



MEGAN'S TESTIMONY

Every life is a story, and every story matters. Recently, I have been in a deep, dark pit, certain that my story was not worth telling, and wanting it just to end. How I got there, I'm not 100% certain, but I know it was one step at a time, and I know the steps were my own.

I was born on Anzac Day, 1968, to a very young mother, married to a man she didn't really love. They were wed because Mum had fallen pregnant with my brother, who was born eighteen months before me.

I love Psalm 139, which tells me "I am fearfully and wonderfully made," and Jeremiah 1 and verse 6, where God says, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee." In the midst of all the messes we make in this fallen world, God still loves His people, and each new baby formed is an eternal soul that He cares about deeply. I am very thankful for that.

Mum's first marriage didn't last very long, and I was just three when she married again. This new man loved my Mum, and took on my brother and me as though we were his own. After a couple of years, another daughter was born, and later, a big, Maori boy who had run away from his home in NZ planted himself with us, and that became our family.

At about this time, my mother's family banded together to start up a company in the steel industry. Her father, my grandfather, had recently lost everything in another business venture, and so this was an all-or-nothing gamble for the whole family. My new Dad joined the team, and in just fifteen years, the family had made their fortune, and my Dad found himself the CEO of a growing multi-national company, based in Brisbane. The rest of the family sold out, and invested their fortunes elsewhere.

Growing up, I knew nothing much about the risks and hard work involved in building the family company – I am not business minded. What it meant for me was weekends at our grandparents' beach house, with loads of cousins and aunts and uncles. The adults spent their weekends playing cards, skiing, eating, drinking, arguing about work, and laughing a lot, while we children just played and played, in and out of the water, all day long. It was a safe and loving environment to grow up in, and I am thankful for it.

But God was not a part of our lives, with the exception of one catholic aunt, who practised her religion in her own time. We certainly didn't go to church, and God was never acknowledged or thanked for the prosperity we began to enjoy, as the family business grew. I remember, at quite a young age, asking my mother if God could read our thoughts. She couldn't answer me, but asked what I had thought that so worried me. I couldn't tell her. I had thought a big swear- word earlier in the day, and it had plagued me until bed time.

When I was eleven, I was sent to boarding school in Sydney, presumably to get a better education. I lasted just one term, before I packed my bags and ran away! I can't imagine what my parents must have gone through, first with worry, and then the shame and

reproach. That was none of my concern! I had caught the train home, and there was no way I was going back to that awful place!

I went to the local high school, where I thrived. I managed to stay at the top of my classes with very little effort, even securing first place in the whole year in a couple of subjects. And of course, those glorious weekends at the beach house continued, filled with the love and laughter of family.

During the Summer holidays, my grandparents would take us on overseas trips, so that by the age of thirteen I had visited many and varied cultures, from the fast-food and theme-park-loving United States, to the slums of Calcutta in India, and the soaring heights of the Inca ruins, in Peru. My Grandfather thought that the education gained on one overseas trip far outweighed anything we could possibly learn in a year of school! I had to agree with him.

At the age of fifteen, I was sent back to the boarding school I had earlier run away from, to complete my final two years of high school. It was thought by all my elders, the Principal of the school, included, that I should be mature enough, by that age, to handle it. I was not.

At the swanky Sydney school, I was no longer top of my classes, but found myself thrust into that dreadful abyss called “average.” I didn’t like being there, but instead of working harder to climb back up to the top, I reacted by becoming rebellious, and put even less effort into my studies. A pretty stupid thing to do.

It was at this time that my struggle with the meaning of life and the reason for my existence really began. I felt TOTALLY unworthy of all I had been given, and the privileged lifestyle afforded me. I began to simultaneously like and hate all the baubles that came with wealthy living. I liked them, because I was used to them, and they made life easier; and I hated them, because they were meaningless, and empty, and didn’t ever satisfy. Solomon rightly proclaims, in the book of Ecclesiastes that “all is vanity!”

There were a few Christians in my year at school, and I began to gravitate towards them, and ask them questions about the reason for the hope they had in Jesus. I was sceptical, and my questions were like fiery darts, aimed at destroying, or at least finding holes in their ridiculous, archaic faith. I couldn’t believe, in our day, and in such an elite school, filled with highly educated people, that these girls could cling to such out-dated ideas, that they could be so stupid.

