

# Called and Kept

The Life and Testimony of  
Richard Frees

and Sara Shockley Frees

BY MARK ALLEN FREES

© **Copyright 2014, Mark Allen Frees**

Special thanks to Phyllis Draws of the Omro Area Historical Society for her kind help in researching the church clerk records of now-defunct Omro Baptist Church.

Thanks to Lynn and the children for letting me honor my father and mother in this way, even if it occasionally meant neglecting other things.

The selections at the head of each chapter are from F. W. H. Myers' masterful poem, *Saint Paul*, first published in 1867.

*Yea thro' life, death, thro' sorrow and thro' sinning,  
He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed:  
Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning,  
Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	1
1. Troubled Beginnings	5
2. Enna Pingry	22
3. Launching Out	33
4. Sara	39
5. Shockley Revival	53
6. Together	62
7. Triumph of Grace	77
8. France and Back	90
9. Called to Service	101
10. Adventures in Misawa	114
11. Uncertainty and Light	128
12. Active Duty	141
13. Kentucky Days	152
14. Changes and Struggles	163
15. Retired and Unretired	172
16. Facing Forward	180
Appendix A: Sixty Years	189
Appendix B: Sources	192



## PREFACE

Whenever I delve into our family's ancestry, I am fascinated by the untold stories. I stare at names of ancestors, trying to imagine what they were like—what they thought and felt, how God dealt with their souls, what simple, honest deeds filled their lives.

Heaven records it all, of course, but it is remarkable how thoroughly it can be lost to us down here. It's unnerving how quickly the passing of years can reduce the rich, consequential lives of our ancestors to a series of names on a family tree. So I wrote this book above all to honor my father and mother, to ascribe enduring significance to the faithful lives they have lived (and are living), and to insure that theirs is not an untold story.

I have in mind this being of particular worth to Dad and Mom's descendants, now about a score in number but soon enough to be in the hundreds and, if the Lord allows the creaking wheel of history to turn along, thousands. Other than family, will anyone care to read of a small-church pastor and his wife whose lives make no discernible ripple in the history of the day? Perhaps not, but really there is no way to know who may someday run across this testimony and be blessed by it. If Dad's story tells us anything, it is that our notions of importance are skewed to begin with. We count significance by largeness, by celebrity, by headlines. God's reckoning is far different.

It has been a thrill to have Dad and Mom alongside as I have put this account together. They have patiently endured the questions and intrusions, and our hours of conversation have been an incalculable blessing in their own right. I will always treasure the memory of them. I'm keenly aware of the honor of being entrusted with highly personal material, including Dad's spiritual journal, excerpts from which will surely comprise one of the chief values of this memoir.

Sorting out the family history in the first few chapters led to pleasant hours digging through digital and microfilm copies of old newspapers and such. I've included an appendix of sources at the end, though for sake of readability I've avoided using footnotes in the text itself. Hopefully I've laid down enough markers to allow future family researchers to follow my tracks, for whatever they are worth.

I should note that while this is Dad and Mom's story, it is my telling of it. If they were doing the writing they might put some of this a bit differently. Although I have not knowingly included anything they would disagree with, the interpretations placed on certain episodes and the occasional theological reflections are my doing, not theirs.

The focus is Dad and Mom's early life, spiritual testimony, and relationship with one another, not their parenting career, so I've tried to keep us children from cluttering the story more than is necessary. But lest there be any doubt, let me take a moment at the outset to affirm that they were top-notch parents as well.

Warm childhood memories cluster around Dad—not extraordinary things, just the random snapshots that linger

in a child's mind: shivering with excitement on Christmas Eve as Dad read the nativity story from the Gospel of Luke, then with a jolly "Ho, ho, ho" presided over the gift-opening festivities; hearing Dad pray as we started off to Nanny and Pa's house in the pre-dawn darkness, "Lord, guide my hands on the steering wheel;" riding together to the Baptist bookstore, just the two of us. (I'm sure it would have been more relaxing to go by himself, but he usually asked if I wanted to come along. Strange, I've had a love for Christian books ever since.) Family fun nights, going to football games together, stopping at the little amusement park on the beach to ride the tilt-a-whirl and buy cotton candy, camping at Lake Towada in Japan, cookouts featuring Dad's secret barbecue sauce, his comical performances of the one and only ditty he knew on the piano—these are a few of the memories that swirl together from those not-so-long-ago days.

As for Mom, she has her part in all these warm snapshots of memory plus plenty more. Perhaps I can do no better than this tribute I wrote to her on some long-passed Mother's Day:

*Only a Mom could take an air base bungalow,  
A Japanese village house, a seminary apartment,  
Furnish them with caring, softness, beauty,  
The sound of godly music,  
The smell of Sunday dinner,  
And make them each a warm and welcome place,  
A tiny outpost of heaven.*

*Only a Mom could so wisely stretch the dollar,  
That somehow, even in the leaner times,*

*When beans and rice came just a bit too often,  
And ailing clothes survived an extra summer,  
Her children never felt that they were poor,  
But pretty close to rich.*

*Only a Mom could endure a lively flock of boys,  
Their rollicking play disturbing her nap,  
Their petty quarrels disturbing her heart,  
Yet love them in a thousand little ways  
(Including little spankings when required),  
And train them up for God.*

We always knew Dad and Mom loved us and each other. The thought never crossed our minds of them not being together. We never doubted that the Bible was true and God was the most important thing in life. We never wondered where we would be as a family on Sunday morning and Sunday night. All this is stability and blessing to a child.

I considered writing a separate account of Mom's life, and certainly she merits it, but in the end I chose to fold her story into his, keeping Dad and Mom as they have been for almost sixty years now—inseparable. Mom occupies here the same role she has filled in Dad's life and ministry: a winsome, beautifying, serving presence, often in the background but (as Dad would attest) indispensable and in many cases the real hero of the story.

God bless you, Dad and Mom. What an honor it is for me to tell your story and place it in the hands of the generations to come.

## CHAPTER 1

# TROUBLED BEGINNINGS

*Never a sigh of passion or of pity,  
Never a wail for weakness or for wrong,  
Has not its archive in the angels' city,  
Finds not its echo in the endless song.*



**E**nna Frees stiffened in horror as the rifle report crackled through the night air. Her husband Lloyd had just finished a drunken, self-pitying tirade by announcing his intent to kill himself. Grabbing a rifle, he stormed out of the house and out of sight, and then came the terrifying sound. Enna sank into a chair, weeping hysterically. But it was only a cruel charade. Lloyd never had any intention of harming himself, but only fired the gun to frighten his poor wife.

Unhappy incidents like this dominate Dad's remembrance of his Omro, Wisconsin, upbringing. Night after night Lloyd would come home late, sullen and drunk, and Dad would listen helplessly as his father would begin angrily abusing his mother. The mistreatment was mostly verbal, but occasionally became physical.

Lloyd was a different man when sober—personable and likable. Mom remembers him as congenial the few

times she met him. He came to visit us once in Biloxi, Mississippi, after Dad had long since been away from home and had a family of his own. The children remember it fondly, since grandfather Lloyd took us across the street to the hardware store and bought us toy army guns to play with.

Lloyd held well-paying jobs over the years—backhoe operator, ice man, mail carrier. Indolence was not his vice. But week by week, in a sordidly predictable pattern, he would squander his paycheck at the night spots, often leaving the family without money for food, clothes, and rent. Missed meals were not uncommon. The church helped on occasion, and there was always something to eat at Grandma Pearl's house, but by and large Dad recalls the constant feeling of not quite having enough to eat.

As we glance into the Frees home on one cheerless evening, we view a scene that captures Dad's childhood in a nutshell. The family is waiting hopefully for Lloyd to get home from work, for today is payday and he has promised to bring groceries for supper. "He'll be here pretty soon," Enna assures the children as hour after hour slips by. Midnight comes and goes with no father and no supper. Finally Lloyd appears, thoroughly drunk and with no groceries. Enna manages to boil a few potatoes so the children don't have to sleep on an empty stomach.

Lloyd Frees was my grandfather and as such deserving of honor, but it would do no good to pretend he was a noble husband and father. He was enslaved to alcohol as far back as Dad can remember. He had his good traits, but

his behavior toward his wife and children over the course of many years was neglectful in the extreme and inexcusable.

When Dad was fifteen years old, his father made a profession of faith and joined the Baptist church. For a while it appeared he had truly been converted. The drinking stopped and something resembling normal family life settled in at the Frees household. Lloyd was home at nights now like a regular father—reading the paper, chatting with his wife, drunken rants replaced by pleasant conversation. Without liquor to buy, there was money for food and other necessities. “It was just like heaven on earth,” Dad recalls, “after the way he had been.” But after a year or so—Dad doesn’t remember exactly how long—Lloyd started drinking again and things returned to the same state as before, if not worse.

The family lived in a long succession of rental houses, “thousands” of them, Dad wryly notes. He recalls one rickety place charmingly equipped with rats scurrying about the floor. More than once the Freeses rented a house but by the end of the first month had no money for rent, and so had to pack up and move again. In keeping with the times, some of the houses had electricity, while in others oil lamps had to do. Indoor plumbing was not a common feature in those days either. Dad remembers one dwelling where he and brother Danny had to put a milk jug on an old wooden sled and drag it up a long incline to the neighbor’s pump to fetch water. Naturally the trips to the out-house in the middle of the Wisconsin winter were memorable as well.

Dad's early memories are not all unpleasant. He remembers riding with brother Danny in the rumble seat of the family's Model A Ford on the way to visit relatives, going to a Shirley Temple movie in Omro with his mother when he was four, marveling at the four-foot snow that came up level with the big front porch one winter. For Dad as a boy, the height of a good time was a picnic in the countryside with his mother or riding the bus to Oshkosh with her on shopping day and stopping at the dime store to get hot dogs. He doesn't recall any similar good times with his father, though surely there must have been a few over the years.

On the more traumatic side, there was the time as a small child that he wondered what would happen if he stood on a chair and stuck his finger in the empty light socket on the wall. It was a shocking revelation, but thankfully he was not seriously hurt. He also recalls a mishap involving his mother when he was five that merited this note in the *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*:

Mrs. Lloyd Frees, who stepped on an old cistern top and fell into water, is recovering from the shock.

Dad was in the second grade when World War II broke out, so he didn't feel much of an impact from it. Certain commodities became difficult to buy in those days, to be sure, but going without necessities was nothing unusual for his family. His father Lloyd was not called into the service, though later in the war he tried to enlist and was rejected for medical reasons. The war shuddered to its weary close when Dad was thirteen years old. All the church bells

pealed in jubilation, and the pastor fetched Dad to do the honors in the bell tower at Omro Baptist Church.

Thanks to the blessing of a godly mother (whom we'll come to know better in the next chapter), Dad was a regular at this picturesque little church on Lincoln Avenue. One of his very first memories is of being held in his mother's arms as she pointed to the babies' names, including his own, on the wall of the church nursery. In the pews and classrooms of this unpretentious gathering, with fifty in Sunday School on a good day, he had the blessing of being exposed to the word of God throughout his childhood and youth.

One Sunday when he was almost twelve, a speaker from the Gideons (an organization of Christian businessmen dedicated to distribution of the Scriptures) visited Omro Baptist. He preached a strong gospel message and gave an invitation. No doubt he meant well, but he made the regrettable mistake of promising a new Bible to anyone who came forward to receive Christ. Dad made a profession of faith that day and was baptized shortly afterwards (the church clerk's record gives the baptism date as May 21, 1944) but there was nothing in it of true conviction of sin or the drawing of the Holy Spirit. Truth be told, he just wanted one of those Gideon Bibles. Other than the crisp, new Bible, the only thing gained from the episode was a false assurance of salvation that lasted for years.

About a year later the church called as pastor a young man, soundly evangelical in his beliefs, named Robert Wiegner. This was his first church, and he and his new bride Helen entered upon the venture with fervor. Dad visited the young pastor as he was getting settled into the

parsonage and helped him organize the books and papers spread over the floor upstairs. For some inexplicable reason, in the course of the conversation that day, Dad told Rev. Wiegner that he too wanted to be a preacher when he grew up. This flash in the pan of ministerial ambition did not last long, but it seems remarkably prophetic in hindsight. Rev. Wiegner was pastor at Omro for the remainder of Dad's youth and had a steady influence on him for the gospel.

Another shining light for Christ that crossed his path in those days was a young man named Edward Tritt. About twelve years older than Dad, Ed joined Omro Baptist as a high school senior, while Dad was still grazing on juice and cookies in the preschool department. Ed graduated from Omro High in 1938 and two years later enlisted in the Marines. This was just before World War II broke out, and it's safe to say that he got more than he bargained for from his enlistment. For the next five years he found himself in the thick of some of the most harrowing engagements of the Pacific theater—Pearl Harbor, Guadalcanal, Okinawa. Amid the horrors of war, Edward Tritt was gripped by the profound spiritual darkness he saw everywhere in the South Pacific and determined to return one day as a missionary, trading out rifle and hand-grenade for the life-giving gospel of Christ.

When the war ended, Ed made plans to attend Columbia Bible College in South Carolina for missionary training. But a change of countries does not a missionary make, and Ed was not the type to wait until he was overseas to serve Christ. He had a burden for the young fellows

he knew there in Omro and rounded up the boys from the church and neighborhood once a week for cookies, hot chocolate, and Bible lessons. Dad, now a teenager, was one of those boys. While Ed would not live to see the gospel seed come to harvest in Dad's life, only God knows the hidden impact his loving witness had. Dad recalls:

One time we were home, and we didn't have anything in the house to eat. Ed just happened to come by to visit with us. My dad was at home, and the whole family was there. We were wondering what we were going to do to get something to eat. He came by, and we were telling him about the problem. He reached into his pocket, and he pulled out a little bit of money. It wasn't much, but he said we should take it and buy some food with it. Then he had prayer with us.

Dad didn't know till years later what had become of fervent, young Ed Tritt. After finishing Bible college, Ed sailed for Dutch New Guinea, where he and Walter Erikson were the first missionaries of the Evangelical Alliance Mission on this desperate field. A few months after their arrival, Ed and Walter set out to survey the remote western interior of the country, accompanied by sixteen carriers and a guide. The venture was blighted from the start. Crossing the territory of hostile tribes terrified the native carriers, and they feared for their lives. Ed's diary indicates bickering among the carriers, with sharp disagreements about which direction to take and growing hostility towards the missionaries. His last diary entry on September 27, 1952, records that the troubled group made camp at 4:30 P.M and ate a meal of rice, potatoes, salmon, and bamboo. Early the next

morning the natives brutally attacked the sleeping missionaries with sticks and machetes, and Ed Tritt and Walter Erikson were ushered into the presence of Christ.

