**Memories of God’s Mercy and Love**

**Life of Sr. Mary Elian of Jesus**

**Childhood**

I was born on 29th of September 1943, in Elburgon, Nakuru County-Kenya. I was 3rd born of five children, four girls and one boy. My parents were Paul Muthee and Kesia Wangari. My early Childhood was very happy and peaceful. God blessed me with very good parents. We were not rich, but had all that we needed; there was much peace, love and unity in our family. I don’t remember ever hearing of quarrelling in the family or with other people around. My father was very friendly and welcoming and my mother was mother was very quiet, kind and kept discipline in the home and people around respected her. One I found a good amount of money on the road and I picked it and brought it to my mother. She told me to return it exactly to spot where I found it, because the owner might be coming back to look for it.

**The death of my mother**

My mother passed away, when I was about nine years old. And the night before she died, the family had read the Bible, together, prayed and we, the girls, bade good bye to our parents and went to our room to sleep. Before getting up in the morning, I had a dream that my mother and I mother were travelling to heaven and we reached the gate, saw beautiful, houses of gold, all shining bright. Then some one with shining white gown came to separate me from my mother; he took my mother in and told me to go back, that I too will go there, but after many years. When I got up in the morning, I went straight to the kitchen, expecting to find my mother making breakfast and I tell her my dream, only to find her on a stretcher, being taken to the hospital. She died that same day, afternoon, while giving birth to my youngest sister. And so that dream “after many years” left me with a feeling that I would not die young.

After my mother’s death, dad re- married and we had other brothers and sisters, but they lived separately.

**Life in my uncle’s home**

After mother’s death, I went to stay with my uncle in another village. Many children, there especially girls were not going to school; they just spend their time looking for any amusements, and while I was there, I did the same, forgetting the good up bringing of my mother. In fact at about ten years of age, I won a first prize in worldly dances. But luckily I didn’t stay there long as my family called me back home to go to school.

**Religion**

For a long time there was no Catholic Church in our area. All who were looking for God joined one of the other Christian Churches. My parent belonged to Anglican Inland Church and I was baptized there as a child of two years old and given the name Naomi. After some time, a priest from far away parish, started coming and saying Mass in our school, in the class room for very few Catholic Christians. I attended the Mass a few times and I liked every thing I experienced there. The Apostles’ Creed was the same, like the one we said in the other Church. So at age of eleven, I asked my to give me permission to leave his church and join Catholic Church, so that, when I say in the Apostles’ Creed, that I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, I will mean what I say. So my dad gave me permission and I started taking instruction and was re-baptized, on 29th September1957 and given a new name Anne, as was the custom of those days, to re-baptize converts.

**Suffering in our family**

It was the time of war, between British settlers and Kenyans, and my tribe suffered most, because they were the ones who started fighting colonialism and asking for freedom. Many of them were beaten, imprisoned and killed. One day, policemen came with a lorry came to our village and collected all men aged about forty years old and took them detention, and my father was among them. He was put in detention for about three years. My two elder sisters about sixteen and fourteen years old had to stop schooling and start working for the settlers for our living, and also in order to be allowed to stay in our house. And my sisters were real so good; they said to one another, in my hearing, “our parents wanted us to learn, but now it is impossible, as one is dead and the other one is detained. So, let us sacrifice ourselves and educate our sister (me) and our brother” and that is what they did; at their hard working and generosity, I and my brother lacked nothing. And God in his goodness blest me with good brains; I was almost always the top student.

