

## The Original Beauty of Mother Nature

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Excerpted from Chapter 4 of True Mother's Memoir, Mother of Peace



Our motorboat, which was basically a rowboat with an engine, noisily chugged its way across the deep, blue Paraguay River. Halfway across, one passenger suddenly stood up, and the boat rocked wildly from side to side. The other passengers cried out, fearing the boat would capsize. Just as everyone settled back down, someone yelled, "Ai! What's that?"

Before our eyes, a bizarre-looking fish jumped high out of the water and landed on the deck. There it flopped around in the hot sun, jerking its salmon-sized body and gnashing its dozens of razor-sharp teeth. The frightened passengers moved away from it, protecting their legs, as the boatman calmly picked it up with a long stick and tossed it back in the river.

"It looked scary. What is it called?" someone asked.

"It is a dorado," he said, "It's Spanish for 'golden.'"

The dorado is one of countless species of fish peculiar to the waters of Mato Grosso do Sul, one of the mid-western states of Brazil. The Paraguay River, which forms the border between that part of Brazil and Paraguay, is abundant not only in such fish but in every kind of living organism. In the regions of South America that are near the equator, the weather is either a warm springtime or hot summer. Flowers are constantly in bloom, and fruit is abundant for the picking. It is a pleasant land for human habitation in

harmonious coexistence with the animal and plant life.

If paradise on earth is defined by having many different creatures living together in a lush, green garden, Mato Grosso do Sul belongs in that paradise. Its vast territory is covered by virgin forest and wetlands. It is ideal for cultivating a farm or caring for an orchard. Enormous trees provide shelter and sustenance for many kinds of birds, insects and animals. The rivers are clean, and some of them are quite clear. There are more than 20 waterfalls, including the famous Iguazú Falls that thunders where Brazil meets Argentina.

We visited Jardim in the winter of 1994. It was midsummer in Brazil at that time, and everywhere we went there were plains covered with anthills. The local townsfolk told us that an old prophecy predicted that Jardim was where the Lord would come. As beautiful as the Pantanal was, one had to be careful at all times. We would take a boat up the river, dock it and explore the countryside. Sometimes we could barely get through tangles of vines hanging down from enormous trees, and we would have to crawl on our bellies.

We often would not return to the boat until midnight. We would rely on a steel cable stretched out through the forest to guide us back in the dark. When we rose before dawn every day to continue, we again would deal with sweltering heat and swarms of mosquitoes. It was a strenuous routine. My most difficult task was bathing. I would awkwardly put up a screen for privacy in the narrow boat, so I could wash myself with the murky river water.

In my heart I welcomed such primitive and natural conditions. Near the Mato Grosso do Sul town of Jardim, we built a headquarters for global education, called the Headquarters for the Education of Ideal Families for World Peace, and set up the New Hope Farm to establish a foundation to build God's nation.

The first time Father Moon and I went to Jardim was in late 1994. When we held our first leaders' workshop there, the training center was a rundown storehouse without even bathrooms or a kitchen. I cannot begin to describe how uncomfortable it was, but it was perfect for the experiential education we wanted to provide our leaders. It was a workshop of heart during which participants breathed the warm air and sweated without reserve as they read God's Word in the early morning and fished in the midst of the unpolluted and pure original creation.

Over the years, we developed that Jardim site into a lovely family retreat center. We invested in the New Hope Farm that surrounded it. Unificationist missionaries and members from around the world moved there, with the vision of restoring the Garden of Eden that God created at the beginning. We built our community in Jardim with a school so that all these families from all over the world would be able to experience God's love while living in beautiful nature. We donated ambulances to the town, farmed and raised cattle and improved the livelihoods of local people. In the late 1990s, thousands of our members from around the world spent 40 days in study, prayer, and recreation in the natural beauty of New Hope Farm outside of Jardim.

