

Mission Story from Duane Howe
(Missionary serving in the Amazon Jungle)

Yesterday we were sitting around the table after a meal and the question came up, "What was the most terrible medical problem that you had to ever deal with during your years living with the Culina tribe?" That brought to mind several really excruciating memories of suffering people. But, undoubtedly, the case that touched our hearts and rattled our souls the most was Mrs. No-Nose. I've told the story before, but here it is again.

The Culina people called her "Ini Caissa". Very well named. That, being translated literally, is "Grandma Itch". I have often wondered if her mother named her Itch when she was a baby, or did "Itch" become her name later in life when she was afflicted with a disease called leishmaniasis? But one thing is for sure..Itch itched.

We were all young, green, inexperienced missionaries back in those days. We were studying culture and language and weird strange diseases we had no idea even were in the world! Leishmaniasis. The sound of that disease is enough to scare you to death! It is a form of leprosy. A flying insect will bite an infected wild animal and then bite a human...thus the disease is put into a human blood stream. Normally leishmaniasis breaks out with a large raised sore that cannot be healed with normal antibiotics. Then it begins to eat away the nose. It starts like a little pimple on the nose and chews away.

When Grandma Itch came to our village from her river, the disease had just begun to nibble her nose. We had, by that time, discovered leishmaniasis and knew what it was and we had a Baptist doctor, Roy Dearmore, in our nearest town. He told us how to treat her and assured us that she would be well after taking a certain amount of medicine through injections. We were so thrilled to have a cure for Caissa! But when she saw that needle, she was filled with fright and the first thing we knew she was long gone. How sad.

A few years later Grandma Itch returned and now most of her nose was gone. We nicknamed her "Mrs. No-Nose", a cute way missionaries have of being able to talk about someone around other Indians and they'll not know it was Caissa we were discussing. We didn't want to frighten her off again. We had the same anti-leishmaniasis medicine, and she was now willing to stay and take her series of injections. But, Dr. Roy warned us that it might be too late. Once the disease gets a foothold it cannot be neutralized any longer, it has become incurable. She faithfully took her shots, but there was no stopping the disease from eating away her face. Our hearts were so filled with pity and hopelessness.

Mrs. No-Nose in time became Mrs. No-Upper Mouth. Then slowly but surely it ate away her two eyes. She was now Mrs. Hole-In-The-Head. I honestly never thought a person could survive without a nose, eyes, or the upper part of the mouth. The Indians would throw rice down her hole-throat and that was how she survived. They came to us to get creosole oil, which they used for animal infections, to kill the maggots in her head. I know this is getting crude and horrid, but the realities of life are not always nice.

My concern was for her eternal soul. I wanted to make sure that when Caissa finally died she at least would know of Jesus the Savior. She would know of Someone Who loved her enough to die for her sins and suffer for her. I would find this poor woman sitting hunched around a small fire...she was a dirty, despicable, sickening

piece of human driftwood that was every day getting nearer to her final gasp. I don't know if she comprehended the Gospel message, but I do know that she heard it in her own tongue.

In the summer, when our children were home from the Mission School, she neared the end of her life. Beth, a teenager, was washing dishes in the sinks which faced the direction of the village. Beth, with tears streaming down her face, came to me, "Dad, you have to do something for Mrs. No-Nose! I can't stand her screams any longer!" And we could indeed hear her agonizing call. She was laying in a hammock starving to death. The Indians had refused to throw food down her hole-throat any longer and would not even come to kill her maggots. I walked to her side and talked to her again. She was very weak. The smell was horrid. "Douemi, you bury her!! Take her and throw her in a hole in the ground!" the people shouted at me from the safety of their shelters. I refused. "She is your people. You bury her!" They grumbled and complained. I stubbornly refused to do their cultural responsibility. When, a few hours later, she did die some people with cotton stuffed up their noses did dig a shallow hole and threw the body in and buried her.

Grandma Itch never needed to die of leishmaniasis. The cure was there! She could have been, yes, "saved". I have told this story countless times because many people are just like Mrs. No-Nose. They refuse to accept the Sin-Cleanser. They will not embrace The Great Physician. They put off their hour of decision and reject Christ the Cure. When, in later life sin has taken it's toll and the devil is dominating, it often becomes impossible to accept His grace and salvation. Too hard. Too depraved. Too late. How foolish. Are you rejecting the Balm of Gilead? Are you putting off the day of your salvation until it is too late forever?

