

A few days ago James told me that for the first time in his life he felt peace in his heart. That made me intensely happy. The impassioned love for one's neighbor seems to me to be far more socially radical than class war.

I have a somewhat different friendship with Glenn Miles. He is a professional caregiver and student of theology from England who visited me for a few weeks. Determined to improve the world, he arrived in Bagong Silang with a certain naiveté, as most do. After Glenn once watched Mata stand in front of the mirror in the shack for a very long time and sadly study the hole in his face, he offered to go to the city to the eye specialist or to the social service office with Mata.

"Okay, go ahead," I told him—and silently I thought: You will have an interesting experience with the "social services" of Manila.

When I speak with Glenn, I notice that I have learned some things in the last half year, and that I not only live in Bagong Silang, but have also assimilated.

## **Imprinted Images**

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Ruth wrote me a letter a few days ago, saying that she admires me. Next to me, she feels like a worm, she said. "That embarrasses me," I answered, "the worm is namely me, and sometimes I ask myself what actually keeps me here. Maybe the Swiss sense of duty that I was raised with? Or maybe it's God's grace?"

One thing is certain: I have to find a path to an intimate relationship with Jesus of Nazareth again—otherwise this

work will consume me. Physically, I feel well, except for my stomach, which gives me problems again and again.

Last night, a little two-year-old child died nearby. He had a fever for a whole week and received no medical care. We first heard about him when it was already too late. These are the unbearable moments. . . .

As is customary, when someone dies in the immediate vicinity, I visit the family. Glenn accompanies me. The child's little corpse lies on a makeshift bier in a wretched shack. The mother is inconsolable. As we pray with her, I discover in the semi-darkness the little sister of the deceased boy. She is completely emaciated and seems feverish. Suddenly, she vomits and I am overwhelmed with horror: It is a large ball of long, live worms, thicker and longer than earthworms. We don't have any medications or remedies with us, but promise to return the next day and to decide then how we can help. On the way home, the image of that girl is indelibly etched in my mind. Despite a certain familiarity with misery, again and again there are certain impressions that make me shudder violently.

In the evening, a cool breeze blows, and the weather is right for letter writing. I would like to set up a kind of sponsorship program with my friends in Switzerland. Besides "my" boys whom Albert teaches, there are approximately thirty children and teens in the neighborhood who don't have the means to attend public school. They *must* get help! But then a mother appears, towing her howling eight-year-old son. She apologizes several times for the interruption. The boy has had stomach pains for a number of days, she says. I carefully feel around the stomach area. The appendix is either severely inflamed or has already burst. Frenziedly, we arrange

transportation to the hospital, and again I feel this rage rise in me. One hundred forty thousand residents and no hospital for them!

On another morning, I allow myself an extended jog. I have finally found a good route. At least when I'm jogging, I'm alone with God and with myself. Thoughts and ideas come up that transcend the activities of the day and propel me to keep going. Sometimes, doubts run along with me, wondering whether this all makes sense or if it's only mere activism. Two hours later I'm back in our little clinic and don't have time for doubt any longer.

In the evening on my way home, I see Mata sitting in front of our shack. The boy spots me, leaps up, dashes towards me, and bubbles over with a flood of Tagalog. Glenn steps out of the hut and tells me that they both were at the Makati Medical Center. Typical of Glenn, I think, marching directly into the most renowned and most expensive hospital in all of Manila. Apparently he had success.

"We traversed the corridors until we found the Chief of the Eye Clinic, an old professor in an elegant, air conditioned office. I believe he found us a somewhat remarkable twosome, I as a Brit, and Mata. In any case, he listened to us attentively, and then he thought for a short while and said: "In ten days I am going to retire. I will personally make a glass eye for you. Let the cost be my problem." Glenn grins.

A short time thereafter James returns home, completely upset. I ask him what happened. We sit down in front of his small house and he says: "Finally, at long last, I once again was able to fight my way into the seat next to the Jeepney driver today—of all days. In front of the factory near Novaliches where I was once employed, workers on strike stood across

from a group of security officers, and we couldn't get by. The workers started to throw stones. And then the security forces opened fire. They shot directly at the workers! Our driver wanted to get out of the line of fire, but we couldn't back up because there was a traffic jam behind us. So he simply stepped on the gas and tried to escape by going forward. The women in the Jeepney screamed like crazy. I saw many people who had been shot, and I recognized three of them as we passed nearby. They were innocent factory laborers!"

Later we're sitting with the teenagers but James seems very distant. One senses how the old scars of the former fighter in the battles of class conflict have re-opened. Even "peace in one's heart" is fragile here.

## Snake Island

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Mata laughs. The old professor actually did make him a glass eye—and what an eye! It sits so perfectly in the eye socket that he can actually move it a little with the remaining muscle, and is so deceptively real that only with difficulty can one distinguish it from Mata's natural eye.

"Now that you're no longer one-eyed, the name Mata doesn't apply any longer," I say. Unanimously the teenagers determine to call him by his real name, and Mata becomes Brian. He beams. I gladly welcome this image to be indelibly burned into my mind.

Ralph and Irene Dörpfeld from Switzerland come for a visit. Together with Volker Heitz, Ralph is the pastor of my Christian Fellowship at home, the Evangelical Community Basel (EGB). They'll be here approximately two or three