

Through It All

by Michaela Lawrence Jeffery

I remember the days after graduation, the haze of a future, the great wonder as to my next steps. Ginny Owens' song "If You Want Me To" became a kind of anthem, especially the words, "But You never said it would be easy, You only said I'd never go alone." I believed that God had a plan for my life but I was scared because I didn't have it all figured out and I was moving back home. Weren't 21-year-olds supposed to be independent and certain about life? That's what I thought when I walked down the middle aisle at PMC to receive my diploma sleeve.

Nine years later, I graduated once again from Andrews, this time with the MDiv but with similar sentiments and similarly uncertain plans. And once again, I returned to my parents' home. A key difference this time around, however, was that I'd already applied for a job. It's actually the only job I applied for because it was the only job I wanted.

When I graduated in 2000 with a BA in English literature, I was confident that I'd go to grad school, get an MA and PhD and become a public university professor. I took a year off instead of trying to pack in getting good grades and researching and applying to graduate programs. But I didn't have a plan for that year off. So after working with Impact Toronto during the 2000 General Conference Session, I joined a friend on a Greyhound bus and headed to my parents' house in Alberta, Canada. Several weeks later, I became a contract instructor for a remedial English course and a speech course at Canadian University College. The English Department was willing to have me and I was willing to try. I loved the classroom and I loved my students. I knew this opportunity was God-sent.

By the fall of 2001, I was a student at the University of Illinois, Chicago (UIC) beginning the MA in English literature. I had a teaching assistantship and no clue as to how I'd survive big city life. During my first year, I'd often hop on a train to South Bend where a friend would pick me up and return me to the comforts of Berrien Springs. But eventually Chicago began to feel like home.



Top: Student leaders and chaplains from Advent House, located on the campus of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (Michaela is pictured at far right on the front row)

Above: ACF students from campuses in Georgia and East Tennessee come together annually for a leadership retreat at the start of the school year

A key source of that "at home" feeling was my church family at Hyde Park Seventh-day Adventist Church. It helped that one of my best friends was there. It also helped that I was becoming intentionally involved and that the church made room for a lot of us young adult transplants. I'd searched for an Adventist student community at UIC and never found one. So my church family was that much more important to me from week to week.

Leaving Chicago in 2004 was hard but I knew it was best. By then, I still loved the classroom but not my field. I was thankful when the only PhD program I'd applied to sent me a "no." Once again, I returned to my parents' house but this time without so much of the guilt and with the promise that if I ever ended up near a public university, I'd do all I could to support the Adventist students there.

The next two years further clarified God's desires for me as I immersed myself in local church life and discovered that in that

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sphere, all my gifts were being used. And through more God-sent encounters, I eventually found myself back at Andrews, starting the MDiv in May 2006. It was there that a professor, who knew I'd enjoyed my UIC experience, told me about public campus ministry and a course being offered during the summer months. I took all the courses I could.

In September of 2009 I began the one job I'd applied for. As chaplain for Advent House (at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville) and director of Adventist Christian Fellowship (ACF) for Georgia-Cumberland Conference, I work with students who attend public universities. There are a total of ten active Adventist student groups within this region and I help

facilitate their growth by providing resources and training. At Advent House, I also manage the physical plant, which serves as a residence and a campus center.

Most of the students I work with are Adventists. Most are at their school because of finances, close proximity to home, and/or their particular field of study. From the loss of family members to questions on how to reconcile their professional life with their faith, I get to come alongside my students and share in their journeys. I'm learning to listen more than offer advice and as I listen, I often hear questions about what's next, life beyond school. It's exciting to be able to use my own school experience to help them feel at ease with the ups and downs of theirs. And it's humbling to help them see God's hand through it all.

Michaela Lawrence Jeffery (BA '00, MDiv '09) is married to Justin Jeffery (BA '04) and the two are expecting a little girl this October.