

WHAT ONE ORDINARY FAMILY GAINED
WHEN THEY GAVE UP EVERYTHING TO FOLLOW GOD

A LIFE OF MIRACLES

DON SCHULZE



I read *A Life of Miracles* in one sitting because I did not want to put it down. This autobiographical account of one married couple's journey of obedience to God's call on their lives will build your faith and stir your soul. Most of all, it brings glory to God rather than people, and it provides numerous glimpses of the coming Kingdom.

LYLE W. DORSETT, PHD

Billy Graham Professor of Evangelism, Beeson Divinity School,
Samford University

A Life of Miracles is a series of engaging stories strung together with the thread of God's faithfulness, love, and supernatural power. Told in an easygoing, conversational style, these stories ring true because they are true. I wholeheartedly recommend this book.

ROBERT WHITLOW

Bestselling author of *Water's Edge* and *The List*

Filled with adventurous stories of faith, *A Life of Miracles* is exciting, inspirational, and hard to put down. This book encourages us to greater faith, and the author's humility reminds us that faith is an adventure in which we can all participate. We can identify with him in his struggles and rejoice with him in his victories, while the real hero who shines through these stories is the same God who regularly shows himself strong in the lives of his children.

DR. CRAIG S. KEENER

Professor of New Testament, Asbury Theological Seminary; author of *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* and *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*

I loved reading *A Life of Miracles* because I love faith-building stories and testimonials of our gracious God's everyday faithfulness. I stayed awake much longer at night than I planned on, while telling myself, *Okay, I'll read just one more quick story, then I have to turn out the light.* . . . Four stories later, I was telling myself the same thing. Whether you have been in ministry for twenty-five years or have known the Lord for just twenty-five days, you will be encouraged, educated, and challenged by this book. You'll learn how to walk deeper with God too.

BRIAN HOWARD

Gold Record Award-winning Christian songwriter; author of *The Butterfly Song*

Don Schulze is a talented natural storyteller, so I could commend his book as a series of well-crafted and engaging accounts of miracles witnessed by ordinary people. And that it is. But it is more than just an uplifting read. The stories will inspire other ordinary people to try out the spiritual life lessons Don teaches. As my wife, Beth, read the book, she was inspired to pray for the healing of a chronic injury in my back. I was healed and am now pain free. This happened for two ordinary people. Be encouraged to become an ordinary person witnessing the power and presence of an extraordinary God.

REV. HENRY ANDREW CORCORAN, PHD

Charlotte, NC

What I especially admire in Don Schulze's writing is this: in everyday life he finds a constant flow of "God sightings." *A Life of Miracles* encourages me to look for the same affirming glimpses in my own life.

JOHN SHERRILL

Roving editor, *Guideposts* magazine; coauthor of *The Hiding Place*, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, and *God's Smuggler*

It was impossible not to stop and smile as I read Don Schulze's book. An infectious joy bubbles forth from story after story of our Lord's astounding power and mercy. Miracles, we learn, are not for special people; they are for anyone who dares to believe that God sees, God cares, and God acts! This book is a powerful and worthy record of God's unending faithfulness to those who will follow him.

GREGORY V. JOHNSON

Associate Pastor, DFW New Beginnings Church, Dallas

From the opening chapters describing Don's life-threatening experiences while serving our nation in Vietnam to his ten years of missionary service in East Africa, the book is an enthralling roller coaster of faith tried and tested in the midst of amazing circumstances.

DR. A. CHRISTIAN VAN GORDER

D.Phil. of Queen's University of Belfast, Ireland, and Professor of Religion at Baylor University, Texas

A Life of Miracles serves as a wonderful reminder that we serve a living God who desires to have an intimate relationship with his people. It encourages, inspires, and challenges each of us to "give more" to the Lord, even during times of great struggle. This is a must-have book for all who hunger and thirst for the truth.

RAYMOND M. THOMANN

Senior pastor and founder of Hope Is Alive; host of *Tough Love* daily radio program

I found it hard to take a break from reading *A Life of Miracles*. I was amazed at the number of miracles Don and Leia experienced, and I was in awe of their obedience to God's call.

