

## FROM JOHN'S READERS: *On Above the Thorns*

“The book should come with a box of Kleenex; hoping one box is enough....This story is fantastic. I see a sequel and a good family movie.”

—Angelo Lagonia  
Owner and Chief Pilot Guanaja Air  
Utila, Honduras

“I finished reading *Above the Thorns* in one day. I could not put it down. It was such a wonderful book and God's hand was there as you were writing [it]....What a testimony this book will be to others....I look forward to more as God guides your pen....The guest of honor...should be everyone's....”

—June Woodard  
School Teacher and Member, Parkway Baptist Church  
Hernando, MS

## *On Two Minutes to Live*

As listed on  
[www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com)

“5.0 out of 5 stars Obedient to the Call, January 16, 2010

By Rita M. Pierce (REAL NAME)

This review is from: *Two Minutes to Live* (Paperback)

I read *Two Minutes to Live* on the plane ride to Belize, as our mission team was on the way down to spend nine days serving the people of Belize while being facilitated by John and Judy Collier and staying at their Mission House. The book kept my interest and was a fast read. I just couldn't wait to see the next miracle God would be performing in the life of this obedient missionary. It was absolutely

amazing to see the Lord's hand in all of Mr. Collier's endeavors. The book is a real testimony of what the Lord can do through the life of a willing servant. After meeting Mr. Collier and his lovely wife, Judy—it was comforting to know these are real people, true to the cause of Christ. The book had me laughing, crying and hoping, but most of all it had me in awe of how great our God really is.”

\* \* \*

“5.0 out of 5 stars Awesome Testimony, April 24, 2009

By P. Lennard (MT USA)

This review is from: *Two Minutes to Live* (Paperback)

I just had the distinct pleasure of meeting John Collier in person while in Belize. I can't begin to express the genuine godly heart of the man. He is the true deal and his book is awesome. The book is well written and a great testimony of a heart on fire for God. I highly recommend *Two Minutes to Live* for personal, family, or classroom reading.”

Above  
the  
Thorns



Above  
the  
Thorns

Encouragement,  
Hope,  
and Miracles

John E. Collier



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Published by Redemption Press, PO Box 427, Enumclaw, WA 98022.

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ISBN 13: 978-1-63232-931-8

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2011923919

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## Dedication

**A**BOVE THE THORNS is dedicated to the Lord and the lives He worked through to help raise me *Above the Thorns* in my own life. Though the names have been changed, the characters in this book reflect the lives of real people...people who have made a deep impact upon me and helped mold my life. While reading *Above the Thorns*, I hope you will be impressed with the dramatic power embedded within one simple act of kindness... how one person can change another person's life by just going that extra mile for him or her. And, as this simple concept is played out in your life, you will be able to watch God work miracles in the lives of those around you. The results can be amazing—they were in my life.

May God richly bless you as you read *Above the Thorns*.



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## Acknowledgments

**A** S I WAS driving over a largely jungle road, from our home in Ladyville, Belize, to Independence Village more than one hundred miles away, the storyline of *Above the Thorns* began to come to me. I truly believe the story came from the Lord, for when I sat down to write it, the complete book flowed from my heart to the paper in ten days. So I first want to express my deep gratitude to the Lord for not only the gift of the story, but also for putting the people in my life who inspired it.

On the drive, I was thinking about people I had known and how much their lives had meant to others around them. And then again, I considered the lives of still others I had known, and what their lives *could* have been, if they had only followed the principles in Bobby's life, the story's main character. It's amazing how some people seem to naturally have a beautiful, sweet, humble spirit, while others have to really work at it. But God has given us all the ability to live out these principles, if only we ask Him with a sincere heart and put His life-in-us into daily practice.

