

Vivienne Stacey: friend, mentor, example *A compilation of reflections from friends, colleagues and from Vivienne's own writings*

Carol Walker, August 2008

Vivienne Stacey came to faith in Christ as a student, in 1946, and within a few weeks of that life changing event recognised that God was calling her to the Muslim world. Characteristically, when recording the details of her encounter with Jesus and her calling as a missionary, in her *Mission Ventured* (Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), she goes on to spell out the questions that occurred to her and the practical steps she decided to take, no doubt hoping to help others respond in similar circumstances. Whilst, from this point onwards, Vivienne has been conscious of God's call on her life, that consciousness has always been in the context of believing we are all called to be fully committed to the service of the one who Himself keeps, equips and enables. Quite simply, taking scriptures to heart, Vivienne has therefore dedicated her life to strengthening Christian witness amongst Muslims. Much of this has been in the training, befriending and encouraging of others.

One of the first questions that came to Vivienne's mind when she knew herself called was what career she should follow. She sought advice about whether she might be able to be a writer. She was advised to write articles and booklets but not to try and earn her living through writing. Next she tested whether she had a gift and calling to teach, and found that enquiries and applications met with a positive response. In this way the pathway for future developments opened. Finally she was led to the organization which is today known as Interserve. When she learnt that the *United Bible Training Centre* in Gujranwala was the only establishment that trained Pakistani women in their witness among Muslims she requested to go there. Though Interserve expected its personnel to come with open offers, once her language study was complete

Vivienne was seconded to the United Bible Training Centre, where she served as a teacher, and then Principal, from 1955-75. Of these twenty years, her friend and Interserve colleague, Anne Cooper comments that this 'was a time of preparation but already the seeds of the unique ministry she would be involved in were beginning to take shape'.

Jim Tebbe, formerly International Director of Interserve and currently the Vice President for Missions and the Urbana Director of Inter-Varsity Fellowship, USA, takes up the story:

Vivienne had vision for the girls she and other teachers trained at United Bible Training Centre. Some who came to them had only the the equivalent of 8th class pass and were not used to even doing much reading. Yet in them Vivienne saw a potential missionary force for the Gulf. A fair percentage of them were being recruited to work in the Gulf even in the early 1970's. Some went as single women, many working as nurses in hospitals. Others had husbands who found jobs and they also worked. What could they do to share their faith? Then in order to better understand and also encourage them, she made trips to visit them and others in their places of work in the Gulf.

The intent and impact of these visits are instructive. As Jim Tebbe observes:

Vivienne had vision for where she was in the mundane and everyday life, be it a taxi driver, shop keeper, fellow travellers on a bus or the mostly younger women she taught for so many years in the United Bible Training Centre.

Vivienne wrote reports of her visits. These led Interserve to decide to extend its ministry and send personnel to the Gulf. One notable involvement of the organization there has been in theological education by extension, which has been a wonderful means of re-envisioning Christians from Pakistan, India and Nepal working in the Gulf as migrant workers. On her visits Vivienne also met and

encouraged Western expatriate Christians and students in the region. Quite unexpectedly this led, in 1974, to the Regional Secretary of the *International Fellowship of Evangelical Students* (IFES) inviting Vivienne to join his pioneer team for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf. Ramez Atallah, who was a later IFES Regional Secretary, and is now the Director of the Bible Society of Egypt, tells of the legacy of Vivienne's involvement, especially in the flourishing work in Dubai, which has resulted in the establishing of the a full blown Inter-Varsity group there, which joined IFES in summer 2007.

Being drawn into the IFES work led on to the next stage of Vivienne's calling which focused on Pakistanis of the dispersion, but also an increasing international ministry training trainers. Vivienne comments:

I began as a missionary from the West. I became a missionary from the East and I ended up a world Christian.

Travelling with Vivienne on her trips always involved laughter, room for the unexpected, giving time to people, and visiting mosques and localities in order to learn more about local Islam. Sometimes a trip involved some formal teaching opportunities, but always there would be sharing of articles and ideas, and times of prayer and probably some extended reflection on Scripture. Donna Smith remembers having Vivienne visit when she was in North Africa, and how Vivienne spent time with two national women believers to inspire them in their Christian discipleship and growth. I have memories of frequenting a Hui Muslim restaurant in Urumchi, Western China, with Vivienne, over a number of days, and being drawn into a brief conversation on faith because we were observed regularly giving thanks with palms upraised, before we ate our meals. There were times when literature was passed to friends made along the way. Jim Tebbe tells of Vivienne's creativity:

Once Vivienne was traveling as a single foreign woman on a rural bus. She heard the passengers around her discussing who she was and what she was carrying in her bag. So she responded, "I have seed in my bag."

"No you don't," they said. "It looks like you have books." So Vivienne took out the books to show the tracts and the Christian literature in Urdu.

