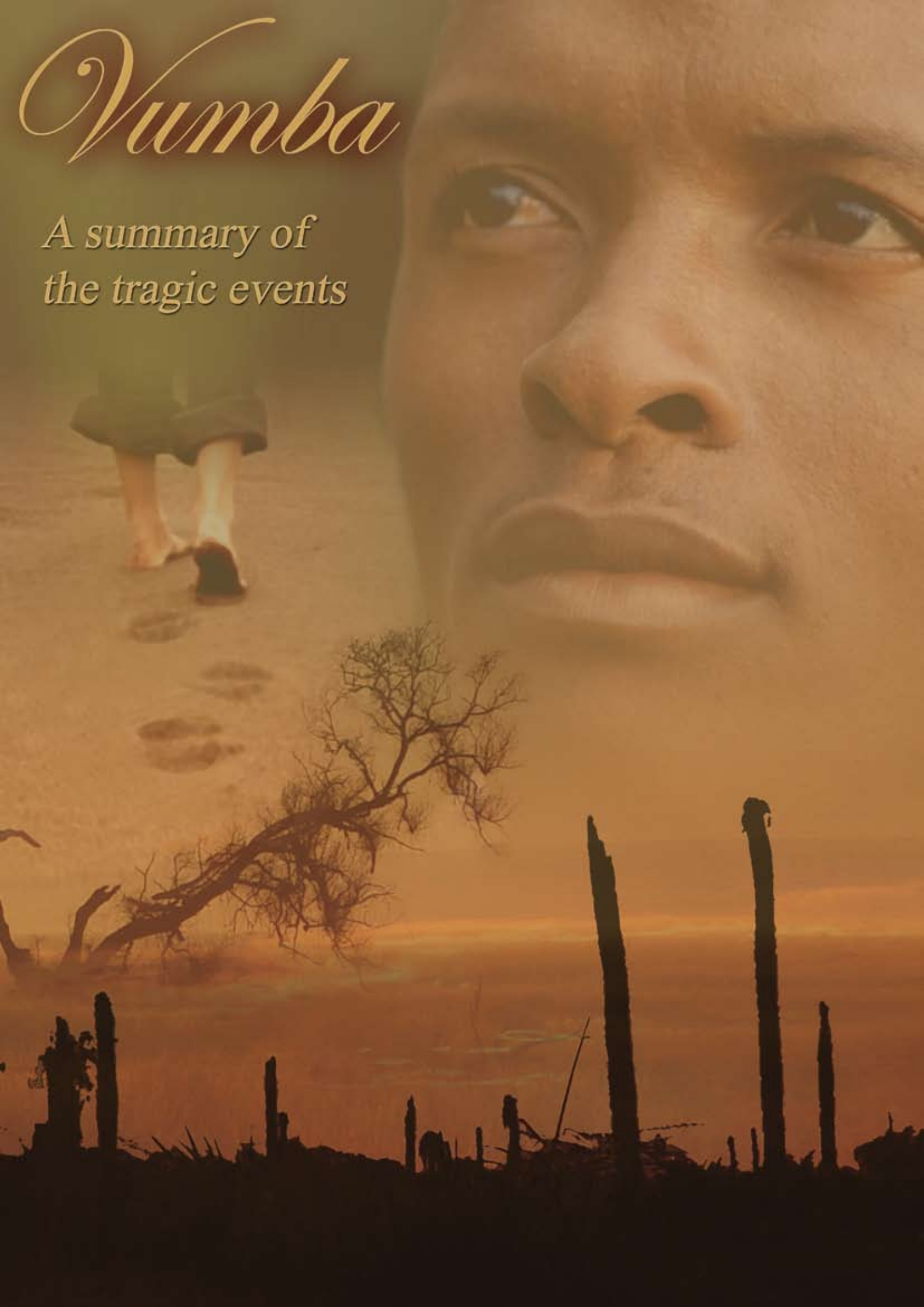


# *Vumba*

*A summary of  
the tragic events*



# *The Vumba Tragedy*

## *A Summary of the Tragic Events*

Friday 23 June 1978 is remembered as being the darkest day in Elim history. On that day, twelve people were slaughtered at the Elim Mission station in the Vumba Mountains, Northern Zimbabwe. Another would die a week later. The sheer brutality of this massacre shocked the world.

We hope the following will not only give you an insight into the history of the Vumba Tragedy but also inspire and challenge you as to the part you are playing in world mission.