My sincere appreciation goes to our friend and editor Joan Sears for her talented and hard work on *Above the Thorns*, as well as on my first book, *Two Minutes to Live*. She brought a great deal

of insight into the story along with her professional skills from teaching English at Texas Tech University. Joan has become a close friend and stayed several weeks with us in Belize working on the book. She was here when, as a result of heart failure, I had to spend several nights in the emergency room, in a touch-and-go situation. A shoulder to cry on, a partner in prayer, and company in the hospital, Joan supported my wife, Judy, in every way, even taking care of our dog, Happy, while Judy spent the nights at the hospital with me. Thank you, Joan. You are a wonderful editor, and even more importantly, a wonderful person and friend. Judy and I thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

And I thank my wife Judy...but how do you thank your own wife for all the encouragement and support as well as all the long hours she put in correcting my many mistakes and helping me express the feelings of the characters in the book? And that's not to mention the love and faithfulness she demonstrated in never leaving my side during the long, difficult, heart-failure journey of this past year. As my heart surgeon, good friend, and now board member Dr. Robert Gallegos put so well, "John, she's one in a million." Well, thanks to the good Lord, it looks like I've been given years instead of hours, days, or months to be able to express my deep gratitude. Judy, I love you and thank God daily for your love for Jesus and for me—you're a living testimony of God's merciful and perfect rendering of a second chance.

To proofreaders Kelly Crank, Angelo Lagonia, Mildred Ormand (Judy's aunt), Rita Pierce, Bobby and Bonnie Steward, and June Woodard: I want to thank each of you for your generous gift of time and talent with your resulting valuable suggestions. May God richly bless each one of you.

Finally, it is with sincerity that I thank all my readers; I truly hope you will be blessed by *Above the Thorns* in some lasting way that pours over into the lives of others. It's not my words on paper that make the difference; it's what the Lord can do with my effort that matters. So I am praying *Above the Thorns* will be used by the Lord to encourage each and every one of you, and make a definitive difference in at least one person's life. Because, as you will see in

## Acknowledgments

*Above the Thorns*, it only takes one person to change a community... and even the world. Will you be that person?

NOTE: If *Above the Thorns* or *Two Minutes to Live* does touch your heart or life in some way, we would be deeply grateful to hear from you at [embassybz@gmail.com](mailto:embassybz@gmail.com). May God richly bless you in advance for sharing *your* story.



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## Chapter One

**J**UST AS BOBBY Digger was about to lose all hope that anyone would give him a ride, a large red and silver semi passed by, began to slow down, and then stopped. When the driver pulled the air horn, the tall, scruffy boy picked up his guitar, grabbed the small bag of possessions, and started running to the truck.

As Bobby caught up to the cab of the semi, a big man with a black beard was leaning across the front seat, opening the door.

“Where’re you going?”

“Uh...I don’t know.”

The driver took off his sunglasses and studied the sad, brown eyes of the young man before him. After a few seconds, Big Mike simply responded, “Get in.”

Bobby climbed into the truck, slid into one of the dark brown leather bucket seats with his guitar, and found a space for his bag on the floor. *The air conditioning sure feels good!*

The truck started off. Big Mike allowed Bobby time to settle in and become comfortable before asking, “Son, are you wanted by the police?”

“No, sir.”

“Well then...Are you running away from home?”

“No, sir. I don’t have a home to run away from.”

Hearing those painful words, Big Mike grimaced, paused, and then slowly continued his questioning. “Do you mind telling me your story? Are you in trouble?”

“No, sir...it’s just...well...my dad died last night.”

“Oh, man, that’s tough...I’m so sorry.”

“Well, we really weren’t very close. You see, my dad drank a lot—and that’s why the doctor said he died. It caused his liver to fail. He never got out of the hospital. We didn’t have any money, so the social worker said they would take care of the funeral and then come by this morning to take me to a foster home.”

“What about your mother or family?”

“My mother died four years ago. I have an uncle but I don’t know where he lives, even though we were living in his camper trailer. I don’t have anyone else. But sir, *please* don’t tell anyone. I *really* don’t want to go to a foster home.”

