

# Joy for Mourning

Story by Christmas M. Beeler  
Photos by Dr. Sumni Moreno and Jomar Morales

## Fed by God's faithfulness, missionary feeds Philippine children

**B**etchie Ashworth couldn't stop shaking. She had feared that her husband's heart had wandered since their arrival in the Philippines a few months before. Now she was faced with the awful truth, confirmed by other believers—he had left her. In their home in Davao, she fell to the floor, shivering, her heart throbbing with pain. Feeling lost, alone, and humiliated, she cried out in prayer, "Oh God, how did this happen?" Her husband had been instrumental in her salvation 12 years before. After six years of marriage, she had followed him to the mission field. Weeping, she fell asleep on the couch.

Every week that passed made it painfully clearer that he was not coming back. Born in the Philippines, she had become a U.S. citizen and had brought her family to the States years ago. She was alone in her homeland.

The first year without her husband was one of pain and loneliness. Several people urged her to leave the mission field; many politely refused to fellowship or serve with her. But Betchie didn't feel that the Lord was telling her to go back to the U.S. When she prayed, she was reminded that, 30 years ago—before she was even saved—she had prayed to be a missionary. As a young girl growing up in a Filipino slum, Betchie had been deeply touched by the kindness of a missionary woman who fed the hungry and shared about God's love. Years later, her American husband had been the first to sense God's call for them to go back to her homeland to share the Gospel. Betchie had been reluctant at first, but her burden for her fellow Filipinos grew, and they went.

Though her husband's heart had since changed, she still felt God's calling. Finally, in answer to her prayers, a missionary woman encouraged her to go with short-term teams to minister to children in mountain villages north of Davao City. So began Betchie's trips up Mount Malikongkong in

the Marilog District; soon, she was going twice a month.

In December 2006, she returned to the U.S. and asked Pastor Brian Brodersen of CC Costa Mesa whether she should move back to the States permanently. They talked about her work with the mountain children. Though she hadn't sensed the Holy Spirit telling her to leave the Philippines, she would respect Brian's counsel. Brian encouraged Betchie to follow the Lord in whatever He led her to do, adding that the church would support her decision either way.

Betchie returned to the island country. She heard about a Calvary Chapel-trained Filipino woman working with a tribe on Mount Malikongkong. Betchie contacted her and was invited to join in the work. Once again in the Marilog District, Betchie met the Bagobo and Matigsalug tribes.

In the Philippines, she explained, often the eldest daughter is expected to feed the younger siblings—as Betchie had done while growing up. In Bagobo, she met a group of eight abandoned siblings; the 8-year-old girl was trying to feed the other children, the youngest being nearly 6 months old. These were the first children Betchie started feeding on a regular basis.

*Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Psalm 37:3*



*Betchie Ashworth, right, crosses a stream with the help of Matigsalug tribesman, Datu. She travels to several mountain villages in the Marilog District of*

The feeding ministry has grown until—in nearly 6 months' time—Betchie and two other missionary women feed nearly 300 children in several villages every week, traveling by foot, by bamboo raft, or horseback.

Betchie recalled, "I cried when I saw them because they were so hungry. They walked three hours just to eat a plate of noodles." Through the continuing ministry, Betchie has enjoyed sharing stories of Jesus with them and watching them grow in learning the Bible. Many have grown up in tribal



*Dr. Menchu, left, and Betchie ride a bamboo raft on the river to bring bags of rice to feed area villages.*



*Betchie, right, and other missionaries minister to nearly 300 children every week, feeding them and teaching the Bible.*



*Betchie, center, and other women wrap a rice mixture in leaves to prepare it for cooking.*



*Betchie traces a young girl's foot in Dumalugdug as part of Operation Slipper which will provide shoes for the children.*



*Children and adults gather to hear Bible teaching in an Indangan village nearly 35 miles southwest of Davao.*



*Joining Betchie, Dr. Sunni Moreno—a missionary based in Thailand—provides medical care for village children.*

Photo by Betchie Ashworth



*Betchie teaches Bible stories to children in an Indangan village where she brings food.*

cultures where the practices of abandoning children and vengeance killing are accepted.

Smiling, Betchie said, “Now I work at the ‘House of Grace.’ The Lord has given me so much grace to make it.” She added, “The children are the love of my life. I love hearing them sing about Jesus on the mountain.”

On their porch overlooking the mountain, Betchie and another missionary lady often read their Bibles together. Villagers began coming to hear their devotions. “Now we do it every morning at 6 a.m., so the people can come before they go work on their farms,” Betchie shared. “It’s a beautiful time.”

Though living on the mountain can be perilous—with poisonous snakes, muddy paths to traverse on horseback, and tribal

cultures—Betchie thanks the Lord for sustaining them all. “I fell off my horse three times,” she laughed. “Sometimes I remind the Lord that I’m 48 years old.” Her most frightening experience, she related soberly, was when a boy they were helping was attacked by an outsider. One of his family members threatened to kill one of the missionary women unless they paid the family compensation for the boy being injured. “In that culture, if someone gets hurt, the family requires someone to pay. They call it ‘blood for blood,’” she explained. “The man who hurt the boy was in jail and had no money, so the family expected us to pay them.” With the Lord’s help, the matter was resolved peaceably.

She gives the Lord full credit for healing her broken heart and continuing to use her.

“The Lord has raised me up from the dirt to where I am right now. Who would have believed that I could do this? ... To have this House of Grace is beyond what I could have imagined doing as a woman alone.”

Speaking of her time on the mountain, she concluded, “The last six months have been the best of my life ... I have felt God’s presence so many times—the first year in suffering, the second year in healing. ... I could almost feel His face beside me.”

Betchie desires to encourage other women and missionaries who have experienced difficult times. “I believe He allowed me to experience those things so that I can go and tell others: He is alive; He is real.” She cited:

***“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.”***

Isaiah 61:1

“Sometimes we must follow Christ even through suffering,” Betchie said. “You have to make that choice: to obey in spite of the pain, to worship Him, to follow Him even with a broken heart.” She encouraged those suffering to cling to the Lord and trust Him, adding, “He is too wise to be mistaken; He is too good to be unkind.” ↵

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