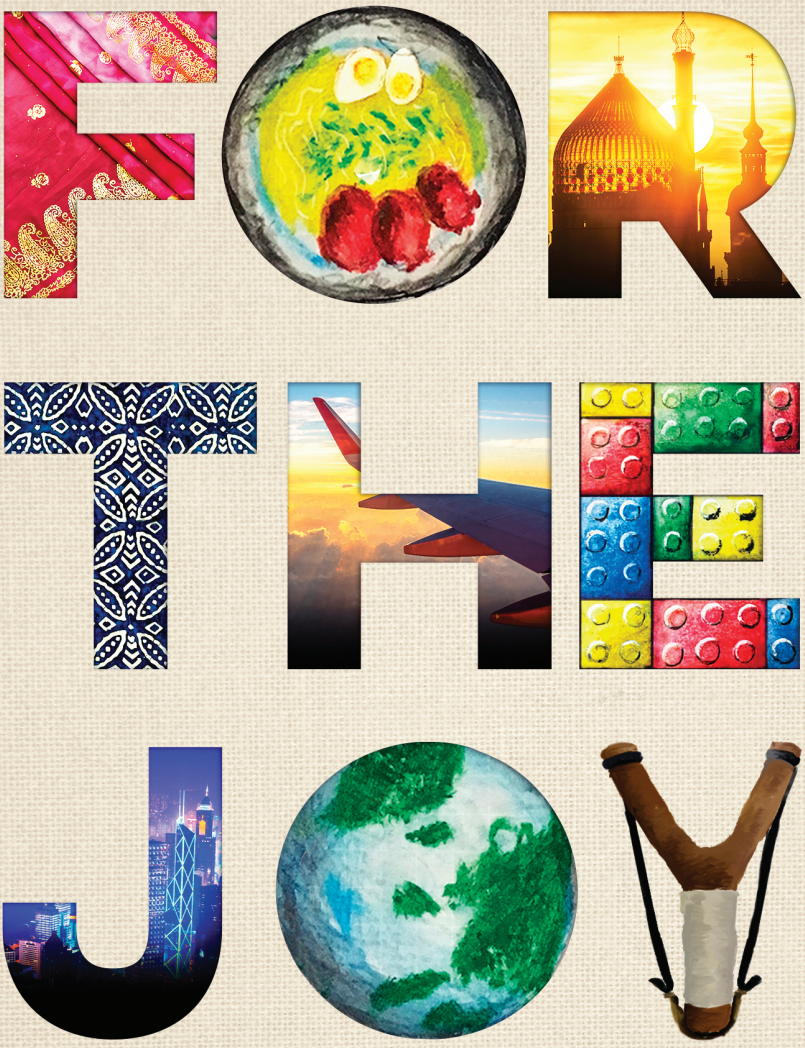


21 Missionary Mother Stories of Real Life & Faith

Edited by Miriam Chan & Sophia Russell

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

For the Joy: 21 Missionary Mother Stories of Real Life & Faith

© 2019 by Miriam Chan and Sophia Russell

All rights reserved.

Originally published in Australia by Grace Abounding Books, an imprint of Anglican Aid.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission of the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with reviews in magazines or newspapers. For permission, email permissions@wclbooks.com.

Scripture quotations marked "NASB" are from the New American Standard Bible® (NASB), Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. www.Lockman.org.

Scripture quotations marked "NIV" are from the Holy Bible, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked "ESV" are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Published by William Carey Publishing
10 W. Dry Creek Cir
Littleton, CO 80120 | www.missionbooks.org

William Carey Publishing is a ministry of Frontier Ventures
Pasadena, CA 91104 | www.frontierventures.org

Mike Riester, interior design
Raniwidia Basileia, cover design
Andy Sloan, copyeditor
Melissa Hicks, managing editor

ISBNs: 978-1-64508-220-0 (paperback), 978-1-64508-222-4 (mobi), 978-1-64508-223-1 (epub)

Printed for Worldwide Distribution

23 22 21 20 19 1 2 3 4 5 IN

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019945858

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

1 Adventures in Arnhem Land

Red's Story

I'm not an adventurous person. I'm an Aussie girl who has never lived overseas. My small life will never change the world—in fact, most days I don't even manage to change the things about myself that irritate me. My bedroom is always messy and I procrastinate when I should exercise. I live a fairly ordinary life, except I have red hair (which explains my name) and I live on Milingimbi Island in the Arnhem Land of the Northern Territory, Australia, for Jesus.