"See," she said. "It is seed. These words give life and produce fruit." She handed out the materials. Different passengers read some of the pieces out loud with others listening and commenting.

"This may be seed," one passenger said to Vivienne. "But it is foreign seed and won't grow in Pakistani soil."

"Oh no," said Vivienne. "This seed is Middle Eastern and was prepared for the whole world." And so the sometimes dangerous act of passing out Christian literature in a Muslim country was handled with imagination and in a way that those receiving it could not forget.

It was not uncommon for Vivienne to have a friends with her on her trips, or at least to invite someone working in a location to join with her in meeting other individuals. This was partly for her own fellowship, that is, for the encouragement and wisdom it brings. But Vivienne has also always sought to build up and train others, and to see them develop by passing on responsibility to them as well. Thus Donna Smith suspects that Vivienne had a great part in recruiting her for IFES, and knows that her own wider teaching ministry has some direct links to Vivienne's:

Vivienne was often asked to teach seminars or courses on Islam, including the topics of Women in Islam and Folk Islam. When she had extra invitations, she would suggest the names of her friends who might be suitable. So I was asked to follow her earlier pioneering efforts in teaching at the December course of *All Nations Christian College* in the UK, in presenting a summer course at *Columbia International University* in South Carolina, in giving talks at a new Islamics Institute in Korea, and in venturing into the northern mountains of the Philippines to teach for a week

at a seminary in Baguio. I would consult with her in the months before my classes; Vivienne was a great help in my preparation as she generously shared her materials and ideas. I am sure part of her strategy was to train up others and delegate to them.

Another word to describe Vivienne's approach is the now in vogue term of *mentor*. Barbara Dyatt, who for many years was a part of the small *Community Development Team* at WCH (Women's Christian Hospital) Multan in Pakistan provides insightful detail of Vivienne's approach:

While mentoring seems to be one of today's 'in' words I reckon it describes a concept which has been around for some time. The *Community Development Team* at WCH referred to Vivienne as 'teacher' – we were her students - she gave us 'homework'. But despite the rather stilted terminology, I believe that this relationship between the team and Vivienne was true mentoring – and Vivienne a great mentor.

Our team was composed of 5-6 local personnel and 2 expatriates. Our team roles were varied, ranging from driver to doctor; our grasp of the local languages and cultures also varied; our experience and understanding of outreach work probably ranged from non-existent to significant yet we were a team – a team committed to rural development work. We aimed to impact local communities in a wholistic way and Vivienne willingly became our mentor in the whole area of faith issues.

On Vivienne's visits we would have interesting and challenging training days – and plenty of laughs too! Together we tackled difficult issues in how to relate to the majority community when we were all from the minority Christian one. Our national colleagues in particular were confronted with a need to rethink the language they used when talking about their faith – we looked at the hymns we were so used to singing in church, we considered how we prayed with village friends, how we explained our faith. And always there was the practical outworking of what we were considering. We wrote prayers which were suitable for varying life situations....we shared them, discussed them and then used them as these situations arose in the villages. We decided on Bible

events or parables that would be particularly relevant and worked out how to retell them, how we might get a clear message across...then we tried to use them. We considered how Christian principles could be at the core of all our health teaching programmes even when we could make no explicit references to our faith.

And along with the group work we were given a homework assignment. – to be ready for Vivienne’s next visit. Not one blanket assignment for all – but a different project for each member of the team, wisely selected to challenge each individual where they were at...and making each one of us responsible in sharing what we had learned with the rest of the team. It wasn’t just information gathering but always something that we had to work out or analyse or experiment with. I once had to read a book on customs and beliefs surrounding childbirth in Bangladesh. My homework was to select relevant issues and consider how to integrate them into our own work...I still remember how helpful some of those issues were.

As well as wanting feedback on our homework, Vivienne was keen to hear how we had made use of material and ideas we had worked on during her previous visit. We would save up difficult questions for her and if there had been some interesting conversations with an individual, Vivienne might join us on a village trip and meet with that individual. We not only had her ideas to work on, but often one or other of the team would be challenged by seeing her in action, relating to our village friends. The woman who lectured in seminaries and wrote books and who led in-depth Bible studies with highly educated enquirers seemed quite at ease sitting in a ‘poorest of the poor’ village home relating to an illiterate mother in an understanding and relevant way. Vivienne gave us ideas and tools to reach these rural communities – in particular the typically illiterate women, steeped in folk religion and whose knowledge of their own religion was limited and often distorted.

Vivienne the mentor – much loved and respected by that insignificant little Community Development team in the

backwaters of Pakistan. God alone knows the full impact of her commitment to us.

