

*Real Life Stories*  
*Darlene Deibler Rose - Prisoner of War*

**Missionary to the Netherland East Indies (now Indonesia) 1917-2004**

1942. That day was burned in her memory because it was the last day she saw her husband Russell. During their relentless sweep through the Netherlands East Indies the Japanese Imperial Army had invaded the island of Celebes and put Darlene, Russell, and all the Christian Missionary & Alliance team under house arrest only 8 days before. They were not allowed to leave their compound. Then on March 13th they came to take Russell and the rest of the men to a prison camp in Pare Pare. Only Dr. Jaffray was allowed to stay; the Japanese said he was old and would die soon anyway.



Darlene grabbed a pillowcase and filled it with clothes, Russell's Bible, a notebook, pen, shaving gear and other things she thought he would need. When she stepped outside Russell was already in the truck with the other men. He was standing near the tailgate. Darlene handed Russell the pillowcase and looked into his face. She was so frightened for him. The driver started the truck and Russell leaned over the tailgate and said very quietly, "Remember one thing, dear: God said that He would never leave us nor forsake us."

The truck began rolling and disappeared down the road. It was the last time Darlene saw her husband.

"Everything happened so fast and without the slightest warning. Russell had said, "He will never leave us nor forsake us." No? What about now, Lord? This was one of the times when I thought God had left me, that He had forsaken me. I was to discover, however, that when I took my eyes off the circumstances that were overwhelming me, over which I had no control, and looked up, my Lord was there, standing on the parapet of heaven looking down. Deep in my heart He whispered, "I'm here. Even when you don't see Me, I'm here. Never for a moment are you out of My sight."

In May 1943 the Japanese took Darlene and all of her companions to a prison camp in Kampili. The vast majority of the prisoners were Dutch, but there were also other foreigners. Those who were not Dutch were assigned to Barracks 8, dubbed the Heinz Barracks for the variety of nationalities represented. Because Darlene was fluent in English, Dutch and Indonesian she was chosen as the barracks leader. She started a practice of reading scripture and having a time of prayer each night which maintained a strong sense of community and compassion among the barracks residents.

Each barracks had a work quota: kitchen and hospital duties, camp gardens, clearing land, felling trees, road work, unloading trucks, raising pigs and chickens, pumping water, sewing, knitting, cooking porridge, boiling water, and nursing. Darlene made a rotating schedule so that everyone who was able would learn all the jobs; this provided variety in their routine and coverage of jobs when someone became sick.

The commander of the camp was Commander Yamaji. He had a maniacal temper; it was rumored he had beaten a man to death at the camp at Pare Pare, and he would strike out at the women for the smallest of infractions. He also had some unreasonable demands. Because pigs were raised at the camp to feed Japanese soldiers the fly problem was extreme. At one point Mr. Yamaji demanded that every woman bring to him 100 dead flies per day, which amounted to over 60,000 daily. Thankfully he soon tired of counting flies and the demand was dropped.

Soon after Darlene and her friends were taken to the camp at Kampili all the men and boys over sixteen were taken from there to the camp in Pare Pare. Dr. Jaffray was taken with them, but while Darlene was saying goodbye to him he said, "Lassie, whatever you do, be a good soldier for Jesus Christ." Darlene said, "The echo of those words was to sustain me through the awful days ahead."

About a year after Darlene last set eyes on Russell she got word he had died of dysentery in the camp at Pare Pare. She was a widow at the age of 26.

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“I was stunned—Russell is dead. He’d been dead three months already! It was one of those moments when I felt that the Lord had left me; He had forsaken me. My whole world fell apart. I walked away from Mrs. Joustra. In my anguish of soul, I looked up. My Lord was there, and I cried out, “But God. . . !” Immediately He answered, “My child, did I not say that when thou passest through the waters I would be with thee, and through the floods, they would not overflow thee?”

As the news of Russell’s death spread through the camp Darlene was summoned to Mr. Yamaji’s office. He was standing behind his desk.

“Njonja Deibler, I want to talk with you,” he began. “This is war.” “Yes, Mr. Yamaji, I understand that.”

“What you heard today, women in Japan have heard.”

“Yes, sir, I understand that, too.”

“You are very young. Someday the war will be over and you can go back to America. You can go dancing, go to the theater, marry again, and forget these awful days. You have been a great help to the other women in the camp. I ask of you, don’t lose your smile.”

“Mr. Yamaji, may I have permission to talk to you?” He nodded, sat down, then motioned for me to take the other chair.

“Mr. Yamaji, I don’t sorrow like people who have no hope. I want to tell you about someone of whom you may never have heard. I learned about Him when I was a little girl in Sunday School back in Boone, Iowa, in America. His name is Jesus. He’s the Son of Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth.” God opened the most wonderful opportunity to lay the plan of salvation before the Japanese camp commander. Tears started to course down his cheeks. “He died for you, Mr. Yamaji, and He puts love in our hearts—even for those who are our enemies. That’s why I don’t hate you, Mr. Yamaji. Maybe God brought me to this place and time to tell you He loves you.”

Mr. Yamaji quickly rose from his chair and left the room, tears streaming down his cheeks. Prisoners were not supposed to leave the presence of a Japanese officer without permission, but when it became obvious he was not coming out of his room Darlene slipped out of the office. From that moment Darlene knew Mr. Yamaji trusted her and understood why she had come to the Netherland East Indies. She prayed for his salvation.

