

Presentation to the Commission on Women's Roles

I appreciate this unique opportunity to share with you some thoughts about the various roles I have been called to fill in my life, both professionally and otherwise. Now a brief background.

I'd hate to think about the roles I would have had to fill had God not sent Neal Wilson to Egypt to share the Seventh-day Adventist message with the Kafrouni family. I thank God he responded to the call.

Following my conversion to Adventism, my foremost desire was to become a Bible teacher. I wanted to be just like Emilie Levy, a convert from Judaism who patiently and, sometimes under difficult circumstances taught us Bible truths. By the way, the story of her own conversion is recorded in the book, As The Stars Forever, a fascinating story. I highly recommend it.

As a result of her teaching, my life was literally transformed. Instead of fulfilling my cherished childhood dream of going to California and becoming a Hollywood star, my goal became to teach others Bible truths. Preparation for this new role is spoken of by Paul in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed rightly dividing the word of truth."

So in the midst of a cold winter night, on January 8 to be exact, I arrived in Lincoln, Nebraska at Union College to "study." Everything was different: climate, cultural values and mores, food, language, dress; but, our loving God was the same one I knew in Egypt. He guided me then and continues to guide today.

I saw evidence of His guidance as I was standing in line at Union College Admissions office to register for my courses, evidence in the person of a kind lady, Miss Bunston, she walked over to me and said, "You must be one of the Egyptian girls." I said, "Yes." She asked, "What course of study are you taking?" I said, "Bible study because I want to help people find God and the truth." "Well," she added, "you could help people doubly if you enrolled in nursing--help them physically find good health and spiritually find God. Pray about it and let me know your decision tomorrow." I prayed. In fact my sister, Gorgette, and I prayed earnestly for God's guidance that night and . . . you know the rest of the story. In Desire of Ages p. 141, Mrs. White says "Angels from the world of light are near to those who in humility seek for divine guidance." I felt their presence then and many times since.

This was the beginning of an exciting and very challenging (to say the least) but fulfilling journey which I hope will culminate in welcoming Jesus at His soon return.

The roles in which I have functioned throughout my life have been many and varied. They extend from scrubbing and polishing

floors in private homes for 50 cents an hour during my student years, to developing courses and directing nursing programs at various colleges and universities (for a little more pay . . . not much!).

No matter what my activity, my uppermost goal has been (and still is) to lovingly serve God and humanity. I have tried to witness for the Lord whether I was scrubbing floors, teaching students or caring for patients.

There is a brief story which illustrates well how a nurse can witness, and it reminds me of many of my own experiences. The account was authored by Liz Walls in the February 1987 Outlook, p. 13. A young woman was taken to the recovery room following surgery and the loss of her baby. He was stillborn. She felt alone and frightened; and I quote:

Please someone . . . anyone . . . I'm here, I cried silently. My baby is gone and I'm sad. I can't even move.

Then a hand touched me, not only touched, but laced its fingers through mine. The hand was warm; it was alive. I could feel the caring in that touch.

The warmth spread from my fingertips throughout my entire arm. Before long, my hand felt capable of moving. I raised it to force open my still-heavy eyelids.

I saw a young face close to mine. There was kindness in the eyes, and a smile played softly about the lips. But most important was the hand.

Like a drowning person clinging to a raft, I held that hand. It left mine briefly to check my blood pressure but always returned. Every now and then, it would give a gentle squeeze.

The longer that hand and I were in contact, the faster I could feel my body awakening. The numbness faded, and soon I was able to speak a few words. I felt revitalized and ready to cope once again.

After my vital signs had stabilized, I was returned to my room. On the way through the big, double doors, I bid farewell to my faithful nurse. There was so much I wanted to tell her, but words seemed inadequate to express my gratitude. So all I said was, "Thank you". She smiled, and I knew she understood.

Later as I lay in my room, it occurred to me how much what had just happened reminded me of Jesus.

A caring, compassionate nurse, emulating a loving and caring Jesus.

What should be the basis for our actions and in what role are we best equipped to function? I asked a nursing faculty member this question and her answer was, "The most important role we play, ever, is role model. If we can follow Christ and serve as role models to others, this is what really counts. It is the most desirable role one can play." In Desire of Ages, p. 67, Mrs. White says, "When we live by faith on the Son of God, the fruits of the spirit will be seen in our life; not one will be missing. . . and every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth (pruneth) that it may bring forth more fruit." We can then become effective role models for those about us. In other words, we can be witnesses for Christ in whatever role He calls us to fulfill.

Sometimes, other people's roles have appeared attractive to me until I hear of some of the challenges they confront and then the saying, "the grass is greener on the other side of the fence" takes on a negative twist or meaning. Consequently, I wouldn't trade jobs with any of them.

