

### Becoming a Deaconess



I did not want to be a deaconess. I did not see myself a good fit for church work, although I have served as a volunteer worker at the Tarlac church all through high school as one of the young men and women being groomed for church work under the leadership of Rev. Philip del Rosario, then Superintendent of the Tarlac District. I enjoyed the fellowship, singing in the choirs, helping out in evangelistic services, in visitations, in teaching junior leagues. By high school graduation Pastor del Rosario announced I was going Harris. What? I told him I did not want to be a deaconess. He asked if I wanted to be a teacher or a nurse. Holy cow, I did not know what I wanted to be. Out of his frustration he told me to go home and come up with what I wanted to be. In sadness I went home! After a week, with much uncertainty, I returned and told him that **I'll just be a deaconess**. A month later, in June of 1967, I was attending Harris Memorial College, and graduated in March 1971 with a major in Christian Education and a minor in Drama.

### Appointments

Concepcion UMC, Tarlac, Resident Deaconess, 1971-1972.

About 130 members with 75 regular Sunday attendees.

### Children's Ministry

Sunday School Program - Recruited young people of the church and conducted Teachers' Training for the kinder, primary, junior, and youth group classes. This included: Methods of Teachings (in telling Bible stories, songs, and prayers), understanding the curriculum, simplified child psychology-understanding the child and where he/she is coming from, and how to be in a relationship with God.

Daily Vacation Bible School (DVBS) - Took the recruited troop to the District Teachers' Training where I served as faculty. Back to our locale, groups of teachers were deployed to different neighboring communities for a week-long DVBS classes, which was previously coordinated with the local members. (These communities are familiar with DVBS as a yearly event by the UMC.) The children were happy with lots of games, singing, story-telling, and making projects. Three important happenings I noted at these DVBS days: 1) The teachers bonded in friendships and gained sense of accomplishment. 2) The Children learned more about the Bible, God is love, and how Jesus is their friend and Jesus loves them - a reinforcement in spiritual foundation. 3) The Parents were happy to have the continuing Christian education of the young ones. For me, it was the excitement of the children when they saw the teachers coming and were literally jumping with joy, everyone wanting to tag along my skirt, and so eager to be in class - that always wiped away my anxieties and tiredness!



Classes under trees like these.

## Music Ministry

My predecessor, Miss Mary Tabaquero, was one gifted in music both in playing the organ and in conducting. I am one very challenged in playing the organ (I have some degree of dyslexia). However, I am not totally handicap; I had a pretty good voice and I learned all the different parts of the music, and we harmonized a cappella! So, at this church I formed and conducted the Children's Choir, the Youth Choir, continued the work with the Chancel Choir, and small ensembles like the WSCS, and the Methodist Men, duets, trios. We also held mini concerts. Oh, I praise God for the patience of the choir members! "What about playing the organ on Sundays?" you ask. Oh dear, I really don't remember much of that, but here is what I remember. One Sunday I was playing the big organ at the main church in Tarlac with a full-packed congregation. The hymn singing was going well until I got lost in the middle of the hymn. I stopped playing! The congregation stopped singing! Instinctively, I quickly got up, picked up my hymnal, faced the congregation, and I announced, "let us please continue!" I conducted the congregation through the rest of the hymn - a cappella! Oh, dear God! From then on, I befriended and serenaded individual members who could play! What a dilemma!

## Drama

I always had a strong passion for drama - bringing God's message through a play. At Harris, each time I was scheduled to preach in the chapel, I gathered up a cast from the student body and presented playlets. This practice turned into a complaint from my classmates for the fact that they had not heard me preach!

I did similarly at this church in Concepcion where I groomed young people in drama and produced a church play. This project developed into a traveling drama group presenting our play in nearby churches on a few scheduled Sundays. This was going well! The group was learning something new; they were part in delivering God's message, they had a sense of responsibility, they were in a close-knit group of friends, they were happy, all together healthy. However, this activity eventually met with strong oppositions from the mother church. Their rationale was that I was taking the young people out of the church on Sundays; we stopped.

It was not surprising to this church to experience something different at Sunday worship service. Every opportune time bible passages and sermons were enhanced visually. For example, in The Parable of the Sower, I would have a youth in biblical costume and props act out a Sower in the aisle and around the altar during the reading of the passages. Similarly, with The Good Samaritan story, an Angel appearing to Mary, host of angels appeared to the shepherds - Christmas stories, and others.



