

# **Bruchko Study Guide**

**Bruchko by Bruce Olson**

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# Plot Summary

The story opens with Bruce Olson talking to an Motilone Indian chieftain Ayaboquina, when an outlaw named Humberto Abril rushes up and interrupts their conversation. He says he has the right to claim and settle the land the Motilone Indians are living. Though Abril is talking to Bruce, another Motilone Indian named Bobby calmly interjects, saying that Abril has been given land and that he chose to sell it, and that they won't give him any more.

The story then drops back in time, describing Bruce's youth among a family of Lutherans and a father who ridicules Bruce's view of God. Bruce loves language and studies on his own, including Latin. He begins attending an interdenominational church with his friend who describes a similar salvation experience to that of Bruce. A missionary then arrives to address the congregation and Bruce is taken back by the man's appearance which includes dirty sneakers. Over the coming months, he forgets that initial impression and comes to believe he is called to do missionary work. He studies South America and eventually understands that is to be his mission field.

Bruce is disappointed that his dream of earning a doctorate in languages is to be cast aside and puts in an application with a mission board. He's turned down and uses that as his excuse to drop the idea, but realizes that God still wants him in the mission field. He drops out of college and with a plane ticket and seventy dollars, goes to South America where he expects to be met by a missionary who never shows up. Alone in a foreign country, he meets people through a series of chances and is eventually taken into the jungle where he believes he encounters the tribe he seeks but later discovers that it was another tribe, the Yuko.

He later encounters the Motilone Indians and spends years with them. It takes months to learn the language and he is depressed at the time, during which he can't cross the language barrier to share his knowledge of Jesus. He continues his work and eventually makes progress though it's a long-term project. He introduces basic medicines and hygiene practices that become generally accepted. Most importantly, he comes to be part of a family and makes a "pact" with Bobby, the man he comes to know as brother. Bruce happens to meet a young woman who wants to help with his work but she is killed in an automobile accident before joining him. When Bobby is also killed by outlaws who want the land for their own, Bruce is devastated. It takes the prayer of Bobby's adopted son and the words of a government official to make him realize that Bobby's life and Bruce's work have had purpose.



# Chapters 1 through 5

## Chapters 1 through 5 Summary and Analysis

The story opens with Bruce Olson talking to an Motilone Indian chieftain Ayaboquina, when an outlaw named Humberto Abril rushes up and interrupts their conversation. He says he has the right to claim and settle the land the Motilone Indians are living. Though Abril is talking to Bruce, another Motilone Indian named Bobby calmly interjects, saying that Abril has been given land and that he chose to sell it, and that they won't give him any more. Bruce, Bobby and Ayaboquina know that Abril won't just give up and they take a moment to pray, giving the issue over to God. Bruce's mind wanders back. He'd been in the country just a few hours, having arrived from America by plane in Rio de Oro. He is met by Bobarishora, called Bobby by Bruce. Bobby calls Bruce Bruchko. Bobby seems well and happy, and reports that his wife and newborn son are well. Bobby and Bruce eat and talk. Bobby says that the schools are doing well and that students are demanding more books to read.

Bruce was studious as a young man with a flair and love for languages. That love prompts him to make his plan to become earn a doctorate in languages. His family life is stressful with fighting in his house a common occurrence. Then Bruce, alone in his room one evening, is saved. He tries to share the experience with his family, friends and pastor but is ridiculed. His pastor says he has been committed to God since he was baptized as an infant and ignores Bruce's statement that he'd never felt committed until now. When his best friend, Kent Lange, describes a similar experience and says he was obeying a call during church, Bruce is curious about his church and visits. There are great differences and Bruce is enthralled. He goes there often though he has to walk two miles to get there. Sometimes, he arrives home to find he's locked out and his parents won't let him in. Sometimes he has to walk back to the Lange's to spend the night.

Bruce hears a missionary speak at the church and is immediately struck by the man's appearance and attire, which includes dirty sneakers. His opinion of missionaries eventually improves and he begins to battle God over his future plans. Bruce holds to the dream of a doctorate but says God wants him to surrender to the mission, which he finally does. He learns that he has to have a degree in order to apply for the mission position, and goes to school in Pennsylvania before transferring home to Minnesota. He finds his family the same and tells his mother he believes the family could do better if they turned to God. His mother counters that it's his God who is tearing the family apart.

Bruce applies to a mission board for a position in South America and is turned down and uses that as a sign he can return to his former dream of a degree in languages. However, he realizes that God has used the experience to teach him to step out on faith. Bruce leaves for South America with seventy dollars and plans to meet with a missionary in Venezuela, Mr. Saunders. He admits to being frightened and laughs at the fact that he's studied Hebrew, Greek and Sanskrit, but no Spanish. He arrives but



Saunders never shows up. The language barrier is serious and it's apparently by chance that he meets a young man named Julio who invites Bruce to stay with his family. After a time, Julio introduces Bruce to Dr. Christian who agrees to take Bruce into the Indian territory. There he encounters Saunders who says Bruce is imposing, that he shouldn't have come without a mission board's support, and that he's on his own. Dr. Christian leaves Bruce with a particular tribe that is not part of the Christian movement making arrangements to pick him up in a few weeks. The missionaries say this tribe "persecutes" the Christian tribes but Bruce soon learns that the Indians believe that the Christians are strange. They point out the clothing required and the square church building, countering that round is a perfect shape, just like God is perfect. Bruce believes that the missionaries are equating North American culture with Christianity and begins trying to share his own beliefs, though hampered by the language barrier.

