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Anonymous Student Missionary 1 Living Memoirs Interview

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Anonymous Student Missionary 1

Transcript

Aug 25, 2024

Interviewer

As per your consent form, your interview will remain anonymous. We will not state your name during this interview. So, can you tell me a little about your childhood and family, please?

Anonymous Student Missionary 1

I was born in the Philippines and moved to the US around two or three years old. I was tiny. My mom came first. She found a job as a physical therapist, and she started working here. She worked around a year or so, and then my dad and I came, and a few years later, my sister was born. Before my sister was born, we traveled a little bit. My mom may have traveled for work, and then we settled in Knoxville, Tennessee, where I spent most of my life. I lived in a suburban area, not really out in the country, not very rural, but not the city. So, it was more suburban. I attended Adventist school until third grade and was homeschooled for four years. Then, I went to public school throughout high school, so I had different educational experiences. My mom worked as a physical therapist for a while, and then when I was a little bit older in my teenage years, my dad started working as a truck driver, and that's what he still does.

Interviewer

Okay, thank you so much for sharing that. So, of course, you grew up in Knoxville and mentioned that you went to Adventist school for a little while. Can you tell me about growing up in a religious home?

Anonymous Student Missionary 1

Let me think about it for a second. I've never had anyone ask me if it was. I was always aware that my family was religious. We went to church. I went to church school. We had a particular set of beliefs. And it was interesting because I always knew I was different. After all, especially when I was a child, we had a lot of friends who were not Adventists, and some people, like we, had a lot of friends; I don't know if, but I am not exactly sure if that's true, but we had friends who were Catholic. I don't know everything about Catholicism, but I learned some fundamental beliefs differed. So it's always been an exciting experience just having an awareness that how you see the world can be very different from how many other people you interact with know it. Um, that was always on my mind, or I just thought it was always there. It was always present.

Interviewer

Okay, all right, yeah, so you're talking about how you were aware of it, but can you tell me a little bit about what your walk with Jesus looked like from then until now?

Anonymous Student Missionary 1

Yeah, that is an interesting question—a continually growing journey. When I was a kid, you know, it was, it was, I guess, more literally, kind of like how a kid would grow in their relationship with a parent or with someone close to them, people with more like a baby, um, I knew a lot about God, I would say the relationship didn't come until I was older, probably until I would say, maybe seeking out a relationship God was. God, putting effort into getting to know God, I would say, probably started when I was a teenager, and just practicing talking to God or praying to God regularly, studying the Bible, and spending time with him. So I guess it's been, and there have been, ups and downs in my life, too, where I wasn't always the best at hearing God or listening to Him, but it's a gradual journey. I don't know. It was a lot of things I took for granted as a kid. I mean, I went to church school, then I went to church, and I was in Adventurers and Pathfinders. So you hear a lot of information. You know, you learn how to learn about the Bible, read stories, and memorize verses in school, church, and other organizations. So it's kind of like a lot of thought patterns are reinforced, as though, I guess, there was information about God, but the personal aspect came later, I would say,

Interviewer

Okay, okay, interesting. I think we will talk about that later. But can you tell me a little about what you wanted to be when you grew up, your major at Southern, and your current career path?

Anonymous Student Missionary 1

So, when I was a kid, I didn't have a clear idea of what I wanted to be when I grew up. The only thing I can remember wanting to do was to be a singer when I was nine, and that lasted only a short time, significantly, as I grew up and learned more about the industries. Like, yeah, I don't think that's something I want to pursue full-time, so that's the only time that I could think of just like, this is something I might be interested in. But other than that, there wasn't anything that stuck, at least in childhood. Let me see. So, I was at Southern my first year of college and then transferred out. I finished up at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville; um, my major, I was an English major, um, I started with that, and that's what I ended up graduating with, um, and the school where I attended, they had a creative writing program, And that was very much something I was interested in, as though I focused a lot on that and just being exposed to a lot of different types of writing. I graduated with that and then returned to graduate school after being a student missionary. I got my master's in ESL education and studied those two fields in school.

Interviewer

Okay. And yeah, what have you done, and what has your career path been since then?

