

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

story by Christmas McCaughey

Maricela Shockey: Leaving a Convent and Mothering Orphans

Maricela glanced back at the convent as she quietly slipped away. She had tried to stay and serve the Lord Jesus Christ, but He seemed to be a stranger in that place.

“Why do we teach these things about Jesus and Mary that are not in the Bible?” she had asked the nuns and the young men being trained as priests. They laughed at her for carrying a Bible everywhere, but the Word was like bread to her. Finally someone answered her question in hushed tones: “Yes, the Bible is true, but we cannot take back what we have told the Mexican people. They would kill us!”

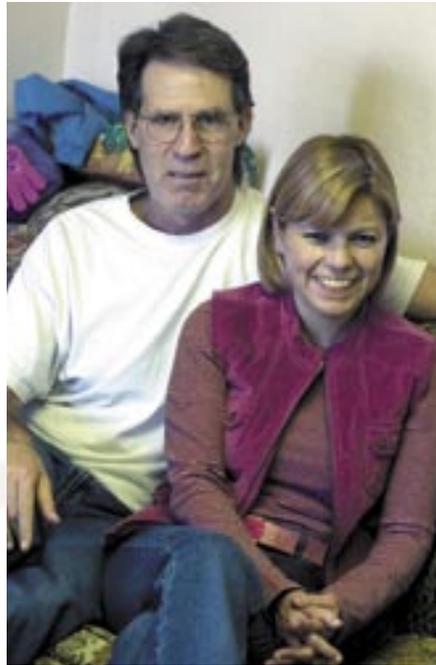
This conversation played in her mind as she left. Her goal was to find Christians with whom she could fellowship, learn the Bible, and serve Jesus Christ. She knew her mother would be furious, but to stay would be untrue to herself and her growing love for the Lord.

Raised in the religious tradition of Mexico, Maricela grew up in Ensenada on the coast of Baja California, Mexico. When she was nine years old, someone gave her a Gospel tract. That night, she knelt by her bed alone and accepted Christ as her Savior. “I felt His love and His arms surrounding me,” she recalled. That same year, she read about a social worker who helped orphans. “I knew that’s what I wanted to do with my life.” Now Maricela and her husband minister to orphans in her hometown.

At age 16, she met a Christian group who taught the Bible and baptized her. She told her mother she wanted to serve God and was sent to a convent in central Mexico.

“At the convent, I realized I didn’t feel the Holy Spirit there,” she recalled. “The nuns and seminarists were always teasing me. I asked them questions about the Virgin Mary, and they told me to stop reading the Bible.” So Maricela decided to leave.

She headed to Guadalajara, praying God would lead her to other believers. Maricela found a Christian church and fellowshiped



Tomás and Maricela Shockey

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there for a year and a half. She worked with blind children and taught reading and writing in poor villages. “I wanted to teach them the Bible,” she said. When Maricela called her mother, she ordered Maricela to move back home. Maricela obeyed.

“My whole family told me they didn’t want me to be a Christian,” recalled the petite, ginger-haired woman with a smile. “So I decided to be a social worker. It was an answer from God to be obedient to my family and to prepare for my future ministry of serving Him at an orphanage.”

With a degree in social work, Maricela worked at a state agency placing orphans. In a Christian bookstore near her Ensenada office, she met American missionary Tomás Shockey. Nearly two feet taller than Maricela, Tomás shared her desire to serve God by ministering to orphans. They married in 1986. Three years later, they

became directors of El Reino de Los Niños in nearby Mañedero. She shared their vision from Psalm 82:3: “Defend the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and the needy.”

Her family hardly spoke to her for five years, then their hearts gradually softened. “My mother accepted the Lord a year and a half ago; and my father got saved,” she said, smiling. “Now my brother and sister are CPAs for the orphanage.”

“I have seen the heart of God,” she said. “Not only has He changed the lives of hundreds of children, but also many families in the community.” Over the 17 years that the couple has served as directors at El Reino de Los Niños, more than 200 Mexican orphans have come to call them mother and father; and some of their children now call Tomás and Maricela their *abuelito* and *abuelita* (grandfather and grandmother).

“This place is like a fire in the middle of a great darkness,” Maricela said, with sparkling eyes. “The enemy has attacked this ministry in many different ways, but we have survived.” Maricela and Tomás have battled physical illnesses. She has had rheumatoid arthritis, a chronic disease that is often painful and crippling, for nearly 17 years. “It has been hard, but it’s just the grace of the Lord,” she said. “I know I’m doing His will. When you are occupied all day long serving Him and serving others, you forget about yourself.” The Shockeys attend Calvary Chapel Horizonte Ensenada, which also supports the orphanage.

Many have come to serve the children at El Reino. Calvary Chapel Bible College in Murrieta sends short-term teams to minister to the children and do construction work. Maricela prays for more skilled laborers; she knows God has sustained the orphanage and will continue to do so according to His will. She quoted Psalm 127:1a: “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.” She added, “Every day the vision here has been renewed by God. We have learned to be content with that.” ☞