

## From hungry caterpillar to butterfly!



If I were to choose something out of God's creation that I have an affinity with, it would most certainly have to be a butterfly. Why, because the metamorphosis that this creature goes through, so identifies with my life thus far.

Does anyone recall the children's story "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" by Eric Carle? I have the fondest memories of reading this story to my two daughters when they were young and, today, I am reading it again to my grandson aged 2 ½ years old.

The story begins with a little egg lying on a leaf. The warm sun ripens the egg and out pops a very tiny, and very hungry caterpillar. Its primary aim is to find food, which it does and gorges on until sated. It proceeds to build a small cocoon around itself; stays inside for more than two weeks and then nibbles a hole, in order to push itself out whereupon there has been a transformation. It emerges a most beautiful butterfly!

My earliest childhood recollections are idyllic and of a life-style, which was quite privileged in what was then, European middle class Ceylon [now Sri Lanka]. As Europeans, we had 3 native servants to fetch and carry out our every whim; one just to look after me! Both parents worked and I attended a Catholic private school, and made my first Holy Communion aged 7 yrs, which meant very little to me!

In 1956, settling into a new country, new culture, new home, and a new school aged 9 years old, when the family emigrated was not the happiest period of my life, but then being too young to have any effect on the decision my parents took, I begrudgingly accepted my lot.

The Christian influence continued at home as well as in school, although the joy of being a Christian was not evident in my life, as it was constantly one of the strictest discipline; at home by my parents and at convent school by the nuns. It did not help being the eldest in the family, a *girl* and parents who were trying to adjust to a new culture! This disciplined lifestyle continued until I was 17 years old, when I started to rebel against all authority figures and also question certain aspects of my faith. Not receiving any satisfactory answer from my parish priest, I left the Catholic Church and didn't return except for festivals and family events!

With the benefit of good schooling, minus the oft times strict discipline, [*I do appreciate it now!*] my career in the City of London brought me into contact with the "high life" and I embraced it with vigour. London was my utopia and I loved every minute of it. Like most, when I look back I can see that I was constantly looking for something else to satisfy and never quite finding it, because I was looking in the wrong places.

I met and married William and moved from London to the country, sharing a home with in-laws! Not ideal, but Mum and I made it work. Two adorable girls arrived which completed our family unit. So life continued until 1985 when it all turned sour. I did not lose my faith, but I felt far from God and my prayer-life was very much driven rather than an intimacy with God through Jesus, my Saviour and friend.

Following the sale of the family home, we moved to Tunbridge Wells, and events in 1985/86 were regrettably still controlling our lives. Soon things would get to

nightmare-ish proportions. After a lengthy court case, which went against us, I had to face the immediate future without my husband. The worst part was how to explain it to the children.

10 months on and we began to reassemble our family life, dysfunctional as it was. Looking back I can see that all we were doing was putting sticking plaster over wounds which refused to heal. Through it all, God was ever faithful and was providing for us.

Visiting Spring Harvest some 18-20 years ago, as a delegate, William and I arrived late in the week after attending to some litigation concerning "the events of 1985/86". With only two days left of the conference, I wondered why we had gone at all! Things were about to change and I was to find myself listening intently to R. T. Kendal talk on the last day about forgiveness and not judging others [Lk 6: 37-42]. Hard as I tried to not take it in, [I was beginning to feel very uncomfortable], I found every thing he said hitting the bulls eye. All the pain, hurt and bitterness of the past came crowding in and I just could not hold back - the dam broke and with it all my resolve. I had built up such a defence that no one could penetrate until now. As I listened, I realised that I had reached a point where I really did not want to go on fighting the judiciary and the conspiracy that had taken my husband and father to my children, out of our lives for a period of time. We had been mortally wounded and suffered pain and trauma, but this was the time to ask for God's help. This turning point was a victory for God, who had been waiting for me to give him back the reins. It was not easy handing over control of my life to someone else, as I thought I had done a pretty good job up to that point. Little did I know!

I first had to discover that Father God was not a stern disciplinarian but a tenderhearted, compassionate provider who always had my best interests at heart. Where all my mis-directed efforts to vindicate the wrong that had been perpetrated in the highest courts in the land had failed, I was to discover that He always delivered the goods, and on time!

From that point on, not only were there answers to prayer before I prayed, but I started to see life in Technicolor and not in shades of grey and sometimes utter, wretched blackness. My children had suffered health problems too because of the "events of 1985/86" and I knew I had to choose to allow God to rebuild me and our family life or my stubbornness would continue to affect others. Life did not suddenly improve - far from it. There were hurdles to overcome every day, but knowing that I was not alone made all the difference. I started to read the Bible and the continuing support I received from new found friends in the local church was of such great value that I am indebted to God and to them for standing with me through some harrowing times.

Like some who have strayed off the narrow road and been brought back by the AMAZING GRACE of a loving Father, I am so grateful that the Lord pursued me until he caught me! I was a prodigal daughter who had to learn the hard way.

My faith grew with Holy Spirit inspired teaching I received in my local church and attendance at New Wine Summer Conferences in the beautiful countryside of Somerset. Being brought up a Catholic, I had not experienced the person and work of the Holy Spirit [the Holy Ghost was only talked about]; this was new, sometimes challenging, sometimes encouraging, always nourishing together with the Word.

I began to look back on my life and realised that God had always been a positive influence but I had failed to see Him or his perfect intervention in my life. Hindsight is

a wonderful thing but now I know He has fed, nourished and guided me, as I took each faltering stride on the stepping stones to cross the river, leading me onwards towards Jesus and the Cross, where all the wrong done to me and all the wrong I have done to others is dealt with once and for all time.

So some of those stepping stones have been, teaching Sugar craft at the Adult Centre which led me into a Basic Counselling course at West Kent College and a 3-week residential at CWR in Farnham which led to more self-disclosure and a sorting of baggage. About 8 years ago I completed what was then Faith in Ministry, progressing to Pastoral Assistant training and DMP covering theology.

I fell into my current role more by accident rather than design having said I would help my vicar input some data on his computer, that was 9 years ago! As a member of St Matthew's Church, High Brooms, I have been involved mainly on the admin side, assisting Rev. Chris Wicks, the DCC the Leadership Team, as well as the growing staff team; no two days are the same. William and I are committed to the work of the kingdom, howsoever God wants to use us and are members of a small group, actively involved in prayer ministry both at St Matt's and New Wine and are currently mentoring a young offender.

I hadn't realised it until I started to write my testimony, but being a restored prodigal, I believe God has laid on my heart a burden to pray for the return of **all** prodigals and I believe I am seeing his power at work in peoples lives now, today.

Sung worship was and has been a continual joy, not just to praise the Lord for who He is, but is also of particular importance to me, as it prepares my whole being for quiet times with the Lord. I know he has a purpose for my life and is using my past experiences, turning them to good. In partnership with Jesus there is no mountain too difficult to climb, no river too wide to cross and I am quietly expectant of quite a few more surprises in store for me as I look to the future.

If you are reading this and you haven't as yet made up your mind - be assured God loves you and has a plan and a purpose for your life. Don't waste time deliberating – he is knocking on the door of your life – give it all up for HIM – he is worth it – he knew you were worth it when he spread out his arms for you on the cross.

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