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What people are saying about ...

THE WURMBRANDS' STORY

When I broke my neck in 1967 and became confined to a wheelchair, little did I realize that I would soon be reading a just-released Christian book that would impact my views about suffering for Christ. The book was *Tortured for Christ*, and my college-bound friends insisted I read it. They said it would help me come to grips with my own struggles to trust God in the midst of deep suffering and loss.

Up until the diving accident that caused my paralysis, I assumed God wanted His children to live happy, healthy lives that were free from trouble. But in reading *Tortured for Christ*, I realized that God's purpose in redeeming us is not to make life a soft bed of roses but to make us more like Jesus. Loss, grief, pain, and suffering are His choicest tools in accomplishing that goal.

Now, having lived fifty years in a wheelchair as a quadriplegic—as many years as *Tortured for Christ* has been used of the Lord—I can truthfully say that deep affliction in a Christian's life is what provides the most powerful platform for the success of the gospel. That is why I thank God for this remarkable book and its timeless message.

Joni Eareckson Tada, founder, Joni and Friends

I praise the Lord for the constant mercy and grace demonstrated through the lives of Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand. Their message greatly challenged my own heart. In the early years of Operation Mobilization, we carried many of Richard's books and prayed they would be greatly used by God, especially Sabina's book, *The Pastor's Wife*, as we felt a need to have more books appealing to women. We also praise God for *Tortured for Christ*, of which we distributed thousands of copies around the world.

In all the ways God used him, Richard continued to walk humbly and meekly, always ready to learn new lessons at Jesus's feet. Richard's testimony cut to the heart of sleeping Christians unaware of the suffering of other Christians. To this day, his testimony and legacy through *The Voice of the Martyrs* are still opening the eyes of Christians to their persecuted family. I believe God gave Richard a vision for the far reaches of the world, and that vision has not changed in fifty years.

George Verwer, founder, Operation Mobilization

Our dear Brother Wurmbrand hit us right in the heart with his example. Because of him, YWAM started smuggling Bibles into countries behind the Iron Curtain. It has been a great thing to partner with VOM in the kingdom, and we want to keep this ministry close to our hearts because the unity we are seeing is a wonderful love thing God has put within His family. Our focus at YWAM is keeping the Word of the Lord clearly before us, and we have been inspired by leaders such as Richard and Sabina.

Loren Cunningham, founder, Youth With A Mission (YWAM)

As a twelve-year-old pastor's daughter, my heart moved with pity as I read *Tortured for Christ*. I remember wondering if I would have Wurmbbrand-type courage to endure hardship for the sake of the gospel. Although I do have my own captivity story, I have never shared in the sufferings of Christ as the Wurmbbrands did through imprisonment and torture, stripped of all earthly possessions. All these years later, I am reminded there is no pity in the heart of the Enemy of our souls. Now as then, he stalks around like a wild beast seeking someone to devour. But the Enemy has not gained a victory in these stories! These brave redeemed ones—detested on earth—now join in a wondrous chant on high: “Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” May we find courage within these pages to live heroically as Richard and Sabina did, until we join them in their magnificent song!

Gracia Burnham, New Tribes Mission,
author, *In the Presence of My Enemies*

Although Richard and Sabina Wurmbbrand were born more than a hundred years ago, their timeless story has a freshness and timeliness that comes through clearly in these pages. Yes, they were heroes for the gospel during the Cold War days, when the West was fighting Communist expansion. But they are heroes for our day too, demonstrating with their lives a love and commitment to Christ that would not be swayed or diminished by pressure, persecution, or pain. The first time Richard's and Sabina's stories are both contained within one cover, this book contains a wealth of insight into the lives of these

two heroes of the faith. Their story challenges all of us to “go and do likewise” as we boldly live out our own walk of faith with Jesus.