DONNA WAREN

Fayetteville, NC

A Life of Miracles is a must-read—saturated with the love of God, filled with truths of God’s handiwork. Because of the tears of joy it brought to my eyes, I had to stop reading this book several times.

JAMES CLAYTON

Christian businessman, San Dimas, CA

A Life of Miracles describes an exciting way to live that all people can experience but that very few people do. This book encourages readers to give God the chance to prove that his promises are true. If you want to experience an exciting life full of miracles and answered prayer, follow the example of the Schulze family.

JEAN ROACH

Teacher, York County, South Carolina

Don Schulze expresses himself with clarity, humor, and sensitivity. *A Life of Miracles* is a fascinating read that will challenge and amaze anyone who believes that miracles have ceased and are not for this day and time. The book offers an authentic and candid portrayal of God’s miraculous and exciting intervention in the life of a couple who are living by faith.

PATRICIA JOHNSON

Retired educator and administrator, Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District,
North Carolina

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DON SCHULZE



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The names and identifying details of many of the coworkers and ministry partners who are mentioned in this book have been changed to protect their privacy.

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To my wonderful wife, Leia, without whose faith, faithfulness, and sacrifice none of this would have been possible . . . and to our precious Heidi and James, who paid the price and shared the experience.

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INTRODUCTION

Invading the Impossible

April 1995

Uganda, East Africa

Covered by only a stained sheet, Lieutenant John Ssjemba* lay on a bare mattress. His head was propped up on one thin pillow, and his eyes were closed.

As my eyes adjusted to the darkness of his apartment, I took in John's bleak surroundings. Though a member of Uganda's elite Presidential Guard, he lived in a shabby flat set aside for junior military officers. The furniture was simple and un-upholstered. Unspeakingly dirty and torn draperies hung in front of filthy windows. The cracked concrete walls were sullied with mold, smoke, and dirt, and the paint was flaking off in places.

The modest furnishings of John's small apartment were in stark contrast to his person. Even though he was weak and lying flat on his back, he seemed to maintain his military bearing and quiet dignity. The enemy he faced now was far more brutal than any he'd encountered in his army career.

John was dying of what the Ugandans ruefully call "slim." We know it as AIDS. When I visited Lieutenant Ssjemba, nearly two million of Uganda's nineteen million people were living with HIV; hundreds of thousands had died, and entire villages had become

* This name, and many others throughout the book, have been changed to protect the individuals' privacy.

virtual ghost towns. Seeing John lying there, I was sure he was within twenty-four hours of becoming another statistic.

John attended the church I pastored in Kampala, Uganda's capital. Richard, my Ugandan assistant pastor, and I had been summoned to John's home by Vincent and Mary, church council members. They rose to greet us as we entered the darkened room where John lay.

Vincent whispered, "The doctor says he dies soon. He hasn't taken food for many days; now he cannot keep water down. His family is bringing in a coffin from the village."

I glanced toward John's sleeping form. I hoped he hadn't heard Vincent. "John," Vincent said softly, "Pastor Don is here." He and Mary tried to rouse the dying man. John opened his mouth, trying to say something, but no sound came out. He opened his eyes; they were feverish, red and yellow, and sunken into gaunt cheeks. His breathing was raspy, shallow, and irregular. He tried to smile. I reached down and touched his cheek. His skin felt like very hot, dry, thin rice paper. His skeletal hand gripped my wrist.

From just behind me Mary broke the silence. "Pastor, can you pray for John now? Maybe it's not too late!"

I glanced at Richard; he turned his palms upward in a sign of helplessness. His eyes said, *It's up to you*. They were looking for a miracle, and I was confronting the impossible.

I'd first met John several months before during a Sunday morning church service, not long after my wife and I arrived in Uganda. That morning I felt I should offer to pray for anyone who needed healing. Many of the slum dwellers who came to our church couldn't afford medical care. God was their only hope.