Like the more celebrated story of Jim Elliot and company killed by Auca Indians in Ecuador five years later, as the account of Ed and Walter's sacrifice in the cause of Christ filtered back to the States, it stirred conviction and passion in the hearts of many. More than one young person surrendered his or her life to missions as a result. In the late 1950's the Erikson-Tritt Theological College was founded in memory of the courageous young missionaries and still stands today in Manokwari, New Guinea, for the training of native pastors. Yes, Ed Tritt's legacy endures, and because of his faithful witness to Dad, I like to think a small sliver of it lives on in our family.

As he made his way out of the childhood years into later youth, Dad was a B-minus student at Omro High School, bright enough but not particularly disciplined or studious. He managed to stay out of trouble for the most part. Perhaps his most daring misdeed took place one Halloween night when he and a buddy broke into the switch box at the high school football field, flipped on the stadium lights, and made a successful getaway. He did not belong to the ultra-popular set at school, but he had his friends and a girlfriend or two along the way.

A few poems he wrote in high school have survived the years. Not works of literary genius, perhaps, but they show that he was not without creative imagination and verbal skill—for instance, this wry tribute to the lingering Wisconsin winter:

*Spring comes here in March, they say,  
But most likely it's in May.  
The snow swirls, the cold wind blows,  
On my fire I heap more coals.  
Two lovers wish with a ring;  
On the calendar it says Spring,  
But on grass they do not stand—  
Ice and snow cover the land.  
Fishermen all set to go,  
Thwarted by a heavy blow,  
Stay inside and fix up gear.  
It's Spring, they say—but not here!*

At 159 pounds, Dad played football as a starting guard for the Omro High Fighting Foxes. He made his mark as a hard hitter, in practices as well as games, as he found football a good release for pent-up frustrations about things at home. He tried to persuade his father to watch him play, especially since the football stadium was across the street from the house, and Lloyd could literally have seen the game from the front yard. Dad would practically beg him, and his father would say, “I might watch a little of it tonight,” but Dad knew he wouldn’t. Game nights were prime time for the downtown watering holes.

Not surprisingly, Dad sometimes dreamed about getting away from home. Once, late in the high school years, he set out more or less on a whim to hitchhike westward, with no money to speak of and little more than the clothes on his back. He had heard a friend of his father, who lived in Washington State, speak glowingly of its pleasant weather and lovely green valleys dotted with apple trees. So that

settled the destination: he was Washington-bound. He was urged on by one of his favorite movies where a young fellow left home and worked his way across America doing odd jobs. But that was a movie, while this was real life, and a hundred miles or so down the highway the grim reality of his situation set in. He wisely thought better of the grand scheme, and turned his hitchhiker's thumb back toward the familiar confines of Omro and home.

No, it was not the happiest of childhoods. With another of Dad's schoolboy poems before us, it's easy to picture him sprawled across the bed in a shoddy attic bedroom, mulling his troubles while the cadence of rain on the tin roof lulls him to sleep:

*When a summer's storm breaks with a crash,  
And rain droplets race to the ground with a dash,  
And lightning flashes through the dark summer night,  
And the rain-drenched leaves flutter in fright:  
That's the time for sleeping, that's truth,  
When the rain rattles upon the roof.*

*The storm quiets and a steady drizzle sets in;  
Strains of ecstasy, that gentle rattle on tin.  
Minds heavy with thought are set at ease  
By the soft sighing of the rain-tinted breeze.  
That's the time for sleeping, that's truth,  
When the rain rattles upon the roof.*

Later as a Christian, Dad determined to forgive his father for his failings. At age thirty-six, during a season of prayer for personal revival, he wrote in his journal: "I must forgive my Dad and love him. I need to call or write to him frequently." The choice to forgive is no doubt pleasing to

God even where there is stubborn emotional residue lying around. Dad's determination to love and forgive was genuine, though he occasionally struggles with impulses of anger to this day over things his father did, particularly the way he mistreated Dad's mother.

To Dad's knowledge, his father never repented of his ways or even expressed remorse for them. After Enna's death in 1959 he remarried, but continued the drunkenness and abuse in the new relationship. Dad had a chance or two to reason with him later in life, begging him to consider his ways and turn to God. Lloyd was not moved by these things and seemed embarrassed to hear Dad speak of God, church, and repentance. My grandfather Lloyd died in 1982 at the age of seventy. We can only leave his destiny in God's hands and hope against hope for a late, extraordinary work of mercy in his life.

After graduating from high school, Dad landed a job at a cookie factory in nearby Ripon, a position that came with the delightful perk of all-you-could-eat cookies while working. He manned the night shift at the factory, then in the early morning trudged the half-mile back to his lonely apartment. Along the way there was a ridge where he would sometimes stop and look over the valley below, a serene landscape of fields and pastures dotted with a few simple farmhouses. The scene, pleasant though it was, made him feel his deep loneliness. He tried to imagine having a wife of his own and raising a family in one of those picturesque little homes.

In spite of the sweet (literally) fringe benefits at the cookie factory, the pay was meager and Dad only stayed a

couple months before moving on to a little fast-order restaurant in Ripon. There he essentially ran the place by himself for long stretches, as the owner (himself an alcoholic) didn't stick around much, and often showed up only to check on things and empty the cash drawer. It was a popular hangout for the younger set, and on Friday and Saturday nights in particular, Dad sometimes felt he was chasing his tail—waiting on customers, taking orders, cooking hamburgers, whipping up sodas and chocolate malts, cleaning tables—with perhaps twenty or thirty people at a time packing the counter and booths.

After an impressive several months of playing chief cook and bottle washer in the Ripon restaurant, he moved back to Omro, and from that point navigated a hectic, in some ways almost comical, succession of short-term employments over the next year or two. These included a job in an Oshkosh pea-canning factory that lasted a single day, two days as a rug-cutter in a carpet factory, two or three weeks in a facility that manufactured tank parts (this one paid well, but he quickly tired of the half-mile walk in the bitter winter weather to catch his ride to Oshkosh), a longer stint running an old-fashioned printing press for the Omro Herald, several weeks employed at the county “poor farm,” as they called it, followed by a brief career as a patient aide in the state mental hospital in Oshkosh.

In this massive, five-hundred-bed facility on the shores of Lake Winnebago, he did a little bit of everything: assisted with electric shock treatments, fed disabled patients, and helped with all manner of cleaning and odd jobs. One day he was supervising a mentally-challenged patient

who was trying to mop the floor, and the young man carelessly splashed filthy water all over Dad's crisp, clean uniform. Dad, who had quite the temper in those days, instinctively hauled off and struck the patient, not seriously hurting him, but bringing Dad's employment in that noble establishment to an abrupt end.

He was actually a fine worker—as shown by the trust placed in him by the restaurant owner in Ripon—but he was restless, impulsive, and shortsighted, which made it difficult to hold down a job for long. For the most part, he was an unhappy and lonely young man. Things were depressing as always at home. He dated a few girls here and there but found nothing lasting or fulfilling. He himself drank heavily now, often accompanying his father to the bars or carousing with his own friends. Thankfully, he never gave himself over to alcohol quite to the extent his father did, partly because he was usually short on money. He never went to church anymore and rarely gave a thought to spiritual things. He recalls one evening picking up the Bible and beginning to read it. It brought back memories and stirred warm feelings inside, but the interest didn't last and he soon set it aside.

Following his dizzying run of short-term jobs, Dad ended up doing backhoe work with his father, digging trenches for utility lines, first in Omro and then in a little town near Milwaukee almost a hundred miles away. There they shared an apartment, only driving home on weekends. After work each day the first order of business was to find the nearest bar, and the weekends at home were not much better. Indeed it is not too much to say that Dad's life was

spiraling downhill at an alarming rate. It certainly appeared for a while that he was bound to follow in his father's footsteps and that all the influences for God and the gospel in his life would count for nothing. But God had begun a work and would complete it in due time.

As Dad struggled his perilous way toward his twenty-first birthday, he received a letter that would change his life. These were the days of the Korean War, and his draft number had finally come up. He was to report to Milwaukee for a physical.

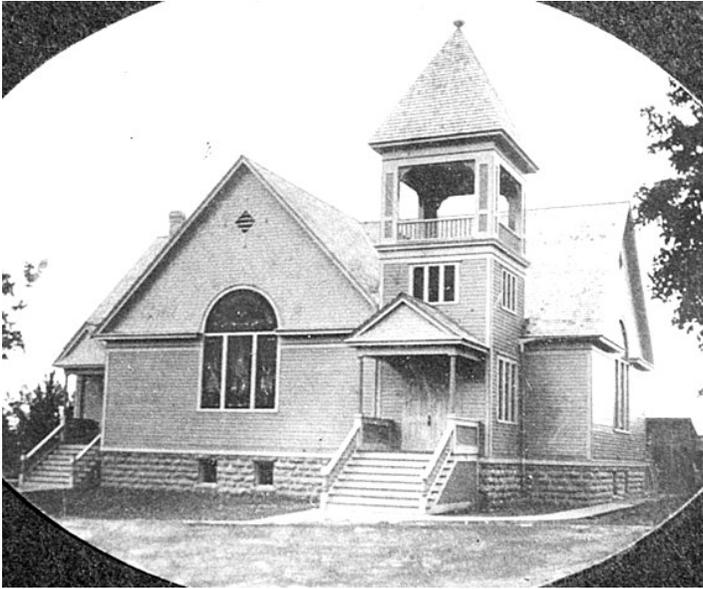
Yes, if the gracious, divine purpose that rested on his life required removing him from Omro and the ungodly influences that had accumulated around him there, that is exactly what God would do. If it meant using the United States Air Force to accomplish the move, well then, God would see to that as well.



**Young Richard Frees engages in an epic battle with Superman in an attic bedroom. Dad recalls this photo, taken by brother Danny, being a prize-winner in some now-forgotten contest.**



**TOP: Dad's father, Lloyd Frees, held a number of jobs, including delivering mail between Omro and the surrounding communities. BOTTOM: Dad and family pet Brownie enjoy one another's company on the doghouse roof.**



**TOP:** This undated photograph of Omro Baptist Church portrays it much as it was in Dad's youth. (Photo courtesy of the Carter Memorial Library.)  
**BOTTOM:** Edward Tritt was a faithful witness to Dad and other young boys in Omro before laying down his life for Christ as a missionary in New Guinea.

## CHAPTER 2

### ENNA PINGRY

*Witness the women, of His children sweetest—  
Scarcely earth seeth them, but earth shall see;  
Thou in their woe Thine agony completest,  
Christ, and their solitude is nigh to Thee.*



**B**efore forging ahead with Dad’s story, pardon me if I step back a generation or two to take a closer look at the one responsible, in the providence of God, for Dad growing up under the influence of the Scriptures. Dad’s mother, Enna Pingry Frees, lived a difficult and uncelebrated life, yet her name was surely known in heaven. She deserves to have her humble story told—and so she will.

She was born Enna Converse, the daughter of Elwin Converse and his second wife, Ennie Luella Pingry. Elwin’s first marriage was at the age of seventeen to his parents’ housekeeper, a woman five years his senior. It ultimately ended in divorce, but not before the couple had two daughters, the youngest of which, eleven-year-old Cora, still lived at home with Elwin when he married Ennie Luella three days into the new century, January 3, 1900. Ennie Luella was thirty-five at the time of the wedding, but it does not appear that she was previously married.

At risk of dallying too long underneath the family tree, I'll mention that *Ennie Luella Pingry*, Dad's grandmother, was the daughter of one of Omro's earliest settlers, *John Favor Pingry*, who laid claim to a hundred and sixty acres in the Omro area in 1847. It took hardy men to carve homesteads out of the Wisconsin wilds, and that first miserable winter Dad's great-grandfather Pingry ate little but bran pudding, and supposedly cut timber barehanded without so much as mittens to protect from the biting cold. The years 1848 and 1849 were unusually damp, and some discouraged settlers packed up and moved on, but John stood it out. The fruit of his perseverance was the well-known Pingry Farm, where four generations would be born under one roof. God blessed John Favor Pingry and his British-born bride, *Ann Whitehead*, with seven children in all, two of which are of particular interest to our story: the oldest son, *Sennett*, whom we will meet again in a moment, and of course Dad's grandmother, *Ennie Luella*, who was the third of four girls.

*Elwin Converse* and *Ennie Luella Pingry* had been married for a year and a half when *Ennie Luella* gave birth to a baby girl on June 17, 1902. The baby was fine, but sadly the mother died a week later from complications, leaving *Elwin Converse* a single father once again. The baby girl, Dad's mother, was named *Enna* in memory of her dear mother.

How soon *Elwin* began to think of giving up his newborn daughter to be raised by others is impossible to say, and whether it was his idea or first suggested by others is equally uncertain. As mentioned, he already had a daughter

from a previous marriage to care for, and she was only now entering her teens. The thought of raising a fragile baby girl without a mother must have seemed daunting to Elwin. It was surely not a lack of love for his little daughter but a concern for her well-being that led him to consider placing her in the care of someone else.

Once the idea was raised, there was little question who were the ideal candidates for the task. Sennett and Addie Pingry, the baby's uncle and aunt, after losing an infant child years earlier were childless. Sennett (the oldest son of Omro pioneer John Favor Pingry, as we have seen) had a thriving farm and was one of the leading men in the area, well-respected enough to be elected clerk of the town. Sennett and Addie's immaculate farm home was host to all manner of club meetings and social galas, as Addie was known far and wide for her entertaining skills. Respected, well-off, no children of their own—yes, Sennett and Addie were obvious choices to provide a home for Elwin Converse's motherless baby girl.

It is not clear exactly when little Enna Converse became the adopted daughter of Sennett and Addie Pingry, or whether formal adoption papers were ever drawn up. The 1905 Wisconsin census shows Enna already living with them at the age of two, so it is likely she was taken into the Pingry home shortly after her birth. Her real father, Elwin Converse, died when she was thirteen, but from the start it would appear she was raised by the Pingrys as their own dear daughter. Sennett Pingry was nearing fifty years old when baby Enna came into his home, and it's not hard to imagine that the little girl quickly wrapped her adoptive

father's heart around her chubby little finger. She in turn became a Daddy's girl, and the two were inseparable, even after Enna's marriage, until his death in 1939.

We catch a few glimpses of Enna's childhood through snippets in the local newspaper. She was a bright student, winning honorable mention in a spelling contest at age twelve and second prize in a regional arithmetic, spelling, and writing competition when she was fourteen. In 1917 she graduated from the eighth grade. At age eighteen, she is mentioned in an account of her grandmother Ann Whitehead Pingry's eighty-eighth birthday celebration. Enna, the youngest of the grandchildren, baked the cake for the occasion.

That same eighteenth year she was baptized at Omro Baptist Church. Unfortunately, if the story of his mother's conversion was ever shared with Dad, he has no remembrance of it. There is no evidence that her adoptive parents, Sennett and Addie Pingry, were active in the Baptist church, so how she came to be there under the preaching of the gospel and apparently converted at age eighteen is impossible to say for sure. Her Aunt Della and Uncle Arthur (actually her first cousins once removed and children of John Favor Pingry's brother William) were pillars of the church, and possibly they were the ones who saw to it that she was in church on Sundays. There is reason to suppose unmarried Aunt Della, in particular, may have taken young Enna under her wing, because just a week after Enna joined the church, the two rode together to the Winnebago Baptist Association annual meeting as the messengers from Omro Baptist.

