

Faith Sharing from St John's Member Dr May Li at our International Students Dinner Friday 11th September 2009



I hope you all enjoyed the dinner. Please make yourself comfortable and share some of my memories as an international student.

In 1999, I went to the United States from China to study for a doctoral degree in Economics. When I said good-bye to my husband (we got married just a year earlier) at the airport, I wasn't sad at all because I was full of excitement and anticipation for the future. It's been my dream to go overseas to experience a different world, and I had prepared so hard to achieve this: taking English exams, visa applications, and of course, paying a lot of money.

I expected my husband to join me very soon, but unfortunately he didn't get admission to Univ. of Texas where I was studying at. Instead, he went to a Canadian University to do his Ph.D. Since Texas is very far from Canada, we could only visit each other during school vacations. What made things more difficult is my daughter's birth in my second year of study. I remember on the day we came back from hospital with the new-born baby, I looked at her tiny tender face, and couldn't hold my tears. How we are going to look after her? I thought about quitting my study, but nobody in my family supported this idea. As an international student, you all understand the first important thing is to get your degree and to find a job with the degree. We decided to send her to China to my parents. I cried all the way back to China. I knew I was going to miss those precious moments, her first word, her first step; I knew that we may have made the wrong decision but I felt that I had no choice. I couldn't put all the burden on my husband if he was not ready to take it.

In the next couple of years, I was in Texas, my husband in Canada, and my daughter in China with my parents. Every vacation I traveled back to China to see her and tried to stay a couple of weeks with her. Until five years later, we both found a job in The University of Melbourne, and my family united here in Melbourne.

When I look back, what I am most thankful for is the love from God and from brothers and sisters in the church. Without this support, I couldn't possibly survive these years, finish my degree and become a university lecturer. I became a Christian one year after I went to Texas, right before I got pregnant. You know I came from China, and my education there has nothing to do with Christianity. How I got to know God and

committed my life to him is another long story that I may share with you in other occasions.

I am so thankful that God had already prepared me for the hard years to come.

I'll just share with you a few moments when I really felt this support. I remember the first time I visited my OB doctor, a friend dropped me near the hospital, but I couldn't find the exact location. When I finally got there, I already missed my appointment. The nurse told me I could either come back at another time or wait till 5pm. I chose to wait for three hours since I didn't want to trouble friends one more time. I was sitting in the lobby, felt so exhausted, lonely, and helpless. Once again, I was crying and complaining to God. But so strange, I felt peace and strength start to fill my heart. As if I heard God saying, I understand how you feel, but I am with you and you'll be fine. Then some little kids passing by attracted my attention. They looked so cute, just like angels. I started to imagine how my baby would look like, and how I can raise him/her. I was cheered up by the thoughts. This is the first time I felt the joy of conceiving a baby since I got pregnant. From then on, I never complained again about the bad timing of the baby's coming, and I started to look forward to her coming.

I mentioned earlier that on the day back from hospital, I had a good cry, worrying about how to look after the baby. Later in the day a sister in the church called me, and I told her about my worries and how my prayer didn't help me. I still remember what she said to me ***"imagine that you are walking with a heavy bag; someone driving by offers to give you a ride, you get in the car, but still carry the bag on your shoulder, then the car is no good to you. God is like the car"***. I learnt since then to unload my burdens to God, and have faith in him that he'll take care of me.

During the years as an international student, what depressed me the most is that I couldn't see where our future is, where we could both find a job, when my family could unite together. You know doing a Ph.D. is a long process. It typically takes five to six years to finish. I frequently felt desperate, feeling that it's never going to be the end. My daughter's absence made me always feel something important is missing in my heart, which made it quite hard for me to concentrate on my study. But I knew what I should do and I tried very hard to focus on my dissertation. Despite of the frustrations and depressions, there was always a faith and a hope in my heart: God will look after my future, I just need to do what I can do and wait for it patiently. So I hang in there, until it eventually comes.

I guess as an international student, sometimes you may also feel lonely, helpless, and so uncertain about your future. There may also be moments you feel you cannot take it any more. Then let me tell you, try to be patient, concentrate on what you should be doing, behave well, patiently wait for your moment to come, because God loves you and always rewards you for your efforts.