

CC Golden Springs

A Passion For Souls

Story by Christmas McGaughey
Photos by Tom Price

A LIGHT IN THE JUNGLE

Deep in Colombia's war-ravaged country, in the capital city of Bogotá, Pastor Raul Ries looked out over the sea of faces before him—nearly 500 young men, sheathed in camouflage and packing automatic weapons. He understood them. They were young, 18–25 years old. Their hearts were like their faces—scarred, wary, curious. They were tired and battle-hardened, but they were searching for answers and hungry for hope. Many had been away from their families for a long time fighting for freedom, and yet Colombia's inner turmoil had not subsided since it began four decades ago. In the past ten years, nearly 40,000 of their brothers, fathers, and friends had been killed for causes on both sides.

After showing the soldiers his testimonial film, *From Fury to Freedom*, in Spanish, Raul shared the Gospel, and then gave an invitation while their colonel, a believer, looked on. When every man stood to his feet, Raul paused, a little baffled. Thinking he had made some mistake, he asked them to sit down. He explained again that accepting Christ was a serious lifetime commitment; then he repeated the invitation. Again, every man stood to his feet. With tears of joy streaming down his face, the colonel watched as hundreds of his soldiers came to know Christ in a single day.

"It was very moving...I was

blown away," Pastor Raul said from his office in Calvary Chapel Golden Springs (CCGS), adding that it was one of the most poignant experiences he has had since God first opened doors for ministry in Central and South America in the late 70s.

A FAR-REACHING TESTIMONY

Raul's own miraculous conversion is detailed in his book, also titled *From Fury to Freedom*. Growing up, his life was characterized by anger and violence. He joined the Marines and served ten months in Vietnam with Alpha Company, better known as the Bounty Hunters. This fierce tour of duty provoked his already violent, emotionally scarred past. Upon returning to the U.S., he married Sharon in 1968 and opened a kung fu studio. Soon his outbursts of anger escalated. Crazy with fear that Sharon would leave him because of his violence, he determined to kill her, their children, and then himself on Easter Sunday, April 15, 1972.

Raul loaded his .22-caliber rifle and waited for his family to come home. When they didn't, he got restless and turned on the television. He happened across a channel where Pastor Chuck Smith was sharing about God's love and forgiveness. Raul heard the call of the Lord in that message and laid down his rifle. By the time the program had ended, Raul had asked Christ into his heart.

From that day on, he was a new person. He began to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ on the streets, through martial arts,

"We need to be passionate for souls and passionate for Jesus Christ. If we're passionate for God, then we're not going to be passionate for sin." -Raul Ries, pastor of Calvary Chapel Golden Springs



Raul's love of children is not only apparent on dedication Sunday, but also when he is holding his granddaughter Monet Ries (left).



People fellowship at the front of CC Golden Springs' building complex.



"As we pray more and study more, the Holy Spirit will be revealed in our lives," said Pastor Raul Ries.

and in local schools. God used Raul's violent past and testimony to call many into the kingdom. Raul traveled throughout the United States and onto the mission field, telling others about the love and forgiveness of God. At home, he started a Bible fellowship in his martial arts studio, which eventually grew into a church.

Raul's vision for ministry is taken from Acts

1:8. ***"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*** He desires to reach out to people in his community, the United States, and the uttermost parts of the world.

Speaking of his 15,000-member church, Raul said, "We have 'Somebody Loves You'

Crusades, and we reach out to the world. Our mission trips are so we can connect with our brothers and sisters. We have Bible Schools in Colombia; over 200 students have graduated from them." His goal is to establish Calvary Chapels in every major city in South America.

"When I look at my life and what He's done, I realize it's all the Lord. With my street

background, Vietnam and martial arts, the door is opened in many places. Like those soldiers I got to talk to in Bogotá and the martial arts people and the street people—they know my life was real, that it wasn't something phony," he said.

Dale Goddard, assistant pastor at CCGS, who has known Raul for 40 years said, "Reaching the whole world is something that's always been a passion of his, but because he is known more for his evangelistic efforts, the missions purpose has been less well-known. In all my years of Christianity, I've never seen a more conclu-

sive change in a life; it was absolute. He went from one extreme to another, and it has been sustained for 30 years."

THE WOMAN BEHIND THE MINISTRY

Sharon, Raul's wife, grew up on the mission field with her parents, Ed and Naomi Farrel,

"I just thought that if Raul gave his life to the Lord and would sit in church with me, that would be sufficient."...Sharon Ries

and said she could not have fathomed the way God would use the two of them when she married Raul.

"Before Raul's salvation, I felt like I destroyed my life: I sinned by marrying a nonbeliever, and I reaped what I deserved. But I devoted my life to God. I said vows to the Lord: 'Wherever You go I will go, and Your people will be my people.'"

When Raul told her he wanted to open martial arts studios in Mexico, she purposed in her heart to do missionary work while he taught kung fu. "I never dreamed that God would do what He has. I just thought that if Raul gave

his life to the Lord and would sit in church with me, that would be sufficient. But God did far beyond what I could have asked or thought," she said.

At CCGS, Sharon heads up a large women's ministry that prays for and financially supports missions. The ministry initially funded the Bible school in Colombia as well as a similar facility in Chile. Sharon recently traveled to Central and South America with Gayle Grenier, Margarite Jaramillo, Robin Milhouse, and Janice Orate—all Calvary Chapel pastors' wives—to minister to women in Colombia, Peru, and Chile at a conference.



Sharon Ries (center) with Diane Patterson and Janice Orate, CC Cucamonga. Photo by Maggie Castro

Many women in Peru traveled from remote jungles to participate. A group of women in Colombia rode a bus for 17 hours and ran into guerrilla soldiers before making it safely to the retreat. The Lord protected them and was glorified in their hearts and spirits



CC Golden Springs worship team reminds us that God lifts us up when we fall down.



Kimmy Allen signs.

Pastor Raul prays as people come forward to dedicate their lives to Christ.



Quoc Duong enjoys worshipping the Lord, despite his inability to hear.

as they came together to study His Word and hear His truth.

PASSIONATE FOR SOULS

Raul said that ever since his conversion the Lord has given him a burning desire to see the lost come to Christ. “We need to be passion-

ate for souls and passionate for Jesus Christ. If we’re passionate for God, then we’re not going to be passionate for sin,” he added.

“What the Lord has shown me is that I need to pray and study more so that I can know Him because, as we pray more and

study more, the Holy Spirit will be revealed in

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The mountains and rivers form a dramatic backdrop for a women’s retreat in El Secreto, Colombia. Photo by Sharon Ries *Missions pastor Jesse Barela and missionary to Colombia, Michelle Friar.*



Pastor Raul’s heart for the little ones is demonstrated in the emphasis placed on their spiritual growth, as well as a pleasant environment.