

FISHERMAN SERIES NO: 7

Published by

THE 'FISHERMAN OF CHRIST' FELLOWSHIP LTD.,

132 MARGARET DRIVE

SINGAPORE 149301.

Fifth Printing August of 2006.

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FOREWORD

Many people's lives are recorded in the Bible. Some of them were heroes and spiritual giants of their days they conquered cities and defeated enemies. But others were mere ordinary people.

God has caused all these lives to be recorded in His Word not only that they may be remembered but also that God's mighty deeds may be remembered through them. These people are not there to be praised and glorified, but that through them God's name may be greatly praised; they are not to show off their own talents and successes, but to show forth God's Grace and Mercy. Therefore, they are not to be the objects of our praises and glories, but witnesses and instruments through which we may see God's glory.

The Psalmist has very aptly praised the Lord for His grace and mercy in Psalm 113: 5-7:

*"Who is like the LORD our God,
the One who sits enthroned on high,
who stoops down to look
on the heavens and the earth?
He raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;"*

Mrs. Dixie Chua is a deaconess of our church the 'Fisherman of Christ' Fellowship. Her husband Dr Chua Eu Jin is an elder. For many years, the couple has served the Lord with one heart to meet the needs of many people. I thank the Lord for them, and it is a privilege to serve the Lord with them for all these years.

Sister Dixie has many gifts. She is gifted in music, literature and preaching God's Word. She has given her time and talent to serve in the literature ministry over the years. The Lord has not only used her in writing but also in editing our English magazine 'Fishers'.

She has written her testimony in the midst of a busy schedule. We are pleased to publish it. May the name of the Lord be glorified through her testimony! We trust that this book will be used by the Lord to strengthen the faith of many people.

We commit this book to the Lord that He may use it for His own glory, and for the blessing of His people.

HUANG EE YUEN
August 1987

PREFACE

Writing articles for our church magazine "FISHERS" has been a great joy to me in the past ten years or so but writing a book has never occurred to me even in my wildest dreams. After all, who would read a book written by such an ordinary person as I?

The idea of writing a life-long testimony for the Lord was conceived during a trip my family and I took last year to Fraser's Hill, Malaysia. From June to October 1986 I was busy writing my Ph.D. thesis on breast cancer research and typing it out using an Apple Computer. By early November, to my great relief, I was able to submit it to the National University of Singapore just before the five-year time limit expired. The children had just finished their final examinations, so we decided to take a break to refresh ourselves.

All I wanted to do was to have a good rest before starting another project, but during that trip, the grandeur of the mountains and valleys unfolding God's greatness inspired me to write this book of my life experiences to testify to His goodness and mercy. After we returned from the mountains, I shared this idea with Mr. Huang Ee Yuen, and he told me that he was about to ask me to compile all the articles which I had written for "FISHERS" into a book so that our readers may get a fuller picture of my testimony. Both of us feel that it is indeed the Lord's leading for me to glorify Him in this book.

Many people have asked me these questions:

How did you come to know the Lord?

How did you and your husband meet?

Why were you so sure that he is the one for you?

Who is the person that influenced you most in your life?

How do you find time to serve God as a working mother?

This book contains the answers to these questions and I pray that it will help readers to come to know the Lord's will and guidance better through my personal experience of His dealing and training in my life.

But why did I choose the title 'FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW'? Some of my close friends suggested 'FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND' because snow sounds a bit foreign to Singaporean ears. My answer is that I love the purity of snow, and I did walk more on the snow than on the sand of this Island. If you had walked five months a year for five years on the snow as I did in Winnipeg you too will grow to like it and enjoy its beauty!

For me all the past experiences were like footprints in the snow which disappeared soon after they were made. But I dig them out and present them to you for a very special purpose - to make known the love and mercy of God shown to a person as insignificant as I. The human life is not WORTH anything until it is united with the life of Christ through accepting Him as one's own personal Saviour. I might be UNWORTHY of His love but I am no longer WORTHLESS in front of God.

In fact, each Christian can write volumes on his experiences with the Lord because he can see God's miracles each minute of his life if he walks closely with his Creator. It is my prayer that you too will have a story to tell about your experience with God.

I echo with David who said in Psalm 23:6

“Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”

My thanks go to the two elders of the “Fisherman of Christ” Fellowship, Mr. Tan Keng Seng and Mr. Huang Ee Yuen for their suggestions.

I would also like to thank Ee Yuen for writing the Foreword for this book, Dr. Huang Keng Chiew and Mrs. Chong Hyu Har for proof reading the manuscripts.

I would like to thank all those whose lives have been showers of blessings to me.

Last but not least I am grateful to my husband Eugene, daughter Linette and son Linus for giving me so much joy in my role as wife and mother in our family.

Dixie Chua

February 1987 Singapore

* All Bible verses in this book were quoted from the New International Version (NIV) unless stated otherwise.

EARLY RECOLLECTIONS

When I was four years old, due to the Japanese occupation in Hong Kong, we moved to Kunming, China, to stay. My two sisters, Yvette and Elaine, attended the primary school in the village and I was left at home to play by myself because my brother Daniel was too young to join me.

I was very much absorbed in my world of make-believe even before I heard the story of 'Alice in Wonderland'. Sometimes I was a butterfly or a bee; sometimes I was a princess or a poor beggar girl. I remember one day, seeing the clouds moving very low, I stretched out my hands to touch them, only to find them beyond my grasp. Disappointed, I lay down on the grass dreaming that someday I would grow very tall so that I could reach the sky! However, my height at its maximum still stands one inch short of five feet.

One bright sunny morning, Mother looked out of the kitchen window and saw me singing and dancing among the wild flowers in the garden, where I spent most of my time. She said to herself, "What a musical and imaginative child Dixie is. When she grows up I must let her learn how to play the piano."

Years later, Mother liked to recount my childhood days to me whenever we had the opportunity to sit in the garden in the moonlight after dinner (before TV reached Hong Kong). Through her eyes, I saw myself as her happy daughter in this poem:

MY HAPPY DAUGHTER

*Look how happy she can be
Whirling and dancing around the tree!
Waving her tiny hands to the sky
Pretending to be a butterfly.
Oh, she's my happy daughter
With her my life can never be brighter.
She sings a simple melody
Her voice is forever pleasant to me
She plays the piano with all her strength
This lasted for hours in length.
Oh, she's my happy daughter
With her my life is full of laughter.
Each day with her dog we take a walk
About her future we like to talk.
"Shall I be pretty and gentle like you
Also be great in all I do?"
Oh, she's my happy daughter
I pray that her steps will never falter.
Beneath the candlelight we sit
She likes to watch me as I knit
An efficient helper she is to me
In lonesome days, my company.
Oh, she's my happy daughter
My comfort in fine and stormy weather!*

Music is in the veins of my family. My grandmother played the organ in church and my mother played the piano for the church choir. She had a lovely soprano voice and was often sought after as a soloist in the church. It was her desire to give all her four children some formal music training so that one day, singing and playing musical instruments would be part of our

family activities. Unfortunately, during those postwar days, she could not afford to buy a piano for us. Furthermore, we were moving from place to place, depending on where Father could find a job.

When I was five years old, we moved into a small house next to a large Anglican church. Mother joined the church at once and started serving the Lord as the choir leader and pianist. We liked to sit right in front of the church watching Mother play the piano. We were very proud of her and wished that someday we too could play like Mother. Since pianos were very precious in those days, no small children were allowed to touch the ones in the church. Only those who knew how to play and could afford to pay the rent were given the opportunity to practise on the piano in the church hall.

One day, Mother found me sitting on the window sill with one of my ears pressed against the window, listening attentively to someone practising on the piano in the church hall.

“Dixie, come down from there before you fall off!” she shouted to me.

“But Mummy, I like to hear the boy playing that piece. May I stay till he finishes?”

“I think you should come down here to listen. Don’t disturb him while he is practising.”

“What is the title of that piece, Mummy?”

“It is one of the Two-Part Inventions by Bach. I shall teach you how to play it when you grow a bit older.”

Bach became one of my favourite composers and each time I play the Two-Part Inventions, I am back to being five years old sitting outside that enormous window

When I was eight, our financial situation turned from bad to worse after Father died of pneumonia on 9 December 1948. The opportunity of learning how to play the piano was remote, let alone owning one. We were stranded in Kunming and I remember taking my Father’s belongings to the market place to sell. In those days no one could afford a pair of new leather shoes so second-hand goods were in great demand. The only thing I could remember was that I wrapped up Father’s old leather shoes in newspapers and gave them to a man who paid Mother the money. Life was very difficult then and sometimes I marveled at the courage Mother had in facing that situation.

Mother received a letter from one of Father’s elder brothers telling her to send all four of us to the orphanage and then to return to Hong Kong to start life all over again, since she was only 37 years old then. With tears in her eyes, she read the letter to us and when she had finished reading she said,

“The night before your Father passed away he told me not to cry, but to be brave and bring all four of you up to be useful individuals. He said that you are four pearls that he had left behind for me to polish and to shine. I shall do my best to keep my family together wherever I go.”

Both Mother and Father studied literature in the universities; no wonder even at the moment of parting, their words were still very poetic. One day I wrote a **sonnet** to describe Mother’s feelings after she recalled the night of Father’s death to me:

*I watched my love beneath the candlelight
With peace upon a sheet of white he slept.
My tears flew down his pale cheeks as I wept
So soon cruel fate had turned my morn to night.*

*Encircled by the everlasting gloom
Why should they take away my love so soon
Before the precious life had reached its noon
And let the broken heart to meet the doom.*

*The words I heard my love said last to me
"May God your Father's grace abide with you
Be brave, be strong and love me to the end."
Oh God, clear up the clouds that I may see
Thy love in life's dark night so good and true
Through loss I come to know a greater Friend.*

She wrote back to my uncle to let him know her decision of keeping all her children together no matter what happened. Finally rescue came, and I am sure Mother must have prayed very hard to God. Father's relatives in Hong Kong gathered enough money to buy five plane tickets and sent them to us to travel to Canton. We either sold or gave away most of the things we had and really traveled light!

The day before we left China, we checked into a hotel very close to the airfield. We took our dog, a black Dachshund, along hoping that we could bring him to Hong Kong too. That night we could not sleep and we three sisters went out for a walk. A man walked by and asked us what we were doing walking around so late at night. We told him that we were going to Hong Kong the next day. To those who were unable to leave inland China, going to Hong Kong was equivalent to going to paradise, because the communist soldiers were marching down from North to South China. Oh, how we enjoyed being envied!

Our wish then was to have lots of ice-cream and chocolates to eat once we reached our destination. We had heard so much about Hong Kong from our parents and now we were actually going back there! The future did not worry us at all and only in the heart of our poor widowed Mother harboured the fear of bringing up four orphans.

The plane that we boarded was a small transport plane. There were blocks of lead under the benches lining the portholes. Passengers had to sit on those hard benches all the way without seat-belts or arm-rests. This was my first flying experience; I thought that was a 'great way to fly'. The boarding procedure was simple enough until it came to Bobbie our dog. The pilot refused to let him onto the plane and the four of us burst into tears. Our cries mingled with our faithful servant's persuasive talk finally got Bobbie a seat under the bench after two blocks of lead were removed, as the pilot figured that was the weight equivalent to a dog. But Bobbie never got to Hong Kong, because we lost him while we stayed in Canton for a short period before taking a train to Hong Kong.

Life was not as rosy as we had imagined once we were back to the place of our birth. I had a hard time adjusting to the educational system and standard. I learnt my first English word when I was 10 years old in Primary IV. Mother worked very hard as an English teacher just to earn enough money to send us to school. She had very little time for us and herself. Playing the piano was more of a luxury than a hobby. I had no courage to tell Mother that I was still very interested in learning how to play the piano because if I had told her, she would have felt bad about not being able to buy us the instrument.

I was a very sensitive child and each time I heard my friends calling their fathers I would turn away as tears welled up in my eyes. This poem was found in my collection describing the pessimistic feelings I had towards life before I found God.

*Thou had taken my father away
Before I could remember his face.
No one to guide my terrestrial way*

And left my heart an empty space.

*Thou had taken my love from me
The sweetest and best I ever had
If Thy will, then let it be
Nothing to cherish all is dead.*

*So in work I place my heart
Again I find the door is shut
Dreams and hopes from me depart
Who will come to heal the cut?*

*Why dost Thou not take away
The breath I once borrowed from Thee?
Life for me is a boring way
So let me rest beneath a tree.*

In Sunday School, I learnt that God was a Heavenly Father to all who believed in Him and He would answer their prayers if they prayed earnestly to Him in His will. Deprived of the love of an earthly father, I turned to God for all my needs.

“Dear God, you know how much I long to learn to play the piano but we just cannot afford to possess the instrument. Please give me the chance to learn one day. Amen.”

God answered my prayer in the most unexpected way.

One day, Mother came home with a piece of good news. She said, “Children, guess what? We are going to have a piano tomorrow!”

All four of us crowded around Mother with excitement. This was the best news we had ever had since our arrival in Hong Kong. Mother told us that her friend, Mr. Quan who was very rich, was going to sell his mansion in Kowloon Tong to a school, and he had asked her and her sister to visit the mansion before it was sold. While they were there, Mother noticed a very old and dusty piano in the sitting room. She asked Mr. Quan what he intended to do with the piano.

He said that he was going to sell it for \$1000 and asked if Mother would like to buy it. Mother hesitated and said, “I don’t think I can afford it.”

“How much can you afford?” Mother thought for a while and replied, “I am earning \$400 a month. I can only pay this amount in four installments.”

Mr. Quan had pity on her and agreed to sell it for only \$400. Sometimes I thought to myself, if one day I became as rich as Mr. Quan, I would give my old piano to a poor musical girl.

The next day, the long-awaited piano arrived. It was in a terrible condition. At least half a dozen strings were broken and many keys were out of tune. Mother had to spend another \$50 to have it repaired before it could produce any decent sound. That evening, our family bowed down in gratitude to the Lord for the first piano we could call our own.

Mother managed to send my two older sisters to a piano teacher but I would have to wait for my chance to come. In the meantime, Mother gave me some simple instructions whenever she had the time. I made tremendous progress after a year under her tutorship. By then she could no longer teach me as she was not a professional music teacher. She wished she could send me to the teacher in the neighbourhood but \$40 per month was too expensive for her.

One morning during school assembly, the Headmistress made an announcement which caught my attention. She said that those who were in the first and second positions in class at the end of the year would be given scholarships to study in Heep Yunn School for the following year. I had always been above average in class but to get to the top would be a Herculean task for me. I thought to myself, if I could get the scholarship I would use the school fees to pay for my music lessons. The motivation was so great that I put all my effort into my school work.

“God, help me to get the scholarship,” was my constant prayer.

God heard the prayer of this little orphan and answered it in the most marvelous way. After receiving my school report card at the end of the year, I rushed home to break the news to Mother.

“Mummy, I can learn piano now. I have won a scholarship of \$20 a month.”

