

MISSION TO MOZAMBIQUE

Based on actual missionary experiences

by Kevin L. Brosnan

Serving in southern Africa under Baptist World Mission since 1992

NOTE: Since some details and order of events have been altered, the missionaries' names have been changed (Keith Brennan for Kevin Brosnan, Sid & Ashley Maynor for Seth & Amy Meyers, Don & Jan Monroe for Dan & Joy Minton). This story combines events from two outreach trips to Limpopo into the one survey trip by Sid Maynor. For sake of simplicity three trips into Mozambique are combined into one and not everyone involved in these trips is included in the story. Dan Minton was attacked by the crocodile on December 31, 2006, in exactly the manner as portrayed in the story. His survival was as miraculous as the story intimates.

OVERVIEW OF SEGMENTS:

- SEGMENT ONE – A Providential Meeting. Sid Maynor counts the cost of total surrender for the sake of those who haven't heard the Gospel and is drawn to Keith Brennan's vision to reach sub-Saharan Africa.
- SEGMENT TWO – A Piercing Question. One man's question, "Why haven't you come to Wayeni?" is symbolic of countless multitudes still waiting for someone to bring God's greatest gift to them.
- SEGMENT THREE – Christianity Without Christ. The team discovers Christian influences amidst total ignorance of the true Gospel. A mechanical problem threatens to end their journey into the interior of Mozambique.
- SEGMENT FOUR – The Great Trek. The missionary team treks into the interior of Mozambique to survey its people and to formulate a strategy for taking the Gospel to those who haven't heard. Tragedy strikes when the sweltering heat drives two members of the team into the Save River.
- SEGMENT FIVE – Crocodile Attack. Don Monroe miraculously survives a crocodile attack. The missionary team overcome their setbacks and make plans to establish a permanent presence in Mozambique through the ministry of their Bible institute students.

SEGMENT ONE – A PROVIDENTIAL MEETING

The year was 2000 and the Keith Brennan family was on furlough from their missionary work in southern Africa. Keith carried with him a burden to challenge American Christians to seize the moment of opportunity in Africa. His challenges in churches were more a presentation of the great, untapped harvest fields of Africa than they were a report of his own labors.

Often, the most productive interactions came from one-on-one conversations rather than public services. Keith never tired of talking about Africa and often found himself answering children's questions about African wildlife. He understood that the Lord could use such idle curiosity as seeds for a more spiritual interest in the great harvest fields of Africa. The children always enjoyed hearing about the time Keith and his boys listened to a leopard walking around their tent in the middle of the night, or the frightening moment when a pride of lions approached their camp while they were cooking steaks,¹ or the occasion when an elephant brushed against their tent and walked right through their camp.

Keith often responded with the question, "Which African animal do you think kills more people than any other?" The common, but incorrect response is, "lions." Keith explained that hippopotami and crocodiles are the most dangerous animals. People are most often trampled to death or bit in half when they venture between a hippopotamus and the river.² Hippopotami are also known to overturn small boats.

But, nothing is so fearful as a crocodile attack.³ Contrary to their appearance, crocodiles are very strong and swift. They approach their victims by stealth, strike with lightning speed, then retreat to deeper water, where they both drown and tear their prey apart with wrenching twists and turns while relentlessly clamping their daggered jaws into their victims like a powerful vice. Every year many Africans simply disappear after going to the river to wash clothes, fish, or fetch water.

The annual meeting of the mission board was a furlough highlight for the Brennans. Keith Brennan declared,

No generation of Christians since the time of Christ has faced a greater opportunity to reach sub-Saharan Africa with the Gospel. Despite disease, unknown languages, hostile tribes, and uncharted territories, the early missionaries to southern Africa, such as Robert Moffat,⁴ the patriarch of South African missions, and David Livingstone, his son-in-law, suffered great deprivations to cultivate the opportunities of our present day. Shall we not reap where the pioneer missionaries sowed? We now know the languages. We've conquered the diseases. We've charted the lands. And, we've translated the Bible into their own dialects. Today, multitudes of Africans would receive the Gospel if only someone cared enough to take it to them.