Sennett Pingry retired from farming in 1922. He and Addie sold the old farm where they had lived together for forty years, the last twenty with Enna by their side, and bought a house in Omro. A year later Addie died at the age of sixty-three after a long battle with kidney disease.

Now in her twenties, little Enna the honor student had become Miss Pingry the schoolteacher. She presided at the Maple School, a one-room schoolhouse outside Omro. A brief *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern* notice from the Christmas season in 1927 gives a glimpse into those simpler days:

A Christmas program was given Thursday evening at the Maple School of which Miss Enna Pingry is the teacher. There was a large and appreciative audience. The school house was bright with the season's decorations and trees, from which presents were distributed following the program. An interesting feature was the sand table project. It was a miniature representation of the scenes and figures of "Holy Night," made by the children.

Later, Enna taught at the larger Omro Junction School. She continued to live with her father, the aging Sennett Pingry, and he drove her to school in the mornings, or so we surmise from a mishap that occurred in 1930. It seems that one May morning Mr. Pingry pulled out of the schoolyard after dropping off Enna, and as he crossed the intersection he was broadsided by a car carrying two college students. Mr. Pingry was unhurt, but the students suffered scrapes and bruises serious enough that the account of the accident made its way into the *Daily Northwestern*.

Enna was faithful at Omro Baptist and became a fixture in the little gathering. She taught the Junior Girls' Sunday School class—the Sunshine Sisters, as they were known—and she could always be counted on to help with Vacation Bible School in the summer. She had a quiet and gentle spirit, but as a schoolteacher was not intimidated by being in front of people. At a patriotic service in 1929, with the Baptists and Presbyterians meeting together, twenty-six-year-old Enna stood and shared the story of how the hymn, “I’m a Pilgrim, I’m a Stranger” came to be Abraham Lincoln’s favorite.

So how did a sweet and godly girl like Enna Pingry end up married to an untamed carouser like Lloyd Frees? The good people of Omro Baptist Church must have wondered the same thing. It was 1931 when the twenty-nine-year-old school teacher and the rangy, nineteen-year-old farmhand tied the knot. The age difference catches one’s eye, as does the fact that the two were first cousins once removed. (Not to clutter our narrative with arcane details, but for those who may care about such things, Enna’s Aunt Jura, another of John Favor Pingry’s girls, had mingled the Frees and Pingry lines by marrying Lloyd’s grandfather Angel Bartlett Frees.)

As cousins, Enna and Lloyd would certainly have known each other all their lives. The relationship was not likely close or constant, since Lloyd was born some thirty miles from Omro in Menasha and spent at least some of his growing up years in Plover, Wisconsin, over sixty miles from Enna’s pleasant farm home. Lloyd was in the middle of the pack of ten children, and his father John Ervin Frees was a

construction and farm laborer who followed the work wherever it led. By 1930, Lloyd's family had returned to their native Omro, and the census that year shows Lloyd as a "hired man" living with a farmer in Poygan, only a few miles away. Somehow the relationship between Enna and Lloyd became intimate, and the two were married in 1931. They moved in with Enna's loyal father, Sennett Pingry, who purchased a farmhouse southeast of Omro just for the purpose.

It was for the most part not a happy marriage as we have seen. It is not certain whether Lloyd's abusive behavior began immediately, or if (as is more likely) there were a few happier years at the start of the marriage. Very quickly the couple was expecting a child, and perhaps this cold dash of reality subdued the ungodly tendencies for a time. When my father, Richard, was born in Oshkosh's St. Mary's Hospital on June 8, 1932, he inherited Lloyd's name as a middle name. Surely Lloyd took joy and pride in the new addition, and perhaps made earnest resolutions to be a good father.

It is safe to assume that as long as Sennett Pingry was alive, things were better than they would later become. For instance, in 1934 the *Daily Northwestern* notes:

The Social Workers of the Baptist church were entertained on Wednesday afternoon at the home of Mrs. Lloyd Frees. There was a large attendance.

This gathering could hardly have taken place in the succession of cheap rental places the family lived in afterwards or in the financial circumstances of those later times. It's

difficult as well to imagine Sennett Pingry standing for the drunken abuse toward Enna that later became common. So when Dad at age seven walked into the kitchen to find dear old Grandfather Pingry standing unconscious with his elbows propped on a counter, sadly to pass away two days later, it was likely the beginning of harder times.

Through it all, Enna maintained a consistent Christian testimony. She did what she could to see that Dad, with younger brother Danny and sister Ruthie, received a Christian upbringing. She loved the Lord's people and remained faithful to her little church. As late as 1950, the printed program for the Omro Baptist centennial celebration lists Enna as teacher for her beloved junior girls' class. (As an aside, the same program mentions Lloyd Frees donating backhoe labor for an addition to the church building, again confirming that he was not without some noble instincts when sober.)

Dad recalls his mother having frequent headaches, a malady he himself would in time be more than acquainted with. She had high blood pressure, and in September 1952, shortly after Dad had left for the Air Force, Enna suffered a severe stroke and was taken by ambulance to the hospital in Oshkosh. She survived, but ten weeks later she was still in the hospital learning to walk again. She was able to return home and God granted her several more years, though she never fully recovered her health. In 1959, after another lengthy illness, she passed into the presence of Christ.

It serves as a warning to any young person reading this that my dear grandmother's outward circumstances on

earth—though not her inner joy in the Lord Jesus—were largely defined by an unhappy marriage. Foolish choices have their consequences. Dad was in fact told by someone, perhaps his mother herself, that he was an “eight-month” baby. This suggests that the marriage with Lloyd may have been entered into as much out of necessity as choice. If this was indeed the case, it does not at first blush reflect well on the character of young Enna, but the whole truth of the matter is impossible to establish at this point, so it is best to reserve judgment.

What is beyond question is that Enna Pingry Frees proved over the course of a lifetime to be one of God’s true, precious saints. She adorned the faith with godly living in the midst of withering circumstances. Hopefully no one will begrudge this detour we have taken from our main story to honor her life and legacy. All her descendants who love the Lord Jesus Christ, and she would surely be thrilled to see how many they are, can trace the family line of grace on Dad’s side back to her.



**Lloyd and Enna Frees proudly display their new treasure, little Richard Lloyd, in what appears to be autumn 1932. Likely these first months of Lloyd and Enna's marriage were reasonably happy ones.**

Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Frees announce the arrival of a ten pound baby boy on Friday, June 10, at St. Mary's hospital at Oshkosh. Both mother and baby are getting along nicely.



TOP: Dad's birth was heralded by a brief note in the *Omro Journal*. Note the factual error, as Dad was born on June 8, 1932. (Perhaps June 10 was the date the paper received the notice.) BOTTOM: This is my favorite picture of my grandmother, Enna Pingry Frees, with Dad and little brother Danny.

## CHAPTER 3

# LAUNCHING OUT

*Only like souls I see the folk thereunder,  
Bound who should conquer, slaves who should  
be kings,—  
Hearing their one hope with an empty wonder,  
Sadly contented in a show of things.*



**B**utterflies were having a field day in his stomach as Dad arrived at the steps of the Oshkosh post office. His destination: the Army recruiting office. The year was 1952 and the Korean War was sputtering toward its ambiguous conclusion. When his draft number had come up, rather than waiting to be called up, he decided to go ahead and enlist. The Army was his choice, and today he was to be sworn in.

Much earlier, while still in high school, he had tried to join the Navy but had failed the physical because of varicose veins. But now that his draft number had come up, he had travelled to Milwaukee for another physical and this time—lo and behold—he passed. He asked about the varicose veins, which had only gotten worse since high school, and the bemused reply was, “What varicose veins?” It

seems when Uncle Sam needs men, he is not finicky about the details.

Now as the twenty-year-old would-be soldier started up the post office steps, he met coming down a man crisply dressed in Air Force blues, who asked Dad where he was going. When Dad said he was there to join the Army, the man replied simply, “You don’t want to do that.” The Air Force recruiter (for so he turned out to be) proceeded to explain all the blessings of Air Force life and the manifold curses of the Army. “Why don’t you come over to my office,” he said, “and let’s see what we can work out.” Before Dad left the courthouse that day he was a sworn-in member of the United States Air Force.

Lifelong destinies hinge on seemingly chance encounters. If Dad had not met the Air Force recruiter on the steps that day, he would have joined the Army. If he had joined the Army, he would not have ended up at an Air Force base in Mobile, Alabama. If he had not been there, he would not have met Mom. If he had not met Mom—it goes on. To disbelieve in the sovereign providence of God in such things is to abandon oneself to despair, because every random left or right turn on a sidewalk could shape the future of generations to come.

A few weeks later, as the train left the Oshkosh station, bound for San Antonio, Texas, and basic training, Dad relished the adventure. It would be his first time outside Wisconsin for any length of time, and it was good to get away from the troubles at home. He arrived at the base after midnight and was immediately hustled to the mess hall for some late night chow. He was indeed hungry, and

savoring the hearty and plentiful food, including the best peach pie he had ever tasted, he thought back on his youth and the all-too-frequent feeling of not having enough to eat. Air Force life was looking better and better.

His enthusiasm was tempered the next day when he made better acquaintance with the august personage known as the drill sergeant. This excessively loud individual explained to Dad and the other recruits, in a profanity-laced diatribe, that he had zero interest in being their friend and that from now on things were going to be done precisely his way. Dad hit a snag right at the start of basic training as he was ordered to the hospital to have surgery for—what else?—varicose veins. So he rode out his first four weeks in San Antonio in a hospital ward. After this dubious adventure basic training proceeded without major incident. The harsh discipline was a rude awakening for a young man admittedly immature and irresponsible, but it was good for him. He persevered through the ordeal and soon landed the lofty title of Airman Third Class.

Then it was on to radio operator training at Keesler Air Base in Biloxi, Mississippi. (This would be the first of five stints for him and his future family in that Gulf Coast city.) He excelled in the course and was well ahead of the learning curve, but in September 1952 he received word that his mother had been rushed to Mercy Hospital in Oshkosh with a life-threatening stroke. She would eventually recover, as we saw in the previous chapter, but Dad took emergency leave to be with her and when he returned to Biloxi he had trouble regaining any enthusiasm for the training. The marching to and from class, the dry lectures, the constant

studying—it all seemed wearisome. Irresponsibly perhaps, but again providentially, he dropped out of radio operator school and accepted instead an assignment as a clerk typist at Brookley Air Force Base in Mobile, Alabama.

During this period of his life there was no real movement on the spiritual front. If the subject came up, Dad would say that he was a Christian. He indeed thought himself to be, based on his youthful profession of faith that earned him the Gideon Bible. But when he tried to pray, it was as though God were nowhere to be found, and to tell the truth he felt more at home around his drinking friends than he did around Christians.

There were plenty of bumps in the road in Dad's early military career. As Dad looks back on it now, he shakes his head at his immaturity in those days. He never had much of an example at home (to say the least) of disciplined, responsible living, so perhaps the surprising thing is that he managed as well as he did. At Brookley his barracks were situated next to the "orderly room," as they called it, where he worked, and it wasn't unusual for him to wake to the sound of Sergeant Ludwig's voice wafting across the yard and through the open window—"Frees, are you up yet? You're late!" On one occasion his negligence in missing a dental appointment earned him the punishment of picking up pine cones two hours a day for two weeks. For committing precisely the same offense a second time, he was restricted to the base for nineteen days. All this was well before Dad's now-legendary little black notebook appeared on the scene, with its intricate reminders and to-do lists.

Those who know him now in all his hyper-organized glory have to chuckle when hearing of these early foibles.

After another incident or two that could have gotten him into serious trouble and even jeopardized his military career, Dad had an awakening of sorts. He determined he was going to shape up and be the model airman. It shows a fine strength of will that he was able to carry out this resolution, and he indeed became an exemplary military man for the remainder of a twenty-one-year career. No doubt his soon-to-be courtship and marriage to Mom knocked off some of the rough edges and helped the cause a great deal.

There was one occasion where the budding young airman got into trouble for being *too much* of a stickler for regulations. It seems the base commander, a full-bird colonel, had returned from an extended absence and needed to have his status changed on the morning report. He telephoned the lowly morning report clerk, who happened to be Airman Frees, and asked him to make the change. The still green-behind-the-ears airman swallowed hard and bravely replied, "I can't do that, sir," and carefully explained that regulations required a certain form to be submitted in such cases.

"But I'm the base commander!" sputtered the colonel—a useful tidbit of information he offered more than once during the conversation—but the conscientious morning report clerk would not budge. After Airman Frees hung up, it was not ten minutes before he found himself in front of his own irate commanding officer, who had received a less-than-cordial call from the colonel. As Airman Frees was

being raked over the coals that day, he got his first real taste of the sacred military dogma of R.H.I.P.—rank has its privileges.

For the moment, though, let's leave our chastened morning report clerk to lick his wounds. While he is busy learning the ropes at Brookley Air Force Base, we'll travel a few hundred miles north and a couple decades back in time to meet the other hero of our story.

## CHAPTER 4

### SARA

*Lo, as some ship, outworn and overladen,  
Strains for the harbor where her sails are  
furled,  
Lo, as some innocent and eager maiden  
Leans o'er the wistful limit of the world.*



**S**craping together food and clothing for five children can be a challenge in the best of times. For Alabama sharecroppers Edgar and Jodie Shockley, toiling their way through the heart of the Great Depression, it was, as the saying goes, a tough row to hoe. With three boys and two girls in tow, they hopscotched the Alabama-Tennessee line farming the land of others for a hard-earned portion of the crops.

Pa and Nanny (as Edgar and Jodie came to be endearingly known to the grandchildren) might be considered dirt poor by today's reckoning, but they didn't see it that way. As Mom, the fourth child and younger of the two girls, puts it:

We didn't know we were in a Depression because everybody else was the same as us. We didn't have anything, but nobody else did either. We were more content

than people are now. We didn't know we were poor and didn't have what we needed to be happy. We were just happy anyway.

In contrast to Dad's childhood, there were no missed meals in the Shockley home. To be sure, nothing fancy found its way to the table—biscuits for breakfast, leftover biscuits and cold fried potatoes for school lunches, cornbread and milk for supper, usually with cabbage or another vegetable from the garden. They killed their own hogs, so meat of some description was often available. Family and friends shared from gardens, and everyone canned for the winter months. During the Depression, being a farmer—even a sharecropper—usually insured there was *something* to eat. Plus, Frank Cothren at the general store was more than willing to let honest farmers buy on credit during the year, to be repaid when the cotton crop came in.