Mother was very proud of me and encouraged me to continue with my good work. I received my first formal music lesson at the age of 12 under Miss Lam, a student of one of my aunties. A year later with \$20 in my hand I went to a friend’s mother who was a more experienced piano teacher and asked to be her student. God must have touched the heart of Mrs. Moses Wu because after the audition she said to me, “Dixie, I charge \$40 a month but for you, I will make an exception. If you show me that you are a keen student, I shall teach you for only \$20 a month.” For the next seven years I learnt piano under her patient instructions until I obtained the diploma in piano teaching. I respected and liked her very much because she taught me both piano and music theory almost for free.

I practised on the piano longer than my sisters and I made great progress in a short time. In order to maintain my scholastic record in school and keep up with my piano practice, I had no time for anything else.

Every Sunday morning at 10 am the radio would broadcast ‘Classical Favourites’, a programme Yvette and I enjoyed tremendously. Nothing could take us away from the radio and Mother had to go to church by herself.

After I had received what I had always wanted, I had no time for God anymore. All that I cared about were my achievements in school and in music. At that time my aspiration was to become a first class concert pianist one day.

God was merciful and patient. He waited for me to go to Him again, like the time when I had prayed for the piano and the scholarship and I had been so simple in my faith that I trusted in God for all my needs. Now I was drifting further and further away from Him. The gifts had gained more eminence than the Giver in my life.

I think God has special ways of bringing us back to Him. In my case it was through our little dog called Lark. We all loved her as much as Bobbie, which we lost in Canton. Lark often walked us to the bus-stop, and came home by herself after we had gone to school. One afternoon, we came home from school but Lark did not come out to greet us and we realized that she was gone! We went all over the village searching for our beloved dog. We ran out of the house each time we heard a dog bark, only to find someone else’s dog there. For four days and nights we searched in vain. I was very upset and it was then that I remembered how God had answered my prayers in the past, and I was sure that God would help me again if I turned to Him.

I said to Mother, “Mummy, if God finds my little Lark for me, I promise to go back to church each Sunday.” At that time I was 13 years old and I never thought that God would take my promise seriously.

That night it rained heavily and we were not able to go out to look for Lark. Early next morning I was awakened by a faint scratching sound on the main door. At first I thought that it was just the sound of rain-drops, but after a while, I was quite certain that it was the sound of a paw scratching the door. I jumped out of bed and unlocked the door. In the faint light of dawn I saw a wet and miserable-looking furry bundle lying on the dirty floor. It was none other than our beloved Lark.

Oh, how we rejoiced over the return of our lost pet! We took great care in nursing the poor creature back to her normal self. Obviously she had not been fed for days and was too weak even to bark when she saw us.

When Sunday came, Mother reminded us to go to church again. I said, "Mummy, today the radio is going to broadcast a special programme in memory of Chopin my favourite composer. I don't want to miss it. Can I go next week?"

"Dixie, do you remember what you promised God? You said that if He returned Lark to you, you would go to church every Sunday. He answered your prayer and you are not keeping your promise."

Hearing what Mother said, I felt ashamed of myself for not keeping my promise. I never thought of breaking a promise made to my friends but now I was breaking a promise made to the Almighty God because I loved music more than the One who gave me my talent.

That Sunday the Lord spoke to me through His messenger. The message was taken from Luke 17:11-19. We were told that Jesus cleansed ten lepers but only one of them came back to give thanks and glory to God.

Jesus asked, "*Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?*" (Luke 17: 17-18)

I suddenly realized that I was given more than I deserved: a loving mother, a piano I had longed for, an outstanding school record, a compassionate music teacher and a dog, lost and found. As I meditated upon the love and blessing I had received from my Heavenly Father, I was indeed very grateful to Him. After that incident I went to church very often because I wanted to please Mother and to keep my promise to God. I became a faithful "church-goer" for the next ten years before "salvation through faith in Jesus Christ" was made known to me.

II

LOST AND FOUND

*"Many years I longed for rest,
Perfect peace within my breast*

*And I often sought the Lord, alone in tears.
But I would not pay the price,*

*Would not make the sacrifice,
So I wandered on and on for many years."*

This verse from a hymn describes very vividly what happened to me in the past. For many years I was searching for the truth but I went the wrong direction and was too proud to turn back.

I was born in a family in which my Mother was a Christian but my Father an agnostic. There were constant conflicts in the home over the matter of religion. Mother came from an Anglican background which resembled the Roman Catholic Church in many ways. I was baptized when I was only a month old. After my Father's death, Mother took the responsibility of educating the four of us and she always encouraged us to go to Sunday School because she wanted us to be good children.

In my teens, the ceremonious worship in the Anglican Church could not satisfy my longing for peace of mind and I became very restless. At the age of sixteen, I was confronted with the problem of choosing a career. I was very ambitious and I wanted to be someone great, someone who could change the history of mankind or even the whole world! I was a great admirer of Chopin, the great composer, and I practised very hard on the piano, hoping that one day I could become as famous as he.

At the same time, I wanted to become a doctor like my grandpa, uncles and aunties. There were quite a few doctors in both Father's and Mother's families and they all seemed to be very rich to me. My intention of becoming a doctor was to earn a lot of money to give Mother a more comfortable life. Mother was an English Literature graduate of the University of Shanghai in China. After Father passed away she became an English teacher in two schools in order to earn enough money to keep us alive. She worked full-time in a mission school in Kowloon in the morning and traveled to Hong Kong to teach in an afternoon school. She left the house very early in the morning and came home in time for dinner. In the evenings she would bury herself in a mountain of exercise books and correct them painstakingly. Her pay was low and her hours of work long. I vowed not to be a teacher when I grew up, but I did not know that the Lord wanted me to taste the joy of being a teacher one day!

As my mind ran wild with its fantasies, I no longer let religion be the centre of my life. I continued to be a church goer and attended all the meetings for young people choir, youth group meetings, Sunday School, Sunday Service, Summer Conference etc. I thought that by doing all these I could reach God and obtain my salvation. All the teachers in school, friends as well as relatives, praised me for being such a good student and a religious girl. Mother was very proud of me and I considered myself a good Christian too. My aim in life then was not to let Mother down in whatever I did. I liked this quotation very much but have forgotten who said it:

"MAKE YOUR LIFE A DREAM AND OF THAT DREAM, A REALITY".

In 1961, two important things happened in my life. First, I was admitted to the Faculty of Medicine in the University of Hong Kong and second, at the same time I passed the Royal School of Music examination and became a qualified piano teacher. I was indeed very proud of myself!

The glamour of being a medical student was not able to suppress the fear and the restlessness in my heart. The pressure of study was so great that I thought I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Fainting at the sight of blood was quite common but I had no courage to confide in anyone about my fears. The anxiety and tension increased as the days went by, but I had no intention to quit the medical course as Mother had very high hopes in me.

While staying in St. John's College, I had the opportunity of meeting a group of Christians whose faith in God was very different from mine. God seemed to be very real and personal to them but far away from me. They tried to contact me and I avoided them like plague because I was proud of my church and its atmosphere of worship. To me, there was nothing wrong in reading prayers from a prayer book and letting the pastors and bishops interpret the Bible for us. Why should I bother to study the Bible myself? After all, I was not going to be a fulltime worker in the church or on the mission field. The way to salvation was not taught in that Anglican Church which I attended, and being a Christian was equivalent to doing a lot of good works. Not realizing the miserable state I was in, I continued with my academic pursuit and taught piano during the weekends to earn enough money for the expensive medical course I was taking. I gave little thought to my spiritual poverty.

One day a great blow came to me. I failed Biochemistry in the first M.B. examination and had to repeat the second year. Failure was something I had not met with up to that point and disappointment, shame and self-pity overwhelmed me so much so that I hid myself from all my friends that summer. When Fall came I had to emerge from my self-imposed hibernation to face the world whether I liked it or not! I went back to repeat that year and met another group of Christian boys in the class. One of them named S.K.Ho was concerned enough to ask me a question which had never crossed my mind.

"If Jesus Christ were to come back today, do you have the assurance that you are saved and will be taken up to meet Him in the air?"

My reply was, "How can we know who is saved and who is not? We can only know that when we meet God."

Knowing the precarious position I was in, he took great patience in explaining the doctrine of salvation to me and also taught me how to study the Bible and search for the truth. However, spiritual development did not guarantee academic success, and before long another blow came to me which was more severe than the first. I failed Biochemistry again and was asked to withdraw from the Medical Faculty.

I began to blame God and everybody around me for my failure. How could such a cruel thing happen to such a good and diligent person like me? Bitterness towards life overcame me and I almost terminated my own existence by driving very fast on the highway. But the Lord kept me from all harm and protected me from all danger because He had a better plan for my life which I did not realize then. I wrote this poem during that time:

WHY

*Why do the tears fall?
Glistening, they run across my hand.
I do not understand these tears at all,
I do not understand.*

Why is my heart sore

*Painful and easily offended?
I do not understand my heart at all,
I do not understand.*

*Why does my mind not stall?
Restless as waves upon the sand.
I do not understand my mind at all
I do not understand.*

*Why do dark clouds sprawl
Covering the moonlight I depend?
I do not understand these clouds at all
I do not understand.*

*Why do my hopes, though small,
Have to scatter like tiny sand?
I do not understand the thing at all
I do not understand.*

One day, S.K. Ho came to pay me a visit. In my utter frustration I said to him rudely.

“Who told you to come to see me? I want no visitor and above all I need no sympathy!”

In actual fact I was craving for company and an ear to pour my sorrows to. God could not have sent him to see me at a better time.

Knowing my pride and my state of restlessness, he answered calmly, “You are a brave girl and you don’t need any sympathy. What you need is Jesus Christ to come into your life to take control of everything.” What he said was true and I wondered why I had never thought of Jesus all this while!

He was only one of many Christians who was concerned about my soul and due to their prayers my proud heart was finally touched by the Holy Spirit and my life was never the same again. I received Christ as my personal Saviour after I had been a so-called “Christian” for many years. I left the Anglican Church and attended a branch of the Evangelical Free Church of China.

After becoming a Christian, my life was still full of failures because I was not willing to pay the price of asking God to take full control of my future. I had my own plans and He was not the centre of all those plans.

*“Then one day, while bowed in prayer,
Jesus whispered to me there
Take the cross and follow me to Calvary
O how hard it was to die
And all self to crucify,
Just to lose my life and find it, Lord, in Thee.”*

The second verse of this hymn again describes my spiritual experience very clearly. One day while I was praying, I suddenly realized that if the love and the blood of Jesus Christ which was shed on the cross for my sins could not make me love Him and trust in Him, nothing in this world could. Finally, I said to Him,

“Lord, please forgive me of my pride and my disobedience towards your command, I am willing to do what you want me to do and go where you want me to go.”

I had no idea what to do for a living in the future. I could not depend on my Mother forever. The way ahead was totally unknown and bleak to me. Though my friends were very kind and sympathetic towards me, they could not cry or sigh with me all day long. I remember one incident which made me write another poem. The afternoon of 16 August, 1964, I was waiting at home for two former class-mates of the medical school who promised to come to see me but they did not turn up. It seems to me that my poetic instinct was most prolific in the days of desperation.

WAITED IN VAIN

*One bright and sunny August afternoon,
Remember how I decorated my room
With plan and care for all I had to do
For I had saved this afternoon for you.*

*The flowers in the vase were now in bloom
Their fragrance filled my heart instead of gloom
I waited here for you to come to me
The comrades I longed very much to see.*

*You kept me waiting, waiting all the time
And imaginations pervaded my mind.
I thought perhaps you'd forgotten this date.
But still I waited for you at any rate.*

*I played the Prelude by the greatest Pole
This Chopin wrote his music with all his soul.
And then I started to play some odds and ends
So time went as I waited for my friends.*

*Alone again I pondered on my past
And then the time for tea had come at last.
I had measured out my life with a spoon
Especially that August afternoon!*

I was bored to death until Vivien Lee, a sister in the Christian Fellowship of the University of Hong Kong, came to see me and asked me if I was interested in teaching in a newly-founded mission school, Carmel English School. Teaching had never been attractive to me as a career but I was willing to give it a try. Mr. David Cheung, the Principal, told me later that he was unable to recruit a suitable Christian teacher for Form 1 D even though the school term had started for three weeks. It was as though the Lord was keeping that post open for me.

Working among teenagers was the most fascinating and challenging experience for me. In the school we preached the Gospel and led the students to the saving knowledge of Christ besides teaching them the secular subjects. I was assigned to teach English, Music and Geometry which were my favourite subjects when I was in high school. The students and I got along famously and many years later I still received letters from some of them. Whenever I have the opportunity to visit Hong Kong, we would set aside a day for our reunion. They called themselves 'Form 1, 1964' and Miss Fung was their favourite teacher.

Before I left the school I wrote this poem dedicated to them:

TO MY STUDENTS

*My well-beloved young friends,
It is not I to choose the way
As a teacher my life to spend*

With you day by day.

*But the Lord chooses for me
To learn from your youthful lives
The joyfulness that I may see
In you, my life greatly deprives.*

*When I hear the songs you sing
And the smiles I find on your faces
I recall my long forgotten Spring
And all the memorable places.*

*I was once young as you
And took part with my mates
In play, as much as you do.
Well remembered are all those dates!*

*I pray that God may impart in you
Hearts to search for Eternity
And the Holy Spirit good and true
Guides you on to maturity!*

I praised the Lord and thanked Him for bringing me down from my Ivory Tower to see His wonderful power in changing a sinner's life. I no longer thought of my ambitions and pride because in front of God all these were but vanities. After I had been teaching for one year, the Lord sent me to Canada for further training. There I learnt how to trust in Him and serve Him while in a foreign land. The greatest gain in those five years was not two academic degrees but the lesson of obedience. Unless we are willing to lose ourselves in Him, we cannot find the new and meaningful life that He has for us. My heart echoes with the chorus of this hymn:

*"Let me lose my life and find it, Lord, in Thee;
May all self be slain, my friends see only Thee,
Tho' it cost me grief and pain,
I will find my life again,
If I lose life, I'll find it, Lord, in Thee."*

III

WHEN THE AZALEAS ARE BLOOMING

"How long will you be away this time?" Mother asked as she watched me pack my books and clothes into my overnight bag getting ready to go back to the university hostel.

Looking at the pot of Azaleas laden with buds on the table, I smiled and said light-heartedly,

"Mummy, I shall be back when the Azaleas are blooming!"

I was right, physically I did return home when the Azaleas were in full bloom but psychologically, mentally and spiritually, I was a completely different person who had to face a major crisis in life. I was totally unprepared for it. As a result I suffered a very long period of grieving, almost left God and ran into Satan's trap. But thank God, His love would not let me go. Throughout the whole process of suffering He taught me how to cope with crisis and finally restored me back to Himself. After that my faith was much strengthened and later I could cope with crisis in life better. For those who are going through crisis in life, my experience may be of help to you though you may not be facing a similar situation as I was but the process of grieving and loss is the same.

