



God's Fingerprints: A True Story

by Gail Buckley (7/13/06)

On Divine Mercy Sunday in 2002, Billie Silva Mobley, kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament at her church in North Carolina, received the inspiration from God to build a seminary.

Getting the Message Straight

Fifteen months later, Billie found herself in Fatima, Portugal, visiting a museum that houses many precious religious artifacts. Among the treasures is the golden crown from the statue of Our Lady of Fatima; this crown holds the bullet used in the May 13, 1981, assassination attempt on the life of Pope John Paul II. Believing that the Blessed Virgin Mary had spared his life on that feast day of Our Lady of Fatima, the pope took the bullet to Portugal and it was placed in the crown of the statue honoring her.

This wasn't Billie's first pilgrimage to Fatima, but it was the first time that she'd been to the museum.



She couldn't help but think of her father and remember his words, "Don't ever forget that your grandmother was Portuguese." Billie had never really known her grandmother. Shortly after her first Holy Communion, when Billie was 9 years old, her mother had left Billie's father, placing Billie, her brother and her little sister in an orphanage. Although Billie's father was Catholic, her mother was Baptist and left instructions at the orphanage that the children were to be raised as Baptists. Billie's father had attempted to gain custody of his children, but society held a restrictive view of gender roles during the 1950s and his efforts were unsuccessful. It was many years before Billie saw her father again, and by that time she had come back to the Church. After leaving the orphanage at 19, she was invited by someone to go to Mass. That's all it took: she was "home."

Now here she was, in Portugal again, so far away from her home in North Carolina and those sad memories. Although many aspects of Billie's life had been difficult, something good had come of that dark past — she and her husband had met at the orphanage. "What a blessing it is to be in this holy place," she thought, looking at all the artifacts that pointed to the piety of the Portuguese people. Silently she prayed, "Why am I here, Lord? I know there's a reason, but what is it?" She was standing in front of the vestments of the man who'd been the Bishop of Fatima in 1917, when the three shepherd children had seen the apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary and 70,000 people witnessed the miracle of the spinning sun. Just then Billie's eye fell on a card with the name of the Bishop of Fatima at the time of the apparitions: Jose Alves Corrcia da Silva. "Silva! That's my name," she whispered to herself. "Of course, my grandmother was Portuguese! What a nice coincidence," she thought.

Moving on, Billie came to the glass case that held the golden crown with the bullet in it. Knowing how

the Virgin Mary intervened on that occasion to save the pontiff's life and believing that the Blessed Mother's intercessory prayers are always heard, Billie paused and silently prayed for discernment, for clarity, and for understanding concerning what the Lord was asking of her. Finishing her prayer, she moved on, and then noticed a priest standing with his back to her. Turning toward her he said, "Build my seminary." Immediately, Billie burst into tears. This was it, the answer to her prayer — her confirmation! Billie had no idea how she was supposed to accomplish such a lofty deed or even where to begin, but she was now sure that the Lord, indeed, wanted a seminary built.

Signs Along the Way

Before leaving Fatima, Billie walked with other pilgrims along a special Way of the Cross, the same route that the three "little shepherds" of Fatima had taken through the sheep field in 1917 to see the Blessed Virgin Mary. This path is also known as the "Hungarian Way" because it was built by Hungarian freedom fighters opposing the communists in 1917. The path ends at St. Stephen's Catholic Church.

After returning to North Carolina, Billie continued to experience events that pointed her toward the building of a seminary and culminated in a search for its location. After looking at several sites, Billie was led to a 215-acre piece of land situated alongside a river in the hills of western North Carolina. Billie was delighted to learn that the owners were Catholic. Walking around the land, she noticed first one sheep, and then another, and over the next hill, many more. "Yes," answered Barnabas, the owner, when Billie inquired, "I'm a shepherd, and this is my sheep farm." Immediately Billie's thoughts returned to Fatima and the sheep field she walked through there on the "Hungarian Way." "Is this another of the many signs, Lord, that this is the land for Your seminary?" she wondered to herself.

A few minutes later Billie received her answer. Barnabas invited her into his home to meet his wife, Suzanne. There, Billie learned several remarkable things. Barnabas had been a Hungarian freedom fighter, and he and Suzanna were married in St. Stephen's Church in Hungary. Suzanna was born on May 13, the feast day commemorating Our Lady of Fatima. The couple risked their lives fleeing Hungary in the dark of night, with only the clothes on their backs, to escape communism. His sole possession at that time was a medal that he'd received at the last Eucharistic Congress in Budapest in 1938, the year before World War II. Barnabas kept the medal in his pocket. He showed it to Billie — a medal honoring John Bosco, the saint who'd converted orphanages into seminaries. Billie knew that this series of amazing connected events was more than coincidence: these were God-instances!

There was no doubt in Billie's mind. Considering that there is not a single Catholic seminary between Washington, DC, and Miami, Florida, this scenic plot of land is the perfect location for a new seminary to be built. But how? The 215 acres of land cost over a million dollars! And because Suzanna is seriously ill, there is an urgent need to sell the land as quickly as possible.

It's often said that where there's a will, there's a way. Billie truly believes that her hope for a seminary reflects God's will, and she's waiting for God to reveal the details of His plan to make the dream a reality. Yet Billie insists that this isn't a story about her, but rather is a story about God's desire for a

Catholic seminary in the southeastern United States. Billie describes herself as “just a person who loves the Lord and has vowed to serve Him in any way He wants.”

This is where the Te Deum Foundation comes in. Founded by Billie in 2003, the Te Deum Foundation is a non-profit organization established to meet the spiritual and financial needs of men who have answered the call to discern their vocation to the Catholic priesthood. The foundation takes its name from the opening line of an ancient prayer of the Church, the Te Deum: “You are God, we praise You.” The Te Deum Foundation hopes to raise the money to purchase the land on which to build a seminary.

Enter the Book — and Maybe You

In 2005, the year the Vatican proclaimed to be the Year of the Eucharist, events moved quickly. That was the year the land for the seminary was found. That same year, a young priest, Fr. Matthew Buettner, who had been on the Fatima pilgrimage where Billie received her confirmation, wrote a series of 27 articles in the diocesan newspaper about the Mass. So many people began asking for reprints of Fr. Buettner’s articles about the Eucharist that he had them compiled into a book, *Understanding the Mystery of the Mass* (\$8.95, Queenship Publications), and he is donating the proceeds from the book’s sales to the Te Deum Foundation to help purchase land for the seminary.

Fr. Buettner, now pastor of St. Dorothy’s Catholic Church in Lincolnton, North Carolina, believes that the two projects — building the seminary and distributing his book — have developed in a parallel fashion for the same cause. It was never his intention to write a book, but he is hopeful that his book will help bring attention to the seminary project and also will open the door for much-needed donations for that project. Fr. Buettner is grateful to be part of a larger, divine plan. Reflecting on the series of events, he said: “God often chooses the most unlikely people and the most unlikely situations to do His work, starting out with the twelve fisherman, tax collectors, and sinners. It’s all very much a part of what God does, but it still requires a lot of faith and trust.”

The book also attracted the attention of Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) executives attending the first Eucharistic Congress in Charlotte, North Carolina, last year. *Understanding the Mystery of the Mass* is available through EWTN and is being considered for possible presentation on Bookmark, the EWTN program that highlights contemporary books of special interest to Catholics.

God’s providence has indeed united the hope for a future seminary in western North Carolina with a new book about the Mass. The involvement of unlikely candidates is manifested in both projects — an identifying fingerprint of the hand of God! Now it is time to ask, “Is God calling you to be a part of this plan?”

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