**Convent Boarding School**

When the primary school examination was out, and had passed very well, I was called to a very good school, ran by religious nuns, of Mother Kevin, from Europe and Uganda. It was my first time to have close contact with nuns. I liked and appreciated them and their dedication to their work and the good care they took of the students. To be in a schools ran by nuns those days, was like being postulants: we learnt so many good things; there was time table for prayers, retreats and attendance at Mass every day, it was just good, but in my mind, I was wondering how my two sisters were going to manage boarding school fee for me. But God took care of that by giving the nuns good hearts towards me; when they interviewed me and learnt about my parents and the situation at home, they told me that I would only pay fees for first year and from then on, I would learn free of charge; I only look for transport, to and from the school and pocket money, but not fees. It was a great release for my two sisters who were not getting much salary for their work; they were so grateful to God and to the nuns. Also people in our village were very kind to me, they used to give me enough pocket money, which I used to share with other poorer students, or the sick, when as Legionaries we went to visit them.

**My Father’s Release from detention**

In my second year in that school, I got the good news that my father was released from detention. I was praying for him and wishing I could meet him to tell him about the blessing of becoming a Catholic, but couldn’t do so since it was in the middle of the term. So I went to the statue of our Lady and talked to her, telling her to go to home to convert my father to be a catholic; she, Our Lady, I told her, does not need transport or the permission of the head mistress of the school; that I want to find my father taking instructions when I go home for holiday. And that is exactly what happened! My dad suddenly decided that he wanted to become a Catholic and since by then there was a Catholic Church and a priest, he started taking instructions. I believed that it was our Lady who talked to him and that increased my trust and for love Mary as my mother. Dad lived his catholic faith devotedly to the end and other members of the family also joined him. It was Mary’s prayers.

**Vocation to Carmel**

Even as an A.I.C. Christian, I was very attracted to reading and meditating on the scriptures. Chapters of the Gospel with the Beatitudes and the end of the world were my favorites. Whenever it was my turn to read for the family, those were the ones I read. In fact, one time I was hit by a bicycle, because I was too lost in my meditation on the beatitude ‘Blessed are the peace makers…’But of course I hadn’t learnt how to pray as in the Catholic Church; even in the school, I used my free time not only for study, but I also for prayer and spiritual reading; I read the Imitation of Christ through; only there were no Carmelite books. Still, I felt deep desire for more life of prayer. I learnt that there were two Carmelite communities in Kenya, one in Nairobi and the other one in Tindinyo, formally Mukumu, which live that kind of life. So I with another girl who also wanted that life, asked a priest to go and request them to accept us. The Carmelites answered that, they have not thought of accepting native vocations as yet, and also that we were not old enough, only about fifteen years. So, the two of us decided to go to start our own community in the caves we had seen some where when we were in the train, coming to school. We planed to stop schooling and go there at the end of the term and start the life of prayer, loving Jesus and praying for the salvation of souls and hoping that other girls would join us. But that plan, was frustrated by the sisters, who were going to Nairobi side for their annual retreat and said that since our homes were near the road, they would take us in their car and again collect us back when the school was opening. That delay gave us time to re-think about our plan; how the cave was so far away from the Church for Mass and how it might be dangerous for two small girls living far away alone.

**Vocation Opposition**

Back to school, the sister superior called me to her office to chat with me and one of the questions she asked me was about my plans for the future, and hearing that I wanted to be nun, she was disappointed and even annoyed with me; she told me that was to waste my brains which God had given me; that I stop thinking of that and learn well, and finish secondary and they would send me to University in Europe for medicine and I would do more good or join afterwards. At that time, going to university abroad was like going to heaven; the whole town and all relatives would know of it and think I had really made it. But for me, the depth of my call within me, made every other ambition in life disappear. My companion, with whom we were aspiring, accepted the offer; after finishing she was sent to that university and never joined.

So, seeing no possibility of joining Carmel or starting a praying community, I decided to join the Little Sisters of St. Francis in Uganda and try my best to live a life of prayer there. I applied and was accepted. So, I wrote to my family that I was going to join convent and all of them, including my step mother were against it. So during next holiday, I went to ask the opinion of the priest who baptized me. I wore a dress which made me look big so that he would not ask about my age. He told me that it was just because my family loved me so much, that they couldn’t see how I could leave them; that it was just the problem of detachment and for that reason I should respond to God’s call and that they would accept it afterwards.