I was born in 1974 and lived my first 36 years of life in suburban Sydney. I love crowds, shopping, Thai food and going to the hairdressers. Cut to 2011 and I'm about to fly out to a tiny community of 900 Australian Aboriginal people on a remote island called Milingimbi, which is part of the Crocodile Islands. This place has only one shop, one plane and a plethora of sandflies, and it is about to become home for my husband, our three kids and me. I'm bustling around the tarmac, checking bags and going through invisible lists in my head. A few families have gathered to wave us off. They stand here at the airport in place of absent extended family. The women watch me with a compassionate eagerness to see if I'm coping. I plaster a smile on my face and try my hardest to fake coping. In the short term, this surprisingly helps.

To say I'm feeling nervous is an understatement. My nerves are firstly for my kids. This isn't exactly the safe and easy childhood I'd planned for them. Our children are growing up so differently to the way my husband and I did, as bustling Sydney seems a long

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

way from Milingimbi Island. It is a long way from here: over 4,000 kilometres away. I don't think I'm a 'wrap them up in cotton wool' type of mum, but I've never made a daring move in my whole life. I'm not sure what life will be like for them. For any of us.

My nerves are secondly for myself. Have I got what it takes? Will I get depressed and lonely? Get eaten by crocodiles? Wreck my kids' education? (When I discovered I would need to homeschool our three kids, I cried.) When I found out we were moving to Milingimbi, I threw myself into reading books of amazing women who thrived living in the outback. That was demoralising as I'm clearly nothing like those chicks. I'd be lying if I said I'm well suited to this environment and ministry; this simply isn't true. But I know from reading the scriptures that God's plans are always unfathomable and hilarious. It's His pattern to send ill equipped, weak people way out of their depth so He can bless them and use them to bless others. Then the glory goes to Him. I presume I'm in good company as fishermen, prostitutes and tax collectors all come to mind.

Nerves for my husband? He'll be fine. My only fear is whether he'll actually choose to land the plane each night if he looks down at the runway and sees his wild, red-haired wife—nuts from the humidity and being with the children 24/7—with her fists in the air. If I'm brutally honest, my nerves are also concerning God. Will He really sustain us? Is He really faithful? Is God out of His mind, sending me on an adventure like this? In that very moment, boarding the plane, I have no special verse of scripture, no word from God or peace in my heart. What I do have is a knot in my stomach. I have no idea what to say to the kids. Before this particular day, I had moments of confidence and faith. Somehow, these moments vapourise as I climb aboard and take my seat.

I have a love/hate relationship with flying in small planes. On take-off, after a quick, solemn prayer, I love it. Today, I'm relieved as the roar of the single engine means I no longer have to think of the right thing to say to the kids; they can't hear me anyway. All faces are glued to the windows. The beauty up here is breathtaking. Red ochre dirt and bush stretch as far as the eye can see, much of it untouched. Rivers wind purposefully through bush scrub like

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

serpents slithering out into aqua seas. In this place, sometimes the ocean is so still the clouds' reflection is as perfect and undisturbed as the clouds themselves. On those days, the only moving water is the buckets of sweat running down your back and every other part of your body. It might sound like a cliché, but seeing things from above broadens your horizons: a higher view, bigger picture and all that.

I feel a bump from the turbulence outside and my thoughts change. Now I hate flying. The angle of the trees gives me all the windsock information I need. I hate turbulence. I hate the feeling of being blown like a feather around the sky, like we are plummeting towards the ground on every bump. The pilot, of course, has no such fear of wind and flies happily along. The MAF (Mission Aviation Fellowship) plane, owned by the organisation that sent us to Milingimbi, is our family's only transport on and off the island; love it or hate it, it's something we have to get used to. MAF serves in remote areas where aircraft are needed to get in and out, either to cut down the journey time or to provide transport where roads are non-existent. Strangely, after a while, I feel more secure in this single engine plane than I do in a boat. I'm not fond of the crocodiles in the water and anything smaller than a ferry on these waters is too small for me. We land safely (thank you, God), stand up and disembark.

