

How Missionary Bruce Olson Still Sees the Gospel's Power Changing Lives Today

Bruce Olson's story of how, at age 19, he bought a one-way ticket to Colombia and ultimately became a missionary to an unreached people group, the Motilone, is legendary. Not only did it become a bestselling book, *Bruchko* (the way the Motilone pronounce "Bruce"), but a 2017 movie as well.

Olson himself, who turns 80 later this year, remains active in ministry with the Motilone and many other tribes in the jungles of Colombia. He has spoken before the United Nations, and his book, with its examples of mission work that embraces rather than destroys indigenous culture, is required reading in many missions organizations and Christian schools. His work, like many missionary endeavors, has received its share of criticism along the way—silenced only by the lifechanging impact of the gospel.

Olson tells the story of how he introduced written language to the Motilone and then began a simple school. Later, tribal leaders decided to send some of their young people to high school in Bucaramanga, Colombia, and Olson was able to get them registered.

"Can you imagine coming from the jungles?" Olson asks. "They had never seen cars before. They didn't know what glass was, which they call in their language, 'hard water.' So several students from the tribe went to school for the first time. They had to learn to count beyond three; they had to learn Spanish," he says.

"The first year in school, they were failing," he says. "The second year, they were improving. The third year, they were on the Dean's List of achievers. And the last year of high

school, [a student] was honored that he should read his term paper in English to the graduating class. He had to be bilingual or trilingual ... in high school, he had to prove that he had a certain command of English. His paper was phenomenal. He wrote:

Colombians call us "Motilones" for our short hair. We call ourselves "Bari." That means "the people." In the cities there are many trails, and on every trail, there's a chieftain shouting, "I have truth. Follow me." And the city's people live in confusion.

In the jungles, we walk on the trail that brings us to the horizon in the footsteps of our chieftain. In the city, if you don't have money, you're hungry. In the jungles, there is no money. We have the bountiful jungle products, roots and fruits. In the cities—confusion. In the jungles—peace.

Where is it most logical to live?

And so the director of the high school said, 'If you choose the jungles, what is the value of living in the jungles?' Olson recounts. "You have no monuments; you have no money. What is the value of life?"

"And [the student] looked into his eyes and said, 'The value of life is the character of each individual,'" Olson says. "He has now graduated in law and is litigating the protection of the Bari territories in in the Colombian legal system. The other students—several have graduated in medicine, others in agriculture, others in practical training. Over 400 tribal peoples have had specialized education outside of the jungle. And not one has abandoned the jungles for preference of city life because they meet Jesus in the jungles, in their own culture. And now we have the translation of the New Testament into their language."

To hear more from Bruce Olson about how the gospel has

transformed the Motilone people and many other tribes as well, listen to the entire *Strang Report* podcast [here](#). You can also help support Olson's continuing work in Colombia through Charisma's nonprofit partner, Christian Life Missions [here](#). Be sure to subscribe to the *Strang Report* podcast on Apple Podcasts or the platform of your choice for more inspiring stories like this one. {eo}