

Preface

SHORTLY AFTER OUR HOSTAGE ORDEAL I was asked whether I intended to write a book on the experience of our family. I said I had no intention of doing so.

However, people continue to display curiosity as to just what happened and we are still asked to share our experience at churches, groups, and organizations. Many have declared that they have been encouraged, blessed and even awed by what took place. We as a family know that God has used what happened to us to touch the lives of hundreds of people, especially in Taiwan. Inevitably, there have been misconceptions regarding what took place. Evidences of this are the questions which we are repeatedly asked by various people whose curiosity overcomes their reluctance to pry.

Witnessing all this, I reviewed my initial reservations about recording the events. Encouraged by my very special friend Anne, that remarkable woman who consented to marry me, I decided to commit pen to paper. It has not been easy. Time, as always, has been in short supply. Much of the manuscript was written under canvas while I was commanding a military peace-keeping force in the strife-torn Richmond area of the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa.

It is our prayer that those who read this story, if they are Christians, will be blessed and uplifted by the confirmation of God's love for each individual and His faithfulness towards His children. If they are not Christians, then we pray that the reality of God's love would become apparent to them from these events.

This is our story, as we experienced it. There is much that we cannot explain and the skeptic will no doubt be very critical. We have no arguments to counter criticism; we only know what happened – and I have tried to set that out in these pages.

We do not regard ourselves as special people because of what happened to us. A great many people (far too many!) have gone through greater terror and have suffered far more than we have. Many innocent victims have died in similar or worse incidents. Our hearts go out to such people and their families, and we feel humbled that we should have survived when people are suffering and dying every day in this broken world. If our story bears telling, it is only because God used what happened to us to touch the lives of so many people.

We know that many people's lives were changed because of what happened in Taiwan on 18 and 19 November 1997. We know that a brutal killer eventually found peace for his tormented soul, and that we were delivered from a terrifying and life-threatening situation. For these things we give glory to God and praise to Jesus Christ.

McGill Alexander
Port Elizabeth, January 2000.

HOSTAGE IN TAIPEI

1

▶Why Is This Happening To
Us?◀

DARKNESS HAD FALLEN as I drove up Cherry Hill and stopped at our official attaché residence. I glanced at my watch as the garage door opened. It was exactly 7:00 P.M..

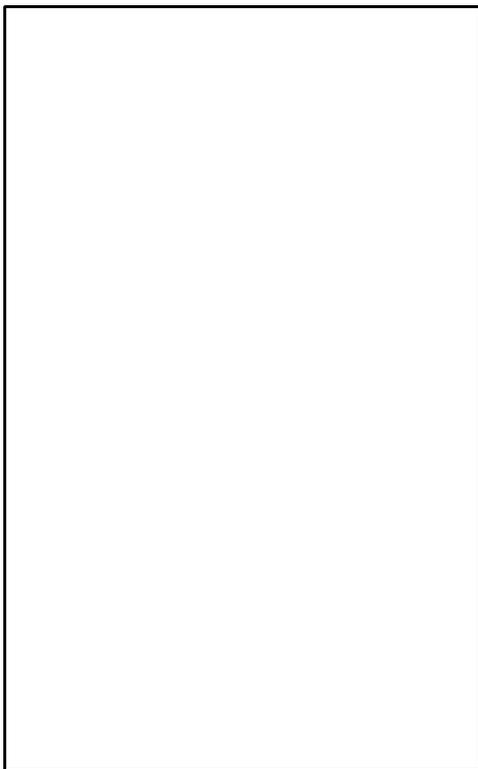
The thought didn't enter my mind that someone could be standing in the shadows of our Taipei neighborhood, watching me.

"I've made it on time," was all I was thinking. "Anne's going to be pleased." I drove into the garage, and the door closed behind me. At the same time, I mentally closed the door on the challenges of another day at the embassy. I was ready to relax for the evening.

The house was built over the garage, and as I mounted the stairs I heard my twelve-year-old daughter Christine practicing piano in the lounge above. I greeted her with a kiss before ascending the next flight of stairs to the large landing which we used as a TV lounge. Anne was busy on the computer. Twenty-two-year-old Melanie was watching TV. On her lap she held the Chinese baby boy we were fostering, seven-month-old Zachary. The only family member missing was nineteen-year-old Shona, who was

5

▶Horrors Of Helplessness◀



**Alexander's official attaché residence
on Cherry Hill, a suburb of Taipei.
Anne stands in foreground.
(Photo: Mac Alexander)**

The

CHEN CHIN-HSING BROKE into the house of the young American couple just after dark on Tuesday 18 November. To his consternation, he found no one at home. It happened that the husband was on a business trip to South Korea, while his wife was on holiday in the United States.