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Bruce says he is happy at the idea of additional translations and notes that the children especially like to read from the New Testament. He says that he also enjoys translating because he learns so much from that task. This is one of the first indications that Bruce greatly enjoys studying. He relates that as a child he spent hours with books, including the Bible. While the rest of his family - including his father - preferred to take religious facts at face value without delving into the meat, Bruce early on seeks out the deeper meanings. He says that he wonders about God, the personal being who was the savior and admits that he has trouble equating that God to the God preached in his church.

Bruce's parents don't forbid his attendance of the church where Kent Lange attends but they also aren't supportive. His father makes fun of him when he arrives home, calling him a "holy-roller." It's interesting that Bruce, with no family support, continues to seek out the answers he craves.

Bruce recounts his "argument" with God over the calling to the mission field. He notes that missionaries are "ridiculous," that they wear tennis shoes at the pulpit and that they are failures who joined the mission field because they couldn't make it in the real world.



# Chapters 7 through 12

## Chapters 7 through 12 Summary and Analysis

Bruce remains with the tribe of Indians for three weeks before being picked up by Dr. Christian on his return trip. Bruce accepts the doctor's offer to stay in his suite of rooms at Puerto Ayacucho but is uncomfortable there. He notes that the rooms are filled with figurines and one day he breaks a vase. Bruce is also very lonely and craves companionship. He makes friends with two sons of missionaries but one, Tom, then says they're no longer allowed to associate with Bruce because he's "out of fellowship." Tom says it's because Bruce refuses to obey them and return to the states. Bruce points out that he hasn't even enough money to return home and questions the reason he should be required to obey the missionaries.

Bruce then encounters a young man named Raphael who invites Bruce to stay with his family. Bruce says the family live in squalor with dirt floors and a cockroach infestation, but that he's happy there. He begins attending Mass with Raphael's family though he knows it will further anger the missionaries. When Raphael plans to leave for Caracas, Bruce makes plans to leave as well and trusts God to provide a way. A check arrives from the Langes providing support from the church, as promised. Bruce buys his plane ticket and rents a room in a boarding house where Raphael and some other students live.

On Bruce's first day in Caracas, he steps outside to discover a bloody fight. There are gunshots and he watches several young people killed before managing to tear himself from the scene to return inside. There's an anti-American sentiment prevalent in the area and Bruce is constantly sparring with his roommate, Lucio. Bruce admits that there's some level of real resentment toward him and understands that the students' ideals are important to them. One day, Bruce and Lucio are swimming and Lucio almost drowns Bruce, on purpose. Bruce watches as Lucio's group falls apart, none as dedicated as Lucio. One day he comes to Bruce and says that he's ready to make a commitment to Jesus, and does so.

Bruce eventually enrolls at the university where the other students attend though he's without money and behind on his rent. He then meets Miguel Nieto who employs Bruce to work at the Ministry of Health teaching English to students preparing to attend medical school at Harvard. Bruce takes the job though it's illegal for him to work as a visitor in the country. His enrollment in school eventually becomes a burden. He says that he isn't nearing his goal - to help the Indians. He learns that no one knows the Motilone language, that they live in an oil-rich land, and that they've been known to kill those who wander into their territory. He then reads a newspaper article about an outbreak of measles among the Motilones and renews his vow to go to them, ministering as he can. He takes a bus to Machiques and notes that he is now familiar with the language and enjoys talking to the other passengers. He carries a "large pig" on his lap for most of the journey. He's told by several people to steer clear of the



Motilonos but knows that's where he's headed. He buys a "sure footed mule" and begins his journey.

Bruce gets lost along the way, spends the night in the jungle alone and wanders around trying to find his way to the Motilone village. He finds Indians the following day and is greeted but somewhat hesitantly. He pulls out a flute and begins to play. He's soon joined by another man and they play until three in the morning. The people are all elderly and Bruce realizes that the chief and hunters are all away. He spends some time with an elderly man who begins teaching him the language. The men of the tribe return the following day and Bruce is immediately met with hostility. He's beaten and then shot with arrows that don't quite pierce the skin. Bruce later learns that some older men stopped the attack and that the chief was drunk. Bruce begins again to play his flute and someone else takes up the melody, playing along. The next day he plans to leave, citing the fact that he's not wanted, but as he packs a man brings him a sick child. Having only a limited supply of antibiotics, Bruce divides them among the sick children and stays for the several days until they recover. As he begins to learn the language, he discovers that these Indians are not the Motilonos but call themselves Yuko.

Four months later, he packs up to leave the village, reassuring himself that he's done what God commanded. The mule throws him some distance from the village and he has to walk back to retrieve the mule. He repeats the process a second time before he understands the lesson: God wants him in the village. The second time he's thrown, he's injured and is sick from amoebic dysentery. He nears the village and cries out for help. The chief carries him the remaining distance and he's cared for until he's recovered.