At that time I was in my second year of the medical course, young, energetic and full of hope for the future. Since the age of 16, I had set my mind to study medicine and one day become a successful doctor to serve society. While I was preparing for the university entrance examinations, my younger brother asked me a very practical question.

"Dixie, you have always wanted to study medicine, just suppose you can't fulfill the requirements to enter the medical faculty, what are you going to do?" "I have only one ambition and I have not thought of anything else."

I was a hard-working person and I believed that if a person determined to do something, he could achieve his goal. Finally, in spite of the stringent selection into the medical faculty of the University of Hong Kong for female students, I was accepted. I realised that medicine was a very difficult course and I had to sacrifice many things in order to go through that five long years.

At that time my sisters and brother were all overseas, working or studying and I was the only one left behind to keep Mother company. Every weekend I would go home to let Mother pamper me with lots of good food. It was when the first M.B. examinations were approaching that I told Mother I would not be home until the Azaleas were blooming. Both Mother and I love Azaleas because of their bright and intense colours. We liked to buy a pot around Chinese New Year to decorate the house.

I studied so hard that sometimes I found myself sleeping with the human skull on my pillow and dried bones all over the bed. While other hostel-mates were having fun dating and enjoying group activities in the university, I let my youth slip by as I buried my head in the pile of medical books.

When the results were released, I was disappointed that I only passed in Anatomy and Physiology and had to take the supplementary examination for Biochemistry. That was not so bad as quite a few people shared the same fate with me. We were given a provisional pass and went ahead with the clinical courses in Queen Mary Hospital.

Mother was happy to see me back after a long absence of three weeks from home. The crimson Azalea plant was a welcome sight. I felt more comfortable to be in the familiar place.

Both Mother and I thought that everything would be sailing smoothly for us from now on and we did not mention the failure at all.

Six months later, I took the subject again and was quite confident that I would sail through it. On the day the result was posted on the board, my good friend Annebella drove me to the medical college and we planned to have a little celebration after the victory. When we were there a big crowd was already gathering around the board. Annebella, who was much bigger in size than myself, volunteered to look at the result for me. She pushed her way through the crowd but did not come out at once. Eventually I saw her slip out quietly, pulled me into the car and drove off. I need not ask her what the result was; just by looking at the expression on her face I knew that I had not made it again. This time I cried bitterly on her shoulder because I dreaded the thought of repeating the second year and having to study all three subjects again.

I moved out of the hostel and stayed at home with Mother. The tension mounted up each day as I had to pass the examinations this time or else I would be asked to leave the medical course. One night I had a nightmare that I failed my examinations again and I cried loudly in my dream. Mother had to wake me up and comfort me.

“Mummy, what should I do if I fail again? Why am I so hopeless and useless?”

“Never mind Dixie, I met many difficulties in life too, but God always helped me to pull through them. I am sure that He will take care of you.”

No matter how hard Mother tried to comfort me, I still had no peace in my heart and was living in fear and anxiety all the time. Sometimes I wondered why God allowed me to enter the medical faculty and yet put all these obstacles in my way. Is He joking with me or playing a fool with my life? I consoled myself that tomorrow would be better than today but I was quite wrong.

The lyrics of the song which I liked very much said,

*“There’s a silver lining,
Through the dark cloud shinning.”*

But for me there was no silver lining at all!

It was during that time that I was introduced to the doctrine of salvation though I had been a church-goer all my life. Spiritually speaking I was born again and I really had the assurance of eternal life. God’s Word helped me a lot during those depressing days. I was longing for that period to be over so that I could go back to the clinical studies and meet my good friends once more.

Soon it was time for Azaleas to bloom again and the examinations were just around the corner. In order to save time for me to travel from Kowloon to Hong Kong each day, Mother arranged for me to stay with one of her friends in Hong Kong Island so that I could concentrate on my studies. It seemed to us that we had done everything we could to help me study well for my important examination, and everyone around me was sure that I could pass this time.

On the day the result was released, Mother, Annebella and I went to attend a concert presented by the Vienna Boys’ Choir. We were so confident that everything was going to be all right so we did not go to check the results. After the concert I called the class representative just to make sure, but the reply I heard was,

“Sorry Dixie, you did not make it again. You failed the Biochemistry paper.”

Suddenly the whole world sank below and my feet could not feel the ground at all. I held on to Annebella and started to descend from the long flight of stairs. I wondered if it was only a

dream but reality woke me up as I saw a group of Christians standing at the bottom of the stairs waiting anxiously for me to appear. They heard the news and had come to comfort me. When Mother saw that I was with my friends, she said she would go home first and walked ahead of us. I ran to her and said with great guilt in my heart,

“Mummy, I am truly sorry!”

She held back her tears and signaled for me not to go on but to go and have dinner with my friends. They took me to the restaurant and ordered some food for me. I could not remember what I ate but I did remember when I said grace before partaking the food, Annebella said,

“Why do you believe in God? He has already left you!”

I too began to doubt if He still cared for me. Why must He allow all these to happen to me? What had I done to deserve such a crisis in life? When I asked these questions I made the assumption that only sinful people would suffer; good people should deserve better things in life. But the fact is when one man sins, many people suffer for his action because we were interrelated. How can anyone be exempted from suffering at all? If God did not spare His Son from suffering, those of us living in this imperfect world will bound to meet suffering one time or another. Therefore suffering is not necessarily linked with sin.

That summer I applied to the Science faculty hoping to get a chance to change course and the reply was that since I was already given one chance, the place should be given to someone else. I then applied to several universities in the States because my second sister, Elaine was working there. I was accepted by Calvin College and was given a scholarship to study science. For a short while I thought the clouds were clearing up but my joy was short-lived because I was not granted a visa to go to the States. The reason given was that since my sister went there to study and did not return, the chance of my returning to Hong Kong was slim therefore I was barred from going to the States, even for a visit.

At that point my hope of getting a university degree was completely shattered and I was heading for a total mental breakdown. I no longer knew what I was doing though I kept myself busy every minute of the day by giving piano lessons, private tuition, teaching full-time in a school and studying English Literature in an evening college. There was no way that Mother could persuade me to slow down and take things easy. In order not to see her weary face I stayed with my friends often. Even if I was home, I vented my frustrations on my Mother and I felt that I was no longer a good daughter to her. The good relationship we had before had disappeared and I was changed into a ‘monster’. Mother was really upset about me during that period of my life.

I did not go to church and even wanted to leave my faith. I doubted His reality and His love for me. The feeling that I had at that time could only be understood by those who had gone through lost and grieving. Within those two years I felt that I had aged twenty years and I no longer knew what to expect in life. How could I talk about serving God when He did not even allow me to finish my studies?

It was in such a state of bitterness that I passed another year after leaving medical school.

One day I found myself alone in the house with nothing to do because it was a holiday after the Chinese New Year and Mother was out visiting. My eyes caught the Azalea plant and I realised that it was in bloom again. I was so busy that I did not even notice that it was budding. I seemed to hear that youthful voice saying,

“Mummy, I shall be back when the Azaleas are blooming.”

Even though I was sitting at home my mind was always somewhere else. I knew that I had to solve a major spiritual problem before I could solve other problems in life. I had a lot of knowledge about God and I was sure of my salvation, but why was it that I felt so hopeless and helpless when I met a crisis in life. I began to reflect three stages in my life. My past, my present and my future.

Were there any experiences in the **PAST** that I could recall the reality of God? Yes, there were. He was very real to us after Father passed away. He took care of us and answered our prayers many times.

Psalm 68:5 said,

“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling.”

This verse had been true in our home and carried us through many difficult situations. I could not deny what He had done for us especially in my own conversion experience. He had forgiven my sins and carried my burdens on Calvary. I had also seen changes in the lives of those who had committed their lives to Him. All these convinced me that He is God and if He is God, who am I not to worship Him and give Him due honour?

When I recalled the past I was reminded of His goodness to a sinner like me. David in Psalm 77 expressed my feelings at that moment,

*“I will remember the deeds of the LORD;
Yes, I will remember Your miracles of long ago.
I will meditate on all Your works and consider all
Your mighty deeds.”*
(Verses 11-12)

The psalmist remembered God's deeds and he was convinced that He is on the throne.

But when I looked at the **PRESENT** situation, He seemed to have vanished from my sight completely. I asked the same questions as David did,

*“Will the Lord reject forever?
Will He never show His favour again?
Has His unfailing love vanished forever?
Has His promise failed for all time?
Has God forgotten to be merciful?
Has He in anger withheld His compassion?”*
(Psalm 77:7-9)

I realised that I was not the only one having such a feeling, many people recorded in the Bible had the same experience. Then I knew I needed greater courage and faith than my past experience to carry me through because I never had such a crisis before. Though I could not experience His love now, by faith I knew that He still loves me because He is love.

Two incidents in the Bible show us that such faith is important.

Daniel's three friends said to King Nebuchadnezzar,

“If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and He will rescue us from your hand, O king. BUT EVEN IF He does not, we want you to

know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”
(Daniel 3:17-18)

This is the kind of courage I needed at that time to carry me through my crisis. It did not depend on past experience but on God Himself.

Another case is recorded in Habakkuk 3: 17-18

*“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls,
YET I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour.”*

This is the kind of absolute faith in God that I needed at that time to sustain me.

After recalling the past experience of God’s reality and realising the faith and courage I needed for the present crisis, I thought about the **FUTURE**. I found that I was always expecting tomorrow to be better than today. But when disappointments struck me again and again, I had lost all motivation to carry on because I had placed my hope on the uncertain future. What I needed was to face the situation bravely rather than to waste my energy on hoping that something better will come my way. What is to come may not be better but what I can ask for is courage to face today’s suffering and crisis. I must not imagine that tomorrow will be more rosy, instead, I should solve the present crisis with courage.

I could not change the fact that I had lost a dream and bright future which I had painted for myself since I was a teenager, therefore I was grieving for the loss. But after that initial period of crying, grieving and feeling sorry for myself, I must pick up the courage to face the present circumstances. Whether God will give me a smoother way ahead or not, should not affect my faith in Him. Because my hope is not in the uncertain tomorrow, it lies in the security I have from God which gives me the strength to face even greater pain and sorrow in the future.

Another thing I thought of was that Satan will be smiling each time I bow down to defeat. I am determined not to let him win and therefore I must never give up easily just because of the present crisis I was facing.

After I had considered all these that afternoon in front of the Azaleas I knew that I had learnt to cope with my grief, loss and disappointment. I was determined to carry on to trust in God and bravely face that situation. Healing did not come at once; it took a long time. It was when I was able to share with others what I had gone through that I knew I was completely healed.

For the first time in two years, since the beginning of a series of disappointments, I began to look at things differently and behave in a more matured manner. I decided to unload some of my unnecessary burdens and live a more normal life.

I quit the evening classes and went back to church on Sundays and even joined my friends in some activities. I no longer felt that “failure” was stamped upon my forehead. I began to appreciate what my Mother had done for me and gradually I could accept kindness from others without interpreting it as sympathy. In the past two years I was a completely different person, dejected and pessimistic. After I had learnt to cope with my crisis I suddenly realised that there were many people who suffered with me and cared for me. I gave thanks to God for each one of

them and determined not to disappoint them again. If I did not go through that crisis, I would never have made so many true friends in my life.

That afternoon as I sat alone in front of the blooming Azaleas, I could almost hear myself say,

“Mummy, the Azaleas are blooming and I have come home.”

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

*Faith believes the Word of God is true
Patience awaits for God's timing too
Hope knows God never promised sky always blue
Love obeys God's command through and through
Humility bows down before His throne
Submission seeks not the desire of his own
Resignation surrenders to God in cheerful tone
Thus the Christian Character to the world made known.*

IV

ESCAPE! ESCAPE! ESCAPE!

When I left Hong Kong in 1965 for Canada, I was like a fugitive who wanted to flee from all who knew of his past. I was a converted Christian and I always wore my favourite verse upon my lips,

*"... Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead."
(Philippians 3: 13b.)*

But deep down in my heart I was resentful, bitter and full of anger as though the whole world owed me an apology. I had just enough Christianity to make me feel uneasy because I refused to let the Spirit have full control of my life.

I told myself that once I reached Canada, no one would know about my failures, disappointments and shame. I wanted a new life and never wanted to have to mention my past again. When I saw my relatives, friends and students waving goodbye to me at the departure gate, I smiled at them and said secretly to myself,

"Don't try to be sentimental, I will never step on this soil again. All these people will belong to the past and I am leaving my memories behind too."

Mother was the only person I really missed and as soon as I arrived in Winnipeg I wrote this poem to her:

TO MY MOTHER I LEFT BEHIND

*Tonight I sit inside my room
With loneliness to share the gloom
My thoughts take me to see a place
Where I was given great solace.*

*A little house with garden fair
And fragrance ever filled the air
The tunes so sweet upon each ear
Of neighbours whether far or near.*

*Be you rich or needy poor
A welcome warm was at the door
Prepared for all by one so dear
Who took away your pain and fear.*

*Her face was bright as broad daylight
Her smile was full of true delight
I long to hold you tight again
And thus my faith will once regain.*

*But now I've left that lovely place
Where I could see your gentle face
And with your words of comfort dear
To wipe away my every tear.*

*How sad it is from you depart
I'll bear your love upon my heart
And waiting here each day for you*

May soon my humble dream come true!

To escape from reality was all I wanted then.

There was no harmony between God and myself. I always asked these questions,

“If God is love, why does He allow all these things to happen to me?”

“If He is the Almighty God, why can't He let me pass all my examinations?”

“If He loves me why must He take away the things and persons I love most?”

Questions upon questions I asked but I could not get the answers. I did not understand that Christian joy involved total submission and a costly surrender of one's life ambition and possessions. There was no easy and cheap way of obtaining full Christian happiness.

After being a resident of the small crowded island of Hong Kong for twenty odd years, I found the vast expanse of Canada extremely thrilling. The air was so clear and fresh, the flowers so fragrant and enchanting that even the animals seemed to enjoy more freedom than I did in Hong Kong. I congratulated myself for making the right choice of coming to this wonderful place. The hardship ahead did not frighten me at all.

With only \$600 Canadian dollars in my pocket I reached the first stop of my journey, Vancouver. I stayed with my late father's youngest sister, Auntie Vivien and her family for a week and I knew that I had fallen in love with that place at first sight. In the garden, there were apples, pears, plums, sweet corn and peaches. All the trees were laden with ripe fruit in the Fall. I could eat to my heart's content and Auntie Vivien was very good to me. She told me if I didn't eat the fruits, the birds and worms would finish them up. I liked Vancouver and its scenery so much that I almost abandoned my original plan of going to Winnipeg.

Whatever my will might have been, God had a better plan for me. After that week of enjoyable carefree life in Vancouver, I took off for Winnipeg - a place famous for its long cold winters, in the heart of a vast prairie, the bread basket of Canada.

