

Sparks of Grace

Tony Koch

As a post-war migrant from the former Yugoslavia, I grew up facing many challenges, but I have always had a sense of God's watchful presence over me. But it was through my trade as an electrician that God showed me his grace most powerfully.

From the refugee settlement community in Cowra, NSW, I received an apprenticeship as an electrician in Sydney. My first job was at the Children's Hospital in Camperdown. What an experience that was, working with a range of tradies including plumbers, brickies, carpenters, painters and fellow electricians among others. The language used and jokes told were a shock to my system. I wondered why God had led me there.

When work on the hospital was completed, an open day was organised for the mayor and other local 'big wigs'. In preparation for this, the foreman, Bill, asked me to go to the main switchboard room in the basement and clean and dust all the switchboard gear and wiring I had earlier helped to install, as this room was to be on the inspection tour. The main power for the hospital came through the electrical switchboard from a nearby power sub-station with three-phase high voltage cables. The wires I was cleaning would be very hot indeed when turned on!

As I was going about the cleaning, the boss, Mr Halloway, came into the room, took one look at me, and turned white as a ghost. He had just been at the power sub-station, had his hand on the main power switch, and was about to turn on the power to the hospital. But something didn't feel right and he hesitated, then decided to go to the hospital and check that the door to the switchboard room was closed and locked – just to be on the safe side. Imagine his shock and surprise to find me there with my hands on the wires. If he had thrown the switch, I would have been killed instantly. I experienced God's grace that day in a very concrete way. But God was not yet done teaching me about his grace.

Even though our home had a Christian background, I knew little about the Bible. English was my second language and I found the old King James Bible by mother had acquired incomprehensible. Again, it was through my work as an electrician that God showed me his grace.

After completing my apprenticeship, I found myself back in Cowra, where one of my first jobs was at the local Christian bookshop. The lady in charge, for some reason, felt compelled to give me a Good News version of the Bible. Once I started to read it, I could not put it down. When I came across a word I did not understand, I asked a friend. Through

reading that Bible I learned about the gracious God who had earlier spared my life. It was the beginning of a life-long journey with the God of grace.