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Hope In Action: My Journey through Open Doors
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I remember early in the morning hearing his song calling out from the alley behind our home in Louisville, Kentucky. The year was 1952 and he sang “Rag-o-man, rag-o-man”.

The African American man we called Mr. George was collecting rags for sale, early recycling and entrepreneurial program in our southern city when I was a child. My grandfather introduced me to him one sunny morning when both men stopped and talked together, as they did regularly I learned. Later Grandfather and I talked about black and white people having the lack of opportunity to be together because of a thing called “segregation”. This is my first memory of being struck with the reality of problems of ethnic and cross-cultural issues between and among God’s people. The realization opened the door for me to the Civil Rights Movement as I listened to the conversation between the two men. His voice rings through the years and echoes in my soul as his song sings in me, “Rag-o man, rag o-man.”

Seven years later at the age of 15 a door opened when I was chosen to work with The National Council of Churches Migrant Ministry program in a small Midwestern town. Spanish speaking people from Texas were working in the corn, tomato and pumpkin crops. They were housed in barracks left over from World War II. Whole families came from south Texas to be in the community and work for the two packing companies who paid them next to livable wages.

The Migrant Ministry focused on activities for the children and young people while their parents worked in the fields. My responsibility was to develop activities for the preteens. Together my three companions and a host of volunteers played, talked, shopped for groceries, went to the doctor and one occasion I drove 25 miles to hospital to take a child fighting for his life. The police must have all been at the corner café because this 15 year old driving at 75 miles and hour on a two lane highway would have been at a loss for words if stopped. I am aware that God was in control of all the happenings that day. Language barriers were crossed even if the vocabulary was only about 50 words. Through my work in this organization I became so aware of the words attributed to St. Francis of Assisi “I would much rather see a sermon than hear one.” The relationships made over two years with the migrant community lasts today in those who

“settled out” of traveling from place to place and established their homes in our small community.

My university days were an open door to discovering people from all over the world and learning about the developing countries emerging from colonial governments and the needs of these fledgling states. Arriving at my call to social work and preparing with my new husband for work in Mexico was a fulfillment of an insight I had when in training for my work with the National Council of Churches eight years earlier. Looking out over Lake Michigan while in a time of reflection, I heard deep in my spirit “You will see many waters and lands unknown.” There was however a detour in our plans for work in Mexico. Sam developed cancer a year and a half after our marriage. He died 2 months short of our 2nd anniversary. Alone three days after his death I was startled by a memory of a passage of scripture I had been given during a Mid Night New Years Eve service. I had returned home from college my freshman year for the holidays. I was just 18 and was asking God in the silence of the hour what He wanted with my life. I was directed to

Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in travail! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her that is married, says the Lord. Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; hold not back, lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your descendents will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities (Isa 54:1-3).

As I read the passage I began to cry. Deep in my spirit I knew that the words were a direction for my life. I had not considered the passage again until after Sam’s death.

Life continued to unfold as I graduated from Indiana University with a Master’s Degree in Social Service two months after Sam’s death. I accepted my first professional employment as a caseworker in a marriage and family agency in our university community. It was time to focus on what I had trained for even if it was not in Mexico. Toward the end of three years with the agency another door opened when I received a call came from the Chairperson of the Sociology Department of Anderson University in Indiana, asking if I would consider becoming part of the department. Although reluctant, because I had never taught before, I knew this was an opportunity to serve people from all traditions and backgrounds. I accepted the offer.

During my days in undergraduate education it was a joy to develop programs in urban studies. It was a very turbulent time in the United States as racial issues of the 1960s and the Viet

Nam War was front and center. Many of my students were caught in doing what they believed deep in their heart regarding the race issue and their families. Several were asked to not come back to their homes should they march at Selma with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The work with these students was a refining time for me as together we talked and reflected on the words of our Lord and how we were to live out His words. Once again came the words of Mr. George singing up in my spirit...Rag-O-Man, Rag-O-Man.

Toward the end of 1965 John A. Morrison, the first President of Anderson College (Anderson University), passed away and I was asked to sing at his memorial service. The family chose the hymn *Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah*.

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah, Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak but Thou are mighty-Hold me with Thy powerful hand;
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven, Feed me 'til I want no more.

'Barren land', there it was again the word Barren...