Mike kept driving while thinking, *The kid is all alone*. Mike didn’t have a family, but he had lots of friends and everyone liked and respected him, especially his army buddies. This kid had no one. “What’s your name?”

“Bobby.”

“Well, Bobby, how old are you?”

“Sixteen.”

Mike was silent for a long while. His mind flashed back to an incident four years earlier. He thought about another boy who, like Bobby, had been twelve at that time. Mike told Bobby he was going to a truck stop to get some diesel and asked Bobby if he was hungry.

“Oh, yes, sir.”

“Do you have any money?”

“Yes, sir. \$8.71.”

“If you clean the cab of my truck, I’ll get you a hamburger while we’re here,” Mike offered.

“Oh, thank you, sir.”

“My name is Mike; call me Mike, not ‘sir.’”

“Yes, sir...I mean, Mr. Mike.” Mike smiled.

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As Big Mike pulled into the truck stop, he reminded Bobby that this might be the only chance to use the restroom. Bobby watched as the 6'2", 250-pound driver got out, pulling at his wrinkled jeans and light blue plaid shirt. While the diesel was being pumped into the large tanks, Mike went inside and Bobby started to work cleaning the truck, the windows, and the large mirrors. Then he ran to the little room behind the building before returning to finish his tasks. Bobby was in front of the truck cleaning the headlights when Mike came out and climbed in. He didn't see Bobby but noticed how clean the floor of the truck was. He pulled out the nice, clean ash tray. He looked at the windows and then the mirrors—all clean. In fact, his truck had never been as clean, but... *where is Bobby?* Mike got out of the truck and walked to the front of the cab where he found Bobby finishing his work on the headlights.

“Boy, you do a good job! Who taught you to clean a truck so good?”

“My dad. He was a mechanic and I helped him at the truck company. They gave me a little money to help clean. I got to use the pressure washer too—that was cool.”

“That’s great.”

When Mike handed Bobby his lunch—a hamburger with French fries and a shake—Bobby exclaimed, “Wow! This is a lot of food... *and* a chocolate milkshake! Oh, thank you, Mr. Mike!”

“You’re very welcome. Well now, we’ve gotta get going. I have a limited time to deliver this cargo of fresh food. It won’t wait.” Mike started the truck. Both travelers were hungry and ate in silence as they continued their journey.

After all the remains of the lunch were bagged, Mike couldn’t believe what he was about to say. “Bobby, I am going to tell you a story, but you are never to repeat it. Do you understand?”

Bobby looked puzzled but replied slowly, “Yes, sir.”

“Four years ago, Albert, my army buddy from Vietnam, had a twelve-year-old son named Bobby. Albert and his wife, Mary, are both wonderful, caring people and only had the one child...the light of their lives. When Bobby was little, he picked the petals off the roses in Mary’s rose garden, and then took them to her to show

his love for his ‘mama.’ When he was older, he picked the whole flowers for her. As for Albert, Bobby followed him everywhere he went, every chance he could. And that didn’t change when Bobby got older. Albert owns a large heavy equipment company where they fix all types of dozers and earth-moving equipment. Bobby would ride on the equipment, with his dad, and Albert would let him drive the equipment, sometimes by himself. Bobby was the happiest kid you’ve ever seen and I don’t think Albert and Mary could have been any happier either.

“Then, on a hot Saturday afternoon, Bobby’s mother was fixing a jar of lemonade when Bobby asked if he could take it to his dad who was test-driving a big wide-track dozer. Every time Bobby would see his dad, he would take out running toward him. So on that afternoon when Bobby saw his dad, he must have run behind the machine to give him the lemonade. But it was right then that Albert put the dozer in reverse.” Big Mike paused with a glazed look, almost like he could see the whole scene reenacted before him. “It was *horrible*...that huge ol’ machine...It just backed right over that sweet kid...”

