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Unfamiliar Paths

(Arlene)

Lying awake beside Karla's bassinette listening to her breathe, I expected each ragged gasp to be her last. Our five-week-old baby was dying and there was nothing we could do but wait in the darkness and pray that she would live until daybreak.

My pregnancy had been a difficult one. We were continually confronted with the possibility of losing our second child. We had been living in the city of Ibague, Colombia for only a few months, but already felt as if we were "real" missionaries.

Ibague was a city of 200,000 nestled in a valley high in the Andes mountains. While it was not an uncomfortable place to live, it didn't have many of the facilities that a bigger city could offer, especially medical facilities.

The Lord had provided a good doctor and with his care my pregnancy came to term. Karla was born in the Clinica Marly on March 13, 1971 without complications. The nurses placed her in a bassinette at my bedside. I thought I would burst

with love for her and gratitude to God. It was such a relief that things had turned out well.

Three-year-old Kurt and Dave were with us as I gave her her first bath that day. I peeled the little bonnet off her unwashed head, removing some of the few hairs she had. The nurse didn't know I was bathing her. Colombians believe that it is harmful to a baby to be bathed before it is three days old. Precious body heat can be lost, they think.

She was a perfect, robust infant weighing over nine pounds and patients and visitors in the hospital came to greet us and to see this little North American wonder. Kurt was so proud and possessive of her, protesting fiercely when the Colombians teased him with, "Me la regala? (Will you give her to me?)"

How we enjoyed that first month of her life—until one afternoon when she was five weeks old she began to have explosive diarrhea. When the diarrhea turned bloody about two hours later I knew she was in trouble.

We bundled her up, walked to the corner and caught a taxi to the doctor's office. He examined her and ordered some tests but couldn't find anything that defined the problem.

We took her home with instructions to observe her and to give her lots of liquids. She took small amounts of formula but as soon as she drank, the diarrhea would start almost immediately.

The next morning she was listless, not drinking well and her abdomen was distended. We took her back to the doctor. He explained that the tests indicated the problem was not infectious, but he still

had no inkling of a diagnosis.

He didn't want to put her in the hospital because the risk of infection there was high, and in her weakened condition, that could be fatal. Having been in that hospital for three days, I, too, believed that she was better off at home. So we bundled her up and took a taxi back home. Our only recourse now was prayer.

The situation worsened. The swelling of her little body increased until she couldn't open her eyes and she took only sips of the liquids I tried to give her.

Dave and I were in continual prayer and, as we prayed and talked and waited, the Lord impressed on Dave that this was an occasion not just for praying but for fasting. I had never fasted before but was certainly ready to now. So we began to fast and pray that God's perfect will would be done in this situation.

We were totally helpless. I was a nurse but I couldn't help my baby. The doctor was baffled. Karla's condition was deteriorating. Suddenly the excitement of living in a foreign country turned to fear. How I longed to be back in Canada surrounded by familiar faces, modern hospitals and doctors that spoke English!

That night the swelling continued to increase and the diarrhea did not abate. Karla's throat was so swollen that each breath was an effort. I stayed by her, willing her strength to take each new breath.

As I lay there in the darkness, I came face to face with the fact that the Lord could take our baby to be with Him. In fact, it looked more than probable.

Here we were, new missionaries who had "sacrificed all" to serve the Lord in this mountain city. Excerpts from many missionary biographies and stories I had read came to mind. We would not be the first missionaries to lose a child on the field.

In the silence of those moments, I placed Karla on the altar, trusting God to do what was right and good for us whether in death or in life. I wept, but I was at peace.

Morning dawned and Karla was still with us. We continued to fast and pray and once again we bundled her up, caught the taxi and made the trip to the doctor's office. When he saw us, he grinned from ear to ear. We could hardly understand the rapid Spanish that exploded from his mouth.

In his hand was an American medical journal he had just received in the mail. He pointed to an article and exclaimed, "This is your baby's problem!" The title of the article was "Milk Intolerances in Newborns."

In God's perfect timing that journal had arrived with hope and answers that would save Karla's life.

Coincidence? No. God was far ahead of us in our walk down this unfamiliar path of total commitment. He had everything worked out even before we had a need.

Within a few hours of initiating the new treatment, Karla was better.

There would be many more unfamiliar paths to walk and, if we were to see God at work, we needed to learn to trust Him completely.