Bruce soon begins the process of trying to find his way to the Motilonos. The Yukos refuse to take him, obviously fearful. Bruce has noted a fascination among the Indians for shiny things. His clothes have long ago worn out but he saved the zipper when he began wearing traditional Indian dress. Now he uses it as a bribe and a strong young man agrees to take him to Motilone territory in return for the shiny object. They travel six difficult days. Bruce is then shot in the leg by an arrow as the Yukos run away. He's taken to the Indian lodge which he describes as being rounded, like a bee hive. His leg is infected, he's feverish and has diarrhea, and fades in and out of consciousness. He's either poked or ignored until the day a young boy brings him some grubs and demonstrates how to eat them. Hunger drives Bruce to eat several but he throws them up and is then given fish. He's never again hungry but never again offered grubs to eat. Days later he slips out in the middle of the night and begins an arduous trek toward civilization. He eventually hears the sound of an ax striking a tree, is cared for by some men and their wives, eats only a little at a time as his body adjusts to food, and discovers that he's in Columbia - far from where he'd expected to emerge from the jungle.

He has a little money he's managed to hold onto during his time in the jungle and buys a few necessities. He wants to go to Bogota but has only enough money for a train ticket half way. During the trip, the military take him from the train because he lacks identification papers and takes him to Bogota, proving Bruce's faith that God would help



him arrive at his destination. There, he's questioned by Dr. Gregoria Hernandez de Alba, head of the Indian Commission in Colombia, and his time with the Yukos is verified through his ability to correctly answer questions about their culture. He is then introduced to the Martins, an American couple who take him in, give him money and introduce him to their friends. Mr. Martin, an employee of Texaco, asks Bruce to talk to a Colombian Petroleum Company official, Frank Lerory. Lerory clearly doesn't believe Bruce's story, citing the fact that the company has sent two anthropologists into the jungle and that they agree the Yukos are the Motilones. Bruce doesn't try to argue the point but then Lerory offers Bruce transportation back to the area. Bruce, having put his return in God's hands, accepts.

This time, he has provisions, including a tarp, three books and food for a week. He goes to a place where he believes Motilone trails merge and leaves small gifts. They remain untouched for two weeks and Bruce has to pray for patience. Then he discovers the gifts are gone with a bow and arrow in their place. Once he finds arrows, point down, which is a sign of war but Bruce refuses to leave. He soon discovers that he's being watched. Frightened and angry, he begins to cut trees for a raft. In the middle of this project, he discovers that six Motilone men are watching him. One of them is the man who was kind to him during his previous stay with the Motilones, though that tribe was miles from this location. Bruce is taken back to their village where he's curiously touched and prodded. He is fed and given a hammock and notes, just before going to sleep, a cockroach the size of a mouse running down the rope of his hammock. His final thought as he listens to talking around him is that he'll someday understand that language.

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Bruce says it takes some time for him to understand the lesson God has been trying to convey. He says that God has led the way and has used the experiences for Bruce's good.

While Bruce is being attacked by the Indians, it occurs to him that the hatred of these people is comparable to the hatred against Jesus as he faced crucifixion. As Bruce lies in pain, he considers that he has fulfilled his duty. He notes that he's come to the Indians as God commanded and that he's clearly not welcome. He uses that as a reason to pack up and go home but discovers God hasn't yet completed the plan for his work among these people.

Bruce notes that once he's made contact with the Motilones he doesn't want to give that up even though he's very sick. He does admit that he won't be much use to anyone if he dies and that thought prompts his escape. When he's at his lowest, a bunch of bananas come floating by him on the river. He is briefly strengthened but is soon ailing again. He recalls the Bible passage in which God prepares a "table before me in the presence of mine enemies," and equates that with the finding of the bananas. He admits to wondering if that were God's way of giving him hope only to take it away again, but says that God will provide and moves on. What's interesting is that Bruce says he wasn't entirely convinced of God's guiding hand, but that he gets up and moves on anyway. It





seems he was certain because that certainty is surely what moved him to take another step in what must have seemed an endless journey.

During his time in Bogota, Bruce realizes that his two years in the jungle was difficult and that there's really no reason he should want to return. He knows that he has to tell the story of Jesus but feels there's nothing about it that will appeal to the Indians. Nonetheless, he knows that God has given him a longing to touch the lives of the Motilone and that he'll do that.



# Chapters 13 through 18

## Chapters 13 through 18 Summary and Analysis

Bruce is accepted into the Motilone tribe. He points to himself and says, "Bruce Olson," which is crudely repeated as "Bruchko" and becomes his name among the people. Bruce soon begins to entertain the children by pretending to remove his eyeball, clean it off or even swallow it, then replacing it. By listening carefully, he begins to pick up words, to distinguish present and past tense, and to write down what he learns. The adults are also captivated by his antics though it soon becomes uninteresting to the Motilones and to Bruce. He clumsily tries to imitate the craft of arrow making and watches as the women weave. He sees there is little overt emotion among the people and little need for discipline of children.

One day, Bruce steps in a pile of manure just outside the door of his hut and is disgusted by the habit of defecating and throwing food waste just outside the door. He's repulsed by a dirty, smelly woman who hugs him, seeing the lice in her hair. She follows and he wants to yell at her to leave him alone, but the language barrier continues to be an issue.

One morning he is looking at the cockroaches and wondering what he'll do that day when he realizes that the same young boy often brings him his meals. They begin to talk a little and Bruce soon feels comfortable with the boy who becomes his language and cultural teacher. The boy's name is Cobaydra but he becomes Bobarishora as a man, shortened by Bruce to "Bobby." When Bruce has been with the Motilones for almost a year, Bobby urges him to go along on a fishing trip. Bruce is teased for his lack of strength and ability to spear fish like the men of the tribe. Bruce is among the few invited to the ceremony officially recognizing Bobby as a man and later enters into an official pact with Bobby that makes the two brothers. Bobby's father encourages the friendship between the two. One day Bobby confides that his secret name—a name that only his father and a few people know because the knowledge represents power—is "In the Heavens."