Sid Maynor⁵ listened with keen interest as Keith delivered his furlough report to the administrators of the mission board. Keith's vision was for twenty missionaries for South Africa and two-hundred African preachers for sub-Saharan Africa. Sid was captivated by the veteran missionary's vision. It struck a chord within his own heart for Sid had already committed himself to take the Gospel to those who haven't heard.

Following the meeting, Sid introduced himself to Keith, who immediately sensed an unusual fervency and strength of character in the young man, who explained his burden for un-

reached people groups. Keith was especially thrilled to learn that Sid was both prepared and ready, having completed Bible college and serving as an assistant pastor.

Come to Africa and I will take you to Limpopo, the land of the Tsongas.⁶ This vast area contains many villages where there is no Gospel witness. One of our Bible institute graduates has established a church there. He is alone and has often asked for the assistance of a missionary. Perhaps God will call you to the Tsongas.

Neither man perceived the significance of that first meeting nor the bond of mutual respect and friendship which would develop between them. Neither did Keith anticipate the contribution Sid would ultimately make toward accomplishing Keith's 20/200 vision, for Sid Maynor possessed that unique, infectious trait of personality which draws others to the cause. Several young couples would soon comprise Sid's team of missionaries with the singular vision to reach those who haven't heard.

Keith was greatly encouraged to meet a young man who seemed to share his burden for unreached peoples and his understanding of the personal sacrifices and commitment required to accomplish such an ambitious task. Keith perceived in Sid an almost unique combination of zeal, vision, spiritual and theological depth, singleness of purpose, and boundless energy, all traits which made Sid a most promising prospect for missionary service. Still, Keith wondered whether Sid would actually follow through with a survey trip to Africa.

SEGMENT TWO – A PIERCING QUESTION

The Brennans completed their furlough responsibilities and returned to Johannesburg, South Africa.⁷ Sid Maynor's interest in the Tsonga people only grew and it wasn't long until he also arrived in South Africa to survey opportunities in the Limpopo region. Pastor Godfrey Ngomane,⁸ a Tsonga himself, and pastor of the Mashamba Bible Baptist Church, was aware of Sid's burden to evangelize new areas. He suggested the men target the villages of Mahatlane, Mufeba, and Wayeni. Pastor Ngomane had abandoned earlier attempts to evangelize Mahatlane because of its distance and Mufeba and Wayeni were wholly untouched.

The drive from Johannesburg to the Limpopo region only took six hours, but it seemed as if Keith and Sid had traveled to a new world. Gone were the paved roads, shopping centers, fine buildings, concrete, pollution, and congestion. Before the men lay a carpet of lush tropical vegetation gracing an endless vista of undulating landscape, dotted with candelabra trees⁹, occasional baobabs,¹⁰ and villages of traditional African thatched roof huts.¹¹ Ironically, the darkness of night revealed even more accurately the vast scope of this unevangelized region, as the fires of countless villages sparkled from horizon to horizon like stars amid a sea of celestial blackness.

The next two weeks were full of unprecedented and varied opportunities for witnessing¹² and preaching¹³. Sid was overwhelmed by the reception he received in the villages. The men used puppets¹⁴ to present the Gospel to over 1,500 students in five schools.¹⁵ The chief of five villages extended a special invitation for Sid to preach at his office, where Keith presented him with the customary gift of a chicken.¹⁶ He also arranged for the men to be entertained by ceremonial dancing,¹⁷ an activity not wholly appreciated by the visiting missionaries. Several hundred young people attended the daily youth activity and many received Christ as Savior.¹⁸ The Gospel also went forth in evening services at the Mashamba Bible Baptist Church.¹⁹

Hut-to-hut witnessing in the villages provided the most memorable experiences and spiritual challenges for Sid. Keith was moved to tears as he watched the evangelism teams, armed with Tsonga gospel tracts, make their way through Wayeni for the first time. He well remembered the heart-wrenching event which first placed Wayeni on his prayer list. It was nearly two years earlier that Keith took a team of Americans to Limpopo to help pastor Ngomane evangelize Mahatlane. Wayeni lay between Mashamba and Mahatlane, but was not included in the team's outreach.²⁰ The drought of that period occasioned Keith to set out alone one day from Mashamba to fetch water from another village. He drove his Land Rover off the main road in search of a well in Wayeni.

