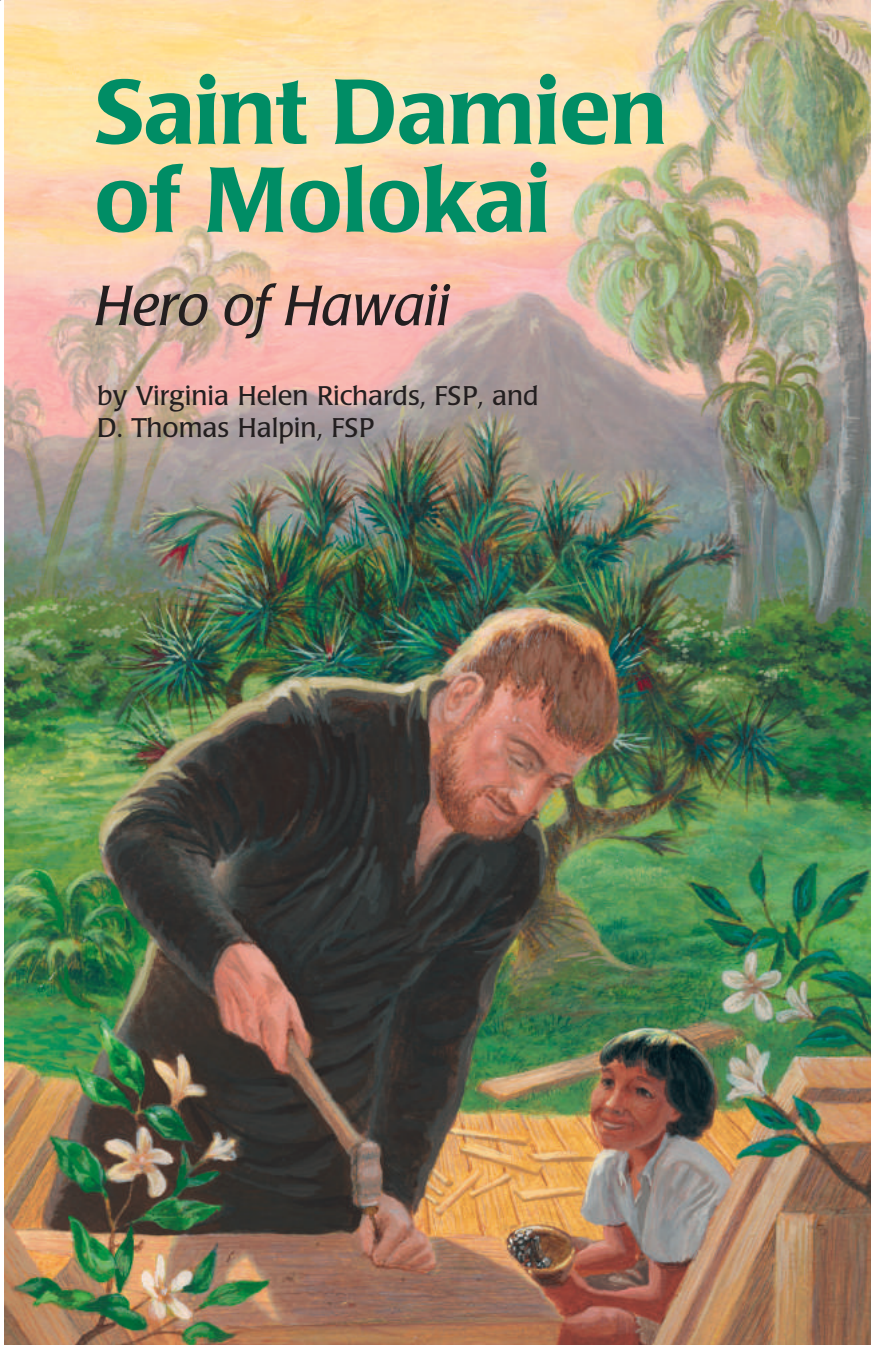


# Saint Damien of Molokai

## *Hero of Hawaii*

by Virginia Helen Richards, FSP, and  
D. Thomas Halpin, FSP



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Illustrated by Anne Bergstrom

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## A CLOSE CALL

The old bell clanged loudly, cutting through the quiet afternoon air. In Tremelo, Belgium, school was over. The students scattered quickly, heading for home. The De Veuster brothers and sisters and a group of their friends pushed and shoved, chatting as they walked along.