On the first Saturday night I attended the Chinese Christian Fellowship meeting, I knew that my hope of escaping from my past was shattered. My peace of mind was greatly disturbed when I met P. Liu one of the boys whom I knew in the University of Hong Kong. He went to Winnipeg for the same reason as I did. He failed in Science and was going to take up Engineering in Winnipeg. I never tried to find out whether he went there to escape from his past like me. All I knew was that I had no intention of becoming his close friend even though we had similar experiences before.

Gradually I found out that more people knew about my past than I realized and I had no place to hide myself. I even met Esther, the Head Prefect at the Junior College I attended in Hong Kong, when I was in Toronto during the second Summer of my stay in Canada. I continued to bury myself in books and refused to mix with other people. Those were the loneliest days of my life because I had no one to talk to not even my beloved Mother. I wrote to her every week without fail until she joined me in Winnipeg two years later. All the Christian brothers and sisters were very considerate to me. They never looked down on me or mentioned to me the things I longed so much to forget.

Outwardly I was a cheerful and co-operative person but inwardly, I was still full of self-pity during the first three years of my study in Canada. In the third Summer of my stay there, I attended a three-day Summer Retreat in a camp site called the Star Lake. One of the speakers talked about the work of the Holy Spirit.

She said, "This morning I am changing the topic of my talk to 'The work of the Holy Spirit' in my life. I feel strongly that the Lord wants me to share this message with YOU." Yes it was a message from the Lord specially for ME. I was completely absorbed by her sharing.

She mentioned that she and her husband, a medical missionary, had lost a son while serving the Lord in Africa. The life of the child could have been spared had proper medication been available at that time. But the Lord chose to take him from them. The speaker said that for many years afterwards, she still could not bear to mention that incident. All that time she was trying to forget that painful experience and pretend that such a thing had not happened at all. One day, under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, she came to realize that, as long as she was trying to avoid the subject, her bitterness would still be there. It was not through suppressing thoughts of any past failures or disappointments that the battle was won, but by sharing with others without bitterness and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that she knew she had overcome her grief. Now she had yielded that part of her emotion to God and had regained freedom in serving Him

Her experience reflected my foolishness of trying to hide from others what the Lord had taught me through my failures. We may not understand why things happened the way they do but our faith is strengthened through many trials. After I had yielded my pride to the Lord I was able to stand up and give my testimony at many different Christian meetings with the help of the Lord.

As Christians we are already cleansed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we should not be ashamed to share with others what the Lord has taught us, if our experiences can help others to come closer to God. If the speaker had not shared her experience with us I would probably be dwelling in my land of perpetual depression for many more years to come!

Paul was not ashamed to relate to others his experience on the way to Damascus (Acts 9: 1-9). The Samaritan woman near Jacob's well was not ashamed of her past after she believed in Jesus (John 4). In fact, she witnessed to others and said

"He told me everything I ever did (things that were considered shameful in her life)"
(John 4:39)

The Holy Spirit has taught me not to escape from reality but to face it in a new light. As long as I was burdened by the past I had no freedom to serve Him.

Now I understand the true meaning of this verse, "*Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead*"
(Philippians 3:13b)

The following two poems express the change that had taken place in this stubborn heart of mine.

HELP ME GOD MY UNBELIEF!

*Have you ever asked yourself
In the days when darkness dwells,
"Is there really a Son of God?
If there is all should be well!"*

*After you have received all grace
Can you doubt the love of God?
Satan wants to possess your heart
Preventing you to call Him Lord!*

*Sadness on His holy face
Jesus is asking you this day*

*With all tenderness in His voice,
"Will ye also go away?"*

*Once you walk away from God
Things to you can never seem right.
Only He has eternal life
Pray to Him this very night.*

*"Oh, my Saviour, Lord and King
Open arms I've come to receive
Grace and joy you want to give
Help me God my unbelief!"*

THE CHOICE

*If I have to choose a way,
Choose Thou Lord for me I pray
Let no dust to blind my sight,
Help my feet to walk aright!*

*Though the way seems hard for me
Sufficient my strength to walk with Thee
"Fear not, Child," I hear you say
"I'll be with you everyday!"*

*Follow close to Jesus' pace
Look full into His holy face.
Things from God can ne'er be wrong,
Amidst all hardship I'll sing a song.*

V

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW

The Science Library was very hot and stuffy as usual. We students had been complaining about the suffocating heat each day but nothing had been done about it so far. I sat in front of a mountain of books trying to study for the second year final examinations. I jumped from Botany to Zoology and then to Organic Chemistry but nothing seemed to be able to enter my mind. The Canadian boy sitting beside me was snoring away as though the whole library was his bedroom. I could not blame him for it was indeed a very dull and gloomy afternoon in March and everything was a bit out of sorts.

I sighed and let my eyes focus on the pine trees lining the famous Red River which runs along the campus of the University of Manitoba. The River was still frozen before the final examinations, but when the examination fever was running high, we students could see the lovely icebergs floating leisurely down the centre of the river. Oftentimes I wished I could hitch a ride down the river on one of those boats made of solid ice blocks.

I admired the evergreens because only they could maintain their green coat throughout the five months of snow. Had it not been for their presence any signs of life would have vanished completely beneath the thick coat of white. The sky was heavy and gray as though it was going to fall at the slightest touch. Snowflakes had been dancing in the air since the night before. That was the second winter I spent in Winnipeg, Canada.

Knowing that I was just wasting my time sitting there dreaming away, I decided to call it a day and packed up my books to go home. The process I had to go through before venturing into the cold surroundings was as tedious as coming into an overheated room. I had to take off my shoes, put on my knee-high boots, a heavy overcoat with a furry hood, a long thick scarf around the neck and finally slip my hands into a pair of woolen gloves. By the time I emerged into the open space, I looked like a walking mummy! After all, who cares about looks and figure when there was the risk of a frozen leg or ear to worry about!

The cold air outside had an unusual power to wake me up and I felt as if I was being released from a prison cell. My feet sank into the soft white carpet of snow as I walked across the field towards the bus terminus, leaving behind fresh footprints which would soon be buried, forgotten, beneath another sheet of snow. These footprints can only be recalled by the one who made them and who so chooses to make them known, when thousands of others are also made, but vanish each winter along the same path.

Nothing in the world lasts. Even my stay in Winnipeg would someday become a memory. As I walked along, a verse came into my mind and I wrote it down entitled

"LASTING MEMORY"

*Shall the glamour of my youth melt
With the laughter gay and bright,
As the snowman we've just built
Before the merciless sunlight?*

*When age snows white hair upon my brow
And time steals the joy I'd reserved,
May the beauty of my pilgrim soul
In your loving memory be preserved!*

"... our typewriter has broken down again and we need a new one desperately if the Literature ministry is to be continued...", the secretary of our magazine committee made this announcement at the Saturday Fellowship meeting.

"A reasonably good typewriter will cost about \$300 and we have only \$10 in the general fund" he continued.

After I learnt of this need in the Fellowship, my heart was restless and I wondered how a needy student like me could help in this project. Every month I depended on my sister Elaine, working in Seattle at that time, to send me \$65 to cover my daily expenses. I worked as a demonstrator in the Biology Laboratory periods to earn enough for my tuition fees.

The snow fell on my face and melted on my lips. It was tasteless but it refreshed me. My eyes were tearing because of the icy-cold wind which cut across my path. I saw clearly the figure that was recorded in my bank-book - \$300. I wished I could add another zero behind it and then offer one tenth to the Lord. But the words of the Bible came to me loud and clear:

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."
(Malachi 3:10)

The Lord did not mention the amount. He only said tithes. On my way home I told the Lord that I wanted to offer a quarter of what I could earn in the coming Summer to Him, not just one tenth. I thought this decision would at least give me some peace and I could forget about the immediate need of the Fellowship. After all, there were many members who came from very well-off families and they could offer much more than I. But the Holy Spirit continued to urge me to do something now and not four or five months later. I prayed and asked the Lord to show me His will concerning this matter. Being a second year Science Honours student, I could only expect to earn about \$600 during the Summer months, and a quick calculation told me that a quarter of that figure was \$150. After reaching home, I made a decision by faith: offer first and leave the rest to the Lord.

So I wrote a cheque of \$150, which was half of what I had in the bank, and left the rest of the money to last me till I could find a job in the Summer. The next day I handed the cheque to the treasurer and he asked me if I had found a summer job.

"No. By faith I know the Lord will provide me with one," was my reply. I enjoyed a period of peace and joy after doing what the Holy Spirit had convicted me to do. However the lesson of complete trust in Him was not an easy one to learn. I became a bit uneasy as the Summer holidays were approaching and I was still without a job. Many members in the Fellowship were beginning to leave Winnipeg to work in other towns and their departure added more anxiety to my already burdened heart. Each day my fingers would be blackened with ink as I ran over every advertisement in the newspapers and I also made enquiries at different departments in the University for any openings. That was a bad year for part-time jobs and doubt began to overshadow my peace. One evening, in the middle of April, I received an unexpected long distance call from my sister Yvette in Toronto. "Have you got a Summer job?" she asked. "No, not yet."

"Would you like to come and work for Cecil (my brother-in-law)? He has got an opening in his laboratory for a Summer student."

The student who was supposed to work for him that Summer was not able to take up the post due to some unforeseen circumstances, so he thought of me. I was too happy to ask any more questions. Besides, it was not economical to prolong the conversation over a long distance call. Our talk was limited to three minutes but the thrill of knowing that my prayers were answered

lasted for hours. How perfectly God had planned out the whole situation for me! I could spend the Summer with my sister and her family and work for my brother-in-law in the famous Best and Banting Institute in Toronto! I could even save on room and board for one Summer, which meant a lot to a poor student like me. I had just enough money to buy a one-way ticket from Winnipeg to Toronto and I jumped onto the plane with great joy in my heart even before I experienced the great blessing He had prepared for me.

Working in the Best and Banting Institute was quite a fascinating experience for me. There were lots of new equipment which I had never seen before in my life. I learnt a lot that summer which helped me a great deal in my future research. I worked hard and never bothered to ask about my salary. After all, we Chinese are a bit shy to discuss about money especially when the boss is one's close relative. When the first pay cheque came, I had to read it several times before I could believe my eyes - \$380. Apparently Summer students were paid higher salaries in Eastern Canada. I did a quick calculation and found that the amount I could receive for the whole Summer was more than \$1500. At first I had wanted to offer a quarter of what I thought I could earn to the Lord, but it turned out to be only one tenth of what the Lord had blessed me with. The Lord's provision is always more than we expect.

That Summer turned out to be the most enjoyable one I had in Canada. I visited the world-famous Niagara Falls, I camped all the way to Montreal with two Canadian girls to see Expo '67 and I found myself rounding up the summer by attending a very inspiring Summer Conference in Indiana, United States. The speaker was Rev. Stephen Knights who had conducted my brother's engagement to Cathy a few months back. I was not present on that happy occasion so I received all the latest news about my brother from Rev. Knights. The theme of the conference was a very appropriate one for me:

"In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength,"
(Isaiah 30:15).

If I had no trust in Him in the first place, I would never have enjoyed the rich blessings which He had for me that year. Ever since that summer, I was able to support myself through my university education. I am also grateful to my sister Elaine who encouraged me to further my studies in Canada and also promised to support me as long as I needed her help. God has given me a wonderful family. Though we were not rich yet our love for one another makes us the richest people on earth.

VI

THE DOWRY

When I was in Canada, I worshipped the Lord in the Chinese Alliance Church of Winnipeg. For more than three years our meetings were held in the basement of a Canadian Church. We found this arrangement very inconvenient and we prayed for a church building of our own. In the Spring of 1969, the Lord provided us with an old church building as well as the sum for the down payment for the purchase of that building. We were informed by the church committee that we could move into our own building in the Fall. Pastor Louis and the Building Committee were appealing to the congregation to donate furniture and other necessary equipment. We were all very enthusiastic about this project and each member was doing his or her very best. Some brothers offered their time to paint the whole building, others helped in building the partitions for Sunday School classrooms. A lot of hidden talents as well as human weaknesses were revealed through working together in building the Lord's House. Oneness in Christ was manifested among us in our love for one another and for His work.

One bright sunny afternoon, I sat in front of the window with both legs resting upon the window sill, and my hands behind my head, to have a good rest. My mind had been overburdened with facts in the past weeks. The final examination was over and I was waiting to receive my first hard-earned university degree. I deserved a good rest and I was determined not to be disturbed externally or internally.

The snow began to melt on the muddy roads. The birds were singing on the budding boughs and I could almost hear the tulips pushing their way through the soil to unveil their glory hidden throughout the Winter. My heart could rest no longer. It was throbbing in rhythm with the melody of Spring.

"Lord, what can I do for the new church building?" I heard myself praying. "Nature is doing wonderfully to glorify Your Name. Please teach your child to do her best too!"

My eyes rested upon a certificate which I proudly hung on the wall of my little room:

This is to certify that
DIXIE FUNG
examined in Hong Kong in the year 1961 as a
Teacher of Pianoforte
.... declare proficient therein and is hereby
admitted a Licentiate of the
Royal School of Music

What could I do with this qualification which God had given me? I taught piano for a few years on a part-time basis when I was in Hong Kong, but I had no opportunity to teach in Canada because of my studies. Before I committed my life to the Lord, music had been my "second life". I could practise on my piano and violoncello for hours without a break. But music had lost its spell on me since I became a born-again Christian and I played the piano only as an enjoyment and service to God.

Suddenly, it dawned upon me that I could offer a piano to the Lord by teaching piano again. It would take one to two years to collect enough money for a new piano, but we needed one immediately. My mother was staying with me at that time and I shared my vision with her. I remember clearly what she said to me,

"I have put aside a sum of money for each of my children when they get married. The sum I had for your dowry in the future will be enough for a new piano. You can have it first if you like."

Being a widow, that sum of money meant a lot to her but she was willing to give it to me! I thanked God for such an understanding mother. As I was not contemplating marriage then for the Lord had not yet revealed to me my life-partner, it did not matter to me whether I had any dowry or not.

With great joy in our hearts, Pastor Louis and I went to a piano company and chose a piano which we could afford. The piano was to be delivered to my house first until the church building was ready for use. I started to give piano lessons to a few students from the church. At one of the Fellowship meetings I shared my vision with the brothers and sisters so that they could advertise for me in the Sunday School and more children would come to take lessons with me. Beyond my knowledge, this sharing sowed a seed of love in Eugene's heart and his secret admiration for me grew rapidly. (This piece of information was revealed to me after our marriage.)

The Lord gave me seven students and I enjoyed teaching them. Meanwhile, I was given a grant to pursue a M Sc degree under a very helpful supervisor, Dr. J.G. Eales. Life was busy with research in the laboratory and piano teaching during the weekends. The Lord provided me with time and health to go through my work each day. Eugene left Winnipeg just before we moved into our new church building and our friendship bloomed into courtship through letter-writing. Finally in March 1970, the Lord revealed to us that we were to serve Him together as life-partners in the future. After receiving his proposal I started to plan for our wedding. I was trying to save as much as I could, but weddings, no matter how simple, would need money. Eugene had just started his medical career in Singapore and I was still a graduate student surviving on a grant. By the time I finished my studies, I had collected enough money from my piano teaching for a one-way ticket to Singapore and a small sum saved throughout the years for our wedding.