A long line of people came forward and faced the platform. As Pastor Richard and I prayed for each one, I asked them what their need was.

Eventually a well-dressed man reached the front of the line. His neatly tailored gray suit and crisply pressed white shirt indicated that he was a man of some substance.

“What can we do for you, sir?” I asked.

He looked at me through red-rimmed eyes. He cleared his throat several times. “Ah, I have a very, very bad cough. Please pray for me.”

Suddenly the man had a severe coughing fit. And before he could retrieve his handkerchief and cover his mouth, he sprayed droplets of saliva all over Richard and me. When his coughing subsided, I spoke a brief but sincere prayer for healing of the cough. When I glanced up, I noticed that Richard was almost grimacing as he continued to pray silently and intensely.

After the crowd was gone, Richard asked, “Pastor, do you remember that man in the suit?”

“Of course,” I replied.

“That was John Ssjemba. He has AIDS and is in the last stages of the disease.”

I felt the cold hand of fear grab my heart.

Today, antiretroviral drugs enable people to live with AIDS for many years. In 1995, an AIDS diagnosis—especially in Africa—meant death in a few months or, at most, a couple of years. We knew that body fluids contained the virus, though it was unknown whether AIDS could be transmitted by saliva.

“Richard, I wish I had known that. How am I supposed to pray for a guy with AIDS when I think he has a cold?”

It suddenly hit me that I was more concerned for myself than I was for John. I felt ill as I left church that day.

A few weeks after praying for John at the front of the church, Vincent and Mary had summoned Richard and me to John’s home. They’d gone there regularly to pray with John and comfort his family; now they asked us to join them before it was too late.

As Richard and I bounced down the dirt road in my Land Rover toward John’s home, I felt terribly inadequate.

God, what do I say to this man? He wants me to pray for him; his friends want me to pray for him. How do I pray?

I tried to still my racing mind. I'd learned years before that when I wasn't sure how to pray for someone, I needed to ask God, *Lord, give me grace that's sufficient for this situation*. I couldn't help John, but I knew that God's grace—his love and power in action—could overcome anything. After asking the Lord for his grace that day, I simply listened. Suddenly, I knew that God was directing me to tell John about certain verses of Scripture. I didn't understand why, but I knew it was important. I breathed a deep sigh of relief. At least I wasn't going into this situation without direction.

Then I was there, on one knee in John's apartment after Mary's urgent plea. It was time to pray.

"John, I want you to know that God loves you," I began. "He has given me something to share with you. These are his words, not mine. I believe they will have special meaning to you." Then I opened my Bible to the Psalms and began reading:

For as the heavens are high above the earth,
So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;
As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.
(Psalm 103:11-12, NKJV)

After reading the psalmist's familiar words, I turned to the book of Isaiah:

I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for
My own sake;
And I will not remember your sins. (Isaiah 43:25, NKJV)

By now, John's eyes had closed. I wasn't sure he even heard me. Yet I had one more passage to read to him:

Indeed it was for my own peace
That I had great bitterness;

But You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit
of corruption,
For You have cast all my sins behind Your back.
(Isaiah 38:17, NKJV)

I looked at John when I'd finished reading the final verse. "John, did you hear what I read to you?"

He nodded slowly and smiled weakly.

"John, I don't want to presume what God is doing. But it seems to me that there is a clear message here. Whatever you have done in the past was forgiven when you put your faith in Jesus. God has forgotten all about it."

John smiled again and seemed to doze off.

"Well, Pastor," Mary said insistently, "aren't you going to pray for him?"

I had already done what I felt God wanted me to do, so as we prayed, I simply asked God to help John. Mary gave Vincent a disgusted look and shook her head. I had not raised the dead.

The next Sunday morning, I stood in front of our church, which met in a big, green tent, welcoming people as they arrived.

Ugly marabou storks picked at piles of garbage on the street corner. It was not quite ten in the morning, but I was already perspiring heavily. As I squinted in the blazing, equatorial sun, I watched a large group of people approaching.

