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The Women in Moses Life

based on Exodus 2:1-22

by Ralph Milton

Moses was like any other baby. Or he would have been, if it hadn't been for the women in his life.

Moses was an Israelite. He was born a slave. The Pharaohs, the monarchs of Egypt used the Israelite slaves to provide cheap labour to build their cities, much as some industrial monarchs these days use cheap labour in Asia to build their empires.

Life was cheap in ancient Egypt. And the Pharaohs were getting nervous about all those Israelites. There were too many of them. At any moment, they might rise up and start a revolt. The way people did in Haiti. In the Philippines. In Poland. Put people down long enough, put them in a pressure cooker of oppression, and boom! Sooner or later they'll blow the lid off.

The Pharaoh was no fool. He decided to do a little enforced family planning. He told the midwives. "Kill all the boy babies."

If it hadn't been for Shiprah and Puah, the midwives who came to Jacobed in her labour, baby Moses would have been slaughtered. The midwives risked their own lives and told Pharaoh's agents a bare-faced lie.

But you can hide a baby only so long. Moses was a cholicky child and Pharaohs agents were everywhere.

In the face of all this, Jacobed, Moses' mother, was inventive. And Miriam, his sister, was brave. They made a coffin-like reed basket for the baby and put it in the river Nile. Miriam, waist deep in water, watched over her brother.

Moses owed his life to these three women – the midwife, Jacobed his mother, Miriam his sister. Then along came the fourth. Pharaoh's daughter. She spotted the basket and loved the baby instantly. "What a sweet baby," she said. "But he's a Hebrew and my father will want to have him killed." She decided to look after the baby as if it were her own child. It was a foolish, courageous thing to do.

Miriam saw the princess pick up little Moses. She swallowed hard. It took gumption for a teenage girl to risk her life for her brother. But she went right up to

Pharaoh's daughter. "Would you like me to find you a wet-nurse for the baby?" asked Miriam.

That's how Jacobed got to care for her own baby and get paid for it. And that's how Moses survived. At least till he was a young man.

Moses lived in the Pharaoh's palace, but he knew he was an Israelite. Day after day he watched his own people being beaten by the slave drivers. Day after day he saw them treated like animals. Day after day Moses watched his people being ground under the heel of the oppressive Pharaoh, building the cities of Egypt with their starving, wasted bodies.

"It's a tough world out there," Moses said to himself. "And it's none of my business. If I expect to get promoted in this organization, I keep my opinions to myself."

It's tempting to sell your soul for your own survival, for your own prosperity. Moses managed that. For awhile.

Then one day he blew. He saw one of the bosses forcing a starving Israelite to work harder and harder. Moses' built-in sense of justice just wouldn't be squelched any longer. Everything he'd said to himself about keeping his nose out of Pharaoh's business went out the window with one stroke of his staff on the skull of the slave driver.

A split second of bravery. A moment of nobility.

Then Moses turned coward again. He high-tailed it out of town, into the desert. He sat down by a well, wondering where he was, and arguing with himself about whether he had been a hero or a first-class nitwit. His whole future out the window. The cushy life of a Pharaoh's court gone. And just because for one idiotic moment he let his sense of justice get the better of him.

Justice! Did he get that from his mother? From Miriam? From Pharaoh's daughter?

As Moses sat there, mad at himself, along came a group of women with a herd of sheep to water them at the well. Moses didn't pay much attention. Then right behind the women, another flock of sheep led by a group of men. And the men pushed the women away from the well, swearing at them, calling them abusive names.

Again, the anger welled up in Moses. The same anger he felt when he saw the slave driver beating the Israelite. Again Moses tried to stay out of it. "This is none of my business," he said to himself. "I don't know those women and I don't know those men, and I'm in enough trouble already."

But it didn't work. Much as he wanted to, Moses couldn't sit there and watch people being abused. Moses waded right in, fists flying, and forced the men to allow the women to water their sheep.

"Stupid fool thing to do," Moses muttered to himself. "Those men will be back and with reinforcements. Why don't I learn to keep my nose clean. Stay out of other peoples business."

Moses sat beside the well, preaching himself little sermons on why he should stop being a hero, when one of the women came walking across the desert toward him.

"Sir," she said. "Thank you for helping us. Could you come to our place for dinner? My family and I would like to thank you."

There was a certain brightness in Zipporah's eyes when she looked at Moses. And that brightness was reflected in Moses' eyes. Later, when Zipporah's father suggested he join their household and marry Zipporah, Moses didn't feel inclined to argue.

Zipporah, it turned out, would get Moses into more hot water than all the slave drivers and sheep herders combined. Indirectly of course. Zipporah and her father Jethro who was a priest, knew things about God that Moses had never heard before.

Moses had lots of time to think about his conversations with Zipporah. He spent his days in the desert, herding sheep. Lots of time to think about the stories his mother had told him of Abraham and Sarah and Jacob and Rebecca. Lots of time to think about his own people still struggling under the heel of the Pharaoh.

Moses thought about the courageous women in his life. The fast-talking midwife. Jacobed, his inventive mother. Miriam, his brave sister. Pharaoh's compassionate daughter. Now Zipporah his new wife and mentor.

"Women!" sniffed Moses. He wasn't quite sure if he was rejoicing or complaining.

Because of those women, Moses was in the right place at the right time and in the right frame of mind to hear God's call.

A call to Moses through a burning bush.

**Ralph Milton has written a number of books,
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