* I thought.

The water below swelled gently as I stared at the bamboo. When it was my turn, I admitted I had no choice. I began to crawl across the void on my hands and knees, praying that I would not fall.

Martin came right behind me, and by the time we all piled aboard, there were close to sixty people—again, a far greater load than this seventy-five-foot craft was ever meant to carry.

The boat had an inboard engine and outriggers—bamboo poles lashed together to make extensions off the sides. The pilot wheel was inside a small cabin in the middle of the deck. Down in the hold were large tunas packed in ice, fish the crew had caught before being hijacked by the Abu Sayyaf a few moments earlier.

We sat down on the deck while the captors quickly began their evening prayers. As the chants washed over the boat, I felt my mind slipping into a fog. *I can’t believe this is happening.* When they finished with their prayers, we ate some rice and tuna, which helped a bit. But again, there was no place for the women to go to the bathroom. Again, we were forced to use a corner. Angie, Fe, and some of the other women were distraught and crying.

“Do you think people know yet that we’ve been captured?” I asked Martin as the darkness grew around us.

“It’s hard to tell,” he said. “But don’t worry, Gracia. We’re gonna be okay.” His optimism was contagious.

A song began to run through my head that I’d heard the previous week. “Martin, I heard this song while you were away. Try to sleep and I’ll sing it to you.” I began to quietly repeat the melody:

*Be strong, be strong, be strong in the Lord,
And be of good courage for he is your guide.
Be strong, be strong, be strong in the Lord,
And rejoice for the victory is yours.**

“Mmmm, that’s a good song,” Martin murmured when I finished. “Thank you, honey.”

Nobody really stretched out to sleep that first night; we all just sat up and dozed, leaning on one another from time to time. It turned cold, as ocean breezes began to replace the heat of the day. Solaiman’s earlier promise to get Martin a shirt had produced nothing, so Francis gave him a sleeveless one to wear. We huddled together for warmth.

Sleep was fitful. I remember waking once to find that my head had fallen down to the deck, and somebody’s foot was on my hair. I jerked it loose.

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The next morning was Monday—Memorial Day in the States, but hardly a holiday for us. When the sun came up, we explored the boat to see what we had missed in the twilight before. Someone made a “CR” for us—a platform out on the bamboo outrigger with a tarp curtain around it. Getting out there was still tricky, but there was a rope to hold, and at least we could go in the ocean rather than on the boat’s floor.

People got busy on the satellite phone, calling their relatives in

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Manila and elsewhere to arrange ransom payments. Impassioned discussions ensued. Reggie showed his connections right away, getting a government official to call Sabaya back and say, "I know this guy, and he's a good guy. Let him out, since you owe me a favor, remember?" They agreed on an amount of money to be transferred, and Reggie's release was promised.

By this time, Guillermo was definitely showing signs of stress. He was on a lot of medication due to a recent nervous breakdown, he explained, adding something about being overwhelmed by a messy divorce that wasn't yet finalized. Now we could see him going through withdrawal. His body quivered from time to time, and his voice was shaky.

This boat was certainly slower than the speedboat had been. "Where are we headed?" one of the hostages asked.

The answer from the Abu Sayyaf was vague: "We'll just see. . . ."

I was painfully aware that I wasn't dressed properly for the Muslim standard. Of course, they hadn't given me time back in the room to do anything better. Other women were still in their pajamas. I sat there feeling embarrassed that, in their minds, I was just another typical "loose" American woman in my shorts and T-shirt. I began asking the Lord to protect me.

Sometime that morning Fe gave me a long piece of lace for a *tirung* (head covering), and someone else threw me a *malong*. Although my bare arms were still showing, I was at least somewhat more presentable to Muslim eyes.

Solaiman wanted us to know that we were in an atmosphere of high morals. "Would we ever lie to you? No. Would we ever steal from you? No. Would we ever touch the women? Never. The Koran forbids these things." He began to rhapsodize about how great it is when Allah is the ruler and the Koran is the guidebook—as in Afghanistan, their cherished model. "Afghanistan will show the world how great the truly Islamic state can be. You know, in Islam, if you're a thief, they cut off your hand. That's how things ought to be."

I thought to myself, *Wait a minute—didn't you guys just steal Martin's wedding ring?!*

"In Islam, all the women are dressed properly, with nothing showing but their eyes. If a lady's eyes are causing a scandal, even they will be covered. There are no enticements to sin, no Western movies, no drinking, no smoking, no drugs."

Our captors' greatest goal, it seemed, was to get to Afghanistan. What a utopia that would be, they said. But if that didn't work out, they would settle for their second choice: to go to America and get a good job!