## Wednesday Mission

Balutu is a barrio in Concepcion, Tarlac, where my minister with his family and I made regular visits and stayed overnight. It's a farming community with a handful of members, no church building, but with numerous sympathizers. The barrio was quite remote crossing a bridgeless river that separated the barrio from the town. During the rainy seasons the river roared from strong current and was known to have drowned people each year.

Crossing the river took time even with smart maneuvers of the jeepney drivers. Jeepneys were the main transportation and were not on any schedule - as they got filled up at their station intown, which took a wait, they drove ever so slow to the barrio destination. Similarly, going back to town they drove slower waiting for anybody to come out to the street for a ride. It was common for the jeepney to wait for a passenger however long it took. For example, a woman sees the jeepney headed

to town. She stops the jeepney and instructs the driver to wait for her while she goes back to the house to take a shower! So, we waited and waited for incidents like this.

A typical setting of a farming barrio community in those days would have about 200-300 families, with an elementary school, a barrio captain, and one major unpaved road running from one end to the other with houses along either side. Behind the houses were the fields. Kerosine lamps were popular in the absence of electricity, there were few radios but no televisions.



Our visits to Balutu were somewhat of an entertainment to the residents, though they saw us every week, nevertheless there was some excitement in the air each time we arrived. The children would crowd around and they were organized in Junior League classes early afternoons. Late afternoons the young people would come around for group visits and fellowship. In the evenings a Coleman kerosine lamp will be lit a sign for the service to start and the adults would slowly come around and join in the singing, praying, and listening to the sermon. Previous church workers laid the groundwork on our mission there.

Drama: As soon as I got familiar with the members, I formed a drama group of several young people and some adults in the cast and a stage crew, and we had quite a production. Drama is one media that brings people together with a common goal, as for the church, a common message. Drama created tighter fellowship among the cast and the crew members, developed a sense of cooperation and responsibility, a sense of accomplishment that brought meaning in their lives. The whole barrio had a kick out of this little group; they enjoyed watching the rehearsals, and by the time we presented the play many knew most of the lines already! I could go back there and do it again.

Latest developments in Balutu: River bridge was built, a church was built, the congregation grew, and Balutu produced three ministers and a deaconess. The deaconess, who happens to be my goddaughter. It is a common practice for godparents to present a baptismal gift to the baby. I was so poor I did not have anything to give, and I felt totally embarrassed! At the baptismal I did the best I could, I **prayed** ever so earnestly and sincerely to God - to bless this child, that she may grow and blossom into a beautiful person, to be a faithful believer and to be of good service to Him and to others. Twelve years later the "Perla's Scholarship Project" was established (this was back in California with the help of co-employees and friends we organized fundraising projects: bake sales, garage sales, and welcomed individual donors). My goddaughter was first on the list of recipients. She was in the program for 8 years, from first year high school until graduating from Harris Memorial College. She majored in Kindergarten Education and served the church full time for 24 years. In 2017 she transferred to the Public School while maintaining a church assignment on Saturdays and Sundays as the organist, choir teacher, and preaches 2 Sundays a month. She is blessed with a minister/high school teacher husband and four beautiful boys. Lucila Flores Escano is blooming, successful in her church work, enjoying the many blessings of family life and a wide circle of friends. Praise be to God for answered prayers!





### 1972-1973 – Tarlac Student Center – Director

The Student Center in Tarlac had a long history of community service. Established in 1907 as a dormitory for students, it was part of the early Methodist movement engaged in social projects - an effort to reach the masses with the gospel of Jesus Christ. It closed for a while but reopened in 1964 and remained an outreach program of the Tarlac church. It catered to the general public as well as the academic communities like the Tarlac Trade School (now Tarlac State University), Tarlac High School, Don Bosco, Holy Spirit Academy, and Osias College. The Center included a women's dormitory.

The Center offered a variety of program of activities: lectures, socials/fellowship, tournaments on different ballgames. It had a library, social hall, and a large campus wherein students felt free and comfortable studying their lessons, playing games, occasional debates, or simply hanging out with friends, and making new friends. A place they enjoyed and felt safe in.

The Center also provided some community outreach programs for the indigent families and out-of-school youth: In collaboration with the Clark Field Community Church, the center provided feeding programs and distribution of goods. In collaboration with the Tarlac Provincial Health Office there were distribution of free medicine, free Family Planning Program and Family Counseling Program. In collaboration with the Clark Field Education Office and the Air Force Office, the center offered the first free seminar on "Business Management" to the professionals in the community. The Center was also a frequent destination for church workers meetings, conferences, seminars, and Christmas Institute.