Bruce and Bobby travel often together and Bobby is known as a great but proud warrior. One day the pair return to their village to discover that Bobby's father has died and Bruce is struck by the callous disregard for the death. Bruce wants to meet a great chief called Abaratatura but is told the chief wants to kill Bruce. He is told of a legend in which a cannibal with a magic flute will lead all the Motilones into a trap. Bruce's first appearance to the tribe with his flute prompts Abaratatura's certainty that Bruce is that cannibal. Bruce recalls his overwhelming desire to leave during his first stay with the Motilones and realizes that Abaratatura had planned his demise the following day. Bruce finally convinces some of the Motilones to take him along on a visit to Abaratatura's village. Along the way, Bruce begins to feel ill but can't figure out the cause until it's pointed out that his eyes are a strange color. Knowing he has hepatitis and that he needs immediate treatment, he almost turns back but knows he'll die before



he can emerge from the jungle. They reach Abaratatura's village and he plans to immediately kill Bruce, who he still calls a cannibal, but Arabadoyca, a friend from Bobby's village, points out that Bruce is about to die. The Motilones believe that if they kill something about to die of natural causes their arrows will never again find their mark and that they will starve. For this reason, Abaratatura hesitates and the sound of a helicopter prompts the Motilones to run into the jungle. Bruce pulls himself into the clearing and is picked up by Dr. Hans Baumgartner who had met Bruce with Dr. Christian on their trip up the Orinoco. Bruce is taken to a hospital in Tibu where he's told he was hours from death.

Bruce is treated by Alfredo Landinez and the two become friends. Dr. Landinez says Bruce can never return to the jungle but Bruce does so, trusting in God to heal him. Dr. Landinez, at the risk of losing his job, provides Bruce with an array of simple medicines to be used in his work. Bruce goes into the jungle in an area that will take him to Abaratatura. The chief believes that Bruce has been "preserved" by God and that leads to his acceptance. Bruce wants to use his medicines but knows the new ideas won't be readily accepted. The witchdoctor adamantly refuses to use antibiotics when there's an outbreak of pinkeye so Bruce deliberately contracts the disease, asks the witchdoctor to use the antibiotic along with her chants in treating Bruce and is healed. She then uses the treatment willingly. He uses the same technique, showing her with a microscope that there are organisms in the dirt where the people defecate and that disinfectant will kill them, prompting the use of disinfectant in daily life among the people. Similarly, he introduces the idea of growing crops and raising cattle but can't imagine how he's going to be able to teach about Christianity.

Over four years of living among the Motilones, Bruce sees God's movement in the acceptance of the medications but knows that he can't try to make the people accept North American culture. He also can't see a way to equate Christianity with the Motilone way of life and continues to pray that the path be opened to him. He eventually prays, "Take me out of the way and speak to them in their own language so that they see You for who You are. O Jesus, become a Motilone." One day, Bruce, Bobby and some other men are walking through the jungle when Bruce hears a wild screaming. The others are reluctant but he goes to see what's happening. A man's brother died away from home. Bobby explains that the Motilone believe that the man could never pass the horizon and that the man is shouting into a hole hoping that God will bring his brother's "language back to life." Bruce continues to ask questions and learns of another legend in which a man will come carrying God in a banana stalk. Bobby cuts down a banana stalk and Bruce notes that the limbs resemble a cross. When broken open, the leaves look like pages and Bruce uses the opportunity to show his Bible, saying that the marks have meaning. He prays that God will give him the right words and explains that God once became man. The men immediately want to know where God walked because that is important in Motilone culture. Bruce goes on with his explanation, including that Jesus had died and risen. Bruce says that there's no immediate response but sometime later Bobby asks more questions. This time Bruce uses the analogy of a hammock, saying that to be safe Bobby need only tie his hammock to Jesus. He soon makes a profession of faith and Bruce notes that Bobby never asks what Jesus looks like because to Bobby, Jesus is a Motilone.



One day the Motilone come to believe that the "tiger has spoken" and Bobby explains that it's a symbol that demons will come to the village and that at least one life will be lost. He asks Bruce what to do and Bruce falters. Later, Bobby climbs into his hammock and begins to sing a song of his own creation about the role of Jesus in his life. The scene goes down as the only time in anyone's memory that there wasn't a death. One night, Bobby is challenged to a song by an older chief named Adjibacbayra. The game is simple in that Bobby sings a line and the chief repeats it. The song Bobby sings tells of the Motilone way of life and how Jesus came into his own life. Bruce is initially upset, saying that it's not right that Bobby sing this heathen song about Jesus. He soon comes to realize that God is in control and that He is reaching the people in the only way they can be reached. After the song, the tribe as a whole comes to Jesus, accepting salvation.