The sight of a white man drawing water from the local well was a matter of great curiosity to the local people. One aged man in particular, mustered the courage to approach the stranger. "Why are you in Wayeni?" the man enquired in broken English. Keith spoke slowly and distinctly, "I am with pastor Ngomane in Mashamba. We are witnessing and preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Mashamba and Mahatlane this week. I stopped here to fetch water for the Ngomanes because they have no water in Mashamba." With incredulous gestures and pitiful eyes, the aged native asked, "**Why haven't you come to Wayeni?**"²¹

Keith had no acceptable answer. The man's question rang in his ears like an African version of the Macedonian call. How many years had this man waited in vain for someone to bring the Gospel message? The image of this whitened harvest field was now stamped upon Keith's heart. Frustrated without literature or a knowledge of the Tsonga language, Keith determined from that moment to print tracts in Tsonga and some day return to Wayeni with an evangelism team.

The aged native was not there to witness this glorious day, the first time anyone ever took the Gospel to Wayeni. He missed the wonderful spectacle of crowds reaching for Gospel tracts in their own language.²² He never saw Tsonga Christians from Mashamba witnessing to the youth of his village. He never heard a single sermon preached in the place of his birth. The Tsonga Bibles arrived too late for him. This aged native, who lived in the hut adjacent to the well died just months before Sid came to Wayeni.²³ Although he didn't live to meet Sid, he did receive the Gospel from pastor Ngomane, who walked several miles to find the man who lived in the hut next to the well in Wayeni. This unnamed villager trusted Christ as his Savior just months before his death.

Sid was amazed at the people's hunger for literature.²⁴ Not only did they readily accept gospel tracts, but they often stopped to read the tract immediately and asked for more tracts to share with their relatives and friends. The Tsongas commonly expressed amazement that white people cared enough to come to their village simply for the purpose of sharing Christ with them. This was best illustrated by the response of one woman who burst into uncontrollable weeping when she found two white men at the door of her hut. It took some time to calm her and explain that the men were there to share the Gospel. The only reason she could imagine that any white person would ever care to come to her home would be to inform her of her husband's death. She had already resigned herself to that terrible announcement when she saw the men at her door.

Sid's survey trip ended all too soon. But, he returned to the Tsongas within one year as a fully supported missionary with his new bride, a lovely, talented, and dedicated young lady named Ashley.²⁵ The young couple carried a burden not only to establish churches among the Tsongas of Limpopo, but to take the Gospel to the much more remote, unknown, and nearly inaccessible region of Tsongas north of the Limpopo River in Mozambique. Another missionary couple, Don and Jan Monroe, soon joined Sid and Ashley in the work in Limpopo. Keith, Sid, and Don couldn't have imagined the adventures, opportunities, and hardships which they would encounter during their 2,000 mile trek into the interior of Mozambique.

SEGMENT THREE – CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT CHRIST

Laura Brennan waved the phone at Keith, “It’s Sid phoning from Limpopo. Something about a trip into Mozambique.” Keith put the receiver to his ear.

Keith, we’ve identified an area of Tsongas between the Limpopo and Save Rivers in Mozambique. We would like to survey the area and formulate a strategy for establishing churches among these people. Pastor Ngomane is willing to go with us as translator, but he has no knowledge of the area. I think your experience from travels in Zambia, Botswana, and Madagascar could be an invaluable asset to this trip. And, we absolutely have to have two vehicles.

It didn’t take much arm twisting for Sid to enlist Keith in an undertaking which proposed to take the Gospel to those who haven’t heard. Mozambique is perhaps the most under-evangelized country of sub-Saharan Africa. The key reason - war. The fifteen years civil war in Mozambique left it one of the poorest and isolated countries in the world. The country was littered, not with tin cans, but land mines. Mozambique is now emerging from its ugly past, but infrastructure, apart from the coastal areas, is almost non-existent. Although twice the size of California, Mozambique only has 3,500 miles of paved roads and sixteen telephones per 1,000 people. Most travel in the interior requires a four-wheel drive vehicle and many areas can only be reached by fording rivers during the dry season.

