



A fall into desperation

For nearly an hour, we are both waiting in a taxi in Cusco for two more passengers to Curahuasi. Cornelia Vargas tells me quite fascinating facts about her life, that I immediately invite her to our hospital for the next day. "Are you really giving me permission to publish your life story on our website?", I ask the woman. "Yes, of course, I hope the story encourages other people!"

1969: Cornelia lives with her three siblings at her parents in the mountain village Antilla. Poverty reigns at home and the situation gets even worse, when rustlers continuously steal animals from the family. One late evening it amounted to a fateful meeting in the mountains between her father and the head of the gang. The criminal feels confident and boasts: In the future we will continue to take anything we want from you!" Cornelia's father is full of anger. He takes an axe and starts hitting the criminal. The latter is laying bleeding besides the path and doesn't move any more. He is apparently dead. But befor he dies of his injuries he is able to tell other mountain farmers the name of his murderer. Within a matter of days they bring Cornelia's father to jail in Abancay.

Cornelia's mother is a simple farmers wife. The husband's prison sentence and the responsibility for the children are bringing the woman to the end of her capacity. She starts suffering severe physical symptoms. The colics are getting so strong, that she is taken in an ambulance to the town hospital of Cusco. Within a few hours she dies there on the operating table. The father in jail, the mother's dead corpse in the hospital basement and four small children in a hut.

After the funeral the children are split up between the relatives. 5 year old Cornelia ends up with her aunt in Lima. There she experiences bitter strictness. Sometimes the aunt even hits her with a whip. No kiss, no nice word, no hug. As a ten year old she is passed on to another family. Although she is still a child herself now she is supposed to watch the little children of her foster parents. And here as well she doesn't hear praise or receive any encouragement. As a teenager she is allowed to go to school in the evening, but she doesn't have any time during the day to do her homework.

"Why did my mom have to die?" This gnawing question bothers Cornelia for years. She has no mental picture of her parents. "Where do I come from? Who am I?" The child has so many questions, but receives only one answer: "Life is hard, you have to fight through it!"

At the age of 15, she makes the long trip from Lima to Apurimac. She is searching for her father. After a three year sentence he was released. As a broken man he lives secluded in a shelter belonging to his brother. Cornelia finds him and after a decade she looks in the eyes of the man that created her. Even here she hopes for affection without effect. The man in front of her is a stranger. No smile, no touch, not one encouraging word. "Work for me!" he yells at her. "You have to cook and keep house for me!"

After three months she returns to Lima and life goes on as usual. During the day she works for a family and in the evening she attends school.

Seventeen years old she meets a boy in her class who for the first time since he mothers death shows her true love. The relationship lasts and a few years later they get married in Lima. The marriage isn't easy. Cornelia actually doesn't know what real family life looks like.

Cornelia is pregnant with her fourth child and at the due date she arrives in the hospital "Dos de Mayo". The obstetrician on call looks at her lab values and gives her a bitter truth: "Your hemoglobin is only at 6,0. Either you or your baby will most likely die!"

The young mother is laying on a table in the delivery room and is completely desperate. "When I die now, my kids will suffer through what I had to go through in my childhood and youth." Cornelia turns her head to the side and prays: "Oh Lord, I am putting my life into your hands. When you save me and my child, then I will always do your will!" What happens here is a kind of conversion in the light of death.

Cornelia and her baby survive.

The call to God on the operating table was more than just a clutch at the last straw. Cornelia trusts in the Lord and reads now regularly in the bible. On Sundays she is going to an evangelical church. Even her husband is going with her. The farmer girl from Curahuasi seems completely changed. She is radiating hope and feels loved by God. Her husband is astonished and finally convinced. He as well decides to live a life with God.

That was 18 years ago. Thoughtfully I am looking into the face of the woman next to me at the desk. My life was so much easier.

"Dr. Klaus", Cornelia Vargas continues, "my soul was full of wounds and scars. I was a beaten girl without hope. But Jesus Christ has healed my wounds over the years. I feel safe with him. My marriage has turned into something good, in our family we love each other. I am so thankful to God for everything he has given me. Everything I went through had a deeper meaning.

I nod imperceptible and wish her God's blessings when we are parting.