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As Bruce begins trying to learn the language, he discovers that there's more involved than mimicking the sounds. He eventually learns that the lilt of the voice is vital and says he's handicapped in that he can't carry a tune without a flute. As the months drag on and Bruce has only a rudimentary knowledge of the language, he grows discouraged. Bruce notes that he spent months learning the language of the Yuko tribe and that he doesn't want to spend that much time with this new tribe. Frankly, he wants a shortcut. This seems a common thread among missionaries of unknown tribes. Bruce seems to have continued to think in terms of returning to America to report the wonderful results of his work. As the "work" grinds to a standstill, he admits that he's wanted the crown but hadn't been ready to bear the cross. As he considers the situation, he admits that he doesn't even want the crown now. Bruce says that he is depressed and prefers to spend his days laying in his hammock, sleeping as much as possible. He says the long days stretch ahead of him and he only wants to get through them. It's in the throes of this depression that he meets the young man who will become his "brother." When Bruce returns to the jungle after his hospital stay for hepatitis, he brings several items including a flea collar. It seems that he is again seeking ways to be happy doing the work he feels led to do and that God is providing the small comforts to aid in that effort.

One of the aspects of life among the Motilones that upsets Bruce is their obvious disregard for others. He cites the death of an elderly man who had taken him in as being a time of sadness for him while the others seem callous about the loss of this tribal elder, leaving his body in the hammock where he died for some time and then tying the body high in the trees for the vultures to devour. He says that a family who has leftover meat from a meal will throw it away while a neighboring family goes hungry. Later, as he introduces crops and cattle, he notes that no one will pitch in to care for the cows of a man who is too sick to care for his own. This all works on Bruce, tiring and discouraging him. While he dearly loves Bobby, he says that even Bobby has this disregard for others. When there is a sickness in two villages opposite directions from Bruce, he wants Bobby to go to one while he goes to the other but Bobby objects, saying he wants to go with Bruce and not caring that means that people in the other village will likely die. Bruce notes that Bobby does do as he's asked, but not because he

cares about those people. He only wants to do Bruce's bidding because Bruce is a friend.



# Chapters 19 through 24

## Chapters 19 through 24 Summary and Analysis

Bruce continues to work and to see the examples of healing among the Motilone people. He cites a man who had been bitten by a poisonous snake and recovered though there was no anti-venom available. When Bruce questions the treatment he's told they used antibiotics and prayer and seem surprised that he's surprised it worked.

Bruce notes that the antibiotic would have had not effect and that the people trust medicines only as a gift from God. A similar thing happens when a man falls and breaks his back. At a hospital, he's told he'll have to remain still for three months. Bobby and Bruce, knowing he won't be able to obey that demand, anoint the man with oil and pray. Only Bruce and the doctors are surprised when the man is fully recovered just days later. In 1967, Arabadoyca wants to lead a group to share the news of Jesus with the Yuko tribe though the two are traditionally enemies. Bruce doesn't try to dissuade them though he knows the language barrier will prevent success. When Arabadoyca's group returns, they report that no language barrier. Bruce says lying is almost unheard of among the Motilones and there is the fact of converts among the region Arabadoyca visited as proof of the success. In another instance, measles were running rampant and Bruce has no money for drugs but travels to town anyway. He receives two checks, totaling six hundred dollars, that pay for the medicines with a few dollars left over.

Bobby and Bruce remain close and Bruce is accepted as "brother" by Bobby's wife, Atacadara, and is "second father" to their daughter. When the little girl dies of a mysterious illness, it takes some time before Bobby emerges from his despair but he is soon carrying around a new daughter, born shortly after the death of the first.

Bobby eventually adopts an orphan boy named Odo who is on his way to becoming a delinquent, according to Bruce. The boy soon becomes a loved part of the family and in his imitation of Bobby becomes a caring person. Bruce spends much of his time tells Biblical stories or reading and explaining passages until the day Bobby asks if there's a way the people can read for themselves. With the help of a linguistics expert, they begin the task of creating a written language and translating the book of Mark. Then the older men of the village object to reading classes because it isn't right for the youngsters to know something unknown to the elders. The older people take classes and after a month the youngsters again join in the lessons. After awhile, most can recite their translation of Mark but there's no understanding so the teaching comes to include questions that prompt understanding. Bruce, while thrilled with the progress, is again becoming restless.

During a trip to town to buy supplies, he's questioned by reporters and his story shifts public sentiment to the side of the Motilones who, it's now believed, were only protecting their homes from the oil companies. Later, a group visits the tribe and learns that "Bruchko" is responsible for the school and medical center in a particular village. This



discredits Bruce's stories until the mystery is later cleared up by another visitor. Open hostilities develop between the Motilones and bandits, prison escapees who are happy to take medicines from the Indians but also want their land.

During a particular trip to Timu, Bruce meets a young man who wants to go into the jungle. His sister, Gloria, wants to come along. Bruce objects but finally agrees and Gloria is instantly taken by the people. She spears a fish which endears her to the tribe. At the end of her time, she asks what she can do. Bruce tells her to become a doctor and thinks little more of it for the next five years when he discovers that at his advice she dropped out of law school and entered medical school. When she finishes, she's to serve for one year in a rural area and Bruce asks that it be in Timu where Motilones go for advanced treatment. He's told a single woman can't be posted there and surprises everyone by announcing that he plans to marry her.

Bruce learns of an epidemic and goes to help, spending days on end treating those who are throwing up, dehydrating and seem near death. There's only one death in the initial phases though later the man who'd sung with Bobby, Adjibacbayra, falls ill. One day he tells Bruce that he's met Jesus, that Jesus knows his secret name though no one alive knows it, and that he's being called home.