The next two weeks were spent in a flurry of preparations, not the least of which was careful attention to the maintenance and preparation of Keith’s old, but faithful, Land Rover.²⁶ Keith was anxious to leave, hoping to beat the onset of the rainy season, which would commence any day. Like an athlete about to perform in the Olympics, his spiritual adrenalin was running high as they prepared to take the Gospel where, to their knowledge, it had not been preached. “It must be the pinnacle of Christian experiences this side of glory to preach Christ to those who have never heard. How blessed I am to be a part of this!” Keith reflected.

The proposed 2,000 mile route²⁷ would take Keith from Johannesburg to Limpopo, where he would join up with Sid, Don, and pastor Ngomane. From there the men would travel northeast through the northern extremity of the Kruger Game Reserve to Pafuri, near where the three countries of South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique converge. In the old days this region was known as the “three corners” and was renowned for wild beasts, big game hunters, and lawless renegades. Once in Mozambique, the two vehicles would then follow the southern bank of the Limpopo River to Mapai, where they hoped to ford the river. From Mapai the men would travel northeast for several days, surveying villages along the Chitolo, Chefu, and Xipembe Rivers, all tributaries of the Changane River, finally arriving at Massangena on the southern bank of the Save River, where they assumed they could obtain fuel. They would then proceed north to Chimoio, where they would intersect the east-west, paved road. From Chimoio they would plan their return trip, either east to the Indian Ocean or south back through the same territory. The men would traverse many miles where there would be little or no access to food, water, fuel, or medical assistance.

Although both vehicles carried a map of Mozambique, Keith also tracked their route on his GPS unit²⁸ so that they could pinpoint the location of each village or significant point of interest and calculate distances. It also helped assure that they wouldn't get lost.

While still in the Kruger Game Reserve, a drunk driver kept tailing their vehicles. The missionaries pulled off the road to allow him to pass only to find his car and trailer rolled over a few minutes up the road. He refused to go with them for help so they were forced to leave him with the elephants²⁹ and lions while they reported his location to the authorities.

The next hurdle came at the border crossing, where the four men needed to purchase four visas at \$25 each. The visa official³⁰ just couldn't conceive how five bills could be the proper payment for four visas. The men repeatedly tried to explain that five, twenty dollar bills is the proper payment for four visas at \$25 each. Although never convinced, the official finally accepted their word for it and stamped their passports.

The men were cordially accepted at a village on the southern bank of the Limpopo, where they spent their first night in Mozambique.³¹ The headman invited them to conduct a service the following morning at eight o'clock. It was already dark and the weary men were anxious to set up their tents and retire for the night. Keith got a fright when he unrolled the tent that he and pastor Ngomane shared. Out popped a scorpion right at his feet! Keith jumped like a high-jumper in competition as the scorpion scurried past him to the nearest tree. The men watched the scorpion take up residence on one of the limbs. Keith remarked that he resolved long ago to keep out of trees and rivers in Africa. Trees are the haunt of biting ants, furry spiders, black scorpions, and several varieties of deadly snakes, including the green mamba.

Some of the village children³² played soccer with Sid and Don before the morning service. It was already so hot that the exercise made Don ill. He lost his breakfast. If the missionaries were happily surprised to find a Baptist "pastor" in this small village, they were to a greater extent dismayed to discover that the pastor did not even own a Bible. "So, how do we have our sins forgiven?" the missionaries asked. The pastor replied, "One must live a good life." No mention of Christ, the Scriptures, the atonement, grace, or faith! The three missionaries were dumfounded at his response. They were again dismayed when the people lined up for healing after the preaching service.³³ How can it be that they have come so close to the truth and yet remain in such spiritual darkness? The men proceeded with some heaviness of heart, but nonetheless thankful that the Lord was revealing the spiritual condition and mindset of the people.

The Limpopo River was one-quarter mile wide at Mapai, but the Land Rover and pick-up truck easily made the crossing on a mostly dry sand bed.³⁴ They thanked God for withholding the rain. After stopping for lunch on the northern bank of the Limpopo, Keith's Land Rover wouldn't start. While the four men carried among them quite an array of tools, no one was a mechanic. Keith checked the obvious and the easy. Yes, the electrical system seemed to be working. Yes, the fuel seemed to be flowing. Is it possible, after all this work and preparation, on the very day of their penetration into the interior of Mozambique, the missionary team would be forced to turn back? All the men readily recognized the wisdom of traveling with two vehicles, but none of them relished the thought of a painstakingly slow journey, towing the Land Rover back to the border of South Africa.

