

# Melanie Hansen Interview

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## Interviewer

As per your consent form, we will be using your first and last name for this interview. Will you please state and spell your full name?

## Melanie Hansen

My name is Melanie Hanson, M E L A N I E. And - and last name. H A N S E N.

## Interviewer

All right, thank you so much. So, can you tell me a little bit about your childhood and when and where you were born?

## Melanie Hansen

So I was born in Canada, way back in 2003. And that's where I - sorry - I grew up in Canada. I was born in the States, but we moved there when I was three months old, so I consider that my home, and I lived there for the majority of my life until I was 14 and then moved to Nicaragua—which is a country in Central America—with my family for two years, because we were missionaries there. And then I came back to Canada after that.

## Interviewer

Very cool. Okay, so you mentioned your family. Can you tell me a little bit about them and your parents maybe?

## Melanie Hansen

Yeah, so my dad's actually a pilot.

## Interviewer

Okay, cool!

## Melanie Hansen

So, ever since we went to the mission field, he's been an emergency medical evacuation pilot. And then my mom... she studied to be a bilingual secretary. So she actually takes care of all the ground base, like, the communication with the government and writing letters, and just running all the little things in the background of our mission work.

## Interviewer

Okay, so your parents are still in Nicaragua?

## Melanie Hansen

They were until this year,

**Interviewer**

Okay. Okay. So why - did they move back to Canada?

**Melanie Hansen**

Yes, but they're actually going - they're in Canada right now, but they are going as missionaries to the, like—the South Pacific islands.

**Interviewer**

Very cool. Very cool. All right. So can you tell me as a child what you wanted to be when you grew up?

**Melanie Hansen**

That's a funny question. Because honestly, ever since I can remember, I wanted to be a missionary. Like, I remember when I was five years old, I would ask my parents, I'd come to my dad. I'd say, "Daddy, Daddy, when are we gonna go be missionaries?" And he will try to explain to me that I didn't have to go to some distant country to be a missionary. I could be a missionary right where I lived, but I wasn't really convinced with that or satisfied, like "No, we have to go be real missionaries." But eventually that—that dream came true like I mentioned when my family and I went as missionaries. But career-wise I was all over the place. I thought I wanted to be a teacher, maybe doctor, maybe veterinary, I feel like every kid went through that phase. It was, it was all over the place.

**Interviewer**

Where did that inspiration for wanting to become a missionary come from - were your parents missionaries when they were in school?

**Melanie Hansen**

Actually, yeah, my parents were missionaries for seven...? They were missionaries before I was born. My two oldest brothers... they were actually born in the mission field. They were missionaries in Guam...very beautiful place to be missionaries. And then I also read a lot of mission stories growing up and that - I was raised in that environment. So, missions was always just a huge part of my life.

**Interviewer**

Okay, so your parents were missionaries. So, did they raise you in a religious home?

**Melanie Hansen**

Yes, yeah. I grew up Seventh-day Adventist.

**Interviewer**

Okay. Very cool. So, what did your walk with Jesus look like from childhood to now?

**Melanie Hansen**

Well, as a little kid, of course, I grew up in the church. So we'd go to Sabbath School every week, and I grew up knowing all the learning about all the Bible stories. And I love Jesus with my whole heart. I actually got baptized at a very young age. I was nine years old, but I was completely sincere, and I was very excited. But of course, I didn't really know exactly all...what it meant at that age. And it wasn't until later on, I think, for sure, in my teen years 16... around 16, I'd say is when I really made the commitment to follow that and I understood at a deeper level what it meant to surrender my whole heart to him. So I feel like that's when my walk with God really began.

**Interviewer**

Very cool. Very cool to hear. All right. So, can you tell me what your major and planned career path is right now?

**Melanie Hansen**

So, right now, I am studying pre-dental hygiene, and I'll be graduating in three years.