Mike struggled with tears but lost the battle. After he took a couple of deep breaths and cleared his throat, the large truck driver was finally able to continue the story. “Albert didn’t even know what had happened because he couldn’t see anything close to the dozer—it was too big. So he just kept backing up until...Well, he saw his boy’s body in front of the machine. He screamed, ‘No! No!’ as he slammed on the brakes and jumped off the dozer. Albert ran to his son, shouting, ‘Bobby! Bobby!’ but when he got there, he couldn’t even recognize him...His body was so torn up. Albert just crumpled to the ground and cried, ‘Dear God, what have I done! I’ve killed my son!’ He just kept sobbing until he could get himself together enough to stand up. Then he ran wildly to the house and told Mary, but held her back, refusing to let her go out and see the terrible sight.

“In a few minutes he was able to call 911 and told the operator, ‘I just killed my son.’ After a few more minutes, the police, fire department, and ambulance arrived. One of the firemen ran to turn

## Chapter One

off the dozer before returning to put his hand on Albert's shoulder. All these emergency responders from the small town knew Albert and were devastated too. Shortly the thin, twisted, and mangled body was removed.

"This was the worst thing that had ever happened in Lawrenceville. Everyone knew it was an accident, but that didn't take away the pain. Albert and Mary had always been outgoing, friendly people who helped anyone in need, but that day they began drawing back from all their friends and activities until...well, they became almost like hermits. The employees at Albert's equipment company began running the business themselves. Mary never left the house except when she had to go shopping. She never returned to the classroom where she had taught home economics for so many years—and she had loved it too. And she never went back to the yard where the accident took place either. Ever since that time, she has stayed on the other side of the property inside their home.

"Bobby, you have the same name and are sixteen—the same age that their son would have been. You like heavy equipment and so did their Bobby. The accident happened on a Saturday afternoon in the summer—just like today. When we get to the small town of Lawrenceville in about three hours, it will be about the same time the accident happened.

"Every Saturday I go by Albert's yard to say hello. Many times I'll drop off some samples of fresh produce that the company gives me. Albert and I go way back. When we were in Vietnam, he almost died on the battlefield. Fortunately, I was nearby and able to get him back to the medic. He's a great guy, and I want to leave you with him for a week, while I try to find a place for you to live."

"Mr. Mike, why are you so good to me? You don't even know me."

Mike was quiet for a moment as his eyes again clouded with moisture. "Bobby, people are *supposed* to help each other. The good Lord wants us to."

A comfortable silence filled the cab as Big Mike and Bobby began to realize they were no longer alone. Both had gained a new

friend. The highway before them offered a destination and hope for Bobby.

After several miles, Mike said, "I see you have a guitar. Do you play it?"

"Yes, sir, a little. It was my mother's. My uncle gave it to me. Before that, it was my grandfather's. He gave it to my mom."

"What do you play?"

"Oh, I like country and western."

"Well, then, let's put a tape in the player."

Bobby asked if he had any Chet Atkins.

"Boy, do I! Try this one." And sure enough, it was one of Bobby's favorites. The two talked, listened to music, and soon were in sight of Albert's ten acres of flat, cleared land bordering Texas Highway 59.

When the truck was about two blocks from the driveway leading to Albert's heavy equipment company, Mike pulled the big air horn to let Albert know he was on his way.

As Mike turned into the long driveway, Bobby noticed a road that forked to the right and led up to a lovely, one-story, white-framed home that was trimmed in forest green. Across the entire width of the house ran a large porch. On the left side of the porch was a white swing that must have seen many years of use. The driveway that led to the double carport on the right side of the house was lined with overgrown bushes, now covered with vines and blanketed in weeds. The unkempt yard lent a sadness to the house that spoke of tragedy even without knowing the story of its owners. Bobby realized this must be Mary and Albert's home, once bright with beauty, now draped with sorrow.

Straight ahead in the center of the road was a large shop building that, coupled with several large trees, created privacy for the house. A great number of pieces of heavy equipment lined the front of the shop while old machines used for salvaging parts were kept at the back. To the left were the maintenance shop and wash racks.