SEGMENT FOUR – THE GREAT TREK

As the four men stood on a hill³⁵ overlooking the Limpopo River on one side and the vast, unknown interior of Mozambique on the other, they pondered whether the Lord would allow a piece of machinery to thwart their effort to forge a path for the Gospel in Mozambique. “Lord, we resign ourselves to your sovereign will. If there is a way forward, show us. Otherwise, we willingly submit ourselves to circumstances beyond our control and believe that You can bring victory out of what appears to us a defeat,” the men prayed. Having seemingly exhausted every possible solution, Keith began looking for the tow rope. But another idea popped into Sid’s mind. “Maybe the fuel is dirty,” he suggested. Keith, unfamiliar with a diesel fuel filter, examined it more carefully and found a loosening screw on the bottom side of the filter. Keith placed little hope in this last-ditch measure, but nevertheless did drain some fuel. Never did the sound of an engine make such pretty music to their ears as when Keith turned the key and the Land Rover sprang to life again. This was not the last time the men would need to drain dirty fuel from the sedimenter. With hearts of praise the men resumed their journey northward to take the Gospel to those who haven’t heard.

Later, Keith and pastor Ngomane stopped to change a flat tire, an event thrice repeated by the two vehicles during the trip.³⁶ Sid and Don continued on in their pick up truck, not noticing the stopped Land Rover on account of the dust cloud behind them. “What is that?” “Who is that?” exclaimed Keith. The sight was a first, even for pastor Ngomane. The native hunter³⁷ appeared from nowhere in the middle of a vast, barren wilderness. Accompanied by his hunting dogs and armed with bow and arrows, he appeared to take a step out of history. The native hunter, dressed only in tattered pants and a hat, seemed equally surprised at the sight of the two men and their Land Rover. Since Pastor Ngomane didn’t understand his dialect, Keith used signs and gestures to compliment the hunter on his success, as he had a honey badger and several smaller animals draped over his back. It was a brief meeting which demonstrated the great distance they had traveled, not only in miles, but also in culture.

When possible, they camped in a village at night and held a preaching service. Otherwise, they pitched their tents in the bush.³⁸ Keith, who was more accustomed to sleeping amidst wild beasts, surprised pastor Ngomane with his fear of little creatures. Keith disheveled the entire tent as he searched out every ant and plugged every little hole. “I fear ants, spiders, snakes, and scorpions much more than lions and elephants,” Keith apologetically, and somewhat sheepishly, explained. Sid usually did the cooking as he seemed to have the knack for bringing a taste of home to the bush.³⁹

The men made a curious discovery one morning as they compared maps and planned their daily route.⁴⁰ The location of roads on Keith and Sid’s maps differed significantly. Even more surprising was that both maps differed from the actual road system as tracked by their GPS unit. This situation caused little concern as the men simply took any road which followed their desired compass heading and Keith simply drew the accurate tracks onto his map as they progressed each day. The poor maps only led to one difficulty on the entire trip when the group followed a road which eventually paralleled a marked mine field and ended as a dead end at the top of a mountain. The men did not need a policeman to convince them to obey the road sign which read, “No left turn, mine field.”⁴¹

The missionaries received a warm welcome at every village and an openness to receive the Word of God.⁴² There was a pervading attitude of kindness and courtesy among the villagers who appreciated the willingness of white men to come to their villages.⁴³ The missionaries witnessed multiple instances of genuine spiritual hunger. People commonly asked for a Bible in Tsonga. One lady immediately began reading the Tsonga gospel tract to her illiterate friends. The gift of a tract or Bible is highly valued among these people. The native's simplicity of life, extreme poverty, and isolation from the outside world evoked an even deeper desire to share Christ with these people. The missionaries' burden to take the Gospel to those who haven't heard was now transferred from a concept to images burned upon their hearts, images of men, women, and children with outstretched arms, longing to receive the Word of God. Headmen and villagers alike were jubilant to hear that the missionaries intended to establish a long-term presence in this region.