In 1968 I was sensing the need to continue my doctoral studies and enrolled at the University of Minnesota to focus on marriage and family therapy. It was toward the beginning of my time in Minnesota that a letter came from close college friends inviting me to join them in Kenya and from there travel with them around the world. It was an opportunity of a lifetime and I accepted immediately. I had told family and friends that I would not be looking for work until I had completed my studies which raised the issue of getting a job when I returned from the trip.

In October of my first year I attended a marriage and family therapy conference in New Orleans. Throughout the conference I did not seek out any of the headhunters (those recruiting people for positions) but I met people who would become the ones I called upon later in my career. When the conference ended I was riding to the airport in a limonene with two other professors. The men were talking about the people they had interviewed for positions for their respective schools. I was intrigued as one of them described a position he was seeking to fill and from the back seat I said, "Oh, I am the one you want for that position." He whirled around from the middle seat and replied, "Who in the (expletive) are you?" To which I replied, "Let me tell you over a cup of coffee if you have time before your flight".

We met and after an hour he offered me the research position at the University of Indiana Medical School in the Department of Psychiatry doing marriage therapy. However, there was the issue of my planned trip to Kenya and travel around the world to learn more about myself and

other cultures. It seemed I had to make a choice. I explained to the professor that I could not immediately accept the position because I would be out of the country until late August. “If you are still interested in me by next March give me a call”. He did and on Easter weekend the next spring I signed the contract.

My long anticipated trip to Kenya and a world travel experience provided the opportunity to meet with Kenyan church leaders to discuss how I might serve the need for education in the area of family life and concern for the fast changing life of the church and culture in the emerging nation. While in India I met with mission personnel who introduced me to the work of Lesslie Newbigin, the Bishop of the Church of South India, a missiologist and missionary affiliated with the Church of Scotland¹. His work would prove to be some of the most beneficial to my own study of the Trinity and particularly the Holy Spirit. In his 1978 book, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Newbigin has a chapter entitled “Bearing Witness of the Spirit: Mission as Hope in Action.” It was this chapter that spoke to my spirit as the linchpin² of mission for my journey to guide my obedience to the Spirit’s leading.

It [the church] is not in control of the mission. Another is in control, and his fresh works will repeatedly surprise the church, compelling it to stop talking and to listen. Because the Spirit himself is sovereign over the mission, the church can only be the attentive servant. In sober truth the Spirit is himself the witness who goes before the church in its missionary journey. The church’s witness is secondary and derivative. The church is witness insofar as it follows obediently where the Spirit leads (1978:61).

When I began the new research position with a new educational community, I set my sights on learning all I could about the various cultures in my new setting as well as the variety of religious/church institutions. Within the first year, I learned of a pastoral counseling center that was interested in the work we were doing at the medical center. An invitation came to become part of a consulting team to help clergy develop skills in marriage and family counseling. The pastoral counseling center after three years invited me to become part of their staff. It was an open door I had not anticipated but was so affirmed in the position as clergy began moving from one-on-one counseling to seeing couples and families as systems that needed to be considered as a whole and not as single entities. A breakthrough had come for families.

¹ See Wilbert Shenk’s “Lesslie Newbigin’s Contribution to the Theology of Mission” in *TransMission* special edition 1998:3-6.

² An inserted pin that serves to hold together parts that function as a unit.

The summer before I joined the pastoral counseling center I returned to Kenya at the invitation of the Kenyan church to work with leaders on relationships between husbands and wives of leaders. At the completion of the summer the Bishop asked me to consider returning for a longer period of time. The stress on families in the changing culture was almost more than leaders could comprehend. In my heart I felt that God was opening a new door and calling me beyond the oceans. The call coming in my spirit when I was fifteen came roaring back. Once again an unexpected invitation to enter fully into the culture was extended.

Returning to my new challenge at the pastoral counseling center, I kept listening for a word regarding a return to Kenya. The weeks passed and in late October an invitation from the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) came inviting me to consider a position on a team of Family Life Educators. I would be the only expatriate on a team of ten Kenyan personnel from six tribal communities. I could not believe it when I learned my director would be Bertha King'ori, the first elected woman in the Tanzania parliament. She had married a Kenyan gentleman, who was principal of a technical college. They are quite a remarkable couple who became significant people in my life even until the present.

The problem would be who would provide the support for the assignment. The NCCCK could provide a car. The first church mission agency I contacted said they were not able to send a single woman working as I would. One of the leaders at the mission agency had worked in Kenya and told me he would contact some of his friends in Kenya. It was not long before I heard from the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and their willingness to consider sending me on the assignment. Once again a surprise of how the Body of Christ can cooperate to do mission. I had heard about the MCC through their work as a peace church. Now I would have an opportunity to know them more personally.