At the head of the crowd was a tall, thin man in a suit. *I must be seeing things*, I thought. The man looked like John Ssjemba. But it couldn't be—John was supposed to be dead. Yet it *was* him. John came up to me and wrapped his arms around me. His cheek pressed against mine.

John slowly pushed me to arm's-length distance. His white teeth glistened in his wide smile. His eyes were clear and white. He looked radiant.

“Pastor, later I have to tell you my story. . . .”

Sounds of people singing the opening chorus pulled us inside. Throughout the service my eyes were drawn again and again to John’s beaming smile.

After the service, John and I sat together on a bench.

“When I got very sick from the slim,” John began, “I thought it was my punishment for what I did in the war. You see, I fought in the bush against the Obote government. The Obote army terrorized and punished the villagers who supported us, and we terrorized the ones we thought supported the government troops.”

John looked down. “I was a commander. I did terrible things. I beat the brains out of children with a shock absorber right in front of their parents. I led gang rapes and murders of many people. My crimes were so horrible that I felt that even though God had forgiven me in a general way, I still had to pay. My first wife infected me with AIDS. I felt the slim was a just punishment, and I had no hope of being healed. Now my second wife and most of my children are also infected with AIDS.

“After you came and read those Scriptures to me, I realized that God had not only forgiven my sins, but he had forgotten them. After you left, I prayed. I asked God to heal me and give me another chance at life. I wanted to be able to tell people what a wonderful God he is and to raise my family.

“Then I drifted off to sleep. Sometime in the night I had a dream, or a vision. I’m not sure which. I was standing in a great room with blood up to my knees. I was horrified. Then I heard a voice calling me. Some distance away I saw my first wife. She had contracted AIDS from someone while I was away fighting. Like I said, she infected me before she died. Now there she was. She had an evil smile on her face. ‘John,’ she said, ‘today you will be with me!’

“I heard myself say, ‘Lord Jesus, save me.’ There was something like a bolt of lightning that came and struck my former wife. She disintegrated into many tiny pieces. There was another great flash

of light. I looked down, and the blood I had been standing in was now crystal-clear water.”

John looked back up at me. I didn't know what to say. It was incredible, but there he was. He continued. “When I woke up in the morning, I felt so good, so happy . . . so full of life. I thought I must have died and gone to heaven. But when I looked around my flat, I realized this was not heaven.”

I could certainly understand that.

John began to chuckle. “I got up out of bed. I had not been outside in weeks, so I wanted to see the sun. I went out wrapped in my sheet. My neighbors all started screaming and running away; they thought they were seeing a ghost.”

“So, John, how are you?”

“Pastor, look at me. I am as strong as ever. I've been eating and putting on weight. I feel wonderful! I truly believe God has healed me of HIV!” Looking at him, it seemed he might be right.

“The army is going to give me my job back in the Presidential Guard if my blood test comes out negative. I'm very happy!”

John's smile faded a bit as he met my gaze. “Pastor, I hope I haven't gone too far in my faith. Now I have also asked God to heal my wife and children. When I go for my blood tests, I am going to take them with me. Do you think that's okay?”

What could I say? “John, that seems perfectly fine to me. I'll be praying for you and your family. Please let me know what you find out.”

The next Sunday John stood before the whole church and testified of his complete healing. There were no HIV antibodies in his blood at all. The blood tests of his infected wife and children also came back negative. It seems they were all healed at the same time.

Skeptics kept waiting for John's AIDS symptoms to reappear. Frankly, I wondered about his prognosis myself. But when my wife and I left Uganda three years later, John was still healthy and telling everyone what God had done for him.

My wife, Leia, and I are ordinary people. Yet over the past thirty-five years, we've seen God show up in extraordinary and miraculous ways. John's story is among the most dramatic, but it's really not all that unusual.

Early on, we agreed to do whatever God asked of us; to go wherever he led. We didn't usually stay in any one place, including Uganda, very long. And as we began living out our adventure of faith, we slammed almost immediately into a disconcerting truth: on our own, our resources were utterly insufficient. Yet when we had nowhere else to turn, God always showed up, pouring his power and grace into one desperate situation after another. I can think of no more adventurous and faith-building approach to life than to walk in step with him!