The team spent some time in Massangena, the largest village of the region, before continuing to Chimoio, the northernmost point of their missionary journey. Keith had now traveled 1,000 miles since leaving Johannesburg, mostly over dirt roads.⁴⁴ Rather than head east to the Indian ocean on paved roads, the men decided to return to South Africa via Massangena, where they hoped to obtain permission to establish a permanent mission base. Some of the roads were fairly smooth, but often the path deteriorated, especially near streams and rivers.⁴⁵ From Massangena they planned to survey a more mountainous area further west adjacent to the Zimbabwean border. The roads were especially challenging in this region.⁴⁶ This route would require them to once again ford the Limpopo River on their way back to South Africa. They hoped it wouldn't rain.

How thankful the men were to finally ferry⁴⁷ across the Save River and arrive in Massangena again, where the local officials granted permission for the establishment of a permanent mission in Massangena.

The scorching sun and triple digit heat took its daily toll on the three white men. Even pastor Ngomane was unaccustomed to such intense, relentless heat. Sid and Don decided to seek relief in the Save River. Keith, though tempted, declined the offer, remembering a similar occasion in Botswana, when a submerged hippopotamus emerged from a seemingly tranquil river just as he was about to step into the water. "Watch for crocodiles," pastor Ngomane cautioned⁴⁸, as the four men stood on the bank, gazing into the inviting water. The two men were unsure whether to take the pastor's words as a joke, a dare, or a warning. They nonetheless took a very careful look at their surroundings. On their left were the men operating the ferry. On their right some hundred yards distant were fishermen wading out into the water. Between them and the fishermen was a small patch of reeds.

Sid and Don plunged into the refreshing river. The two young men couldn't resist racing to the other bank. Keith and pastor Ngomane laughed at their display of youthful vigor. Their splashing, paddling, and yelling attracted the attention of the ferry operators and fishermen, who looked on with a bit of incredulity. Their sounds also reverberated through the watery depths. The laughter and frivolity was interrupted by a single, unthinkable word. The fishermen were pointing and shouting, *ngwenya!*, *ngwenya!*, crocodile! Pastor Ngomane was first to hear them and spot the approaching reptile. Only when he screamed "crocodile" in English did the swimmers stop, turn, and spot the telltale eyes and wake, headed straight toward them like a torpedo. Both men immediately appraised their predicament and understood the grave situation they faced,

being equally distant from either bank. Both men knew all too well the fierce power and cruel savagery of a crocodile. Both men knew that there are no stories of survivors of crocodile attacks.

SEGMENT FIVE – CROCODILE ATTACK

Terror gripped Sid and Don as they spotted the menacing eyes and dinosaur-like body just breaking the water's surface.⁴⁹ The crocodile, now a mere twenty yards away, was accelerating toward them! There was no time for discussion, no time for a coordinated response, no time to think. In that instant, each man reacted on instinct and impulse. Sid froze motionless in his place while Don, a remarkably good swimmer, raced for the bank.

Keith, quickly appraising the situation, yelled for Sid to stay put while he commandeered a small, native dinghy which fortunately, was lying on the bank next to him. Knowing that Don was only a few seconds from reaching the bank, Keith decided to focus his efforts on saving Sid, who was bobbing hopelessly in the middle of the river. Keith had often watched the native fishermen gracefully stand in their dinghies⁵⁰ and effortlessly propel themselves with a long rod. He never imagined how unstable these little boats are. He began wobbling from side to side and feared he might capsize the little boat at any moment, exposing himself to the submerged killers. He was well aware that crocodiles often hunt in groups and that one on the surface could be indicative of several lurking in the murky depths. He used the long rod as much for balancing as he did for propulsion.

Sid screamed for Keith to hurry. Both men lost sight of the crocodile, which in fact had submerged, as they focused on their efforts to reach each other. "Don't capsize the dinghy," Keith yelled, as Sid frantically tried to climb aboard the unstable craft, anticipating at any moment, the piercing pain of daggered teeth clamping onto his dangling legs. After what seemed an eternity, Sid catapulted himself into the safety of the Dinghy. The catastrophe had been averted, or had it? Neither man had noticed Don's absence during those frenzied moments.

