



BROTHER FREDERICK SILBEREIS

Celebrating 60 years of profession

I have come to believe firmly that our God is a God of surprises; and not only does He surprise us, but His surprises — after the fact — always look so *right*. In conversation with a modern-day mystic, God reportedly told the seer that “with Me there is no such thing as a coincidence.” Things that look like accidents or blunders can be His hand at work, directing us in ways in which we would not otherwise have gone — and forcing us to grow.

When I was in school, because I got good grades, people expected “really great things” in my future. But talent at taking exams is rather limited in the real world, and God took things in hand, to use my other, less-developed talents.

I found myself in Africa — God’s first surprise — in 1981, after six years of teaching in Michigan and Ohio, and five years in Hawaii at Chaminade College. When I reported to my community, there was no teaching job waiting; it had been a mistake — God’s second surprise. But before long, I was employed at a government teacher-training college, involved in campus ministry and on the national committee (surprise number three) for the Charismatic Renewal. Both were tremendous growth experiences.

After four years there, the African area administration asked me to serve as full-time vocation director. Had this not happened, I might not have stayed in Africa much longer — another surprise from God.

In 1998, 12 years later, I returned to Hawaii and Chaminade University. This may not have been God’s plan, but He made use of it: My near-constant pestering moved the administration to clean up the science storerooms just in time to avoid massive state and federal fines for hazardous conditions. But before long, I was missing Africa and went back in 2002.

Surprised, again! I soon was named rector of a small minor seminary within a Sudanese diocese, located in Kenya. The Sudanese boys, whose life experience up to then had been war, were a challenge, but we Marianists managed to make a difference by focusing on family spirit. After a few more years of vocations work in Kenya and Zambia, I received still another surprise: appointment as chairman of the managing board at our school in Lusaka, Zambia.

I left Africa in 2009 when my father had a turn for the worse and was near his end. I wanted to see him again and to be near when the end came. In 2010, I returned to Maui, and the surprises kept coming. I had been invited there to teach at St. Anthony’s Junior and Senior High School,

but on arrival, I found myself librarian. Within a year, that ended due to financial reasons, and I had to find new, worthwhile duties and niches to fill. A parish has much going on and so many needs, but without much experience in parish ministry, I got into it slowly.

Who would have expected me to do artsy things like banner-making? Or to take up the keyboard and play organ at Sunday Mass for a few years? It has been a great time for growth, and I am grateful. Grateful, too, for new spiritual experiences, for opportunities to run Bible classes and preach homilies once or twice a week, and for meeting adults at the parish whose commitment to prayer and service surpasses mine.

Now, at 78, I will be leaving Maui, but I hope I won't be leaving active ministry. There is still so much more to do, or at least try to do. And I work for a generous God, a God of surprises.

#