

## My Story and Your story – Debbie P.

### Our Stories Are Sacred

1. When I was around 13-15 years of age I was reading my Bible alone in my room. I'm not sure exactly what led me to reflect on life. I think it was that I was thinking of my classmates. And a picture of a car and a bunch young people driving around comes to mind. I think that I was realizing that I longed for more/ other things. I opened up my bible to **Ecclesiastes 2:11** and I read the passage that says " **Vanity of Vanities** all is vanity and a chasing of the wind" Solomon wrote this reflecting on his life I reflected and asked God to give me a purpose in life.

I also the next day recognized very clearly the gift he gave me.

Later on I explored more, reading Mother Teresa and the book by Malcom Muggeridge "Something Beautiful for God". I was inspired by the words of Mother Teresa that gave me life.

I came upon a quote years later that expressed what I felt: that we experience God in many different places and ways. The quote which I cannot find the source of was "God is not Book Bound". God's spirit is living and he sends words of life, made flesh to us. His spirit moves freely and we experience him in many surprising ways and places, seeing and hearing Him in creation, in other people, Christian and non-Christian, he speaks to us. He is sooo.. great and big that He cannot be contained only in the covers of one book.

2. My sister and I were born in Bolivia on the shores of Lake Titicaca, the highest navigable Lake in the World at 13,500 feet. My parents went to help on a farm that the Canadian Baptist Mission owned. The Canadian Baptists had been offered the purchase of this farm by an Italian man several decades before and the farmland came with the serfs. The Aymara indigenous people. David is Aymara. A few missionaries had lived on the farm and come and gone when one missionary said, "This is wrong. We cannot continue to keep this system of serfdom going. We must free the serfs." And they did... over the period of 5 years, also teaching school to boys and girls and providing medical needs.... Many beautiful things for God.... but

Mistakes as well

My mother said to me many years later, "Oh Debbie, we made so many mistakes."

The **mistake** was to not take enough time I to listen and learn from the other cultures. As the Bible says, that God has put Eternity in the hearts of men and they know and see God in what was made. God was there many years ahead of us with His people. We came with great intentions and with a bit of a savoir complex wanting earnestly to help and do it our way which is the only way we understood.

At times we were **afraid** of what we didn't understand. The indigenous instruments were not played at church and some customs and rituals were understood as pagan. So good and bad was done.

The prayer of our Lord that says "**Father forgive us for we know not what we do.**"

3. Coming to Canada at the age of 16 was not easy for me. There were many adjustments and I cried every night for one year wanting to go back but Katepwa Lake Camp and church and young peoples and playing guitar were my joy.

After high school I studied at the University of Regina to be a teacher. I specifically asked my professor to let me do my internship at the Lebret Indian Residential School, not knowing as many of us did not, or not questioning the existence of these schools.

I lived with the cooks (Yvonne Bellegard; at that time the school was run by the Qu'Appelle File Hill Band.

One day I was walking through the dining room into the kitchen to talk to my roommates and I can't describe to this day very well what happened but as I entered the dining room 100 little brown eyes looked up at me and I felt fear in them.

That **image** and others have stayed with me and it led me a few years ago to commit to start to work on the 97 calls to action that the Truth and Reconciliation committee helped compile. In a sermon preached at Easter by our area minister he explained that God is **reconciling** all things to Himself.

The cross the (Vertical) between God and man and the (Horizontal) between man and his fellow man. That led me to commit to this reconciliation.

4. I went back to Bolivia and got married and had my two daughters.

When we came to Canada in 2005 we by necessity and choice lived in the Heritage Neighborhood where we were able to have a cross cultural experience and see a more complete reality of the city and we have been enriched and challenged by what we see in the "hood" as some call it.

A verse in the Bible that I choose as one of my Mantras is from **Romans**: "don't look out only for your own interest but also the **interest of others.**"

So in little things like when my cat is bored I take time to play with her.

Or

When the city wanted to close the Maple Leaf pool we went out with the other neighbors to rally and make sure that inner city kids who can't go out to lake or cabins in the summer have a healthy place to enjoy and keep out of other things.

Or

When walking in Wascana Park one afternoon in March and seeing teepee up on the Legislative lawn my family and I went over to sit around the fire and listen to the hopes and dreams of others and thus lose the fear and distrust that separated us at times.

The Bible says in **Jerimiah 29 :7** "Work for the good of the city to which you have been exiled for when the city prospers you will prosper."

5. I worked at **Open Door** for almost 10 years and was able to be with refugees of all faiths and listen to their cries and laughter. And share in the many similarities we have and become less

fearful of what we don't understand and know, finding curiosity and joy in our differences and seeing a bigger picture of God.

Finally

6. In 2019 my family and I returned from a trip to Bolivia to my mom's dying bedside. She was 99 years old.

After having the funeral, the first day back at work I was told that I was among 12 people who were laid off from work due to budget cuts.

7. Then there was COVID and in July of that year I was diagnosed with **Breast Cancer**. So it all came falling down on me at the same time. There were intense struggles of the mind, body and soul. Having my girls home during COVID was a blessing and the social workers and the mental health workers and alternative treatments and a healing writing group and a visit from some elders all helped us cope. ( and Suduko)

8. There is a hymn I love, the words which were etched into the walls of an insane asylum, called **The Love of God**. "The love of God is greater far than pen or tongue can ever tell. It goes beyond the highest star and reaches to the furthest Hell."

And so I offer up my story to you.

This is my story and your story is just as special and beautiful and I hope to hear it someday as well.