

Train Wreck

Yupha Thubthimthong stood transfixed at the scene before her. Fear, revulsion, and horror overwhelmed her; she longed to turn away, not wanting to be part of it, even to help. Before her lay the carnage of a train wreck—a passenger train from Ban Pong and a cargo train headed for southern Thailand had collided head-on near the station, derailling the passenger train. Many people had been killed, and many more were severely injured, trapped in the smoldering wreckage.

Yupha, a member of the Woman's Welfare Services Society of Thailand, had been summoned to help. She had stopped only long enough to don the blue uniform of the Society and then had rushed to the scene. But she was not prepared for the sight that confronted her. As she wavered, a "light whisper" seemed to say: "You are a Latter-day Saint. You must let your light shine for the world to see. You must be strong enough, patient, brave enough to go and help." Strengthened by the voice, she took a deep breath and began the gruesome task of pulling bodies from the wreckage and readying the injured for transportation to the hospital.

Though the entire area seemed covered with blood and a foul odor hung in the air, Yupha worked on determinedly and soon came upon a woman nearly crushed under a heavy gas storage tank. Yupha rushed to help her, realizing as she drew closer that the woman was pregnant and quite near her delivery time. As the tank was [page 57] lifted, the infant was born. Overwhelmed, Yupha excused herself. She needed time to summon her courage once again.

Groping blindly for a place to calm herself, she was confronted suddenly by a woman brandishing a stick who raged at her, "My children are dead because of you! Look at the destruction your carelessness and negligence have caused!" Yupha staggered back from the threatened assault, confused at first at the woman's accusations. The woman was consumed with grief, having lost two children in the train wreck but having found only one of the bodies. The poor mother had seen Yupha's uniform and mistaken her for a railroad employee.

As calmly as she could, Yupha explained that She was not working for the railroad, that she had come only to help. Three police officers noticed the conflict and warned the raging mother that she would be arrested should she harm Yupha.

Carole Osborne Cole, "Train Wreck!" Ensign, Jan. 1981, 57

"What if that mother were me?" Yupha thought to herself. "Wouldn't I be crazy with grief, too?" She turned to the policemen and said, "No, please don't harm her. She is only reacting out of grief." Surprised, the police protested that the woman had tried to hit Yupha and might try to do so again.

"I'm not afraid," she replied. "Heavenly Father teaches that we are all brothers and sisters; we must love one another. She will not harm me."

Doubtfully the police released the woman, and Yupha returned to her grisly tasks. The difficult and heart-rending work consumed several more hours.

At length a search was started among the workers for someone with blood type "O". A small girl was about to undergo surgery, and the hospital had exhausted its blood supply. Without the blood and surgery the child would die. Yupha volunteered and rode to the hospital to donate the needed blood. She had never before given blood, and because it was so badly needed more than the usual pint was drawn out of Yupha's veins. An air of urgency hung over the hospital and the workers. Not realizing she should rest after blood is drawn, Yupha left the hospital and returned again to the accident scene.

By late afternoon the worst tasks had been accomplished, and Yupha's thoughts returned to her own children and their needs. She readied herself to go home. But before she could go, a railroad official requested that the volunteer workers meet at the hospital where Yupha had donated blood. The director wanted to meet them and express his appreciation.

The Minister of Public Health thanked the workers also, and while they were talking the grief-stricken mother from the station entered the room, searching about for someone. A doctor with her called out, "Is there a Mrs. Yupha here?" (It is the custom in Thailand to address people by their title and first name rather than the last name as in English-speaking countries.) Knowing she must acknowledge who she was, Yupha nodded rather reluctantly. By this time the woman had spotted Yupha, ran to her, embraced her, then burst into tears.

Yupha stared at the doctor, bewildered. "Your donation of blood saved this woman's daughter," he explained. "She has come to thank you."

Relief flooded Yupha's face as the woman tearfully expressed her gratitude, then commented, "How can you stay so calm? When I have been so angry with you, you remain serene. What makes you like that?"

Yupha's answer was much the same as she had given the police officers earlier: "My church teaches that we are all brothers and sisters and should love one another no matter who it is or what they do."

While this scene took place, Dr. Martin, the Minister of Public Health looked on. He was greatly impressed with Yupha and her response to the once grief-stricken but now joyous mother.

Dr. Martin was in an unusual position. He had previously been head of the Department of Education, which supervised the Department of Religion, and this latter department had imposed visa restrictions on the LDS missionaries. Dr. Martin's response was therefore a welcome one. Noting the beautiful way in which Yupha reacted to a difficult situation, he recognized the fruits of LDS missionary work.

Meanwhile, the grateful mother pressed Yupha for more information on the Church and its teachings.

"May I come to your church when I have seen to the funeral of my child?"

"You are always welcome," Yupha assured her.

At last the long, eventful day was over. Yupha returned home to her own children, exhausted, but warm with the knowledge that she had listened to the "light whisper," of the Spirit and put her faith into action.