The only time Mom remembers almost missing supper, at least one of the staples of it, was the day the milk jug washed away. They drew their water from a spring a quarter of a mile down the hill from the house, and this also served as a makeshift refrigerator. They kept the milk submerged in the spring and tied to a shrub on the bank. It made a memorable impression on a girl of five or six when a gusher of a rainstorm came and the spring overflowed, taking the precious milk away with it. The accustomed cornbread and milk supper looked dubious until Pa's sister, Aunt Zemba, came by bearing milk and the day was saved.

If the farming life provided steady meals, it also furnished long hours of work under the Alabama sun. As soon as Mom was old enough to wield a hoe, she chopped weeds

from the cotton rows in the spring and summer, and picked cotton by hand in the fall. There were all the typical farm chores—chickens to be fed, eggs to be gathered, corn patches to be weeded, bugs to be plucked from potato vines.

There was plenty of fun and laughter to be had as well. Makeshift toys and a dash of imagination went a long way in those days, and the Shockley children were none the poorer for having to manage without elaborate play-sets and chirping gadgets. The girls played paper dolls with figures cut from the Sears catalog and houses made from shoe boxes. The boys crafted cars from matchboxes and played for hours in the sand. Jump rope was always a favorite, as was fighting over the hammock on the front porch and romping with youngest brother Dean's pet billy goat. As the children got older they would gather with friends on weekends to play Rook or Old Maid or listen to the Grand Ole Opry courtesy of Pa's big battery-operated radio.

Pa's radio served as a beloved family gathering spot. Tuesday evening—NBC's comedy night—was the favorite radio night, and Mom always looked forward to it, though sometimes she had trouble staying awake to the last. During the late harvest time, when it was too cold to pick cotton outside, the family would bring a stash of bolls inside and laugh along with *Fibber McGee & Molly*, *Bob Hope*, and *Red Skelton* while plucking the cotton and tossing the bolls into the roaring fireplace.

Mom recalls with a chuckle the early summer evening her older siblings and their friends brought the radio out on

the porch to listen to the “Fight of the Century” between heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis—himself the son of Alabama sharecroppers—and his German nemesis, Max Schmeling. Mom may not have been aware of it at the time, being only eight, but with Germany and the United States inching towards war the event was crackling with international tension. (President Roosevelt himself hosted Joe Louis at the White House in the run-up to the bout.) What Mom found amusing was that after all the build-up, the eager folks gathered on the porch scarcely had Pa’s radio turned on and were settled in to listen when the fight was over. Joe Louis scored a knockout two minutes into the first round.

Christmas was always a festive occasion in the Shockley household. It was not the consumerist binge the holiday has since become, but neither was it the drab scene painted in some Depression-era accounts. Farm families sold their cotton in the fall, so this was generally the time of year they had cash on hand. Mom usually got a new doll for Christmas, along with fruit and candy, homemade goodies, and plenty of happy memories.

As the proverbial sharecropper’s daughter, it was fitting that Mom spent her early schoolgirl years in the proverbial one-room schoolhouse. (In the interest of full disclosure, Mom notes that it actually had two rooms but they only used one.) It featured, of course, the proverbial pot-belly stove in the middle of the room. Miss Junie Phillips presided over the scholars gathered eagerly (or not) in this humble edifice nestled just across the Tennessee line. Mom had to hike a couple miles to get there, but she had a

favorite cousin to help her giggle away the walk, so it was no great hardship.

By her own reckoning, Sara Shockley could be a naughty girl. Once her aunt asked little Sara to deliver a note to a cousin, and she hid it under a rock instead. No particular reason—she just resented being asked to do it. Then there was the time brother Louis was chopping cotton in the row next to her and she, more or less on a whim, gouged him on the heel with her hoe. She felt badly afterwards, but as she relates it, she occasionally did mean things just for the sake of doing them. I only mention this because we tend to view the children of previous generations through an idealized lens. They peer at us so virtuously from the old black and white photographs that we forget they were much like children today and, above all, were in need of the same Savior from self and sin.

As for church, well, Pa and Nanny were not by and large regular attenders. They had been active in the Presbyterian church early on, before Mom's time, and it is possible they were both converted then. By the time Mom was old enough to remember, Pa and Nanny were no longer attending Sunday services as a rule, though they did make a point of attending revival meetings. Farm couples lived a hard life in that day, working dawn to dusk all week long, and were worn out when the weekend came. This was perhaps no good reason for Pa and Nanny to neglect church attendance, but it should at least soften the criticism from those of us who work our forty-hour-a-week jobs and drive air-conditioned cars to church.

While the boys usually stayed home with Pa and Nanny on Sunday, Mom and older sister Hazel often made their way to Stateline Methodist Church. Stateline shared a pastor with three other churches and so had preaching services only once a month, but a bustling Sunday School was in session every week. The little sanctuary was divided by curtains into makeshift classrooms, and while Mr. Cothren stood to teach the adults, Mom and the others were corralled into youth and children's classes.

As we picture Mom and sister Hazel tripping up the dusty road on Sunday mornings and taking their places among the Sunday School students, it would be nice to report that Mom's presence there sprang from a deep spiritual hunger. But the truth is, church was a fine social occasion and an opportunity to catch up with friends. The busy triangle formed by the Methodist church, Mr. Cothren's general store across the street, and the Cothrens' house next to the church formed the unofficial social hub of the community. Whether it was Sunday morning church, evening young peoples' meetings, shopping meet-ups in the store, get-togethers at the Cothrens' home—there was always something happening. Occasionally some entrepreneurial soul would even set up a few bleachers in the lot behind the store and have an outdoor movie showing.

When one of the area churches held revival meetings, be it Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, or Church of Christ, usually the whole family would pack up and go. One night at a Church of Christ revival Pa and oldest daughter Hazel got under conviction and went forward to join the church. The Church of Christ folks are not known for waiting to

baptize converts, so the very next day Pa and Hazel were baptized at the creek bank. But the fervor didn't last and they never were active in the Church of Christ. Later on, Hazel made a profession of faith at Stateline Methodist during a revival, and she always afterwards believed that to be the true moment of her salvation, making her the first of the Shockley children to trust in Christ.

As the 1930's gave way to the '40's the clouds of war darkened. One Sunday in December 1941, the Shockleys rode up to Vanntown, Tennessee to spend a leisurely afternoon at Aunt Allie Buffalo's house. Eleven-year-old Mom played outside with the children, while the older folks were inside talking and listening to the radio. The children, I'm sure, had no idea of the gravity of it all when someone rushed out to say that the Japanese had that morning attacked Pearl Harbor. They felt it must be something really awful when Aunt Zemma emerged from the house crying. Her adopted son Thomas was already with the army, and of course this latest news meant war.

Seeing it all through the eyes of carefree childhood, Mom was spared much of the trauma and anxiety of the war, though to be sure there are poignant memories—the excited chatter surrounding D-Day, her oldest brother J.M. leaving for the army (he would eventually see action in Germany itself), Nanny's anguish as they watched the next oldest brother, Louis, leave the house and walk toward the bus stop, only seventeen and bound for war. About to be drafted, he had volunteered for the Navy and ended up in Papua New Guinea for the latter stages of the war. Throughout those years, Nanny was nervous whenever she

saw a car she didn't recognize, for fear it might be someone sent to notify the family of something terrible. But God was merciful, and J.M. and Louis made it through safely.

Older sister Hazel had joined the Navy and was stationed in Atlanta. (This was well before the modern insanity of sending wives and daughters into combat areas.) In Atlanta she met and married a young army medic from far-off Maine, our dear Uncle Joe, whose later conversion to Christ was bound up with Mom's, as we'll see shortly. As a Navy gal, Hazel would come home for visits looking pert and splendid in her uniform, and that's when Mom decided that she too would join the service when she was old enough. This would later prove to be more than a passing fancy.

One night shortly after the D-Day invasion in France, Mom's uncle showed up at the door with a stricken appearance. The awful word had just arrived that Mom's cousin Thomas had been killed in action, and Nanny was needed to go stay with Aunt Zemma. Thomas was killed in Brittany, France, most likely in the bloody, house-to-house siege of the port city of Brest, one of the fiercest battles of the Western Front. Years later when stationed in France, Mom and Dad were able to send Aunt Zemma pictures of Thomas' gravesite from the American cemetery in Brittany. The sight of the impressive, well-kept cemetery and memorial was true comfort to her.

Economic conditions actually improved during the war, though commodities were in short supply. As Mom phrases it, people had money but they couldn't buy anything. Everything was rationed—gasoline, sugar, tires, butter, shoes, canned goods. Coffee was next to impossible

to obtain, so folks drank Postum, a fairly nasty coffee substitute made from roasted grain. Shortening and cooking oil were scarce, and indigestible mineral oil was occasionally elevated to kitchen use.

The war dragged on. Mom finished junior high and launched into the high school years, having long since abandoned the quaint, one-room school of her younger years for the highfaluting classrooms of Hazel Green, Alabama. She enjoyed school, made good grades, didn't drink or smoke, and didn't hang around with the wilder set. Giggling in class was her primary vice, and she got called down for it more than once in Miss McLain's Algebra classroom. It seems Miss McLain had a distinctive laugh and Mom's friend had a way of imitating it under her breath that would send them both into a fit of giggles.

For most of the war years the Shockleys lived in a rustic house, or shack, along the main highway between Huntsville and Fayetteville. Many sharecroppers had to move every year or two, but the Shockleys were able to keep the same landlady from the time Mom was in the fifth or sixth grade to the end of their farming days. Mrs. Jessie Spray treated them kindly and fairly, and her son Raymond was a favorite playmate of the children.

The house, though Mom refers to it affectionately as a shack, really was quite livable. It was built in the old dog-trot style, with an open breezeway running down the middle of the house. As girls, Mom and Hazel shared a feather bed in one of the back bedrooms. Far from the fireplace, their room got so chilly on winter nights that Hazel would heat up a flat iron, wrap it in a towel, and thrust it under the

covers to keep her feet warm. The boys occupied the other bedroom, while Pa and Nanny slept in the front living area, and a large kitchen completed the floor plan. Later the dogtrot was closed in to make a third bedroom, and Mom and Hazel migrated to this somewhat cozier sleeping spot.

This humble Shockley manor, as noted, lay along the highway, and all day long troop convoys rumbled past, most bound for the Army training base in Tullahoma, Tennessee. Mom would sometimes sit on top of the out-house (not an elegant perch, admittedly, but functional) with June Gill, a schoolgirl friend, and wave to the soldiers as they passed. It was a gesture that must have brightened the day of more than one lonely young man away from home for the first time.

One Thursday evening late in her sophomore year of high school, Mom was sitting at the table doing homework by oil lamp when the news came over the radio that President Roosevelt had suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and died at his retreat in Warm Springs, Georgia. She remembers the sadness she felt—he was beginning his fourth term and was the only president she and her friends had ever really known. Thankfully, by the time Roosevelt died the war was nearly won. The very next month, May 1945, victory in Europe was declared. Four months later Japan signed the instruments of surrender and it was all over.

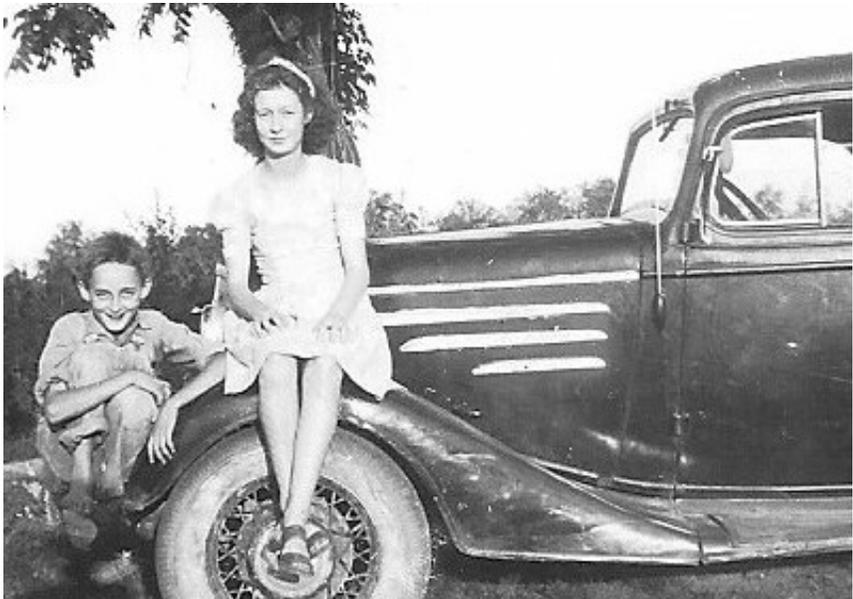
For the Shockley family, as for America as a whole, the war had brought lasting change. With the departure of his two oldest sons to the military, Pa had found it difficult to keep up the farm. City jobs were plentiful with so many able-bodied men overseas, and as the war was grinding to

its conclusion, Pa took a job at the Martin Stove factory in Huntsville, riding back and forth each day with a friend. The family left Mrs. Spray's shack for a rental house up on the corner, the old Posey place as it was called, and then with his factory wages Pa was able to have a small house of his own built on nearby Mulberry Road.

