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How two Christians from Iowa became involved with head hunters in Nagaland, India.”

Tim & Pat Phillips tpworship@juno.com

by Dan Wooding

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WASHINGTON, DC (ANS) -- It is a long way from the small Iowa city of Cedar Rapids to Nagaland, the mysterious state in northeastern India, but that is where Tim Phillips and his friend, Daniel Hurt, travel regularly to minister and be ministered to by these extraordinary people who have gone from being head hunters to becoming soul hunters.

I met up with Phillips and Hurt on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, at an all-day event called “Nagalim...Discovered,” in the Gold Room of the Rayburn Building on Thursday, May 25, 2006.

During the extraordinary get-together put on by Honorary Nagalim Ambassador, Grace Collins, the Naga–American Council and Congressman Dan Burton, to inform political leaders and the media about the Naga people who are native to the land-locked region of Northeast India, and who are struggling for self-determination and recognition, Phillips and Hurt shared about their love for the Naga people.

Tim Phillips, who along with his wife Pat has been working with suffering Christians since 1979, said he first became involved with the Nagas while attending a ministry conference in Bangkok, Thailand.

Naga Men on Capitol Hill

“It was there,” said Phillips, “that I heard a gentleman from Nagaland share some experiences of the suffering, persecution hardships his people were going through and yet, in spite of that, he said they were taking the Gospel message out into all the earth.

“I was greatly impressed and my heart was touched mightily and I wanted to learn more about these people. I found out that the Nagas are predominantly of Mongolian by descent who settled in this particular area of India hundreds of years ago. In the middle eighteen seventies, American Baptist missionaries brought the Gospel message to these people who were head hunters.

Naga Women in Washington, DC

“Since then, the Gospel has greatly increased in the land of the Naga people. The British were controlling India and Burma at this particular time and in the nineteen forties when the British were going to leave, they had promised to grant the Naga people their independence. However, when the Indian people took over they did not acknowledge that covenant with the British government and took control of the Naga peoples.

“They have nothing in common with the people of India with a different culture and religion and so they desired independence. Out of this time came an independence movement where the Naga people began their struggle for independence. The Indian government would not recognize this and in the nineteen fifties began to move militarily against Nagaland where the Naga people live. Since 1954, over 300,000 Nagas have been killed for their faith; simply because they desired freedom and to be able to worship Jesus Christ in their own way.”

Phillips said he contacted Baptist leader, Rev. Phu Ghoto Sema, the very man who had shared these stories in Bangkok, who invited him to visit Nagaland.

“It took me a year to get a restricted area permit,” he said. “In order to go to Nagaland you can’t just have your passport and your Indian Visa, but it also requires a restricted area permit.

“After getting the necessary papers, in the late 1990s, along with friends, we flew into Calcutta, and from there we flew up to the gateway city of Nagaland called Dimapur. We had an opportunity to speak in Bible colleges and churches there. We also had an opportunity to do a revival crusade where thousands and thousands of people would come out to hear the messages that we had to bring, extremely primitive living. It is a difficult hard way of life for these people because outside of their couple of their main cities it’s really as tribal living, people living together in huts and in villages.

“That trip reinforced our desire to come along side and help these people and help meet the needs that they have. This includes literature, materials and financial support. Also, if they need us to come and minister in their Bible colleges, their churches, or their in crusades then that’s what we want to do.”

Arrested in Nagaland

Phillips revealed that and a team he had taken from Cedar Rapids on a second visit to Nagaland got into trouble with the authorities.

“We did not have our restricted area permits,” said Phillips. “The Nagas that were responsible for us to go indicated to for us to go ahead and come any way saying that they had permission from the local government to have us come in. When we arrived at the airport, myself and two pastors from Cedar Rapids, were arrested because we did not have these permits.

“It was quite an experience. The first thing they did was drive us to the local prison, threatening to put us in there for not having the restricted area permit. However, the Rev. Phughoto was able to encourage these people not to put us foreigners in their prison. Still, they took us to jail and asked us some questions and did some interrogation and decided that they would just place us under house arrest and put us in a local hotel where we were not allowed to leave our rooms except for meals.

“We were stuck there for a number of days until our very last day in Nagaland they allowed us to come out and do a one day crusade. We had to have armed Indian soldiers go with us everywhere to make sure that we wouldn’t break any laws; and they had to report back to their authorities everything that we said and did so their government officials were able to get the Gospel message in a very unique way.”

