

AN INVESTMENT IN STUDENTS

How one woman's faithfulness to God reaped Kingdom rewards

by Tim Gingrich



Lena Clippinger and Silas Issa

No one understands the risk of an investment as much as those working in the financial sector. So it came as some surprise when 25-year banking veteran Abdou Issa made a mid-life career change to Christian missionary—especially to his son, Silas.

Though Silas spent much of his childhood in the United States, his family returned to their homeland of Lebanon during his teen years, and Silas graduated from a Christian high school in Beirut. His father's new post with the Home Mission Board (today, the North American Mission Board) brought the family to the United States just as Silas was searching for a college.

"I got a roadmap and saw DBU, and that's the first time I heard of it," admitted Silas.

The year was 1990, and University Hill looked much different. He remembered being first attracted to the campus because he could study the Bible in a university-setting complete with dorms and an active student-life scene. But to follow his heart, Silas would have to make some surprising decisions of his own.

Weeks earlier, a Bible school had already offered Silas a much-needed scholarship. Nevertheless, he was sure that DBU was the place God had in mind for him. Though he had not yet received any response from DBU regarding his application, Silas and his father decided to visit the campus...in faith.

At the time, the University was still recovering from a large debt, but DBU President Dr. Gary

Cook worked to come up with some limited scholarship funds for Silas.

"Dr. Cook was pretty much the one who made it work, because he offered me a scholarship for one semester," recalled Silas. Of course, the University could not guarantee anything for the following semesters. In the meantime, Dr. Cook encouraged Silas to pray.

"I was very apprehensive, especially since I had a scholarship somewhere else. But Dad and I prayed, and I knew I should just go to DBU," Silas shared. "I

just told the Lord, 'Whatever you want to do, I'm just in it for the ride.'"

But when Silas was summoned to the President's Office on the first day of classes, he expected to hear, "Sorry, you're out."

Instead, Dr. Cook told Silas, "You're going to graduate from DBU."

Shortly after Silas' application, a woman named Lena Clippinger had contacted DBU to make a gift through the Baptist Foundation. She specified that the money be used to help the children of a home missionary. A search through the student roster turned up only one such student—Silas Issa.

Prayers answered, Silas continued studying at DBU, earning a bachelor's degree in biblical



Silas and one of his former professors and strong encourager, Dr. David Fletcher.



(Above) Silas and members of his family on his graduation day at DBU, along with Lena Clippinger. (Right top) Silas and his wife, Amanda, minister in Melbourne, Australia. (Right bottom) Children gather at an event in Silas' church in Melbourne.

studies and later completing a Master of Liberal Arts degree with a concentration in theology. In addition, he was active on campus and served for several semesters in the Student Government Association. Silas also became involved with local ministry at High Pointe Baptist Church and initiated his own missionary career by taking part in six DBU student mission trips to Belize.

God also provided Silas with a “girlfriend.” Lena Clippinger, in her late 70s, had raised the funds for Silas’ scholarship after selling her home and moving to an assisted living center in Garland. She often referred to herself as Silas’ “Garland girlfriend.”

Silas and Clippinger stayed in touch, and he visited her shortly before her passing. She told him, “When I die, you should find a younger girlfriend who will last you longer.”

Today, it is impossible to measure the return on Clippinger’s investment. Silas has since become the pastor of International Baptist Church in Melbourne, Australia, a multiethnic congregation with services in both English and Arabic.

“I couldn’t have done it without that scholarship at DBU,” he said.

“We have 27 nationalities in the church now,” Silas explained. He founded the English arm of the ministry after his parents pioneered the church as an Arabic-language outreach. When he became the senior pastor in 1998, Silas merged the ministries.

“We have people from Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, as well as Poland, Ireland, and even Texas,” he explained. “The younger generation is caught in between cultures because they get

married, and we wanted a church where no matter who you are married to and no matter who your children are, you could belong.”

The congregation is already investing itself in mission projects to Australia’s South East Asian neighbors like Indonesia, East Timor, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, and even the African nation of Zambia.

But most of all in Melbourne—a hub of some 166 nationalities—Silas cannot overemphasize how important a Christ-centered education at DBU was for him. “The MLA at DBU helped prepare me for the cosmopolitan, post-modern world in Melbourne,” he said.

“I appreciated the variety of exposure that I got at DBU; it was a well-rounded, well-balanced education.”

“When I was there working on my degree, the whole theme of servant leadership was obviously evident on campus,” he said.

He cited Dr. Cook as one of his role models for leadership. “He showed me servant leadership by the way he was able to humbly help me out. He just set a good example,” said Silas.

Clippinger’s wish that Silas would find a “new girlfriend” also came about. Silas and Amanda, a school teacher in Australia, met while leading a youth camp. They married in 2003.

Together, Silas and Amanda are working side-by-side to serve the spiritual needs of the people in Melbourne. Whether the investment of Silas’ father in following God, the financial investment of Lena Clippinger, or the personal investments made by Silas’ professors—it all added up to put this DBU alumnus in the position to invest in others.