My papers and references were sent and testimonials as to my character and Christian life were examined. Once again I saw the relationships and connections being lived out as I witnessed the Body of Christ working together to serve people cross culturally. The assignment was for three years with the focus being to work my way out of an assignment. It was the desire of NCCCK to train a Kenyan to take over my responsibilities.

A year from the date of having the Bishop ask me to come, I was on the African continent. The assignment was working with not one people group but several and with many different church groups including the Catholic community. The aim for me was to prepare the

way for a Kenyan to take over my role as developer of materials to help educate young men and women become healthy mature adults in a nation caught in rapid change from rural to urban life. The cultural teachings in family education done by parents, uncles and aunts were vanishing. The elders of the NCK had asked for a program to be developed that would assist secondary schools across Kenya in preparing the young for this new world.

The first year of the program we as a team worked with secondary schools to hear what the need was, this opened the door to cultural understanding for me. We listened to the young people and their struggle to live away from their families in boarding school. The questions they had about their female and male development and how they were to relate to the opposite sex was our focus. Seminars with parents were also held to listen to their concerns. The boarding school instructors were also listened to as we moved from one community to the next.

The operative word was LISTEN. I learned so very much about the customs of the past and how young people were formed for their role as married people and part of connected communities. When I was preparing to go to Kenya I recall that my mantra was to 'go as a learner'. Yes, I had anthropology in university and had studied and worked in cross cultural relations in the United States, but this was a very new place and situation for me.

Bertha (Mama) King'ori who directed the Family Life Program was a gifted Christian who had grown up in Tanzania .She had pursued her education at home and in the United States and had served in the Tanzania Parliament. Married with three children she worked tirelessly to make the Family Life Program a success for not only her young children but for the country of Kenya. Mama would drive from her home at the coast and spend time in a small apartment in Nairobi. I knew she was a people person and I invited her to spend the nights at my apartment in the city and I gave her the keys to my apartment. She was overwhelmed by the gesture and I was stunned to learn that in all of her years working with expatriates she had never been offered a place to stay let alone given a key to a place. Then I was without words to learn this woman of such Christian character had never stayed in a missionary home. Together Mama and I spent many hours talking and listening to each other's stories of our walk with people.

Over the year of listening to the groups we as a team sat down together and developed material that would address many of the concerns and needs. Our teams wrote curriculum in their heart language and then went to schools and groups who spoke those languages. People learned in their own tongue and the responses were so exciting. The groups were so open to hearing what

our doctor, nurses, pastors, adult educators and yes, even the expat had to share with them. It was important to reach all areas of the country if churches and schools were to be part of the change in helping young adults meet the challenges of the new urban reality. We became so busy that we had to consciously decide how often and where we could go.

As a protestant organization we were concerned about our Catholic brothers and sisters and their response to our program .We were so pleased when many attended our seminars and began talking about how the Catholic community could be part of this new development. Conversations between our team and the leaders in Nairobi developed into a national week focusing on Family Life Education. We jointly led the week as Christians concerned about the condition of “our” families and we walked with each other in the mission.

Throughout these years in Nairobi my housemate and I opened our apartment for all those who needed a place while in the city. There were Kenya nationals, missionaries from all sort of missions and agencies and teachers from Holland, Canada and the United States. We called the place ‘Bethany’. The three years passed quickly and I found myself planning to return home and wondered where I would go? Was anyone going to be interested in a woman who had lived and worked in East Africa in family life education?

Six months before I was to arrive in the United States a former student who had been named director of a counseling center in a large Presbyterian Church in my home state called Nairobi and asked if I would be available in September to take a position. My heart did a flip as I pondered the implications of such a move. Earlier the same month I had been offered a position back in the university I had left to go to the University of Minnesota. Faced with two open doors I believed I was to accept the offer of my former student as he had called me in Kenya and offered me a position should I come back to the states after my first year, however, I remained for my full term.

After prayer and conversations with my family, it seemed right to now go and serve in yet another part of God’s big community. I had been in the new counseling ministry a year and a half when a letter from NCKC came inviting me back to Kenya. Again after prayer and family talks I decided it was best for me not to take the assignment as my parents were aging and I was needed at home. Working along with me Ted shared that he and his family were planning on going to India but the way was blocked for them to do so. The Holy Spirit impressed me to share the letter from the NCKC .The position they had wanted to fill was one of a counselor to set up a

program for training counselors. Ted would be just right for that assignment. He took the letter home at noon and talked with the family. By the time he returned to the office they had said ‘yes’, they would make themselves available and they left for Kenya the next August. It is amazing to walk in mission, connecting, and reflecting on pathways and roads that seem humanly impossible to travel.