Tim Phillips then introduced his Nagaland colleague, the Rev. Daniel Hurt, an ordained minister with the Assemblies of God, who is also from Cedar Rapids.

“Daniel and I met about seven years go and he had a heart for missions and we have linked up since then,” he said. “Daniel is the founder and co-director of ‘Fire Around The World’ and we’ve had the privilege of ministering together in India, Vietnam, Laos, and other areas of needs.”

Hurt then said, “I get pretty excited when I talk about Nagaland. So many of the Nagas are Christians, and they have a desire to reach the lost those that haven’t heard the gospel yet. That’s where my passion comes in because living in America, I think just about everyone has heard the Gospel here. But in India about 1.1 billion live, some

Eighty-three percent are Hindu and probably a large percentage of these Indians haven’t heard the gospel yet; and the Nagas are devoted to evangelize them.

Nagas have pledged to send out 10,000 missionaries

“The Naga population is no larger than that of Iowa where we live and yet they have committed themselves to send out 10,000 missionaries to reach the lost, so I really admire these people.”

Daniel Hurt said that he was invited to visit Nagaland after Tim Phillips had heard him preach.

“We began to evangelize and have healing crusades there. The Nagas go on ahead of us and

they put up a home-made tent out of bamboo and cover it with tarps and anywhere from between 3,000 and 10,000 Indian people come out to hear The Gospel—people that have never heard the Gospel before. I can't do that in Iowa. If you put up a tent in Iowa and maybe a dog, a raccoon, and 20 people might come.

"I'm really excited about this and we see many miracles where people get healed. And then, when you give an appeal for them to accept Christ and you clearly explain the Gospel, so thousands accept Christ.

"The Nagas then follow them up with trainers and pastors and they help the mainly Buddhist and Hindu converts grow in the Lord. These means that up to 99 percent of these new believers are retained for the Lord and then, many of the new converts go on to lead others to Christ. I mean, it is literally the New Testament Church in action."

Hurt then spoke about the poverty of the people, yet how they have inspired him with their faith in Jesus Christ.

"When we go there, we are living in primitive conditions," he said. "You're taking a bath every day out of a half a bucket of water and you're eating rice and just living in strange conditions, but to us it is taking us back the days of the New Testament book of Acts.

"These people are hungry to hear the Gospel and experience the signs and wonders that followed Christ and, for some reason, are following as we go and preach the Gospel. I have no explanation for it except for the Nagas are tremendous intercessors."

When asked what he thought the Naga Christians could teach people in the United States, Hurt replied, "Devotion and discipline.

Tim Phillips then added, "I believe the key thing that they have experienced is what we would call revival since the 1970s and we have asked them what was the key to the continual move of God among the Naga people. They say it is intercession and prayer. Just like we've heard in Korea—the great move of God that's going on in South Korea is the result of prayer and intercession and devotion of the people.

"We have seen the same thing in Nagaland where they continually take the Gospel message out. We have been in villages and this is amazing, we'll go into villages and their intercessors will rise up at two three o'clock in the morning and they will spend hours in prayer literally crying out to God for their people and for the lost and before they get into their day's activity. Now we're talking about village life, very hard life where they work the fields from sun-up till past sun-down; and yet they spend incredible amounts of time in prayer and in intercession.

Hurt said, "They do continued calls to repentance too. They'll have special meetings on-going throughout the year in different villages where they call the people to continually rend their hearts again and repent before God, and I think that's extremely vital to what's happening with them too.

"These people have a heart that's hungry for God and I think that's all we need. If you've got a heart that's hungry for God and no resources you can still change the world. These people are proving it and I believe it with all my heart."

Tim Phillips concluded by saying, "Our prayer is that they would be able to become an independent people and also bring all of the Naga peoples under one set of boundaries. It is our desire that the young people that are rising up in Nagaland would catch the vision for evangelism and for intercession and worship and continue to fulfill the covenant that they made with God to send out 10,000 missionaries around the world.

"That they would pick up the torch of their parents and their grandparents and continue on with a heart on fire for Jesus Christ."

The group Naga Cultural Troupe, who appeared on Capitol Hill, is involved in a short visit to the United States and then South Korea. To get more information, please go to <http://www.nagamusic.org/>.

