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Missionaries In The Cornfields

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TERRY HERTZLER

MISSIONARIES IN THE CORNFIELDS

As a child of fundamentalist Christians, I prayed for the missionaries in the cornfields. I must have been six and didn't know the phrase "foreign fields" then—but I knew cornfields. We lived next to one.

The cornfields of the '50s were not like those of today: rows so close nothing larger than a cat can move between them. In those days, rows were planted wider—wide enough for children to play hide-and-seek when the stalks had grown tall enough to conceal us in late summer.

For the adults, it must have been charming to hear a six-year-old stand up in church and pray for the missionaries in the cornfields. This was long before I was sent to Vietnam as a soldier, where the rice paddies were more foreign than I ever could have dreamed, but where our chaplain assured us that God was on our side.

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I believed him, as I believed our leaders when they said that this was a righteous war. In those first few months, I prayed often. But I still believed in God then, too.

You can't walk through cornfields today—except of course in winter, when broken stalks and stubble are all that remains and there's no place to hide.