Chen waited, then when no one came home, he again emerged in the dark street. It was winter, and although the semi-tropical climate of Taiwan seldom produces really cold weather in Taipei, it grew dark quite early. Night fell before six o'clock in the evening in November.

In the street, Chen wondered what to do. Then he saw a dark green Honda Accord drive by, slow down, and stop in front of the garage of the house next door. As the electronic garage door opened, he noticed the registration number on the car's plate. It was a diplomatic number plate.

Chen must have felt a surge of triumph when he realized that he had found another foreign family. He watched me drive inside and close the garage door. Then he re-entered the home of the absent American couple. From there, it was an easy matter to jump over the wall into our garden.

He skirted our small swimming pool, found a partially-open window in the laundry, and climbed in. That window we normally left ajar by day, so our cats could come and go as they pleased. Quickly he moved through the dining room to the lounge, where Christine sat at the piano.

Christine heard the sound of him jumping through the window and stopped playing. She turned to see a short, stocky Chinese man with unkempt hair, thin moustache and wisp-like goatee peering around the corner and pointing a gun at her. She started up in alarm, but the man motioned at her with his finger across his lips to be quiet. He moved to the foot of the stairs and beckoned to her to approach him. Grabbing her and clamping his arm around her neck, he then marched her up the stairs, while he held the gun to her head.



The intruder who had taken us hostage no longer lay back on the sofa where my family sat, bound. Chen began to display signs of nervousness. It seemed that he was expecting the arrival at any moment of those he had notified. He kept looking down from the parapet at the lounge windows below. Every so often, he switched on the TV and surfed through the Chinese stations to see if there was any news on his hostage-taking. He held a pistol in each hand: the Italian model 92 Beretta with a 15-round magazine; and an Austrian Glock 17 with an extended 32-round magazine.

His glance fell on the baby, and he indicated to Anne by pointing a pistol over the parapet that there was going to be shooting. Gesturing towards Zachary, he then covered his own ears with his hands, still holding the pistols. He spoke to Anne in an exhorting tone.

“When the shooting starts, cover the baby’s ears,” we understood him to be saying.

Zachary, this baby boy who had come to occupy a special place in our household and in our hearts, now fixed his intelligent gaze upon this strange man. Those bright, alert eyes,

that showed curiosity and wonder at everything around him, now concentrated on Chen’s hardened and determined face.

Even in the darkness, the light from my study adjoining the TV lounge was sufficient for us to see fairly well. At the same time it was so dim that nobody looking into the house from outside would be able to distinguish anything clearly.

I now realized that Chen expected a gun battle with the police.

“Immediately lie flat on the floor if any shooting starts,” I cautioned my family. “And don’t move at all.”

Christine complained that her wrists hurt, so Anne and I brought Chen’s attention to this. When he became aware of her discomfort, he immediately untied her, but indicated that she should remain seated on the sofa.

The phone rang again and Chen answered. After a brief conversation he handed the receiver to Christine. It was our young cousin Matthew Simmonds, who was living in Taipei while studying Mandarin. He and Melanie were good friends and earlier that afternoon she had phoned him to suggest that they go out to a movie together in the evening. Since he had been out, she had left a message for him and he was now returning her call to accept her offer.

Christine quickly told him what was happening. The incredulous Matthew found her account difficult to comprehend. But he soon realized that she was deadly serious, so he asked to speak to Chen again. He exchanged a few words with him in Mandarin. Matthew obtained assurances that Chen did not intend to hurt us. Then he rang off and rushed out of his lodgings to find the police. The whole business seemed unreal and he felt sick in the pit of his stomach. It just couldn’t be happening!

Matthew hurried outside to a small tea shop where the students often gathered to absorb the local gossip. The old Chinese lady who ran the little establishment listened to his garbled account as he explained to her why he needed to get to a police station. Then, with an inscrutable expression she

house or he would shoot.

I started to tell my family to lie down. Then Chen saw something or someone through the window. He whipped a pistol across and fired a shot in the direction of the window.

The report from the gun amplified thunderously in the vault-like lounge. Melanie screamed.