The crocodile had in fact taken pursuit of Don the moment he began swimming toward the bank and had submerged in anticipation of its attack. The assault came just as Don reached shallow water and the hope of escaping an unthinkable death and a watery grave. The brute force of the impact was not unlike being hit by a car. Instantaneously, Don felt sharp, shooting, intense, paralyzing pain in his right knee, left leg, and abdomen, all of which were firmly grasped within the massive mouth of the full-grown crocodile. Don's mind went through a rapid progression of thought. First, I am actually going to die. Second, what a horrible way to die! Third, my poor wife. Fourth, surely, God didn't bring me all the way to Africa to die like this before my ministry even begins! Fifth, I cannot resign myself to death. I must make some effort to free myself and I must do it immediately.

The crocodile had already performed one death roll and was preparing for the second. The beast had pulled Don beneath the surface and into deep water before he could even take a breath. Simultaneously, the croc twisted its body and mighty tail like a spring and unleashed a powerful, wrenching and tearing action, intended both to disorientate and rip its victim apart limb from limb. The first death roll nearly sent Don into unconsciousness and the scream of pain nearly rendered him senseless. However, his head did break the water's surface during the rotation, allowing him one quick breath. Don felt the crocodile again coiling himself in preparation for the second death roll. "I will never survive another roll. I have a split second to do something, but what?"

At that moment an idea flashed into his mind. “Perhaps I can thrust my fist down this croc’s throat,” he thought. It was not his own idea for he remembered watching a program entitled, “The Crocodile Hunter,” during which the host was asked, “what would you do if attacked by a crocodile?” The expert replied that one’s only hope would be to thrust an arm into the crocodile’s mouth and grab hold of the flap which prevents water from entering its throat, thus gagging the animal. With full resolve and every ounce of his waning strength, Don forced his left arm deep into the crocodile’s mouth, snagging and tearing strips of his tender flesh on the many sharp teeth in the process. “Where is it? Where is the flap?” Don could now feel the crocodile beginning to unleash the second death roll. In what he knew was a final life or death effort, he grasped hold of a fleshy projection and pulled with all his might. Instantaneously, the croc released him and disappeared into the depths. Dazed, disorientated, and bleeding profusely, Don staggered out of the water and collapsed on the bank of the Save River.

Keith and Sid looked aghast at the scene which presented itself on the bank. Only a red tint marked the spot of attack, but a steady stream of blood was flowing from the bank into the river. Pastor Ngomane was already applying a tourniquet to both legs. Don’s life and death struggle was far from over! Sid almost passed out at the sight of bone, cartilage, and mangled flesh. The men knew Don would die without immediate medical attention. Apart from the town of Chimoio in the far north, Massangena was the only village in all their travels where they remembered seeing a medical facility.⁵¹ Surely, this was the best place to have a medical emergency. The men carefully moved Don into the vehicle and sped off for the clinic in Massangena, only a few minutes away.

“Please take a seat. The doctor will be back shortly,” the nurse instructed in Tsonga. “But, this man needs immediate attention. You must fetch the doctor now, please,” the men replied through their translator, pastor Ngomane. On a continent that places little value on human life, the men’s pleading had no impact on the nurse’s disposition. However, she did point them to the doctor’s house where he was enjoying his lunch. The doctor was visibly incensed at the men who forced him from his home. When time is of the essence, one can well imagine the frustration of a situation where the nurse first had to translate the doctor’s Portuguese into Tsonga so that pastor Ngomane could then translate the Tsonga into English.

Don was then forced to endure two hours of torture as the doctor painstakingly stitched muscle and flesh without any anesthetic. The intense pain was repeated with each of the seventy stitches without abatement. The ordeal was unbearable, even for the other men who had to helplessly listen to the screams of anguish. Following the procedure Don was suffering from intense, incessant pain and fever. The doctor advised the team against transporting him to South Africa, but they decided infection was the greater concern.

Then began the race for the border.⁵² Each bump evoked a groan from Don, who was writhing in pain. Sensing his deteriorating condition, he begged the men to ignore his protests and drive even faster. The rain began to fall, turning the roads into slippery obstacle courses. Then came the fateful decision. “Do we proceed south in the hopes of still being able to ford the Limpopo or do we turn west and take the longer route through Zimbabwe to South Africa?” The men correctly chose the longer route for as it turned out, they could have forded the Limpopo, but could not have reached the border post before it closed for the night. Once in Zimbabwe, the men contacted their families. Don broke the news to his wife, “I had an accident,” he timidly informed. “What kind of an accident,” was Jan’s tense reply. “Well, an accident with a crocodile,” Don confessed.