Why was it, then, that these “stupid” girls were always so cheerful, calm and serene; so sure of where they were heading, and so happy and willing to submit to the authorities placed in their lives, and work willingly at their tasks, when I, and others like me were very unsettled and unsure of ourselves, living a roller-coaster ride of emotional ups and downs? These girls were able to answer all the questions I fired at them, but their calm assurance and faith just bugged me.

After graduating from high school (with the very average marks I deserved!), I spent a year on a student exchange program in Japan. Over the year, I stayed with five different host families, enjoying the different lifestyles they each had, from pearl farmers living in a rambling old traditional house, complete with bamboo mat floors, paper sliding doors, very

low tables and fold away futon beds, to a modern hip and happening family, who owned a chain of menswear stores, and lived in a western-style house in the middle of town.

I fell in love with Japan. Its people, its culture, its language, its food – I loved everything about it. When the time came for me to return to Australia, I cut my hair into a bob, dyed it black, and swore to all my friends I would return. Now I knew I had been born in the wrong country: deep down, I *knew* I was meant to be Japanese! Surely it was in Japan that I would find all the answers to the questions I had been asking.

Here, I will mention that one of the Aussie girls who was on the exchange programme with me was a born again Christian, who shared a little of her faith and a lot of her favourite contemporary Christian worship music with me, over the year. Whilst her witness kept the subject of the Christian faith ever before me, which was God's intention, I have to say that I found her life not much different to mine, and her faith very shallow, and not very convincing. How important it is for us to be salty Christians!

Anyway, I returned to Australia, and what a dreadful time I had of it! I felt very misplaced, and suffered terrible culture shock. I had a hard time living back at home with my parents and younger sister, and an even worse time trying to fit in with the Aussie university culture. I began skipping classes, and eventually dropped out of uni altogether. I got a job in a Japanese restaurant, sought out the company of Japanese people, and set my sights on returning to Japan.

A little over a year after my first trip there, I did return, travelling on a working holiday visa. On the way there, I had a three-day stopover in Singapore, where I caught up with school friends. In my hotel in Singapore, I found a Good News new testament Bible, which I began to read. I took it with me to Japan, where I continued to read it and read it. I landed a job as an English teacher in a privately owned language school, inland and South of Mt Fuji. I worked hard on my classes, during the day, and spent my evenings alone in my little apartment, reading the New Testament. I began to fall in love with Jesus, and wondered if He could really love me, and forgive me for being the stinker I was.

At this time, a family had moved from Brisbane to Nagoya, to work as missionaries there. I had never met them, but Peter Clyburn had been my sister's Religious Studies teacher in Brisbane, and she had wanted us to meet on several occasions before. He had led my sister to the Lord, and obviously my sister could see that I, too, needed salvation. I didn't know about any of that, but I had some holidays coming up, so I thought I'd jump on a train and go and meet this family.

I ended up staying a week with them, and was absolutely intrigued by their love for Jesus, and by God's obvious hand in their life. I marvelled at their faith, and the life of faith they were living. I spent many late nights talking over the Bible and big life questions, and that family handled me and my questions with a love and care that could only be born of Jesus. I left their home knowing that that was the life I wanted to live.

Back in my little flat at the language school, I opened my Bible again, and turned to the front section, where God's plan for salvation was written out. There, it said that "All have sinned,

and come short of the glory of God”, and that “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ Our Lord.”

I knew I was a sinner, in need of salvation. I knew that my life up to that point had been purposeless and meaningless; that despite the loving environment I had grown up in, and the travel, education and wealth I had enjoyed, I had NEVER known the love and joy and richness of life, such as I had witnessed being lived out by that missionary family. I knew that such a life was impossible, outside of Jesus Christ.

And yet, I still wrestled. All I had been brought up to believe stood in stark contrast to what I was now willing to believe: What would my family and friends think?

I read through the New Testament again, and knew I had no choice. To come face to face with Jesus Christ is to meet with reality. He is The Way, The Truth, and The Life, and anything apart from Him is just not real. I got down on my face in that small apartment, and I prayed the prayer that was written in the front of the Bible, and I accepted Jesus Christ as my Saviour. I was born again. That was in June or July, 1988.

I finished my teaching contract in Japan, and returned to Australia. It was the year the World Expo was being held in Brisbane, and my family was busy hosting people coming up to Brisbane to see it. One of those visitors was the Christian girl who had done the exchange program with me in Japan. She wanted to go to church, one Sunday, so we found the particular brand she liked, and off we went.