“Get down on the floor!” I yelled at the family. I tried to slide down onto the floor from my chair.

Then, to my horror, I heard the police return fire. I heard distinctly at least two shots fired from outside.

“Stop shooting! You’ll kill us all!” I shouted in English at the police.

Chen grabbed Melanie, holding our helpless daughter in front of him as he fired a volley of shots at the window. The noise was ear-shattering, the muzzles flashed in the dark like lightening on a stormy night. The smell of cordite filled the room. Zachary wailed. Anne held him tightly where she lay on the floor. Christine lay flat on the floor beside Anne and Zachary. Chen tightly clasped his human shield.

“Don’t shoot! Don’t shoot!” Melanie pleaded, screaming at the police.

As soon as the police returned fire, Chen backed off from the edge of the parapet, dragging Melanie with him and firing as he did so.

The shooting stopped as suddenly as it had started. I was overwhelmed with anger at the police for acting so irresponsibly. The house was in virtual darkness. They had no means of seeing or knowing where we were positioned. Such indiscriminate shooting could as easily have resulted in injury or death to the hostages as to the hostage-taker.

“Are you people crazy?” I shouted out furiously. “Don’t shoot out there! You will kill us or this man will kill us! Whatever you do, don’t shoot!”

There was no reply, but the police were making a lot of noise. Outside, they shouted. And inside, Chen shouted back at them.

Reporters had gathered in the street outside. They later reported that Chen had shouted at the police not to make any reckless or sudden moves and to stay away from the house. There was still no response by the police to my yelled pleas; but probably no one out there understood English.

My voice does not lack timbre. The people outside must have heard me. That thought consoled me. If the police and onlookers had any doubts before, now they must know that Chen was holding foreigners inside the house.

Melanie’s face reflected sheer terror. Chen had one arm clamped around her slender neck, and he pressed the Beretta pistol against her cheek. The other gun, the Glock with the long 32-round magazine in it, he held ready to fire at the police.

As soon as the shooting stopped, and while he was still shouting at the police and holding onto Melanie, he released the magazines of the guns he was holding, one at a time, and immediately replaced them with fully charged magazines. He then commenced refilling the partly-used ones. Like a well-trained soldier, he kept both his pistols fully loaded at all times.¹

Sticking one pistol into his waistband, Chen picked up the two-litre plastic bottle and took a swig of water. The tension had dehydrated all of us, and I again became aware of my dry tongue cleaving to the roof of my mouth. Catching Melanie’s eyes as he drank, he held the bottle up with a questioning gesture. Melanie nodded vigorously. Her thick brown hair fell untidily across her tearstained face. Holding the bottle to her lips, he allowed her to take a few mouthfuls. She showed clear relief and appreciation.

The man then offered each of us water. I shook my head. I was reluctant to give him the acknowledgement that he had total power over me. I could not relinquish to him all of my self respect. It was as if this was the last vestige of independence left to me, and I was not prepared to give him the

satisfaction of holding this bit of power over me, despite my raging thirst. As my anger mounted, I found it increasingly difficult to control my feelings and maintain my composure.

Chen moved cautiously back to the sofa and peered over the parapet behind it. All the while he held onto Melanie, the cold steel of his Beretta held against her face.

“Please don’t hurt me,” she pleaded with him. “Please don’t shoot me.” He held her right against him. His finger was constantly on the trigger. He took no notice of Melanie’s pleadings. Certainly he did not understand her words, yet he could surely understand the desperation in her voice. It didn’t move him, though. His attention remained fully focused on the direction from which the police had fired.

“Is he going to shoot us?” Melanie asked me. “Daddy, what does it feel like to be shot?” Then her voice took on an even more urgent note.

“Mommy! My chest is closing up!”

Like Anne, Melanie occasionally suffered from asthma. They both carried a small ventilator when they went anywhere, but now both their ventilators were upstairs in the bedrooms. Anne understood the dangers of asthma in this situation.

“Just calm down, my girl,” Anne encouraged her in a steady tone. “Take it easy, stay calm and don’t get yourself into a state.”

Anne’s soothing, reassuring voice had a settling affect on all of us. We all knew that Anne’s calmness was not feigned; she was no good at hiding her feelings. In her heart, Anne was praying that the asthma attack would pass, and her faith is such that she had complete confidence that it would pass. It did, and Melanie showed no further symptoms of the asthma that night.

