

How Did I End Up Here?

The **associate pastor** walked into our house with his wife and oldest son. I could tell right away they felt uncomfortable. They were poor, barely making ends meet. Although we were not a rich family—and my parents would have also agreed we were barely making ends meet—the difference between the **poor** and the **middle class** in Mexico is obvious. Especially when you walk into a home that still boasted furnishings, paintings, books and decorations of once upon a time, when my dad had a successful and thriving railroad business.

They walked in slowly. The pastor and his son looked around in awe, like they couldn't believe they were in such a nice place. They made me feel like my house was a castle. If only they knew how small it was compared to the house we used to have in Mexico City. His wife couldn't look around; she gazed down, so humble.

They'd come for dinner, so we sat down to eat.

The adults talked, and once in a while their son would look at me and smile. I was 16, and he was a year older than me. I knew he liked me, but the feeling was not mutual; I didn't want him to get the wrong impression. So I talked to my little sisters instead.

The pastor's wife was as quiet as her husband was friendly and open. He told stories and had us laughing while we enjoyed dessert. He was asking me questions about the future, like what I wanted to do once I graduated high school. I told him I wanted to be a lawyer.

"Maybe someday you'll be a pastor's wife, Helen," he said.

Many Mexican people struggle to pronounce my name, and often people called me Helen. He was one of them, no matter how often I reminded him it was Ellen.

"Oh, I don't think so," I said.

"Why not? You would make a great pastor's wife."

I glanced at his wife, who looked at me and smiled. She was so meek, so shy.

"That's not the type of life I want," I said.

"Why not?" he pushed.

"Because pastors are poor, and I want so much more than that. I want to be successful in life."

The table went quiet. I glanced at my mom and dad, who looked at me in shock. Had I really just said such an offensive thing to our pastor?

But he'd asked, and I was telling the truth.

Then our pastor started laughing—thankfully. "Oh, you're right about that. We don't have much when it comes to earthly treasures, but we are rich in the Lord."

Yeah, well, being rich in the Lord didn't cut it for me.

"And we are happy," he said. "God has met all our needs. We've never been in want."

I don't remember how the rest of the afternoon went. I don't even remember being talked to by my parents later on. But what I do remember was calling a good friend of mine my freshmen year in college. I was already living in the U.S., attending a Christian college.

"Rumi, there is this guy I really, really like," I said, "But here's the problem: He wants to be a pastor."

"Well, you're not the pastor's wife type of girl," she said.

My friend, unlike me, dreamed of being a pastor's wife. Her greatest desire was to do ministry full time. She did not care about being poor or making sacrifices. And she had always

agreed with me: I was not fit to be in ministry like that.

“We’re only 18. It’s not like I’m going to marry him,” I said.

But I did. I fell in love and married him.

Almost 11 years later, my life is indeed rich—rich with love, with a man who makes me love him more and more each year; rich with the blessing of having three little girls who mean the world to me; and so rich in God’s provisions in our life.

I still wonder if I am cut out to be the pastor’s wife, but I know all God asks of me is to be real, to love Him and to trust Him. I know He’ll do the rest.

*Adapted from **Ellen Stumbo’s** blog. Ellen is a pastor’s wife, and she writes about finding beauty in brokenness with gritty honesty and openness. She is passionate about sharing the real—sometimes beautiful and sometimes ugly—aspects of faith, parenting, special needs and adoption. She has been published in Focus on the Family, LifeWay, MomSense, Not Alone and Mamapedia among others.*