While I was writing my thesis, I sewed my own wedding gown and a few new dresses to save money on tailoring. The experience of designing, cutting and sewing one's own wedding gown was quite an extraordinary one and deserves a separate chapter by itself. The motivation, drive and patience suddenly appeared from nowhere and goaded me to accomplish such a bold task! The desire to join Eugene in Singapore was so great that I was able to obtain a Masters degree in 15 months. Even Dr. Eales thought that was record time among all his students! I am beginning to believe that love can make us do the impossible.

According to Chinese custom, a bride was supposed to show off her dowry in the form of jewellery, furniture and a new wardrobe. But I brought along nothing of that sort except myself. Being the eldest and the first son to get married in the family, it was natural that Eugene's parents would have liked to have a big wedding feast for all their friends and relatives to share their joy. But we really could not afford all that. Though they were non-Christians, the Lord gave them understanding hearts, and knowing our financial situation then, they never insisted on anything, neither did they despise me for the lack of dowry when I married their eldest son.

The Lord knew that I had offered my "dowry" to Him and He paved the way for us in our preparation for the wedding. Everything went on smoothly and joyfully for us. The wedding was a simple one with a reception after the church ceremony, and we only gave a very small dinner party to close relatives after our honeymoon.

The Lord said, "... *Those who honour me I will honour, but those who despise me will be disdained*"
(1 Samuel 2:30b).

This verse has been very real in our lives.

VII

LOVE IS ETERNAL

However, as it is written:

*"No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love Him".
(1 Corinthians 2:9)*

This story began in Winnipeg, Canada.

In February 1969, I read an article in "Fountain" (a magazine published by the Chinese Christian Fellowship of Winnipeg) written by a brother in the Fellowship entitled, "What price, love? What value, Hate?" It inspired me to write another article entitled, "Treasures in Dark Valley" and later a testimony of how God changed my life completely before I went to Canada.

At that time, Philip Ng was the chief editor of the magazine, and Eugene was assisting him in the editorial committee. He read my articles and a candle began to burn in the synagogue of his heart for me.

He went into his untidy room and wrote this poem in his diary:

TO ONE I ADMIRE

*You are so small, so frail,
You weep, you laugh, your tears run deep
your joy runs wide.
What sorrows you bear, what defeats you met,
what victory, what love.*

*God's handmaid, God's chosen vessel,
Are you the one for me?
Am I the one for you?*

*I love you for your love of God
I admire you for your faithfulness in Him,
I long to love, cherish, keep, serve you
- so frail and yet so strong.
- so weak and yet so courageous.
- so joyous and yet so full of sorrow*

*Am I worthy of her?
Can I serve, keep, love and cherish her
as one sent by God?*

*What fears, what doubts,
I ask the Lord to help.
Is she the one for me? Am I the one for her?
Lord I prayed - you know me
You understand me, you be my Master
Even in this matter.*

Lord, make it plain to us

*Somehow, Somewhere, Sometime
If it is Thy will or not
Lord please help us!*

The more he loved me the more he retreated from me, and I never suspected that I had a secret admirer.

It was a gloomy Saturday afternoon in May 1969. While waiting for Stephen Ng to come to give me a ride to a C.C.F. meeting, I played the piano. The bell rang and I ran to open the door. It was not Stephen but Eugene standing outside. I think Stephen still owes me an explanation there!

He said to me, "You were playing Chopin's 'Minute Waltz' when I rang the bell." I was rather surprised as I never knew that he was a music fan too, though we worked in the same church committee before. That was the first time we were alone talking to each other and I noticed that he was tall, dark and rather handsome to me.

It was in June that year that the idea of picking up driving came across my mind. One day after church, William Wong and Eugene were standing at the main entrance and I was talking to William about getting back my driver's license. William was not very keen but said that if he had time he would give me a refresher course in driving. I had given up driving since I arrived in Canada and I needed to get used to driving on the right side of the road. After that conversation, both of us forgot about the whole matter.

A few days later, I received an unexpected call from Eugene offering to give me driving instructions. He had finished his Housemanship and was waiting to go back to Singapore to serve his eight-year bond in the Fall. In the meantime he signed up to go to a Gospel Trip in July. He was quite free at that time and it seemed logical that this brother should offer his assistance to a sister who needed help in getting back her driver's license. Without hesitation, I accepted the offer. Had he known what a lousy driver I was, he would never have committed himself to such a dangerous task! After the first session he said,

"I have to take tranquilizers every night if I were a professional driving instructor!" I found that comment quite amusing and we still do!

That Summer, Mother and I decided to take a trip to Hawaii to visit my sister Elaine, and before we left, we shifted to a three-room apartment on Broadway Street. Guess who offered to help us shift? None other than my brave driving instructor himself. It was the custom at that time that if any brother helped us to shift house, which, happened every Summer, he would be invited back for dinner as a token of our appreciation for his service. Without exception Eugene was invited for dinner after we had settled into our new abode.

After dinner, he talked with me about his ideal spiritual team comprising of Stephen Ng, Philip, May, Stephen Hoh, Philemon and many other brothers, to serve the Lord in S.E. Asia one day. He was converted in Canada and had been serving the Lord with these brothers and sisters for more than six years. Naturally he would miss them once he was back in Singapore. But I was rather unhappy because my name was not included. Then he shared with me his vision for the Chinese, his love for his own people, his joy in seeing children brought up in Christian homes, a privilege he never had. My admiration for him began to grow.

That night, I fell on my knees and said the most unusual prayer, "Father in Heaven, I count it the greatest blessing and privilege if I could walk the rest of my life with this brother in the fear of Thyself and for Thy own Glory." A candle was burning in the synagogue of my heart for him now. Not knowing what to expect, we parted at the airport the next day. I went to Hawaii with my mother for a holiday and he went back to Singapore via Europe. I looked into his eyes for the first time and met the sadness in them. I gave him a poem written in 1964 in Hong Kong, entitled,

“God’s Way is Best”

*Sometimes it is hard for me to see
Things that happen around me.
How could I with judgment weak
To fully understand His mercy meek?*

*Moments come when everything seems upset
I can only sit and grieve with lashes wet.
Not knowing it is out of His Divine Grace
That I have been put in this race.*

*Then suddenly out of life’s dark night
I begin to see how God’s plans are right.
As the stars shine most in the deeper tints of blue
So is the love of God in dark days most true.*

*Let every burden harbouring within depart
For God will comfort and heal every wounded heart.
With tired feet and sandals loose I come to rest
And know that I will say, “God’s Way is Best!”*

As he read this poem on his way to England, tears fell from his eyes and he echoed with me that indeed God’s way is the best way.

After a very pleasant holiday in Hawaii, Mother and I returned to Winnipeg to continue with our work. I had started my Masters programme and Mother worked as a quality control officer in a garment factory. Eugene and I wrote to each other often and our letters were very general with Charlie Brown cartoons filling up the empty spaces. I called him Snoopy and he addressed me as Lucy. We looked forward to each others letters very much but we had no idea what the future held for us as we had half the world between us geographically.

I prayed to God that if it were His will to put us together, He would let Eugene know too, and make it clear to us. In the meantime, he was saying the same prayer, “Lord, speak to Dixie and make it plain to us.”

So time went on and on without further development as each was waiting for the other to make the first move, for fear of making any mistakes. I began to run out of writing material and I started to write to him about news of football in North America, his favourite sport. The response was very good and soon I found that I was writing and reading letters completely beyond my understanding, because I knew nothing about football and all the news I had came from the newspapers! Love makes people do the craziest things.

As I was praying and waiting before the Lord, I had the assurance in my heart that if it was His will to put us together, before 1969 ended Eugene would speak to me about his waiting before the Lord. I waited and waited but nothing happened.

On 8 December 1969, the Lord inspired me to write him a poem:

FOND REMEMBRANCE

*In spite of the glistening neon lights
Lining the windows to lure my sight;
Youthful voices of carols bright
Dancing around with great delight;*

*In spite of the joyful reunion warmth
Living memories of Christmas mirth;
Young and old are gathering near
Drinking the cups of festive cheer;*

*In spite of all these my heart shall be
Longing for you to be with me,
Yet in my land of Fond Remembrance
Dwelling sweetly is your presence.*

After writing that letter, Mother and I took a long trip to visit my brother and his wife in the United States. That was Mother's first meeting with her only daughter-in-law and we were very excited about the visit. We spent Christmas with them and flew to Toronto to spend the New Year with my eldest sister Yvette and her family. I remembered giving Eugene my sister's address in Toronto but I never expected him to write to me there. However, on New Years Eve, **the last day of 1969**, I received these questions from Singapore:

- Has the Lord deepened our friendship into partnership?
- Has the Lord prepared us for each other all these years?
- Are we in His will?
- Can we boldly come before the Lord and ask Him to put us together if it is His will; if not, can we still have the same joy and peace in Him?

At that juncture, our hearts dictated the answers rather than our minds, but we were afraid that our hearts might obscure the mind of God. After that, we began to share with each other the prayers we had uttered and he sent me the poems written about a year ago. One of them entitled "**Someone Just For You**" and I composed a song based on this poem as my first Valentine gift to him.

*Somehow, somewhere, sometime,
God has prepared someone.
- One for you to love, cherish, give, serve.*

*Somehow - what way you do not see
But by faith you have already known.*

*Somewhere - what place you do not go
But by faith you have already been.*

*Someone - What girl you do not meet
But by faith you have already met*

*Someone just for you
Someone just for God.*

He said, "I had fallen in love with you for one year now, oh, what a year!" As he shared with me about his ideal life partner and also his ideal Christian home, he said, "Our happiness should be measured by the happiness we give to others. If our lives are not for others what are we living for?" I fell head over heels in love with him.

Emotional suspense bred great spiritual development. We prayed for each other specifically as we had never prayed before. We asked for guidance from God very specifically.

One day in the middle of March 1970, I went home and asked Mother the same old question, "Is there any mail for me?"

She said, "No."

I was very disappointed but deep down in my heart something was telling me that there was a letter for me in the mail box. I did not want to show my distrust to my Mother, neither did I want to reveal my eagerness to receive a letter from Eugene so I waited until after dinner, and sneaked out to the front door of the apartment where all the mail boxes were placed. I peeped through the glass but could not see anything. Maybe mother was right. I opened the door just to make doubly sure, and to my surprise, I found a blue envelope, instead of the usual blue air letter from Singapore, stuck on the top of the mail box. I tore open the letter and read this message,

"Read this letter first before handing the other letter to your Mother if your answer to my question is positive."

The letter was wonderfully written and in the best of his handwriting. Perhaps he had wanted to make sure that I got the right message. After reading that letter I rushed back to the apartment and handed the letter to Mother which read,

"Dear Mrs. Fung, I am writing to ask for the hand of your daughter Dixie in marriage. We ask for your blessing and consent."

I wanted to spare him the agony of waiting for one week for my reply, so I sent him a telegram instead:

"Ruth One Sixteen, love Dixie."

He took out the Bible to make sure that he had got the correct message:

But Ruth replied, "*Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.*"

He got the message and wrote to me, "I went to Canada to get an M.D. In addition God gives me a B.A. - Born Again and a real M.D. - Marry Dixie, Matched Divinely."

During our one year and two months' absence from each other, we wrote a total of two hundred letters. I shall end our story with a poem written for our Wedding Day on 21 Nov. 1970.

LOVE UNTO ETERNITY

*O, Thou, the Fount of Love,
Noble, gentle, strong and pure,
Fill our hearts and lift our souls
Till our lives in Thee renew!*

*Out of the countless multitudes
We are chosen by Thy Hand,
Each for the other in love and care
Ere the forming of the land.*

*Humbly bowed before Thy Throne
As we vow to join in one,
Joy and sorrow shared alike,
May Thy will in us be done.*

*Walk with us till journey's end,
Forge our hearts to live for Thee
That our lives remain a Song,
"Love Unto Eternity."*

"He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love."
Ephesians 1:4 (King James Version).

VIII

LORD I WANT TO BE HIS HELPER

When I was in Canada, the Lord made it clear to me that I was to marry a man in Singapore. I thought I prepared myself very well by saying this prayer,

Lord, I want to be a helper to Eugene, to make him feel like a king at home and a successful doctor in the hospital. I pray that I shall never hurt him or grieve him in word and deed. Our children, if any, shall be treated like princes and princesses in the palace. Our home shall be a haven to weary travelers as well as a place of worship.... So help me God, in Jesus' Name, Amen."

With 22 kilograms of luggage I flew to a place I had never been before - the Lion City, Singapore, to meet my Prince Charming. During the first few days I was still walking in the clouds but after we had settled down to plan for the wedding, the honeymoon and the new home, I began to wonder if this was the same man I had promised to marry! I almost wanted to quit the whole thing and take the next plane back to Mother in Canada! Thank God, nothing of that sort happened!

I knew my heart was delicate, not knowing that his was equally fragile. When I offered my suggestions, he called me "silly girl". When I wanted to clean up the mess on his desk, he blamed me for misplacing his important documents. I began to doubt my ability to be a helper to him.

We started our married life in one little room in his parents' home and I tried to decorate that room as best as I could to make it look like a palace for a king. After bathing, he would throw the wet towel anywhere except hang it back on the hook where it belonged! When I wanted to talk to him in the evenings, he was always at some church meeting. I felt very lonely at times and longed for my own people in Canada and the States. I had no close friends or relatives in Singapore whom I could talk to, and I dared not even venture into the streets for fear of getting lost.

After the children arrived, they did not get the royal treatment because I lost my temper more often than I had expected. Sometimes they irritated me so much that I felt like running away from home. I was more a stumbling block than a helper to my husband, with my endless grumbling during the first few years of our marriage.

What made me stay on and what made me transform into a cheerful wife and loving mother holding a full-time job in the University? Undoubtedly, the chief element is love. Since the day I vowed in front of God and men that only death could separate us on earth, I was determined to make this marriage work, no matter how difficult it would be. Even if it means I have to swallow my pride, forfeit my privileges, withhold my pleasure, give up my priority, endure pain and poverty, I would preserve this marriage and provide my children with a home they love to run back to after school.

Not all wives are blessed with husbands who can help in changing nappies, like working in the kitchen, remember to send roses on birthdays and anniversaries, discuss their business strategy with their wives, or give them a free hand in the use of their hard-earned money. Since they are given to us by God, we should appreciate their good points rather than try to change them according to our own idea of a perfect husband.

What should a good helper be in a happy marriage? After 10 years of marriage, I have come up with the following suggestions:

- helping him to develop his good points better;

- helping him in the area he is weak in and don't throw pebbles into the pond while he is trying to fish;
- helping him to be respected by respecting him in front of others;
- helping him to be a good father by not contradicting him in front of the children;
- helping him to have self-confidence by not comparing him to someone else's husband;
- helping him to be an effective Sunday School teacher and speaker by keeping the children quiet while he prepares his sermons;
- helping him to love God by loving God more yourself.