Volleyed shouts again erupted between Chen and the police. I guessed he was telling them that he had one hostage as a shield, that she would be hit if they tried shooting, and that he would not hesitate to kill all the hostages if the police

did not do exactly as he said. Although very highly-strung and tense, he still appeared very much in control of himself.

My confidence in the police now thoroughly shaken, I feared greatly for Melanie’s life. I pleaded with Chen in my limited Mandarin to release her and to take me as his shield. He understood me, but shook his head emphatically and kept his hold on her. She was close to hysteria.

Irrepressible frustration welled up from within me. With brutal indifference this man was sacrificing my daughter’s life for his own ends. It was happening in front of my own eyes and I could do nothing about it.

As commander of a parachute brigade I once had several thousand people under me. When I issued an instruction it was carried out with alacrity. I was accustomed to being in control. In a crisis I had resources at my disposal to draw upon. I am a physically fit, strong man who had got out of tight spots often in the past. I had fought in wars, had been under fire, had led paratroopers in battle. I was not a complete stranger to fear; but I had always had recourse to some action in times of danger. Until now.

Here I was trussed up like a chicken for slaughter, my daughter was likely to be shot right next to me any moment, and I could do absolutely nothing about it.

Never had I felt more helpless in my entire life.

Chen moved away from the sofa and the parapet with Melanie, to a position in the room from where he could watch both the stairs coming up from below and those going up to the bedrooms. He held one gun always ready to fire at whichever stairs might yield an assault by the police. He seemed to think they were already in the house.

Melanie cried out as Chen walked cautiously back and forth, always holding her close in front of him, pointing the gun at her head, and keeping an eye on the stairs. Chen and Melanie were merely a few metres in front of me in the dark room. I told Melanie to try to keep quiet and not to annoy him. And I prayed very hard.

The contrast between this short, burly, ugly hoodlum and my slender, beautiful daughter was agonizingly sharp. He reeked of stale tobacco and perspiration; his teeth were stained brown and rotted from betel nut juice; his wrinkled clothes were soiled and his nails were long and dirty. Melanie had just had a bath, she was wearing a brand-new track suit, and her brown hair had been washed and dried. She smelled fragrant and looked lovely.

Again I pleaded with him to let her go and to take me as his shield. Again he refused. Melanie is a slim, petite girl. She was light and easy to move around in front of him. I was much bigger than Chen and my heavy frame, with my hands tied behind my back, would have been difficult to move around. Chen needed to maintain mobility, and he seemed wary of his only male hostage. He kept his distance from me and showed clear distrust.

The phone rang again.

It was Michael Letts, calling from the office of the *China Post*. Chen again held the phone to Melanie's ear. Crying uncontrollably, Melanie told Michael what was happening, and she told him about Chen's demands for international media coverage.

"Michael, he's got a gun to my head, with his finger on the trigger," Melanie sobbed. "He's going to kill me!" She begged him to tell the police not to shoot at the house, as this man was ruthless and would kill the whole family.

Stunned at what he was hearing, Michael assured her he would do something, but after he rang off, he was badly shaken. Twice he misdialed his aunt's number and found it difficult to decide what to do. He collected himself sufficiently to make sure that someone had informed the South African embassy and that the police had been called again. But what now? What else could he do in these unreal circumstances? He felt quite helpless.

Once again our phone rang. Chen now handed it to Christine.

"Hello!" she said curtly. (I had often scolded her for her abrupt telephone manner.)

"Christine!" said the distressed voice on the other end. "This is Habiba."

Mohammed (Mo) and Habiba Elhamdaoui were our other next-door neighbors. Originally from Morocco, this Arab family had lived almost all their lives in the Netherlands, then had moved to Taiwan to work at a Dutch factory. Christine had practiced speaking with them in Afrikaans, because it is so similar to the Dutch which they spoke.

That evening, Mo and Habiba had returned from visiting friends, only to find crowds in the neighborhood and a squad of police ensconced in their house. It took half an hour to convince the police to let them in, and then only on the condition that they wore bullet-proof vests. They couldn't communicate effectively with the police; and with horror they found their furniture had been unceremoniously dragged away from windows to allow armed police to take up firing positions.

They gathered that there was a gunman in the area and that it was probably Chen Chin-hsing. Police were using their house, which had an identical layout to ours, to rehearse an entry. But Mo and Habiba had no idea that the fugitive was in our house.

