

# For I Have Redeemed You

## By Jackie Johnson

History of Mission, July 2022

[This article, written by Jackie (Corlett) Johnson with Tara (Ruohoniemi) Flaten, first appeared in *Together In Prayer*, April 2022, a monthly publication of World Mission Prayer League.

*Oh, thank God – he’s so good! His love never runs out. All of you set free by God, tell the world! Tell how he freed you from oppression.*

— Psalm 107:1-2 MSG

“Aha! So you’re the one!” These were among the first few words I heard from Joyce Ruohoniemi, a saint that I, like many others, came to know and love for her candor, humor and deep generosity of spirit. It was 2003 and I’d recently married WMPL’s long-term bachelor, Jay Johnson. He and Joyce got to know each other well during his time at seminary and her time as Mission House Hostess in 1995-98. Jay was keen to introduce us to each other. However, never one to mince words, Joyce soon turned to him and asked, “Why are you still here, Jay? I want to talk with Jackie!” He left, somewhat crestfallen, yet smiling at his good friend’s delight in his choice of bride.

And so, over the years, during many shared visits and prayers with both Joyce and her dear family, her story has unfolded. It is a great privilege to share these few thoughts as part of the World Mission Prayer League Board’s commitment to actively remember and rejoice in God’s faithfulness through the lives of WMPL workers.

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### Called to Nepal

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It was around 1953 when the young Joyce angered her family to the point of expulsion.

The reason?

Joyce Shelliam had announced unequivocally at age 19 that she was now a follower of Jesus Christ.

When the Lord called her in 1956 as a nurse with the United Mission to Nepal (UMN)\*, it was the final straw. Joyce was cut off. It would be decades before any semblance of a relationship was restored.

\* UMN is one mission created out of several mission organizations to serve in Nepal. WMPL was one of the original eight that founded UMN in the early 1950s.



Maps of Nepal and global view



Suspension bridge over Mardi Khola River



Worker in the hydroelectric plant in Butwal, Nepal

Joyce updating charts her nursing station desk



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## Family

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Nepal was a hotbed of mission activity in those days. Pioneering spirits with strong personalities supporting one another through difficult times was the order of the day.

When Marjorie Ruohoniemi died, she was mother of four girls ages seven, six, two, and a newborn. She was also the wife of Sanfrid who, with his family, had moved to Kathmandu, Nepal, in January 1957 to work for the U.S. International Overseas Mission (now called USAID).

Sanfrid suddenly became a single father of four daughters.

Before too long, and without too much ceremony, San asked Joyce to help him raise these precious children and to be his wife. She stepped up, agreed, and immediately went from being a single worker to a wife and mother of four in April 1959. In the next few years two sons were happily added to their family.

Raising six children in Nepal, and during home assignments, was not for the faint of heart. For 20 years, San and Joyce brought Jesus' Kingdom near to the Nepalese and established a Christ-centered home that God blessed with a rich legacy.

All of their children today live out a faith in Jesus, with their spouses, that continues to bless God, their families, and others around the world.



Joyce "JR" and Sanfrid "San" Ruohoniemi wedding, April 1959 - l-r: Joyce holding Tara, Becky, Lynn, San holding Elise



Joyce and Sanfrid Ruohoniemi family



Ruohoniemi home, Jhimruk, 1991Nepal

Tragically in March 1979, at just 55 years old, Sanfrid passed from cancer. And Joyce was angry, very angry at God. She shared with me what an awful time of wrong decisions that was as she wrestled and grieved. The reality of Jesus' ever-loving grace extended to sinners was never far from Joyce. From it was born her conviction that "God takes care of children and fools."

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## Now What?

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Joyce and the children (only her two sons were still at home at this time) returned to the U.S. in 1980. After being re-certified as a Registered Nurse, Joyce worked in the Minneapolis, Minnesota, area doing both hospital and home health nursing.

In 1990, Joyce returned to her beloved Nepal with UMN and worked for four more years, first as a Services Coordinator in Jhimruk, and then as a Nurse Counselor in Kathmandu. For all her outspokenness, when Joyce listened, she did so with her spirit and people knew they were heard. She would pray and people knew they were seen by *El Roi*, “the God who sees me.”

