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My earliest memories are all connected to education—my father, a fifth/sixth grade teacher, teaching his students and working with those who needed extra instruction, my mother baking cookies for his classroom, my father taking his class on a picnic and playing games with them. I learned two important lessons from these early, chalk- and book-filled years—education is a sacred profession where a good and caring teacher can change a student’s life and, from my mother, all children can learn and are worth your respect.

These lessons remained with me, even after my father and mother were both hospitalized and I had to help my grandmother raise my younger siblings (two brothers and a sister). It was because of my parents’ illnesses that we first came into contact with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. My father spent a number of months in what used to be called the Washington Adventist Sanitarium (now Hospital) in Takoma Park, Maryland, and our family was “adopted” by the small church attached to the hospital. Church members brought food to help my mother, provided child care for my siblings, and, most importantly, gave us Bible studies in our home. And through their loving efforts, I learned another important lesson—that a church filled with committed Christians can keep a family together.

I was lucky enough to earn full scholarships for college and attended the University of Maryland so that I could continue to help my mother with my brothers and sisters. When I was 19, my mother, my sister and one of my brothers and I were baptized as Seventh-day Adventists. My father was baptized the following year, less than 11 months before he died.

I began working for the Seventh-day Adventist Church first as a curriculum specialist and editor for Home Study Institute, eventually becoming a faculty member at Columbia Union College (now Washington Adventist University) and, ultimately, vice president for Education for Griggs International Academy/Griggs University (GIA/GU). I feel that the Lord has blessed me in my professional life. By working at GIA/GU, I have been able to work with students at almost every level from preschool through graduate school and in many countries.

Under the leadership of Joseph Gurubatham, GIA/GU became an educational equivalent of ADRA, working with educational institutions around the world to build local capacity, making it possible for students in Ghana, Cameroon, South Africa, India, Venezuela, Eastern Europe, China and, yes, even in underserved communities in the U.S., to have access to Adventist education.

Joseph Gurubatham was an exceptional mentor who helped me to realize that Adventist institutions could work together to find solutions for Black South African pastors who, because of Apartheid, were unable to benefit from the training available to their white colleagues. In South Africa, GIA/GU offered pastoral training programs in collaboration with Bethel College and the General Conference. For six years, I had the pleasure of traveling to South Africa and watching students who completed high school equivalency programs, then associate degrees and, ultimately, bachelor’s degrees. More than 200 pastors were helped through this collaboration. I have never experienced a more joyful graduation than that first graduation at Bethel College—the singing and crying and, yes, dancing in celebration of the accomplishments of the students.

I worked together with Valley View College (now University) to offer government-approved degree programs for more than 100 students, many of whom now serve the church as pastors and administrators around the world.

And with Newbold College to provide undergraduate education to pastors in the Balkan states after the fall of Communism. We had students who spent years in prison because of their beliefs but who were finally able to study theology.

And with students in West Africa who were not able to take government exams because they were offered only on the Sabbath. For these students, we worked with the West-African Division to develop a high school equivalency exam that the colleges and universities could use for admission.

Or students in mainland China, working in collaboration with Taiwan Adventist College and Hong Kong Adventist College.

I have had the pleasure of working with people such as Marion Hartlein, Erma Lee, Larry Blackmer and Arne Nielsen to

help K–12 schools throughout the North American Division to supplement programs and support students who need something the local school cannot offer.

The Lord has blessed me in that I have seen the transformative power of Adventist education up close—in the lives of hundreds of students who were helped because institutions, organizations and church entities were able to look beyond their institutional barriers and toward the needs of the students.

There is one story I will never forget—we worked for many years with a number of Job Corps Centers throughout the U.S. (career training programs and Griggs International Academy provided the opportunity for their students to complete high school). We were packing boxes to move GIA/GU to Andrews University when I was called to the front desk where a young woman waited for me. She wanted to shake my hand and to say thank you. She'd had a baby at 13 and dropped out of school, but she was determined to change her life. Because of the partnership between Griggs and Job Corps, she had finished high school, gone to community college and was working for the Postal Service. She pulled a picture of her daughter out of her wallet and told me, “This is what you have done. You have changed my life. You have changed her life, and I just wanted to say thank you.”

I know that for every success story, there may be many failures, but without educational opportunities, there are no success stories. So, what have I learned in my life? The power of Christian education to transform, the power of collaboration to make transformation possible, and, most of all, that what is best for the student is more important than what is best for me.

Everywhere I look at Andrews University, I see the power of Christian education in the faces of students on our campus and off, graduate and undergraduate, face-to-face and online. What a blessing it is to play a small role in helping the transformation to take place.



Alayne Thorpe