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**Trauma is Poverty's Twin: Stories that Shaped My Journey**  
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The story of God's call to me to live and minister among the urban poor began in the stories of my mother and father. My mom grew up in poverty amidst the wickedness of Nazi Germany. Like many immigrants, she didn't speak much about her past when I was growing up, but preferred to focus on the future. She was utterly un-sentimental about Germany. I remember asking her during my childhood about her blind eye. She explained that she had a lazy eye as a child, and they simply covered it up due to poor medical care, which weakened her eye and caused her to lose her sight. Her toes were also deformed because, to save money, she had to wear handed-down shoes from her sister that were too small for her. My mom had these visible scars of poverty on her body. Her stories enabled me to understand that poverty is a condition which can befall any person, no matter how hard they work and how capable they are. I understood that poor people were just like my mom—and just like me.

Her poverty caused her to suffer significant trauma as well. Much of what happened to her I have learned later in life, but when I was young she relayed how she went to help her aunt in Munich for a year when she was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Her aunt brought her to a field near a concentration camp. She asked my mom, "Do you know who goes to places like this?" My mom said, "They take the Jewish people there." Her aunt said, "That's right. But they aren't the only ones who go there. If you defend the Jewish people, and speak up on their behalf, or if you say anything against the government, they'll take *you* there, too." To this day, I ponder the incomprehensible terror of being exposed to that evil at such a young age. By contrast, when I was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, I lived in a lovely suburb of Minneapolis, took piano lessons, rode my bike around our neighborhood with my friends, and was in Campfire Girls. I learned that trauma is poverty's twin.

My father grew up on the Iron Range in Northern Minnesota in a Yugoslavian immigrant community. He was raised by his aunt and uncle who adopted him, since his mother died during his birth. My father's first language was Serbo-Croatian, and he learned English when he went

to school. He occasionally told me about life in the iron ore mines, which was where his father worked. He likened iron ore mining in Minnesota to coal mining at sub-zero temperatures. From my father I understood that although a business leader may be a nice person socially, they might, through an organization or system, cause great harm to other people. In the case of the miners in my father's community, the harm included unnecessary accidents and deaths, and low pay for very hard and dangerous work. "In the best situations," he used to say, "an employer treats their employees with fairness and they are able to work problems out with mutual respect. But when that isn't the case, you need a union." I learned from him that in order to end injustice one must be willing to confront it and organize people against it.

When I was a college student, I was involved in the ministry of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship at Occidental College in Los Angeles. Prior to college, I had studied the Bible very little. During that time the Scripture was taught powerfully in an inductive way that forced me to think. Our campus fellowship was a community around the Word. I couldn't get enough of the Bible. A passion for the Word permeated our whole fellowship, which grew dramatically as there was a revival of faith on our small campus. We asked questions and reflected on the Bible, and then moved out in action, living out what we heard. We heard a clear call to take up our cross and follow Jesus, to live simply, to work for justice, and to bring Good News to the poor. Out of this renewal movement on college campuses on the West Coast, many students moved into urban poor communities when they graduated. Servant Partners came along as a mission structure, a "wineskin", to preserve and build upon this organic work of the Holy Spirit.

During college I saw not only the power of the Scripture, but also the joy and potential which Christian community has for the transformation of individuals and the world. I loved ministry on campus, believed this work would change lives, and knew I was made for it. Near the end of my senior year, I set aside my plans to go to medical school, much to the disappointment of my parents, and joined InterVarsity staff. For me this change of plans, in response to the call of God, meant letting go of the goal I had set in my childhood to become a doctor. I had worked toward this vision with steady determination in my academic work and various internships. God's call to ministry meant letting go of the approval of my parents and others. It meant the loss of prestige. Finally, it meant the loss of a good income, as I had to raise ministry support. But I felt free and was full of joy because of my inner certainty that God was directing my path.

