



Elaine meets the basket makers

Fair trade enthusiast Elaine Wilmore is finally getting to meet someone she's always wanted to meet – the women who make the jute hammocks she sells. And the meeting at the Jute Works, in Bangladesh, will be captured by television producer Mark Batey as one of the highlights in a documentary item for BBC North East on the work of Traidcraft.

Elaine, one of Traidcraft's 5000-strong network of Fair Traders, was persuaded to leave husband, John, and children, Hannah (14) and Joel (11) behind with the promise of the meeting at the Jute Works, Traidcraft's oldest producer supplier.

I've been selling their baskets for years so I'm really excited at the prospect of meeting those women, she says.

The frustration will not be being able to talk to them directly about themselves, their families, their joys and the challenges in their lives. But we're resourceful women – I'm sure we'll find a way to communicate.

Elaine runs a regular Traidcraft stall at Durham Road Baptist Church, in Gateshead, and that church connection is at the heart of her commitment to fair trade.

For me it's very straightforward, she says. Jesus commanded us to love one another and fair trade is a simple way of expressing that love, of obeying that command.

Fair trade is making such a difference in the lives of thousands of people all over the world. I'm really inspired by the stories of people who are able to afford medicine, educate their children, have a clean water supply, as a result of fair trade.

It's the 'wow' factor that gets me every time. It's so important that fair trade keeps on growing and it's so easy. How can you not get involved?

Elaine also makes a connection between her commitment to fair trade and her professional life as a research scientist working on the causes and treatment of leukaemia in adults.

I have become more involved at a patient level recently. Seeing people suffer drives you to find a way forward to relieve that suffering and I suppose there is a parallel between that and my involvement with fair trade.

That involvement started 10 years ago when Elaine spotted packs of fair trade sugar in the Traidcraft catalogue.

I thought it was just such a fantastic idea that you could support families in the developing world by buying the sort of everyday foodstuffs you needed for your own family, she said.

I ordered 10 bags straight away then I began selling to colleagues and friends and it just developed from there.

I feel really privileged to be part of it all. I'm really grateful for the opportunity that God has given me to work out my faith in such a positive way.

This article first appeared in The Baptist Times.