Anonymous Student Missionary 1

So, after graduate school, I worked as an ESL teacher. I worked in different public schools in my area and region, and I did that for several years. I taught, I've taught, I've worked with all grade levels. I started teaching elementary school, and then I switched to high school. Somewhere towards the end, you know, I had different assignments. I traveled as part of some of my job assignments and got to work with at least one middle school or somewhere in the mix. I do not

currently teach. I have pursued a different career path since then, but that was something that I was interested in, and my time as the missionary, I would say, influenced that decision.

Interviewer

Okay, interesting. All right, so that will dive right into it. Can you tell me about your motivations for becoming a student missionary?

Anonymous Student Missionary 1

There was much wanting to grow, something beyond things that I had already seen and experienced. I was in my senior year, maybe the beginning of my senior year. I can't remember, and I was thinking about education. And I was in the process of applying to an elementary education program. I want to remember if I got accepted into it. Maybe I did, but I was looking for something more profound. I just wanted to do something more with my life. I knew that Southern had a student missionary program, so I reached out to the program coordinator at the time. I think I might have talked to somebody who was a part of my college ministry, or she went to church with me, and that might have been how I connected with Southern from someone I knew who also went there. So I guess, as Southern worked with me, I think officially, I went as a student missionary through Adventist Volunteer Service. I believe they were the ones who did my paperwork, paid me, and arranged everything. So, those two entities helped me facilitate and plan my trip.

Interviewer

Okay, very cool. All right. Can you tell me a little about where you were located, what organization you served under, and what your work was there?

Anonymous Student Missionary 1

So I lived in Bangkok, Thailand, and the name of my school, I wonder if it changed when I was there. They called it SDA Language School Bangkok because of our location and my assignment. There was a teacher, so I taught English classes. You learn to teach everybody. You were flexible. So, I taught elementary, high school, adult, and the whole gamut of clients we served.

Interviewer

Okay, very cool. So yeah, you were teaching a lot of different people. But can you tell me an average day in your life as a student missionary there?

Anonymous Student Missionary 1

So, it's an average day most of the time. You know, during the day, I would teach, and depending on the day, and I guess, depending on the term, my hours would vary a little bit, but I would spend most of my day, kind of like a nine to five you could, if that's something you could compare it to. So, like, you know, quote, unquote, I worked my nine-to-five job, taught during the day, and then in the evenings, I was pretty much free to do whatever I wanted with my time. Um, you know, sometimes I would go to church events. On Wednesday nights, they had prayer meetings. So I would attend that. I wouldn't always go every week, but I would go to that.

Sometimes, I would go into the city and explore. Sometimes, I just hang out in my apartment. Sometimes, I'd write, so it was just the evenings; they were free for me to do what I wanted, and then I worked during the daytime.

Interviewer

Can you tell me some of the best and most difficult parts of being a student missionary there?

Anonymous Student Missionary 1

So, I fell in love with the country. I loved the culture. I found that Thai people were welcoming. They're very hospitable. Hospitality was a huge thing, and it was a very gracious and welcoming trip. I did wish I had traveled more. And God has taught me since then when it comes to um...when it comes to provision, you know, He's the ultimate source of provision. I wish I had traveled more, but as a student missionary, you don't. Well, as a missionary in general, they don't. I didn't make that much money, at least, I think it was around \$300 a month, if, after you did the conversion rate, um, but I did get to travel within the country, but I wished I had widened my horizons a little bit more, but traveling was something I enjoyed. I liked just getting to know the people there, what types of people were like, and meeting different people. I loved my students. So those were some of the best parts. There were a few tricky parts for me. Homesickness hit me earlier on during my stay, and just being away from my family for an extended period was challenging. I got sick a couple of times. I got the flu. I got an ear infection while I was there. That was not enjoyable at all. So that was hard. And then I just felt like that year was a massive year of growth for me, and just every day, just like the daily dying to self and God teaching me complete and total depends on Him, which is good for me, growing as a person and growing more in Christ is always a good thing. But then it was also painful at times and uncomfortable. So that was difficult, it was good, but it was difficult, and sometimes it didn't feel the most pleasant, but I would say it was beneficial to me as a person and my walk with God.

Interviewer

Okay, okay, so you're talking about a lot of growth that you experienced. Can you identify any significant events by which you can define your experience as a missionary?