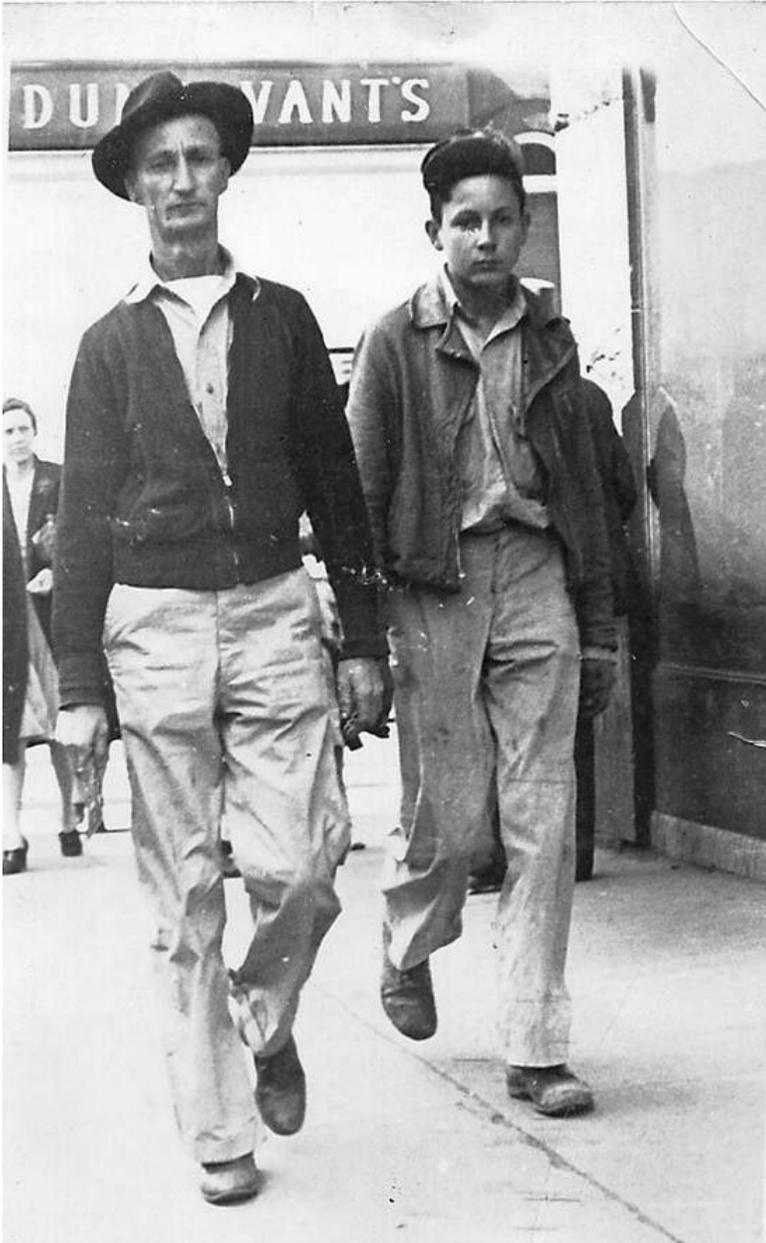
Here for the first time the Shockleys enjoyed the marvel of electricity. Till then, service had been available only as far north as Hazel Green and then started again at the state line, leapfrogging right over Mom and most of her kin. She was at Aunt Zemma's house when the magical moment came and the electrical wires surged to life. Her aunt had a new refrigerator poised for the occasion, so this added to the excitement. At Mom's house on Mulberry Road, in addition to the glorious ceiling lights, they owned an electric iron they could use to try out the new wonder-current, but that was about it. Still they must have felt they were living in the lap of luxury. Though to keep things in perspective, their new-found opulence did not yet extend to indoor plumbing.



**TOP:** Edgar and Jodie Shockley, known to the grandchildren as Pa and Nanny, were Alabama sharecroppers during the Great Depression and World War II. **BOTTOM:** The Shockley clan adopts a stern pose for the camera, with Mom in the foreground at about nine years old. From left, J.M., Hazel, Sara, Nanny, Dean, Pa. Second oldest son, Louis, was likely the photographer.



**TOP: Young Sara Shockley betrays a hint of mischief in this eighth-grade schoolgirl picture. BOTTOM: There's a delightful old-timey flavor to this picture of Mom, in the tenth or eleventh grade, with brother Dean.**



**Edgar "Pa" Shockley walks the sidewalks of downtown Huntsville with Mom's brother Louis in the early 1940's. The shot was taken by a roving professional photographer.**

## CHAPTER 5

# SHOCKLEY REVIVAL

*Even with so soft a surge and an increasing,  
Drunk of the sand and thwarted of the clod,  
Stilled and astir and checked and never-ceasing  
Spreadeth the great wave of the grace of God.*



**M**eanwhile the folks at Stateline Methodist decided it was high time for Sara Shockley and several of her friends to join the church. The pastor and Mrs. Flossie Cothren had been after them about it for some time, and as the annual revival meetings approached, the pressure ratcheted up. Mom was sitting on the front porch when the pastor and revival preacher stopped by for a visit. They presented young Sara a form to sign, pledging to join the church during the upcoming meetings. This was a dubious evangelistic strategy to begin with, and it fizzled in Mom's case as she stubbornly refused to sign.

The meetings began, and the revival preacher turned out to be a fine speaker. Mom still laughs at one of his lines about gossip: "Some people have tongues so long they can sit in the living room and lick the skillet in the kitchen." One night, as the invitation was given after the message, things came to a head. The pastor slipped back to where

Mom and her friends stood and whispered, “Aren’t you all going tonight?” Mom decided she was plenty tired of being pestered about it, so she threw down her song book and headed down the aisle, accompanied by two or three of her friends. This sparked a grand scene of rejoicing, with the ladies of the church hugging each other and tittering: “Isn’t this wonderful!” So Mom was now a member of the church, but she never believed she was a Christian. There was no conviction of sin or drawing of the Holy Spirit. She was just tired of people harassing her about joining the church.

Mom graduated from Hazel Green High School in 1947, adorned with the gold honors tassel. Pa had by now tired of the daily commute, so he sold his newly-built home and moved the family to Huntsville, where he purchased a brand new, four-room house on Seventh Avenue for the grand sum of \$3500. Running water was now added to electricity in the Shockley repertoire, though indoor toilet facilities would have to wait a few years yet. This neat little box house, minus (eventually) the outhouse and plus a tacked-on addition, became “Nanny and Pa’s house” where they spent the rest of their days and which holds such delightful memories for the grandchildren.

Shortly after the move to Huntsville, Mom got her first job at a dime store downtown. She hated it—too slow and boring—so she opted for the more stimulating adventure of serving hungry customers at the Nu-way Café. A distinguished young lady named Mrs. Frances Chestnutt was one of the regulars, stopping by each day for her morning coffee. She had just moved back to Huntsville from Washington, D.C., where she was secretary for Senator John

Sparkman, and at the age of twenty-eight had started a business college across the street from the café. She took a liking to Mom, who was about ten years her junior, and gave her good-natured scoldings for working at such a dead-end job. What she really needed, said Mrs. Chestnutt, was to give business college a shot. This sounded exciting indeed to Mom, but it was a good while later—after she left the café and spent a year working at the General Shoe factory—that Mom finally showed up on Mrs. Chestnutt's doorstep to take the plunge.

While all this was taking place, the Holy Spirit had begun moving in a powerful way in the Shockley family. We've already seen that oldest daughter Hazel had been brought to Christ as a youth at Stateline Methodist Church. Now second-oldest son Louis, with his wife Violet, started attending a Baptist church in Huntsville with friends and soon came to know Christ as Lord and Savior. Mom would be next, as God began finally to stir her heart to an interest in spiritual things.

It started with, of all things, her taking a liking to Southern gospel music. She started listening on the radio and made her way to some of the singings at the civic center and various churches. With the radio tuned to the Christian station she couldn't help hearing other broadcasts as well, and she found herself intrigued by a flamboyant Baptist preacher named J. Otis King. Before she knew it, Mom, sister Hazel, and Hazel's husband Joe were riding the bus on Sundays to Rev. King's church on the north side of Huntsville.

With his white suits and bow tie, Rev. J. Otis King cut a fine figure as he paced back and forth on the platform. He was a colorful preacher and not above using theatrical antics. During one sermon on death and eternity he arranged to have a coffin rolled down the aisle as he spoke, furnished with a (fortunately live) person inside. God chooses His instruments according to His own purposes, and this old-fashioned revivalist with his unconventional style would be used to bring young Sara Shockley to faith in Christ.

The decisive moment came one Sunday night as Rev. King preached on the second coming of Christ, a favorite theme of his. When the invitation was given, Hazel went forward to recommit her life to the Lord and join the church. Joe, who had no church background to speak of, then walked forward to profess faith in Christ. Finally, Mom stepped out. This time there was no petulant tossing down the hymnal in disgust, but a deep concern for her soul. When she prayed to receive Christ that night, she thought there should be a good feeling inside, or something, but she felt nothing special as she rode the bus home and went to bed. When she awoke the next morning, the feelings of release and freedom came—"like it was all rolling away from me," she says—and the burden of sin was gone. She was baptized the following Sunday night.

The three of them, Mom, Hazel, and Joe, attended J. Otis King's church for a while, but soon were attracted to a little fellowship not two blocks from Pa and Nanny's house. Lowe Mill Baptist Church had been slowly dying on the vine for years and had practically shriveled to nothing before

calling as pastor an energetic young man named Johnny Anderson. Pastor Johnny worked the early shift at the cotton mill, but in the evenings was out beating the bushes in the neighborhood, meeting people and sharing the gospel. Before long the church was bursting at the seams, and our threesome felt led to pitch in and help. Joe soon became Sunday School superintendent, Hazel a Sunday School teacher, and Mom was elected church treasurer. Pastor Johnny handed her the church's accumulated financial resources in a coffee can. She could never have imagined that some forty-five years later she would come back to this very church, later named Central Baptist, as pastor's wife.

God was not finished working in the Shockley clan. Soon after Mom was saved, she went to a tent revival held by J. Otis King in the lot next to General Shoe factory. When the invitation was given, she was surprised to see her younger brother Dean coming forward from the other side of the tent to trust Christ for salvation. Oldest brother J. M. resisted the call of the gospel the longest. One day he ripped the ligaments in his knee climbing a utility pole at Redstone Arsenal, where he worked as an electrician. The pain must have been severe, because it wrung from him a promise that if the Lord brought him through this, he would start attending church. On his first Sunday out of the hospital he kept his promise and hobbled through the doors of a gospel-preaching Baptist church. That day he was soundly converted and became, in Mom's words, "the best Christian of us all."

With all their children now active Christians, Pa and Nanny started back to church at the neighborhood Methodist church in Huntsville. They were faithful from then on, especially Nanny, who loved not only the Sunday worship but the women's meetings as well. Dear old Pa was, shall we say, not quite as fervent in attendance as Nanny. He famously said on one occasion: "The Bible don't say a thing about goin' to church on Sunday night and Wednesday night." Pa's pronouncement may not make for sound doctrine, but the family has always found it good for a chuckle.



**TOP: Mom spent the heart of her childhood and early youth in this “shack,” as she affectionately calls it, belonging to the Shockleys’ long-time landlady, Mrs. Jessie Spray. BOTTOM: Pa, Nanny, Mom, and brother Dean grace the porch of the old “Posey place” they rented during Mom’s junior year in high school. The three oldest children were away in the military.**



**TOP: Mom graduated from Hazel Green High School in 1947 with the gold honors tassel. BOTTOM: Sister Hazel and her husband, Joe Robertson, met in Atlanta during World War II. Uncle Joe and Mom were later brought to Christ on the same night at Rev. J. Otis King's church in Huntsville.**

# Baptist Revival Crusade Starts Tonight In Lima

A Revival Crusade will be conducted tonight through Sunday at the Woodlawn Baptist Church at the corner of Judkins and Spencerville Road by Rev. J. Otis King. The revival meetings will start at 7:30 p.m. nightly.

A native of Huntsville, Ala., Rev. King has been pastor of a Baptist Church in Huntsville for the past 14 years. During that time he has baptised 1800 persons, organized three Baptist Churches, ordained 37 ministers and been active in church affairs.

In addition Rev. King has a daily radio show which is entering its 11th consecutive year.

Subjects to be covered during this revival crusade will be:

- "God's Three Deadlines;
- The Second Coming of the Lord;
- The Plan for Salvation;
- The Security of the Saints;
- The Sin That No One Talked About; and



J. Otis King

—A Tried Religion.”

Rev. King said there would be special quartet music each night. Each night of service has been given a special name by Rev. King.

Tonight will be family night; Thursday will be Sunday School night; Friday will be good neighbor night when everyone is to de-

## Evangelistic Set At Spencerville

Rev. Owen W. Glassburn, evangelist, will conduct evangelistic meetings at Spencerville Friends Church, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday mornings and evenings.

Rev. Galaburn has pastored for 13 years in Ohio, Iowa, and North Carolina. For the past six years he has served as the Field Evangelist for Sunday School, Christian Endeavor and Malone College for the Ohio Yearly Meeting of the Friends Church. He is currently serving on boards of several national inter-demoninational religious organizations.

Rev. Glassburn is the newly appointed vice president and sales manager of the Higley Press. His new responsibilities include promotion in the sale of Christian literature and Sunday School supplies.

## DAR Hasn't United Nations

The Lighter Side  
By FRANK ELEAZER  
United Press International

A Lima, Ohio, newspaper from April 1959 provides a grainy photo of pastor and revivalist J. Otis King (several years after Mom knew him) and a write-up of one of his typical evangelistic campaigns. The sermon on the “Second Coming of the Lord” was perhaps much the same as the one Rev. King preached the night Mom and Uncle Joe were saved.

## CHAPTER 6

# TOGETHER

*Dreams of the glow and glory of the distance,  
Wonderful wooing and the grace of tears,  
Dreams with what eyes and what a sweet  
insistence  
Lovers are waiting in the hidden years.*



Not all youthful ambitions survive the years, but this one did. As a teenager Mom had set her heart on joining the military, as we have seen, and after she graduated from Mrs. Chestnutt's North Alabama College of Commerce the old itch returned. She had been going to school at night and working a full-time job by day in the transportation department at Huntsville's Redstone Arsenal. She loved her job and could easily have persuaded herself to stay, but at the age of twenty-two it was now or never for her ambitions of joining the service.

So it was that the summer of 1952 found her on the first airplane ride of her life, bound for Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio. She doesn't recall why exactly she settled on the Air Force. It may have been nothing more profound than liking the Air Force uniforms best. At any rate, she arrived that first night after midnight, and by the

time she crawled into her bunk it was after 2:00 A.M. She naturally assumed her kind mentors would let her sleep to a reasonable hour, but no such luck. At 5:00 her slumber was cut short by a gruff, “Airmen, hit the floor!” and thus began life as a WAF, the name then given to Women in the Air Force.

Sergeant Manley, her tactical instructor, actually did turn out to be helpful and understanding, particularly compared to the ogre-ish drill sergeants inflicted on the male recruits. Of course there was the typical round of marching, early morning hikes, kitchen duty, cleaning barracks, classes, more marching, more classes. Mom made it through without any notable troubles. With the early rising and wearying cycle of activities, one of the biggest challenges proved to be staying awake in class. During breaks she would hustle back to the barracks and plop down on the floor (so as not to wrinkle her inspection-ready bunk) for a few precious minutes of sleep.

Normally the next step after basic was technical school, but thanks to Mrs. Chestnutt’s tutelage and Mom’s work experience, she was able to test out of this and move directly into her first assignment. She was allowed to choose the state where she preferred to be stationed—Alabama, naturally—but there were no guarantees. So when she received her first orders hot off the press, she tore them open, and her eyes skimmed quickly down to the location: Brookley Air Force Base, Mobile, Alabama.

So then, we have successfully brought both of our main characters through their early years and escorted them to the same modest air base on the shores of Mobile

Bay. All that remains is to bring the two young people together, and this turns out to be an easy chore. Mom had come through San Antonio for basic training just after Dad did, but because she was able to skip technical school she actually ended up at Brookley a few months ahead of him. When he arrived on base, fresh (as you recall) from dropping out of radio operator school in Biloxi, their paths crossed the very first day.

He was perched on a hallway bench at Brookley headquarters waiting to be checked in when the smiling secretary bustled past. After the non-eventful flight from Biloxi and the arrival in the drab military confines of Brookley, this pretty young WAF certainly brightened the view. Not that he was particularly interested. There were plenty of pretty girls in the world and, besides, he was semi-attached at the time to an Omro schoolteacher he had met shortly before he left Wisconsin. He certainly had no intention of getting roped in so quickly by a southern girl. He noted the name tag—Shockley.