There is heavy rains and Bruce is working on a paper about the Motilone language that he hopes to publish when he receives a packet of telegrams, each several days apart. They tell of an accident that claimed Gloria's life, then of her funeral and her burial. Bruce insists Bobby leave with him, despite the raging river and they are almost drowned in a whirlpool. Bruce travels alone to Bogota where he spends three days with Gloria's mother. He travels to America where he discusses a book deal and then returns to the jungle. The day after the encounter with Abril, several outlaws come to the health center for treatment and deliver a threatening letter from Abril. The Motilone leaders decide they'll fight and Bruce promises to stand behind their decision. When Bobby doesn't return from a trip, Bobby travels to find him and learns that Bobby has been murdered. The military and police refuse to help and Bruce finds Bobby's body the following day. Bruce himself is shot twice, but the wounds aren't fatal. The Motilones are trapped for a time with everyone traveling the river ambushed and trails booby-trapped. Bruce eventually makes it out to Bogota where an official points out that Bobby's death wasn't "in spite of Jesus," but because of Jesus and that without their faith in Jesus the Motilones would simply be pushed until they ceased to exist.

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Bruce says that he eventually learned that there is no way to help people better themselves unless they do so through Christ Jesus. He says that any development will be "twisted or corrupted" and that those responsible will become bitter with the failure. He says God is the source of change and "the God of everyday miracles."

Bruce says that he buys a transistor radio and sometimes listens. He learns of the first man walking on the moon. While a part of him wants to trade the wild boars and

panthers for street cars and civilization, he also feels that he has something no one else has in his current situation.

There are constant challenges in the translating efforts. In a parable, Jesus says a solid house is built on sand but Bobby points out that a Motilone home must be built on sand so that the supports can be driven deep into the ground. Later, Bobby realizes there is no word for "expectation" that is strong enough to describe that expressed by Paul in his "expectation" that he will not be put to shame but will be exalted in Christ, in life and in death. Bruce makes up a word, equating it with the satisfaction of a full stomach which is an ultimate sign of happiness in the culture, and Bobby eventually agrees. But when Bobby says that he has that level of expectation, Bruce is frightened for him.





# Characters

## Bruce Olson

Bruce is a serious man who believes in God and is willing to follow His direction, though he sometimes has to learn lessons along the way. Bruce grows up in a Lutheran home and is taught that God is strict and that worship time is a period of solemnity and quiet. When he visits an interdenominational church with a friend, his eyes are opened to a new way of worship. Though Bruce has already made a private profession of faith, he seeks the knowledge from this new church family. When a missionary speaks to the church, Bruce is appalled at the man's appearance but is soon taken by his message. When it becomes evident that God wants Bruce on the mission field, he objects mightily. When he is initially refused as a missionary by an official organization, Bruce is relieved. Then he realizes that God's lesson in that exercise is that the mission board may not be willing to accept him but that God wants him. It's a lesson Bruce has to learn again when he tries to leave a group of Yuko Indians and God sends him back.

Bruce's dedication to the Indians is surpassed only by his dedication to God. When he's finally given the perfect opportunity to witness, he prays that God will guide his words. He also quickly learns that God must speak to the Motilone people through their own culture. When a mass movement toward Jesus occurs, Bruce notes that he hadn't been the one to instigate it.

Bruce reflects often on his own position, his beliefs and his ideals, but always seems open to the direction God offers. His faith seems complete though he admits that the Motilone people have faith at a greater level than he. He comes to be known among the Motilone people as "Bruchko," the closest they can come to pronouncing his name.

## Bobarishora

Bobby's adult name in his place among the Motilone Indians. As a child he is known as Cobaydra and is given the name Bobarishora when he reaches the age of adulthood among his people. Bruce, present for the ceremony that bestows the new name, can't quite say the word and finally shortens it to Bobby. The nickname is adopted though Bruce later learns to correctly say the full name.

Bobby is the young man who first brings food to Bruce during his stay with the Motilone people. His smiling nature breaks through to Bruce during a time of depression and it's Bobby who teaches Bruce much of the language and culture of his people. As Bobby grows and the friendship between the two deepen, Bruce and Bobby become "pact brothers." Bobby is the first to accept salvation through Bruce's teachings and Bruce seems in awe of the young man's faith.

Bobby is a leader among his people but is known for his proud, warrior ways. As he learns more about Jesus, his pride lessens and that change is noted by his people.



When there's a threat against the village, it's Bobby's song of Jesus in his life that calms fears and becomes legend when there are no deaths. When Bobby is challenged to a singing competition, he sings of Jesus and prompts a turning to God among his entire village.

## **Humberto Abril**

The outlaw who threatens Bobby and members of his tribe. He demands land though the Motilone people have already given land that he in turn sold for a profit. It seems likely that it's Humberto who raises the anger of the outlaws to the boiling point and prompts the shooting death of Bobby.

## **Atacadara**

Bobby's wife. Bruce notes that the young woman faced her father's ire in order to become Bobby's wife because her father hadn't approved the marriage. While it's not common for the men to share with the women of the tribe, Bobby and Atacadara are different. They are friends and can often be heard quietly talking late into the night.

## **Gloria**

A young woman who begs Bruce to take her into the jungle with him. She is amazingly able to keep up with his pace and surprises everyone by piling into the water during a fishing trip and spearing a large fish. When it's time for her to leave, she asks Bruce what she can do to help and he says she can become a doctor and serve these people. When he meets her again five years later, he discovers that she dropped out of law school and is earning a medical degree. Gloria is to marry Bruce but is killed in a car wreck.