I first met Betty Sue Brewster when I joined Servant Partners after fifteen years with InterVarsity, but that was not my first exposure to her. I read Betty Sue and Tom Brewster's booklet, "Bonding", when I was in college. I have re-read it many times since then for my own benefit and in equipping leaders first for mission on college campuses and later among the urban poor. What I experienced in Christian community and leadership in college, and learned about in the Scripture, were practically applied to the context of mission through the Brewster's writings. "Bonding" emphasizes Jesus' model of incarnation—as one translation puts it, "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood" (John 1:14a)—and how this costly model of crossing barriers and building relationships is essential in Christian mission. The Brewsters describe the value of simplicity in mission, not as some mark of piety, but as a way to remove the barriers to relationship, which are often caused by money and possessions.

It can be an occupational hazard of people in urban poor mission to judge other Christians for their materialism, and to adopt an attitude of superiority and a notable rigidity about simple living. Betty Sue's teaching challenged that tendency in our field by always keeping relationship with Jesus and people as the focus of simplicity, rather than self-denial. Her view of the poor, as people with whom we must have reciprocal relationships, resonated with what my parents had passed on to me through their stories. The benefits of bonding closely in relationship with those to whom we are ministering are well worth the costs. We cannot communicate about a loving and relational God, apart from developing relationships of love and trust.

The concepts in "Bonding" shaped my ministry. As a campus minister, I lived my life as fully as possible with my students, spending time in their dorms, activities and classes, and even keeping their hours. They became my dearest friends and partners in ministry. Later when I was called into urban poor mission, my husband and I moved into a poor community, and understood that relationships with people were the top priority. We have had a lot of joy in knowing people in our community, and watching one another's kids grow up. We have also suffered the difficulties in our city along with them—things like drive by shootings, arson, theft, bad landlords, environmental hazards, and dismissive public officials. The values that the Brewsters articulated have become foundational for every ministry I have had the grace to lead.

Betty Sue was one of the original board members of Servant Partners. She joined our board and put her name, time and effort into our work when it was still an idea more than a

reality. She spent a lot of time mentoring the pioneering leaders of Servant Partners. Through her teaching and personal example, she shaped our emphasis on incarnation (living among those we minister to for the sake of building relationships), simple living, and coming to communities where we minister in humility as those who want to and need to learn. She also shaped our emphasis on disciplined language and culture learning, and provided us with practical strategies for these foundations.

In Servant Partners, church planting and community organizing are the central approaches we use to work for holistic transformation in slum communities. Both approaches are relational, develop leaders, and value the power of the local church to bless individuals and whole communities. Both require vision and faith to imagine a different reality than what currently exists and the courage to speak and live out that vision. I have learned through this work that there are no “urban ministry experts,” and that one must continually and aggressively learn. We have particularly tried to remain in a posture of learning from our neighbors and our context. Urban poor mission involves work in various cultures and nations, various religious communities, various languages, various age groups, various spheres—like education, health, the environment, economic development, etc. There are over one billion people living in urban poor slum communities in cities throughout the world. Saying that one is an expert in urban poor mission is a bit like saying one is an expert in reality. There is obviously no such thing. Christian mission belongs to the learners not the experts.

Several stories Betty Sue has told me have remained with me. She described in some detail her collaborative work with her husband, who was paralyzed due to an accident. In her story I saw a model of spouses partnering in ministry, gritty determination to overcome obstacles, and the kind of unselfishness that enables people to make great contributions. She communicated both the joy and difficulty involved in her work with her husband. She also shared with me stories from her life as a single mother after her husband passed away while their son was still young. As a *woman* leader in mission, her stories expressing the intersection of faith, leadership, loss, and being a wife and mother had a profound impact on me.

One of our Servant Partners board members said it well. “Betty Sue is a godly woman. When she is around, it makes us all better people.” I believe it is no understatement to say that cross-cultural mission among the urban poor is better, more godly, and more fruitful because Betty Sue Brewster has been around. She didn’t take shortcuts in her work and spared no

expense in giving of herself. There is no question that she has built with gold and precious jewels. Her legacy is secure in the Kingdom and in the work of those of us who have been fortunate enough to labor alongside her.



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