

A joy and a blessing

I was born on the 20th of February 1957 in Koronadal, South Cotabato, which is a town in the southern part of the Philippines. I lived and worked in the capital city Manila for about nine years before coming to England in October 1989. I came to know the Lord Jesus in April 1983 and have always considered myself as an 'EE Baby' because I was led to the Lord by through an EE gospel presentation.

I was brought up in a religious family and went to a private school run by nuns, but despite the spiritual influences of my family, the church and my school, I never knew God personally. I knew there was a God but he seemed very distant not able to hear our repeated and memorised prayers.

Although part of a big family I grew up feeling nobody really cared for me. I developed an inferiority complex because people always compared me with my sisters. They would say I didn't look like one of the family or I would be mistaken as one of the servants. I became very shy and did not have any self confidence even at school. My mother died suddenly when I was only nine and that affected me very badly. I remember crying in bed every night for a very long time. My misery and sadness became worse when my father married a widow with two children who treated us unfairly. When I went to university it was a relief to get away from home. I joined every organisation, fraternity and sorority group, and hung around with friends but I still felt so lonely inside.

Eventually I ended up getting married at a very young age, hoping that someone might truly care and love me and give me the happiness that I longed for. But I was wrong because we were not prepared for a family. Life was difficult because we were still at college without jobs and depended on our families for support. After three years, my husband was tragically murdered and I was left with a three year old daughter and a newborn son!

Fortunately I had finished my studies just before my husband died and my father helped me get a job in a big government office. I heard of a Bible study going on in another department at lunch break once a week. I enjoyed the studies and was happy with the group where I met Ampy, the lady who organised it.

One lunch break, Ampy shared the good news with me and for the first time in my life I understood the gospel message. I had heard it many times before but the simple way she explained it with simple illustrations made it so clear to me. What touched me most was the realisation that Jesus had died on the cross for ME – for MY sins!, so that I could receive forgiveness and the precious gift of eternal life!!! I was very happy that day and put my trust in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour. My heart was filled with so much love, joy and peace that I never had before. God was no longer distant but someone who is with me all the time. My hopelessness was gone and I was filled with assurance that whatever happens to me, I will be with the One who has loved me more than anybody else in this world.

With excitement I asked Ampy how I could share this good news with my family and friends and she told me about EE. At that time she was training some of the employees who attended the Bible Study. Unfortunately the course was nearly finished so I borrowed some of her training materials because I really wanted to learn how to share the gospel. She invited me to her church for Sunday and even arranged to pick me up. I was amazed at how she cared for me even though I had not known her very long.

That night, I spent hours reading my Bible. I looked up all the references about widows and orphans, read them and even wrote them down. It was so exciting because it was full of promises for me and my children. It was like digging out treasure after treasure and I thought what more could I ask. It was so good to know that God was there for me and would provide whatever was missing in my life. It was a wonderful night of knowing God.

I started learning the EE presentation on my own and also started praying for my family, especially my father and others who were living with us at that time. When I went to church with Ampy for the first time, I was so impressed because the people were so warm and friendly and the service so lively. She told me about the Sunday School so I started taking my children with me every Sunday. Each week I would share with my father or my brother and sisters the good things I learned from church or the Bible study. They started to notice the change in me as I became more happy in my life.

Later on, my younger sister Rowena told me how she had committed her life to the Lord sometime previously when some Christian students shared the gospel with her at university. So she started coming to church with me and my children. One day my youngest sister Merle told me she how she had always wanted to come with us! I sat with her on my bed and started sharing the gospel by using the EE memory cards. She listened with excitement to all that I had to share and then she prayed to receive eternal life. It was a wonderful night because I could feel the presence of the Holy Spirit with us all throughout the night. Then she started coming to church with us and she loved it.

I encouraged my sister Rowena to join the EE training. I wanted to do it but could not make the 16 week commitment because of my children. My sister did the course and has been used by the Lord in so many ways since then. I kept praying that the Lord would also give me the opportunity to be trained.

In January 1985, they announced another programme to start at the end of the month. I really wanted to do it, but could not manage it with the children to look after-so I prayed about it. The week before the course started we received a message from my eldest sister telling us to meet Phoebe. Phoebe told me that she had been my sister's servant for some years and that she had been sent to help me look after my children and the house. What an answer to prayer!! Now I could go do the EE training!

Phoebe used to go to church as a young girl and when I asked her the two EE questions, she answered them correctly! It was exciting to know that she was a Christian and she too started attending church with us. As there were so many of us coming to church Ampy suggested that we hold a home Bible study to help everyone grow and so that the rest of the family

could hear the gospel. One night after Bible study an invitation was made and my father, brother and cousin came to know the Lord!