**Interviewer**

Wow. All right. So, can you tell me a little bit about what inspired you to choose your career and maybe a little bit about your personal interests and passions?

**Melanie Hansen**

Yeah, for sure. So, after I completed high school, I decided that I wanted to go as a student missionary somewhere and through lots of prayer I ended up going to Nicaragua because my parents knew this dentist who worked there. She was a local dentist, and they said, "We know you're interested in dental hygiene, this would be a great opportunity for you to learn more about it." And I've always wanted to do something that helps people and medical... so, I found that interesting. So I was like, "Yeah, sure." So I think that through the hands-on experience, and, like, seeing what dental hygienists do or dentistry as a whole... that is what really influenced my decision to become a dental hygienist.

**Interviewer**

Alright, so yeah, you talked a little bit about how your parents were motivations for you becoming, like, a student missionary, and how you always kind of wanted to be a student missionary. Can you tell me a little bit more about, like, the journey and choosing to become a missionary... What was that decision like for you?

**Melanie Hansen**

Yeah, so I knew that I wanted to be a student missionary after I graduated high school. But I did not actually—I did not want to go to Nicaragua because I wanted to do my own thing instead of being under the shadow of my parents' mission. So I applied to different organizations. I applied to AFM, ABS, I got accept...accepted for - I think I was gonna go to the Philippines, but I prayed about it. I just did not have peace about any of it. And that's when my parents suggested this opportunity to work with a local dentist in Nicaragua. And I can just tell God was—that was the

only thing I had peace about. So, I don't know, I feel like I've diverged from the original question, but that's how I ended up going to Nicaragua.

**Interviewer**

Okay, so yeah, you mentioned that you were a dental hygienist or assistant with a dentist in Nicaragua, right? So, was that connected with any organization, or is that just with the dentist?

**Melanie Hansen**

No, it was connected. It was—it was through the—my parents' organization. So the very small organization, which was just in Nicaragua, is called Miracle Air. And it's underneath an umbrella organization called Angel One. So I was the - I was technically the only student missionary that Miracle Air had, and it was only through the connection that my parents had through that dentists that I was able to - to go there.

**Interviewer**

Okay, very interesting. All right. So, can you tell me what an average day in your life as a student missionary down there was like?

**Melanie Hansen**

I had so much variety in my days... It's hard to say what an average day was. For the first few months, I was living in the capital city with...with the dentist. So, during that phase of my mission year, I would get up in the morning, I'd cook breakfast for her. She's a single mom, and - and she had one child, and because she was very busy, it was hard for her to find the time to, like, make meals and stuff. So I would - I would usually do the cooking for the family, and then we would together...we'd go to something organization that was called Operation Smile. And I'd assist her in her work, so I would pass her tools if she needed them for doing extractions, or I would help, like, sanitize, clean up after the patients. And yeah, and then the rest of the days, it would just vary. Sometimes, we'd go to schools and teach oral health, so we bring a fake... what do you call it? A mannequin - fake teeth. And we teach the children how to properly brush their teeth, why it's so important. Foods that are healthy, not healthy. So we did a lot of education and then also dental work. And she had a—she had an office inside her home. And so people would come sometimes in the evenings to get dental work done, and then of course, I'd be assisting her during that as well.

**Interviewer**

Wow. Okay, so were you living with your family during this time?

**Melanie Hansen**

Right, yes.

**Interviewer**

Okay, so how, like—your parents were in Nicaragua at that time, right?

**Melanie Hansen**

They weren't yet. They came three months in. My mom had a health crisis, so they were out of the country for a little bit. So then afterwards, after they came back, then I moved in with them. Actually, I moved to different parts of the country, and I ended up working with a different dentist.

**Interviewer**

Okay, so can you tell me a little bit about that dentist?

