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## 'All God's Children:' Exposing the abuses of children of missionaries

By Janet I. Tu  
Seattle Times staff reporter

Marilyn Shellrude Christman of Seattle was only 7 years old when she was sent to a boarding school for children of missionaries in Guinea, West Africa, in 1961.

For eight years, in the remote, isolated school, she says, she was emotionally and spiritually abused. At times, she was also physically and sexually abused — in some cases by a man who served as a dorm parent there, she said.

It wasn't until decades later that she realized she hadn't been the only abused child at Mamou Alliance Academy, a now-closed boarding school run by the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA), an evangelical Protestant denomination.

Christman's story, along with those of two other families whose children attended Mamou, are told in the documentary "All God's Children," which has its West Coast premiere tonight at Mercer Island Presbyterian Church.

Christman plans to attend, as does Luci Westphal, the documentary's co-director and co-producer, and the Rev. Dr. Marie Fortune, founder of FaithTrust Institute, a multifaith organization working to end sexual and domestic violence.

Westphal and her husband, Scott Solary, both Brooklyn-based filmmakers, first heard about Mamou from relatives who eventually became one of the families profiled in the documentary.

All three families left North America for West Africa in the 1950s to spread God's word. They were required to send their children to Mamou, where many of the students didn't see their parents for nine months out of the year.

The documentary juxtaposes old photos and films of kids playing at the school with the victims' recollections of what happened there: beatings with leather belts, a school nurse who didn't use Novocain when she drilled teeth, sexual abuses.



Beverly and Marilyn Shellrude in All God's Children by Scott Solary and Luci Westphal  
Photo Credit: Shellrude Family

SHELLRUDE FAMILY

Beverly Shellrude Thompson and her sister, Marilyn Shellrude Christman, were sent to Mamou Alliance Academy located in Guinea, West Africa, in 1961.

On the Internet

About the documentary: [www.allgodschildrenthefilm.com](http://www.allgodschildrenthefilm.com)

About Missionary Kids Safety Net: [www.mksafetynet.net](http://www.mksafetynet.net)

### Movie preview "All God's Children"

7 p.m. today, 70 minutes; Mercer Island Presbyterian Church, 3605 84th Ave S.E.; free and open to the public; [www.mipc.org](http://www.mipc.org).

There was an atmosphere of fear, that "if you did something wrong, there would be consequences, a lot of shaming," Christman said.

Christman was 38 before she started grappling with what had happened to her there. It was another few years before she realized other students — including her own older sister — had been abused as well.

Church officials denied the victims' allegations for a decade. Finally, the denomination funded an independent investigation that concluded a significant number of children had been seriously abused at Mamou. The church apologized.

C&MA says it has made changes, including no longer requiring children of missionaries to attend boarding schools.

Christman and others have started an organization called Missionary Kids Safety Net, to be a resource to and advocate for children of missionaries who've been abused and to call churches to justice.

Her purpose in being part of the documentary and attending the screenings, Christman said, "is to tell my story loud enough and long enough that other survivors would hear that they're not alone."

*Janet I. Tu: 206-464-2272 or [jtu@seattletimes.com](mailto:jtu@seattletimes.com)*

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