On finally returning to the U.S., Joyce worked in the WMPL business office and then as Hostess at the Mission House until she retired in 1998. Although not a natural fit for her, she made the role her own with her stimulating character, wit and wisdom. Many were blessed to meet her during those years and certainly carry with them even today stories of God’s faithfulness from around that kitchen table.

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## Back to Her Roots

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From 2006 to the end of 2019, Joyce returned to her hometown area of southwestern Wisconsin: to her roots. Over the almost 60 previous years she had dearly missed the sound of the wind in the cornfields and the hardy, realistic outlook of the farm folk she had grown up among. Here she reconnected with family and in her quiet way walked beside them in prayer and with a listening ear.

A considerable time each day, however, Joyce spent in the Word of God. Working through one book at a time, she would write out each chapter by hand and then contemplate the passage with the help of the biblical commentary collection *The Bible Speaks Today*. (*The Bible Speaks Today Series*. John Stott, J. A. Motyer, editors. IVP.)

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## Joyce’s Legacy

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Jesus was her constant companion, and she directed her growing band of grandchildren to the Lord in every conversation. To Joyce, her family were indeed “...*the noble ones in whom is all my delight*” (Psalm 16:3, *NIV*).

Joyce was devoted to her grandchildren, not in that over-indulgent way grandparents can stray into, but in prayer, counsel, phone calls, cards, fireside chats, and long car rides. By God’s good grace, that amazing legacy lives on in them too, for on September 29, 2021, God called Joyce to her forever home.

“I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist.  
Return to me, for I have redeemed you.”

— Isaiah 44:22 *NIV*

For Joyce, her Lord was first and foremost her Redeemer. And she would share the living truth of Isaiah 44:22 with anyone, anywhere and at any time He gave her opportunity.

### **About the Author**

Jackie (Corlett) Johnson designs artisanal textiles and crafts in Bangladesh since 1989 and runs her own Business as Mission venture, Motifhandmade.com, since '98. Through WMPL friends she met Jay Johnson in 2001, and they wed in '03. Jackie's now grafted into the WMPL family and happily serves as secretary on the board.



**Special Thanks** to Tara for her contributions to this article!

Tara (Ruohoniemi) Flaten grew up in Nepal, the fourth daughter of San and Marjorie Ruohoniemi. She returned to Nepal with her husband Wynn and served with the World Mission Prayer League. Her international upbringing and education has served her well as she raised her family around the world: Pakistan, Tajikistan, Indonesia, Philippines, Jordan, and Washington DC. Joyce spent the last months of her life with Wynn and Tara in their home in Virginia.

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## The Rest of the Story

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[The following was written by Joyce Ruohoniemi and is printed on p96 in the book *Food From Ravens*, published by World Mission Prayer League, c 2015.]

The Lord God, Maker of heaven and earth, our Savior and King, always hears us when we speak with him. But God's answers are not always what we expect or want. Many times during our family's years in Nepal we had experienced healing of bodily ills, deliverance from fear and anxiety, protection in times of trouble, and mending of relationships. So it was natural when my husband was diagnosed with cancer that we should rally friends and family as well as the Mission family and local Nepali congregations to pray for his healing. With great faith he declared he would live to see his "children's children," the first of whom was expected later that year. But the disease was not halted and continued its relentless invasion of my husband's body. Five months after his initial surgery for removal of a mole, he was dead, and our devastated family began the painful journey through grief and doubt. He did not live to see the weddings of five of his six children nor the 22 beautiful grandchildren who followed through the years.

It took a long time for some of us to trust God again. Could God have had our best interests at heart when he allowed the removal of that strong, positive spiritual influence and love in all our lives?

Through the years some of us have come to see the truth of Isaiah's words from the Lord:  
*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*  
— Isaiah 55:8, 9

One of the ways God's thoughts are higher than ours is that he will use circumstances and people we could not have imagined to bring others to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and save them from the destruction to come.

So we continue to pray for things great and small and trust the wisdom and sovereignty of our Lord God.

*Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*" — Matthew 6:10