Anonymous Student Missionary 1

Yes, I don't know. There's something about just the process in and of itself. I don't know. There's just something about it. And they told us before we left, you know, I was told to have realistic expectations, and so I always had it in my head to be realistic about my environment, about things that would happen, um, I guess, not to have a romantic point of view. And it's not to say that people were terrible. Still, it's just that I saw a lot of humanity. You know, I always make mistakes, and I am not perfect. I wouldn't want anyone putting me on a pedestal, thinking that I was perfect, but just seeing like people, being people, you know, their imperfections, things that are good about them. One thing that I would consider foremost in my work environment was that I saw a lot of inconsistencies, and there needed to be something I could refer to to figure out what the policy or procedure should be. And obviously, I was new there, and the people I worked with had been there a long time, years and years and years, and had worked with each

other for a long time. And so there were certain routines, specific ways of doing things that were already said, which is normal, it's very typical. But then I found it hard to navigate when there would be inconsistencies in the workplace, and I was sometimes trying to figure out what to do in a particular situation. But. And the longer I was there, the more I could see it, um, in the end, I ended up writing like a list of my grievances. I do have some regrets about how I handled that. A lot of it was out of anger. The Bible talks about being slow to wrath, and I think there are many reasons. So I do feel bad, like at the end of the year, how I expressed my frustrations with how things went in my work environment, but that was a growing process for me as well, and it was very eye-opening to see. And I guess I'm not; I don't know why, but maybe this whole, I think there might have been an assumption that I made, or a perception, a faulty one, mind you, that because I was working in an Adventist institution, that there wouldn't be any problems, or like, you know, people would be perfect, but that's not the case. And wherever you go, people make mistakes. It's not that people intend to make mistakes and not that people intend to do wrong, but you know, we're just humans. We're flawed. We make mistakes. We make errors. So that was part of bringing me back to reality, just seeing people as people and accepting them, regardless of whether they were Adventist, Buddhist, Baptist, Hindu, or whatever.

Interviewer

You're talking about how there weren't the most incredible experiences there. Can you tell me how going as a student missionary impacted your relationships with people?

Anonymous Student Missionary 1

When I was there because I went as a missionary, people might have automatically thought that I was a quote, unquote, good person because of a particular title that I carried or my position. Yeah, that's a better word for the position I held there, and I never really thought about it. You know, I always identified as Christian, and I would always tell people throughout my life that I believed in God and that I had Christian beliefs, but I felt a lot more compelled to, I guess, behave like a representative of Christ. And, you know, I wanted to do an excellent job in representing God, and I wanted people to see that I believed in God and how God influenced, you know, how I behaved and the decisions that I made throughout my life. So that was important to me, just trying to represent Christ well or doing, um, trying to do an excellent job at it. I remember being aware of that. And then afterward, I think, because I don't know God, it felt genuine to me when I was there, and no going back to learning to depend on him for everything thoroughly, and there being times when it would just be me and God. And so I guess strengthening that bond by spending more time, I think when I came back, just seeing the world a little bit differently, and when I say that, I mean that for me, really really believing that there is a God, that there's only one God. I see the world through that lens, and then just seeing, I guess it goes back to you. Seeing other people who don't believe the same way I do, just seeing the differences, but learning how to interact with people who don't have the same viewpoint, doesn't change who I am, right? So just because I have a classmate who might be atheist or maybe Buddhist or whatever, you know, trying to understand their perspective, but at the same time, that's not going to change my beliefs at the end of the day, and so learning how to navigate through those differences better. But then also, I think being better, or at least trying to make more of an effort to do this with Christ leading like you know, "Well, God, how would you want

me to handle this situation with this person? Or, like, this person eats a certain way, and I eat entirely different ways. Or, like, you know, they don't keep Sabbath, or they do this differently. How would You want me to handle that? But how would You want me to handle it in a way that they can see You positively? Where You shine, it shines brightly. So that made an impact, just leaving and coming back, I guess, in the years afterward.

Interviewer

Okay, all right, thank you for sharing that you're talking about many different long-term impacts that you experienced, but can you tell me a little more about that, maybe how your student missionary year impacted your career goals, as you were talking about before?