After one and a half days of non-stop driving the weary group crossed the border into South Africa⁵³ and sped their way the final hour's drive to the hospital, where a team of surgeons were waiting to amputate Don's legs. Following the procedure the head surgeon met with Jan.

We can't understand it. Such severe mutilations always result in amputation. Infection is usually the greatest concern, but your husband's wounds are remarkably clean. His condition is manageable. The stitching, though crude, demonstrates great skill. Your husband may even recover the full use of his legs and arm.

It was an occasion for praising the Lord and testifying of His greatness. Indeed, Don did recover the full use of his limbs during the following year.

Sid's missionary team continued to grow and within a year a Bible institute was established in Limpopo with a plan to send Tsonga-speaking students into Mozambique for periods of three months as part of their practical training in evangelism and church-planting, and to establish a permanent mission station near Massangena. Surely, there are yet many others whom God will call to the emerging mission field of Mozambique!

LIST OF PHOTOS

- ¹ Photo “01-Lions.jpg”
- ² Photo “02-Hippo.jpg”
- ³ Photo “03-Crocodile.jpg”
- ⁴ Photo “04-Moffat Mission.jpg”
- ⁵ Photo “05-Seth Meyers.jpg”
- ⁶ Photo “06-Woman in village.jpg”
- ⁷ Photo “06-Johannesburg.jpg”
- ⁸ Photo “07-Ngomane family.jpg”
- ⁹ Photo “08-Candle tree.jpg”
- ¹⁰ Photo “09-Baobab tree.jpg”
- ¹¹ Photos “10-village1.jpg” & “10-village2.jpg”
- ¹² Photo “11-Witnessing.jpg”
- ¹³ Photo “12-Preaching.jpg”
- ¹⁴ Photo “13-Puppets.jpg”
- ¹⁵ Photo “14-Schools.jpg”
- ¹⁶ Photo “15-Chicken.jpg”
- ¹⁷ Photo “16-Ceremonial Dance.jpg”
- ¹⁸ Photo “17-Youth big ball.jpg”
- ¹⁹ Photo “18-Mashamba church.jpg”
- ²⁰ Photo “19-Mahatlane.jpg”
- ²¹ Photo “20-Wayeni man.jpg”
- ²² Photo “21-tracts.jpg”
- ²³ Photo “22-grave.jpg”
- ²⁴ Photo “23-tract1.jpg” & “23-tract2.jpg”
- ²⁵ Photo “24-Seth & Amy.jpg”
- ²⁶ Photo “25-Land Rover.jpg”
- ²⁷ Photo “26-Map.jpg”
- ²⁸ Photo “27-GPS.jpg”
- ²⁹ Photo “28-Elephant on road.jpg”
- ³⁰ Photo “29-Visa official”
- ³¹ Photo “29-Camp.jpg”
- ³² Photo “30-Children.jpg”
- ³³ Photo “30-Service”
- ³⁴ Photo “31-Ford Limpopo.jpg”
- ³⁵ Photo “32-Landscape.jpg”
- ³⁶ Photo “33-Flat tire.jpg”
- ³⁷ Photo “34-Hunter.jpg”

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- ³⁸ Photo “35-Camp.jpg”
- ³⁹ Photo “38-Seth cooking.jpg”
- ⁴⁰ Photo “36-GPS & Map.jpg”
- ⁴¹ Photo “37-Mine field.jpg”
- ⁴² Photo “38-Openness.jpg”
- ⁴³ Photo “41-Openness2.jpg”
- ⁴⁴ Photo “39-Travel.jpg”
- ⁴⁵ Photo “43-Landrover river”
- ⁴⁶ Photo “44-Landrover roads”
- ⁴⁷ Photo “40-Ferry.jpg”
- ⁴⁸ Photo “41-Crocodile.jpg”
- ⁴⁹ Photo “42-Crocodile.jpg”
- ⁵⁰ Photo “43-Dinghy.jpg”
- ⁵¹ Photo “44-Clinic.jpg”
- ⁵² Photo “45-travel.jpg”
- ⁵³ Photo “46-Border crossing.jpg”