



I was born at Columbio Sultan Kudarat on April 9, 1985, a day remembered as Araw ng Kagitingan (Day of Valor), marking the Fall of Bataan. I am the eldest among four siblings. My father was a pastor, and my mother was a housewife. I was born during a time of armed conflict between the Moro rebels and the Philippine government. Life back then was extremely difficult. Every day was a struggle for survival.

Though my mother's family were settlers in Columbio and owned a large piece of land she had inherited one acre, the war forced us to evacuate. After one year of conflict, we were able to return to our town.

At the time, my father was a young pastor. His small allowance could not sustain our needs. In order to provide for us, my parents started raising ducks that laid eggs every day. My mother's land was cultivated and planted with rice and vegetables.

As the eldest son, I began helping out as early as six years old. Rain or shine, I would tend to our 500 ducks alone. Every day I searched for food for them so they could continue laying eggs. Some ducks were stubborn and refused to follow me, and there were even some mischievous ones that would suddenly wander away from the group. There were times I cried out of frustration because I couldn't gather the ducks. Out of anger, I once slaughtered five of them and cooked them for food. I also know how to tend to carabaos, cows, and goats which we also had on our farm. Our ducks laid around 600 to 700 eggs daily. There were days I couldn't attend school because of the work. Sometimes, I just feel too tired and unmotivated. I had to walk 6 kilometers from our home to school every day.

As I continued with my studies, life became more and more difficult. It seemed like our problems would never end. But in the midst of hardship my parents held onto a dream that we would rise above poverty.

My father pursued further studies at Union Theological Seminary (UTS), and we lived with him at the UTS compound. It was there that I slowly began to understand that being a pastor is an honorable and noble calling in the eyes of God.

Since I was a pastor's kid, we moved around a lot and that meant transferring from one school to another. It was tough. We often felt sorry for ourselves because we constantly had to adjust to new cultures, environments, and make new friends. There were times we experienced culture shock, but in time, we overcame it.

During all these transitions, I began to reflect on my future. By the time I graduated from high school, my father told me, "Be a pastor, so someone will continue what I started." But I said, "I don't want to." I took the entrance exam for the Philippine Military Academy and passed but I didn't pursue it. It felt like something was pulling me away from it.

I then took the entrance exam at the University of Southern Mindanao and passed again. I enrolled in Psychology, but only lasted one month. My father told me, "That's not your calling. What God wants for you is to become a pastor."

I later took the entrance exam for AB Theology at Southern Philippines Methodist Colleges, a Methodist-related school at the foot of Mount Apo in Kidapawan, North Cotabato. I passed and began the course, though I had doubts at first. "Lord, is this really for me?"

But eventually, things began to fall into place. I finished my first year strong, and in time, I completed my Theology degree.

It was at that school where I met my future wife, Lea. She was taking a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education, with a concentration in Christian Education and Kindergarten Ministry. She is also a daughter of a United Methodist Church pastor. After completing her studies, we got married two years into our first pastoral appointment.

Following our wedding, we were both assigned to a rural mountain appointment in Baslay United Methodist Church, Negros Oriental. It was a small, organized local church with just ten members and an offering of about 100 pesos each Sunday. We served there for one year. Since I understood the life of farmers, I applied that knowledge to till the land, planting corn, vegetables, and other crops to sustain ourselves.

In the years that followed, Lea became pregnant with our first child, Earl Sarah, who was born in Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental. A year later, I decided to pursue my Master of Divinity at Wesley Divinity School, Wesleyan University-Philippines in Cabanatuan City. While I was studying in seminary, Lea gave birth to our second child, Earl Samuel, during a visit to her hometown in Romblon, Southern Luzon. After I graduated from seminary, Lea gave birth to our third child, Earl Sheena, in Digos City, Davao del Sur, Mindanao.

Looking back, we always say: our children were born in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao a reflection of the nature of our calling as church workers.

Our children were also actively involved in the ministry of the church. Earl Sarah was an officer for Christian Nurture in the District United Methodist Youth, while Earl Samuel served as the Vice President of the local church UMYF (United Methodist Youth Fellowship.) Our youngest, Earl Sheena, was a youth member of the church as well. Although she is only 12 years old, she is already actively participating. All three of our children are gifted with musical talents they play instruments, sing in the choir, and serve as praise and worship leaders.

After completing three years in seminary, we returned to a local appointment in Negros Oriental, full of renewed hope and energy. Our assignment was a blessing. As Lea is a Deaconess, we were able to serve as partners in ministry in all its joys and challenges. Lea served as the LED Coordinator of the UMC Davao Episcopal Area for Global Health, focusing on HIV/AIDS. She is also a certified facilitator on HIV/AIDS awareness and community-based screening.



During our time in the Visayas, I was appointed as a District Superintendent at the age of 33, one of the youngest to hold that position. My district covered the entire Cebu Province, Leyte, and Bohol we served together with Lea and I riding motorcycles and boats when visiting churches across the region.

I served for four years as District Superintendent and at the same time, as the Administrative Pastor of First United Methodist Church in Cebu City. It was exhausting, and at times overwhelming. There were tears and moments of doubt, but we endured and rejoiced in Christ.

Most recently, we were assigned to Tagum United Methodist Church, in Tagum City, Davao del Norte, where I served as the Pastor, and Lea continued her calling as a Deaconess.

Many of our family and friends ask, "Why go to the U.S.? Things are going well for you in the Philippines." But our answer is simple: "Because God is calling us to this foreign land and we are committed to follow, for I am an itinerant preacher."

To the beloved community of Ogden First United Methodist Church, we are ready to serve you and the wider community with open hearts. We are prepared to embrace your culture, build relationships, and walk with you in love and friendship. ~ Rev. Apriniel "April" Salmon