

The First Recipient of the WM Scholarship Earns Ph.D.

May-Ellen Colon: In Her Own Words



"In 1990 I was appointed, with my husband, Gaspar, as Family Ministries Director of the Africa-Indian Ocean Division [AID]. My husband was occupied with other leadership responsibilities so I knew that the bulk of running the department would fall on me. I felt that I needed more training, so in 1991 I started a Ph.D. in Religious Education, with emphasis in family life.


I used annual vacation time to take classes at Andrews University [AU] during the summer session, and returned to Africa and used what I learned out in the field. The AID, however, was unable to help pay for my classes. I was on my own, but not really. I knew that if God wanted me to do this He would provide the means.

In 1993, when I learned that GC Women's Ministries was launching a scholarship program, I immediately applied. I was gratified when my request was granted, and I received the first scholarship in the new program. The \$1,000 was a real blessing the next time I registered for classes. Not only that, it gave me the message that I was not alone, that I was supported in high places (in the North American Division and GC Women's Ministries Departments, and higher—Heaven)."

In the past ten years May-Ellen has faced some

of the following challenges: In 1993 she was diagnosed with breast cancer and spent the rest of the year with surgery and treatments. In 1994 the family was transferred to the Euro-Asia Division in Moscow, Russia, to continue their Family Ministry work. Learning Russian was added to May-Ellen's educational plate, but her religious education studies were able to benefit a new part of the world field. In 1997 the family moved back to the United States for their children's education. By then May

Ellen was done with her course work, but the dissertation loomed ahead. And full-time office work, and the donation of a kidney to her husband, Gaspar, were challenges that accompanied the writing of the dissertation.

May-Ellen continues, "Five years of Fridays and often Saturday night and all day Sunday resulted in the completion of my dissertation and its successful defense on December 10, 2003, by God's grace. The title of the dissertation is Sabbath-Keeping Practices and Factors Related to These Practices Among Seventh-day Adventists in 51 Countries. My next goal is to publish this message in as many forms as possible, beginning with a book based on the important findings of my study, in everyday English. I pray that the results of my study will be valuable for my church." 

"It gave me the message I wasn't alone"

Ways to Get Involved...

- Organize a group of friends, co-workers, or church members to create your own fundraising projects
 - Save change to "change lives"
 - Make a quilt to be auctioned
 - Plan a "donor dinner" where each person brings a dish and a donation for the SOS fund
 - Write for the Women's Ministries devotional book

Or...create your own innovative ideas for increasing awareness and donations for the SOS fund to support our sisters around the world. We'd love to hear about your projects.



Scholarshipping Our Sisters is published quarterly by the General Conference Women's Ministries Scholarship Task Force to communicate news about their scholarship program.

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Scholarshipping Our Sisters

Supporting higher education for Adventist women globally

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Women's Ministries Awards \$30,000 — More Needed!

This January more than USD \$30,000 in scholarships was awarded by the General Conference Women's Ministries Scholarship Committee to young women around the globe struggling to get a college education.

- 93 young women received funds
- 24 countries are represented
- 22 majors are being pursued
- 35 different schools are represented.

This may sound like a lot of money until you realize the needs total more than \$90,000!

Members of the Scholarship Committee said that as they read the requests for financial assistance, they were inspired. But they were also saddened by the obstacles these women face. Parents of some students are of another religion and provide no support. Others have a widowed parent in poor health or large families trying to live on as little as \$80 a month. Some families struggle to eke out a tiny income with a farm but no transportation to get their crops to market.

Challenges abound but with funding as low as \$330 a semester to cover tuition, room and board, these women could have a chance to dramatically alter their lives and those around them.

In the letters of recommendations, phrases such as "has great leadership potential" appear frequently. Teachers and pastors say that many of these women are already providing significant leadership in their churches and communities. For example, one woman has established an income-producing one-acre banana plantation for her home church.


"We just wish there were more funds available to help them..."

Another applicant established a government accredited school in a village which had no school. Another has worked more than a year at an ADRA kitchen preparing food for the poor.

"We just wish there were more funds available to help them — and many more like them," said a member of the Scholarship Committee.

Funds for these scholarships have until now come from sales of the women's devotional book, produced by the General Conference Women's Ministries Department. The income has remained fairly static even though there are more divisions worldwide. Each year the number of applicants increases, with nearly 50% turned away due to a lack of funding.

To nurture the great potential of these women, the Women's Ministries Scholarship Fund Taskforce is launching an energetic fundraising campaign called "Scholarshipping Our Sisters." The goal is to at least double the funding in 2004 and to double it again in 2005.

A challenge? Yes, but it can be done as we unite to support our sisters around the world, as we encourage them and show them they are not alone. Supporting our sisters, we strengthen our church and improve the world. 

The Facts...

Semester tuition around the world...
– \$3,600, Newbold Collge (England)
– \$3,000 Brasil Adventist Uiversity
– \$1,300 Taiwan Adventist College
– \$140 Solusi University (Zimbabwe)



The scholarships...
– 829 scholarships awarded over 10 years
– \$323,418 total given
– \$3,000 per Division in 2004
– 50% of applicants denied due to lack of funds

The Challenges of Our Sisters Throughout the World The Stories of Mei, Celeste and Olga

They come from all walks of life—women seeking higher education and wanting to contribute to improving the quality of life for those in their communities, women wanting to make a difference.

Amidst poverty, abuse, rape, and discrimination, women from places such as Vietnam, India, Hong Kong, Rwanda, and Bolivia get an opportunity for education when they receive scholarships from the GC Women's Ministries Scholarship program. Funded until now by sales from the Women's Ministries devotional books, the scholarship program has assisted 829 recipients, over the last 10 years. Here are stories of a few.



