Chapter 1

Juanita Napoles is the name my parents gave me. I was their sixth child in a family of ten. My first memories are of Hawaii and the smell of mules pulling heavy cane loads to waiting boxcars. I remember the shiny black locomotive belching and spewing steam. And the men behind the mules shouting, "Whoa! Whoa!" just beyond the reaches of our backyard.

Our little village, perched on a wide, windy, sugarcane-covered hill, looked down to green fields of cane below and to the shores of the grand Pacific. There my family and I often enjoyed picnic outings on Sunday afternoons.

We children would run up and down the sandy shores, splashing in the water that surged forward to cover our feet and then receded. How I would protest when Mother packed us back into the car and headed for home in the late afternoon. I'd cry and holler until Mother clamped her hands over my mouth to keep the rest of her brood from joining the clamor. "Hush!" she would say. "We'll take the sea home tonight to lull you to sleep."

And later that night Mother would keep her promise. She'd put the largest conch shell we had up to my ear at bedtime, and my heart would fill with wonder. "Do you hear the song? Isn't it sad?" she'd ask. The whooo-ooo-ooo sound inside the shell always took me back to the lonely sea and our happy Hawaiian afternoons.

And I remember the taste of the delicious mushrooms my big sisters Florence and Madge gathered after the rains.

After Father left for work, I was usually the first one up in the mornings. It might be the thud of a juicy, ripe mango falling on the fragrant violet flower bed that would send me out scurrying for it. Sometimes there were three ripe mangoes to take in for Mothers breakfast treat.

Finding privacy in a large, growing family was not easy to manage, but I found my own secluded moments.

In the mornings I checked on my bird trap. I used ripe papayas and corn grains to lure birds into my cage. With all the cunning and patience of a five-year-old, I'd catch most of my prey. Some of them I let loose after playing with them for a while. But a few red-breasted linnets I kept for trading purposes with the neighborhood children.

The rest of the day I spent with the other village preschoolers chasing butterflies or the good-natured horsemen who galloped down the road, inspecting irrigation ditches.

Then in the afternoons, when the tired mothers took naps with their children, I'd steal away and wander along the ditches or walk farther up to the water reservoir with my gunnysack and an empty jar. The irrigation ditches would be emptied by that time, and sliding down the six-foot embankment, I'd catch the colorful little rainbow fish that hid in puddles under the rocks and ferns. I'd shoo them into my gunnysack, spread out like a trap across the width of the ditch.

My lone expedition would tire me so that I'd go home and join Mother in her afternoon siesta. I'd sleep so soundly that the mill whistle wouldn't even wake me. Then Father would come home and find his grimy child still napping. He'd shake me awake and take me to the shower.

Still groggy with sleep, I'd threaten violence. "I'll throw the radio away!" I'd scream, arms flailing. "I'll tear my new sweater! I'll put gum in my hair!"

And there were magic moments in my Hawaiian childhood. Many of them came while I was with "Little Old Woman." Whenever I saw her approaching our house in her slow old shuffle, I'd drop everything to follow her inside.

"Nina," she'd say to Mother, "may I borrow one of your children to take along to the store?"

"Why, certainly," Mother would answer. Then she'd look at me. "Take Juanita, here. She's not doing anything. It will keep her mind off mischief for a while."

The wordlessness of Little Old Lady's company was like slipping into my own private world. She'd shuffle along, an ancient scarf wrapped around her head, a large brown basket hanging on her frail arm. She didn't seem to mind that I always ran ahead of her to investigate the pools left in the irrigation ditches. I'd watch the fat mosquito fishes which the Islands had imported to curb the mosquito population. When she caught up with me, I'd scamper up the ditch embankment and once again run ahead of her.

From the railroad crossing I could see the beaches and the shoreline in the misty distance, while the tall sugarcane swished all about me in concert with the wind. It always felt good to stand there engulfed by wind and space while waiting for Little Old Lady, lumbering up the hill like an old frigate ship steadily on course.

As a reward for my company, she would buy me a box of Cracker Jacks or a bunch of lollipops.

Life was good, and living was easy during my childhood. Father was a contract boss, and his earnings were substantial. Mother was the play director in our town. Plays and parties occupied our weekends. Mother was not only a gifted director, she was equally facile in Latin chants, and her services were in demand in praying for the deceased souls' departure. Whenever she prayed for the souls of the dead, she'd take two or three of us children along to keep her company as she drove to the different villages or towns.