The Pantanal, which Jardim borders, is the world's largest freshwater wetland area. Lying on both sides of the Paraguay River, it is a paradise on earth. Everything God created in the area has the appearance of the original creation. I am deeply impressed with the thought that this is what the Garden of Eden must have looked like, with the fish and all these animals and plants living exactly as they always have. There are capybaras, crocodiles, wild pigs, and birds such as rheas, all living freely in the wild. In the river you find surubi and pacu, and of course the piranhas that are dangerous even for humans. Many species considered endangered live here, including jaguars, pumas, deer, wolves, otters, armadillos and anteaters. There are also unique trees and cacti. It is the largest wetland in the world and, as a UNESCO world heritage site, it is protected. Thus it is a unique area in which to create an ideal village.

An extraordinary natural environment such as this has its dangers, but at the same time it could be a key region for solving food shortages in the future. We started farming and created a fish farm with a view to improving the local people's livelihoods. One of our ideas was to create a fish powder that could be supplied to boost people's nutrition in poorer areas. We made plans to raise cattle on our ranch and supply beef to as many as 160 countries. To protect the natural landscape, we planted a great number of trees in the land alongside the Paraguay River.

The second area in which we invested is called the Chaco. This remote area is part of the Gran Chaco region that covers parts of Bolivia, Paraguay and Argentina. In 1999, we encouraged our members to develop a settlement there called the Puerto Leda project. If you cross the Paraguay River at Puerto Leda, moving from Paraguay to Brazil, you are only a couple of hours by four-wheel-drive vehicle from Jardim.

Puerto Leda was the most difficult place to live in the Chaco, yet our Japanese brothers rolled up their sleeves and worked their hardest. In only a few years, they transformed the area into an ideal village where people and nature live in harmony, a place where anyone would enjoy living. They even built a swimming pool. It is a model ecological settlement, including water purification and fish farming, which was recognized by Paraguay's president, who personally visited the site. We prioritized these projects over building churches, but as the number of people who responded to our members' tireless devotion grew, our faith community also grew.

I wept many times over the pain of the people who lead arduous lives under those spacious skies in Latin America. My heart was torn for the children who craved to learn to write but could not. In the 1970s, when our missionaries from that area expressed how difficult it was to bring God's truth to people who struggle day to day to survive, all I could do was listen and silently pat their shoulders. We would pray together, "We will return here on another day and build a land of happiness. Heavenly Father, please don't forget these people." In the 1990s, God opened the door, and we began to fulfill those prayers.

When we arrived there, Puerto Leda lacked every basic facility. The nearby village needed a school as well as a hospital, and they urgently needed to secure an economic foundation to overcome hunger. Our members all over the world, especially Japan, responded to our call and donated in support of the Leda Project. Nothing can change in a day; yet our members were comforted by the hope they saw in the eyes of the children, and by seeing changes emerge in the hearts of the youth. The new generation of Puerto Leda began to think, "We too can have a good life."

We keep in mind the need to stop the steady destruction of the ecosystem. We know that, in the name of economic development, we are losing the Amazon rainforest. Overfishing and the rapacious killing of valuable animals for monetary profit also are a serious problem. At the same time, more than 800 million people around the world regularly go hungry. Some South American countries have abundant stocks of beef and wheat, yet they cannot prevent malnutrition. In the midst of our education and community building in Latin America, we conduct plant and animal research on how to best utilize the local resources while protecting nature.

The wings of monarch butterflies span just a few inches, but they migrate 3,000 miles between Canada and Mexico every winter. No one taught them to do this; it is encoded in their nature. Human beings and nature have an inseparable relationship. We can be enlightened about God's act of creation and the mystical truth through nature, which represents God's heart, only when we live in it, invest in it, and study it. We can feel the infinite joy and love that God experienced while creating the natural world for us. When we do so, we can live each day with a heart of love and gratitude. The land in which we can learn this truth is Latin America. Through family-oriented love, as one family under God, we can discover our original homeland in this land, God's gift of nature.