As we've already anticipated in a previous chapter, Dad settled into a role as morning report clerk in the orderly room, and we've already noted some of his trials and tribulations as a new airman. As he carried his morning report to headquarters each day, he sometimes ran across Sara Shockley. But if they talked at all, the conversations were brief and work-related. Here is Mom's analysis of the situation from a tongue-in-cheek account she later wrote about their courtship.

About the only conversations we had together pertained to business matters, and I always failed in my attempts to make them of a more personal nature. I couldn't figure out what the trouble was, but I learned from him later that he had nothing against me personally; he just didn't care to become involved in any way with a "Rebel." Since coming to Alabama he had developed horrors of marrying a Southern girl and being forced to eat corn pone and hominy grits throughout his lifetime.

In spite of Mom's light-hearted spin here, he actually *had* noticed her, though it is true they had only spoken in passing. Things might have gone no further if not for a perfectly-timed bureaucratic reshuffling. It seems the powers-that-be decided to move Mom's unit from headquarters to the orderly room where Dad worked. Dad joined in the general grumbling about the hassle involved in such a move and how crowded things would be with the extra people. But in the back of his mind he couldn't help thinking that *she* would be coming and that might be, well, interesting.

As it turns out, she almost didn't come. Her secretarial skills were coveted and the original plan was for her to be retained at headquarters. She was fond of her workmates, though, and had her heart set on making the move with them. So she engaged in a lobbying campaign—grumbling might be the more accurate word—until finally she was allowed to go. It was another one of those little forks in the road that could have gone either way.

Behold, her new desk in the orderly room was only a few feet from his. Now his case was indeed hopeless. His aversion to "rebel" girls notwithstanding and in spite of the

dangling loose ends of the relationship with the Omro schoolteacher, he found himself smitten. It was only a few days before the decisive episode happened, and it involved—a pencil.

The occasion was the monthly commander's briefing, and the orderly room crew was piling into cars to go to the base theater for the drab event. Dad timed it just right so that he ended up stuffed in the back seat of one of the cars next to her. As morning report clerk, one of his duties was to take roll at the briefing, so he had his roll sheet and a pencil with him. Just as they pulled up to the theater, she playfully grabbed the pencil from him and held it hostage. They tussled over it for a few moments and were the last to spill out of the car, laughing.

After the commander's words of wisdom were exhausted, Dad again executed perfect timing to end up beside Sara as they exited the theater. He asked her out that very night, and she accepted. Dinner, dancing, strolling in the moonlight—they enjoyed one another's company late into the night. He noted with satisfaction that while he drank his accustomed spirited beverage, she ordered a soft drink. It was hypocritical, no doubt, but he preferred girls who didn't drink or smoke. She would later lay down the law: if he wanted her, he too would have to stick to soft drinks.

The next evening he was worried she wouldn't want to go out since they had stayed out so late the night before. But she was as eager as he was, and they decided to brave a light rain and walk together to the Triple X hamburger joint. (Admittedly this was an eyebrow-raising name for the

popular hangout just outside the base, but Dad and Mom assure me there were no immoral connotations to it.) As they strolled along, the light rain became a downpour, and they tumbled into the Triple X dripping wet and laughing.

From that point on they were inseparable. They didn't always have money for the Triple X or other fine establishments, so they would spend evenings together enjoying free snacks and television in the Service Club or listening to records at the library. Before parting for the night they might bounce around the base a few times in the free shuttle bus. Usually at that time of night they had it to themselves, or nearly so.

During one of those carefree nights at the Service Club, Mom joined a free bingo game and won a little yellow radio that was destined to make its way into family lore. As the story goes, when Mom went home to Huntsville during the holidays that year, Dad and one of his buddies found themselves out of money on Christmas Eve and solved the problem by hocking Mom's new radio. Dad did faithfully redeem it before Mom returned, or at least before she had been back long enough to notice it missing, but sheepishly told her what he had done. Fortunately the lurid confession did nothing to derail their courtship, and the incident has been the source of good-natured banter ever since.

That brief separation over the Christmas holidays only served to confirm their devotion to one another. The evening of her return, Dad paced eagerly on the train station platform with one of their favorite Perry Como songs running through his thoughts, as it often had while she was away:

*Watching the night go by,  
Wishing that you could be,  
Watching the night with me,  
Into the night I cry:  
Hurry home,  
Come home to me!*

He had the briefest of heart-stopping moments when she stepped off the train side by side with another young man, chatting and laughing. With a twinge of irrational fear, Dad could picture the two walking off arm in arm, leaving him standing there desolate and alone. But the imagined rival turned out to be merely a fellow passenger who had struck up a conversation the last few minutes of the trip, and when Mom's eyes found Dad she rushed into his embrace, as eager to see him as he was to see her.

Yes, the two were decidedly in love, which sometimes made life in the orderly room tricky. On one occasion Dad was called into the Lieutenant's office and warned about public displays of affection. It seems Mom was spotted with her feet propped up on Dad's knees getting a foot rub. It was perfectly innocent (her feet were cold, after all) but not to be tolerated while on duty. No harm came of it, and since my two primary sources disagree on who instigated the forbidden conduct, we'll press on without assigning blame.

It is sad but true that a number of Dad's previous relationships with young ladies were not altogether chaste and right. He was, as we have partly seen already, afflicted by poor judgment and loose morals in those years. We could be forgiven then for assuming he might try to take liberties with young Sara during their three-month court-

ship, but this proved not to be the case at all. There was an unspoiled purity about this sweet and sprightly Christian girl that he not only appreciated but prized and guarded. As Mom notes:

I can truthfully say that he treated me with the utmost respect any time I was with him. I think that is one reason I fell in love with him. Never once did he even suggest anything immoral, and we had plenty of opportunities when we were together.

Talk of engagement and marriage naturally began to percolate as the courtship progressed. Staff Sergeant Nellie Crowe, pay clerk and fellow inhabitant of the orderly room, seemed to take a particular interest in nudging our smitten pair toward matrimony. From her desk directly behind Dad's she from time to time dropped pointed hints. She waved off his "we can't afford it" excuse, putting pencil to paper to show him how things could work. Nellie reminded him among other things that the Air Force would pay a generous housing allowance to each of them if they married and moved off base.

It was only a matter of time before the inevitable happened. Mom gives us a front-row seat:

Even though we'd been seeing each other daily, it still came as a surprise to me when he proposed. It was a cold, rainy night in January, and we were lounging in the Service Club enjoying coffee and donuts. I had noticed that he seemed extremely nervous, but it hadn't occurred to me that he was trying to gather enough courage to ask me to become his wife.

He had been unusually silent most of the evening, and each time he tried to say something, he couldn't seem to find the right words. Finally, with determination in his voice, he said, "Honey, I never thought I could become this fond of a 'Rebel,' but now that I have, I would like--." At this point he was interrupted by the club hostess who came over to invite us to join a pool tournament that was in progress in the next room.

I realized by this time that he was trying to ask the magic question that would make me a very happy gal, so I tried desperately to get the conversation back to its former status. Just as things were going my way again—we were talking about apartments, children, and so forth—one of our co-workers came in and invited himself to join us for a cup of coffee. I was getting rather worried, because I was afraid that Dick might get disgusted and give up the idea entirely.

But as soon as we were alone again, he startled me by getting right to the point. "Honey, did you know that if we got married right away, we can move off base into a nice little apartment and get away from those weekly barracks inspections?" Well, those weren't exactly the words I had expected to hear, but I lost no time in letting him know that I was all for it. So, we set our wedding date for the following Monday.

About twenty-five people showed up at the base chapel on Monday, February 1, 1954, for the grand occasion. Lieutenant White, the base's WAF commander, was there. Major Davis, for whom Mom was a favorite babysitter, made an appearance, and Mrs. Davis brought the rice to shower on the new couple. One of Dad's barracks buddies was best man, while Nellie Crowe topped off her role as matchmaker and excuse-remover by serving as maid of honor. Humor for the event was contributed by Dad's brand new shoes, which

squeaked at his every movement. When the wedding party knelt for solemn prayer, the resulting squeaks caused Mom and Nellie to break into barely-stifled giggles. It was like Mrs. McLain's Algebra class all over again.

But girlish giggles notwithstanding, Chaplain Harvey persevered through the sacred vows and the holy and happy deed was done. With no money or leave saved up for a honeymoon, Dad and Mom moved straight into an off-base apartment, launching a lifetime together that has now stretched just over sixty years.

Ironically, almost immediately after they got married, the Air Force stopped paying those double housing allowances for couples that Nellie Crowe liked to talk about. This detail is significant to our story since it took away one of the financial incentives for Mom, now that she was married, to stay in the military. So at the first opportunity she said goodbye to WAF-hood and took a civil service job instead.

To most observers the two had the look and feel of a fine Christian couple. On Sunday mornings they walked a few blocks to a downtown Methodist church and took their place in the pews. It was convenient and Dad took a liking to the pastor there. And when they finally were able to celebrate a late honeymoon some months later, they chose to spend a couple nights in New Orleans attending a Billy Graham crusade. Appearances do not always tell the tale, however, and Mom could sense something amiss in Dad's life and his way of thinking that didn't quite track with his profession of faith.

Though in the providence and mercy of God it worked out in their case, Dad and Mom would be the first to say it

is a grave mistake for a believer to marry an unbeliever. For the sake of any of our children or grandchildren reading this, I would not want to inadvertently leave any other impression. As Dad's own mother would testify with bitter tears, playing with fire in courtship and marriage more often than not leads to disaster. Dad did profess to be a Christian, and in many ways it seemed a credible profession, so Mom cannot be charged with a deliberate choice to marry an unbeliever, though she admits she was not as close to the Lord as she could have been in those days. Once again the truly striking thing is the sovereign goodness of God to our family in working all these things together for good.

Many years after the two young lovers said their vows at Brookley Air Force Base, Dad wrote the following tribute for a friend's wedding anniversary. It aptly describes his own faithful union with Mom through the years:

*A mystery!  
That two should be one.  
But why should it be?  
God has declared it from Eternity.*

*A mystery!  
That through the trials and tears  
Love should last  
Through all the years.*

*A mystery!  
That the bond of love should tighter grow  
As you give all  
To each other here below.*



**It's Saturday down-time at basic training in San Antonio, and Mom sports the WAF dress uniform near the entrance to the barracks. As she recalls, she was on the way to catch a movie with friends at the base theater.**



**TOP:** This portrait of Mom as a young WAF, made while on leave in Huntsville, turned out so well it ended up on display in the photographer's downtown window. **BOTTOM:** Two months into their courtship, the festive couple celebrates New Year's Eve, December 31, 1953, in downtown Mobile.



**TOP: Happily in love, and a long way from Omro, Wisconsin, Dad enjoys some time off base in the mild Alabama early winter. BOTTOM: Dad and Mom take each other's picture as they prepare to move into their first dwelling, the upstairs portion of this house, on their wedding day.**



**The wedding ceremony over, Dad and Mom unwind on the steps of the Brookley Air Force Base chapel on February 1, 1954.**

## CHAPTER 7

# TRIUMPH OF GRACE

*God, who to glean the vineyard of His choosing  
Sent them evangelists till day was done,  
Bore with the churls, their wrath and their refusing,  
Gave at the last the glory of His Son.*



Sitting at the used shipping crate that served as a makeshift desk, Dad must have wondered what he was doing some fifteen thousand miles from his new bride back in Alabama. Nine sweet months of marriage had not been without struggles and adjustments, but they were the happiest times by far that he had ever experienced. Then had come that dreaded staple of military life, the overseas assignment.

So in November 1954 Dad found himself aboard the USS Breckinridge, a battleship converted to troopship, bound for Korea and the smoldering remains of the just-ended Korean War. The voyage was far from pleasant. Conditions were crowded, with rows of hammocks strung five-high in the stuffy sleeping quarters, and the seas were choppy to say the least. Dad recalls standing at the railing on deck staring up at the waves towering thirty feet overhead. In the dining hall he quickly learned the art of eating

with one hand and clinging to his tray with the other to keep it from sliding out of reach as the ship pitched back and forth. All this was a sure recipe for sea-sickness, and he was tormented by it for the first seventeen days. With the rough seas even some of the hardened seamen succumbed to the malady.

After about twenty-five days the voyage came to a merciful end. Dad and the other airmen were deposited at Itami Air Force Base near Osaka, Japan, to await a flight to Korea. But the day before he was to fly out, Dad got word that his assignment was changed. He was not Korea-bound after all, but would be staying put at Itami. This was not a bad trade except that the original Korean assignment was for twelve months, and now with the change of location he was to be apart from Mom for seventeen long, depressing months.

The loneliness, boredom, and ready temptations of life so far from home combined to make this perhaps the most dangerous period of Dad's life, spiritually speaking. Alcohol, always a lurking danger in his life, threatened now to claim its prey. Evening after evening, he would get off work and head for the airmen's club. As he later put it, he became as close as one could get—and as close as he ever got—to being a bona fide alcoholic, and that's saying something considering how much he drank in his post-high school years.

And who could be surprised if he had followed that path? I have often thought how easily I could have, like Dad, had an alcoholic for a father. By all rights that is how this story should have ended. But God had set His sover-

eign mercy on this lonely airman thousands of miles from home, and his sin would go so far and no farther.

Dad had his drinking buddies, to be sure, but God also saw to it that he fell in with a group of fervent believers in Christ. Indeed, fervent may be an understatement. This band of young men would walk down the street on base singing hymns at the top of their voices, ready and bold in their testimony for the Lord Jesus.

The leader of this hot-hearted group was a young airman named Bob Kelshaw. Always bold, sometimes abrasive, you never had to wonder where he stood. Dad recalls the time an unsuspecting airman let loose a string of profanities at the mess hall table. Bob Kelshaw shot him a stern look and said, "You sure believe in putting one foot in hell, don't you?" Bob thought nothing about walking up to someone on the street and asking if they were a Christian.

Dad was never a part of the bold witnessing or hymn-singing in the streets, but he did enjoy "buddying around," as he put it, with Bob Kelshaw and his friends. He would attend chapel services with them on Sunday evenings and even stick around for the lively after-meeting of singing and testimonies. Dad still professed to be a Christian, but those around him must have noticed the inconsistencies in his life. Nonetheless, precious seed was being planted, and the time for God to display His saving grace in Dad's life was drawing near.

While Dad was in Japan, Mom moved back to her old room in Pa and Nanny's house. She was hired again into her old Redstone Arsenal post and eventually became secretary for Mr. Wilkins, the transportation director. She

made good money and was able to help fund an addition to Pa and Nanny's house, featuring indoor facilities. It was a glorious day indeed when the old outhouse was no more.