At some point that day, Sabaya asked Martin to get on the sat-phone and make a statement to Radyo Agong in Mindanao. This radio station, we eventually learned, was friendly to Abu Sayyaf interests and willing to air their messages when asked.

So Martin prepared to speak; the voice would be his, but the script came from Sabaya, of course:

I, Martin Burnham, along with my wife, Gracia, who have lived in the Philippines for fifteen years, members of New Tribes Mission, have been taken hostage by the Abu Sayyaf, the Janjalani group. . . .

Actually, Sabaya wanted him to say *Al-Harakatul Islamia*, which means "the Islamic Movement," but Martin was afraid he would blow the pronunciation.

"Okay, then just call us 'the Osama bin Laden group,'" Sabaya said.

Here in late May 2001, a full three months before September 11, that name meant nothing to me. Martin told me later that he had heard it once or twice.

"Can I just say 'the Janjalani group,' because I know that term, and I won't get tripped up?" Martin asked, referring to the group's

founder, who had died in battle a couple of years before. Approval was granted. His speech continued:

We appeal to the American and Philippine governments to work to bring this situation to a peaceful end very soon.

As usual, Martin kept his cool, talking very calmly without notes. When he finished, he came over to me.

"You did a good job, honey," I said. "You always do."

Near the end of the day, Chito, who was full of life and spunk, decided to organize a "getting to know you" exercise for his fellow hostages. We all crowded into the wheelhouse and sat around on the floor or whatever else we could find. Going around the circle, each person gave his or her name and the person's name to the left. Soon we all had each other's names nailed down. We talked and even laughed together a bit, trying to make the best of the situation. We talked about our interests and other personal things.

Guillermo told us he'd been born in Peru but had immigrated to the Los Angeles area as a teenager, where he now had a small construction business. He had come to Dos Palmas on vacation the year before, which is when he had met Fe working in the gift shop. They had been in touch by e-mail ever since, and now they were engaged.

As we learned bits and pieces about each of the other hostages, we



May 28

Philippine president Gloria Arroyo appears on national television to declare "all-out war" on the Abu Sayyaf, telling them she will "finish what you have started."

May 28

Martin's sister, Cheryl Spicer, and her husband, Walt, drive seven hours north from Manila to Aritao to stay with the Burnham children.

became more of a team, more willing to encourage one another and try to keep our spirits up.

By that evening, the “ecumenical” nature of the boat was in full evidence. The Muslims, of course, conducted their ritual of bowing down and praying as they faced west, toward Mecca. The Catholics got out their rosary beads. Finally, one of the hostages asked Martin to pray aloud for the benefit of the group.

“Lord, all of this doesn’t surprise you,” he began in a calming voice as we all bowed our heads. “You know where we are, even though we don’t. We know that people are worried about us. But you hold us in your hands. Give us the grace to go through this trial. We’re depending on you. Amen.”

A peace settled into my heart as I listened to my husband’s words. The same seemed to happen for the others. “Wow, you can really pray good!” they said. Martin just laughed. For him, prayer was just his way of talking to God, sharing the thoughts of his heart.

By that night, we had generally figured out where we’d all like to sleep. The younger members of the Abu Sayyaf had already staked out the roof of the wheelhouse as theirs. Near the bow were places to hang hammocks, which were claimed by their comrades. A few others rigged up hammocks near the back. The fishing crew claimed their turf.

As for the hostages, we mostly stacked ourselves along the narrow sides of the deck, heads inward and feet hanging out over the ocean. A few others settled into a central well space in front of the wheelhouse. All together, we covered every inch of available space.

There was one luxury about these circumstances, I noticed: No mosquitoes! They had nowhere to breed here in the midst of salt water. We could lie out here and stare at the stars above without being bitten. There was a gentle breeze, and the sound of the water lapping against the boat sounded peaceful.

Francis and Tess, as it turned out, were fans of the old Beatles music, and in fact, they sang quite well together. As we stretched

out under the open sky, they began to sing the mellow songs: “Yesterday,” “Ticket to Ride,” “Let It Be,” “The Long and Winding Road.” The rest of us joined in when we could. Even the Abu Sayyaf sang a little, though such music was technically forbidden by their faith.

Then we came to the song “Imagine,” John Lennon’s ballad about a different world. When we got to the line “Imagine all the people, living life in peace” I finally lost it. For the first time since we’d been kidnapped, tears began to stream down my face. It was so poignant—all these hostages singing about a world so near and yet so unbelievably beyond our grasp. As we lay there in that moment, a bond began to form, connecting us with one another, even our captors. Looking up at the sky, I found myself drifting into fitful sleep.