Concerned about us, Habiba immediately phoned. When she heard Christine answer, she thought that Anne and I may be out.

"You must make quite sure that your house is properly locked up," she admonished Christine. "That man the police are looking for is in the neighborhood. Or are there also police all over your house?"

"No," replied Christine. "The police are all outside. The only one in our house is the guy with the gun, and the police are trying to shoot him!"

Habiba felt her heart jump into her mouth.

Then shooting broke out in front of the house. Christine

screamed and rang off.

I went rigid. Had the police gone completely mad? They were trying to shoot their way into the gigantic, aluminum double door which formed the entrance to our home. I was appalled.

The gunman dived across to the sofa, roughly dragging our screaming Melanie with him. She hollered at the police to “stop shooting!” I joined her.

“You idiots!” I yelled. “What do you think you’re doing? Stop shooting!”

Leaning across the back of the sofa and over the parapet, Chen fired a burst on automatic at the front door with the long magazined Glock. He then swung his gun across to fire briefly at the tall lounge window. Empty shells ejected by the pistol struck Melanie in the face. Between the shots we could hear the sound of shattering windows, while shards of glass and chips of plaster fell to the floor.

He fired several more single shots with both pistols, then quit when he realized that the police had stopped.

Had the police decided to sacrifice our lives in their insane desire to kill this man at all costs?

The pale face of my eldest daughter broke my heart. With desperation I pleaded for the third time with Chen to let her go. This time, incredibly, he released her and she immediately fell to the floor on her face and crawled awkwardly between the sofa and the armchair. Her hands were still bound behind her back. I struggled to my feet and moved with dread towards the psychopath who had invaded our privacy and terrorized my daughter at gunpoint.

6

▶Shadow Of Death◀

AS I APPROACHED the man with deadly eyes and a pistol in each hand, he motioned toward the sofa. I sat down. He crouched on the sofa next to me. He pressed one gun into my ribs, and he leveled the other gun over the parapet, aiming at the downstairs lounge window.

Anne had crawled across the floor of the room to the far corner, where she lay behind an armchair, shielding baby Zachary and trying to calm him. The shooting noise was quite terrifying, and made him cry. However, with Anne holding him tightly and comforting him, he quickly quieted down each time the shooting stopped. Then he would coo and cluck, and struggle to get away from Anne and crawl around. Anne worked hard to keep his attention.

We had no doubt that what was taking place around us was a spiritual battle. That much we had shared with one another and we acknowledged it to God in our prayers at the time. What we didn’t know was just how much the forces of the Lord were being boosted by the prayers of His people. We weren’t aware of the prayer chains that had been set off all over the world.

Yet at this crucial time Anne was filled with peace. As she lay there on the floor in the dark, holding onto the wriggling and restless Zachary, she recalled a story from the insurgency war in Zimbabwe, then known as Rhodesia.

A Christian family was besieged in their isolated farmhouse by a band of insurgents who were in a position to wipe them out. But the attack never came and the attackers backed off. Later, authorities apprehended the insurgents and asked them why they had not attacked. The rebels replied that they could not, because they saw an army of men dressed in white surrounding the homestead. The Christians believed that the attackers had seen the heavenly angels that God had sent to protect His children.

Now, besieged in our home, Anne had an impression of God's angels surrounding us and she *knew* that we would be all right. Her calmness and steady composure inspired the rest of us, confronted by this violent man with a gun in each hand.

Waving one gun in the direction of the stairs leading up to our bedrooms, Chen told Christine to sit at the bottom of the stairs and warn him if anyone tried to come down from there. Apparently he expected the police to penetrate the house at any moment. And he thought they might enter from the roof.

Not understanding him, Christine looked at me in consternation. I told her to go to the foot of the stairs and warn him if the police came down. She gaped incredulously.

"What must I do if the police come?" she asked, obviously convinced that she'd heard me incorrectly.

"Warn him immediately!" I demanded. "If you don't, we'll all get shot."

Christine dubiously crossed the floor to the stairs. This wasn't the time to reason with her; she must do as she was told. But her questioning child's mind was unconvinced. Surely the police are the good guys and this character is the bad guy? It follows that we should not be helping him and that the police would not do anything to endanger our lives in

their efforts to get him.

Reluctantly, she lay at the foot of the stairs; but she ignored them, riveting her attention on Chen Chin-hsing, instead.