There is no question Mom could have had a highly successful career in her own right. Mr. Wilkins bragged to someone, who passed it on to Mom, that she was the best secretary he ever had. Years later she ran into one of her former co-workers at the Arsenal who told her that her old position was now perched high up on the pay scale. But her loyalties rested with Dad, not her own career, and many of those secretarial talents and people skills ended up being devoted, not to the paper-shuffling grind of the civil service, but to the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In 1956 Dad returned from Japan and rejoined Mom to begin the next adventure. His enlistment term was nearing an end, and as a re-enlistee he had his choice of assignments. For no particular reason, other than it sounded like a nice place to live, Dad chose Orlando, Florida. It was a nondescript little city in those days before the advent of Walt Disney World turned it into a bustling metropolis in the 1970's, and our young couple moved into a tiny garage apartment shaded by an orange tree. Six weeks later they were able to buy their first house, spanking new for \$9500, in a busy Orlando subdivision called Englewood Park.

There was a new and growing Southern Baptist church in the next neighborhood over, Azalea Park Baptist Church, and Dad and Mom soon settled in as members. For Dad, being active in church involved some hypocrisy, of course, but for the most part it was not of the deliberately deceptive sort. He had no real love for the Scriptures but

was not utterly without interest in spiritual things. Mom recalls him on occasion engaging in conversation about the things of the Lord, and even coming home from church one Sunday talking about how wonderful it was going to be to see Jesus someday. But this was all surface-level faith so far.

In another of the surprising displays of resolution sprinkled across his life story even before he came to know Christ, immediately upon his return to the States Dad stopped drinking entirely. It was not that difficult, he notes, because the wrenching loneliness that fueled his drinking habit in Japan was now past. He did experience one relapse soon after he was stationed in Orlando, when he found himself out with a friend who was drinking. Dad began the evening with a soft drink but was soon cajoled into the heavier stuff and ended up slinking home half drunk. Remarkably, in the mercy of God, though he had come perilously close to following his father's path, he never drank another drop to this day.

Giving up drinking was a timely decision, as now the children began to arrive in the cozy Orlando home: first David in 1957, then Jim in 1958, and I was added to the brood the following year. Having three preschoolers at once was not for the faint of heart, but Mom and Dad hung in there and made fine young parents. Not to sound self-serving, but Mom tells me that we boys drew compliments everywhere we went for being so well-behaved.

Shortly after second son Jim was born, things came to a crisis for Dad (graciously!) in his relationship to Christ and the gospel. In the epistle to the Galatians, Paul recalls

the time when, as he put it, “it pleased God to reveal His Son in me.” That mighty and merciful moment had now come for Dad, and it would be sparked by a verse from that same epistle. All the years of false profession would be swept away in the divine work of regeneration, and the little house in Englewood Park would become holy ground in Dad’s life and the history of our family.

While Dad was now into his second term in the Air Force, his bold-as-a-lion Christian friend from Japan, Bob Kelshaw, had gotten out of the military. Bob had enrolled in tiny Southland Bible Institute in a place called Wolf Pit Hollow, Kentucky, where he met and married Ruth Haaland, a young housemother at the school. In December 1958 Bob and Ruth came to Orlando for a few days’ visit. Bob had not changed. He embarrassed Dad by sharing Christ with the baggage guy at the bus station, then even more by witnessing to the next door neighbors, and of course he spoke often with Dad about the things of the Lord. We’ll let Dad pick up the story:

During his visit, I realized that he had something in his life that I didn’t have in mine. He embarrassed me one day by witnessing to my neighbor. He didn’t know it (or maybe he did), but he was witnessing to me also. He was so enthusiastic about the Bible and what it had to say that I too became interested in the Book I had shunned for years.

The day Bob left, Dad went out and bought a new Bible and began to read it. That evening, or perhaps it was the next, he came across Galatians 2:20, “I am crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but Christ liveth

in me, and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Those last words in the verse struck him with convicting force.

I suddenly realized what a sinful hypocrite I had been all through the years! It dawned upon me that Christ had died for me, Richard Frees, personally. That night I accepted Him as *my* Savior and Lord.

Finally the seed had come to fruition, the seed the Sower had mercifully planted and watered, first through a faithful mother, then through Pastor Wiegner and others at Omro Baptist Church, through the brief, burning testimony of Ed Tritt, certainly through a born-again Alabama bride, and finally through zealous Bob Kelshaw. Now God Himself gave the increase. As Dad put it, “I was driven to my knees that night, because I realized that Christ died for me personally.”

Everything was new and Dad was filled with the joy of the Lord. The very next morning he went to see his pastor and asked for a job to do for the Lord. The pastor managed to find a class of young boys for Dad to teach, at least one of whom would come to Christ as a result of Dad’s witness. He signed up for visitation and door-to-door witnessing. As evidence of Dad’s bright testimony and rapid growth as a Christian, less than a year after his conversion he was ordained as a deacon at Azalea Park Baptist Church.

A neighborhood drugstore had a display of Christian booklets, many of them published by the *Back to the Bible* ministry of radio evangelist Theodore Epp, and Dad de-

voured these as a brand new believer. He stopped by the store whenever he got the chance and scoured the rack for any he had not yet read. On these ten-cent booklets with their simple, conservative Biblicism Dad cut his doctrinal teeth.

God saw to it that other vibrant Christian literature crossed his path as well, particularly missionary biographies like Elizabeth Elliot's *Through Gates of Splendor*, Isobel Kuhn's *Green Leaf in Drought Time*, and the magnificent two-volume life of Hudson Taylor by Mrs. Howard Taylor, which Dad eagerly plowed through at some point in those early days. Though he was not destined to be a full-time missionary himself, this early passion for missions nourished his spiritual life, and he did indeed have opportunities in future Air Force tours to serve the Lord in needy overseas fields.

Dad never considered himself much of a public speaker, to say the least. Speech class in high school was more or less a disaster. Once he was called on to give an extemporaneous speech, but when he got to the front of the class he could not produce a single word. He stood there mutely frozen for a minute or two until the teacher mercifully told him to take a seat. No wonder then that when he was asked to share a brief word during a special service at Azalea Park Baptist Church, he agreed only reluctantly and with much fear and trembling.

When the big day came he found himself so nervous he could hardly talk. But as the time drew near, a verse of Scripture, one of the very texts he was planning to use in his talk, struck him full force: "Lo, I am with you always,

even unto the end of the world.” If Christ had promised to be with him always, why, He would certainly be with him right then and there! God so powerfully spoke to him by this thought that he was transformed from being so nervous he could scarcely speak to actually being eager for his turn to come. He stood before the whole church and spoke the Word of God with boldness, a joyful foreshadowing of his future ministry for Christ.

Near the end of our time in Orlando, Dad and Mom (and I, though I was oblivious of it) experienced a miraculous deliverance. I had been born two months early, weighing just four pounds and seven ounces—a more perilous thing in that day than it is today—and at three months of age I contracted a grave case of pneumonia. The doctors prepared Dad and Mom for the worst, and we found later that the hospital staff did not expect the tiny baby to survive. During the darkest time, with Mom waiting anxiously by my hospital crib-side in the middle of the night, I suddenly started crying with all my infant might, something I had been unable to do before. The next morning when the doctors took me for x-rays, they found to their astonishment that the pneumonia was gone and my little lungs were clear. It was a remarkable answer to prayer and a demonstration of God’s mercy that still brings tears to Mom’s eyes as she speaks of it.



**TOP:** The soon-to-be-parted couple had portraits made for each other in November 1953, shortly before Dad's departure for Japan. **BOTTOM:** With an "I love you" penned on the back, Dad sent Mom this picture taken aboard the U.S.S. Breckinridge.

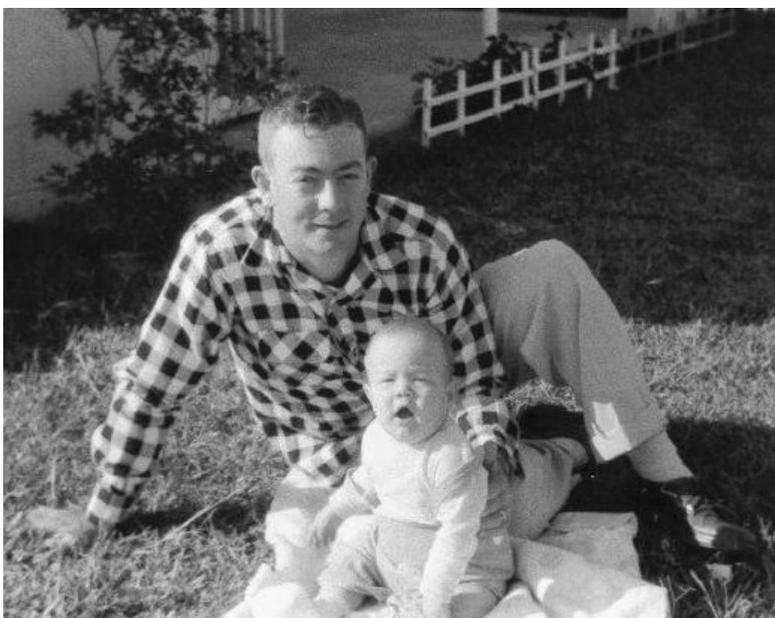
TRIUMPH OF GRACE



**TOP: Dad's year and a half away from Mom in Japan was a time of grave spiritual danger, but much gospel seed was planted as well. BOTTOM: He relaxes at his desk in the barracks at Itami Air Force Base, Japan, with Mom's picture in the background.**



**Mom lived with Pa and Nanny in Huntsville while Dad was in Japan. She is pictured here next to the '53 Ford she and Dad bought soon after they were married. On the plus side of the painful separation, it did result in a number of photographs of both Dad and Mom that we would not otherwise possess, lovingly made for each other and exchanged across the Pacific.**



**TOP:** Back from Japan and now a new father, Dad relaxes in the yard in Orlando, Florida, with firstborn son David. **BOTTOM:** Bob Kelshaw was Dad's friend during Japan days and afterward. Bold in testimony for Christ, he was powerfully used by the Lord in Dad's conversion.

## CHAPTER 8

### FRANCE AND BACK

*Witness the men whom with a word he gaineth,  
Bold who were base and voiceful who were dumb;  
Battle, I know, so long as life remaineth,  
Battle for all, but these have overcome.*



**W**ith the orange groves of Florida in the rearview mirror, in 1960 Dad headed for his second stint at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, this time for nine months of training in radio communications. A modest house on Crawford Street in east Biloxi was our new abode, close to a doughnut shop as the children fondly remember. Also nearby was the red brick edifice of East Howard Baptist Church, and in another of those choices that seem inauspicious at the time but prove to be life-altering, this became our church home for those nine months.

East Howard had its beginnings in 1904 when the First Baptist Church of Biloxi launched a mission Sunday School in Point Cadet, the fishing and factory corner of the city. The mission soon morphed into the Second Baptist Church of Biloxi, with thirteen charter members, and a small wooden building was erected at the corner of Howard and Maple Streets. In the 1950's this was replaced by the

current brick structure, later ravaged by hurricanes Camille and Katrina but still standing today, and the name changed to East Howard Baptist Church. As we will see in later chapters, this church and its friendly people were to be interwoven in our family's history for the next two decades.

After the nine months in Biloxi, it was on to our first overseas adventure as a family. In the Air Force's wise dispensation, Dad became site chief at a radio relay station near the northern tip of France, a link in the Cold War-era communications chain between London and Paris. We took up residence first in a beachside apartment on the English Channel in Le Treport, then eventually rented a house in sleepy Abbeville.

As it turns out, this family adventure was almost squelched before it started. In November 1960, as Dad and Mom were getting things squared away to leave for France, President Eisenhower unexpectedly announced a ban on military dependents travelling overseas. In fact, almost 300,000 family members already overseas were to be brought home. This startling order was meant to ward off a budding monetary crisis—something to do with the outflow of U.S. dollars—but it predictably sent military morale into a nose dive. For Mom it was a heavy blow. Once again she waved goodbye to a plane carrying Dad to a far-off land. Once again she settled in Huntsville to ride things out, this time in the house next door to Pa and Nanny, owned by her brother J.M., and this time with three children to care for.

But relief was on the way. Even at the time Eisenhower announced the new policy, John F. Kennedy had already been elected as his successor and was waiting to take

office. Mom is a diehard Republican, but she still recalls with grateful emotion how newly-inaugurated President Kennedy, in one of his first official acts, rescinded Eisenhower's odious decree. So Mom and her three boys were heading for France after all.

Just as the Frees family was being reunited in France, a seemingly minor incident occurred that would have lifelong ramifications. Dad was prepping to drive to the airport in Paris to pick us up on our arrival, and as he stood at the mirror shaving, annoying spots and zigzag patterns began appearing in his line of vision. He did not know it at the time, but these were the telltale signs of an oncoming migraine headache. He also had no way of knowing that this was the first of many, many to come and that these headaches would become one of the signature trials of his life. For the rest of his Air Force career and for most of his pastoral ministry, he suffered as many as two or three debilitating headaches a week.

Peter Marshall, no stranger to physical trials himself, once said: "God will not permit any troubles to come upon us, unless He has a specific plan by which great blessing can come out of the difficulty." While the persistent headaches seemed on the surface to be nothing but a hindrance in Dad's life and ministry, there can be no doubt that God used this suffering as a means of accomplishing His good purposes. At the very least, as we'll see, the battle with headaches created a sense of utter weakness that kept Dad dependent on God and drove him to desperate prayer and wrestling with the Lord.

In France we found ourselves tossed into the midst of the local population, with the nearest American military base an hour away and few English-speaking families in driving distance. This made Christian fellowship hard to come by, and our Sunday “church” usually consisted of crackly radio programs beamed from southern France by the Far East Broadcasting Company. There were occasional visits with Christian families from the surrounding sites. The Glovers from the northernmost site near Belgium and the Eldridges to the south became lifelong friends. Dad and Mom also had joyful contacts with the fearless young missionaries of Operation Mobilization who swept through the area distributing gospel literature.

Once a month the Air Force chaplain held services for the handful of men up at the radio site, but this was not necessarily a spiritual high point. On one occasion the chaplain, a Lutheran clergyman, walked in with a jug of wine in each hand and announced, “We’re going to have Communion today,” and set the wine on the table. “Anybody who would like may take Communion,” he explained, “and if you don’t want to take Communion you can just come and drink some of this wine.” Dad suspected, after this irreverent performance, that the chaplain had no true relationship with Christ. Walking him to the car, Dad began to share his own testimony and to speak about the blessing of knowing Christ and the assurance of salvation through faith. Tears came to the chaplain’s eyes. “I wish I could be sure like that,” he said as he drove away.