As Mike got out of the truck, he told Bobby to wait so he could talk to Albert.

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“Hey, Albert,” Mike called as he walked over to his good friend in the dark-blue work clothes.

“Mike! I didn’t hear you with this washer on. Let me turn this thing off.” Albert removed his cap and wiped his arm across his face before greeting Mike with a bear hug. “Now, what did you bring me this time? I hope it’s blueberries.”

“No, it’s something much better and bigger—and alive.”

Albert smiled. “Well, let me guess...it’s a turkey.”

“Nope.”

“Then I give up. What?”

“You know, Albert, you owe me for saving your life.”

Albert laughed. “I’ve paid you for that a hundred times over!”

Then Mike got serious and said, “I need a favor.”

“You know I’d do anything for you—you’re my closest friend.”

Mike continued, “Albert, I picked up a boy who lost his father yesterday. He needs somewhere to stay for a week until I can find a place for him to put down some roots. He’s a good kid and a good worker. I trust him. His father was a mechanic, but had a drinking problem and his liver gave out.”

Albert nodded. “I know lots of mechanics like that. Sure, I’ll let him stay in the trailer. You know no one has lived in it for a while. It’s small, but the electricity works and the water is hooked up. But, Mike, it sure does need a good cleaning.”

Mike turned to the truck and gave a big whistle. Bobby came running. “Bobby,” Mike said, “you see that pressure washer? Let’s see how clean you can get that loader.”

Bobby smiled and gave a hearty, “Yes, sir!” Then he turned and ran to the washer. Quickly turning it on, he began to wash the large machine.

Albert took a deep breath and spoke almost as if he were speaking to himself, “His name is Bobby?”

“Yes, it is, Albert.”

In the ensuing silence, the pressure washer could be heard in the background as Bobby meticulously cleaned the loader. “Mike, how old is he?”

Mike looked Albert in the eyes and somberly answered, “Sixteen.”

Albert looked past Mike to the scene of the tragic accident. Tears welled in his eyes as he thought, *Today is Saturday; it’s Saturday afternoon; the boy’s name is Bobby; he’s sixteen.* Finally Albert spoke, “Mike, is God punishing me again?”

Mike knew what Albert was thinking and thoughtfully replied, “No, Albert. God never punishes someone for an accident. But have you thought that God is the God of second chances? Of a second chance at happiness?”

Albert paused. “OK...one week.”

Mike called Bobby over and told him to get his stuff out of the truck because he was staying there for a week. Then he led Bobby to the left side of the shop and to the small vine-covered trailer where he would be staying. Bobby remembered the last time someone had given him a trailer to use—when Uncle Ralph had given him and his dad a little trailer to live in. This time Bobby didn’t seem to see all the junk in front of the trailer—only a safe place he could live around good people. Mike said, “Bobby, here’s fifty dollars for your food. I want the fifty dollars back next week when I return.”

A wide grin finally broke out on Bobby’s face as he could no longer conceal his excitement. “Yes, sir! Thank you, sir. Thank you very much, sir!” Then Bobby ran back to the truck, and got his guitar and paper sack tied with the string. When Albert saw the young boy returning with his few belongings, he turned aside to Mike and asked if that was all he had.

“That and what he has inside him—character. You’ll see what I mean this week.”

“Bobby, you can put your things in the trailer and you’ll find a grocery store three blocks down the highway on your right.” Albert pointed the way. “When you finish cleaning the loader, just turn off the washer. I’ll see you Monday.”

As Mike and Bobby turned to walk away, Bobby said, “I will, sir. And thank you, sir. Thank you for *everything!*”

## Chapter One

Once they were out of hearing range, Mike said, “Bobby, remember what I told you. It is never to be repeated.”

“Oh, yes, sir.”

Then Mike did something he didn’t do very often—he gave Bobby a big hug. “Bobby, you are special. Now prove it.”

Mike walked back to the big truck, climbed into the cab, and drove off with two short pulls on the air horn.