When I first sat down to retrace our journey, which spanned four continents, I began making a list of each time God answered our cry for help in an unmistakable way. By the time I finished, I'd recorded more than fifty hope-giving, faith-stirring illustrations that showcase God's provision, protection, and direction.

As you read about our experiences, I hope you will be in awe of God's miracles but also keenly aware of the weakness and humanity of Leia and me. I pray you'll also find answers to your questions about the way God works today. Perhaps you've wondered,

Can I really expect to see God work miracles?

Can I trust God to care for me and my family if he calls us into uncharted areas?

What should I do when I'm asked to pray in a situation that seems hopeless?

How can I even know what God is asking me to do?

I don't claim to have special insight into God's plans for your life. But I do know this: God is good. He performs small miracles and great miracles according to our needs, according to our faith, and always, according to his good purposes.

But what if you are unconvinced, not only that miracles happen, but also that God even exists or cares for you? My story is for you, too, because God's supernatural work in my own life began before I even knew him. When he first showed up, I, like John, was a soldier fighting for my country—and for my very life.

CHAPTER 1

VIETNAM

May 1968

I Corps Area, South Vietnam

Marine Lance Corporal Ken White and I walked across the broad expanse of white sandy soil on the way to our night posts. It was nearly midnight, and the bright moon behind us cast long shadows across the dunes ahead. My attention suddenly shifted from the sand to the sky as I saw bright orange flashes on the distant hills miles from our base. The flashes were followed by a staggered series of muffled explosions.

At eighteen, I was a new guy in Vietnam, less than a month “in country.” Ken had been there about ten months. He had been through the Tet Offensive in January 1968, when the Vietcong had launched massive attacks on almost every American base in South Vietnam.

Taking note of the explosions in front of us, Ken calmly said, “Looks like they’re getting hit with rockets over at the air base.” I had seen no real action yet but tried to sound matter-of-fact as I agreed with his observation.

A moment later a set of brighter orange explosions appeared off to our immediate right. Like thunder following lightning, the reports of the Russian-made 122mm rockets came much faster, much closer. Ken was not so low-key now as he said, “Man, they’re getting hit right over there at Hotel Battery [a nearby artillery base].”

My eyes quickly scanned the dark, jagged shapes of the surrounding hills. There were more flashes of light and booms of thunder behind us as another nearby Marine position came under bombardment from the rockets.

In a high-pitched voice, my friend suddenly shouted, “Don, they’re hitting all around us!” We stood in a large, open area with no cover available.

I heard something that sounded like the amplified hiss of tires on wet pavement passing overhead. I looked up in the direction of the *whoosh*, and a bright flash lit up the sky behind the building directly across the field from us. Instantly, this was followed by the sharp crump of an explosion. It sounded like the slamming of a car door magnified a hundred times. Flames leaped up now from that direction.

I looked at Ken. I could barely make out his voice over the din caused by more *whooshes*, more explosions, and men shouting and screaming.

“Incoming—those are incoming rockets! Run for cover!” Ken shouted.

I lost sight of him as we both sprinted for a sandbagged bunker. Terror I had never known propelled me across the soft sand. I glanced to my left, looking for Ken. Instead, I saw a newly constructed building disappear in a sheet of white-and-orange flame. The sound of that explosion was indistinguishable from the general chaos. Several other rockets hit almost simultaneously among the enlisted men’s tented huts. I could now clearly hear the cries and screams of wounded Marines.

More rockets passed overhead and exploded nearby as I reached the bunker. I dove into a narrow opening. My hands pulled my helmet down tightly over my head and neck, but my legs and feet were well outside the protection of the sandbags. I was too paralyzed with fear to wiggle the rest of the way into the bunker.

I had not prayed in years. As the cries of the wounded grew louder and the salvos of rockets continued to fall, I felt sure I was

about to die. In panic-stricken, hyperventilated breaths, I talked to God: “O God, I’m too young to die! I believe you have some purpose for my life! If you will get me out of Vietnam alive, I will do whatever you want. I’ll be whatever you want me to be. I’ll serve you the rest of my life!” I was desperate, but I was sincere.