He placed one pistol momentarily on the sofa, repeating his instructions to Christine in Mandarin. He pointed his second and middle finger at his eyes, then indicated the top of the stairs. Cupping his hand to his mouth, he mimicked a shout, making quite sure that Christine understood how she was to warn him.

"I'm going to die," she whimpered to her sister.

Just then the phone rang once again and Chen answered. After a brief conversation, he held the cordless receiver to my ear. It was Nate Showalter, pastor of the Taipei International Church. (We had become acquainted with him and his wife at a Marriage Encounter weekend shortly after we had arrived in Taiwan.)

Nate was conducting a Bible study at the home of David Ni, a Taiwanese member of his church. Someone phoned to tell them what was happening to the Alexanders. The prayer chain set in motion by Brian McLeod was running like wildfire, as Christians all over Taiwan were notified. Now, David and Nate were asked to pray for our safe deliverance.

The Bible study came to an abrupt halt as everyone joined in a period of intense prayer.

Then they decided to switch on the TV and see what was happening. The situation was confused; but they could tell we were still inside the house. Then someone suggested that they try to phone us at home, in case there was anything that they could do.

Because David Ni spoke Taiwanese, the little group of Christians agreed that he would talk if Chen answered the phone. Twice they phoned; and twice Chen answered. David spoke to him at length, and tried to keep him calm and to assure him that a peaceful resolution was possible. While he spoke on the phone with Chen, the Christians gathered around him to intercede for David, for Chen, and for us.

Ni kept Chen talking as long as possible, while his wife called the police on the other line, keeping them abreast of Chen's comments.

Chen informed Ni that he had three pistols, lots of ammunition, and several hand grenades in his possession. During the second call, Ni told Chen they had contacted the police.

Seeing that the police were still not in proper communication with Chen, the group of Christians decided, after further prayer, to dial again. This time, David asked the gunman if he could speak to me. Chen agreed and held the handset to my ear. Nate came on the phone. He asked me how things were going. I felt encouraged to hear his voice.

I told him just what our position was and that Chen was holding the phone to my ear because I was tied up. With his other hand, I explained, he was jabbing a gun into my ribs. Nate assured me that people all over the city were praying for us. He asked if we could pray together right there over the phone. Of course I'd been praying almost constantly since this crisis began, but I was immensely grateful to be able to pray with someone from outside.

Nate prayed, and it felt like a spiritual injection to hear him calling on the Lord to keep His hand upon us and upon Chen. Nate then asked me if I would like them to speak to Chen again.

"Yes," I replied. "Please do."

I turned to Chen and told him that someone wanted to speak to him. He lifted the receiver to his ear and began speaking. I was unable to follow the Taiwanese, but Nate and David later told me the gist of their conversations with Chen.

David asked Chen why he was holding us. Chen replied that he was trying to get a fair deal for his wife and family, who, he claimed, were innocent.

"I know I'm going to die," Chen told him. "But I want my wife to go free."

David asked him not to hurt our family. Chen reassured him that he had no intention of doing so, provided the police

did not do anything rash. It was fortunate that I could not understand that, as I would certainly not have felt reassured, given the police actions until then!

Chen asked David who these people were, and why they were praying aloud all the time.

David explained to him that his hostages were Christians and they were praying to Jesus to keep them from harm and to get them out of there safely. Then he added, "And they're also praying for you and your situation."

Another spiritual encounter for Chen!

Chen put down the phone and crouched on the sofa next to me again. He seemed a lot calmer after speaking to David Ni, but he still kept one pistol barrel pressed into my ribs. And he kept an eye out for any movement at the downstairs door or window.

Chen became aware of me watching him intently. He held my gaze for a few moments. Then he slowly raised the pistol in his right hand and placed the point of the barrel under his chin. He indicated that he intended to shoot himself.

I was appalled by the thought of him doing such a thing in front of my wife and children. Besides, I knew that he would be more valuable to the police alive than dead. And even the thought of suicide repulsed me. I knew that though he might escape any earthly trial by taking his own life, he still would have to face God's judgement if he failed to set his life right with Him before death.

I pleaded with him not to shoot himself. He lowered his pistol and stared hard at me. Then he returned his attention to the door and window downstairs. Later, he repeated the suicide threat, and I again dissuaded him. It became obvious that he was not intending to shoot himself then and there. But he was warning me this was to be his ultimate act once he achieved what he wanted — or if the police forced his hand.