A happy marriage does not happen by chance. Neither is it a gift given to select couples. It is a result of hard work and perseverance. Someone made this remark to me,

"Dixie, you are lucky to have a happy marriage."

If you think that a happy marriage is your luck then you are highly mistaken. With God's help, our marriage has not only been a blessing to each other but also to our children and those around us, because both of us were determined to work hard at it. In the areas where we are weak, we pray for the Lord's help. In the event that love and forgiveness are needed, we make it a point to show them. Building a happy marriage is not easy.

After 10 years of marriage, I found that my husband had changed a lot. He became more mellow and mature. In the areas where I could not change him, I changed myself. The desk with books and papers piled up like hills indicates that the great man is at work; it is my privilege to hang up the wet towel he throws on my desk; it is also my pleasure to pick up the dirty socks he leaves on the floor. When I have to sit up till midnight waiting for him to come home from church meetings, I consider it a precious time of quietness for prayer and thanksgiving; even his snoring has now become my lullaby!

I have come to know many wives who started off with the desire to be good helpers to their husbands, but later became their stumbling blocks, Christians and non-Christians alike. A successful marriage does not depend on wealth and good looks; it depends on how hard both sides are willing to work towards it as a goal. I find that even when the whole house is on fire, the wife has to keep calm and cool to save the situation. Yes, it is difficult, but not impossible, with the help of God.

I am thankful to God for a man who has patiently put up with my weaknesses all these years, and will have to do so for many more years to come. If I were to marry again, I want to marry the same man. Let us wives join together in prayer that we may be good helpers to our dear husbands.

IX

WHEN I WAS JUST A LITTLE GIRL

In January 1980, my Mother came from Toronto to visit us. We were very excited and talked about the things that we would do when she arrived: which restaurants we would bring her to taste the local food; which holiday resorts in Malaysia we would visit etc ... We made plans long before her arrival and excitement escalated as the day drew near.

Finally, it was time to receive her at the airport. What great joy it was to see my beloved Mother again! We were separated by half the world, and each meeting made us treasure each other more, as we did not know when we could meet again. I was the first one to spot the short and stout figure in floral blouse and white pants. I had a good look at her before tears of joy welled up in my eyes. She had grown older, but was as dear and beautiful to behold as the day I could remember her face when I was a child. To me Mother never changed, and every remembrance of her brings much warmth to my heart even now.

After a short rest from her jet lag, the long-awaited programme began. We enjoyed each others company very much and treasured every moment we had together. Mother was almost 69 years old then, and we knew that as the years went by, it would be more difficult for her to travel half the world to see us.

When we sat down to refresh our memories of the long gone years, I felt like a little girl again, immersed in the luxury of my Mother's undivided love and attention. How I wished those moments would never end! Reality woke me up after a long sweet dream that lasted for four months. Before we knew it Mother was already packing her suitcases and getting ready to fly back to Canada.

The day after her departure, I felt lonesome for her. I could not help looking into the guest room hoping to catch a glimpse of her smiling face again. The room was exceptionally tidy and empty. I felt very sad. My daughter, who was only eight years old then, came to me and said the most unexpected thing,

"Mummy, when I grow up, I will not marry a man who is far away from you! I want to be near you always!"

It was such a comfort to hear those innocent words uttered by my little girl. I made her sit down close to me and told her more about myself, a topic she always listened to with great interest.

When I was just a little girl
With long hair tied into a pony-tail
Sitting next to Mother on a stool
Holding tightly to her knitting wool.

She said the company I gave then
Would someday be given to a young man,
Who would court me for my hand
And build a nest with me in Wonderland

With childlike devotion and disbelief
I proclaimed my desire short and brief,
"I will never leave you alone
Or this house we called our own."

She smiled and sighed, but she was right.

One by one her children took their flight
To all parts of the world they would scatter
And never did they come back together.

Rocking by the fire she prayed
For each of them in his or her place
Where God had called them to do His will
With faith and love His tasks to fulfill.

When she was old and weak
She trusted that God would meet
Her needs in providing help and care
And someone, her lonely days to share.

A young strong arm to lead her way,
And a warm gentle smile given everyday
Through someone else's daughter and son
While her own were far beyond the horizon.

My dear daughter, you are a great gift from God to me, but I do not possess you. When you grow up, God will reveal to you His purpose for your life. Do not be afraid to go where He leads you. As God has provided someone else's children to look after my beloved Mother in her old age, He will provide me with the same, should He send you away to a foreign land.

I have never regretted that I obeyed God's calling to come to Singapore to be the wife of your Father and the Mother to my two dear children.

The goal of Christian parenthood should be, '*Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.*' (Proverbs 22:6)

AND NOT

'Train up a child in the way **I WANT HIM TO BE**, and when he is old he will not depart from **ME.**'

Christian parents are to direct their children to walk in the path of righteousness, foster wise habits of thought and action, and equip them to find their way through life with sureness and honour. They must not be the obstacles to their children's obeying God's calling in their lives.

My dear little girl, enjoy your childhood and entrust the future into God's hand. When I was just a little girl, I had the same desire as you have; but when I grew up, I had to put away childish thinking and take up the responsibility of a mature woman. May you learn to love and obey God even when you are just a little girl!

X

THANKS TO GOD

"Mrs. Chua, how are you feeling?"

That voice was very familiar; who was it? I forced my heavy eyelids open and saw Dr. S.H. Tow standing beside my bed.

"I feel terrible!" I mumbled weakly.

"Now you have more things to write for 'Fishers' magazine!" Oh yes, I certainly have!

Turning to the nurse, he said, "Give her a pack of blood after the drip."

Blood transfusion! Dear me, I must have lost a lot of blood during the operation. The thought scared me.

"I removed your ovaries, uterus and the appendix," he said calmly and dutifully as a doctor to his patient, explaining in layman terms so that I could understand.

Appendix! I never knew that my appendix needed to go too! Well, it must be a "bonus". Only later did I learn from my husband that it was a usual procedure.

Under heavy sedation, I began to ask silly questions,

"What's going to happen to me after the operation? Will you be giving me pamphlets to read to tell me what to do?..." Suddenly, I realized that I had been forced into an artificial menopause which caught me totally unprepared. I had heard many stories about women behaving abnormally when they reached menopause, and how they should prepare themselves emotionally and psychologically for it. I thought I had many more years to go before I had to worry about that problem, but now I was reaching menopause overnight!

He assured me that I was going to be alright, and that I would be given hormone replacement therapy after I was discharged from the hospital.

After he left the room, all I could remember was that my sleep was interrupted by a nurse who came to take my blood pressure and pulse, change the empty drip bottle to a full one, and remove the urine from the bag connected to my bladder by a catheter. This sequence went on and on throughout the night, as though it would never end.

I felt so uncomfortable lying there that I could have screamed! Only earnest prayer helped me keep my sanity. "Lord, please shorten the agony for me."

The next time I opened my eyes, I saw a pack of blood dripping slowly into my vein. Thank God, this tube would soon be removed from me. Each time the nurse came around to adjust the flow, I felt an unbearable sharp pain flooding into my arm. I could not help screaming and the nurse would say, "It will be over soon."

But to the sufferer, time stands still.

Finally, that horrible tube was removed from my right arm and I thought I could at least rest for a while. But something else was bothering me now. I felt some pressure in my abdomen, as though I had a very full bladder. Dear me, the catheter must be blocked and urine accumulating in my bladder!

I urgently rang for the nurse.

“Nurse, please empty my bladder for me, it is bursting!”

“Mrs. Chua, you haven’t got anything in the bladder; it’s all empty,” she replied.

“The bag must be full then, please empty it.”

“No, there are 200 cc more to go.”

I must have appeared extremely stupid to her. “When can the catheter be removed?” I asked anxiously. She went out to check and came back, informing me cheerfully, “Tonight at 9 pm sharp.”

“What’s the time now?”

“1 pm.”

I still had to bear the uncomfortable feeling for another 8 hours! I was not sure if I could survive that long.

Feeling rather miserable, I began to recapitulate what led me to my present state, and what lessons the Lord wanted me to learn through this experience.

A few weeks before my operation, I was enjoying good health and was busily involved in my two major research projects, namely, “Congenital Hypothyroid Screening in Singapore” and “Breast Cancer Research”. I was so busy that I had no time to sit down to think, to feel, or to have fellowship with brothers and sisters. Even Bible reading was done hastily and doing editorial work for ‘Fishers’ had become a burden rather than a joy.

I knew I had to slow down, but how? I could not even afford to get sick because the cell cultures that I had started needed constant attention. Family commitments, church work.... Lord, I wish I could just put up my legs and rest at home for one whole day! That wish was granted in the most unexpected way. It was not just one whole day but one whole month!

On 30 July 1982, I accompanied my mother-in-law to a medical check-up. She was complaining of a slight discomfort in the lower abdomen, since I was there in the clinic, I decided to have my check-up too even though my annual visit was not due until a month later.

In fact every year I looked forward to my annual checkup, because my doctor is a god-fearing man; besides looking after his patients physically, he also cares for their spiritual well being. For me, it was like visiting an old friend once a year. Each time I went for my examination, he would say cheerfully, “All is clear, you are alright!” Then he would spend five to ten of his precious minutes talking to me about spiritual things. After that I would say, “Good-bye, thank you.”

This time, something unusual happened. Before I had the chance to crack a joke, I noticed a serious expression on his face as he was performing the examination.

“I feel a cyst in your right ovary.”

“How big?”

“As big as a big egg!”

Impossible! How could I not feel anything if there was an “egg” growing inside me?

"Nurse, please bring Mrs. Chua to do a scan." The ultrasound scanning confirmed that I had a cyst about 7 cm in diameter in my right ovary.

Dr. Tow said to me, "Arrange for an operation at your earliest convenience and commit the whole thing to the Lord."

Coming out from the clinic, I felt very lost. My mother-in-law had to comfort me and asked me not to worry too much about it. She had turned out to be alright and I was not. I was not sure what worried me most; The operation? The cyst? The possibility of having cancer of the ovary? A slow and painful death? or perhaps all of the above!

"God, please give me the strength to go through another operation!" (I have had two previous abdominal operations when the children were born.)

Mother-in-law went home by herself, and I had to wait for my husband to pick me up after work. I stood at the roadside thinking of how to break the news to him; maybe I should not tell him anything until the operation was over. Well, that was only wishful thinking.

Finally the car arrived. I sat next to the man I love most in the world, and yet I could not share freely with him my fears at that moment. As he drove along, he whistled a happy tune as usual. Obviously, he did not see the anxiety written on my face.

"Don't you want to know the result of my check-up today?"

"Yes, what about it?"

"Bad news, I need an operation!"

I thank God for giving me a husband who is not easily excitable and who can face every situation calmly. I am just the opposite. I always imagine the worst that can happen to me. While we were waiting for our son to come out from school, he made me tell him exactly what the doctor had diagnosed and then he sat quietly beside me. I was not sure whether he was thinking or praying, but I was scared stiff. I had looked up to him for all major decisions in our lives for the past twelve years of our marriage, and now I was confident that he would make the right decision for me.

"Do you think we need a second opinion?"

I said that just to break the silence. He smiled and said, "What kind of second opinion do you want? We can have a CT Scan done in the hospital tomorrow if you want." He was so calm that I felt as though we were discussing about one of his many cancer patients, and not his wife!

A CT Scan was done and an operation was decided upon to find out what kind of cyst I had growing inside me.

Since I had promised to play a piano duet with my daughter on the "Musical Night" in church on 9 August, I arranged to have the operation done on 12 August. The week prior to my hospitalization was spent making arrangements for technicians and colleagues to take over my work in the laboratory, and for brothers and sisters to look after duties in the church.

Each time brothers and sisters came to tell me that they would be praying for me, I felt like crying. Who am I that I should deserve so much care and love from fellow Christians? Younger Christians had always looked up to me as someone steady and strong in the faith but at times like these, I knew that I was not as strong as I would like to be. I have always encouraged those who had to go through pain and suffering to turn to the Lord for comfort and strength, but

when the time came for me to go through suffering, I was devoid of words to comfort myself. I wished I could hold on to someone and have a good cry to get everything out of my system. But I did not want to transmit my fear to my husband and children.

“Lord, may Your will be done and I commit my life into Your hand!”

With this prayer, I took a taxi to the hospital by myself...

“Mrs. Chua, I am coming to remove your catheter.”

Was I ever pleased to hear that! Thank God, the last tube had been removed from my body. I was unable to move freely yet because of the pain in my abdomen. By the fourth day, I could get up and sit down on the chair with a bit of assistance. It was then that I noticed the many floral baskets and get-well wishes lined on the shelf for me.

Thank God for all those who offered prayers, supplication and thanksgiving for me, especially my doctor who came to pray for me the night before the operation. After the operation, he came again to offer thanks to God for preserving my life to serve Him. Praise God for Christian doctors all over the world!

The histological report showed that I had no cancer of the ovary. I can never finish writing about all the wonderful things God has done for me. Unworthy as I am, He cares for me and His mercy endures forever.

A crisis like this was needed in my life to remind me of the fragility of this physical body, and to put my perspective of life right before my Heavenly Father, who is the Giver of our lives.

Paul's words in Ephesians 5:15-17 were especially precious to me,

“Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.”

May God help me to spend my time wisely for Him so that I may not sin against Him by robbing His time.

I would like to share with you a hymn, which never fails to touch my heart each time I sing it, to conclude my testimony:

THANKS TO GOD

Thanks to God for my Redeemer,
Thanks for all Thou dost provide!
Thanks for times now but a mem'ry,
Thanks for Jesus by my side!
Thanks for pleasant, balmy springtime,
Thanks for dark and dreary fall!
Thanks for tears by now forgotten,
Thanks for peace within my soul!
Thanks for prayers that Thou hast answered,
Thanks for what Thou dost deny!
Thanks for storms that I have weathered,
Thanks for all Thou dost supply!
Thanks for pain, and thanks for pleasure,
Thanks for comfort in despair!

Thanks for grace that none can measure,
Thanks for love beyond compare!
Thanks for roses by the wayside,
Thanks for thorns their stems contain!
Thanks for home and thanks for fireside,
Thanks for hope that sweet refrain!
Thanks for joy and thanks for sorrow,
Thanks for heav'nly peace with Thee!
Thanks for hope in the tomorrow,
Thanks thro' all eternity!

XI

BEYOND THE SUNSET

On 4 December 1982, three and half months after my major operation, I climbed up the plane which would take me to Honolulu and then Toronto to visit my close relatives. I had taken several similar trips before, but this time my heart lacked the joy and enthusiasm I used to have. I felt very sad and burdened as I did not know what awaited me in Toronto.

The words of my eldest sister Yvette kept coming back to me as I sat alone in the plane to meditate upon the past.

