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## *Benteng Tinggi*

*"I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and  
my fortress: my God; in him will I trust."  
(Psalm 91:2)*

**F**riday the 13th, the 13th of March, 1942. The date is etched in my mind forever. The day began as usual—rising at 6 a.m., eating breakfast with my husband, Ernie, and each of us going about our regular business—he to counsel and teach the believers who had fled the city to the haven of the large conference building at the top of the hill—and me, to my language study.

Ernie always returned about noon. I could count on that.

Suddenly, however, just moments after leaving, Ernie burst through the bedroom door.

"The Japanese are here. I have five minutes to get ready."

"Get ready for what?" I asked, trying to mask an uninvited stab of fear with monotone consistency.

"They are taking the men to Makassar to be examined. At least that is what they say." Ernie pulled open a drawer and reached in.

With few words passing between us, we collected a change of clothing, a toothbrush, a shaving kit, a notebook and a special pen with ink in one end and a pencil in the other. It was mine, but I wanted Ernie to have it.

Ernie reached for my Bible.

"I will take your Bible because it is smaller than mine," he explained.

With the little black suitcase finally packed, we embraced.

"The Lord be with you, my dear," he said. "They say we are coming back soon."

Ernie hurried out the door and up the mountain path to the truck where the Japanese were waiting. I followed him as far as I dared, a deepening shadow of apprehension crowding slowly but surely into my soul.

Russell, a missionary colleague, was already on the truck. Darlene, his wife, stood alone at a distance. I joined her and in silence we watched the truck bump down the lane and onto the narrow road below the compound.

"God," I prayed, "in Jesus' name, help me to be strong."

Ernie and I had been married one year and three months and, in fact, I had been on this beautiful island in the East Indies less than eight months.

Was this the end of our dreams? Was a missionary career that had hardly begun about to end in tragedy? Would Ernie and I ever see each other again? Question after question begged for an answer.

But at that moment, there were none.

Since the turn of the century, the Japanese had desperately pursued ways and means to gain more land and power. Particularly after World War I they were convinced that they deserved greater recognition as a world power.

Believing that the United States was a threat to the trading of resources to Eastern Asia, in 1921 Japan took over the region of Manchuria, adding it to her already expanding collection of Pacific Islands that had formerly been owned by Germany. These she used to fortify her position and invade China.

In November of 1941, Japanese diplomats arrived in Washington, D.C. to talk peace. At the very same time, Japanese aircraft carriers were already on their way across the Pacific to position themselves for an attack on Hawaii.

The tragic day arrived—Pearl Harbor was bombed. The United States and its allies, already preoccupied with a bloody war in Europe, were now forced into another war arena, this one with Japan.

From that time on, Japan attacked island after island, by land, sea and air. Drunk with victory, they swept through Guam, Midway, Wake Island, the Philippines, Borneo and Hong Kong.

December 17, 1941, found them in Borneo. January 2, 1942, they occupied Manila in the Philippines. February 4th, they demanded the unconditional surrender of Singapore. February 9th, they landed on the Celebes Island. These areas could supply the oil and raw materials that Japan needed.

Makassar had been our home, but the ominous

news crackling over our radio, along with the tropical heat, had prompted 10 missionaries, including ourselves, to head for Benteng Tinggi, a beautiful, somewhat secluded mountain resort where we could, in comfort, wait out whatever might happen.

Our group included Dr. Robert Jaffray, his wife Minnie, their daughter Margaret, three single missionaries—Lilian Marsh, Margaret Kemp, Philoma Seely—and two couples—Russell and Darlene Deibler and Ernie and me.

Now, with Russell and Ernie gone, just eight of us were left. Dr. Jaffray had been spared the ordeal because of the Japanese respect for white hair. They also thought he took too many medicines because of the many bottles on the dresser in his bedroom. Actually, they were cologne bottles.

As darkness fell that Friday the 13th night, eight people gathered at the Jaffray residence. None of us was very talkative that evening, each one consumed with his or her own thoughts, questions, memories.

Yes, memories.

I thought of my happy-go-lucky childhood days in Albion, New York. A family of nine children was a real houseful. I often wondered how my mother remained so calm, for eight of those children were boys. I was the only girl, the second-born child.

What a gang we were! We had no television. We didn't even have a radio. But we didn't need a lot of outside entertainment—we made our own.

Even though we were carefree, life was quite regimented. Mother and Dad's word was law. If we were told to do something, our parents expected

their orders to be carried out. They might remind us once; after that, we suffered the consequences.

We all had our jobs to do. One of mine was to see that my brothers washed their faces and hands and combed their hair before sitting down at the table to eat.

The dining room table was the common meeting place. It was a big, solid oak, oval table with four elephant-type legs. As the family grew, so did the table. It eventually boasted six large leaves. Dad sat in the middle with the two youngest boys on each side of him. I sat across from Dad, Mother sat at the end by the kitchen door and the boys sat between. The order never changed.

We were all supposed to make our beds. With the boys, that got a little complicated because they slept two to a bed. Mother would say, "Have you made your bed?" Often the answer was, "I made my side!"

There was always lots of work, very hard work. Even though Dad had hired help and a "year man" in the tenant house, there never seemed to be enough workers. My duties were in the house doing "women's work." Since I was the only girl, my mother and father were determined that I remain "feminine."

In the summer of 1917, the measles swept through our town. We attended a school picnic where it was "going around," and one by one our whole family succumbed. I especially remember Pete. When Pete began to feel sick, he went out and picked a bouquet of flowers, put it on his dresser, then went to bed!

