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## FIRST PERSON

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# LEARNING TO TRUST IN GOD

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María Neira Rodríguez

The first time I attended a retreat for Seventh-day Adventist university students in Colombia, several years ago, I had just started my studies towards a degree in civil engineering. The meetings were stimulating and I very much enjoyed the friendly atmosphere. During the retreat I was impressed with the experiences told by some of the students and, although I had not yet joined the Adventist Church, I decided to obey God in everything and not take any more classes or exams on the Sabbath.

When I returned home and started the second semester, I had to drop a course that met on Saturdays. I had fulfilled my promise to keep the Sabbath holy, but began to fear that I might not be able to complete the program and receive my degree. Since I was working during the day and

attending classes in the evenings, I knew that several of the key courses were offered only on Saturdays. I had not yet learned to trust completely in God!

I finished the third semester of studies and enrolled in the fourth. But the course I had dropped during the second semester still haunted me. I had to take it in order to proceed with my coursework. I prayed earnestly asking for God's help in solving this problem. After speaking repeatedly with the teacher, I was able to make special arrangements for that course and passed the exam.

Eventually I completed the two semesters of my third year of studies while keeping up with my job. Several times I had to receive permission both from the academic dean and from my boss to take some courses on weekday mornings instead of on the Sabbath. My

situation became more difficult when I enrolled in the fourth year, because from then on all courses were taught in the evenings or on Saturdays.

The basic course on Roads and Highways was always offered on Saturdays. What was I to do? I decided to take the other fourth-year courses, hoping that in time the schedule would change. However, my hopes did not materialize.

A colleague who knew my predicament suggested that I make a formal request to the dean of students. But fearing that it might be turned down and I would be asked to drop out from school, I chose not to do it and instead to go on as far as I could with my coursework. Now I acknowledge my lack of faith and my naivete. At that time, however, I thought that if I continued taking as many courses as I could, at least by the time I was let go by the university I would have learned many things that I could put to good use. (It didn't occur to me that technical knowledge without a recognized degree has little value in civil engineering!)

Somehow I was able to proceed with my studies and complete the 11th semester. But when I was registering for the only two courses I could take in the 12th—the last one in the program—I was found out! The registrar told me I was in violation of the policies and therefore could not go on with my coursework. I was sent to the academic dean who, in turn, presented the matter to the academic council, which decided that it was too complicated for

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### Chamberlain Story

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#### DISCUSSION

1. As a Bible-believing Christian, how do you understand and relate to the suffering of innocent people? What role does "the will of God" play in human suffering? Can you explain your views to others? How would you have reacted if the Chamberlains' tragedy would have been your own? What would you have done, as a fellow Seventh-day Adventist, to support them in their ordeal?
2. What is the public image of Seventh-day Adventists in your country? Why? Should we be concerned about how our church is perceived by the

media and by the public at large? What can we/you do to make our Christian message and mission better known and appreciated?

3. What personal criteria have you developed, as an Adventist, for the selection of the TV programs and the movies you watch? Is the place where a film is shown an important factor in your decision to watch it or not? Why? In addition to the approach recommended in the article, what other questions would a Christian ask in evaluating a movie? (For example, What view of life comes through? Are the decisions of the characters morally right? How does the basic message of the movie relate to the teachings of the Bible?)

them to unravel and they referred my case to the superior council of the university.

I submitted a letter outlining my reasons for not taking classes on Saturdays. I also explained why I had nearly finished my program without taking a few courses along the way. I expressed my determination to remain true to my religious convictions as well as my desire to become a competent civil engineer. While I awaited the answer, I prayed fervently. One member of my church encouraged me with these words, "Don't worry, sister. I believe that angels protect any document that contains eternal truths." I thanked him and continued to pray.

In March of that year I received word of the decision of the superior council. They had reviewed my academic record and decided to treat me as a "special case." They allowed me to continue with my studies and even assigned me a special teacher to help me clear the course on roads and highways I still "owed" from the fourth semester. However, the council also ordered that, because of recent changes in the curriculum, I had to take three additional years of coursework before obtaining my degree!

While I was delighted to learn that I could continue my studies, I felt sad about the additional courses that I was required to take. Had I faced the issue during the fourth semester, trusting in God's providence, I might have avoided months of anguish and years of delay. After all, Christ had said that "all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27, RSV).

I proceeded steadily with the additional requirements until I encountered another obstacle. One of the last courses I had to take was taught on Thursday and Friday evenings, with the practicum on Saturday mornings. The

academic dean had helped me to solve the problem of classes on the Sabbath, but now I had to tell him that from God's point of view Friday evening was also "Saturday"! After struggling with myself, I gathered courage and decided to tell him the truth. To my surprise, the dean told me that he already knew that the Bible marks the days from sunset to sunset. Again I was assigned a teacher to clear that course. I was so thankful to God and to that kind teacher!

The three years of additional coursework were finally over and at the December 28, 1988, commencement exercises, the dean handed me the diploma and said with a broad smile, "You've made it! Congratulations!" The following day my husband and I visited him in his office to thank him for his kindness. We presented him a plaque inscribed with these words: "From the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its members to Dr. John Elkin G. Castrillón and the University of Gran Colombia, with warm appreciation for contributing to the professional training of our youth while respecting their religious convictions." We also gave him several denominational books that I knew he and his family would enjoy.

As I was about to begin my professional career, after those long years, I had learned to believe in David's promise, "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act" (Psalm 37:5, RSV).

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*María Catalina Neira Rodríguez (Civil Engineer, University of Gran Colombia) is currently practicing her profession in Bogotá, Colombia. She told this story during the 1989 retreat for Seventh-day Adventist university students in her homeland.*

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## God of Excellence

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world his spirit and character. There is nothing the world needs so much as the manifestation through humanity of the Saviour's love."<sup>8</sup>

I believe that God has a dream. Above all else, he wants us to so excel through him that our lives will reveal his glory to those all around us—the glory of the God of excellence. *That is the direction Seventh-day Adventists should be going!*

### NOTES

1. Genesis 1:31, The Living Bible.
2. Psalm 8:1; 76:4, NKJV.
3. 1 Corinthians 12:31, NKJV.
4. Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 18
5. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 595.
6. Leviticus 26:12; Deuteronomy 28:13; 30:5, NKJV.
7. Joshua 1:9, NKJV.
8. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 418.

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