It was not only the WCH team that were helped to be reflective and intentional about what they were doing. Vivienne applied similar principles to stimulate sharing of insight and understanding by people in diverse situations, getting them to write papers and meet together to discuss content. The papers might be about specific interests of individuals, or those with overlapping experience might be asked to write on a subject from their differing perspectives to fuel constructive debate. The first time I was invited to the Interserve *Ministry to Muslims Commission* Vivienne gave me the book *Birth Rituals in Bangladesh* to read and review (on that occasion the meetings were in Dakka). It raised some important questions for me about assumptions foreign Christian workers can bring to situations they do not know well. Jim Tebbe was also part of the Commission for a period of time. He explains:

We were encouraged to write and to find ways our Fellowship could be more effective in its outreach to Muslims. I always looked forward to those meetings and many great ideas came from them. Were there ways that our mission structures and orientation hindered rather than helped effective engagement with Muslims? Our recommendations sometimes slipped into the area administration, causing considerable furor on one or two occasions. Vivienne had a lovely way of sidestepping the fights and accepting the stormy response with a laugh and a smile. She would step back, only to bring up the issue at another time and another way later.

It was not just for Interserve that people were brought together. For example, there were occasions when Vivienne invited like minded people, both national and expatriate from across Pakistan to meet together, too. Warren Larson, now Director of the Zwemer Institute of Muslim Studies, remembers:

I first met her during the 1980s at some scholarly get-togethers we used to hold at Frank Khair Ullah's place in Lahore when we shared papers on Islam and reaching Muslims for Christ. I felt

Vivienne was always so gracious and affirming though I had so much less experience and knowledge. She was an accomplished writer, and later one book in particular proved very helpful. *Christ Supreme over Satan* was about spiritual warfare. In it she related the story of a Pakistani brother who was greatly used of God in Bahawalpur. When facing a situation in DGK involving spiritual oppression with the family of a girl who worked for us, we used the principles and strategies Vivienne suggested, and cleansed the entire house. The Muslim family was completely delivered from the demonic oppression. It was a powerful testimony.

After we had been expelled from Pakistan and I was put in charge of Muslim Studies at *Columbia International University* (now the Zwemer Center), I invited Vivienne to come and teach a short course on Women in Islam. The course was so popular we soon developed it into an Independent Distance Learning course, and over the ensuing years, many have benefited from that single course. It's still being used of God to help equip workers. To this day I can remember things Vivienne said during the course and through her writings. For example, she said that only Christian women could win Muslim women by building loving relationships and demonstrating personal interest and concern for them. She said that since a Muslim woman seldom hears her name, praying for her by name, gives genuine worth and value. She said that though many Muslim women are illiterate, and know little about the Qur'an, they do know quite a bit about the Judgement to come. And many have the idea that obedience to their husband holds the key to whether or not they themselves make it to heaven. It's amazing to pause and reflect on things Vivienne said that remain with me, and I'm sure with many others. Truly, she has been a blessing to many of us who served in Pakistan, but also with our students at CIU, and through them she continues to be a blessing all over the world.

In keeping with the advice that she received before embarking on her years of fulfilling her call to mission, most of Vivienne's writing has been articles and papers. She has also written a number of books. She describes these as having been in four areas: to help people to relate to Muslims (*Submitting to God*:

Introducing Islam, and Women in Islam), to provide knowledge of the history and growth of the Pakistani church (including the biographies of Henry Martyn and of Thomas Valpy French who was the first Bishop of Lahore, and also of her long time friend Mrs Tara James of the Pakistan FES), to provide Bible study material for those of Muslim background (*Bible Studies for Enquirers and New Believers*) and, unexpectedly, as a result of experience, being led to write her book on spiritual warfare, folk religion and the occult (*Christ Supreme over Satan*). Most of her works are available in both English and Urdu (the national language of Pakistan).

Typically her advice and encouragement has also contributed to the writings of others. Anne Cooper had originally studied Hinduism in Bible College and knew almost nothing about Islam, so Vivienne took her in hand. She says: 'I am so grateful for this and indeed for all that I have acquired under Vivienne's guidance.' At a much later stage Anne put together the book *Ishmael My Brother, an introduction to Islam*. Vivienne gave great support to the production of the book, writing almost a whole chapter in the second edition. As with the whole of her ministry, she has been very ready to help others in their writing, offering encouragement along the way.

The enabling and encouraging of people has not just been through meetings, training sessions and reading material, though. Ida Glaser (of the *Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies* now located in Oxford) writes:

The great thing Vivienne did for me was to take me out for lunch when I was struggling towards my PhD, and then to ask whether money might help. She then (probably through a trust of which she was senior trustee) provided enough to pay Crosslinks for, I think half my time for 3 months, so that I could break the back of the writing up. I might never have completed it otherwise. Another time, after a conference in Holland, she treated me to a day in Amsterdam - took me on a canal trip and gave me a good dinner - things I'd never have done for myself, or been able to afford.

