

Margarethe Sparing-Chavez

(October 10, 1936 – September 6, 2006)

My name is Margaret. I am a WWII survivor. I lost my Dad when I was 4 years old and got a light case of Polio when I was 6. Those were chaotic years.

After High School, I worked as a tour guide, taking groups mainly to Greece and Turkey. I loved the Greek islands and finally decided to find a job in Athens. Whenever I had time, I also continued working as a tour guide.

I needed what has become my favorite Scripture verse, in Isaiah 30:15: “In Quietness and Confidence shall be my Strength”.

I immigrated to Canada in 1957. In Toronto I worked for a company renting apartments. One day the government discovered an ex-Nazi and there were signs everywhere saying that Germans were not welcome in restaurants, beauty salons, etc. So, I avoided going there. Then I met a lady in the elevator who spoke Yiddish to me and I confessed that I could understand her, but only answered her in German. Then she said: “But you are Jewish, I can tell by your nose.” She was correct. From my Dad’s side I am Jewish. From then on I went everywhere. In 1958 I immigrated to the US.

Later on I returned to Germany and continued working as a tour guide, taking people on 3-week tours all over Europe. Often when I awoke at night, I thought: “If I don’t wake up in the morning, where will I go, to Heaven or Hell?” That frightened me. Then I met some people who invited me to church and I was baptized and tried to live a good life.

However, it was not until several years later when, back in the U.S., I was introduced to a German guest preacher in a church I was attending in Long Island, through whom I experienced a real change in my life. When I was introduced to him, he told me that he was from Wilhelmshaven, a city in North Germany, just a few miles from where I was born. Then he looked me straight in the eyes and asked me: “And how is it with your soul?” At that instance, it seemed to me that my whole life passed before my eyes and I broke down crying. He then prayed for me, and from that moment on, my life changed completely.

In the US, I studied at New York State University in Stony Brook, L.I. where I received my BA to become a high school teacher of German. My professor recommended that I should apply for graduate work at UC Berkeley and apply to become a teaching assistant in the German Department. I did so, was accepted and studied at UC Berkeley where I wrote my PH.D dissertation under the supervision of Prof. Alan Dundes.*

Several years before that, in 1964 at the New York World’s Fair, I had met the Founder of the Summer Institute of Linguistics and Wycliffe Bible Translators and several people who later would be my colleagues. They were handing out little brochures on their work. I applied, took their linguistic courses and worked for twenty years with them, including fifteen years with the Amahuaca people in the Amazon jungle of Peru. I got married in 1984 and my husband joined me in the work, mainly helping in government relations, community development, training teachers of different indigenous groups living in the jungle, and training the Amahuaca community leaders. With the help of the Amahuacas I wrote primers and reading books for their schools, while at the same time translating Scripture books, one at a time.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible is John 3:1-21. It gives the Gospel in a nutshell and it is particularly meaningful to the Amahuacas, because Jesus is talking directly to Nicodemus and explains to him that the most important moment in our lives is to be born again and what that means.

Why don’t you read that portion in your Bible and ask the Lord what that means for you?



* Sparing, Margarethe W. 1980. The perception of reality in the Volksmärchen of Schleswig-Holstein: a study in interpersonal relationships and world view. Ph.D. thesis. University of California.