

~~“Children have the right to be happy. So God sent me to help them.”~~

In Tegucigalpa, the capital city of Honduras, in 1966, a short, plump, middle-aged Catholic nun was hot on the heels of the richest man in the country. Sister María Rosa Leggol, a hospital nurse with a fifth-grade education, had no money, no social standing, no clout. What she did have was the audacity to ask big favors of powerful men and the unwavering conviction that her dream—to rescue, house, and educate street children—was sanctioned by God.

She also had the gall to think she could stop the man’s airplane from taking off.

Sister María Rosa needed this man, a board member of her new child rescue project Sociedad Amigos de los Niños (SAN), to sign the mortgage for one of ten brand-new buildings she had commissioned from a local builder to house at-risk children.

“I ordered those ten homes, but I didn’t know I had to pay for them,” Sister María Rosa laughed when she told this story decades later. “I thought if I came to a big building company and said that I needed homes for poor children, they would just give it to me!”

She needed all of SAN’s board members—wealthy businesspeople, media owners, and lawyers, the “movers and shakers” of Tegucigalpa—to pledge to contribute, but these friends in high places were unlikely to be found in their offices when she wanted something from them. This last man whose signature Sister María Rosa needed had slipped her grasp for weeks. Arriving by taxi that day at his home, she was told he was at the airport, about to jet off on a lengthy business trip.

“I could never find that guy, because businessmen spend more time on the plane than at home!” Sister María Rosa exclaimed, exasperated. “But this was the last day before the signatures were due, so I ran back to the taxi and asked the driver to drive me fast to the airport!”

When her taxi arrived at Toncontin Airport, Sister María Rosa hurried to the Departures desk. The agent informed her that all the passengers—including her board member—were already seated on the flight, the plane’s door was closed, and the pilot was ready for takeoff. She told the nun to turn around and go home.

Instead, Sister María Rosa took off running through the airport. Before any security guards could stop her, she plunged out a door onto the tarmac. There was a single DC-3 in motion, starting to taxi toward the airport’s lone asphalt runway. Out of breath, Sister María Rosa galloped toward the front of the jet, jumping and waving wildly at the pilot’s window, yelling, “Stop the plane!”

Incredibly, the plane slowed to a halt. As Sister María Rosa caught her breath, a flight attendant opened the door to the plane and lowered a stairway. Sister María Rosa hurried up into the plane, brandishing her mortgage papers and shouting the businessman’s name. The astonished man came forward and signed them. Later he said, “Who can say no to Sister María Rosa?”

“He didn’t even ask me what he was signing, so I gave him the papers for *two* homes,” Sister María Rosa chuckled. “Then I said thank you to the pilot and goodbye to everyone else. When I turned around to go down the stairs, there were policemen yelling at me, ‘You are not supposed to be there!’ So I thought quickly, then I turned around and blessed the plane with my arms in a big sign of the cross and told the people, ‘Here is the blessing I came to give you for your journey!’ After that I ran past the policemen to the taxi and we got out of there!”

As providence would have it, the pilot stopped the plane because he actually recognized Sister María Rosa down on the tarmac. Weeks earlier, his wife had delivered a baby at Tegucigalpa's La Policlínica hospital, and Sister María Rosa had been her nurse.

"Can you see how God plans everything?" Sister María Rosa concluded. "Why did that pilot know me and stop the plane? Why did the man come forth and sign the papers for my homes? So that on the day they were due, all my mortgage and grant papers were signed and at the American Embassy! This was all in God's plan.

"Money to start my project with? What is money to me?" she continued—a prophetic statement for her organization's frequent financial struggles. "If I start with money, then where is God?"