

A Mission Love Story *By retired missionary Laura Benson, as told to Lorena Gray*

Laura Prim was born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1914. She says that “prim” described her well. After attending the Presbyterian Training School in Richmond, Virginia (on a full scholarship) she went on to work in Christian Education for the Birmingham Presbytery, teaching and organizing Vacation Bible Schools in many local churches.

It just happened that the pastor of one of these churches had a friend from Seminary who just happened to be passing through town and whose car just happened to break down. Laura met the young man, who turned out to be Clark David Benson, born in Buffalo, New York in 1913. At the time, she didn’t know that he was a Moravian – the great-grandson of David Zeisberger Smith, and the grandson of Johann Renatus Smith (a missionary among the Cherokee people in Georgia and Oklahoma). The two visited for a short time, and then Clark left. Soon after that, he went to Honduras to serve in the Moravian Church along with George Heath. Laura didn’t expect to see him again.

Some time later, however, as Laura was leaving the office to go to lunch, she heard the phone in the upstairs office ringing. Since no one was there, she ran up the stairs and answered the phone. It was a woman who was inquiring about two local pastors. Laura ended up going to lunch with her, and she just happened to be Mrs. Benson, Clark’s mother! They talked about her son’s mission work in Hondu-

ras. Laura was very interested.

Clark and Laura began corresponding. A romance developed by air mail (love is in the air?). Late in 1944, Clark sent a letter with a very special proposal: would Laura travel to Honduras to marry him? Laura had never been on an airplane, but on January 17, 1945 she flew to San Pedro Sula, Honduras, where Clark was waiting for her. After almost two months of paper work and red tape, they were married on March 8, 1945.

Laura says that when they arrived in Cocobila (where they would be in ministry together), someone rang the bell (she remembers the man’s



name!) and the whole village came out to meet her and shake her hand. Teresa Alvarez (Lorena Gray’s grandmother) was in that crowd. According to Laura, Brother George Heath said to the village, “the young missionaries have arrived; please come and teach them how to speak!” And they did. In fact, 62 years later, Laura and Clark were able to conduct this interview in Miskitu.

Laura remembers fondly the time she spent getting to know the people, understanding the culture and learning how to live in La Mosquitia, Honduras. She says that there were no books on the subject, so she had the privilege of learning from people

instead. The Bensons worked with the Heaths and then were left in charge of the Cocobila district. Since there were no public schools, Laura worked in education in the surrounding villages. Clark traveled to many outstations to serve communion, baptize and minister to the people. In one unreached village, Ras, some people brought lumber and said to him, “we have not turned to God yet, but maybe our children will, and they will need a church.” The church that they built is now one of two Moravian congregations in that village.

Clark and Laura Benson returned to the United States in 1968. The Miskitu Moravians remember them as gentle, loving, devoted and practical people. Many Miskitu “old-timers” love to tell about how Clark would suddenly stop in the middle of a long motorboat trip, no matter where they might be at the time. He would say, “the motor needs to rest, and so do we.” An hour later, they would once again be on their way, refreshed and with a well-rested motor.

The Bensons live in “Go Ye Village,” a retirement community in Oklahoma. Every morning they pray together (using Pray Every Day from ONWARD!), read the Daily Text, share the passages of Scripture and then sing the hymns. Laura says that whenever possible they sing in Miskitu, just to remember.

Please remember the Bensons in your prayers, giving thanks for their love story: the story of their love for each other, and their mutual love of God and God’s people around the world!