To learn how you can help Naga Christians, please send an e-mail to Tim Phillips, who travels to Nagaland each year from his home in Iowa. His e-mail address is: tpworship@juno.com

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NORTHEAST INDIA RIPE FOR HARVEST, IOWA PASTOR SAYS

by Mark Ellis Senior Correspondent, ASSIST News Service

MARION, IOWA (ANS) -- Pastor Daniel Hurt stands in front of an Iowa corn crop that rises above his head, talking about fields that are ready for harvest. But the fields he points to are tended by Hindus thousands of miles away in the northeast corner of India, close to the border with China.

“Right now the hearts of the Hindus are open in Northeast India,” says Hurt, founding director of Fire Around The World, an evangelistic and humanitarian aid organization active in 12 countries. “It’s their time to receive the Good News,” he says. “Their hearts are open and they are responding tremendously to this.”

Hurt recently returned from a crusade in the state of Assam among 13 villages where only two families had ever heard about Jesus. Under a makeshift tent fashioned from bamboo poles and blue plastic tarps, several thousand gathered for a four-day crusade. “When we pray for the sick, the sick are getting healed,” Hurt says. “We have on video blind eyes that were healed, deaf ears that were opened,” he says.

“One very old woman came up to me who was blind in one eye,” Hurt says. “I really didn’t feel like I had faith for her,” he says, “because people get old and go blind. The next day she comes up in front of the tent and says, ‘My eye is healed!’”

For confirmation, the woman was told to cover her good eye, and she was asked how many fingers were held up in front of her. “She told us how many fingers were held up,” Hurt says.

“When God does these things they sound too wondrous,” Hurt says. “If you couldn’t catch some of them on video you would think a person was lying,” he adds.

Hurt was also struck by the sight of an older woman dancing during the worship. “This old woman was dancing like she just came from Pensacola,” Hurt says. “This looked like a Pentecostal church in America,” he adds. Hurt asked for the woman to come forward, wondering if she had previously received Christ.

“I’m a Hindu woman,” she said, “and my body was crippled and I couldn’t move. During the worship I felt God’s presence so strong that my body began to move and work properly.” As she danced, her friends from the village were cheering her on.

“I felt so joyful,” she exclaimed.

Some wonder why God seems to move so dramatically in the developing world. “We’re content and happy and entertained here in America,” Hurt says. “I think why we see more happen in India is it’s the first time the gospel has been preached among these Hindus,” he says. “It’s a big part of them receiving the Good News.”

Hurt also credits intercessory prayer by the Nagas, who are assisting their evangelistic crusades. While the state of Assam is considered one of the great spiritual challenges in northeast India, with only 3 percent of the population considered believers, Nagaland is a different story.

Over 87 percent of neighboring Nagaland is Christian, the result of missionary efforts by the

Baptists during the last century. In fact, Nagaland has the highest percentage of Baptists of any state in the world, as well as eight theological colleges.

“The Nagas have a desire to evangelize those around them and reach the lost,” Hurt says. “They are committed to sending out 10,000 missionaries,” he says. “They are planning to send them out everywhere, even to Jerusalem.”

Young missionaries in their twenties are being sent to neighboring states from Nagaland, sustaining themselves by any means possible to further the spread of the gospel. “They raise vegetables or whatever they have to do to live, and they just start preaching the gospel,” Hurt says.

“They sent two young guys to Bomdilla who have already led 60 to Christ,” he says. Bomdilla is a stronghold of Buddhist influence in India, with the largest Buddhist temple and monastery located there.

Fire Around the World, Hurt’s organization, is often invited to visit after the Nagas have plowed the fallow ground. “They bring us in after they get an initial group of people,” Hurt says. “They ask if they would like to hear some Americans preach and pray for the sick, and they get 2,000 to 5,000 into this raggedy old tent,” he says. “I can’t go anywhere in Iowa, set up a tent, and get 5,000 non-believers to come.”

Hurt and his wife first developed a passion for missions during a time of awakening in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. “While we were taking a break from ministry, there was a revival going on,” Hurt says. “What God imparted to us during the revival was intimacy with God,” he says. “We just soaked in that for a couple of years.”

“One night He divinely imparted a burden and love for missions into my heart,” he says. On a trip to the West Coast, Hurt and his wife visited Che Ahn’s church. “He gave us a word that the ‘Fire of the Lord’ would go with us wherever we minister.” This became the name of Hurt’s organization, which he started with co-director Tim Phillips.