**Melanie Hansen**

Yeah. So, I joined...this group was called the Caribbean Grace, and it was composed of... there's like five dental professionals, and then the dentist who was in charge, and it was this boat, it was a catamaran. And with this boat, we would go to these remote villages. They were only accessible by water. And then we provide extractions and cleanings, and there would also be a Bible worker that would go to the village just to socialize, just to teach and pray and really just to share the love of Jesus because the whole point of all these mission trips was, yes to help the physical needs of the people, but also mentor to their spiritual needs. So during those times that boat, we would all live on the boat. So, there's beds underneath; it's very crowded. There's a little kitchen on the boat too, but don't - don't picture anything bougie or nice. It was...it was very... what's the word very, not nice. I can't think of a more descriptive word. But, like it's yeah, rustic primitive, in a way. And yeah, we would be working as a team, and we do these trips multiple times, like, usually for three or four days, is going to these different...sometimes five, five, I think the longest was a week going to these different areas.

**Interviewer**

Okay. Very cool. So, could you tell me maybe, like, the best and most difficult parts of your time serving as a student missionary?

**Melanie Hansen**

Best and most difficult? I think the best parts were when I could see that we really made a difference in people's lives. So, what I mean by that is all of those dental clinics treating hundreds of patients... that was really great, but I loved when we really got to—when I got to know people one-on-one; I made friends there. I also—I helped to teach at a local school for English... grade—fourth-grade English. And I also taught some violin on the side to some of the members from church, some of the kids, so what I loved most was building those connections and just building those friendships. And once you kind of became a closer level, then it was easy to talk about that or, you know, just share... they would share struggles—or even I would share struggles I'm going through, but we could support each other, and it was just that was probably my favorite part building friendships and connections and actually, because I made friends with one of the girls, she trusted me so much. This one time she came—she was not feeling well at all. Sorry, can I share this story?

**Interviewer**

Absolutely share whatever!

**Melanie Hansen**

Okay, I'll make it short. But she wasn't feeling well at all, and nobody in her family believed her. So she walked to my house—to my place. At this point, I was staying with my parents, and she said that she had a terrible pain in her stomach. It was on the right side, and she didn't know what to do. Her family didn't believe her, they didn't... yeah, and they were gone. They were at work. So, she was a teenager too, she was maybe 16. So, I walked with her to the local clinic. And I made sure that she got—that she got seen, and I actually—I put my life myself at risk to do that because it's not safe to go by yourself places, and my family wasn't home so—but I knew she needed help immediately. So I took her there, and they were able to transport her on a boat to a larger hospital to see if it was appendicitis because that's what I suspected, and it was. If she had not been seen right then, then she would probably not be alive today. The doctors... afterwards they said “If it had been any longer. I don't think that this girl would still be here.” So that was—that was just one of the many stories I could tell you, just moments that were so...so special to me and really made a difference in my mission experience.

**Interviewer**

Alright. So yeah, you shared some of the best parts. So, can you share maybe some of the difficult parts of being a student missionary?

**Melanie Hansen**

Okay, there's lots of those too. So one of the most difficult parts was during those first few months when I was...I was living in the capital city with the dentist, and then we would also sometimes go on these mission trips to, like I said, more remote areas. And during one of those times the place that we were staying happened to be right next to a bar. And we had—we had traveled super late at night to get there. So we arrived there at, like, 4 am and then we... there's this bar, so we couldn't—I couldn't really sleep because there's this loud music playing the whole night. And then the next day we had to get off, go to, like, help people and do the dental education school. I came back...I was hoping to get some sleep, and—but the bar was still going, and there's still loud music. And then to make matters worse, the septic system all of a sudden didn't work, so—and I was sharing this room with, like, a few other people too, so I didn't really have space for myself. And anyways, I had just been going through a lot of things during that time, and I just kind of reached a breaking point where, like, I was exhausted, I couldn't sleep, it smelled awful, and I just felt so alone. So I think that was one of the worst times because I just felt so alone. I just remember it being absolutely awful, and I called my dad, and I just started crying on the phone. He was like, “I'm so sorry,” he prayed with me, and that made it better. Eventually, I survived, of course, but it was just those times when you feel so alone. It's really hard.