### The Missionaries in Rhodesia...

Peter and Sandra McCann, Philip (6) and Joy (4)  
Philip and Susanne Evans and Rebecca (5)  
Roy and Joyce Lynn and Pamela Grace (3 weeks old)  
Wendy White  
Catherine Picken  
Mary Fisher

Joy Bath (nurse) and Peter Griffiths (Principal of the Elim School) were in the UK at the time of the massacre.

### Background...

From the earliest times, most British Pentecostal missionaries were talented. In Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), the leader in the work from 1948 was Doctor Cecil Brien and his wife. With their medical and surgical skills, they saw a substantial reduction in infant mortality in the area. The future growth of the work in Rhodesia was to further develop both in the hospital and more particularly in the school.

At the time of the tragedy, the missionaries out on the field were both talented and highly qualified. Three of them had science degrees. Peter McCann (teacher) had a B.Sc degree as did Philip Evans (teacher), who also had an M.Sc. Roy Lynn was a whiz with mechanics and Joyce was a nurse/midwife. Wendy White had a degree in social studies as well as being a nurse. Catherine was a sports teacher. Mary Fisher (teacher) had a B.Sc degree and had studied at London Bible College as well as at Swansea and Brunel University.



Cecil Brien at work



The McCann Family leaving for Vumba

Philip Evans had first gone out to Rhodesia at the end of December 1975. On his arrival he was presented with papers by the authorities and was asked to sign them. Included in these was a section that required him to agree as a layman to take up arms if hostilities broke out. This he refused to do and he was sent home again. When he returned to the UK, Elim ordained him as a minister and he went back again and was admitted to the country.

Irishman Robert Lynn, who was familiar with troubles in his own country, had access to a gun, which was mainly used for shooting snakes and vermin. However he, together with the others, agreed that this should be surrendered in keeping with the mission's strict neutrality.

## Zimbabwe Then...

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At this particular time in history, Rhodesia was in conflict; the forces of the Rhodesian government under Prime Minister Ian Smith opposing the so-called “liberation” forces led by Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe (now President of Zimbabwe).

Leslie Wigglesworth (the International Missions Director) and David Ayling kept in close touch with the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office to ascertain the safety of their workers in Rhodesia. One interview took place in the office of the Labour Foreign Secretary, David Owen. Some time later in a television interview which dealt with David Owen’s personal faith, he paid tribute to the two Elim ministers. They had asked to pray with the Foreign Secretary and were permitted to do so. David Owen said that it had impressed him greatly and that it was probably the first time such a thing had happened in that office!

At the time it seemed wise to move the Elim School and hospital from their premises at Nyanga North (also known as Katerere) to the Vumba, because of safety precautions. There was an army base a few miles from the school and hospital at Katerere and the so-called Patriotic Front freedom fighters were increasingly active. The Vumba is in the hills above Mutare, about 100 miles from Katerere, and is situated only a very short distance from the border with Mozambique.

John Smyth, a senior staff member at Elim Headquarters, had been delegated by the Executive Council and the International Missions Board to go to Rhodesia to share with Ron Chapman, the Chairman of the work there. Together they consulted the teachers and nurses who served at the Mission at Katerere and also at the Eagle School in the Vumba. Every one of the Elim missionaries bravely and unstintingly opted to stay in Rhodesia to continue with their work. Arrangements were made to evacuate them in the event of an impending disaster.



Ron Chapman

The situation became more serious and moving became imperative. A member of the International Missions Board was sent to discuss the possible move



Vumba Mountains in Zimbabwe

to the Eagle School at the Vumba, a move which was not initially favoured because of the separation between the hospital and the school. It must be remembered that the staff at the school and hospital ran churches in the Katerere area as well as following their nursing or teaching ministries. The nursing staff also ran clinics. However, the International Missions Board member readily agreed to the move once the whole position had been assessed.

At this time, Joyce Pickering had become engaged to Roy Lynn. Their marriage took place in the UK on 23 July 1977. Joan Caudell (a teacher) and Joy Bath were due to go on furlough. Wendy White, who was due to go on leave on 3 July 1978, was a nurse at the hospital, but her degree meant that she could teach when the move to the Vumba took place. She taught Biology and English. Her nursing skills were invaluable especially as she was to be the only nurse on site at the Vumba.

Ron Chapman (Chairman) was regularly in touch with the school and taught Bible Knowledge two days a week. The teaching staff were the most highly qualified of any African school in Rhodesia. They were well able to teach their scholars at secondary level.