Todd Nettleton, host, VOM
Radio (VOMRadio.net)

In my close association with persecuted Christians—serving them and serving with them on the world’s most difficult and dangerous missions frontiers in more than fifty nations—I have witnessed the power of Richard and Sabina’s testimony. Few stories outside the canon of Scripture have inspired so many to serve so faithfully. And when we consider how the Wurmbrands’ story has challenged Western Christians to a deeper commitment to Christ, His church, and His Great Commission, it is easy for us to see that this is one of the most important Christian biographies in history. *Wurmbrand* is much more than a historical record detailing the lives of two Christians who experienced atrocities at the hands of Romanian communists. This story is a testimony of God’s faithfulness and the exemplary service of His saints in the face of imprisonment, torture, and death, and God has used it to transform millions of people worldwide. Every Christian should read this book.

Cole Richards, president,
The Voice of the Martyrs

WURMBRAND

WURMBRAND

TORTURED FOR CHRIST
THE COMPLETE STORY

the voice of the martyrs

WURMBRAND
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NOTE TO READERS

In our present era, readers and movie viewers are accustomed to tales based on a true story, which often makes them wonder how much has been exaggerated or fabricated. The account that follows is factually accurate and faithfully rendered according to actual documents, writings, and historical records.

So readers can trust the historicity of the book, and to be faithful to the legacy of the Wurmbrands, we have not created any dialogue in this book. When dialogue is in quotation marks, we have used Richard's and Sabina's own words, modernizing them where necessary.

PROLOGUE

February 29, 1948

Bucharest, Romania

A black van raced through the snowy streets of Bucharest. Its tires screeched to a halt, breaking the Sunday-morning silence. Richard Wurmbrand knew that government-ordered kidnappings were common in his Communist city. He'd been arrested before, and like so many others, he lived in constant fear it would happen again. But he didn't expect to be a victim that morning, especially not on his way to church.

As he mulled over the points of his sermon, his thoughts were interrupted when the van clipped the curb beside him. Two men wearing dark suits leaped from the vehicle. Their eyes, cold and intimidating, locked on to the thirty-nine-year-old pastor as he stumbled in shock.

Even at a towering six foot three, Richard was unable to resist his captors, his lanky frame ill suited to fending off an attack. They lunged at him. One man grabbed his arms while the other landed a gut-wrenching blow to his ribs. Any hope of screaming for help was lost as Richard crumbled to the ground, unable to catch his breath in the frozen air.

As the men wrestled him into the back seat of the hearse-shaped Ford, a profound thought entered Richard's mind. Two days earlier, while reading the book of Joshua, he had noticed an endless repetition of the message "Do not fear." Richard had been curious. Why was that command repeated so many times in Scripture? How many *more* times did it appear? He decided to count each instance and discovered that it occurs 366 times in the Bible.

For every possible day of the year, including an extra leap-year day, Richard realized the Christian didn't have to be afraid. God's promise even covered February 29, the day Richard was abducted.

The driver accelerated even before the door slammed shut, but Richard smiled. He and his wife, Sabina, had known this moment was coming. They knew the high cost of their Christian activities and had counted that cost for years. Even now, as Richard was being kidnapped, he had a reminder from God's Word not to fear.

A third man in the passenger seat aimed a pistol at Richard as the men flanking him chained his foot to his wrist.

Richard's smile widened, and his captors exchanged worried glances. Their prisoner was under arrest, yet he smiled. Had he already lost his mind? They needed information from him, and an insane man wouldn't be of much use.

"Why are you smiling?" one man asked.

"Because it's written 366 times," Richard said.

Now the men were sure he'd gone mad.

"Sir, what's written 366 times?"

"Just what I need."

The man sighed in exasperation. “What is it you need?”

“Man doesn’t live only on bread,” Richard replied. “He lives on the Word of God, and I have words from God that I don’t have to be afraid.”

Even though Richard was in the custody of the secret police, he knew he was in the hands of the almighty God, and this quieted his heart.

As the van disappeared down the quiet street, Richard closed his eyes. God had prepared him for what was to come, and he prayed he would be found faithful.