And to my surprise, when I returned home, my father gave me his permission and encouragement, but didn’t tell the others. And so when the others learnt that I am in the convent, and not knowing that he permitted me, they told him to write to the superior telling her to send me back. He wrote the letter, encouraged me to persevere, closed it and gave my sisters to put address and post it and wait for me to come back. Of course, much later my family congratulated me for having followed my vocation and not listening to their position; they were then so happy with me. Thanks to Jesus who gave me the courage to stand the position.

**Little Sisters Convent-Uganda**

I joined the Little Sisters in Uganda on the 31st of December, 1959. Since I had not finished my schooling, they put me in another convent school of the aspirants, where we did the national examination in which I passed in position 1 or Grade A. Then I stopped learning to continue later as a professed sister, which I never did since I opted for Carmel. So I started formation classes as a postulant, for two years, then a novice. I can say that I enjoyed everything to do religious life. I remember a short while after my arrival in Uganda, I was asked why I wanted to be a nun and I replied ‘to live with Jesus and to save souls’ and that is just what I did. I thought of nothing else but Jesus and salvation of souls. I used to offer Him many little acts of love and sacrifices and tell Him to pay me by saving seventy souls each day, but afterwards, I left Him free to do what He wanted with my acts .In fact one day as I was washing up dishes with an elderly sister, who was cooking for the European sisters, she asked me where I come from and which tribe I was and after answering her question politely, she gave me a very heavy blow on the face and at that time, I was small in body, I nearly fell down. I got confused, as I didn’t expect a nun to beat her sister. Then I remembered how Jesus said to turn the other chick, so I just stood there and waited for another one, but she did. I told nobody about it. So, when I came the following day to wash up, talked to her and did my work with her as usual, she became very friendly with me, and never was cruel with me again. I learnt afterwards that she was mentally sick, but nobody had told me before. So I thanked Jesus who helped me to pray for the sister and offer to Him what she did to me, without sharing it with anybody else.

**Coming back to Kenya to join Carmel**

During my second year novitiate, I heard that, the Carmel in Tindinyo, had started taking native vocations and that some girls were already there. (This Carmel that first started taking native vocations an O. Carm. founded from Utrera, Spain and transferred to O.C.D. in 1970) The news was so good for me. I went straight away to the Novice Mistress to tell her that Carmel was my first love. But she just listened and kept quiet, thinking that it was a temptation. And about two months passed, and we began preparing for first profession. So I went to remind her again that I don’t want to make profession as a Little Sister; I want to go to Carmel. She then sent me to the Mother General’s office to tell her my story. It seemed Mother already new of it. So, she calmly told me that, they were sorry that I wanted to go, because they were happy with me there, but she would not hinder me God’s ways; she would help me to get to Carmel and if I should find life in Carmel too hard, I was most welcomed back to them. So after a few days, Mother General went to Kenya to meet the Bishop, the Prioress and chapter nuns about my case and I was accepted. So they arranged with them the day of my entry, 20th July 1964. I had been in Uganda with the Little Sisters for about four years and seven months; was second year novice. So, on that day morning Mother General and I left Uganda for Kenya. I put off the habit and put on ordinary dress in the car, because mother didn’t want other novices to know that I was leaving. After crossing the border and entering Kenya, mother put me in a bus and told the driver who knew place to stop by the Monastery and I found the sisters waiting for me and I entered my heaven, Carmel! I found there three fervent novices

and soon another postulant entered. The five of us were very united; we helped each other to grow in virtues, while our Spanish mistress struggled with English to give us classes. All the five of us are still alive but separated; two went for the Foundation in Kisii-Kenya, one in Mafikeng-South Africa, one remained at home, Tindinyo-Kenya and I, in Zomba-Malawi.

