

## Jean's Story

I was born in Glasgow, in 1936.  
I was born into a privileged family,  
one that was very thirled to the kirk.

It was a very snowy day in December.  
The doctor couldn't get his car up the hill  
so I was born with the help of the nurse.  
To my mother's absolute terror,  
as soon as the nurse took me in her arms,  
she climbed on a chair and held me up.  
My mum said, "What are you doing to my baby?"  
And she said, "I'm holding her up to God before she comes down to the rest  
of us."

That story, about my birth, was reinforced in all family life.  
I was to be a good girl.  
I was to be devoted to the church and prayer and all the rest.  
I was to become a Sunday School teacher  
and go through all the different stages of church life as it was in those days.  
That's just the way it was.

I became a teacher.  
But the day after I turned 22  
I had one of those experiences  
when I just suddenly knew something I hadn't known before.  
The minister in our church was giving a talk.  
He said, "sometimes people give up well paid secure jobs to serve Christ in  
some other way"  
and at that point, I knew that God wanted me to give up teaching to become a  
deaconess of the Church of Scotland.

The call made me angry,  
because it was very different to what I'd expected as a life for myself,  
and here I was being told by God that I must obey him  
At that time, deaconesses didn't marry,  
they were single women.  
And I thought, "God, why on earth do you want this for me?"

When I finished my training, I was sent to Glasgow,  
to a parish in a new housing scheme.  
And after a few months, I suddenly said to God,  
"my goodness, you were right, I was supposed to be a deaconess,"  
because it so fitted me.

The biggest challenge I found was pastoral care.  
The only training I had was that the lecturer at college  
took us through the Gospel of Mark  
and showed us how Jesus had responded to people,  
then told us to go out with the Bible and prayer  
and be with people the way Jesus had been with people.  
Now fair enough in one way,  
but I was supposed to be ministering to people who were in deep grief,  
and I had no real experience myself.

I remember sitting in somebody's living room,  
on a winter afternoon as the room darkened,  
and she began to talk about experiences of her dead husband coming back to  
visit her.

I was scared shitless.  
I didn't know how to pray in situations like that.  
I didn't know how to read the Bible to them in situations like that.

People who were mentally ill,  
I didn't know how to relate to them.  
People who had a drink problem.  
I had been brought up to be teetotal,  
All I could do, was to tell them that they should really try to get off the stuff.  
I hadn't the foggiest.  
I felt so de-skilled.

I was awarded a scholarship to Chicago Theological Seminary,  
And there were courses in pastoral psychology  
and I thought, "gosh, this is what I'm wanting."  
It was the beginning of my exposure to the whole counselling world.

I must have spent most of that year with my mouth open in awe of what was  
happening.

I'd no idea that people could be so skilled,  
could be so compassionate.  
I had sometimes been full of fear with the people who needed me.  
When I realised there was training I could do,  
that really launched me off.

I returned to the parish in which I had been working in Scotland, equipped with listening skills, able to apply in many pastoral situations what I had been taught in America. The Church of Scotland then lent me to the Department of Christian Education in the Methodist Church in Australia for three years, during which I had many opportunities for further growth and development in working with people.

When I got back, the Church of Scotland had made a new job for me, working with Archie Mills, who was Director of Counselling, Development and Training. We'd both gone to an introductory course in Transactional Analysis, also known as TA and as we talked we said, "this is a wonderful tool for us to use to help people understand how to be a Christian. It's a secular tool but it's as if it's a fulfilling of Jesus' command: love your neighbour as you love yourself." So we asked permission to take professional qualifications in TA. In the 70s, the Church of Scotland was creative and open to new things.

One of the big theories of TA is, "I'm OK, you're OK." Now, that was confronted hugely by people who said, "that doesn't fit with our theology because, of course We're not OK. We are people with original sin, so how can you possibly say, I'm OK, you're OK? I'm a sinner, you're a sinner. And you live with that." But of course, God sees us as perfect through Jesus, that's my theological understanding.

We tried to explain that what we saw in the Gospels was the same as we were understanding in teaching TA. We would say, "this is the way Jesus behaved with people. He believed in them. If he said, go and sin no more, he believed in them enough to believe that they would stop and at least try and be better." But some people said, "Well of course, Archie and Jean are just preaching the gospel of TA, not the gospel of Jesus."

Eventually, Archie left employment with the Church of Scotland  
 I stayed on a few more years  
 During which I married.  
 Bill and I were in our 40s and we didn't have children of our own  
 Although we both wanted that.  
 We were passed as potential adoptive parents  
 and were given a girl and a boy in their early teens.  
 So I gave up work to be an at home mum for the first 2 years.

I was opening the mail one day,  
 sitting on the couch.  
 The sunshine was streaming in the window –  
 I've got a very vivid recollection of that –  
 and I opened one letter.  
 It was advertising a new job  
 and I read it and I thought, "oh, that's for me. "

The job was to start up a counselling service from scratch  
 and to train counsellors to a good professional standard  
 It was to be an ecumenical thing.  
 It was being launched by a small group of ministers who were all in different  
 denominations  
 and they had got together and thought, we need a Christian counselling  
 service in Edinburgh.  
 and it was to start at 12 hours a week,  
 working with volunteer lay people from the churches round about,  
 who had some interest in counselling.  
 none of them qualified counsellors.  
 I went for the interview and was offered the job.

That became the Pastoral Foundation  
 I was director for eight years  
 The PF grew and developed.  
 We appointed other staff  
 And of course my work got longer than 12 hours

This is a truism, but God knows me so much better than I know myself –  
 I have been conscious of being led through life sometimes  
 so that I was carrying out my calling to be a deaconess,  
 to serve Him,  
 working in the community, working in the church  
 even in retirement.  
 My life sort of makes sense to me looking back.