"Hey! Let's play crack the whip!" one of the girls called out.

"I'm not sure that's such a good idea. Sometimes people drive their carts down this road," cautioned ten-year-old Auguste. The younger children hesitated a moment.

"Oh, we'll be careful! Come on, it will be fun!" said Joseph. He was just three years younger than his brother Auguste. Joseph grabbed Auguste's hand and started running. The others quickly followed suit, joining hands along the empty country road. The object of the game was simply to run as fast as you could and not lose your grip. It was a challenge to stay balanced and to keep up with the faster runners in the group.



“Hang on tight! I see a curve ahead!” Joseph shouted. They tightened their grip on each other and swung around the arc. This was the fun part!

But suddenly they heard the sound of hoofbeats ahead—four huge horses and a noisy wooden cart were about to round the bend from the opposite direction. The driver panicked when he saw the children in the street and pulled back with all his might on the reins to halt his team. Screaming filled the air as the children ran to get out of the way of the horses. Then there was silence . . .

The cart rumbled to a stop several yards down the road. The driver, with his heart thundering in his ears, leaped off his seat and ran back to the bend in the road, searching frantically for the children. One by one, they were climbing out of a shallow ditch on the roadside, where they had jumped to avoid his cart. *Thank goodness!* thought the driver, wiping the sweat from his forehead. *No one is hurt.*

“What were you children doing? Don’t ever take a risk like that again!” the driver scolded.

But Auguste wasn’t listening. “Where is Joseph?” he asked as he stood on the road again.

The driver's heart jumped to his throat. Had someone been injured after all?

"That sure was close!" a familiar voice called out from the opposite side of the road. The driver squinted and realized that a little boy—perhaps seven or eight years old—was speaking. It was Joseph.

"Are you all right?" the driver asked, running to him.

Joseph De Veuster stood up and brushed the dirt off his pants. "Oh, I'm fine," he said. "I was just thanking my guardian angel for watching out for us." Then, turning to Auguste, he added, "I told you we'd be careful!"



The De Veuster family lived in the northern region of Belgium known as Flanders. The people of Flanders, often referred to as Flemings, spoke Dutch and farmed the flat land of their region. Joseph's father, Francis De Veuster, grew and sold grain. It was a good living, and the large family was well provided for.

After the children finally returned home that evening, the family crowded together in their large farmhouse kitchen for the

evening meal. Catherine De Veuster turned from her place at the fireplace where she had been stirring the thick Flemish soup for supper. She gazed for a moment on the healthy young faces of her children: Auguste, Leonce, Gerard, Eugenie, Pauline, Marie, Constance ... and Joseph. He was her second youngest child and had been born January 3, 1840. What a knack he had for getting into mischief! She had already heard about his latest escapade.

But then Catherine smiled, almost in spite of herself. *God has certainly blessed our family, she thought. We have to work very hard sometimes, but we're happy!*

"Tonight I get to sit by Mama!" Marie announced, breaking into her mother's reverie.

"You *always* get to sit by her! It's not fair!" the others complained.

"Not *all* the time," she said, tossing her head back in defense.

Suddenly the tall figure of a man appeared in the doorway.

"Are those my children I hear arguing?" Papa De Veuster feigned astonishment. Silence filled the dining room.

Joseph shook his head solemnly and answered mischievously, "Not *us*, Papa."

“Joseph!” His father’s gaze fell on him in concern. “What happened to your head? Where did that lump come from? It looks like a mountain!” He reached his hand out to Joseph. “Let me take a look at you.”

Sheepishly, Joseph came forward, his large, dark eyes fixed on his father. Sure enough, there it was, a big lump on his forehead that even his curly hair couldn’t hide.

“You weren’t trying to scare Farmer Jan’s horses again, were you, Joseph?”

“No, Papa, of course not. I remember what you said last time. We were only playing a game!” Joseph replied.

Mama’s voice trembled a little as she explained, “It was a bit of a miracle. We must thank the good God that none of the children were seriously hurt today, Papa.” Then she recounted the misadventure.

Papa sighed and surveyed his children. “I trust that in the future you’ll keep your games *off the road*?” Eight heads nodded energetically. “All right then, I won’t say another word about it. But the next time I hear you’ve been playing crack the whip, it had better be in an open field where it’s safe!”