Everyone was concerned about Mother. She was expecting another baby and she had never had the measles. The dreaded thing happened—Mother contracted the disease. However, on September 23rd, she gave birth on schedule to a normal, healthy baby. She named him Robert. About three weeks later, baby Robert contracted the measles, too.

Our large, wood frame farmhouse was flanked on either side by two tall pine trees. One of them sported a rope swing. To the right of the driveway were two big maple trees which we tapped for sap in the spring to make maple syrup. There were also English walnut trees which never bore many nuts, but provided good shade and low branches which became our acrobat bars.

The one-room, cobblestone schoolhouse was just one mile from our home in the village of Fairhaven (now called Childs). Every day, in all kinds of weather, we walked the mile to and from school proudly carrying our lunch boxes and books.

Each morning we pledged allegiance to the American flag. We sang "My Country 'Tis of Thee" and "The Star-Spangled Banner." Our spirits were high because this was war time—the First World War.

Ah, war. What an odious word! It was war that had sequestered us here in Benteng Tinggi, virtual prisoners at our own denominational retreat center. Although the surroundings were beautiful and the accommodations commodious, all 10 of us would much rather have been elsewhere.

Ernie and I had been in the city of Makassar on



the island of Celebes only five months before the alarming news of the bombing of Pearl Harbor had come.

The 1941 senior class of the Bible school there had had its graduation. The graduates had been counseled on how to proceed because of the war and some were given assignments to strategic places of ministry. Trip after trip had been made to the harbor as the missionaries tried to contact boats, ships or anything traveling to other islands that could help evacuate the Christians from Makassar.

Now the question was: what would the missionaries do?

The Japanese were advancing at an alarming rate through the Philippines, the China Sea, Celebes Sea and Makassar Straits, conquering each island as they advanced. Rumors were that they were killing ruthlessly, especially on the island of Borneo.

Where were we to go? What did the Lord have in mind for us? Time was fast running out for those of us in the Celebes Island. One day Ernie came home with bad news.

"According to the officials," he said, "any one or all of the ladies should evacuate to Java, the United States, Canada or wherever they can get transportation."

Ernie asked me if I wanted to go.

"No, I don't think so," I responded rather hesitatingly as my eyes focused on my husband of less than one year, "especially if you are not going."

His response was immediate: he and Russell had decided to stay.

The days that followed were filled with prayer, reading the Word and singing hymns. It was becoming clear then, if it hadn't been before, that nothing was going to be easy. Either choice—to go or to stay—could mean death. Later we heard that a ship transporting evacuees had been torpedoed and all lives had been lost. We could have been on that ship.

God had given me a special verse several years before when I had set my mind toward the mission field. It was Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." The "all things" I needed strength to meet were now becoming an everyday occurrence. The chorus of the song, "Precious Hiding Place," gave me courage:

Precious hiding place,  
Precious hiding place,  
In the shelter of His love.  
Not a doubt nor fear  
Since my Lord is near,  
And I'm sheltered in His love.

That hiding place, that place of shelter, would come to mean more to me than I could ever know at that moment.

Each one of the missionary women was faced with the same decision, whether to go or stay. Margaret Kemp said that she was willing to leave and take Mrs. Jaffray, who was now 70 years old, with her. But it was too late. When they tried to make travel arrangements, no transportation was available.

So everyone stayed and prepared for war, trying to make the best of the deteriorating conditions. We made air raid shelters, but they filled up with water. A vacant lot next to our house was turned into a training grounds for Dutch Indonesian soldiers. Later, sharpened bamboo stumps, four or five feet high, were pounded into the ground. They were intended to injure or kill anyone who would dare to parachute into the area.

The bellowing alarm of the first air raid sounded one day when I was alone in downtown Makassar shopping for a present for Ernie's birthday. Fortunately I had already made my purchase—a genuine crocodile skin wallet—and was on my way home in a *tiga roda* (a three-wheeled bicycle or pedicab). The man who was pedaling the vehicle pulled to the side of the street as the alarm blared. We sat motionless until the "all clear" came.

War or no war, I wanted to make Ernie's birthday as special as possible. I decided to make him a cake. Of course, we had no cake mixes—it had to be made from scratch. Neither was there any vanilla extract, and I knew that a white cake with white frosting certainly needed vanilla. Bet, my house helper, gave me some raw substance from the vanilla bean. I added a generous portion.

The finished cake looked nice, but, oh, the taste! The vanilla flavor was so strong that we couldn't even eat a bite of it! I should have known that raw spices from the spice islands were very different from those in North American bottles or cans!

Dr. and Mrs. Jaffray, their daughter, Margaret, and the other other women left for Benteng Tinggi

after the Bible school graduation. Darlene and I stayed with our husbands as long as we felt safe. However, on January 21st, we were driven to Benteng Tinggi in the Jaffrays' car. The car and driver returned to Makassar.

Russell (the assistant field chairman) and Ernie (who had accepted the responsibility of Bible school principal) remained in Makassar to stock up on supplies for the months ahead at Benteng Tinggi. Ernie and Russell had been classmates at Nyack Missionary Training Institute and now they were ministering together far from American shores, blissfully unaware of the experiences they would share in the days ahead. For now, our team was just looking forward to some "R and R" in the cool, mountain air.

When the Japanese made their landing on the island, Ernie and Russell escaped in the Jaffrays' car, joining the rest of us in Benteng Tinggi in the middle of the night of February 2nd.