The Autobiography of Pastor Raphael Manguele

with assistance from Adelina Malombe

translated by LeAnne Hardy

 *The true story of what God is doing in a country often has very little to do with missionaries. God has raised up his servants among Africans to do the work of the ministry of the gospel and to stand firmly for him amidst the ups and downs of their own communities. Pastor Manguela is an ordinary pastor, faithful in the ministry God has given him with an amazing story to tell of God’s protection in the midst of the terrible civil war that raged in that country for many years. His daughter Adelina, who compiled this, is a dear friend.*

 *LeAnne Hardy*

 I, Raphael Zenisse Hofisso Macuacua Manguele, was born in Nyantsalale-Nhazilo in approximately the year 1916 in the house of King Tiane Chikolo, where my father had his fixed residence with the chief of that land as an nduna (warrior). He married my mother Muanduane Nhazilo. I was born to them and later twins, a girl and a boy, but the baby girl died soon after the birth as did my mother. My father returned to South Africa where he worked in the mines. After some years my father married again, but this second wife died in childbirth before her first child could be born, and once again we were left alone to suffer.

 My brother and I worked as herders of cattle, swine, goats and other animals that belonged to the chief who was a great man with a house two stories high although it was made of sticks, straw and mud. We were poorly treated, and lived much like the animals with neither clothes, nor a place to sleep nor coverings at night. This suffering led us to flee to the house of our maternal grandparents, where our father found us when he returned from South Africa.

 Our father was angry and insisted that we fulfill our duty as sons of a warrior and return to the house of the king and our work as herd boys. Our grandparents however, couldn’t help but see what was happening, and when our father returned the next year, he found us once more with them. He couldn’t convince us to go back, and he had to move his official residence and come to reside near our maternal grandparents, leaving his responsibility as Nduna.

 Our father died when we were of school age. After this we sought out our mother’s younger sister who had nursed my brother Tsikwanhane (Amosse). That was how we came to live here in this land of Matimbine, where we now reside, because it was here that our aunt married.

 I, Raphael Manguele, suffered much. I grew up in paganism, following the spirits of the ancestors until they possessed me. My grandparents gave me garments and various paraphernalia which had belonged to my ancestors, and when I became ill they said it was the spirits of my parents who were in me and loved me. This was their way of showing themselves and their love for me. But I didn’t like it.

 I always looked for a way to flee from this, but never succeeded until one day I fled to the house of an evangelist in the area, Abel Matiko. He received me and asked my grandparents to let me live with him. After many difficulties they agreed, and he convinced them to hand over to him all the things that belonged to the evil spirits which I had used. I burned them and committed myself to God. God was with me and helped me to forget that old life of slavery to Satan and to live a new life of peace and happiness.

 This evangelist, Matiko, also worked in the South African mines as was common for men in our country. They would be gone for months at a time and return home with marvelous things like metal pots and soft mattresses that had been purchased in the shops of the big city. I remained behind to take care of the evangelist’s house, gardens, cattle and other things.

 I began to lead the worship services, because this evangelist had a church under his charge. I stayed about three years with his family and in that work, and that is how I began to be involved in the work of the Lord.

 Later I, too, went to work in the mines of South Africa. When I identified myself as a Christian, they gave me not only a house to live in, but also one in which to hold worship services. The work of the Lord went well in this area. I evangelized and taught the Word of God, and periodically, ordained pastors came to do baptisms and collect our offerings.

 In 1941 I returned home to look for a wife. In January of 1942 I married Essineta Afonso Nhatumbo, the daughter of an evangelist of the United Methodist Church. God blessed me in my choice, and gave us eleven children, seven sons and four daughters. We worked night and day in the vegetable garden and in preaching the gospel to support and educate our children.

 The time came when I was ordained an evangelist and given the responsibility of some churches. Then in 1956 the church thought good to send me to the Theological Seminary in Inhambane, which belonged to the United Methodist Church. We remained there for four years and in 1960 returned from school. But because of this absence, we lost our possessions, our houses collapsed, and we lost our cattle and gardens. After our return we rebuilt our thatched huts and began again the work of our gardens and of the gospel; in this way we passed the next ten years, and in 1970 I was ordained as a pastor.

 Times were hard and the political situation in our country grew unstable. Satan tried to disrupt the work of the Lord, and for a time even normal worship services were prohibited. Because I insisted on holding services, I was imprisoned twice.

