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MARGARET AND THE GRADUATE: STORY OF AN ENCOUNTER

The speeches had been made, the awards and honors given. The atmosphere was charged with excitement as families rejoiced with their university graduates at the milestones reached. But one graduate was not enjoying the day as he had thought he would. He had flown from Australia to California for the weekend and was about to head back to the airport for the long flight across the Pacific. He was tired and jet-lagged; but it was more than that. He wished his wife had been there to enjoy the moment; after all, she had done everything she could to support him in the graduate study program that had taken so many years of effort. Then too, having finished was not as enjoyable as he had imagined it would be—maybe the pleasure was in the journey rather than the destination. Anyway, he felt a need to escape the boisterous crowds and shed the heavy academic regalia the occasion had demanded. As he did so, an immaculately groomed young woman stepped in front of him and with a smile demanded, “You don’t know who I am, do you?” and he was taken back more than 15 years.

It had been late in the junior academy principal’s busy day when Margaret and her family first came to see him. Unhappy with the local high school’s influence on their elder daughter, this Anglican family wanted Margaret placed in the care of Christian teachers. Enrolled that year in the seventh grade, Margaret was an excellent student who generally sat in the front row and had her books open and pen in hand when the bell rang.

The next four years passed in a happy blur with Margaret in the middle of it—a fully involved student. The principal taught her history, English, and Bible classes some of those years. He also liked to have lunch with the students each day. As she reached ninth grade, Margaret began to sort through her value system. Often over the lunch table, she would discuss what was on her heart. While invariably polite, Margaret held strong convictions and as a typical adolescent saw Christianity in general as limiting and Adventism specifically so. She could be very direct in expressing that viewpoint! The lunchtime discussions at times became quite focused. On occasion, her questions required the principal to do some reading in preparation for the next day’s encounter!

With encouragement, Margaret’s mother sent her to Monterey Bay Academy for her junior and senior years. During that time, Margaret phoned her former principal to say she was being baptized the next Sabbath, and with puckish good humor announced: “. . . seeing it is all your fault, I expect you to be there!” Family finances were tight and it was a 500-mile return trip in the elderly family gas guzzler, but it was great to see Margaret take her stand for her Lord and equally rewarding to see her family just as happy for her. Her former principal hadn’t seen Margaret since, but heard that she had attended Pacific Union College in California.

And now she stood in front of her former mentor—the graduate. Both were delighted to meet again. Margaret told how she had graduated from PUC and married a dentist. They were about to leave for a term of mission service in the Far Eastern Division. When asked whether in spite of her earlier fears the Christian walk had turned out well for her, she just glowed and said, “It has been wonderful!”

Somehow, the day now seemed much brighter. Meeting Margaret again turned my graduation into a high day after all. The experience was a timely reminder that above all else the greatest reward of our teaching ministry is seeing a young person make a lifelong commitment to his or her Lord.—Les Devine.

Les Devine is Director of Education for the South Pacific Division, Wahroonga, New South Wales, Australia.