

In 1962, Alcoa manufactures the first pull-tab aluminum can—it's a transformative new industry but the process demands intensive mining and massive electricity for smelting the ore. For that purpose, Suralco (Alcoa's subsidiary in Suriname, South America) builds a hydro-electric dam across the Suriname River flooding 900 square-miles of jungle.

Behind the Afobaka Dam, the river water forms a vast spreading lake. Many native villages are submerging; thousands of people and animals are in peril. Although the government oversees the woeful relocation of 6,000 Saramaccas (descendants of African slaves) out of their homes in the now-flooded area, there is no consideration for the trapped animals that will surely die. But one man, Commissioner Jan Michels, writes to the International Society for the Protection of Animals (ISPA) in Boston, Massachusetts for help. "Time is short," he pleads, "and the water rises."

Over the next year-and-a-half, as he works with his team of 40 Saramaccas in what comes to be called Operation Gwamba ("gwamba" means "animal" in Saramaccan), the water rises faster and faster. It is a race against time with rusting equipment, disease, and lack of funds. Against all odds, Walsh and his men go on to rescue and relocate nearly 10,000 animals.