Perhaps because of her later peripatetic life, the years of institutional living in Pakistan, or limited interest in home making, Vivienne has tended to prefer using restaurants as a place of hospitality. Of course, as a single person, the practicalities of providing a meal at home can undermine time for good conversation. Nevertheless, many of us have enjoyed the uncomplicated freedom of a refreshing stay at Vivienne's apartment during the years she lived in Paphos, after her retirement, and probably all who did so have savoured the one speciality she learnt to cook – sword fish. The CMS medical team with whom she lived, in Bannu, in the North West Frontier of Pakistan, from the time she left UBTC to engage in her travelling ministry until her retirement, tell of how Vivienne had also taught herself to make marmalade, and would banish all others from the kitchen once a year when the ripened oranges were collected, to fulfil her chosen duty.

Vivienne's home in Paphos also hosted a regular weekly Bible Study for elderly British retirees whom she came to know through the Anglican church there. Reports are that they too had homework to do between meetings, and became very diligent and committed in their search of Christian Scriptures. Marmalade or Bible Study, there has always been a certain precision in Vivienne's approach to what is served up. Though, in saying that, one has to remark that appearance and presentation have never been the central concern; memories of slide shows, in which pictures were back to front (clear from the wording), or upside down (clear from the sky!), or locations forgotten (Oh, you know that picture three back that I thought was Dubai, I have just remembered it was Brighton!) evoke recollections of laughter, but also of how accessible, rather than awesome, Vivienne has always been.

Anne Cooper describes Vivienne as 'concerned, unconventional, practical and with a lively sense of humour'. She remembers her first contact with Vivienne, in October 1956, in a letter of welcome

she received in Aden, while travelling out to Pakistan. In this letter was a drawing of a London bus stop. Underneath was written: *Bus in Urdu means stop!*

One of my early introductions to Vivienne's simple down-to-earthness was in my first summer in Pakistan, when we were on a student conference together. In sizzling temperatures she taught me how to identify a good water melon, and share its delights with local people who have become life-long friends. The fun, though, has never been about shallowness. Vivienne knows what the cost of faith in Christ in Islamic contexts can be. She has had friends from Afghanistan who have permanently 'disappeared' and the murder, in 1960, of Esther John, a friend and colleague with whom she worked at UBTC, left a deep impact. Of Esther, whose statue now stands alongside those of other contemporary Christian martyrs, in Westminster Abbey, she comments: 'she was the first martyr I had known, but by no means the last.'

So, what are the things that stand out for me, as I reflect on how I have learnt and been enriched through knowing Vivienne? I think first of friendship; I have never known Vivienne relate to anyone as if they were a project.

She has been a strategic thinker, and that has certainly guided in both where and with whom she has invested herself, yet British retirees, isolated mission workers and lone national Christians all know the genuineness of the friendship that Vivienne has given.

I have on occasions known I could go to talk with Vivienne about personal issues and decisions, and that I would be listened to with respect for the integrity of the struggles I was working through. I was confident that she would not be listening simply to persuade me to follow her own agenda. I think this is all part of her gift, or characteristic, of accepting everyone equally, and believing in the potential of everyone, in the loving hands of Christ.

Jim Tebbe explains that he and Beth, his wife, chose to join Interserve because of Vivienne. For them what stands out is her vision and how she communicated it:

Usually one makes a decision based on several factors. But in our case Vivienne was the major reason. Her creativity in finding ways to communicate with Muslims, her infectious enthusiasm, her vision to have Pakistani Christians become a major outreach arm of the church in the oil rich states of the Gulf absolutely captivated us. In our search process someone had told us that we should choose a mission based on the people we would want to work with rather than the location or the actual job. We chose to follow that advice. After our meeting Vivienne in Pakistan, as we were leaving, she scurried off to get the Interserve address in the USA. "Just in case you should consider coming with us." Her vision stayed with us through a bumpy application process typical of a new office (which the US was at that time)... In later years I continued to find Vivienne a good source of advice. Where should I study? Books to read. Ideas for my thesis. Should I take a leadership position in the Fellowship? And when there was a sticky problem, it was Vivienne's advice to "grasp the nettle" that I found to be the most helpful. Vivienne casts a long shadow not just within Interserve but also outside the Fellowship.

It has been the simple genuineness of Vivienne's concern that has been behind the dispersing of financial resources to people in training who lacked funding, the sharing of materials with isolated mission workers, and the willingness to make difficult journeys to encourage the witness of ordinary Christians in Islamic contexts. She has believed in Christ, and in Christ believed in others. So, more than learning about being strategic, I am encouraged to seek to be true to Christ's call, intentional in investing the gifts and abilities that I have, and patient in trusting in God's unfolding purposes, when I consider Vivienne's life of service. As Ramez Atallah commented, 'I think she is a true testimony of the fact that ordinary people can do extraordinary things with God's help.'