From the time I entered, I have been in that same Monastery, happily living my life of prayer and doing all kinds of works that are done in monasteries, such as cooking, washing sewing etc, etc. I got Carmelite habit on 29th July 1965 and made my First Profession on 3rd October1966. In 1970, one of our Spanish nuns went back to Spain, after our transferring to the Discalced, so she couldn’t go back to Utrera; instead, she went to San Lucar de Barameda and after some years, when she was prioress there, she asked our Carmel to send some sisters to help them. So, I was one of those who were sent; I was in Spain as a loan from 2003-2008. I had a good chance of visiting our founding Carmel, Utrera. I also visited Sevilla

Carmel, was happy to be taken a photo wearing the Relic Mantel of our Holy Mother St. Teresa, and seeing her Book there, but didn’t visit any other of her Carmels.

**Malawi Foundation**

In 2002, when the Association of our Lady of Africa communities, sent their future Foundresses of Malawi Carmel to Mityana to start living together, we also sent our two sisters, who had personally asked and offered themselves for the Foundation. I myself as prioress, with another sister, accompanied them there, and stayed a few days with them, encouraging and wishing them success, not knowing I would end up there, in Malawi myself. So in 2011, when we heard that for some reasons, Malawi still needed help, we sent one of our sistesr to help for one after which, she could offer to stay, but she came back in 2012, and since Malawi’s need was still there, and we did want the monastery to close, we decided to plan on re-founding bases, although we were not many since Mafikeng, S.A. had already asked for help before and the sisters destined for going there, were on the move. Any way the Chapter accepted to re-found Malawi Carmel and then waited for the nuns to offer themselves; two junior professed, a novice and two chapter nuns offered. Mother hasted about my coming; may be because of age or whatever, but since the number of those who offered was not enough, she finally gave in.

I was very happy in my community of Tindinyo, but I counted it a privilege to be a missionary. My family relatives and friends found my decision to go to Malawi very mortifying for them, because they liked coming from time to time to share with me their plans or problems and ask me for advice and prayer. But I told them that I would offer the sacrifice of our separation and prayer and then the Good Lord who has called me to the mission, would take very good care of them. So we came to Malawi on the 28th of May 2014. Since then, I have been here in the monastery content and happy with my life as a missionary. Only once last February I found myself in a detention! Sister Calista and I were going to Benoni, S. Africa for the Association Regional two weeks’ course. We went for the Visas and thought everything was okay, as they stamped our papers and passports. We travelled well, but when we reached the S.A. airport and went to clear our luggageS, I found myself being kept behind and taken to offices to fill forms of crimes I had committed; that I was a political disturber and had entered the country without a visa, and was bringing strange diseases in the country. So I was kept in a small room, waiting for Kenya Airways to be returned that evening. So when Sr. Calista left, that was the news she gave that I was returned that evening. But after she had left, they changed their mind I that I was to be returned to Malawi, where I had entered the airplane. It was on Wednesday and there was no airplane to Malawi till Saturday. So I was put in a room which had nothing but a bed and one thin and dirty blanket. The room had a heavy door which only the guards had keys to open when I was to be taken to another room to eat and then brought back by the guard and locked in again. But the really pain was that the sisters didn’t know what happened to me or where I was; They phoned Kenya, Malawi, I not there!The guards kept away everything I had, but luckily, they left me the breviary, so at least I could pray the office. I couldn’t keep the time as they had kept my phone, which I was using as the watch; I had no tooth-paste nor brush and no soap; I was collecting small pieces which the previous detainees had left; no clothes for changing, but thanks to God there was water. They were real days of reflection and prayer. Finally the awaited Saturday of return to Malawi came and as a real criminal, I was accompanied by a guard carrying my travelling papers and passport, up to Malawi clearing office in the airport.

Before we die, the Good God can allow us to experience something which we could never have dreamt of. All is blessing of the hand of Him loves us. May He be loved, adored and praised forever. Amen