One night she was leading the women in prayer when the widow of the man they were praying for looked up at the ceiling and spotted a spider easing down the wall. "Oh, I just know it's the spirit of my poor husband! May his soul rest in peace," she groaned, making the sign of the cross. The chanting stopped. All the little children snuggled up close to their parents until the spider crawled away to a dark corner.

And my Hawaiian childhood was filled with stories of the Philippines. That was where my parents were born and reared, and their childhood stories always thrilled me.

My mother's name, Saturnina, was quickly abbreviated to Nina. Although her parents lived in the same row of thatched homes skirting the beach on Leyte, Nina often spent the night with her grandparents. Grandfather was a reading man, possessing the only Bible in the neighborhood.

Each night, after ceremoniously lighting up the little reading lamp, he would open his old sea-trader trunk and take out the Book and solemnly sit down to read portions of it to his grandchildren.

Listening to the heavy reading in the flicker of the kerosene lamp, some of the children would doze off while their grandfather intoned. Other nights they would listen to him tell of "iron metal actually flying in the air" and the swiftness of airplanes, long before anybody ever heard of the Wright brothers in a faraway place called America.

Another home where Nina found welcome was with Aunt Atanacia, a young sister of Nina's mother, Hilda. Atanacia operated a grocery store, and Nina was her errand girl. Atanacia often sent her to Baybay (pronounced By-by, meaning "inland shore") to do odds-and-ends shopping.

To get from her village to Baybay, Nina had to cross a long, wooden bridge. She always carried a parasol to protect herself against the tropical sun. On one such errand for Aunt Atanacia, Nina met a

cripple, laboring inch by inch across the span of the bridge. Sweat streamed down his face as he painfully maneuvered on his elbows.

Nina gasped at the sight of the man's wasted legs and calloused elbows. "You poor, old man!" she blurted out. "How did you make it this far - in this heat!"

The cripple raised himself on his elbows. Nina took the only money she had or would have for a long while, and put the coin into the man's hand.

Tears mingled with sweat on the cripple's face as he looked heavenward to bless little Nina. "O little child," he began, "you who have taken pity on such a man as I when other children have given me only derision, may God empty heaven for you. May you have a long, happy life, and may you have good children to bless your home!"

Nina cried too.

Whenever Mother or Father would tell me that story, I would think how that crippled man's blessing had followed Mother like an invisible halo wherever she went. Mother was such a happy, lively person that I just knew God had heard the blessing and fulfilled it.

And Father also had stories to share. Segundo, as he was named, was motherless from birth. Unlike Nina's poor family, Segundo's father was mayor of Baybay, a rich mayor with vast landholdings and a corral full of horses.

Everything would have been easy for Segundo, if it weren't for his half-brothers and half-sisters, all married and many years older. Segundo's young mother, who died at his birth, was only a maidservant when the mayor married her. When she died, Segundo's half-brothers and half-sisters became afraid of a divided family inheritance.

They waited1 until Segundo was almost eight years old before they took him away from their father's house on the pretext that he would be better off living with them, playing with their children who were his age. Then they hustled Segundo off to the mountains to forage on his own and abandoned him with not even a blanket.

Every once in a while a hired man would make the trek up the slopes to look in on Segundo to see if the boy was still alive.

Segundo found bird eggs and wild fruits to keep him alive day after day, and then, month after month, until malnutrition finally made an inroad. The hired man, finding Segundo too sick to get up, brought word to the mayor's children that their half-brother was dying. The oldest son, like Reuben in the Bible, was moved with guilt and

compassion and went up the mountains himself to bring Segundo home.

My father and mother grew to young adulthood, and then Segundo decided Nina was the girl for him. He'd heard of her scholastic excellence and her sweet, unaffected ways.

I always enjoyed the story of how Father invited Nina and others to a day of horseback riding and picnicking and then maneuvered things until he was alone with Nina. But when he proposed, she refused. She didn't want to marry. She wanted to finish her education.

But Mother's refusal didn't deter Segundo. He often came to visit her, and even if she refused to see him, Mother Hilda welcomed him. He split huge piles of firewood for Hilda.

When the day came for leveling and Segundo asked Hilda for her daughter's hand in marriage, she went to talk with Nina. "It isn't easy for me to support seven daughters single-handedly," she said. "Your education has stretched my resources as far as possible, and it's time for you to bear some of the load."

Hilda pointed out all Segundo's fine qualities, and also the handsome dowry his aging father was planning to give them for Nina.

Mother cried over the thought of a curtailed education. But as most Oriental girls in her position would do, she dutifully fulfilled her role of an obedient daughter and accepted the proposal of marriage.