Anonymous Student Missionary 1

Yes, I think I mentioned it before, but my experience in Thailand and the type of work I did were the reasons I pursued my master's in education: I loved my students. I loved being able to help them. I loved being able to see them grow and be successful in life. And I just love its cultural aspect, too. Because I lived in Thailand, most of the student population was Thai, but I also worked with, you know, a Chinese student who was Taiwanese, and then I also had some Korean students. So, within that, there were differences that I got to see. And that part I just really loved, like learning about different cultures and how other people from other cultures navigate life and their belief systems and customs. And so that influenced my decision to pursue not only education but the field of ESL. And it hit a lot of those points. You know, helping children, seeing them grow and helping them overcome barriers, seeing them be successful in life. And, you know, there's always a melting pot in my classroom. There are always a lot of different nationalities presented. That had a significant impact on my academic studies and the career path that I took.

Interviewer

Thank you for sharing that. All right. So, we talked a bit about how it had a long-term impact on your career goals and the life outlook you mentioned. Can you tell me about any individuals you consider essential to your success as a student missionary? You said it was a little tricky to connect with people and agree with them about your worldview. But can you tell me, maybe anybody that helped you through that?

Anonymous Student Missionary 1

Yes, a family in my area was pivotal to many things during that year. They mentored and guided me because they also worked for the church in different capacities. They took it differently; they were doing something different when I was there but had been through many of the same experiences. So they, you know, have empathy. They had walked in my shoes in a lot of ways, and they just, they knew how to help me, and they knew how to guide me in a lot of different ways, in, you know, the learning how to work with people there, you know, like, it's a very different cultural mindset. And they had been there for years at that point, for, like, many years. And so, they helped me a lot with that. They were very supportive, they were also American. That was a big thing that helped. Because, you know, my parents are Filipino, and so a lot of how I was raised, you know, influenced it, as well as what they brought from their upbringing

and culture. However, many are also more Western and American, so finding people who shared those core values or practices was helpful, someone you could relate to and identify with. And like at the end of the day, there was no cultural confusion or guesswork, and knowing you shared your experiences and you shared their day like they understood what you were talking about. There wasn't any trying to interpret or any guesswork. So they were very, yeah. They were in so many ways, like, yeah, so many ways. And I was just highly grateful to them when I was there. But there, you know, I spent much of my time with them too. I went on trips with them. I hung out with them a lot, doing different things. So, you know, they were close friends. I would consider them like, like, family that I had there, and it was just, yeah, it was, it was just a massive support system that I had. So they were a part of me just going through that whole year and everything. And there were other people too, other people who lived in the area who were also very helpful—some of my fellow teachers. There was a pastor in his family, and they were very gracious. There were some young adults who, you know, kind of showed me the ropes, and they invited me to things, too. So, some people made it seem like you're just a lot. I guess it enriched my experience. There are a lot more.

Interviewer

I'm glad to hear that. Okay, so as we're nearing the end, do you have any advice you would share with others considering being a student missionary?

Anonymous Student Missionary 1

Yes, just talk to God about it. I'm not sure I would have anticipated being a missionary at Southern. I was familiar with the program, and I knew that many people took off a year to do their missionary year, which I did not want to do. I was one of those people who was just four years of college. I want to graduate in four years and want to be supported. And a year is not that significant in the long term. But I would say just, you know, talk to God about it, and it's a big decision, I would say, and it's not something that you have to rush into. So pray to God and ask Him to lead you. And He does because the Bible says that He will lead you like the Holy Spirit will help you, and if we ask, He'll guide us. So God will do that, but, yeah, just talking to God, just letting Him lead and guide.

They were at the beginning because you could have options when I was there. You could pick your top three places that you went; the place where I went was my first choice. But I had some, like, I had at least one other one. I had two other ones. My second choice was in Japan, and I can't remember my third choice, but there were times like, Well, I'm not sure. Or, if you know, I was supposed to go to Thailand, and once I got there and just talked to people and had different experiences, there were just, like, a lot of light bulbs that clicked. I was like, "Yes, I know God wanted me here," and it's a process too. Sometimes, you might not have all the puzzle pieces at the same time or the time you wish to, but you can trust that God is with you and is in the process.

Interviewer

All right, thank you so much for sharing that before we conclude. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Anonymous Student Missionary 1

I don't, I don't think so.

Interviewer

All right, great. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today and for your willingness to participate in our oral history project.

Anonymous Student Missionary 1

You're welcome.