 One time when I was conducting a funeral for one of our church members, I had barely finished reading the Bible when I was taken prisoner. The second time they came to arrest me in my house because they had received complaints that I was holding services. This time, after judging me and finding nothing to condemn, they let me go, and I asked that they give me a letter of authorization to work freely, preaching and opening new churches. With this authorization I gained strength and courage to continue the work of the Lord. God helped and sustained us in these difficult situations.

 The war disrupted the lives of everyone, and there were always extra mouths to feed. We didn’t ask what denomination people were from or even if they were saved, but helped each one. When I saw that the people of the region were suffering for lack of water, I dug a well of great depth because in this region the water is very far, and in this way I gave drink to the people. Whenever possible we arranged seed for the people to plant, especially those who are the most poor and have no one else to help them. There came a time when our land passed through a prolonged drought. People came from as far as twenty kilometers (twelve and a half miles) away looking for food. Some when they arrived were already sick and at times critically malnourished. But they always stayed with us until they had recovered and carried something home with them from our garden. We are happy in this. In our house we don’t know what it is to be alone even though all our children and grandchildren live in the city; we are never lonely.

The Massacre

 In those days our country was in the conflicts of war. In the area of Matimbine where we live, many people had fled because the villages were frequently sacked, the people killed or carried off. Twice the armed bandits had come to look for us, but hadn’t found us. Once they found a nephew of ours and killed him. The second time they carried off all they wanted: clothes, chickens, food. They even burned the house. But we were there because God had put us there to work for his kingdom. So we remained despite the risks of death. We were willing to die if necessary for the cause of the gospel. Our children in the cities offered their homes as safe havens for us to take refuge with all our possessions, but we weren’t willing to leave our ‘flock’ most of whom were poor and elderly with no place to go.

 On the morning of October 30, 1989 we rose at 4:30 am to journey to Maputo for our church’s annual conference. Forty minutes later the rebel soldiers arrived and found us with our bags packed ready for the journey. One was full of money—the offerings of our church being sent to Maputo. They seized us and beat us. They demanded food, clothing and for us to show them other houses where there were valuables. We told them we didn’t know of any, but they forced us to go with them and other prisoners.

 We walked the whole day. Once they stopped to cook and eat. I asked for some tea, and one of the soldiers ordered a girl to make us some. Then we continued walking.

 When we reached the place where we would pass the night, they shut us up like prisoners in a house. It was a cement-block house, and they put all forty of us in one bedroom for better control. They nailed boards over the door and windows so that no one could escape. There were so many people in the room that not everyone could sit at the same time, much less lie down. We had to stand or sit in one another’s laps.

 The house was stifling, without air, and women and children cried. I was the only pastor to comfort others, although I was in need of comfort myself. Two women drew near in the night and asked me to pray for them. Both of them were named Marta. I said that I would pray for them, but they also must pray in their hearts and trust in God.

 When morning came, on the 31st of October 1989 they took us from the bedroom where we were held prisoner. We continued walking toward the place where they intended to kill us. We walked for around ten hours. They began to separate the men from the women and to beat us.

Essineta Manguele continues the story:

 When we arrived in the place where they wanted to kill us, they strung the men together with one continuous cord, so they could only walk in single file. They tied their arms and began to beat them badly.

 I drew near to my husband and encouraged him to break his bonds and flee so that our children would have at least one parent. I was certain that I was not strong enough to get away. But he swore to me, “As God has made our marriage, I will not desert you.” When they saw that we were close enough to talk they separated us, but those words made us both strong and firm.

 The soldiers had brought the instruments they intended to use for killing us from the houses we passed. They had collected hammers and heavy wooden stampers used by the women to pound corn.

 The moment of killing arrived, when the men were tied and being hit. I began to be afraid. I didn’t want to witness that scene; my husband was the first in line to be killed. They cut the cord that tied him to the others and ordered him to kneel in the road to kill him there. Not wanting to see what happened, I crouched and tied the cloth that served me for a skirt firmly around my waist.

 One of the soldiers asked me, “Woman, what are you doing?”

 So I said, “I want to drink water.”

 He said I could drink, so I stepped out of line and fell behind the other women. Then I leaped up and ran. I opened my arms like one who would fly. They chased me, but they didn’t catch me; they shot after me, but the bullets didn’t reach me. This is a marvelous thing because I am an old woman; I had walked more that a day and a half already and was very tired.