MEI

Losing his job, Mei's* father was unable to find employment at the age of 40. The eldest of three children, Mei was impressed to get a degree in religion although she had planned on a health science degree. Such an impression brought Mei to her knees many, many times. To change her course of studies meant a delayed graduation date, more cost, and a serious commitment to the ministry. "I asked God many times if this is the right choice for me, and He impressed me that it was," said Mei. "Therefore, I decided to be a pastor and spread the gospel."

Born in Hong Kong, in her teens Mei joined Pathfinders and was exposed to Christianity and the Bible. Soon she expressed her desire to follow Jesus and be baptized. When Mei's mother heard her plans, she did not want Mei to continue her association with these Christians, called Adventists. In desperation, Mei would run off to church whenever her mom was occupied around the house. Mei's determination paid off finally. On the day of her baptism, her tears flowed when she spotted her mom in the congregation. Today Mei's mother is attending an Adventist church regularly and plans to be baptized this fall.

CELESTE

Another scholarship applicant, Celeste* of Chad in Central Africa, known for her leadership skills, wants to promote the development of women in her country and to hasten the Lord's coming. "From the departure of Egypt to the Promised Land, women played a very interesting role in the development of society and the church," Celeste comments. "Now women are able to conduct evangelistic campaigns and contribute to winning souls for Christ."

The daughter of poor farmers, Celeste grew up in an environment where women were not considered valuable to society. She also endured three decades of ethnic warfare. Over the years, she overcame her inferiority complex and is developing into a young Christian woman dedicated to serving Christ and His church. Influenced strongly by her best friend, Celeste was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1993.



OLGA

In Ukraine, Olga* struggled with a dysfunctional family, her parents' bitter divorce, and the eventual death of her father. Having grown up a non-Christian, Olga was under much secular influence and doing all the things that prevented her from being a useful contributor to society. "My father's death was the hardest thing for me to bear," Olga tearfully explained. The trauma landed Olga in a hospital where she heard about meetings at the local Adventist church.

Olga attended the meetings and soon after, her stepfather decided to join the Adventist church and give up smoking after 20 years. Olga knew that

her life would change if she associated with these Christians, but she was resistant. Finally in 1999 she gave her life to God. "I cannot stop thanking God for His love," she said. "He found me!" Today Olga is studying for a degree in economics and plans to be a financial analyst. The Women's Ministries Scholarship Fund will help fulfill her dream. "When I get my degree, I will be well-respected," she comments, "and I can contribute to helping my church with my financial skills and telling people about my God."

As women around the world seek to better themselves, we thank you, our readers, for your help in making this possible through your support of the Women's Ministries Scholarship Fund. For these women, scholarships provide a flicker of hope; a hope that goes beyond that of a degree. A hope that brings them to the foot of the Cross. ☝

(*To protect the privacy of applicants, all names have been changed and photos are not necessarily those of the recipients).

Editorial: The College Difference

by Ardis Stenbakken

Why did you want to go to college?

- Was it the only way to get into the career you dreamed of?
- You love knowledge and learning?
- A Christian college was the perfect place to meet a Christian spouse?
- A degree was necessary for promotion and advancement?
- As an example to your children?
- You needed a degree to get a good job?
- It would make a big difference in your life?

There are many reasons for wanting to go to college, but for most women there are more obstacles than opportunities. In some parts of the world, a college education is more than a dream, it is almost an impossibility. This is a loss—for the woman, her community, and her Church.

As I travel around the world, I meet absolutely amazing women who are making a big difference for the Church, their communities and their countries. I wonder, "Why haven't we heard about these women? How did they get these amazing ideas and learn to make such a difference?"

Reasons to Give...

"[She] is the fourth child in the family. Her disabled father is seriously ill and her mother died a few years ago while she did missionary work in a difficult region. She is a diligent student and active in church life."



"Since my family is from a Muslim area, I want to complete my education and return to this area to spread the Gospel."

"[She] is always eager to learn and fulfills all tasks with enthusiasm and diligence. She is a strong leader, able to initiate and organize projects. She has excellent potential."

"In Ukraine, most of [the] members in our churches are women. They are leaders in different ministries, including Sabbath School, Children's, Health and Women's Ministries and ADRA. I believe that for each woman in the church God has a special work. And I believe that He has a work for me too."

Many of these women achieved leadership positions and developed their ideas because of education. The Church and their communities are strengthened by the unique perspectives, ideas, and leadership of these educated women.



Unfortunately, for millions of women getting an education is nearly impossible. While it is hard for anyone to get advanced education, for women it is almost impossible. In the Adventist Church, scholarships are limited and usually available only to men. So Women's Ministries scholarships, which support higher education for Adventist women globally, are crucial.

I am always thrilled when women introduce themselves and tell me they received a Women's Ministries scholarship and that they are involved in leadership in the Church. They always tell me what a difference the scholarship made. Hearing their stories, I am grateful to all the women who have written for or bought the WM devotional books, because profits from these books have provided nearly the only funding for scholarships.

It's time for a change! There are too many needs, too many plaintive letters we can't answer, too many scholarship applications cut early in the process because there's not enough money. It's time for a change! We can't waste women's leadership talents. Join us in "Scholarshipping Our Sisters," our brand new project to bring in funds for scholarships this year.

Join the team! Sign up! Pick a project! Spread the word! Invest in our sisters! YOU can make a huge difference—in a life, a community, your Church! ☝

"For millions of women, getting an education is almost impossible."

"Every gift to the needy, if prompted by a right motive, will result in blessings to the giver." Ellen G. White