“..... if you want to see Mother again, you must come fast. She is getting weaker each day and her memory is going too ...”

The last telephone call from her before I left Singapore was “..... Auntie Edith (Mother's sister-in-law who was very close to her) has just passed away. Come in time for the funeral on 7 December

I remember Auntie Edith well. She was very kind to us when we arrived in Hong Kong from China. One of my sisters and I stayed with her family until Mother could find a place for all of us to live in. She and my Uncle had left Hong Kong to join their daughter Shirley in Toronto, but shortly after that she died of cancer of the bladder. The thought of starting my visit with a funeral was really depressing, though I liked to pay my last respects to an aunt who had been very close to the family.

In Honolulu, I was received warmly by my second sister Elaine and I stayed there for two days just to catch my breath before continuing my journey to Canada. We had it arranged such that Elaine would arrive in Toronto two weeks after my arrival. In this way, we could spend Christmas with Mother together, and after I had left Toronto, Elaine would look after Mother for another three weeks. Both of us, however, were extremely apprehensive about this trip that we were about to take to visit our Mother.

Yvette met me at the airport with a thick coat as it was snowing heavily outside. I had not seen so much snow since I left Canada in 1970, and when I saw Mother in her apartment, not only were my hands and feet stiff, my whole heart froze. I could not recognise the weak and frail woman standing at the door to greet me! She was not the Mother I used to know, and tears flowed down my cheek as I said in a choked voice,

“Mummy, your Dixie is home...” I must thank God for sending me to Mother at the right time when she needed help most. I bought her cards and helped her to reply letters. I wanted to do all the things that we used to enjoy doing, but her responses were slow and nothing seemed to be able to arouse her interest, not even the pot of beautiful white and pink Azalea that I presented to her. It really hurt to see her going downhill so rapidly at the age of 72. She was full of fear instead of the self-confidence which I used to admire. Her ears, which were once very musical, were afraid to hear any loud sound; her hands, which had written many lovely poems and letters to me, could hardly hold the pen; her hospitable personality suddenly withdrew into a shell.....

I knew that the day for her to go home to God was drawing near, but I was too sad to accept it, and I cried silently at night after I heard the familiar heavy breathing which Mother always had in her sleep. There I was lying in the same room with the person who had brought me into this world, nurtured me until I could stand on my own feet, loved me in spite of all my folly, and yet I could not even bear for her a fraction of her pain and suffering towards the end of her life.

Indeed, no one can walk through 'the valley of the shadow of death' with us, except the Lord whom we trust. I prayed that God would help Mother to go through it with less pain and agony.

On 22 December, Elaine arrived at Toronto around noon. Though Mother was happy to see all her three daughters with her, she expressed regret that she was not well enough to cook us a sumptuous meal, as she used to do on our previous family reunions. We comforted her, and brought her to the hospital as she had been complaining of breathlessness since early that morning. At 4.00 pm we reached the Western Hospital and rushed her to the emergency unit. That was the last time we saw her alive. Half an hour later, the doctor came to inform us that Mother was gone. We cried unashamedly like three little girls, though we knew that she had gone to a far better place where she would suffer no more...

Early next morning, I went for a walk in the snow to clear my mind. The brisk winter wind of the northern hemisphere awakened me from my nightmare of having to face the death of a person I loved so much. I walked through the street on which Mother and I had taken many strolls in the snow on one of my previous visits. But this time there was only one set of footprints on the fresh sheet of snow. Though her feet would never make prints on this earth again, the lovely prints she had made before shall be stamped indelibly upon the path of my memory...

My younger brother Daniel arrived at Toronto a few days later to attend the funeral on 28 December 1982. This occasion had brought the four of us together from different parts of the world to give one another support and comfort, and to share one another's pain, a pain which no other persons around could have understood.

As I stood there looking at the lifeless body lying before us, I could not help but give thanks to God for the life He had graciously given to raise us up single handedly after Father passed away 35 years ago. The four 'pearls' which Father left behind have been well polished by her with the help of God; Yvette is a qualified nurse and piano teacher, Elaine with a Masters degree in Sociology is working in the Kaiser Hospital in Hawaii, Daniel is a Professor in Kansas State University and I am a Clinical Biochemist attached to the Department of Medicine, National University of Singapore. What we are today is the fruit of her labour of love and we know that we will always miss her as long as we live. She had performed her duty well for 72 years, and now God had taken her home to rest in the arms of Jesus. She was like a piece of precious jewel taken to the factory of her Creator for the final stage of perfection. When we see the Lord face to face, we shall be perfect as He is perfect. What a great hope it is for those who belong to Him!

Mother had been a generous giver and a gracious receiver all her life. Rev. Bruce W. Neal's sermon depicted Mother as a person full of grace. I would like to share part of it with you:

...Grace is a gentle word. Grace. It slides softly from the tongue. One syllable. Quickly said. Yet large and warming when its meaning breaks over you: like a smile which comes across a person's face, or a flower opening on a summer morning, or a line of music which suddenly moves you with its beauty. Grace.

It's a word which child or adult, parent or teacher, find difficult to define: but who needs a dictionary at a moment like this? It's what it expresses, the note it sounds, the shape and colour it gives to life which makes the essential point: grace.

It means receiving... receiving gifts of love and beauty: like the green hills of China and school rooms of Hong Kong - the heads of children bent to their writing and the sounds of voices repeating the words of the teacher...like the music of piano and organ pipes, gospel song and choir - and the offered prayers of persons close to you... like mealtime conversations and the warmth of family faces - parents, brothers, sisters, husband, children, grandchildren... the love of generations wherever they may be.

Grace means receiving... warm house, full bowl, friends at the door - safe journeys and providential care... - strength in the midst of weakness, joy in the midst of pain... - persons with whom to sing and worship, persons with whom to share the faith.

Grace is receiving... the good news of the Word of God, the loving presence of the Holy Spirit, and the gift of eternal life.

Grace means receiving good things we have no reason to merit or expect - which is why we call them gifts of grace.

It seems that every time we turn around, there is another gift to be received... for there is a 'givenness' to life which nothing can destroy. God made it this way.

Grace.

It also means giving: giving graciously, warmly, freely, of love and kindness: skills, smiles, a gentle way, a listening ear, a teaching word, and encouragement to others.

It means making home, cooking supper, sharing things. It means crocheted colour well and truly done, tunes well played, songs well sung.

Yet, more than that, it means going through a war together... and then having to bring up a family as a widow, as a teacher, as a person who learned by experience how essential faith must be. Grace means giving...and caring that others too can hope and believe.

It means that every time we turn around there is another gift to be given, another call to be generous... for there is a giving to life which creates its richest meanings. God made it this way.

But receiving and giving and talk about God's grace do not mean that everything is sweetness and light.

Long illnesses and unhappy limitations, pain and the necessities of patience are so very, very real. There are diseases to be fought and crises to be faced and the gaunt reality of death.

Yet our shared witness is that grace makes the difference between hollow disasters and hopeful possibilities... that God's gift of grace, revealed in Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord, makes the difference between anxious self-concern and shareable courage, between frightening limitations and eternal living. It makes all the difference... in this world and the next!

It makes all the difference because... *"God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."* (John 3:16)

We believe that neither death nor sorrow, sin nor evil, failure nor downward slide can have the last word. The gospel proclaims that any dark event can be transformed into the light of a new possibility... by the grace of God and your faith and mine.

The good news of Jesus Christ is the gift of eternal life... partly known in our three score years and ten, fully known in the heavenly Kingdom of our Lord.

This is the way that death loses its sting. It becomes a comma in the sentence instead of the period at the bottom of the page. It becomes light at the end of a tunnel instead of the darkness of a cave. It becomes the gateway to fulfillment instead of the nothing at the end of the road. It becomes the moment of newness instead of just the finish of the old.

So the gift is given for eternal living. And we are now called to discover the gifts in this that has happened to us: gifts of deeper faith, stronger hope and greater love.

This morning we give thanks for one who shared grace with us. May our faith and our living be gracious!

I was very touched by the message delivered that morning. Though Rev. Neal of the Walmer Road Baptist Church, Toronto, knew Mother for only a few years, his description of Mother's life was so vivid that one would have thought that they had known each other all their lives. Amidst the sea of sorrow of such a great loss, I was able to thank God for such a loving Mother, who had selflessly given all to her children throughout her life.

Every mother is special to her child in her own way, and mine had left me a great wealth of spiritual legacies. May God help me to use them to glorify His Name by following her example in love, faith and hope till we meet again in the

LAND BEYOND THE SUNSET!

Lord, leave me not to linger on,
When my work for Thee is done,
But gently call me by my name,
And I will gladly come.
Jesus, my Saviour and my Lord,
I long for Thee and Home
And Thy, "Well Done!"

XII

THE JOY OF A WORKING MOTHER

After the excitement of our wedding and honeymoon was over, I found life rather quiet, sitting at home with nothing to do. We were staying with Eugene's parents and the household chores were taken care of by the faithful old servant, Ah Hor. Soon, I found that I was watching the clock from 7:30 am to 5.00 pm for Eugene to come home. I have always led a busy life since young and eating the bread of idleness was not my cup of tea!

I decided that I had to look for a job for two reasons. Firstly, I wanted to earn some money to send to my Mother who was in Canada, as she needed her children's support, and secondly, I wished to contribute what I had learnt in the University of Manitoba to the new country I had adopted through marriage.

Everyday I scanned the advertisements in the newspapers for jobs suitable for a graduate with a Master's degree in Science. I did not realize that looking for a post in the early seventies was such a trying thing. I applied for a job at the YWCA and one of the three ladies who interviewed me said, "Mrs. Chua, you are much better qualified than those of us here. You should join us over this side of the bench to interview other candidates!" The result was that I did not get the post, but received invitations to organise charitable functions.

On another occasion, I was offered a teaching post in a music school located at the border between Singapore and Malaysia. If I were to take up that post I would have had to travel to Malaysia everyday! Later, I was offered the post of Relief Teacher in the Singapore International School, and my first assignment was to take over the teaching during the Chinese New Year holidays when other teachers wanted to take leave. When I turned down that request, I was not given another chance.

While I was waiting for a suitable job, I went to church to help in the library and also compiled a chorus book containing all the favourite songs I had learnt in Canada. I also attended a Sunday School Teachers' Training Course conducted by Scripture Union and enrolled in a Christian Writers' Correspondence Course. Since then I have been involved in the literature ministry of the church.

Six months after my marriage, I was offered the post of Demonstrator in the Department of Physiology at the then University of Singapore. It was not a taxing job for me because Physiology was my best subject in the university. Shortly after I had accepted the offer, I found that I was expecting our first child.

I continued to work even after Linette was born on 15 March 1972, until Eugene left for London to take up a postgraduate course in Therapeutic Radiology. Linette was six months old when we took her to England. I enjoyed being a full-time housewife even though it meant getting up five times a night at the slightest noise made by the baby. As soon as I had warmed up the blanket in a freezing cold night, Linette would call me up to attend to her. It never dawned on me that I should wake Eugene up when the baby cried. After all, he had a heavy schedule the next day at the hospital and I was staying at home looking after the baby ONLY.

I was literally working day and night with short rests in between. Surprisingly, I survived with the help of God and the whole family was happy and healthy. No matter how hard I had to work, I believed that a family should stay together, and it was my responsibility to take care of my own child, rather than to leave her with someone else in Singapore while we spent fifteen months in London.

We made it a point to go to church every Sunday, rain or shine, wind or snow. We stayed at St. Nicholas Glebe, about 15 minutes' walk to Tooting Broadway Subway station, and another

hour or so from the church in central London. Every Sunday we bundled Linette up and pushed her to church. We attended the Chinese Church in London for the fifteen months of our stay there. It was not easy to travel with a young child in the winter, but I felt this was not the excuse for parents with small children to be absent from worship service. If you honour the Lord, He will honour you and bless you more than your expectations.

Though Linette was too young to understand anything that was preached, we wanted to harness in her the habit of worshipping God on the Lord's Day. There is no way parents can teach their children to honour God if they themselves do not observe the commandments of the Lord.

We made friends with the foreign students there, as well as learnt great lessons on the loving kindness of our God in protecting us in a place so far away from home. Eugene passed his examinations and we came home before Linette was two years old.

With Linette under the loving care of my mother-in-law and the old servant, I was back to work at the Physiology Department once we got ourselves organized. Though I have been a working mother ever since, I make it a point to spend as much time with my children as possible when I am home. Linus was born on 1 August 1974, and we were thankful to have Grandma Fung to look after him until he was one year old. I thank God for my in-laws who took a keen interest in our children when they were young, so that I could take up a fulltime job in the University. Later on, I was transferred to the Department of Medicine to fill the post of Clinical Biochemist doing medical research full-time. In this new post, I was able to make use of the research experience I had in Canada, and to keep myself abreast with new developments in the rapidly progressing field of medical research.

My ministry in the church was temporarily suspended when the children were very young. As soon as Linus was able to sit through the nursery class in the Junior Sunday School, I was back to lead a class in the Senior section. I have always been involved in the literature ministry in one way or another, and I enjoy writing articles for Fishers, our church magazine, whenever the Lord inspires me to do so for His glory.

I strongly believe that primarily I am a Christian holding several responsibilities: that of wife, mother, research worker, Sunday School teacher, editor of Fishers, and others as the Lord opens the way. Whatever I am doing, I am a handmaid of God serving Him as He enables me. I often pray for wisdom to divide my time properly so that my family will not suffer because of my busy schedule. I thank God for a husband who serves Him uninterruptedly in spite of the arrival of the children, and I also thank God for two obedient and god-fearing children who prefer church activities to worldly attractions. I pray that God will preserve and prepare them to be His clean and useful vessels in time to come.

The best thing a mother can give to her children is not only her time, but also her example of living a god-fearing life. The spiritual legacy that she is leaving to her children is better than any material possessions, like properties, jewellery etc., that she can accumulate for them.

The decision to be a working mother or full-time mother depends very much on personal conviction, and each case is unique in its circumstances. As for my case, I am convicted that my job has helped me to organize myself better and I can live a more disciplined life. Knowing that I cannot afford to spend too much time on anything I do, I make extra effort to do a job well within the time limit. My children learn to be less dependent on me because they know that Mother is always busy doing something, and they enjoy and treasure the time I spend with them.

In 1977, our Pastor, Mr. Huang Ee Yuen asked me to be involved in the preaching ministry in the Worship Service once every two months. I prayed to God and asked for guidance. With much fear and trembling before Him, I took up the challenge, considering it a great privilege to share with brothers and sisters what I have learnt before the Almighty God.

In 1981, the former Head of the Department of Medicine, Prof. P.K. Wong, encouraged me to pick up my studies again so that I could complete my Ph.D. degree, which is an added advantage for all academic staff. I battled with the idea for four months before I finally decided to take his advice, on the condition that my service to God and my family must not be adversely affected. I was prepared to quit otherwise. I thank God for helping me to complete the whole project within five years on a part-time basis, and now while I am waiting for the oral examination, the Lord inspires me to write articles to testify to His goodness and mercy to a person as unworthy as I am.