I had only been back from my working holiday a couple of months, and hadn't yet thought about finding a church to go to. I had actually been wondering whether my prayer, uttered alone in my room a few months before, was the real deal; so when an invitation was given at the end of that church service, I raised my hand, and went through the whole thing, again – this time with many witnesses. I believe that my new life in Christ DID actually begin when I first cried out to the Lord, in Japan, because Romans 10:13 says, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” I just felt I needed others to witness my decision, for accountability, I suppose.

My growth as a Christian was very slow and unsteady, in the beginning. Unfortunately, my friend directed me to worship at a charismatic church, where I enjoyed a lot of froth and bubble for a season, but no real depth or growth. I purchased a Bible, and continued to read parts of it at home, but I did not get a lot of meaty teaching at church, and was even a little confused and put off by some of the doctrine being taught. Worship there seemed to focus on feeling good and enjoying the mood, but to be honest, I can't remember learning much from the preaching.

I shared my love for Jesus with my family, and couldn't understand how they could so vehemently reject the one who loved them so much. I invited them to witness my baptism, which they did, but if anything, that just made matters worse. They thought I had lost all sense, and couldn't understand how I could be so easily brain washed, when I was such an intelligent young lady, with such promise for a bright future. They were angry, and there was much tension in our home at that time.

Meanwhile, I had settled down at university, and was determined to finish my degree – and determined to finish it at the top of my class! I had really enjoyed my teaching in Japan, and now planned to study Japanese and Chinese, with a view to gaining a post graduate diploma in education, and becoming a language teacher. Really, in my heart of hearts, I just wanted to get married and have a bunch of children, but with no real prospects on the horizon, teaching would have to come first.

Then I met Simon. Simon waltzed into my first tutorial in Mandarin Chinese, with his beard and hair still wet from the gym shower, and I was a goner! With a smile almost as big as his face, and sparkling, cheeky dark eyes, I knew this was the man for me. His family all went to church, and he even sang in the choir, so that sealed it, as far as I was concerned.

After a while, it became evident to me that this young man may not be truly born again, so I began to drag him to all my charismatic services and picnics, sure that if he wasn't saved, then he soon would be. Now, had I been properly grounded in my own faith, a whole lot of warning bells would have caused me to flee youthful lusts, but those warning bells were very dim, and my faith not strong, and in the end, it was me who ended up pursuing him! Oh, boy! How strong the pull of the flesh is, and how much in need we are of the Spiritual weapons God has given us in His Word.

Galatians 6:7 says, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." We must always live with the consequences of our own decisions and actions, be they good or bad. When we are saved, God, through His Word, guides us in paths of righteousness, and gives us very clear directions for avoiding poor decisions and harmful consequences, if we are walking in the Spirit and yielded to His ways. If we do go astray, and make choices that will mar our testimony, or even harm us, then God promises He will NEVER leave us nor forsake us, but will lovingly help us to live THROUGH those consequences, victoriously. He will not remove the consequences, but instead assures us that "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." Only God can turn a poor choice into a victory, if we are yielded to Him.

Simon and I have suffered much unnecessary anguish and heartache in our marriage, because of wrong actions we made in the past, and because we never really learned how to confront and deal with issues Biblically. Simon's testimony of his recent salvation certainly shed a whole lot of light on some of the problems we had experienced, and opened up a door for the Holy Spirit to come into the lives of every one of our family and do an amazing work. We praise Him for that.

Every victory in our fight against the Flesh and Satan is usually won with a battle. Actually, Christ has already gained the victory for us, but there are battles that must be fought in the mind of every believer, every day, if he is to live victoriously. God brought our family to Newcastle in His perfect timing, to give us a place and the time we needed to engage in a fierce Spiritual conflict, such as we have never experienced before.

For Simon, it meant five months of anguished prayer, on his face, in the closet, and much time in God's Word, seeking His direction and counsel. He was confronted with who he really was, and brought time and again to areas in his life that God would have him yield. It

hurt, at times, but many battles were won, and he came out of his closet a changed man. For me, it went a little differently.