The EE programme started at the end of January 1985 and I was so blessed each week watching my trainer share the gospel and witnessing our contacts pray to receive Jesus as Lord and Saviour. A few weeks later, a Leaders' Training Course was also held at the church and we took the trainees out for their on-the-job training. It was a real joy for me seeing more people led to Christ. While on the training I started praying for my office colleagues and sharing with them as the Spirit led me. It was exciting to see them come to know the Lord and helping them with some discipleship Bible study. I shared with my two children (then aged 5 and 8) and it was a wonderful experience to see them receive eternal life. I also shared with a student who stayed with us at that time and with my cousin who was with us for a few days before she flew to England to get married. I experienced all these people being led to Christ in addition to those we were seeing on our training visits during the course.

That course was one of the most exciting times in my Christian life. I had thought that because of my shyness I would be unable to undertake this ministry, but praise God, He gave me the strength to do it and to overcome my weaknesses. He has blessed me with a special gift of sharing His love with others.

About two years later, the church sent me to be a Sunday missionary to one of our church plants. I started working with a full-time team and each Sunday we would go out with the aim of contacting every house on every street in the area. We shared the gospel with those who welcomed us and followed-up those who made professions of faith. Bible studies were done by the full time workers during the week. It has been a joy to hear that the church planting that we did has now grown to an independent church and those workers have moved on and planted another church. I praise the Lord for the EE ministry and for the perseverance of the believers in my church back in the Philippines. That church has become a centre for EE work, not only training leaders from the Philippines but other Asian countries and some from the Middle East. The programme has been continuously implemented at the church, resulting in rapid growth. The mother church, which started in 1975, now has over twenty daughter churches which are mostly run by young pastors that have come from the congregation. Each year, hundreds of people come to know the Lord and many become missionaries and are sent to other parts of the country and abroad. The church - Kamuning Bible Christian Fellowship (KBCF) - has a vision to be a leading church in missions in the 21st century.

As a widow with two children, I never thought I would marry again. It was a struggle bringing up the children, trying to be father and mother to them, and working hard to meet their needs. One day, my son told me how he wished he had a father, and so we started to pray every night for a father for them - a husband for me. In 1988, I started to receive letters from England! It was a big surprise and I later discovered that my cousin, who came to England to get married, had published my name in a Friendship Club in London. I was not too happy with the idea because if I did marry again I wanted to marry a Christian and thought it would be impossible to meet one in this way. I ignored the first few letters and gave them to some ladies in the office.

One day I received a letter from Robert saying he was a Christian and actively involved with music at his church. I was intrigued by what he said and wrote him a long letter about myself and the children. I also asked him the two EE questions and couldn't wait to get his response. When his reply came, he had answered the questions correctly and I prayed, *'Lord, is this the answer to our prayers?'* We started writing regularly for about a year and in February 1989 Robert came to visit us and made a formal proposal. We got engaged and he returned in June for our wedding. Three months later our papers were finally approved and we came to England to join him.

One Sunday morning in 1993, we went to Coton Green Church. The people were friendly, the worship lively and most of all, the Word was preached in a way where I felt fed and blessed. It reminded me of my church back in the Philippines. After a year, we became members and were soon involved in leading worship and Sunday School teaching. But something was missing in this church, there was no evangelism ministry! I started praying because I wanted to be involved again. I talked to one of the leaders about EE and told him what a great benefit it had been to KBCF and the growth of the church as a whole.

Then in 1996, unbeknown to me, Richard, one of the church leaders attended an EE Leaders' Training Course. When he returned he trained two people and I was so surprised when one Sunday morning those two people were awarded their certificates and badges! I knew it was an answer to my prayers. After the service, I went straight to Richard and told him that I would love to be involved in the future. Once again my excitement and love for evangelism was burning in my heart.

In autumn of 1997, Richard asked me to be a trainer for the next programme. I felt inadequate for such a big responsibility because I had not done it for many years, but I knew it was from the Lord. As I started revising from my EE books I became excited as the Lord reminded me of all the experiences I had had in the Philippines and He gave me the strength that I needed. We had six successful trainees on that course. On our first visit I shared the gospel with a couple and their two sons. At the end of it, the whole family gave their hearts to the Lord! This couple subsequently attended our Alpha course. Another lady we visited has also started attending the Alpha course bringing her daughter and other lady friends! We are seeing the results of EE now and it is wonderful to see God move when we obey Him.

My husband enrolled on the next course and was one of my trainees. We have now completed several programmes and there are more than twenty in the church who are trained. The couple who were my first trainees are now in Canada as missionaries.

The EE training is not easy but is always a tremendous blessing to everyone involved, including prayer partners and the contacts. I too am richly blessed as I witness the power of God working in people's lives and have the joy of leading some of them to Christ.

I will never forget Ampy sharing the gospel with me because she cared enough to spend time with me. I want to do the same, not just because Jesus has commanded us to do it, but

because I want others to experience the fullness of life in Christ and to have the joy of the assurance of eternal life. By God's grace, I will carry on spreading the good news and hope to pass on to others the love and zeal for evangelism that is truly in my heart.

Elvira L. Calvert

Elvie is married to Robert and they live with four of their children in Tamworth, Staffordshire. They are members of Coton Green Church where Elvie now teaches the EE programme.