

*Giselle became a child soldier in The Philippines at the age of 15. Her narrative was recorded in 2002 by staff working for the Quaker United Nations Office.*

### Giselle

My father had a problem, because he had another woman. I heard that he had another wife. He moved from place to place. Sometimes he would go home only once a month. I heard that my father had other children. So my father sometimes could not provide the tuition fees for my other siblings. When he gets home, he would shout and he was drunk. He would say lots of different things. So my sister was not able to finish school and got married early. My father seemed to be always mad at me and at all of us. My elder brother told me that our father doesn't love us. He had a big stick that he would use to beat us up; this was a branch of the guava tree. That's why we had to follow him. Just one mistake and he would hit us directly. My sister didn't even have a boyfriend, but she just left because she couldn't stand it anymore. Even when we were bigger, he would still beat us. We didn't even understand what we did wrong. I can't understand why he treated us that way when we did nothing wrong. We follow all his orders. Just one mistake and he would hit us. When he would start beating us, my mother would tell us, just go to my sister's house and we would reply, No, we will just be an added problem there. When we were still small, my father wasn't like that. He only changed when he started having another woman. All of us were badly affected. Children really need their parents.

Sometimes, my elder brother would cry. Even my brother who was 18 then, decided that he would just take care of himself because our father didn't take care of us. Our mama was also being battered. But we would rather stay with her. We didn't want to be away from her. My father would threaten us that when those two children come, I will kill them! From grade three onwards, I stayed in my aunt's house. Then one day, I saw my aunt crying. Then I found out that my mother had died. I didn't have a chance to see her before she died. When she died, that's when everything seemed to fall apart. We didn't know what to do. My father sold our family house, so we had nowhere else to go home too. He started living in the house of the other woman. My father had become crazy for the other woman. We did not receive a single centavo from the proceeds of the sale of the house. My elder brother paid for all the funeral expenses of my mother. When my father came to the wake, my brothers and sister and I were all very mad at my father. My brother and my father had a brawl in front of the coffin of my mother, because we found out that my mother didn't have any medical check-ups with the doctor because all the money had been given to the other woman. We didn't speak to him. We were all grief-stricken and mad with him.

After I finished grade five, I couldn't stand it any more. I wasn't very comfortable in my aunt's house. I was wondering, "Who is my family?"... Around that time, the situation at home was getting worse. I had problems with my sister-in-law. I couldn't bear it anymore. My sister-in-law would say 10 things for each statement that I said. I didn't like that. She accused me of being lazy and unhelpful. But I disagree with her... I told her that I was doing my best to be helpful to them. However, she remarked that it

would be better if I left the house so that they would have fewer problems. It was very difficult to get along with her. They just wanted me to be there to take care of their small child.

Poor families have many children and they come one after another just like do-re-me. But in the movement, there is allowance for each child of the adult comrades. They entered the movement because they were hoping that the movement could help in their family problems. Never mind if the movement's objectives are very difficult to achieve, like defeating the government. Never mind if the movement's chances of winning are unsure.

Inside the movement it's like I have a mother, a father and elder siblings but we get along well with each other even if we don't even know where each of us comes from. I don't know the details of their life. Inside the movement I found the family life that I was searching for. I really do not know who they really are but they are very good people and they are like my family. They're very different from my real family. The things that I have been looking for in a family, it seems that I found it with my comrades. The only difference is that it's not done through the correct means. I said, Comrade, what if we get shot? I would ask them the most difficult questions. She replied, Well, if that happens, it's plain misfortune.

I was really sad when I heard that my sister was getting married because I really wanted to witness it. So I asked the comrade, may I go home to visit? I had heard of the wedding through a neighbor of one of our contacts. The comrade said, How would you explain to them where you came from? It's possible for you to go home as long as you think you can explain without giving them the real information. So I thought, How am I

going to be able to explain why I do not have any money and why I have become so dark complexioned. Therefore, I told the comrade that I would not go. I was so mad at myself. I saw the pictures of the wedding later, when I got injured in the encounter.

After my injury I was in the hospital. I took off my IV; I felt that I did not want to live anymore. I was thinking that I will be rejected by my family and my peers in my community, because when we were still together they said that the armed group was bad. I wasn't ready to explain to them then. But all they said was that they had missed me. I couldn't face my father. I didn't want to live. I didn't take my medicine. I flushed my tablets down the toilet. What I wanted was to go out of the hospital, already dead. The hospital staff wanted to me to see a priest, but I said what's the use of seeing a priest, can he fix my injury? I also didn't want to see my comrades because I felt so ashamed.

If I meet my old comrades I will talk to them. But if they don't want to talk, then I won't. I cannot snub them. But I will try to persuade them to go down from the mountains. I will try to discourage them. I will ask them if they want to be injured like me. Just stay here. I want to be able to study, to stand on my own and be able to help my father. When I am in front of my father, I cannot talk to him. I am still mad at him. But sometimes, I feel that I would like to go home with him. After a while, I will eventually be able to stand on my own, and then I can help my father. Whatever my dreams are, I have to act on them, otherwise nothing good will happen to me.

What I need now is patience, perseverance. I ask the Lord, Don't allow me to become weak! I am being compared to a spring of water. I am also strong and I can climb well. Once, when I was climbing, there was this person who pointed to another person who was climbing. The other person was panting and looking pale, while I was taking it

easy. Once someone pointed out that the clothes that I wash are cleaner than the clothes washed by someone who used two good hands! In volleyball, even if I'm injured I can hit the ball stronger than the others. My performance is similar to the abled persons there. But sometimes there are obstacles in my life and I just pray to the Lord. Sometimes when I need help and I worry that there might be no one around to help. But the mind can be strong. Sometimes I worry that I can't manage, but in the end you realize you can do it.

I entertain the idea of going home if there are people there who I can rely on. But I will not go back with such an intention. Well, maybe I can go back to my brother, if my family is still there. But then I don't think so. I'm in a difficult situation... I still don't know how I will go back home. I think it is better for girls still in the movement to decide to come down on their own. But it is difficult if you go to the revolutionary area, to talk to them and try to convince them to go down from the mountains.

I felt that if I go home, nothing good would happen to me... I was so happy that they came to visit me. I can't take it anymore when they visit me then leave again. I hope when they come here I can come with them as they leave. Or maybe I can go to them as a surprise. How I wish that when they come to visit me I could come home with them already. I don't know how life is outside anymore. I don't have big dreams. My only dream is for me to have a simple job and to be able to come home and be with my family again.