## **Odo**

A young orphan boy who encounters Bobby and Bruce during their trips. The boy is a problem and has developed an impossible attitude. It's Bobby who wants to take Odo along on a trip back to their own village and who takes the boy in as an adoptive son. Odo prays a beautiful prayer upon Bobby's death, asking God to take the seeds planted by Bobby and allow them to grow in the members of the tribe.

## **Dr. Alfredo Landinez**

The physician who treats Bruce for hepatitis at the hospital in Tibu. When Bruce leaves the hospital to return to the jungle, Dr. Landinez risks his job to provide basic medicines for Bruce's work. He and Bruce become good friends and he once offers Bruce advice regarding stories circulating about Bruce's motivations for remaining among the Indians.



## **Abaratatura**

The Motilone chief who believes that Bruce is the cannibal who will hypnotize the Motilone people with his magic flute and lead them into danger. He initially plans to kill Bruce but later welcomes him.

## **Arabadoyca**

The Motilone Indian who has a distinctive laugh that Bruce recognizes from his first days with the Motilone upon his return to the tribe. During Bruce's first days with the group, Arabadoyca often brings him food. He also was patient with Bruce as Bruce unsuccessfully tries to learn to make arrows.

## **Kent Lange**

The young man who is Bruce's best friend as a child. Kent also accepts Jesus and tells Bruce about his church. Kent's comments prompt Bruce's visit to the interdenominational church where Kent's father preaches and where Bruce comes to learn new things about God and new ways to worship. It's through Kent's church that Bruce becomes interested in missions.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Rio de Oro**

The small town where Bruce's plane lands and where he meets Bobby.

### **Minnesota**

Where Bobby lives with his parents as a child.

### **Orinoco**

The river where Bruce travels to stay with the Yuko Indians.

### **Caracas**

The town where Bruce stays for a period of time in South America as he heads up the Orinoco to stay with the Yuko Indians.

### **Machiques**

A town in the foothills of the Andes and the jumping off point where Bruce heads into the jungle to minister to the Motilones.

### **Tibu**

The town where Bobby is treated after falling to hepatitis.

### **The Festival of Arrows**

The event during which the entire Motilone tribe accepts Jesus.

### **Ministry of Health**

The organization that prepares students to study jungle medicine at Harvard and where Bruce is hired to teach English to students preparing for that course.

## **Yuko Indians**

A tribe in South American. Bruce finds a tribe of the Yuko Indians and ministers to them though it's some time before he identifies them as the Yuko tribe rather than their neighbors, the Motilones.

## **Motilone Indians**

A tribe in South America. Bruce learns a few facts about the group and finds himself pulled in his desire to minister to them. He spends years with them.

# Themes

## Faith

Bruce leaves the United States with little more than the faith that he will be able to do God's will. He arrives in South America and is let down by the missionary who'd promised to meet him. When Bruce is faced with continued warnings to remain away from the Motilone tribe, he simply can't because he has faith that God is leading him there and that He will pave the way. That same faith is seen again and again. At one point, Bruce has only enough money to make it halfway to his destination. He confidently boards the train without any idea how he'll eat or make the second half of his journey. When the train is searched, Bruce is asked for identification. Having just come from a long stay in the jungle, he can't produce it and is taken into custody, fed and transported to his destination.

As strong as Bruce's faith is, he admits that it's nothing compared to that of the newly converted Motilone people. When a man is bitten by a poisonous snake and there is no anti-venom available, the man is treated with antibiotics and prayer, and recovers. Bruce notes that the antibiotics have no role in the recovery, meaning the prayer worked. The same happens when a tribe member has a broken back. Days later he is fully recovered. When Bruce is amazed, Bobby doesn't understand the reaction, saying it's nothing more than God answering prayer.

## Cultural Contrasts

When the Motilone people are faced with the threat of a demon that will take lives from the village population, Bruce admits that he's out of his depth. Having never been faced with "demons" before and not really understanding the basis or level of threat, he's simply a bystander. He does admit to being caught up in the fear exhibited by members of the tribe. When Bobby asks what he should do, Bruce doesn't have any advice. Then Bobby begins to sing a song of his own composition that expresses his faith in Jesus. The song is done in the traditional chanting of the people and is a firm exhibit of their culture. What's interesting is Bruce's own reaction to Bobby's singing. Bruce says that it's not right for Jesus to be part of this song, calling it a "heathen" ritual. It seems to be all Bruce can do to ignore the situation. He puts his feelings in God's hands and later admits that it's acceptable for these people to worship God in anyway they see fit.

This scene and Bruce's reaction to it is a direct contrast to Bruce's own decision as a youngster to attend an interdenominational church while his parents continue to attend a Lutheran church. Bruce's father is unbendable in his objection, going so far as to ridicule Bruce. The difference - and another contrast - is that Bruce's father never opens his heart to God's direction and never accepts that Bruce's choice of worship is acceptable.



## The Desire to Share Christ

Upon his own decision to turn his life over to God, Bruce immediately wants to share the momentous event with others. He is disappointed to find other people unreceptive to his message. For example, his friends are uncomfortable when Bruce begins relating his salvation experience. Bruce's disappointment doesn't keep him from seeking opportunities to share Christ with others and he continues to do so, wherever he is and whatever his circumstances.