On the island the Indigenous kids, beautiful with messy hair, cheeky grins and runny noses, are not shy. They come in droves as we move into our new home: a large, sprawling house on stilts. The kids are fast, can climb anything, excel at back flips on any terrain and are brazenly opportunistic. They pinch our pale skin and try to rub the freckles off our noses and arms. At one point, a small boy comes to our back door and very softly asks about our trampoline, "okay to play?" It was almost a whisper. "Sure," I reply. He spins around, cups his hands around his mouth and screams, "okay to play!" Fifty half-naked kids rush out of the bush and onto our trampoline. So much for my cautious rule of one at a time.

Our life settles into a slow routine that includes homeschooling, scratching our sandfly bites, sitting on the beach but not swimming due to the crocs that regularly peruse the banks, daily browsing our one shop, getting to know the locals and flying around the massive

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

expanse of sky. Church up here usually happens under a tree at whatever time people get there. Like everything else in Milingimbi, the service is beautiful: simple, slow and teetering on the edge of extinction. The dry season is perfect, the wet is spectacular and the build-up is unbearable, no matter how you look at it. It's during this time of the year when we all go loopy. It's awful not being able to cool off. I remember the palpable frustration of dry storms with lots of thunder circling our little island, but no rain. We would sit on the stairs, begging for rain, and then the storm clouds would roll away and rain on the mainland. Having said that, we do have air conditioning. We spare a thought for previous generations who really just had to sweat it out.

The people group of north-east Arnhem Land are known as Yolngu. History between *balanda* (white Australians) and Indigenous people in Australia has been appalling on many levels and even now, the Yolngu people are irreversibly caught between two clashing cultures. There is still an expectation on Aboriginal people in Australia to assimilate to the dominant 'white' culture in order to survive. It doesn't work. The government gives financial handouts, perpetuating dependency. Poor general health means that life expectancy in the Northern Territory for Indigenous men is currently 61 years—14 years lower than white males in the Northern Territory. For women, it's 69 years—12 years lower than white females. Many people here are spiralling down in a generational cycle of poverty. Local gambling groups ensure that money in the hand doesn't actually lead to food on the table. Many times I shake my head in disbelief. Classifications on the map are the only evidence that I am still in the Australia I have always called home.

As we slowly make relationships, we discover that almost all families here have been touched by alcohol addiction, petrol sniffing and suicide. I have witnessed a constant stream of tragic funerals: small coffins, parents burying more than one child, 45 thought of as 'old age'. Our new neighbours are hesitant to trust us, wondering how long we will stay but openly appreciative of MAF supporting their community. These 'in your face' issues are not easy to witness over your back fence and come to terms with. However, I don't

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

want our kids to be protected, naive and oblivious to these sad complexities. I hope what they witness here will enable them to be more compassionate, more Christ-like and more involved in making a better Australia in the future.

It can be difficult to understand the struggle for the Yolngu to live according to white man's ways, but you should see me as I'm hurtled into their environment. I am deaf, blind and dumb in things my Yolngu friends think of as elementary. Going hunting with the women, walking into the mangroves with an axe and shovel, is both fascinating and terrifying. Had my survival relied on my being able to find and kill a mud crab or eat mangrove worms, I would have surely died. But my adopted *yapa* ('sister') knows the call of the bird that says the tide is coming back in … and with it, the crocodiles. She knows to rub mud on herself to protect against sandflies. She knows how to climb over the twisted roots in a skirt; how to balance on one branch while leaning backwards to hack the claws off a crab hiding under another branch. And she knows they taste best if you cook them right away over the fire on the beach.

In this setting, I know nothing. This hunting experience was a tremendous basis for understanding my new neighbours. Living as part of the balanda minority on the island is also an eye opening experience for our kids. It's great for our children to understand that a gesture which shows respect and politeness in one culture can be the height of rudeness in another culture. For example, making eye contact and asking 'get to know you' questions are our way of showing interest and respect. To Yolngu, these things are very rude and respect is shown by lowering your eyes and quietness. I think our kids are less likely to get offended by other cultures and give people some grace when they relate cross-culturally, knowing that it takes extra patience and love to understand and appreciate each other. I know that being among the minority has increased their awareness of what being different or left out feels like. They are more inclusive as a result, as this has moved them to watch out for those who are excluded in social situations.

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

Thank you for reading this preview.
To purchase a copy of this book, visit:

https://missionbooks.org/products/for-the-joy

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.