God in His wisdom has prepared each one of us, through personal life experiences He has brought us through, to function in the specific role He has placed us in. Things don't get easier, I have discovered; but with His constant presence and leading, and our increased faith and trust in that leadership, we can look forward with excitement and great anticipation to a bright future with positive outcomes from our humble efforts.

Dr. Merton Strommer, Executive Director for the Center for Youth and Family Ministry at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, presented a fascinating report in January 1988, to the Board of Higher Education. He shared some statistics that contribute to today's changing roles. I will share excerpts of only five of his points.

1. Mounting anti-child attitudes. In 1985 there were 24 million married couples with children compared to 26 million that had none. Articles are being written today with titles like this one, "Do Americans Hate Children?" Germain Greer categorically asserts that modern society is profoundly hostile to children.

2. Changing nature of the family. In 1955, 60% of the households in the U.S. consisted of a working father, a housewife mother, and two or more children of school age. By 1985 that kind of family unit had dropped from 60% to 7%, an astonishing shift. Truly, the traditional family is a vanishing one. The typical family will have two earners with the woman suffering from overwork. The initial problem will be how to manage conflicting demands of work, family, and domestic roles.

3. Changing roles of women. Strommer reports that in a study of 2 million women in a Lutheran denomination three issues surfaced: equal status in the Church, mothers working outside the home, and abortion. He addresses the first two. In that study three out of four women believe they are qualified as men to give

leadership in the Church and four out of five believe God calls women to the ministry. Fifty percent of the women believe that a married woman with children has as much right as her husband to work outside the home. The question one may ask is, who minds the children?

4. Increased secularization. 800 young adolescents (grade 5-9) whose parents are church members were asked how often they discussed God or the Bible or some religious issue. Only 10% had some degree of religious discussion every day. With respect to college students (6 million freshman), the 23 year study shows a steady rise since 1966 in student interest in material success and a steady decline in development of an individual philosophy of life.

5. Growing moral vacuum. Since 1985 there has been a shift in values toward greater individualism and personal freedom. Evidences of this shift are seen in the more hedonistic lifestyles and people's unwillingness to make commitments. The idea of this growing moral vacuum is especially evident in the behavioral patterns of today's youth and adults through a marked upturn of self destructive activities. Here he refers to the social epidemics of drugs, alcohol, child abuse and suicide.

He also speaks of the epidemic increase in hurting people, confused people, lonely people.

What are the implications of these changes in our own families and our church families? This commission would do well to consider these changes with respect to the issues at hand.

A group of nurses from Loma Linda Medical Center shared their feelings about change in the following poem:

It's been tough Lord . . .
so many changes,
so much turmoil,
so many people in need.

Sometimes I feel shattered
or at least scattered
by all that happens to me
and around me.
The life I live at work
is sometimes impossible to explain . . .

So thank you Lord
for the support of my co-workers
who listen to me, hug me,
and love me.
They gently remind me that You too
hold me

in the palm of Your hand
and love me
with an everlasting love.

Thank God for co-workers who emulate Christ or model after Christ.

In 3T pp. 66-67, Mrs. White says, "We are living amid perils of the last days, and if we have a spirit of self-sufficiency and independence we shall be exposed to the wiles of Satan and be overcome . . . It is dangerous to contend with the Providence of God and to be dissatisfied with almost everything as though there had been a special arrangement [to change] circumstances to tempt and destroy . . . We must go through the furnace, till the fires have consumed the dross and we are purified and reflect the divine image. Those who follow their inclinations and are governed by appearance are not good judges of what God is doing. They are filled with discontent. They see failure when there is indeed triumph, a great loss where there is gain, and like Jacob, they are ready to exclaim, 'All these things are against me,' when the very things whereby they complain are all working together for their good."

This quotation is especially meaningful to me because for the past academic year I have worked extremely hard to investigate need through a feasibility study, to plan and develop a Master of Science in Nursing program at Union College. A couple weeks ago the Board of Trustees met and turned down my proposal. Now, I could "see failure where there is indeed triumph, a great loss where there is gain; and like Jacob, . . . exclaim 'all these things are against me.'" Yes, I could! But, I sincerely believe that God is still leading no matter which way it turns out in the long run. I am reminded of the statement "To have strong faith we must be placed in circumstances where our faith will be exercised." (3T p. 67) And believe me, I have had a lot of this type of exercise! But this is necessary if we are to have the patience of the saints and the faith of Jesus before His return. Until then, we can function as role-models before others and be a blessing in whatever role God calls us to lovingly serve Him.

By Laurice Durrant