“This is the first time I’ve known Him as the lover of my soul,” Hurt says. “That was never part of my makeup or understanding,” he says. Hurt says he is drawn by “the beauty of His holiness,” when he ministers. “Instead of preaching a sermon, all I want to do is impart a deeper love for God in people.”

No matter what the background or denomination, people seem to respond. “When we go out to preach, people begin to weep,” he says. “The presence of God shows up. When I got invited to go overseas, I saw this is happening among the Hindus who have no preconceived idea of what church is like.”

“The hearts of the Hindus are open,” Hurt says. He is concerned that if the church doesn’t move quickly, others may fill the gap. “Four counties in Assam have already turned Muslim,” he says. “At the rate they have been converting to Islam, all of Assam will be converted by 2020 if we don’t get in.”

Hurt uses a small construction company he owns to provide funds for his missions trips. “All the money we receive we give directly to missions,” Hurt says. “We keep nothing for overhead,” he says. “I don’t know how long I can do construction-- my body aches.”

“I ask the Lord if I can do His work,” he says. “We want to take the concept of the fire of God and the love of God around the world.”

The Extraordinary Revival That Is Sweeping Through Nagaland Where 99 Percent of The People Are Christians

An Iowa believer reveals how he lost his heart to the Nagas and why he travels to be with them each year

2006,

LAKE FOREST, CA (ANS) —

— It is a long way from the small Iowa town of Hiawatha to Nagaland, the mysterious state in northeastern India, but that is where Tim Phillips travels each year to minister and be ministered to by these extraordinary people. In an interview when he visited my home in Lake Forest, California, with his wife Pat, Phillips a tall, wiry, long-distance runner, talked about his love for the Nagas and why he keeps returning to be with them. He began by talking about the area and its people.

“Nagaland is a state in northeast India near the China and Burma border,” said Phillips. “It was settled by tribal people who had migrated there from Mongolia. They were predominantly head hunters who were involved in agriculture. There are 16 different tribes that make up the Naga people. Hindu missionaries were fearful of dealing with these fierce warriors and left them alone. In 1876 the first Christian missionary made contact with these headhunters. He had traveled from Boston and it took him many months to arrive in the Naga Hills. On his first day of ministry he led over a dozen to Christ. The next day they went to the jungle to cut down bamboo to build the first church.

Nagaland girls

“The Nagas have always been independent. When offered the opportunity to become a part of India in 1948, they expressed their desire to remain free. Instead of leaving them independent, the Indian government tried to conquer them militarily. This led to a continuing war for independence which has seen over 250,000 civilians killed. Today there are about one and a half million Nagas living in Nagaland. If you include Nagas who live in Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Burma there are just over three million. There has been a cease fire between the Nagas and Indian government since 1999 to resolve the issue of Naga independence.”

The Revival that Swept Through the Area

When I asked him to talk about the great revival that took place there in the 1970s and the covenant that Naga Christians have made to send thousands of missionaries to nearby lands, he said, “In 1976 in the midst of terrible persecution, Naga Church leaders were distressed about the spiritual condition of the church. They began to pray and fast for revival. Thirteen months later revival began to fall. There was great repentance among the people and God confirmed His word with signs and wonders.

“It was like the book of Acts all over again. Out of this revival the Church leaders realized the need to fulfill the Great Commission. They made a covenant with God to send out 10,000 missionaries and take the Gospel message to all the nations. Their goal is to have missionaries in Israel, the birthplace of Jesus. As of this year they have sent out nearly 8,000 missionaries. They are located in remote areas of India, Burma, Nepal, Tibet, Bangladesh, S.E. Asia, Indonesia, Japan and many others.”

He added, “In Nagaland 99 percent of the people are Christians. In some areas of the Himalayan region we minister in, there are only a few believers. There is also a great deal of persecution in

Hindu and Buddhist dominated areas. We have met families of people who have been beaten, deprived jobs and martyred for their faith.” Phillips said that he first visited Nagaland in March of 1999. “There were two pastors traveling with me,” he said. “It had taken me a year to arrange my restricted area permit. This was done through our local contacts living there.