One of the main challenges facing the staff at Katerere was the land mines which had been laid everywhere. One of the lorries belonging to the Mission was badly damaged in an explosion. After one particular journey that Peter Griffiths (Principal of the Elim School) and Joan Caudell made, they found out that they had passed over several land mines without them exploding! Because of the tremendous risks involved in travelling, it became increasingly difficult to provide meals for up to 1,000 people on the site in Katerere.



## Move to Vumba ...

The Eagle School had been a preparatory school for European boys. It could accommodate about 150, whereas the Elim School needed twice that number. When the Elim School moved there, the scholars accepted the available accommodation despite many having to sleep on mattresses on the floor. They were just glad to be able to continue their secondary education.



Peter Griffiths and School children

Peter Griffiths and his wife Brenda, took a lengthened leave and returned to the UK in August 1977 for Peter to complete his MA studies. Philip Evans was made Acting Principal in the absence of Peter. Philip was only 28 and serving his first term, but he accepted the challenge.

### ***Every one of the Elim missionaries bravely and unstintingly opted to stay in Rhodesia to continue with their work.***

The British teachers first impression of the Vumba was that it was like the English Lake District, so beautiful was this mountainous area. It was 15 miles from Mutare, which meant ready access to shops and wider Christian fellowship.

The school at Katerere was disbanded. One tragic event was that two of three double decker buses, which were transporting scholars, were seriously damaged by land mines. Two of the boys were killed and one lost a leg. The occupants on one of the buses lost all their possessions.

The move to the Eagle School, Vumba happened in 21 July 1977.

Timothy and Rachel Evans, the two older children of Philip and Susanne Evans, were at boarding school in Salisbury (now Harare). Philip Evans' mother visited the whole family at the Vumba so was able to make meaningful contact with the whole family before the massacre. She bravely and lovingly took Tim and Rachel into her care after the Vumba tragedy.

Joyce and Roy Lynn's baby daughter, Pamela Grace, was delivered two weeks early by Caesarian section in hospital in Mutare on 1 June 1978. Had the baby gone to full term, she and Joyce would have been safe in hospital at Mutare when the massacre occurred.



The Evans Family

The Elim workers felt safe at the Vumba as it was well protected. While there, Joyce Lynn opened four clinics in nearby areas while her

husband Roy preached and ministered to the men. Visits were made once a month to the hospital at Katerere by staff from the Vumba, courtesy of the marvellous service provided by the small planes of the Missionary Aviation Fellowship. MAF transported Elim missionary personnel as well as personnel from other missionary organisations. Their help was invaluable. In many cases it would have otherwise been totally impossible to gain access to the mission stations because of guerilla activity.

The first term at the Vumba went very well, but the second term proved to be very difficult due to increasing guerilla activity and influence in the country. The African House Master came under such pressure that he was obliged to leave. Six boys disappeared, probably to join the guerillas. Food was stolen and probably supplied to the guerillas, which put the staff under enormous pressure from the Government forces for allegedly supporting the so-called rebels. Consequently, no food was kept in store at the school. Instead, supplies were obtained daily from Mutare. It was nonetheless felt that scholastically and spiritually the scholars progressed at the Vumba.



From Left - Catherine, Mary, Roy and Joyce

Ron Chapman kept in close touch with the church authorities in Cheltenham, but events mounted because Roman Catholic, Dutch Reformed, Salvation Army and American Southern Baptist workers were murdered. The Roman Catholic and Salvation Army schools had been disbanded. The killing of two Salvation Army lady teachers sent shock waves all over the world. The work of their organisation in Rhodesia was large, highly esteemed and very well known. No one thought that their personnel would be murdered.

Alarmed by this news, Leslie Wigglesworth phoned Ron Chapman in Rhodesia and it was decided that the staff should move to Mutare and travel in to the school every day. Matters were not helped because all the staff members, except Wendy White, were unwell. Every staff member said yet again that they wished to continue their work at the school. The International Missions Board sent Peter Griffiths to Rhodesia 19 October 1977. This brief visit resulted in the staff again expressing their desire to stay where they were.

## So came the tragic events of 23rd June 1978...

21 Guerillas came over the border from Mozambique and attacked the missionaries with axes and other weapons. The inquest revealed the terrible punishment and mutilation that they suffered. One guerilla later said that the “executions” were in retaliation for a Rhodesian Army attack on a guerilla camp two years earlier, which the Elim missionaries knew nothing about.