 I ran about twelve kilometers, only stopping when I reached the sea. There I fainted and woke in the morning revived by the ocean breezes. I found someone who showed me the road to the city of Xai-Xai where I found the house of my children and gave them the news of the death of their father. But news of the massacre had already run through the country. They had gone to the hidden site and had not found the body of their father.

Pastor Manguele again picks up the tale:

 I found myself on my knees in the middle of the road, the first designated to die. The soldiers joked that as the shepherd I could lead the sheep into the afterlife. I asked the commander and he permitted me to make a prayer to God. After I finished my prayer, I closed my eyes and bowed my head prepared to meet my Lord.

 The commander gave orders for the execution. A man raised a heavy grain stamper to split open my skull; suddenly his arms had no strength. He couldn’t hold the stamper. When he tried a second time, there came a voice that said, “This one is not to die.” He looked around to find the source, but there was no one. The strange voice repeated once more, “This one is not to die.” Frightened, my would-be executioner kicked me aside saying, “Get out of here.”

 I got up, and one of the men took out a knife and cut me on the head, but the commander rebuked him. So they began and clubbed to death thirty-eight people. Later I learned that the two women with whom I had prayed the night before did not die because the bodies of other murdered people fell on top of them, and in that way they escaped.

 Since the bandits couldn’t kill me, they forced me to accompany them. At that time of year there is much heat in the south of our country. I was more than seventy years old, very tired, and had no water to drink. By noon I fell and could walk no more. So they began to argue over what to do with me. Some said they should kill me, but others said, “There is no one who can kill him if the spirits say he is not to die.”

 “At least let’s take advantage of his shoes and watch,” they said.

 Finally they agreed to leave me alone in the bush with the thought that this old one will die here because there is no food, water or other necessities for survival. But God had a plan for my life. My time had not yet come even though I couldn’t walk.

 I stayed there a long time and rested. I thought if I had a stick I could support myself to walk, and when I opened my eyes I saw a stick nearby. But hunger, thirst and exhaustion still overwhelmed me. I thought if I had some fruit I could eat and regain my strength. When I looked, there in front of me was a papaya tree with one mature fruit. I took and ate. Supported by that stick and strengthened by the papaya. I looked for a house where I could ask for water to drink. In those days because of the war, people didn’t stay in their houses, and when I arrived at a house, it was empty. Nevertheless, there was water in a clay jar nearby. I drank the water. I also found a basin and used it to wash my face and head. I stayed a little there, prayed and wrote my name in the dust of the ground so the owners would know when they returned who had been there.

 I found a better walking stick near that house for which I praised the Lord. Then I set off to find the main road. There I caught a ride to my house.

 When I got to the stop of my house, I met my neighbors and acquaintances; when they saw me they began to cry. I asked them “Why are you crying?” and they answered me, “We cry for you and for your wife because your children were here and said that in the place where thirty-eight people were killed, they didn’t find your bodies.”

 So I said, “My body is here now; I go in search of the body of my wife.”

 I caught another ride to Xai-xai; I arrived at my son’s house when it was already the night of November 1, 1989, and I stopped; I didn’t have the strength to climb the stairs to the upper floor until someone appeared who recognized me, and they came to carry me up.

 The house was full of people; they cried and prayed and praised God. Then I asked, “The body of my wife, has it already been found?”

 And they said, “Mother is alive and here in this house with us.”

 When I heard these words I was greatly moved; I cried much and they consoled me; after a long time I became calm; we sang hymns and one brother named Lourino prayed to the Lord.

 The governor of the province of Xai-Xai received me, gave me materials to construct a house and transport to go back to my home and collect my belongings. I resided in the city of Xai-Xai until the signing of the peace accord in 1993.

 In that same year I returned to Matimbine to begin life anew: to cultivate the land and to rebuild my houses. It has not been easy for us. I and my wife are already sick from the physical and psychological blows which we took in this period of war. Economic conditions also don’t allow us to recover quickly.

 But with everything we are happy to be in this place and for the fact that God saved our lives, giving us the possibility of exalting him through us.

 I would also like to say that when God calls someone and puts him in a place to serve him, he takes special care of that person. What happened to us is one among many true miracles which our God did and continues doing.