



"People tell me I'm fantastic. But God doesn't see fantastic, extraordinary people. He does extraordinary and fantastic things through ordinary people. If we lose sight of this we are nothing."

Edwina Gately, founder and director of the Volunteer Missionary Movement (VMM) is tired of her 'whiter kid' image, of being regarded by others as a paragon of virtue. Most of all she is tired of being looked upon not as a woman but as a rather strange super-human who is never frivolous, weak or fed-up!

But the fact that many people do regard Edwina's career so far as fantastic is hardly surprising, for she is a great example of what God can achieve in our lives if we let him. For Edwina there have been no flashes of light from heaven, no voices. There has simply been a steady growth in her awareness of a vocation.

That vocation began with a mission appeal sermon from Fr. Rafter WF given in her parish church. When he spoke of the life of the missionary, Edwina, then aged 15 years, was very interested: "That's the job for me," she thought, "full of adventure and travel!"

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# EDWINA GATELY

In July this year 24 young people left England for different parts of Africa where they will work as lay missionaries for two years. They went as members of the Volunteer Missionary Movement—an organisation which has, since it began in 1968, sent 240 lay missionaries to 16 different countries.

In the following pages we look at the work of VMM and meet some of the young missionaries. But first ROSEMARY GALLAGHER talks to Edwina Gately, the woman behind the Volunteer Missionary Movement.

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After leaving school and finishing a three-year teacher training course, she finally arrived in a mission school run by the White Sisters in Uganda. The school was a modest one with most facilities laid out. After a year there Edwina still wanted to continue the work but she could see a greater need in less developed areas. "I wanted a challenge," she says, "so I went to the local African Bishop and asked him where there was a need for a village school to be set up. He spoke of a village 22 miles away: no Europeans, no water, no electricity, and a main diet of bananas and peanuts."

Edwina accepted the challenge, learnt the local language, and at the age of 23 set off to live among her people for two years. "We went camping, sleeping in the nearest town, produced plays together, and went on holidays. They responded so well, and I could see a need here, a gap that the Church was not yet filling."

A severe bout of malaria forced her to return to England. But the seed had been sown. She had an idea of what could be achieved by the laity in the missionary work of the Church; it just needed organizing. "I couldn't get out by joining a missionary order," she says. "God gave me a personality to respond to a challenge—in this case starting the WSM to fill that gap in the Church."

"I didn't want to get involved in administration here; I felt that my place was in Africa. But the idea of a lay missionary movement begged me to rethink,

move and act. I realized God was calling me, but it was a fight. Would I say 'yes' to God? I decided to stay in England for a year, just to get things moving, and then return.

"After that year I found it hard to drop out. I recognized that God's will for me was to continue here. I am now totally committed to this vocation. The movement has grown because God used people; but he doesn't go halfway; you must give him everything. I expect our volunteers to be as committed as I am. To be a Christian today is a tremendous challenge and responsibility. There is no life in nominal Christianity. We must be alive to Christ and alive to his people."

Edwina has a deep and total faith in God's continuing presence.

"Some of the greatest loves are unspoken; you can sit with a person for hours without talking. It's the same with God. We often think that prayer means a set formula—set hours and times. When you are in love you don't say 'I'll see you at five for our hour'! When the loved one is not with you, the love is. You know the loved one lives and cares even if there is no physical presence. Without this faith in God I'd be simply running a travel/employment agency. We need a deep personal relationship with God."

Now, five years later, Edwina realizes the price to be paid.

"If you are a single woman, an administrator, and the director of an organization people assume that you lack warmth, that somehow you are different," she says. "You are not allowed to be weak, to suffer, or to cry. People tell you that

you're different from others. They put you on a pedestal and look at you instead of looking at the Christ who is in you.

"I want God to use me as much as he wishes; to bring me to him and others to him. But I am not different from other people. As a woman I enjoy a visit to the hairdresser, a new dress, and a gin and tonic. And Christ is in me in all these things which make me.

"I would have liked to get married—though what man would dare take me as a new? I know what it is to love a man. I want to love and to receive love. But now I am totally and personally involved in WSM. If it were not so I could not do the work.

"Friendship and love from others is very important—especially with the few with whom it is possible to be completely oneself, with all one's strengths and weaknesses. My needs for love and friendship are met in the response of the volunteers to those needs; without that there would be no movement."

Edwina's other pillar of strength is her family. "I have a brother who is a professional colonist in Rhodesia," says Edwina. "We're poles apart, but he's my brother and I love him." She also has a married sister with two small children. Edwina's mom, who is not a Catholic, spoils her dreadfully. "From beginning to end she's never fully understood what I'm doing," says Edwina. "But she's so very proud of me, her daughter, who lives in London and must be doing well because she has lots of friends who are visitors!"

## PREPARING THE WAY

In May this year, twenty-five young people gathered at the Missionary Institute in Mill Hill to take part in a four-week training course before going out to different parts of Africa as WSM volunteers.

Edwina Clardy looks over the course as essential prepara-

tion if the volunteers are to be effective when they reach their destinations. Certainly the subjects dealt with are very varied. They take in almost everything a lay missionary will be faced with—from the customs of the people they are going to work with to advice on how to avoid "putting your foot in it."

Because WSM is essentially a missionary venture and not just an agency for sending volunteers, part of the course is taken up with spiritual formation—with talks on prayer, for

Anneline Chaminika is a nurse, aged 26. She is going to Kenya in Kenya where she will organize nursing. "I've always wanted to go and help people who haven't had the same chances I've had," she says.



Vincent Kerr, aged 22, is from Co. Antrim. He is a teacher and is going to Tamale, Ghana. "I'm going to take the place of one of the White Sisters at the school and replace him for other work," said Vincent.



Christine Bell (also pictured on our front cover) is 21 and comes from California. She is going to do vocational work, and to teach it, in Kenya. Why does Christine want to work as a missionary? "It can lead it down to saying that I think it's God's will for me," she said.