Ron Chapman was called upon to go to the Eagle School on the day of the murders to identify the victims and to deal with the immediate aftermath. All the deceased, including three week old baby Pamela Grace, had been brutally ill-treated, abused and murdered. The bodies were almost unrecognisable. Altogether there were three men, five women and four children.

Mary Fisher was cruelly attacked, but managed to run down the steep hill on which the school stands, going through agonizingly prickly bushes and trees. She was found later and taken unconscious to hospital in the capital, Harare, where she died on 30 June 1978. Mary should have been setting off for her furlough that day. Her departure was delayed because she wanted to visit her sister who was on missionary work in Ghana before returning to Britain. The travel arrangements had proved to be immensely difficult involving detours through other African countries, thus delaying her departure.

On the day of the tragedy, Mr Chapman tried to phone Elim Headquarters without success, but managed to get through to the Elim Bible College at Capel, Surrey. He was able to speak to Wesley Gilpin, Principal of the College. It so happened that it was Open Day there and the main speaker was Peter Griffiths. Wesley Gilpin had the unenviable task of informing Peter of the situation as he and Brenda arrived at the College. Peter stood high, greatly admired by everybody, because he proceeded to minister at the crowded Open Day despite the devastating news from Rhodesia. His ministry was tremendously moving, brave and challenging. Amazingly, what he had prepared on Hebrews 11:24,25 could not have been more fitting. It even included the illustration of the five American missionaries murdered by the Auca Indians in South America.

### **Shock...**

There was worldwide condemnation of the needless slaughter. Politicians, churchmen and journalists all joined in the chorus. It was an especially difficult time for Elim Missions. The long serving Missions Director, Leslie Wigglesworth had just retired and his successor, David Ayling (minister of Ulster Temple, Belfast) had not yet moved into the office.



Digging the graves

The news rocked the whole Elim movement. On Sunday 25 June special services were held in Elim churches all over Britain. The Cheltenham Elim Church (next door to Elim International Offices) was

packed for the Sunday morning service. Many representatives of the media were there. Some went into the service and came out astonished. They could not get over the fact that the congregation, led by their minister Rev Lionel Currie, were praying for the very people who had committed the murders as well as for relatives and friends of the deceased.

The media gave special attention to the prayer offered at Cheltenham Elim. The Daily Mail of 26 June carried the heading, ‘Father...forgive them’. This viewpoint, which was given to the media and propagated by them, gave rise to a very mixed response in the UK. There were those who applauded such a Christian standpoint while a few indicated that such a view was totally repulsive to them. It seemed to be the view that Elim should have cried for immediate reprisals and for those who had committed these atrocities to be brought to justice.



Funeral service

The International Missions Board was called to meet that same day. It was decided unanimously that International Missions Board members should leave in twos to visit the homes of those who had been murdered and to seek to arrange for their future welfare.

Leslie Wigglesworth and David Ayling along with John Smyth were selected to attend the funeral service in Rhodesia. Tom Walker, Field Superintendent, remained behind to deal with the vast number of phone calls, interviews and requests for information. He was at his post from 6 am until 11 pm every day for a week.

Radio and television people requested interviews. One interviewer from Australia did a very demanding interview over the phone which was broadcast live over Australian television.

The lovely thing was that every now and then the unending calls would include one from an Elim minister. Without exception, each one lovingly said, “We are standing with you and praying for you!”. Each supportive call was brief, but so deeply appreciated.



## Back in Zimbabwe...

.. the scene was devastating. Students and African personnel had left the area. Zimbabwean friends were trying to bring some order into the chaos, but the situation was nevertheless dark and depressing.

### ***There was worldwide condemnation of the needless slaughter.***

The first funeral service was for all those killed except for Mary Fisher, and was held in Mutare. A fleet of hearses from the main cities of Rhodesia were required to accommodate the funeral. The service was led by Mr Ron Chapman and David Ayling preached. John Smyth conducted the burial service and Ron Chapman preached.

Mary Fisher's funeral was held on the following Thursday. John Smyth led the funeral service and conducted the burial service and Ron Chapman preached. The verse quoted at the time of the deaths and on the memorial was, "For to me to live is Christ, to die is gain".

During the funeral service, Ron Chapman had prayed for the families of those who had been killed. He also prayed for those who were responsible for the killings. Some of the papers reported that the Mayor of Mutare took objection to this.

