

A SOLDIER FOR CHRIST

Surrendering to Christ changed Di Yay's desire for justice into a longing to glorify God.

BY SABRINA PETERSEN



“If I am ever killed by someone, you or the children must administer justice,” 16-year-old Di Yay’s father told his mother.

Little did Di Yay realize that he would soon be staring at his wounded father, blood flowing from a bullet that had pierced through his forehead to his neck.

“Dad, what happened to you? Tell me!” He gripped the older man, pleading for a response.

His father’s lips moved, but no sound came out. His breathing was labored as blood from his neck wound threatened to suffocate him. Di Yay tried to find someone who could drive his father to the hospital, but to no avail. It was about 3 AM in a rural mountain village in Burma. Hardly anyone owned a vehicle, and even by car the hospital was hours away!

Within 15 minutes, the dying man breathed his last. He was gone, and with him any knowledge of the cause of his death.

Together with neighbors who had heard the gunshot, Di Yay and his mother heaved the limp body out of the hammock that hung under their bamboo hut and carried it inside.

It was then that they discovered the bullet and recognized it as the ammunition used by the military. Could the mystery murderer have been from the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)?

Di Yay and his family belong to the Karen people group who have traditionally resided on their land within the borders of Burma (present-day Myanmar). For over 70 years, the Burmese have sought to drive the peaceful Karen off

their land, even cruelly raiding and burning their villages. The DKBA had sided with the Burmese and grown a reputation for killing the innocent.

Di Yay’s shock over his father’s sudden death was replaced by anger. He looked at the villagers around him and muttered, “If the person who killed my father were here right now, I would kill him.” And he meant every word of it.

But now he had to consider the safety of his own family. He knew that they had to leave—and soon! Within two weeks, Di Yay, his mother, and his younger sister left their village under the cover of darkness, the bags on their backs as their only possessions. They began the two-day trek over the mountains to the border of Burma and Thailand where Di Yay’s uncle lived.

A NEW LIFE

Soon after their arrival, Di Yay's mother determined that her son needed to finish his education. He had attended a school back in the village, but it had been too expensive to continue. Di Yay's uncle knew of a "white people's" school across the border in Thailand that provided free education. Sunshine Orchard Children's Home and Learning Center was run by Seventh-day Adventist Christian missionaries. Di Yay had heard about Christianity—in fact, there had been a Christian church in his village—but, having been raised a Buddhist, he didn't know much about it.

Once a student at Sunshine Orchard, Di Yay began learning about the Bible. The more he learned, the more he realized that Christianity offered something better than Buddhism did. As a child, he had often hiked to the top of the hill near his village and pondered the thought that Someone must have created the scene before him: the river, the towering mountains, the people. Now, the Bible confirmed his conclusions. But more than that, it began to reveal to him his need of a Savior, and on June 11, 2010, he obeyed the Holy Spirit's impressions on his heart and was baptized.

God began changing Di Yay's life. He no longer desired to drink, and he longed to follow the life and teachings of Christ and obey the Ten Commandments. But this also meant loving his enemies. Di Yay had carried bitterness over the death of his father, and he wasn't quite ready to let go. He still had a journey ahead of him to learn to forgive.

THE STRUGGLE TO SURRENDER

Both Di Yay and his mother had not forgotten his father's injunction. Though Di Yay no longer nursed a bloodthirsty revenge, he still hoped to somehow gain justice.

Di Yay had planned to join the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) when he finished his education at Sunshine Orchard. Despite his desire to work as a missionary, the pull to join the army was still stronger, and he thought that perhaps he could join for a time and return to do God's work afterward. Many of his teachers discouraged him from making this decision, but he wouldn't be persuaded. As graduation approached, two teachers began meeting every morning at 4 AM to pray earnestly for Di Yay's decision, unbeknownst to him.

As his wounded father's life slipped away, Di Yay remembered his words, "If I am ever killed by someone, you must administer justice."

A struggle ensued in Di Yay's own heart, no doubt the work of the Holy Spirit. Hope filled the hearts of the missionaries as Di Yay announced on graduation day that he would attend a medical missionary training along with his fellow graduates. But soon after, he ran away and joined the army anyway, rationalizing that he could serve God there.

At first, everything went smoothly, and he reasoned that this must have been God's plan for him. However, he began making small compromises, particularly in regard to keeping the seventh-day Sabbath of the Bible. He realized that under the command of a leader in the army, he would be required to obey orders, even if they went against his faith. He felt trapped in Satan's snare and feared he would soon be unable to escape.

A DIFFERENT CALLING

Di Yay's teachers back at the missionary school had not stopped praying for God to convict his heart. One evening, Di Yay felt particularly restless and anxious. He laid down in his barrack and picked up the book *Steps to Christ*, search-

ing for something that would give him peace, and as he did so, the Holy Spirit began bringing Bible passages to his mind: "Whoever will save his life shall lose it: and whoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Matt. 16:25, 26. And, "If we died with Him, we shall also live with Him." 2 Tim. 2:11.

His conscience pricked, Di Yay realized that he had joined the army for his own glory. He had vowed, "I will serve my people. I will die for

my people"—but in that moment, he thought, *I'd rather die for Jesus. If I die here in the army, I don't know whether I am right with God.* Even the desire for obtaining justice for his father's death was gone.

"I realized that I didn't want anything of this world. Nothing. I was done. What I wanted was heaven. I wasn't going to sacrifice my life for this world, or for glory, or for fame. I was going to sacrifice my life for Jesus only."

And with that, Di Yay determined to leave the army, even if it meant disappointing his family or losing his reputation. He returned to Sunshine Orchard with the announcement: "I'm no longer a soldier in the KNLA. I'm a soldier for Christ."

Epilogue: *Di Yay, who is now studying to be a pastor and missionary at Hartland College, was my student at Sunshine Orchard Children's Home and Learning Center in Thailand. Having watched his life change, I felt impressed that his story needed to be shared as a way to showcase God's transforming power. ❖*

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