On May 12, 1944 the Kempeitai, the Japanese secret police came for Darlene. She was accused of being a spy. The Kempeitai took her to prison where she was to be kept in solitary confinement. Over the door of her cell were the words, “This person must die.” After the guard unlocked the door and shoved her inside she knew she was on death row, imprisoned to face trial and the sentence of death. She sank to the floor. Never had she known such terror. But suddenly she found herself singing a song she had learned as little girl in Sunday School:

Fear not, little flock, Whatever your lot,  
*He enters all rooms, The doors being shut.*  
He never forsakes, He never is gone,  
*So count on His presence From darkness ‘till dawn.*  
Only believe, only believe, All things are possible,  
Only believe.

So tenderly my Lord wrapped His strong arms of quietness and calm about me. I knew they could lock me in, but they couldn’t lock my wonderful Lord out. Jesus was there in the cell with me.

She was kept for six weeks in a cell about six feet square and had only small amounts of rice to eat each day. Frequently she would be taken to an interrogation room where two Japanese officers would accuse her of spying, of having a radio, of getting messages to the Americans and knowing Morse code; they said they had proof of her treachery. All this she would deny, but in the process they would strike her at the base of her neck or on her forehead above her nose. She never wept in front of them, but when she was back in her cell she would weep and

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pour out her heart to the Lord. When she finished she would hear Him whisper, “But my child, my grace is sufficient for thee. Not *was* nor *shall be*, but *is* sufficient.”

The Kempeitai did not believe anything Darlene said. They informed her they had sufficient proof of her involvement in espionage—she knew she was condemned, without formal trial, to be beheaded as an American spy.

One day Darlene pulled herself up to the window of her cell and began watching some women who were in the courtyard. One woman’s actions intrigued her. The woman inched toward a fence covered with vines. When she was close enough and the guard was not looking, a hand clutching a small bunch of bananas thrust through the vines; the woman grabbed the bananas, folded them into her clothes and strolled back to another group of women.

Bananas! Darlene began to crave bananas. She got down on her knees and said, “Lord, I’m not asking You for a whole bunch like that woman has. I just want one banana.” She looked up and pleaded, “Lord, just *one* banana.”

Then she began to think—how could God possibly get a banana to her? There was really no way it could happen. She couldn’t ask anyone to do it. It was impossible for her to get a banana. She prayed again, “Lord, there’s no one here who could get a banana to me. There’s no way for You to do it. Please don’t think I’m not thankful for the rice porridge. It’s just that—well, those bananas looked so delicious!”

The morning after she saw the bananas she had a surprise visitor—Mr. Yamaji. When her door was opened and she saw Mr. Yamaji’s smiling face she clapped her hands and exclaimed, “Mr. Yamaji, it’s just like seeing an old friend!” Tears filled his eyes and he didn’t say a word but walked back into the courtyard and talked the officers for a long time.

When he returned Mr. Yamaji was sympathetic. “You’re very ill, aren’t you?” “Yes, sir, Mr. Yamaji, I am.” “I’m going back to the camp now. Have you any word for the women?”

The Lord gave her the confidence to answer, “Yes, sir, when you go back, please tell them for me that I’m all right. I’m still trusting the Lord. They’ll understand what I mean, and I believe you do.”

“All right,” he replied, and turning on his heels he left.

When Mr. Yamaji and the other officers left Darlene realized she had not bowed to the men! “Oh Lord, they’ll come back and beat me,” she thought. When she heard the guard coming back she knew he was coming for her. She struggled to her feet and stood ready to go to the interrogation room. The guard opened the door, walked in and with a sweep of his hand laid at her feet—*bananas!* “They’re yours,” he said, “and they’re all from Mr. Yamaji.” Darlene was stunned as she counted—there were *ninety-two bananas!*

In all my spiritual experience, I’ve never known such shame before my Lord. I pushed the bananas into a corner and wept before Him. “Lord, forgive me; I’m so ashamed. I couldn’t trust You enough to get even one banana for me. Just look at them—there are almost a hundred.”

In the quiet of the shadowed cell, He answered back within my heart: “*That’s what I delight to do, the exceeding abundant above anything you ask or think.*” I knew in those moments that nothing is impossible to my God.

Time and time again God showed Himself to be powerful and faithful to Darlene. She was within moments of being beheaded as a spy only to be taken from the Kempeitai back to the prison camp in Kampili. She was protected as their camp was bombed by allied planes.

The war finally ended and Darlene returned safely to the States. She met and married Rev. Gerald W. Rose (pictured with her at right); they returned as missionaries to New Guinea in 1949 and Darlene was again among

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her beloved Kapauku. She had two sons and six grandchildren. Always when Darlene shared her story she said she would “do it all again for her Savior,” and she went home to be with Him on February 24, 2002 at the age of 87.

References:

*Evidence Not Seen: A Woman's Miraculous Faith in the Jungles of World War II*, by Darlene Deibler Rose, Harper Collins Publishers, San Francisco

*I Will Never Leave Thee*, audio recording of Darlene Deibler Rose speaking to a church congregation in 1987.