Working in this type of professional environment it pays to know who is who in the community, who the players are and their individual expertise; tapping into their spirit of volunteerism is key to produce collaborative programs for the center and for the community. It also pays to have a good



Picnic with dormers and friends

mentor, who is vibrant, intelligent, loving, caring, compassionate, and civic minded like Presy Quilon Seager, who was the Center's Director before my time. I want to pay tribute to the former directors, who, through their dedicated service and creative management, the center grew to be a well-known destination for education, arts, sports, and community service. American missionaries: Sara Lou Williams Jacobson and Donna Ratzlaff. Presy Quilon Seager, and Miss Carmen Graganza.

### Deaconess Work in the Midst of Danger

I graduated in 1971 at the height of the government and rebels' atrocious activities in the Tarlac province. This was the time when men and women's heads were discovered in iceboxes in the wet markets; where men and women vanished at any given day; where many families in Tarlac evacuated to the neighboring provinces. My mother's house was made a hiding place at night by the rebels; she decided to evacuate as well. Nonetheless, church work continued. I learned, after the fact, that I nearly got ambushed by the rebels with my young people while riding in a car on our way to an evangelistic service. I was in the backseat by the window holding a guitar, which they mistakenly thought to be a gun. Before anyone could start shooting someone recognized me, the "deaconess," which halted the ambush! Praise the Lord oh my soul! Another happening I learned after the fact - I was secretly being observed by the military while running the Student Center watching my programs and the activities; should I have hinted any small dealings with the "outsiders" I would have been arrested and jailed. I do believe God was protecting me from harm. Praise God!

## Aetas – Pioneer Work

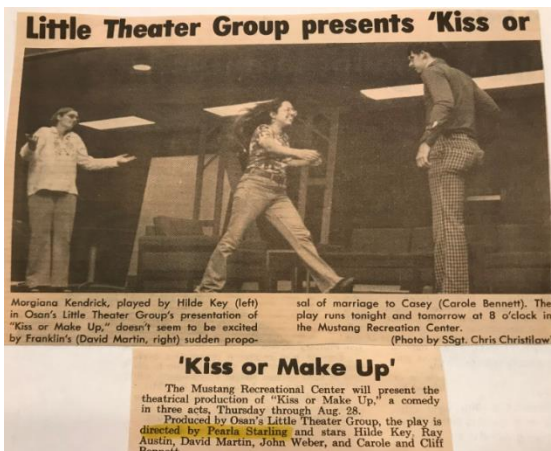


In the early '70s, my former husband, the late George Starling, was the Chief of Police at Camp O'Donnell, Capas, Tarlac. His Filipino staff (many Aetas) lived a few miles from the camp in neighboring mountains. On one of our outings, we drove way up the mountain to visit. The villagers came running to us with curiosity. While Mr. Starling was visiting with his men, I took the opportunity to befriend the women and invited the children for games and taught them songs, bible stories, and prayers. With too many kids, at the following visits we brought additional church workers. (This community of Aetas is now part of the UMC Aeta District with their own Aeta pastors, deaconess, and superintendent – the expanded pioneer work of Ms. Marion Walker, an American Missionary.)

## 1975 Volunteer, South Korea

Mustang Recreation Center, Osan AFB, Korea – Drama Director

The newly built Recreation Center was the popular destination for the men and women in uniform. I was the first ever volunteer drama director – American style! American everything: cast, crew - staging, lighting, sound, and publicity.



The play ran for three consecutive nights attended by the whole base population – from the cooks to the Base Commander. Thank you, God!

I am forever grateful to our Drama teacher, Mrs. Leah Hattrick, who provided me with wide exposure to the theater world outside Harris. She sponsored me to Drama Workshops in Manila wherein stage and movie actors were in attendance.

### **Back to school at different times during the 80's and 90's**

Business Management, Accounting, Human Resources, Computer Technology, Paralegal, Conventions and Tradeshows Management, Meeting Planning, and Contracts Management.

### **Employments in the Corporate World until my retirement in 2015**

- Office Administrator
- Conventions & Tradeshows Management
- Contracts & Budgets Management

### **Conclusion**

As mentioned above, I did not want to be a deaconess. However, it was at Harris where I learned the value of discipline and hard work, where I learned maintaining harmonious human relations is vital in communal living and making friends, where my organizational skill was sharpened, where my leadership ability was developed, and those curriculum writing classes paid off in developing educational training materials in the corporate arena.

Most importantly, I learned with God's presence in my life I could have peace and happiness!



With Jack, the love of my life!