Soon after Ted and family left for Kenya I received an invitation to join the pastoral staff of a congregation of my own denomination. The appointment would be to setup a counseling service and serve in other pastoral roles. Never ever thinking of serving in such a capacity once again I hit my knees. Yes, I did go through this open door and served the church for seven years. Over those seven years I was ordained, became the founding director of a counseling center, as well as a mission pastor. A mission prayer group was formed that met every Friday at 6:30 AM to pray for what God had in store for this community of believers to join with what God was doing in our city and around the world. Soon a mission conference was held, the spirit began to move in the hearts of the people to plant a church in another part of the city that would serve the growing ethnic communities of the eastside. Today that congregation thrives after 28 years. There were short term mission trips to Africa and South America which brought many people into the everyday life of nationals and mission personnel. The program enabled congregants to know each other as well as cross cultural workers expats and nationals alike.

It was on one of those trips to Brazil that I knew I was being called to leave my ministry with the church to explore the open door of further education in cross cultural mission. A family I had known since my work in Kenya was settled in Pasadena, California. They invited me to share their home and enroll at Fuller Theological Seminary in the then School of World Mission. For the better part of the next 2 ½ years I slept on their floor and rolled up my mat every morning. While at Fuller I met and became acquainted with Betty Sue and Tom Brewster. It was my privilege to sit in on some of the courses they co-taught. I never had a formal course from them but became friends with Betty Sue after Tom died. We both had lost our husbands and we carried on with what God wanted each of us to do. She is an encouragement to me as she continues on with her ministry.

While working on my first degree at Fuller it was a joy to meet several wonderful women who had walked alone in their ministry overseas and were beginning to question the mission community about the place of women in the extension of the Gospel both at home and abroad.

Together several of us met to discuss our concerns regarding the way mission structures were formed and operated with respect to women. We also questioned the curriculum of the major schools preparing cross cultural workers. Together we worked through questions such as; Who taught the courses? Who wrote the texts? Who included women and their contribution to the expansion of the Kingdom as part of the curriculum? We were concerned with not only western women who had given their lives to the cause but also the national women who carried the message of the Gospel to their own people as well as other countries.

There were five of us, four graduate students and a professor's wife, who asked for a meeting with the Dean of the School of World Mission, Paul Pierson, who granted us a time to talk about our concerns. The outcome produced a course called Women In Mission. The class would be taught by PhD candidate Evelyn Jensen, and the Dean. It was the first course in the school taught by, for the most part, a woman about women in mission. It was a break through whose time had come.

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A new door opened and I accepted a position with Anderson University School of Theology in the spring of 1987. This began a 20 year period of teaching and counseling women and men preparing for ministry and mission around the world. Once again the Isaiah 54 passage came back to me as an

assurance and affirmation of what God had spoken to me at the age of 18. Isaiah 54: 2-3: "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and left, and your decedents will possess the nations and will settle the desolate towns." Students from around the world and the US were a joy to teach as I became involved in their call to

ministry and mission. The students have gone all over the world teaching, preaching and baptizing those who would follow their Lord.

Retirement is not in the vocabulary of those who serve the Lord. Since leaving the seminary I have found myself writing and participating in the preparation of personnel preparing for cross cultural mission. Traveling to other countries teaching and relating to those who are following God with peoples I have not met has been more than I ever expected. Perhaps one of the most unexpected developments has been to door opening to be one of the founding members of a humanitarian organization, Pathways Africa, relating to four countries in eastern and southern Africa. We are connecting with others who are involved in the betterment of girls and women through education, community development and health care. In the fall of 2012 I will be part of a group from Pathways Africa who will travel to Southern Africa with the purpose of introducing them to the potential of walking alongside the next generation of young women who will be the leaders in their own context.

Reviewing the doors that have opened and paths taken and the people I have been privileged to walk with in mission my theoretical understanding of relationship and attachment theories have provided lens through which bonding has developed. Key to the entire journey has been listening to the Holy Spirit and the people themselves. Future cross cultural personnel who engage in mission either in their own country or beyond will want to immerse themselves in these theories and GOD'S WORD.



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