The belief in God is at the heart of almost everything Bruce does. Bruce finds the belief in God at an early age and does so despite the fact that his parents - especially his father - doesn't encourage him to seek a deeper belief. On his own, Bruce studies languages on his own. It's that same level of commitment Bruce shows in his own belief in God. While that's true, Bruce also believes that he must minister to the Indians of South America in their own way. He helps them learn to grow crops and use disinfectants and basic medicines. Over the course of his time with the Indians, Bruce prompts several conversions. Bobby, one of the first converted from Bruce's desire to share God, shares that desire. It's Bobby who prompts the entire village to turn their lives over to God, all because Bruce had the insatiable desire to share his own knowledge about God.

# Style

## Perspective

The book is written in first person from Bruce Olson's point of view. The perspective is limited entirely to those things Bruce sees and knows. Because the story is that of Bruce's time with the Indians and his life leading up to the commitment to minister to the Indians of South America, the limited, first-person perspective is likely the most effective method available.

For the most part, the information presented through Bruce's observations and point of view is sufficient to keep the reader fully informed. As is typical of all stories of this style, there are occasional details not included. For example, Bruce is in dire need of money, is in town and receives two checks, one for five hundred dollars and a second for a hundred. Bruce doesn't say who the benefactors are which could mean they are insignificant but leave the question in the mind of the reader. Another question is how Bruce gathered up the money for his initial plane ticket and the seventy dollars he has in his pocket when he initially leaves the United States. It seems possible that his parents paid his fare but he never says whether that's the case.

## Tone

The book as a whole is an easy-to-read description. Those descriptions may actually be disturbing to some readers. For example, there's a scene in which Bruce, very hungry and being held captive, is given a meal of large, live grubs. A young native shows him how to bite the heads off and eat the grubs. Hunger drives Bruce to mimic the boy's actions and he eats the grubs which he says taste like bacon. He then throws them up. In another scene, he pushes himself to reach Timu as quickly as possible and doesn't stop to eat along the way. Very hungry at the end of the third day of travel, he sleeps fitfully and dreams of a butterfly that is wriggling against his mouth. He wakes to discover that it's an eighteen-inch parasite from his own stomach, driven out by hunger. Bruce declares that he will never again go hungry so that at least the parasites are happy.

## Structure

The book is divided into twenty-four chapters of various lengths. The chapters are named and the names offer a foreshadowing of the events that will occur in that chapter. Chapter names are Home to the Jungle, Who Is My God?, Conflict, A Missionary?, First Meeting With Indians, Last-Minute Help, Almost Killed, Bribery, A Terrifying Proposition, In and Out of Civilization, An Impatient Wait, Discouragement, A Pact Brother, Mistaken for a Cannibal, Using the Witch Doctor, Jesus the Mutilone, The Night of the Tiger, Everyday Miracles, Like David and Jonathan, Gloria, Almost Wiped Out, The Whirlpool and Beyond the Horizon.





The book includes a foreword, prologue and epilogue. All three are written by other people who describe their knowledge of Bruce and his work.



## Quotes

"We must have made quite a sight; a short dark Indian embracing a tall blond American. But that made no difference to us." Chapter One, Page 18

"For weeks after the conference I quarreled with God. 'But why are You set on making me a missionary?' I asked. 'Why can't I be Your servant here in Minneapolis?'" Chapter Four, Page 39

"The Yukos didn't particularly want me to stay, but God did. And I would have to follow God." Chapter Nine, Page 77

"I had no money and a train ticket that went only half way to my destination. Now the military was feeding me and sending me to where I wanted to go. I had a Friend in high places." Chapter Eleven, Page 92

"I didn't want to spend three months completely without communication, as I had with the Yukos. I was always looking for shortcuts, but there were none." Chapter Thirteen, Page 107

"There's an old gospel song that says, 'If you can't bear the cross, then you can't wear the crown.' I realized I didn't want the cross. I wanted the crown, with all its jewels, without every carrying the cross. Looking again at the old woman, I wasn't even sure I wanted the crown." Chapter Thirteen, Page 108

"After Bobby and I became brothers, the dirt was still there, the fleas still bit, the bugs still carried disease and I still got diarrhea. But those things seemed less and less significant. I had been accepted. I had a family." Chapter Fifteen, Page 115

"God had spoken. He had spoken in the Motilone language and through the Motilone culture. He had not even had to use me." Chapter Eighteen, Page 146

"I have learned, with the Motilones, to expect God to provide what we need, regardless of the circumstances." Chapter Nineteen, Page 152

"How do you tell a primitive tribe about things like grace when they have no such word in their vocabulary?" Chapter Twenty, Page 160

"Half an hour later she came back, dripping wet, smiling, with a big fish dangling from her spear. The Motilones loved her for it. No other women had ever gone fishing, let alone speared a large fish." - Description of Gloria, Chapter Twenty-One, Page 167

"Make his death into a great tree growing in our soil, so that we can live as he did, to help each other and learn to love." - The prayer of Bobby's adopted son upon his death, Chapter Twenty-Four, Page 193

## Topics for Discussion

Describe Bruce's childhood. What is it about his personality that makes him open to the word of God even when he has no outside support?

List three instances in which Bruce simply trusts that a particular problem will be solved and it is.

Why is the language barrier so problematic during Bruce's early months with the Motilone tribes? Is it more or less difficult than with the Yuko? Why?

How does Bruce come to know Bobby? What aspects of their lives do they share? Why is this connection so vital to Bruce?

What is the significance of the name Bruchko? What confusion erupts from that name? How is it cleared up?

Who is Gloria? Dr. Christian? Kent Lange? Julio? Raphael?

Describe the amazement Bruce feels when the Motilone people are healed without proper medicines. Compare his attitude to that of the Motilone people.