The question of forgiveness had become a very controversial issue in Zimbabwe. Nevertheless Peter Griffiths and the others maintained that this was the Christian thing to do.



## To Date and Answers to Prayer...

We now know that the same prayer of forgiveness was prayed by some of the missionaries as they were being killed. It also came to light that this prayer was beginning to be answered - rumours began to circulate in the early 1980's that several of the men personally responsible for the killings had been dramatically converted.

Peter Griffiths returned to Zimbabwe. In January 1979, after settling back into the work, he was given a senior position in the Education Department in the newly independent Zimbabwe. The International Missions Board asked him to investigate to see what substance there was in these rumours.

Peter was able to confirm the remarkable story of what happened to a group in the platoon who were together in an army camp in Entumbane shortly after the war had ended.

Eight of them experienced a vision in which they saw the cross and the hand of God coming against them in judgment. Seven of them who had passports immediately left the country and enrolled in Bible Schools in West and East Africa. The other, not having a passport went to a Bible School in Harare where Peter Griffiths was able to meet him. He had left school at 14 and had been the youngest platoon commander in ZANLA, operating under the name of 'War Devil'. Peter subsequently kept in regular touch with him.



In another separate incident, an African pastor named Mopofu, working for Harare Intecessors, was asked to speak at a rehabilitation centre for ex-combatants in Troutbeck, Nyenga. While he was preaching, a paraplegic man screamed out in agony out of deep conviction, crying for mercy. He later confessed that he had been one of those responsible for killing the missionaries. He told the pastor how the missionaries had prayed for their killers as they were being slaughtered.

The Elim missionaries suffered because they happened to have moved into a new area at the wrong time. They were at a location that straddled one of the main routes of entry for bands of freedom fighters; they had not been in the area long enough to build up the respect and trust of the locals in the same way that they had been able to do in Katerere.

Some of the Africans also suffered during the conflict, particularly in the more rural areas. Some churches were closed. Pastor Abraham Satuku was badly beaten after being falsely charged in July 1977. If it hadn't been for the intervention of a guerrilla commander, Pastor Satuku would have been killed. In a remarkable turn of events, the guerilla

commander said that he would be willing to die alongside Pastor Satuku if the beating did not stop.

Dr David J Maxwell, Editor of the Journal of Religion in Africa, who was a teacher in Zimbabwe from 1986 to 1989, writes:

*“The war left the Church in the hands of the local people. They did not simply appropriate its structures but also its religious authority. The new structures of the Zimbabwean Church reflected this with its greater emphasis on lay vocation and an indigenous leadership. This renewed closeness with its base made it responsive to the needs of rural people in post-war society. The Church offered them the chance to come to terms with and heal memories of the war through acts of confession and restitution. Christians have found meaning for the pain they experienced through concepts of reconciliation, sacrifice and, in the specific case of Elim, martyrdom. This dynamic continues today as Christians draw inspiration from the war through the idioms of testimony and song as a means to help overcome the hardships of the present.”*

## Finally...

As a result of the attitude of forgiveness and prayer, we have seen the work in Zimbabwe flourish rather than diminish. The secondary school is now twice the size it was before the massacre and the hospital is making excellent progress not only in treatment but also in relationships with the government. The church is growing and 16 new churches were planted between 1993 and 2003. Following the massacre, many people gave funds for a church to be bought as a memorial tribute and the Mutare Memorial church was purchased. The church continues to flourish and services are full to overflowing.

What happened in Zimbabwe is not something that any of us would ever wish to see again, but heaven must have rejoiced at the dedication, faithfulness and loyalty of the devoted missionaries. In the plan and purposes of God, He saw fit to take these workers home to Himself. It is also clear that the principles of sowing and reaping are eminently worked out in each human life, that as we die, so we live.

*These missionaries were truly “promoted to Glory”.*

The plaque we maintain here at Elim International Offices reads as follows:

**IN GRATITUDE TO GOD FOR THE LIVES AND SERVICE OF OUR MISSIONARIES  
MARTYRED IN THE VUMBA, RHODESIA, 23 JUNE 1978.**

**Peter and Sandra McCann, Philip and Joy - - Wendy White  
Philip and Susanne Evans and Rebecca - - Catherine Picken  
Roy and Joyce Lynn and Pamela Grace - - Mary Fisher (died 30 June 1978)**

**“THEY LOVED NOT THEIR LIVES UNTO DEATH” Revelation 12:11**

## The Missionaries:

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### **Robert John Lynn (known as Roy)**