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By his second glass of plum brandy, Richard had lost the sharpness of his senses. The long day at his brokerage firm in Bucharest, Romania, had come to an end, and now he could turn his attention to something more pleasing: the cabaret dancer in the feathered red dress. She seemed to recognize Richard, winking at him from the stage all evening.

The dancer's set ended, and as she sauntered toward him, Richard smiled. His good looks and tall build drew the gaze of many women, and his eyes—blue as ice—complemented the suits he could finally afford.

Richard knew what this woman wanted. It's what all women wanted: escape. Richard wanted to escape too. The early 1930s had been good to him, and in 1934, at the age of twenty-five, Richard no longer had to worry about finances. Yet with each promotion came more opportunities to indulge his fleshly desires. He had rightfully earned his playboy reputation, but all the wealth and women he accumulated ultimately failed to numb the bitter memories of his childhood. Inebriation promised relief, and with each burning swig of his brandy, Richard's painful past grew blurry and strangely tolerable.

In search of a better life, his father, a dentist, had transplanted the family from Bucharest to Istanbul, Turkey, in the midst of the First World War. The move seemed profitable at first but soon fell to pieces. The life he envisioned for his children ended when, like so many others, he succumbed to the ravages of the global flu pandemic of 1918–19. Richard was only nine years old when his father drew his final breath.

Some memories were easier for Richard to erase than others. A year after losing her husband, Richard's grieving mother moved her four children back to Bucharest. World War I had deprived their family not only of food but of clothes as well. Richard's wardrobe consisted of little more than threadbare hand-me-downs that often left him susceptible to the cruel Romanian winters.

Once a man offered to buy Richard a new suit. He had walked with Richard to a men's clothing shop, and the tailor sorted through the available options, choosing a pricey outfit—the best he had in stock. But when he held up the clothes next to the young man, the tailor's brow had furrowed. Richard would never forget his words: "Much too good for a boy like this."

If the tailor could only see him now.

Now a successful stockbroker, Richard was consumed by worldly pleasures. When he wasn't at the office, he passed his time in noisy places with half-naked women, loud music, and flowing alcohol. Yet somehow these distractions never filled the hollowness within. When the cabaret closed its doors each night, Richard always found himself longing for something more, something substantial.

Tonight as he blinked at the bright lights on the cabaret stage, he thought back to his early struggles about God. The Wurmbrands were Jewish, but their faith rarely permeated their daily lives. His family avoided the synagogue and didn't observe the Sabbath. Richard's transition from childhood to adolescence even lacked the defining mark of Jewish manhood, a bar mitzvah. As a young teen, he struggled to reconcile religion with the suffering around him and, years later, found himself searching for answers at a synagogue service. There he saw a man praying for his sick daughter, pleading with God to heal her. The following day the daughter died.

"What kind of God could refuse such a desperate prayer?" Richard asked the rabbi, who had no answer. With so many people starving in this world, Richard couldn't believe in a silent God, much less worship or serve Him.

A gentle touch brought Richard back to the present moment. The dancer in the red dress brushed her hand across the folds of his suit lapel, obviously admiring its quality. Her eyes smoldered and her rosy lips parted in a seductive smile. Richard smiled back and downed one final swig of his drink. Tonight this woman offered all the midnight pleasure he desired.

Richard stood, took the dancer's arm, and guided her out of the cabaret into the crisp night air of Little Paris.

EPILOGUE

According to Jewish tradition, when the Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea, the angels sang with the Israelites who had been delivered. But God rebuked the angels, saying, “The Jews are men and can rejoice about their escape. But from you I expect more understanding. Aren’t the Egyptians also My creatures? Don’t I love them too?”¹

The darkness of fourteen years in prison brightened Richard’s eyes to a glowing truth: God loved Communists as much as He loved the Christians they tortured. No one is beyond the redeeming grasp of God. Actually, He has a long history of turning rebels into soul winners, misfits into missionaries, and criminals into the finest Christians in history.