“We ministered in the Theological school as well as a revival crusade attended by over 10,000 people. It was a tremendous experience to see a hunger for the Lord that is not so apparent in the West. The people from the highest ranking church official to the farmer or soldier, all are involved in the covenant at some level. They want to see the Gospel go into all of the world. I was deeply impressed with the intercessors we met. They will rise at 3 or 4 in the morning and meet at the church to spend hours in prayer before the day’s activities. We have been told by various leaders, this is the secret to the on going revival and the missionary fervor.”

He went on to say, “I have been to Nagaland every year since 1999. We go because we are invited to minister in churches, Bible Schools and crusades in remote areas in the Himalayan region of northeast India. We assist local pastors and missionaries in outreach, encouragement and leadership training. We have provided finances to build church buildings, Bible Colleges and Christian schools. We come along side of the national workers and provide what they need : preaching, teaching, prayer, resources, what they need, not what we think they need.

“We have seen God work mighty miracles in various meetings. The sick healed, deaf hear, blind see, lame walk, demons cast out. This year a mother brought her daughter to a crusade we were doing in the Himalayan region. The lady was an animist. She had lost three other daughters to sickness. We were her last hope. The locals said the girl, 10 years old was dead. After prayer God raised her up. Both mother and daughter gave their lives to Christ. This is one of the main reasons we go. The people are so open and hungry to hear the Truth about Jesus. We could preach the same word in the West and people would walk away unfazed.”

When asked what a typical service is like in Nagaland, he said, “Services would be similar in content but not in structure or length. Some services can go for several hours. They sing traditional tribal songs and songs we are familiar with here. The people give what they can but they are very poor. I have seen people put an egg in the offering to help a missionary. In addition to Sunday and mid-week services they also have Friday night revival services. Nearly every day villages will come together for a prayer meeting. Some of their church buildings are stone and cement, others are bamboo with thatched or tin roofs.”

Arrested

Tim Phillips then spoke about the time that he and his team members were arrested during a visit to Nagaland.

“On my second visit we were assured our restricted area permits would be waiting for us when we arrived in Nagaland,” he said. “The paperwork was not to the satisfaction to the local authorities. We were first taken to the jail and later to a prison until our situation could be resolved. Our pastor contacted appealed on our behalf. He promised the officials if we tried to escape or caused any trouble he would take our place in prison.

“We were placed under ‘house arrest,’ driven to our hotel and not allowed to leave. We had many ministry assignments arranged and now could do nothing. There were threats made about us having to go to prison, or be taken to the border and dropped off to find our own way home. We spent a lot of time in prayer. After several days the situation was resolved. We only had one day left on our permit but were allowed to spend that day at a crusade ministering to thousands of people. We had armed guards with us to keep us out of trouble. They also had to report to their commanders

everything we said and did. So they got an earful of the Gospel.”
The Trinity Theological College in Dimapur

Phillips then talked about the Trinity Theological College in Dimapur, Nagaland and their need for commentaries, theology books, reference works, Bible dictionaries, concordances, church history, preaching and pastoral resources.

“In order for the Theological school to elevate and improve its degree program, their library is required to have so many books in it,” he said. “Over the years we have purchased and donated many of these kinds of books. But the need is great for more. It is also expensive to ship the books to Nagaland in a timely manner. We also have a need for finances to help with shipping costs. Our ministry : Fire Around the World is a 401c3 organization. Rev. Daniel Hurt is the founder and co-director. We can provide receipts for donations. I can be contacted at tpworship@juno.com for details, or books can be shipped to : Trinity Theological School, Post Box 168, Thahekhu Dimapur – 797112, Nagaland, India.”

I then asked Tim Phillips what were some of the prayer needs of the believers there.

He replied, “Provision for their every day needs. Most live by agriculture. Pray for the resolution to the peace talks. There are a lot of natural resources available if the people were free to access them. Pray the young people would reject the ways and materialism of the West and follow in the revival of their parents. Pray for the needs of the missionaries, pastors and evangelists be met. Like the Apostle Paul most must work secular jobs as well as ministry.”

Tim Phillips said that he plans to return again to Nagaland early next year. “Because it is very difficult and conditions are primitive we have a careful screening process that those traveling with us must go through,” he said. “If people would like more information about one of our trips, they can contact me at tpworship@juno.com.”

He concluded by saying, “In spite of the many challenges we experience, it is a blessing to minister with and to people who genuinely want our help. We have solid national contacts we work with who know the local traditions, customs and language. We go to serve, not to be served. We look forward to taking many new friends to heaven with us.”