Born on 21 September 1941, Roy was 36 when he was killed. Roy was originally intended as a temporary replacement for missionary Alan Renshaw who was on leave and who was normally in charge of maintenance. Roy had a magic touch with all machinery. He was lame and became especially loved by the Africans because if he fell over while doing a repair, he got up and laughed! He would do anything for anybody. When he left for Rhodesia in 1975 after pastoring the Elim Church in Brookeborough, Northern Ireland, for over 6 years, he had to change planes at Heathrow airport. He was met in from Belfast by P S Brewster and Tom Walker from Elim Headquarters. They were surprised to see him walking towards them with a much more pronounced limp than usual. He was carrying two cases, one a fibre one and the other full of tools. He greeted the two men with the remark, "I have had another road accident and I knew that if I told you about it, you would not let me go to Rhodesia. It's too late now and I'm off!" The men were very moved and even found emotional difficulty in praying for this brave young man just before he left.

### **Joyce Lynn nee Pickering**

Born on 16 November 1941, Joyce was 36 when she was killed. Joyce was from York and was a highly skilled nurse and midwife. She met Roy in Rhodesia. They were married in the UK on 23 July 1977. Their daughter, Pamela Grace, was born on 1 June 1978, just 3 weeks before her tragic death. Joyce was the very capable Matron of the Hospital, a good organiser and very successful in pursuit of her nursing and midwifery ministry.

### **Elizabeth Wendy H White (known as Wendy)**

Born on 14 June 1940, Wendy was 38 when she was killed. She was from Kensington Temple and was well experienced in nursing, teaching and social work, holding BA, SRN and a Diploma in Social Studies qualifications. She served in Rhodesia for 1 year 4 months, and was still on her first term when she was killed.

### **Peter and Sandra McCann**

Born on 13 April 1946 and 30 December 1943, Peter and Sandra were 32 and 34 respectively when they were killed. They were both from Huddersfield, Yorkshire and served in Rhodesia for almost 8½ years. Their first child Paul, tragically died with the first whiff of anaesthetic on the operating table seven years before the Vumba massacre and Peter and Sandra were remarkable in their wonderful response to such a tragedy. Peter was a well qualified science teacher and highly skilled in laboratory work. Sandra was very adept with needlework and handicrafts. Their children Philip aged nearly 6 and Sharon aged 4½ were killed with them.

### **Philip and Susanna Evans**

Born on 16 April 1949 and 12 July 1945, Philip and Susanna were 29 and 33 respectively when they were killed. They were from Nuneaton Elim. Their daughter Rebecca was killed with them. She was only 5. They ministered in Rhodesia for 2½ years and were still on their first term. Philip held MSc, MPhil, and Teaching Diploma qualifications. Sue was a qualified secretary. Their children Timothy and Rachel (highlighted in photo) were away at boarding school at the time of the tragedy and therefore survived. Their grandmother, Philip's mother, took over the responsibility of their care in England. Timothy was born on 22 April 1968 and Rachel on 14 August 1969, so they were 10 and almost 9 when they lost their parents.

### **Catherine Picken**

Born on 15 March 1923, Catherine was from Southend on Sea and 55 at the time of the Vumba massacre. She was a proficient hockey player and sports teacher, a role she was still occupying at the time of her death. She studied French and other subjects in Belgium for 2 years from 1956 in preparation for missionary work in Congo. She served there for 1½ years and had to escape at the time of the Katanga war. She served in Rhodesia for almost 18 years.

### **Mary E Fisher**

Born on 13 August 1946, Mary was 31 when she died in hospital in Harare. Mary was from Caerphilly and taught maths and science. She went to Rhodesia in August 1973 and had served for almost 5 years. She had a rich soprano voice and her worship tapes were a great blessing both before and after her tragic death. She survived the initial attack, only to die from her terrible injuries on 30 June 1978.





(Left to right) Back Row: Brenda & Peter Griffiths, Alan Renshaw Front Row: Catherine Picken, the Drs Brien, Joan Caudell, Roy Lynn and Anne Renshaw



Mary Fisher



The McCann family and Catherine Picken



Dr Brien, Catherine Picken and Peter Griffiths



Peter Griffiths, David Ayling and John Smyth with Evelyn and Pious Munembe



Philip and Susanna Evans



The Evans and McCann families



The Vumba Memorial Church

Then (left) ...

... and now (right)



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