Indeed, I am enjoying my role as a mother and a research worker in the National University of Singapore tremendously. I am kept busy and alert all the time as I wait for His Second Coming. The words of David in Psalm 103:1-5 express my gratitude to the Lord at this stage of my life:

“Praise the Lord, O my soul;
all my inmost being, praise His holy name.
“Praise the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not His benefits -
“who forgives all my sins
and heals all my diseases,
“who redeems my life from the pit
and crowns me with love and compassion.
“He satisfies my desires with good things,
so that my youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”

XIII

RAIMENT OF WHITE

INTRODUCTION

Gail, one of the first few girls I met after my arrival in Winnipeg, was very good in sewing. I must stress that it was out of necessity rather than fondness that she developed the skill of using the sewing machine. She was one inch shorter than I and both of us stood like midgets among our Canadian colleagues. Each time we went to the departmental stores to hunt for dresses, our efforts were guaranteed to be futile. After a few disappointed encounters, we decided to sew our own dresses and be proud to wear them.

We had many enjoyable evenings designing, cutting and sewing our latest creations together. It was through her influence and encouragement that I dared to dream of sewing my own wedding gown, and I made that dream a reality in the Summer of 1970. Eugene and I were engaged on 9 May 1970, with half the world separating us, and my engagement ring did not arrive until July through Eugene's friend Dr. Zee, who was returning to Winnipeg with his wife during their honeymoon. With the diamond ring on my finger, I began the project with much sweetness and delight.

Looking at the completed garment, I was inspired to write the following story to remind myself of the Second Coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and how a Christian should make himself ready for that glorious occasion, as a Bride getting ready for her wedding.

THE STORY

Christine is engaged to be married!

The most exciting and thrilling moment in a girl's life is to be chosen from among all woman kind to be the bride of a good and faithful man. It is an honour high above all honours to wear the crown of love he so gently places upon her head. After hearing this wonderful news, all her friends come to congratulate her and to admire her engagement ring which she proudly wears on her finger. This ring is a symbol of his love for her and by wearing it, she has proclaimed to the public that henceforth she belongs to her beloved alone. What sacred promise and trust they have for each other!

Joshua, her fiance, comes from another country. After he has finished his business and has found himself a bride-to-be, he goes back to his home town to get ready for the wedding.

Before he leaves, he says to Christine,

"Do not feel sad, my dear. In my Father's house there are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. After I have prepared a place for you, I will come again, and receive you as my Bride. Wherever I go, I shall bring you along with me and there shall be no separation anymore."⁽¹⁾

By now, Christine's eyes are a bit moist and she can even feel the loneliness that will come once Joshua leaves her.

"Christine dear, I still have many things to say to you, but I am afraid you might not be able to remember and understand all of them now. After I am gone, I shall send letters to you to comfort you, and let you know what I want you to do while waiting for my return⁽²⁾. You will feel sad now, but when I see you again, your heart shall rejoice and no man can take away that joy from you⁽³⁾."

Hearing all these comforting words, Christine's fear and worries begin to subside.

"I shall always pray for you, dear, and ask God to keep you from temptation and danger. When I come for you, I want you to be the most glorious Bride on earth."

The charming lady's big dark eyes begin to brighten up and her lips part to give the sweetest smile from someone in love.

"When am I coming back? Well, I shall keep this a secret and big surprise for you⁽⁴⁾. Anyway, in the meantime I have a very pleasant assignment for you while you are waiting for my return."

What could be a more pleasant assignment for her than to sew her own wedding gown? It shall be ready for the big day when she can be united in mind and soul, heart and body with the man worthy of all her sacred trust.

After Joshua leaves, Christine starts her assignment immediately. In spite of the intricacies of sewing such an expensive and exquisite gown, her heart is filled with delight and her mind is occupied with nothing else but her fiance's speedy return. Every stitch is done with utmost care and love. When the whole gown is finished, she puts it on and admires her handiwork in front of the long mirror. How beautiful she looks! She feels rather satisfied and hopes secretly that her beloved will appear that very instant to praise her work and beauty.

At that moment, her mother comes in and hands her a letter. The handwriting tells her that it is from none other than her fiancé. Her heart rate increases, her eyes brighten up and even her temperature seems to rise at that split second. With shaking hands she tears open the envelope for she cannot be bothered to look for the letter-opener. The sweetness that rises, from the bottom of her heart to her lips as she reads those loving words is the feeling experienced only by those who are deeply in love. Besides the assurance of his love and return, Joshua always leaves room for more instructions.

"... I know by now you must have finished the ground work of the gown, but it will be too plain for the wedding. You must also sew on the best sequins and gems you can find to beautify the white garment. I am sending you the most popular design from my country for you to follow so that you won't feel out of fashion when you wear your wedding gown in this place..."

How considerate Joshua is! Christine is more than happy to follow the instructions and to do a good job on the gown. There is nothing too hard that love cannot do. Her hands never seem to be tired of sewing, her eyes fix upon the smallest gem for that wonderful design and her mind concentrates on nothing but her assignment.

Days go by, but there is no sign of her Joshua's return. Her hands become rough and sore from sewing, her eyes are blurred due to the strain, and her mind wanders with imagination. Shadows begin to gather and doubts increase with days. She no longer looks at the white garment with the same interest and freshness that she had at the beginning. What a sad picture to behold. Gradually, the impatient bride-to-be sews on the garment in whatever manner she likes and forgets all about the instructions from her beloved.

At the time when she was least prepared, there is a loud noise at the door. A servant with a trumpet in his hand announces the arrival of his Master to receive his Bride to the wedding. This is the wonderful moment Christine longs for but she is in great panic: her hair is in a mess; she cannot remember where her shoes are; above all, her dress is only partly decorated... There is no time to waste, the Master is already here and she has to go to the wedding whether she is prepared or not. She puts on the white garment with shame, knowing that she could have done better. As she walks towards her beloved, she recalls his words,

“Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.”⁽⁵⁾

“I know your deeds...”

“I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness...”⁽⁶⁾

“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline...”⁽⁷⁾

Her beloved looks at her and has mercy upon her.

“This is not what I really want. Come, let me make you more presentable for the wedding.”

He removes the unwanted parts on the garment and throws them into the fire. To Christine’s surprise, in spite of her weakness and incompleteness she is accepted in the Beloved ⁽⁸⁾ though she is not totally acceptable to him in all she had done. ⁽⁹⁾ After this final touch, she hears the people around them shout,

“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride had made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)⁽¹⁰⁾

How Christine wishes that she has really “made herself ready” for that glorious day.

References from the Bible:

- (1) John 14:1-3
- (2) John 16:12, 13
- (3) John 16:22
- (4) Acts 1:7
- (5) Revelation 3:3
- (6) Revelation 3:18a
- (7) Revelation 3:19a
- (8) Ephesians 1:6
- (9) 2 Corinthians 5:9
- (10) Revelation 19:7, 8

XIV

GOODBYE CHARLIE!

A Chapter from Mummy's Diary. December 1978

"Mummy, I miss Charlie!"

Each time we mentioned Charlie, a puppy which we kept for only two weeks, sadness masked your six-year-old face as your eyes stared at the verandah which the two-month-old puppy used to occupy.

We all loved Charlie. He was a mongrel with four white paws, white furry chest and a dark brown coat, cute little black tail, black buttoned nose and a pair of intelligent-looking big eyes. Even Daddy who is not particularly fond of dogs found Charlie a charming companion. He was the one who gave the puppy his name.

Charlie was given to us by a friend of mine on 10 November 1978. Since we were flat-dwellers I had to bring him downstairs at six o'clock in the morning so that he could run around and do his business on the turf around the compound. I had never realized how fresh the air was early in the morning, until I brought Charlie for a walk before the family woke up. The dew which still lingered upon the grass made my feet wet, and I could not help singing the hymn "In the Garden" softly to myself. How sweet it was to remember the Lord alone early in the morning! Charlie ran around and enjoyed his freedom for fifteen minutes. When we went to work and you went to the kindergarten, Charlie would be locked up in the verandah because the servant told me that she did not like animals and she was not going to look after Charlie for us.

You were the one who loved the fluffy puppy most. One evening, I saw you holding Charlie in your arms and rocking him to sleep on your rocking horse. Your voice sounded so sweet as you sang "Lullaby" to him. I said to myself if the puppy could give my daughter so much joy, mopping the verandah twice a day and bringing the dog for walks were not too much trouble for me. When I was at your age, I had a puppy all to myself. I bathed him, fed him and even slept with him every night. The only difference was that we had a garden for him to run around when I was in Hong Kong.

In the afternoon when you and Linus were taking your nap, Charlie would lie outside your room with his tummy flat on the floor. We all said that he looked like a grilled suckling piglet when he slept that way. I could not help but stroke his back and wake him up to play with me.

Because of Charlie we made many friends in the neighbourhood. Teenagers and toddlers, who never knew of my existence before, came to befriend me as they crowded around to admire our new pet. You were very proud to announce to them, "This is my dog. His name is Charlie!"

The first Sunday Charlie was with us, we brought him down to the sandpit to play. Three Malay girls came around and admired the dog from a distance.

"Come and play with us." I said.

They shook their heads and replied disappointedly.

"We are Muslims, we cannot touch dogs."

I took the opportunity to tell them about the love of God and how He created all things in this world for us to enjoy. The cute puppy was God's creation too. They seemed to be amazed to

know that the God we believe is so close and loving to us. To them religion means a lot of “dos” and “don’t”. They did not understand the love of God at all.

Two Indian girls were particularly attracted by Charlie. I had the chance to tell them about God while we were playing with him. Soon I came to realize that a little dog, who seemed to be so insignificant, had been providing opportunities for us to share the Gospel with the children in the neighbourhood.

November is the monsoon season in Singapore. Thunderstorms and continual raining had forced us to keep Charlie in the flat the whole day.

I could hear you and your brother shouting all the time.

“Mummy, Charlie has urinated on the carpet!”

“Mummy, help! Charlie is biting my socks!”

“Mummy, Charlie is chewing up Daddy’s shoe!”

“Mummy, come, Charlie

There were endless complaints from you two. I found myself running in circles trying to find out what disaster Charlie was causing next. The servant too became very unhappy about the situation and was threatening to leave us.

After having Charlie for two weeks, I came to the conclusion that we could not keep him any longer. It was unfair to him as an active puppy, to be locked up in a small verandah and it was also very unpleasant for the servant, who kept the flat so clean only to see it dirty again in no time.

On 25 November, two weeks after Charlie’s arrival, we had a very serious discussion at dinner time, and I concluded,

“We had better give Charlie back to Auntie. I don’t think we should keep him in the flat any longer.”

Linus, your four-year-old brother, readily agreed because Charlie was always biting his toy soldiers while he was playing with them on the floor. You felt sad but agreed that we had no choice but to part with him. You comforted yourself saying,

“If we had a garden, we could keep Charlie, but it is too troublesome for Mummy to clean up the flat for Charlie.”

With sadness in your heart, you carried the puppy into the car and we drove him back to his parents.

“Goodbye Charlie!”

With tears in your eyes, you waved at him and we quickly drove away before I lost control of my emotions.

After we arrived home you said, “Isn’t this place quiet without Charlie?”

I knew what you meant. You suddenly felt lost when something you liked so much was no longer there for you to hold and love. I felt sad too.

My dear daughter, all the things we have in this world are only temporary; they are lent to us by God for a while, and we must not cling on to them as though they would be with us forever.

Charlie was a pet you owned for only two weeks and yet you have so much feeling for him. Even your brother was clamouring to have the puppy back.

Nowadays, I always hear you complaining about your brother or your friends. You tell me that they irritate you and refuse to play the game your way. You are only six years old; how can I make you understand what it means to be appreciative towards others? I pray that God will help you to learn the lesson of love and forgiveness towards others when you grow up.

I have two sisters and a younger brother. We used to disagree with each other and even fought over small things. The night before my eldest sister sailed to England for her nursing course in 1955, my mother said to us as we sat in our room talking,

“Treasure this moment together because you won’t know when you four will be together again.”

She was right. That was the last time we four were together in the twenty-three years that have passed. We are now scattered all over the world, Yvette in Toronto, Elaine in Hawaii, I in Singapore and Daniel in Manhattan, USA, and we have never again been together all in one place. (Note: In 1981 we gathered together in Toronto to celebrate Mothers 70th birthday and in December 1982 we met again at her funeral).

You may not like your brother because he always boxes you and takes away your toys; you may not like your friends because they refuse to give in to your ways. But my dear daughter, remember one thing: they are sent from God to keep you company for a while; we never know when all these friends would be separated from us and we cannot enjoy their company any more.

Therefore let us treasure every moment we have with each other and with our friends, as you had treasured Charlie’s company till you said, “Goodbye Charlie!”

XV

MUMMY, I DON'T MIND

A Chapter from Mummy's Diary - October 1978.

The whole flat had finally calmed down after about an hour's shouting, screaming, spanking and crying...

Peace came back to the home again when I held out my hands to receive you, my four-year-old son, into my embrace and placed you on my lap. Your tears were still streaming down your little cheeks while you hands were rubbing the cane marks on your legs.

As I wiped your tears away with my cheek and gently soothed away the pain on your legs, I said,

"Sorry Son, Mummy had to punish you when you were so naughty and disobedient." Looking at me with complete confidence you said, "Mummy, I don't mind you punishing me, because I know you love me."

Deeply touched by what you said, I held you closer to my heart and showered upon you more loving kisses.

My dear son, I really do not wish to use the cane to make you an obedient child. Inflicting those marks on you hurts me more than the pain you feel on your legs when I do so. An hour ago you were wild beyond control. Instead of putting the toys away as you were told, you threw them all over the place. After that you opened all the doors of the cupboards and slammed them as hard as you could to show your temper. Then you took your sister's exercise book and tore it into pieces... I had to stop you with a cane before you hurt yourself and others unnecessarily.

Then you are asked me, "Will God punish me if I am naughty?"

Yes, God loves each one of us, and He knows what is best for us. If we do something that will harm others or ourselves, God must stop our foolish actions by some kind of punishment. The Bible tells us that "*because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son.*" (Hebrews 12:6).

I tried to explain spiritual truth with simple words that a four-year-old boy could understand. You were quite satisfied to know that your punishment was for your own good.

Laying your head against my shoulder, you murmured,

"Mummy, I really don't mind you spanking me....."

The sweet and peaceful smile reappeared on your chubby cheeks as you fell asleep in my arms.

That night, I prayed to the Lord that I, too, would be receptive towards His chastening as a child and be willing to be moulded by the Master according to His will. There are many lessons a mother can learn from her own children as she raises them up to be useful and god-fearing individuals.

I was reminded once again of my responsibility as a parent to discipline my children through these two verses in Proverbs,

"He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him."
(13:24)

“Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death.”
(19:18)