

PURE RELIGION

A Refuge from the Storm

Live with fear, hunger, and death long enough and you begin to understand some things. Lily Santino understands some things. Lily was pregnant with her first child when the terror of civil war ravaged her African homeland. Late one night, rebels burst into her father's house, dragged him away, and murdered him.

Not long after, they came after her husband.

"He is not here," Lily told them. "He is at school." Angered at her answer, the soldiers beat her savagely. It did not matter that she was eight and a half months pregnant. It did not matter that she did not know where her husband was. The beating left her with permanent scars.

After the soldiers left, Lily waited for her husband to return. He never did. No one had seen or heard about him. Hundreds of others had been murdered, many of them students. And with the birth of her baby just two weeks away and her husband still missing, Lily tried to face the terrifying possibility that she was alone.

One day, she heard gunfire and screaming as soldiers rushed into her village firing weapons. Lily knew she had only one choice. She bundled up her three-week-old baby and disappeared into the jungle. "If only I can cross the border," she thought, "I might find safety in a refugee camp." She began walking. For two months, she walked through the jungle. "We had little to eat," she remembers. "A spoonful of corn. A little water. Some wild berries. I could not feed my baby because my milk dried up. We slept where we could. Always walking. Every day walking."

Finally, she crossed the border and reached the camp where, for two years, she struggled to keep herself and her baby alive. Two years she waited, hoping against hope that she would hear news of her brothers, her mother, her husband.

Finally, the words she had been hoping to hear came. Her husband was not dead. He, too, had fled and had found refuge in the United States of America. A long year and a half later, Lily joined him in Salt Lake City, Utah, and once again she held her husband in her arms. Once again her baby could be held by a loving father.



But Lily discovered that surviving in a strange, new country presented its own set of challenges. Although she could speak and understand four languages, none of them were English. In spite of this shortcoming, and although Lily was not a member of the Church, a friend told her that perhaps, if she went to see an LDS bishop, he might be able to help her find work.

Not long after, Lily began a new life working at Deseret Industries.

"I am very happy here," she says. "The people here are good to me. They are kind." Lily has been at the Deseret Industries for over a year now and has found it to be a place of safety, love, and refuge. During the time she has worked at Deseret Industries, she has enrolled in English, customer service, and job search classes. She has learned English so well that she now serves as an interpreter for others.

Lily saves as much of her money as she can, because she has others of her family who are struggling to survive in refugee camps. She is hoping to save enough to help them.

If you were to look at Lily now, you would not know that her life had been so intimately intertwined with sorrow and grief. Instead, you might suppose she is one of those rare people who live always on the edge of a smile—one of those lucky few who have everything going their way. You would never know that this is a woman who, because of her sorrow, understands some things—things like gratitude, the joy of freedom, the blessing of employment, the miracle of life, and the wonder of love.