**Interviewer**

Okay, well thank you for sharing. So you kind of talked a little bit about an experience you had that you remember very strongly, but is there any other event that you may use, like kind of define your missionary experience that you, like, think back on?

**Melanie Hansen**

Of like struggles you mean? or-

**Interviewer**

Just anything that you think back on anything that it really just sort of sums up your entire missionary experience.

**Melanie Hansen**

There was one trip in particular, it was towards the end of the year. And I decided there was this village that was in the northern part of Nicaragua, it was called Crinocrín, and they had not had a dentist in over six years to that area. And we actually—we had connection with—there was some missionaries who lived in that village, and we knew them well, and I knew there was a big need there. So, at that point, I'd already had a bit of experience, like, helping to plan these mission trips with the other dentists. So, I actually, with the help of my parents, a lot of help my parents, I planned a mission trip for 10 days to this village, and we got—we got two dentists to come... actually, it was new dentists that I hadn't worked with before. And I think that just the whole planning of that mission trip because this was—this was... instead of me helping out with a different... somebody else's mission trip, this was something that I was planning on my own, mostly, and it was very stressful. But I think that what I learned most from that was—that it was not my trip, because every time that I tried to make things work, and I was—I was trying to get these two dentists to come and then literally two weeks before, both dentists pull out, they say, "Sorry, I can't go something came up." So here I am, trying to plan this dental mission trip to a place that I know needs help. But I don't even have any dentists, and I'm - I'm not a dentist or dental hygienist or anything, I was just a high school graduate at that point. And I think what God was really trying to teach me was that I could not do it... I could not do those things on my own. It was not me doing it, it was only Him. So He was trying to teach me to trust Him more. And I think that was - that was the major lesson of that trip, so to sum up my whole mission experience, I think that I learned that every time I tried to do things on my own; It always falls apart, but as soon as I surrender it to God and I say, "okay, it's in your hands," that He makes it all work. If it's His will, because, after I prayed that prayer, literally, you know this is... at this point, it's one week before the dental mission trip, God provided two dentists immediately. And they both spoke the...the indigenous language of that region.

**Interviewer**

Wow okay!

**Melanie Hansen**

So, yeah!

**Interviewer**

Very cool. Very cool. Okay, so yeah, you're talking about a little bit about how you learned a lot of things from God during your trip, but could you tell me a little bit about how maybe being a student missionary impacted your relationship with God a little bit more?

**Melanie Hansen**

I think that sometimes, here in North America, we forget how much we need God. And I think that in the mission field, sometimes we realize more just how much we need to rely on His strength. So, like, there's so many days I remember waking up and saying to God, "I don't know how to make it through today, like, I just... this is so stressful. There's so much on my plate. I need you." So just that - that... I guess that realization of how much I needed God really impacted my relationship with Him. Because I was really seeking Him, because I knew I couldn't make it through, like, day-to-day without him.

**Interviewer**

Thank you so much for sharing that. Kind of in the same vein—this might be a difficult question to answer since you did have quite a bit of missionary experience before going as a student missionary, but can you tell me how maybe your student missionary year impacted your relationship with other people?

**Melanie Hansen**

I think that, in a way, it made me more aware. More aware of how others—how to help other people or what other people are going through. And, of course, culturally, it made me realize so much about how - how different cultures are and how they interact differently with each other. But I think that since coming back, I - I tend to see other people a bit more differently because sometimes I think it's easy to judge people and think, "Oh, they're there. They're a drug addict because it's all their fault, and they just chose to be a drug addict." But being - being in the mission field and, like, getting to know some of the some of the poorest people, perhaps I realized that there's so much more to their stories, and you can't just judge and be like, "Oh, they just chose to be that way." Like, there's a lot of other factors involved. So, I think it made me more empathetic... I think that's what I'm trying to say here.