Richard was once asked what he would say to the Communists. He looked into the camera and said, “I love you with all my heart, and all Christians love you. Jesus wishes you to be in heaven more than you want to go there. He wishes to forgive you more than you wish to be forgiven. He wishes to save you more than you wish to be saved.” Like Joseph, who told his brothers who sold him into slavery, “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Gen. 50:20), Richard also saw the hand of God working in the shadows to deliver His people.

The story of Richard and Sabina is a reminder that God can use anyone to bring hope and healing everywhere. Richard, the once-committed atheist, became a leading voice against an atheistic system that persecuted members of Christ's body. When asked how he learned to forgive his enemies, he said, "We cannot always *feel* compassion for men, but we must *show* compassion until we feel it." After his release from prison, he had a choice to make: "You can choose to forgive and love, or hate."

Richard came to discover the ultimate reason God allowed him to be tortured for fourteen years: *his torture rescued his torturers from an eternity of torture*. It was in prison where he found the hope of salvation for the Communists. It was there he developed a sense of responsibility toward them. It was in being tortured by them that he learned to love them.

Many of his guards and interrogators became followers of Jesus Christ, and some even became pastors. Ironically, God used Richard's interrogations to extract confessions from the interrogators. Even the iron-clad hearts of the Communists opened like flowers when touched by the holy hands pierced with the iron nails of the cross.

While Richard emphasized forgiveness and loving our enemies, Sabina emphasized the fellowship of believers, particularly with our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ. She too had an eternal perspective on suffering: "Suffering inflicted on us by the will of God does not contradict love. It is one of its methods."



Until Jesus's return, persecution will exist. In every generation, terrorism and the persecution of our brothers and sisters in Christ have occurred. Christians continue to suffer at the hands of Communist and other dictators, as well as Islamic and Hindu extremists throughout the world. Today Christians sit alone in prisons, hungry and hurting. Yet they endure torture, beatings, and humiliation because they love God more than they fear death.

Richard said, "After more than twenty years in the underground church—first under the Nazis and afterward under the Communists—I have learned not to fear man. I don't fear that [anyone] will kill my body."

In the Muslim world, many new converts to Christ are forced to flee from their families, who disown them for turning their backs on Islam. Others die in North Korean labor camps, accused of nothing more than worshipping God. The vast majority will never have books written about them. They are nameless and faceless, known only by the God who helps them forgive their captors.

While they need our help, love, encouragement, and prayers, we need their testimonies of courage, love, and hope in the face of beatings, imprisonment, and death (see Heb. 12:1–2). We need them to challenge us to a deeper commitment to Christ and the Great Commission that He has called us to fulfill—no matter the cost (see Matt. 28:18–20).

Richard Wurmbrand wrote, "Jesus has said, 'Go and teach all the nations!' He has never said, 'Go and teach all the nations until

the Iron or Bamboo Curtain and there stop!' The first Christians risked their lives preaching the gospel where it was forbidden. We have to follow their example."

The example of our persecuted brothers and sisters inspires us to do likewise. Their faith in Christ and their obedience to His Great Commission have cost them everything. What will it cost you?

ABOUT THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS

The Voice of the Martyrs (VOM) is a nonprofit, interdenominational Christian missions organization dedicated to serving our persecuted family worldwide through practical and spiritual assistance and leading other members of the body of Christ into fellowship with them. VOM was founded in 1967 by Pastor Richard Wurmbrand, who was imprisoned fourteen years in Communist Romania for his faith in Christ. His wife, Sabina, was imprisoned for three years. In 1965 Richard and his family were ransomed out of Romania and established a global network of missions dedicated to assisting persecuted Christians.

Be inspired by the courageous faith of our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ and learn ways to serve them by subscribing to VOM's free monthly magazine. Visit us at persecution.com or call 1-800-747-0085.

Explore VOM's five main purposes and statement of faith at persecution.com/about.

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