

Rev Patrick F Nanning Autobiography

My parents - My father Mr. Siafa Tamba Nanning was born and raised in Kongissi village, Tengia clan, Lofa County, Liberia. It is a village near Sierra Leone; a 30-minute walk to the border. He married my mother Satta Kumba Nanning. The date and time are unknown, but my father inherited one girl child, Hawa Nanning, as a foster daughter. Hawa did not go back to her biological father and her father never came to claim her. Hawa lived with my dad and mom unto her adult age. She was married without ever acquiring education; just as my other sisters did that were born later.

My Mom and Dad were both illiterate but they were great subsistence farmers. They raised livestock such as goats and chicken. They also planted crops such as rice which is the staple food of Liberia along with coco, coffee and sugar cane. The proceeds from the cash crops were sold for the family upkeep. Farmers were greatly cheated by the dishonest dealers but to whom will you complain? Only the buyer determined the price of the commodities; never the sellers. I don't know whether my father had enough money to sustain the family, but there was plenty of food year-round. People came to him for financial and materials assistance.

My mother Satta Kumba Nanning was a very beautiful woman that many people, not only men, admired. Her bright skin attracted many men who might wish to marry her. My father was blessed among his peers to have married my mother. She was not violent to her neighbors, but only gentle, kind and hospitable. Women in the neighborhood would come to request her help, and sometimes she gave without complain. My father was also that type and as a result, they had lots of friends, and many enemies. Some enemies would physically attack my father, but he never reiterated. He was a peaceful and hardworking man.

My childhood - This is the family I was born into and I am the only surviving male child. At the time I knew myself, the village was so lively with children of my age and older ones too. Playing games, hunting for rats and fishing was basically the starting trade for a boy. Of course, farming and growing of crops was an inescapable job for all children. My father taught me how to plant sugar cane, rice, coco and coffee. It seemed like we didn't have a day of rest from work unless there was some type of festival, or a death occurred in the village or within the family. The part of the year I enjoyed the most, was the rice harvest time and ritual festival. There were lots of ceremonial activities such as drumming and dancing throughout the entire community. These festivals occurred between December and April. In Liberia, those days are always referred to as the "Good Old Days". Of course, all that is history now; none of the festivals I saw growing up as a child are held any more.

There were no educational facilities in the area I was born and raised. Later, a few schools could be found but they were a far distance from my village. As I grew up, my father introduced me to the traditional worship temple, at the giving times. Soon, I became the assistant traditional priest with the responsibilities to assist the priest with ritual activities, such as chicken and animals sacrifices to the ancestors. ("Ancestors" are believed that when dead he/she lives near God Almighty and have abilities

to intercede on behalf of the living). The African traditional priests, not the voodoo priests, are considered people of high value, kind, hospitable, generous, honest and peace makers etc.

My education begins - When schools arrived, many people were encouraged to enroll their children into the western “society”, as it was referred. When I grew up and knew myself, I saw only two of my related brothers going to school out of the 500 people that lived in my village. I was told later that most people were ignorant about the western education. When I started school in 1980, I didn’t go with the thought that I would be delivered from the dungeon of illiteracy. Instead, it seemed prestigious to be able to carry books under my arm as others were. At the age of 12, I was one of the two older boys in my class. I was too big and couldn’t fit behind the desk. I was mocked by the younger kids because of my age and size. My parents were interested and willing to release me from farm work so that I could go to school. But they weren’t willing to pay the school fees didn’t realize what the costs were at first. But I was not deterred. I worked hard to earn my own money to buy my uniform and books. I am not certain if my parents just didn’t have enough money for school or if they wanted me to try it on my own. I don’t know their motives. But I know our family was blessed with enough food; and other people even looked to us for material help.

My conversion into Christianity - it was on that great Saturday evening that I visited my cousin in a nearby town to spend the night. The next morning, he invited me to join them for Sunday worship at their church, (Evangelical Lutheran Church- Foya Tengia, pastored by Dr. Robert M. Roegner). My experience on that day can’t even be explained in a written story. But my life was revised as I sat and carefully listened while I heard a white man preaching for the first time. I cannot record everything he said through the interpreter, but what I do remember is his call to reach out and tell others about Jesus Christ. That evening, I stood among friends and told them my experience in the new religion. Right away, they asked me to lead them in singing Christians songs. After a bit of resistance, I led them for many hours in singing praise songs to the Lord. The following Wednesday, I consulted my grandmother and told her of my desire to join Christianity. Though she was not a Christian, she accepted my request on one condition. If I planted a few lots for a sugar cane garden then I would be free to carry out my new religious activities. I overwhelmingly accepted her demand and did just that. I was baptized on December 25, 1984; the same year I became a Christian. From the very first evening that I led the singing in my village up to now, I have been leading God’s people to Christ’s saving hands.

Continuing Education - Where my courage came from to push further into my educational sojourn, only heaven knows. There were many immeasurable difficulties and financial challenges, which even got worse when I came to Monrovia in pursuit of further education. Life became so tough! There was no food or places to sleep, but I never relented or went back to the village. It was then that I took what is now my life time career. I learned to be a professional tailor and specialized in both ladies and gentlemen fashion designer clothing. The income provided for my daily needs and eventually for my college education.

But things did not happen as I anticipated when I left home for the sole purpose of acquiring education. I knew the importance of education by then, and my parents were also looking forward to seeing their village son graduate from high school, but they both expired. In 1989, when the civil war broke out in

Liberia, I was still in grade 10. Fortunately, the war did not reach the capital city Monrovia right away. So those of us in Monrovia could still go to school and move about with other business people.

St Paul is established - St Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church Liberia Synod began in 1989 and was dedicated and recognized as a church on April 1st, 1990. 25 missionaries were present, mainly from Lutheran Bible Translators, and Pastor Bob Roegner preached. I was the sole pastor of St Paul as well as the usher, Sunday School teacher, janitor and choir director. Eventually I equipped and empowered others to fill these roles with joy.

Bittersweet Memories - May 1994, was my most memorable yet bitter sweet month. It was then that I graduated from high school. A few days after my graduation, I received a letter from my village for the first time in the 10 years of my absence. What this could be? A congratulatory message for my educational achievement? I took a deep breath. In a late hour of the day, I opened the letter. The writer had taken much time to explain every detail surrounding the death of my mother and how my father was tortured to death. It was a sorrowful moment, but I took counsel in the Lord and moved on with my life.

God's grace for His glory - St Paul ELCLS started a Lutheran school in 1995. We began small and built the classes bit-by-bit as is common in Liberia. We had no western support for the construction so as funds arrived we purchased cement bags. I have always had a heart and desire to make straight paths for destitute people in their own educational sojourn. To this end, St Paul had always made funds available for scholarships for students in need regardless of our own construction needs.

By God's grace, I have baptized thousands of people and led the establishment of St. Paul ELC and eight congregations in Bong County.

I bless God for all He has done in my life and through my life, for His glory.

Rev. Patrick F Nanning