Soon after their five-day wedding feast, Segundo and Nina went up to the mountains to oversee the rice planting. Three children were born to them, but the squabbling of his father's other children still followed him. His father's death only hastened his decision to leave the Philippines and go to Hawaii where he could start a life of his own, without his half-brothers and half-sisters bothering him.

My parents found life in Hawaii vastly different from the Philippines. Life was more secure; and money, although not plentiful, was certain at the end of the month.

They had had to leave their youngest child, a son, in the Philippines. They left him with Mother Hilda, and Nina's sister, Veronica. Nina saved money to buy presents for her son and Veronica. But before long, both Veronica and the little boy died.

Nina mourned many days for her son and her little sister. Now she had no reason to return to Baybay. It wasn't until four years later that she found the courage to go back and put flowers on the little graves.

Some of Mother's sisters followed her and Father to Hawaii. When I was small, it seemed we always had a houseful of "aunts and uncles"

to board for several months at a time. They added a lot of interest to our active family life.

Although the depression years had started when I arrived, we had no financial problems. Food was plentiful on our table.

The varied pursuits of everyone in the family kept us occupied. Florence, the oldest girl, was a natural on the stage, inheriting some of Mother's potential. Firstborn Ed was a strong boxer, the welterweight champ of our town. Madge was a singer and comic dancer. We were all involved in our own social pursuits.

Then one day a young man from California came to our door selling religious books. He said he liked mangoes, so Mother had us pick a large bagful for him to take home to Honolulu. Then Mother bought a book from him.

When the book, The Great Controversy, arrived, Mother packed it away in one of her trunks. Mother had no time to read, she was too busy as a social leader in the community and president of the Catholic Women's Club. She led out every Easter in the Passion rites of the church. My older sisters, Florence and Madge, sang in the choir.

This religious bent also touched me. While all my little schoolmates skated merrily in the church gym after school, I'd slip into the quietness of the empty church. I'd marvel at the Virgin Mary, her hand raised in blessing. Long shafts of afternoon light slanted into the dark church. Outside, the sugarcane fields swished above the laughter of children.

How precious I thought the day would be when I could take my first church communion with Florence, Madge, and Mary. But the day never came.

Another religious book salesman came to our door. This time my big brother Ed bought a few books. Unlike Mother, Ed read the books. Not only that, but he also applied what he read to his daily life. His eating habits changed overnight. His work habits followed next.

When he announced that he would no longer work on Saturdays, Mother confronted him. "Are you going out of your mind?" she demanded. "Are you going to let your religion rule you? I can hardly wait to run into that colporteur again!

A few weeks later the colporteur returned. Ed was not at home. Mother, nevertheless, was prepared for the book salesman. "What's wrong with those books my son has bought from you?" She rushed the man, ignoring the usual Oriental ceremony of greeting. "Ed refuses to work on Saturdays, and what's more he refuses to eat pork!"

"I haven't told your son anything about Saturdays or about his diet, Mrs. Napoles," the man replied. His voice revealed excitement.

Florence was trying to catch some sleep before going to work at the hospital for the evening shift. Mother's voice woke her up. She pulled on a robe and hurried to the door to find out what all the commotion was about.

When she got to the door, she started asking the colporteur questions. "I've been wondering about my brother's actions lately. The other night he told me I couldn't go on with the Saturday night crowd without some kind of damage to my soul. He told me dances and movies don't bring me close to God, but only rob me of an important relationship with Him. Why is he saying such things?"

The colporteur did not attempt to explain the intricacies of doctrine. Instead he suggested Bible studies for Florence.

But Florence shook her head. "I've just bought a beautiful radio console on credit," she said. "I can't afford Bible studies too.

"No, you won't have to pay a cent for the studies," the colporteur urged. "Pastor Delafield, my pastor in Honolulu, will be glad to stop by some convenient evening for you."

Florence signed up for the studies.

Mother smiled. "You make me think of Grandfather," she said to Florence. "And his big old Bible, and the flickering kerosene lamp. Well, if it keeps you away from that Saturday night crowd, what real harm can it do?"

Mother seemed pleased at first to see Florence and Ed and their friends studying the Bible with Pastor Delafield. "And it all began with Ed," she'd say, almost fondly.

But when our ruddy-faced German priest let it be known he disapproved of the studies, everyone except Ed and Florence stopped coming. And Mother's fondness turned to irritation.

Her position in the community was endangered. Her children were foolishly refusing to eat good food or work on Saturday, and it was all the Adventist preachers fault.

Whenever the young minister came to continue the studies, Mother would huff out of the room, slamming the door behind her.