In our twenty years of marriage, we have lived in five different countries, and have made six international moves, six years in NZ being the longest we have ever been in one place. God divinely appointed places of worship and people along the way, to help us to grow in our walk with Him, but my own world revolved mostly around our own family, and all that is involved in looking after a husband, and homeschooling an ever-growing classroom of gorgeous children.

When I was pregnant with our second daughter, Maggie, we moved to Macau, China, and it was there that we were really grounded in the Word of God and properly established in our faith, disciplined in Christian living by a wonderful missionary family. It was there, also, that I really fell in love with the King James Bible, the preserved Word of God, and began to delve more deeply into its rich truths. I became passionate about it, and eagerly shared each new discovery of truth with anyone who cared to listen. That passion has never left me: I love the Word of God.

It was also in Macau that I began my journey in home schooling, spending much time investigating the different philosophies of education, discarding the rubbish and eventually landing on a philosophy that agreed with my Biblical world view, as well as my preference in teaching style.

My zeal in home making and home education was born of a deep love for my Saviour, and a desire to offer unto Him good, strong soldiers, fully equipped to be used in His service, when they were grown. Psalm 127 tells us that our children are like arrows in the hand of a mighty warrior. I wanted my arrows to be sharp, and able to fly straight. The world and its humanistic philosophy was not welcome in my little training ground, and I guarded that ground well.

At first, my own walk with the Lord was a strong and disciplined one, and it was in meeting God each day that I was able to re-fuel and keep my focus. But as time went on, and more babies were born, I began to spend less and less time alone with God, and tried to get by on yesterday's manna. It just doesn't work. Instead of meditating on God's Word, I began to dwell on negative things, and ruminate on past hurts. Oh, I still loved the Bible, and still taught our children from it, but my own walk with God was suffering, and inside, I was dry and thirsting for the love I had once known. I was also coping less and less with the physical and mental demands of managing a large household: Did you know that in our family of ten people, there are 43 relationships going on at once? That requires a lot of discipline and mental space to manage properly, not to mention a big dose of God's grace – I was depleted of all these things.

By the time our family landed back in Australia this year, having spent the last three years on the mission field in Vanuatu, I was physically exhausted and emotionally and spiritually spent. Even before we left Vanuatu, I had started battling with depression, but I somehow carried on until we finally settled in a rental house, here. And then I just came to a complete stop, unable to go on any further.

I knew that the only way out of the very deep pit I was now in, was by the renewing of my mind, through God's Word. But I could now barely hold a thought, let alone read and memorize scripture. I would spend some days just crying uncontrollably, bound by a feeling of total worthlessness, and certain I was a complete failure. I wanted God to just take my life, so that I would no longer be a burden to others. I have since learned that this is a common thought for people suffering from depression, and it is now so obviously a lie from the depths of hell, that I can't understand why I believed it. But back then, it had such a choking grip on me that I could not get out from under it. So while Simon was experiencing victories, and our whole family was seeing an outpouring of God's Spirit upon us, I was still internally crippled by a deep sadness, and now becoming irritable by its presence.

Simon and I shared my struggle with our children, and then with Pastor Charlie. At first, the thought of being a burden to Pastor and the church kept me from seeking prayer and counsel. But then, I realised I was being a burden, anyway, because I could not function properly, and therefore was useless as a member of the body of Christ. I knew I could trust Pastor Charlie, because he had shown himself to be a man of prayer, and a man of God's Word. I knew that He would give only Biblical counsel, which is the only counsel I sought. What I feared more than anything was being fed some useless, feel-good lies that would put me right back where I was. I knew the answer to my problem could only be found in God's Word – I just needed help getting back there.

I am slowly getting back on track, and regaining some of the ground I had lost to Satan. I have found David's psalms the most refreshing balm, as they portray a very real man experiencing just the kind of deep pain and sorrow I now felt: in fact, I'm almost certain that guy was manic depressive – and definitely a kindred spirit☺. His sorrows always turned to joy, when he came back to God and His truth.

I thank God for His Word and His ways, which are perfect. I thank God for the family of believers, where we can come for comfort, support, strength, prayer and counsel. I thank God for my husband and children, who are priceless gifts to me. I thank God for the opportunity to write out my testimony, which has caused me to see afresh His hand upon my life, even from before I was born, and to see the amazing love and mercy and grace He has so freely bestowed upon me, not to mention blessings untold. I still have a long way to go in my battle with depression, but I serve a God who "forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies," and I can declare, with Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."