Then the police started shouting again at Chen from outside. He shouted back. His demeanor changed immediately and drastically. The pensive look vanished from his face and

he became angry and aggressive. I found his unpredictability frightening.

I began to pray desperately out loud that he would calm down and that the police would not do anything rash.

An impending sense of extreme danger pressed about us.

I prayed to the point of exhaustion. I didn't know what more I could say, but I knew that I had to pray. As I prayed in the Spirit, I felt my spirit rise. Crumpled on the floor near my feet, Melanie also prayed.

Chen looked at us, heard the strange sounds, but never attempted to stop us. All the time I felt the gun pressed into my side. He wasn't letting his guard drop. But he appeared puzzled by what he saw and heard.

Without warning, our captor suddenly swung around on the sofa. He pointed his gun towards the door and window downstairs. Seriously disturbed by whatever was happening down there, he opened fire in that direction with one gun, while the other remained pressed into my ribs.

I crouched lower on the sofa. Again I shouted to the police, "Don't fire!"

The gunman also shouted at the police as he kept firing shots in their direction. It was a scene of confusion. I was not sure whether the police outside were also firing. It sounded like it—but Chen was firing his gun right next to my head and the house acoustics resulted in a deafening din. Between the shooting and the shouting, as well as Zachary's screaming and my family's praying, I wasn't able to distinguish with certainty whether shots were being fired from outside.

After the initial volley, the shooting became sporadic. Highly agitated, Chen switched his guns from one hand to the other, replacing a magazine as soon as there was a lull in shooting; and yelling abuse at the police all the time. They shouted back from different positions outside the house. I got the distinct impression that the noose was being tightened—and I think, so did Chen.

My adrenaline pumped hard and fast. Dread rose within

me. The whole crisis was reaching a head. I had no more words to pray; no more words to encourage my family. I only had the Word of God. Loudly, I began to recite the scripture that came flooding to my mind:

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul:
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness
for His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil:
for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me
in the presence of mine enemies:
thou anointest my head with oil;
my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall
follow me all the days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house
of the Lord for ever.
(Psalm 23, KJV)*

As I uttered the words "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death," uncontrollable emotion rose from within me. In the dark, tears sprung to my eyes. I struggled to keep my voice even. I didn't want my family to know how frightened I was. They needed encouragement.

But truly that valley of shadow was closing in about us. An almost tangible sense of imminent death hovered.

As I finished the psalm, the firing stopped. Then came an eerie silence. Outside, the police stopped shouting. We waited in the darkened room, hardly breathing.

Chen tensed, clenching his jaws, poised like a cat ready to spring. He displayed signs of great nervousness and seemed to be anticipating an assault by the police.

Warily he watched the stairs leading up to the bedroom. I envisioned our roof, which was a large, flat balcony with a door leading in to the top of the stairs. The houses stood so close together that it would have been an easy matter for the police to lay a makeshift bridge across from the roof of the house next door to our own.

Every so often, pinpoints of red light played across the walls of the room, as if the police were seeking a target by aiming laser beams through the windows. But with those methods police were not going to spot him, since he was hiding behind the sofa and the curtained railings of the parapet.

The flashing lights from police vehicles outside weirdly illuminated our darkened house.

"I know I'm going to die," Christine repeated to her sister, who lay hiding beneath the table.

An expectant hush followed, in which we could hear crowds on the street, murmuring – no shooting or shouting. The decisive moment had come!

7

▶Police Assault◀

INSIDE THE HOUSE we had no way of knowing what was happening outside. We later learned that, after speaking to me on the phone, Wouter Badenhorst called the Foreign Affairs Police to report that we had been taken hostage. He found one officer who called himself "Scott" and who spoke English well. But Scott had difficulty believing Wouter. He thought Wouter was saying that Chen was in *his* house. Then he had difficulty understanding the address which Wouter gave him for our house. There is another Hsing Yi Road in Taipei, spelled the same in Roman letters but having different characters and sounds in Chinese.

In desperation Wouter told Scott he could wait no longer to try to explain things to him. He was leaving now to go to our house and would meet Scott there. He rang off, and then contacted our friend Jacolene Spangenberg, the embassy's Head of Administration. She knew every room of every house rented by the embassy, and was aware of every item of furniture in each room. She could describe to police the inside of the house.

She and Wouter agreed on the telephone to get to Cherry