

Towards 2010 Conference
Gold Coast / Ghana. A Reflection by Carol E. Jeffrey.

In Jan. 1953 as a young enthusiastic, but totally inexperienced teacher, I landed in the Gold Coast (after a two week voyage from Liverpool to Takoradi.) However much one thinks one knows, the actual experience is quite different. I already had many deep African connections: my sister-in-law's father had been the business manager at Lovedale, South Africa and she herself had begun her education at the very first interracial school there (long before apartheid.) She and my brother had worked as anthropologists in East and Central Africa in the 1930's and my sister had taught in the 1940's at the Teacher Training College at Mlanje, Nyasaland. But nevertheless the culture shock for me was dramatic and life-changing.

The stark contrasts hit hard. The sight of the vibrant market stalls with the ramshackle poverty of houses behind; the smell of the beautiful flowers and fruit with that of the open drains; the sound of the exuberant harmonies of singing in school and church with the dull, listless, blank faces of those who had no opportunities; the welcoming handshakes, smiles and laughter with the sense (often hidden but very real) of spiritual evil underneath. We candidates had been immersed in theoretical and theological lectures and discussions at St. Colm's but it was all merely head knowledge. These were real facts to learn from and live with.

To begin with I endeavoured to teach general science in a lab 8' x 20' with hardly any light or apparatus at the old Presbyterian site at Aburi which had been built by the Swiss Basel missionaries in about 1880. We were some twenty miles inland on the ridge which was damp and humid but not as hot as Accra. Soon some Church of Scotland teachers, me among them, were to be seconded to the new Government Secondary School opening in 1954.

As dawn was breaking an Easter morning we symbolically walked from the old site with kerosene lamps and singing Easter hymns to carry the light of education and more especially the Light of the world in Jesus Christ to the beautiful new school, In those days there were only 5 girls' secondary schools in the whole country and so any girl who didn't appreciate her privilege knew there were at least six others waiting for her place! The young women (many almost as old as me) were hungry for knowledge in that soon to be independent proud land.

In July 1953 I wrote this about them, " most come from second or third generation Christian families but many do not know the Lord for themselves ... clever and keen to get on in life inevitably they would become leaders, what sort of leaders depends very largely on what they believe and what they learn both from books and from the life of the school community and from the lives of those they mix with." As Nelson Mandela said years later, " Education is the best weapon you can use to change the world. "

And so, under God, it happened. One became the first woman District Agricultural Officer, several became heads of Teacher Training Colleges and schools, many married prominent Christian men, and one became the first Woman Scripture Union staff member who later founded a holistic Christian Ministry for women to help them achieve their potential in practical skills as Entrepreneurs. This work has now spread all over Ghana.

In the '50' s God had led us to start Bible study groups and Christian camps. These were called Inter-College Camps as teacher training and university students were invited along with senior secondary school pupils. The boys began in 1952 (Jim Findlay was one of the leaders). The girls followed in 1954. Today virtually all the leaders in every denomination and Christian organisation in Ghana have been profoundly influenced during their formative years by contacts within Scripture Union. (See "Changed by the Word " , the story of S. U. Ghana, ISBN 9964- 87- 800-1)

I had the great privilege of going back in 2006 and meeting up with about 15 of my former pupils and campers and also some of the men who had been at boys' camps in the `50's. Many had found that following Christ was often difficult, but all those I met still rejoice in His love and care. Many are still actively involved as Eiders and teachers in their churches and in voluntary Christian work. One. has set up a charity to care for Senior Citizens in their homes in Accra where, unfortunately, the traditional African extended family unit has now broken down.

How true are those wonderful words (adapted by me). "Missionaries sowed - often very inadequately-
, the Church - local believers - watered, but God by the power of the Holy Spirit gives the increase."
How marvellous to have played a small part in-this.

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