

The race to Potosí

An opportunity to show God's love

by Steve Hawthorne



At 7 a.m. I went to bed. Two emergencies had kept me up all night at the clinic, and I needed some rest before facing the new day. But by 8:00, my wife Mary was shaking me awake. 'Sorry, but when I went into town to buy some things at Suzy's store, they said her water just broke and the cord has come out!'

I'd been keeping my eye on Suzy, because she was near term and carrying her baby transverse. When she was seven months along I moved the baby's head down into place, but at her eight-month check-up, it had reverted to its original position. On her last visit, I gave her referral papers to the hospital in Potosí for an elective C-section.

However, some resourceful person in the family decided to try an old remedy. They laid her on a blanket with four people grasping the corners, and rolled her back and forth to change the baby's position. This succeeded in breaking her bag of waters, which carried the umbilical cord out as well, since the baby's head wasn't covering the cervix. The cord was down between her knees when I arrived. Suzy looked at me stoically. There was, as yet, no sign of labour.

I considered attempting an emergency C-section in Yawisla. Our government clinic is not certified for this, and unauthorised initiatives are frowned on in Bolivia. I was tired, and some of the equipment needed sterilising after last night. But the hospital in Potosí was two hours away—would the baby make it?

I spread a mattress in the back of the Land Cruiser so Suzy could lie flat. Also in the back went an oxygen tank, a delivery kit and Eysel, the nurse. Her job was to keep her hand in the birth canal in order to keep pressure off the cord and preserve the blood flow to the baby. Suzy's husband, Max, rode in front with me.

A tense journey

We tore out of town up the track following the twists of the river until it joined the main road. It didn't take long for the bumpy ride to stimulate Suzy's contractions. The nurse tried to calm her and get her to breathe. But an hour into the trip, the pains became unbearable. Eysel's voice was strained when she told me she couldn't feel the cord pulsations during contractions. I told her to start the oxygen. Would the baby make it?

My experience said no, this baby would be stillborn or brain damaged. But maybe God would intervene. God helped me the night before when a truck brought in a young woman from up the mountain, haemorrhaging from a miscarriage. I did surgery to stop the bleeding. Then a fourteen-year-old girl arrived in obstructed labour and I finally had to use forceps to get the baby out. Two out of three saves—should I hope for more?

An hour and a half into the trip, we reached pavement and I sped up, though now we were climbing towards 14,000 feet. When the cone of Potosí's Rich Mountain came into view, my hope rose. We were getting close. Then it sank as I thought of the countless thousands who had died there doing forced labour in the mines. God hadn't intervened to save them; why should I expect something in this case? Suzy was desperate now. Her groans were wrenching; she couldn't resist bearing down. Eysel's hand was cramping and could no longer restrain the pressure on the cord. She gave up.

When we reached the city limits, I had a mobile phone signal and I called the hospital emergency room to advise them of our imminent arrival. I tried to speak as calmly, but with Suzy behind me screaming and calling on all the saints, I think my voice cracked a bit.

The closer we got to the hospital, the slower our progress. A parade blocked the street and I had to backtrack. A dump truck pulled out in front and crawled along. A bus stopped in the entrance of the hospital to load passengers! But a doctor had received my message and was on the lookout. He shoed the bus on and threw open the gate.

From there things moved quickly. Firm hands slid Suzy from the car to a gurney and whisked her to the obstetrics wing, while I followed after with Max and Eysel. We waited. News came that the baby had been delivered. His APGAR score was two out of ten and he was in the Intensive Care Unit. He was alive, but would he be normal?

Words, deeds and signs

Five months later, little Rodrigo is in perfect health, but I'm still not satisfied. Saving his life was the easy part. Now I wonder if he will make it into the Kingdom of God. What can I do to facilitate that?

A theology course I taught pointed me towards some answers: 1) Our mission springs from God's mission; 2) As Jesus did, we need to preach the Good News, but we also need to show God's love through good deeds, confirmed by signs of God's power; and 3) A balanced ministry includes words of truth, deeds of love and signs of power.

Preparing for that course showed me some strengths and weaknesses in my ministry. I have many opportunities to show God's love to people, like getting out of bed to drive Suzy to Potosí. The miracle of Rodrigo's health is a sign of God's power. But I've never been back to explain to Max and Suzy that what they saw was God's love and power in action.

Without words of truth, Suzy may attribute her good outcome to those saints to whom she prayed in the back of the car. Or she may put her trust in me. Either way, God doesn't get the credit, and she doesn't get the Good News.

Plead with God on our behalf for opportunities, boldness and language abilities to explain things clearly in this Quechua village. We want the Yawisleños to understand the meaning of our actions, and to love and praise God for His goodness to us all.

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Urgent Prayer Need

Bingham Academy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, urgently needs a [French teacher](#) to join their staff team in August. Pray that God will provide the right person to meet this need.