**Interviewer**

Cool. All right. So you kind of touched on this in talking about how your family really supported you during your mission year, but were there any other individuals who you consider essential to your success as a student missionary?

**Melanie Hansen**

Definitely, the dentists that were...they were huge mentors for me. Yeah, there's two dentists in Nicaragua in particular, that... they just really took me under their wings and taught me everything that I needed to know about dental cleanings, and assisting, and extractions. And then also my brothers, I have two older brothers, they were a huge support to me. One of them was there for the majority of the time, the other one was not, but my brothers were a huge, just... huge support. And then those dentists that I was mentored by.

**Interviewer**

All right. Are your brothers serving as missionaries as well?



**Melanie Hansen**

The oldest one is not, but the middle one is. He was... he was in Nicaragua for two years after high school as well.

**Interviewer**

Okay. Okay. So it's like a family business.

**Melanie Hansen**

Yeah, I guess so, kind of.

**Interviewer**

So, you kind of talked a little bit about this with talking about how you are hoping to become a dental hygienist straight, but could you tell me a little bit how, maybe, your student missionary year impacted your career path or life outlook?

**Melanie Hansen**

Okay. I've always wanted to do something for my career that helps people and that I can see the... the immediate effects of - of whatever I do. So that's why dental hygiene is something that really appeals to me, because it's needed all over the world. And I also... I love the idea of doing mission work again in the future perhaps. So I'd love to use it in the mission field once I—once I finish. What was the other question?

**Interviewer**

Your - how maybe your student, your student missionary year impacted your life outlook. So you've mentioned a little bit about how maybe you want to do it in the future, would you consider becoming a career missionary?

**Melanie Hansen**

That's a good question. I would definitely consider. It just depends where God leads. I think that He'd have to continue working on my heart because I see how much my parents have sacrificed to be career missionaries, and I also see how hard that was on my family but also how rewarding it was. So I don't know, off the top of my head, like, I don't know if I could say right now that I'm planning to be a career missionary, but I'm definitely open to it. And I know that if God asks me, leads me in that way, then I will definitely say... say yes.

**Interviewer**

All right. Well, thank you so much for sharing that. So could you tell me - and you touched on this a little bit before - but could you tell me any further long-term impact you've experienced from your time as a student missionary, or maybe even as going as a missionary with your parents?

**Melanie Hansen**

I mean, I think it's changed my whole outlook on life and, just... what I see as important because my goal was not to become rich in life. That's... it's pointless. My goal is to serve God and - and

however best... however he calls me to do that, however I can do that to the fullest of my ability. That's where I want to be. So I think... I think that missions in general, being raised in that environment, seeing the attitude of my parents, as well as... definitely impacted that and made it more of a long-term mindset; that serving God is the way that I can have the most fulfillment in life and just be the happiest.

**Interviewer**

Alright, so as we're nearing the end, is there any advice that you would tell others who are considering being a student missionary?

**Melanie Hansen**

I would say that if God is speaking to your heart, He's impressing for you to go somewhere as a student missionary, then absolutely say yes, and listen to his voice. Because it's easy to make excuses and say, "Oh, I'll do it later." Or, "Oh, I'm too busy right now." Or, "Oh, then I'll graduate later." There's just so many excuses, but if God is calling you to go somewhere, to be a student missionary, absolutely say yes. But don't think that other countries are the only places that need student missionaries. Because missionaries... it's just a mindset. As Christians, we're called to be missionaries wherever we are. And that doesn't necessarily mean on the other side of the world; that also means right here in North America. So yes, I think that if God is calling you to be a student missionary, then go.

**Interviewer**

Alright. And so, before we conclude, is there anything else you'd like to add?

**Melanie Hansen**

Nothing I can think of.

**Interviewer**

All right. Well, thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today and your willingness to participate in our history project.

**Melanie Hansen**

No problem.