Father Ernest was not only immersed with the church work but was also deeply involved in the social life of the community. He often took his parish out on Sunday picnics in his big yellow bus. And after school hours we children would visit with him or sing around the piano

such songs as "South of the Border" or "Sierra Sue." We had a great attachment for our fun-loving priest.

But one morning he came to our home. And he was all business. "Mrs. Napoles, you must keep the heretic away from your house," he warned Mother, "before he poisons the whole community!"

Florence hurried into the room. "Father Ernest, where in the Bible is the commandment to observe Sunday for Saturday?" she asked, holding out to him her new Bible. But he waved her away.

The ruddy smile on his face had disappeared, and he pronounced a curse on our home.

I had loved him since early childhood. But now I knew we would never enjoy those church picnics again, or the church bazaars, or the songfests with him around his piano, or even the skating in the church gym.

Mother was furious with him. Her beautiful cameo face knotted in anger as he left the house. Then she turned and exploded. "It's all that Pastor Delafield's fault! What trouble he has brought to our home!"

Every Monday night when Pastor Delafield would come, Mother would stalk out of the room, her cigarettes leaving thin trails of smoke behind her. Mother was a chain-smoker. Her habit could have shortened our youngest sister's life. Charlotte was frail and sickly, not even a year old, but her tiny frame was already racked by an incessant cough. Even the doctors had given up on her, making all of us sad as we listened to her weepy cough night after night.

One Monday night, after mother's noisy exit, baby Charlotte's cough became noticeably weaker. "Is the baby sick?" Pastor Delafield asked.

Florence explained that there was no hope for Charlotte.

"Please let me pray for her recovery," Pastor Delafield said. "I'm sure God will heal your sister."

Ed shook his head. "I don't think Mother would allow you to touch the baby," he said. "We could get excommunicated for it, you know. And Mother has already lost her position in the community. It's just too much to ask."

"Well, I'm going to ask her, anyway," Florence said, leaving the room.

Several minutes passed, but finally Florence returned. And Charlotte was in her arms. Pastor Delafield placed his hand on Charlotte's head, and pleaded with God to make her well.

God wasted no time. That very night, for the first time in many months, Charlotte slept soundly, free from her coughing.

We had seen a miracle. God had answered the young pastor's prayer. He'd allowed a miracle to break the barriers in our home and glorify His name.

When Ed, Florence, and Madge asked permission to be baptized into Pastor Delafield's church, Mother consented. She also witnessed the baptism.

"My prejudice against Adventists broke down when the church members made me feel so welcome," she said years later. "I felt so guilty for the trials I had put my children through that I cried. And this man who was principal of the mission academy, Mr. Frank Rice, came and sat beside me and comforted me."

Somehow Mother found the peace and strength to face losing her standing in the community. She and Father packed us and all our goods and moved away from the security of the sugarcane community to an unknown future in Honolulu.

The neighbors cluck-clucked at us, and predicted only catastrophe for us.

Instead of trouble, our family continued to prosper. And we thanked God daily for His blessings. Ed became an apprentice printer at the Hawaiian Mission Academy. Florence, with her boundless enthusiasm for people, found adventure in student colporteuring. Madge worked at an aunt's downtown laundry.

The day the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Father was launched in a good-paying stevedoring job. And with the urgency of the times, he was allowed to work on Sundays to cover for the men who wanted Saturday's work.

We began attending the Adventist parochial school across town.

Florence earned enough scholarships to cover most of her younger siblings' school tuition at the Hawaiian Mission Academy. Most of her college tuition was paid by the time she left for Pacific Union College in Angwin, California.

Contrary to the many dire predictions of gloom, our family finances gained momentum. Our old friends were astonished by what they saw. No dark cloud hovered over our excommunicated family. Mother opened a dry-cleaning establishment in the city and did a large business. Father's substantial paycheck and Mother's new enterprise helped us to buy a house overlooking the famous Waialae Golf Course.

From our windows we had a great view of the beaches and mountains all around us. Our weekly tithe payments soared.

And Sabbaths were a special delight. Our table seated twenty-five people easily. The guests we brought home to share our Sabbath meals were school friends, some new converts, Bible students from Florence's colporteuring contacts, and a few homesick people. World War II continued in the Pacific, and boys in the service often came to spend the Sabbaths with us.

It was a good life. But when the war was ended, Mother had a strange impulse to sell our home and business and return to the Philippines to share our new faith with Mother Hilda and other relatives.

Father went along with Mother's convictions, even though he didn't act too happy about meeting his squabbling sisters and brothers again. "I just hope their dispositions have mellowed," he said. "After twenty-five years, and a world war, I can hope they have."