A few minutes later, the attack was over. I slowly crawled out of the bunker, barely able to believe that I was still alive. I jogged over to the enlisted men’s area behind the smoky remains of our now-demolished mess hall. The sputtering fire among the ruins provided a little light. On the ground were several bodies. They were small, shriveled, and blackened—barely recognizable as people. The bodies were lying on top of green ponchos with only tatters of clothing sticking to them. They were so small that I was sure they must have been Vietcong soldiers—our enemies. I spoke nervously to a captain standing nearby: “Sir, how did these Vietcong get here, right in the middle of our base?”

He looked up and said, “These aren’t their soldiers, son.” Pointing to my left, he said, “These are Marines who were caught asleep in that hut right over there. As soon as their ammo finished cooking off, we brought them out here.” I looked over at the jumble of smoldering plywood, twisted metal, and charred two-by-fours.

Horror gripped me. I realized these must be the same young men with whom I had drunk my first whiskey just the night before. None of these boys were over twenty-one. Two of them had told me they were due to go home in just a few days. My knees nearly buckled, and bile rose in my throat. I felt dizzy and disconnected. Now, I heard the captain yelling at me, “Don’t just stand there, son. Run over to the corpsmen and grab some stretchers so we can get these poor guys out of here.”

For several days after that, the slightest sudden sound made me jump. Since I was pulling night duty, I had to try to sleep during the day. My hut was near the perimeter of our base. The senior NCOs (noncommissioned officers) had their huts close to the center of the compound.

Not far from their housing were two tall radio masts. Each mast had a red light on top to keep helicopters from running into them. Unfortunately, the masts also served as something like goal posts for the Vietcong, who aimed their six-foot-long rockets in our direction. As a result, the majority of rockets hit somewhere in the vicinity of the senior NCOs. We called it “Rocket Alley.” After a while, the plywood sides of these huts were seriously ventilated with holes made by shrapnel.

As the shelling increased, the commanders made a strategic decision to move some of the enlisted men, including me, into the more dangerous “Rocket Alley” area. The senior NCOs would then move into our huts.

Before going to my post on the night that order came down, I reluctantly dragged my gear over to my new quarters in the central area. The very next afternoon, I was startled by the cracking explosion and concussion of the first of a volley of enemy rockets. The surprise daytime attack was over quickly, and I saw smoke rising from the edge of our base. Men began running in that direction. I followed. I soon realized that we were running in the direction of the hut I had just vacated.

My former residence was a smoking ruin. Behind what was left of a plywood wall, I saw a couple of corpsmen feverishly working on someone. After a few minutes, they stood up and put their hands on their hips. Their dejected posture made it obvious that the bloody, burnt Marine was dead.

A cold chill radiated from my heart and spread outward as I realized that if I had not moved the previous night, I could have been that poor guy.

A few months later, I was recuperating from a minor wound at the US Naval Hospital on the little island of Guam. God had heard my prayer. After sustaining a “million-dollar wound”—serious enough that I had to leave Vietnam but not so serious as to disable me permanently—I was miraculously alive and out of Vietnam in one, only slightly damaged piece.

After surgery, I was able to move around. Days were given to physical therapy and minor hospital chores. Evenings were spent at the enlisted men's club, where I enjoyed the free-flowing alcohol and the island girls who hung on to us. One boring day after another passed as I waited to be sent to a hospital in the "world," as we called the continental United States.

God, who is faithful, had answered my prayer and kept his side of the bargain. As for me, I conveniently forgot the promises I had made to him. I didn't yet know that God keeps good books and doesn't forget a thing. It would be seven years before he came to collect.

Meditation on the Miraculous

God pursues us before we even acknowledge him. His ears are already open to our cries for help.

I will answer them before they even call to me.

While they are still talking about their needs,

I will go ahead and answer their prayers!

ISAIAH 65:24