One of the memorable, and frightening, episodes of our stay in France began one winter morning as the family

packed into our little Dauphine sedan for the monthly grocery run to Evreux Air Force Base. It turned out to be much more of an adventure than we planned. Dad later wrote:

It looked like a good day for a trip to the base. After the usual packing we started off in good spirits despite my wife's painful toothache. My three little boys, three, four and five years old, were happily engaged in their pastime of seeing who could count the most cows. Sara and I were discussing the fact that for once we had managed to get an early start. Soon the off-key singing of some of our favorite songs filled the car, and Sara was able to forget her toothache for a few minutes.

After travelling for several miles I started to notice patches of snow on the road. It didn't look like anything to worry about, but just to be sure, I checked by slowing down and gently putting on the brakes. No, it wasn't slippery. A little later I checked again, and once again the car slowed down almost to a stop without any slipping or sliding.

So on we rode, rejoicing that soon we would be at the halfway point on the long trip to the base. I had just slowed down for a crossroad and was topping a small rise in the road on the other side. Then it happened. Our car was all of a sudden going almost sideways down the road in the wrong lane. Then just as suddenly it was back in the other lane fishtailing in the other direction as I fought to control the skid. Then came the sinking feeling of travelling down the road backwards, the less clear sensation of rolling over as in some thrill ride at the state fair, then the crunch of metal as we hit the road bank, and then deathly silence.

Reality began to return in bits and pieces—the sharp pain in my head—the frightened whispering of my boys—Sara's little cry of pain—a coat belonging to one

of my boys lying in the snow a few feet from the car—a broken windshield wiper dangling crazily in front of my face through the opening where the windshield used to be. Then the wave of fear that swept over me as I thought about my wife and boys—the pain in my back as I turned around to look. Sara was looking at me with pale, frightened eyes. Together we turned to look for the boys—only two! Oh, God...! Then we saw the little blond head appear over the top of the back seat.

“Is everyone alright?” I blurted out, and kept repeating it as if in the very saying of it hoping to make it so. Sara could not move because of the intense pain in her arm. I climbed painfully out of the car which was resting at a 45-degree angle in the roadside ditch. Hailing a passing car, I returned to my car—still with the nagging fear as to the extent of our injuries. I managed to pull Sara from the car, noticing that both windshields had popped out and shattered.

The rest was anti-climactic and seemed a little more real—the ride to a nearby café—the long, cold, painful wait as arrangements were made to complete our trip to Evreux—not to the dental clinic as planned, but to the hospital emergency room. As it turned out, my boys, except for some minor scratches, were alright. I had a sprained neck and some minor cuts on my head. Sara had a torn muscle in her arm.

A passing Frenchman and his wife stopped to help our traumatized little crew and kindly drove us to a roadside café, where we called an American friend for help. I don't recall the accident itself, but some of my earliest snippets of memory reside in the backseat of that kind Frenchman's car: being pressed together in the seat with Mom and the other boys, the smoky aroma of the driver's pipe from up front, Mom wincing as I innocently leaned my head on her

hurt left shoulder. For Mom's part, the accident is mostly a blur—one moment riding along, the next the car facing backwards as it hit the black ice, the awful unreality of flipping off the road, the children crying. She regards it as a miracle that no one was seriously hurt. After a thorough check-over at the hospital at Evreux, we were able to finish our grocery shopping before heading home.

Dad's account of the incident was written for Air Force purposes as a driving safety object lesson, so the theme of thankfulness for God's protection is muted, though evident enough between the lines. But there is no question that when the Dauphine was spinning from lane to lane and launching into its frightening roll, the future of Dad and Mom's young family hung in the balance. Apart from God's merciful care this could have been much, much worse.

During these years, perhaps inspired by the example of his spiritual heroes from the missionary biographies, Dad began keeping a devotional journal, though there are only a handful of entries from the time in France. His first journal entry was on January 7, 1963. It shows that now several years after his conversion, Dad was still living in the glow of fellowship with Christ:

In most books we read about people and our only relationship with them and knowledge of them is what we read of them, but we can read about *the Living One* in God's Word and then immediately be in His presence through prayer. Thus He becomes not a mere character out of a book, but a living reality—a personal Friend, abiding with us even as we read of Him.

Another very early entry:

Lessons on obedience He has been teaching me the past several days: (1) Obedience is necessary in the smallest matter. (2) Obedience necessary for fellowship. (3) Obedience to the “Do” commands is as important as obedience to the “Don’ts.”

One struggle of obedience he continued to have as a new Christian in Orlando, and on through the time in France, was addiction to cigarettes. He had begun smoking in high school, and the habit had gotten much worse during his tour in Japan, where cigarettes could be had dirt cheap at the mess hall. After his conversion Dad felt badly about smoking and tried to yield the habit to the Lord, but this was not so easily done. One evening in Orlando—Mom can’t help laughing as she tells it—he made up his mind to quit, and decisively emptied his last pack of cigarettes into the drainage ditch behind the house. But before the night was over he was scrabbling around in the ditch to retrieve them. And so it went. When he went to church, his conscience wouldn’t let him join the smoking-on-the-church-steps brigade, so he would park across the street to finish his cigarette. When he prayed or read the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit would patiently, firmly bring the issue to his mind, yet he seemed to have no power over it.

It was shortly after the family moved back to the States from France that he was finally able to give up cigarettes once and for all. The Spirit’s work in Christian sanctification can be mysterious, and Dad doesn’t know what particularly made the commitment stick this time. Perhaps there was a desperate decisiveness that had been

lacking before. Shortly before this, he had come to the conviction that he needed to be scripturally baptized, since he had never been baptized in Orlando and his childhood baptism at Omro Baptist was not a testimony of genuine conversion. Maybe his new baptism clarified some issues for him and inspired his victory over cigarettes. In any case Dad does recall one fact: it was two weeks after he gave up cigarettes for good that God called him into the ministry.



**TOP: Dad pauses for a picture on the steps of our home in Abbeville, France. BELOW: Mom and children prepare for a roadside picnic somewhere in the French countryside. Our little Dauphine sedan pictured here was later totaled in what could have been a tragic accident.**



**TOP:** Sightseeing in Europe was one of the perks of our Air Force tour in France. Here we are in our faux-Dutch glory during a trip to Holland. The children are from left: Jim, David, me. (I still have the wooden shoes.)  
**BOTTOM:** This is one of my favorite pictures of Mom, with Jim and me on an English Channel boat ride.

## CHAPTER 9

### CALLED TO SERVICE

*This is His will: He takes and He refuses,  
Finds Him ambassadors whom men deny;  
Wise ones nor mighty for His saints He chooses,  
No, such as John or Gideon or I.*



**W**hen the Frees family returned to the States from France in 1964, America was simultaneously spreading its wings and lurching toward cultural turmoil. That year saw President Lyndon Johnson win his first full term, defeating Barry Goldwater in a landslide, and civil rights leader Martin Luther King receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Unmanned Apollo 1 was launched into orbit in a test of the mighty Saturn rocket, and Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf resolution, formally entangling U.S. forces in the ill-fated Vietnam conflict.

For the third time now Dad found himself stationed at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, this time in the role of electronics instructor. We wasted no time reuniting with East Howard Baptist Church. The church had recently called a new pastor, Rev. Mel Mason, who would become a crucial friend and mentor to Dad and instrumental in his call to the ministry. For his part, Dad quickly became an

indispensable help to the pastor—so much so that Rev. Mason arranged for us to move our newly-purchased, single-wide trailer to Maple Street, right across from the church.

Here an incident occurred that could easily have turned tragic. One night the children were fast asleep when Mom and Dad rushed in an hour or two after midnight to shake us awake: “We need to get up, there’s a fire!” They managed to say it so calmly that I recall thinking they were waking us up to show us some fun sight. But in fact Mom had been awakened by sirens and glanced out the window to see the abandoned theater in the lot next to us engulfed in flames. Our little trailer was decidedly in danger.

The rest of that night is a blur for me: taking refuge in the church building across the street, being bundled into a makeshift bed, grownups drinking coffee and talking excitedly, kind firemen smiling at me. The theater burned completely to the ground, but thanks to a steady hose of water trained on the trailer, our humble abode was saved. As a solemn reminder of God’s care, and what could have been, the tail-lights of the trailer (on the outside wall of the bedroom where brother Jim and I were sleeping) were thoroughly melted.

In the spring of 1965, God began to deal with Dad in a serious way about devoting his life to Christian ministry. Fortunately, it is at this juncture that we start to encounter more frequent journal entries and other writings from Dad, so from now on we’ll be able to hear more of the story in his words. I’ll step aside while he tells of his wrestling with the

call to ministry. He wrote this on April 12, 1965, a month or so after the events it describes:

From time to time after I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal Savior in December 1958, I felt the desire to enter into the ministry. I always thought along the lines of some type of foreign mission work. All my thoughts and attention was focused on foreign missions. Every time I would surrender my life anew to the Lord, I would say, in effect: "Lord, I surrender my life to Thee. If it be Thy will may I serve Thee full-time as a missionary."

In other words, I was telling the Lord that I was surrendering my life to Him and turning right around and telling Him what to do with it (not much of a surrender). Also, in looking only at the foreign mission field I overlooked a very needy mission field right around me. I had never seriously considered my home church field as a mission field.

My eyes were opened to this during a School of Missions held at East Howard Baptist Church. God spoke very clearly through several missionary speakers, telling me that I should take my mind off foreign missions (I wasn't doing anything for them anyway) and open my eyes to the great mission field all around me. This I did, and began to labor for the Lord in the "home mission" field. During the following days, I did considerable visitation work in the community and rejoiced and praised the Lord for revealing this to me.

One night a couple of weeks after the School of Missions ended, I surrendered my life fully to the Lord. I simply said, "Lord here is my life. It is completely Yours. Do with it as You please. I am willing to be anything You want me to be—no strings attached." I had never before experienced the closeness of the Lord—the wonderful communion with Him—that I did that night when I had finished praying that prayer.

The afternoon of March 2, 1965, my pastor, Mel Mason, came to the house and said he would like to talk with me privately. We went to his study at the church, where he very calmly related how he had felt for several months that God would eventually call me into the ministry. He told how the previous night he had been awake most of the night thinking about it, and how that morning the Lord had very definitely laid it on his heart to speak to me about it. He said that now he had a very definite conviction that God wanted me in the ministry.

Of course, all this hit me like a ton of bricks. He continued to talk about it, but I wasn't hearing much of what he was saying, for I was getting sicker and sicker as time passed (physical sickness—the kind that results from deep conviction).

Needless to say I didn't get any sleep that night! I began to think of all the reasons why I should not surrender to preach. After all, I was pretty well settled down in life—only seven years left in the Air Force until retirement—a family, etc., etc. I just couldn't comprehend the fact that He was calling me. But down deep in my heart when I stopped to consider it, I knew He was.

I prayed much about it that evening and asked the Lord to prove to me that He really wanted me in the ministry, and He commenced to give me many, many proofs during the next twenty-four hours. I can't remember them all (I am writing this several weeks following) but will list some.

Normally Sara reads the children the Bible story for family devotions, but this particular night she asked me if I would read it. (As of yet I hadn't told her what the pastor and I had discussed.) The Bible story for that night was the anointing of Elisha to be a prophet of God!

The following day I questioned the pastor concerning his convictions, and he restated that he felt very defi-

nately, even more that day than the previous one, that this was God's will.

I had told Sara about it the previous evening and asked her to pray fervently about it. The following day she said she began to feel that this was God's will. After cautioning her that she was being called too as a preacher's wife, she said she still felt that God was leading in this. Considering her previous opinions on being a preacher's wife, this was a great proof!

I was still physically sick (having slept and eaten very little in the past twenty-four hours) and knew that I would be until I made a decision.

That afternoon I got alone and fervently prayed for the Lord to speak very definitely so that I might make a decision one way or the other. I opened my eyes, reached for my Bible, and it fell open to 2 Timothy 4:17 ("Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, that by me the preaching might be fully known"). I thought that this could have been coincidence and glanced across the page to where my other thumb was pointing. It was Titus 1:3 ("But hath in due times manifested His word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Savior"). I was speechless, feeling that God had definitely spoken to me.

That night in the Wednesday evening service we had a visiting preacher bringing the message. I don't remember now what his scripture text was (possibly Mark 8:34-38), but the Lord again spoke very definitely to me.

Up until this time I was still pretty numb and could hardly believe God was calling me, but now began to get a settled conviction that this was definitely His will for my life. After again talking it over with the pastor we got on our knees and I gave my life to God as a minister of His Word. I just said simply, "I will"—feeling very unworthy but knowing that He had definitely called.

And immediately peace came into my heart like it did when I was first saved. I knew I had taken a big step, but had spent much of the previous twenty-four hours “counting the cost” and knew now that I would follow Him whatever the cost.

During the following weeks God has still been confirming His call in many ways—church members that I hardly knew making remarks such as, “I knew it all the time” and “I figured God would call you”—the call to serve as associate pastor (the church and deacon body being one hundred per cent for it).

I just praise and thank God that, as unworthy as I am, He has given to me the great privilege of preaching the wonderful gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mom also typed out an account of the episode, fleshing out those intense hours after Pastor Mason first talked with Dad about the ministry:

I could tell the minute Dick walked in the door that something was wrong with him. He was white as a ghost—he just looked sick all over. I had supper ready, but he said he didn’t feel like eating anything. All he could do was pace the floor, but he wouldn’t tell me what was wrong. I was just about worried sick myself from wondering what was wrong with him.

Finally after I got the kids in bed, I got the story out of him. He said that Bro. Mason told him that he had felt for some time that God was calling Dick to preach. Bro. Mason said he had been praying about it for several months and that he was up most of the night before praying about it, and that the Lord had given him an answer. He said he felt definitely led by the Lord to come to Dick and talk to him.

Well, I had heard Dick say no less than a hundred times that he wished the Lord would call him into some

full-time Christian work, but when the call actually came, it just about knocked him for a loop. He was just sick with conviction. I don't think I've ever seen him before in such a shape. He was sick all that night and all the next day. He kept trying to tell himself that it was all a mistake—that the Lord didn't really want him as a preacher. But it seemed that every time he opened his Bible, he opened it right to the place where there was something about preaching or proclaiming the gospel.

On Wednesday night after prayer service, Dick stayed behind to talk to the preacher. I had already gone to bed when he came home, but I heard him when he came in the door and he was whistling. I knew then that he had it all settled, because he certainly hadn't felt like whistling earlier in the day. He and Bro. Mason had talked about it more and prayed about it, and Dick said the very minute he surrendered and said to the Lord, "I'll do it!" he had perfect peace in his heart.

It's easy to forget that Dad was not the only one who needed peace about all this. Mom continues:

So, he is now a Baptist preacher, and I'm a preacher's wife! It kind of sends shock waves through me when I think of myself as a preacher's wife. I've never thought of myself as being the type for that, but with the help of the Lord, I'll do the best I can.

Dick realizes what a tremendous responsibility is ahead of him, and he knows, too, that he won't be able to do it in his own strength. But he knows that just as surely as God called him into this ministry, He's going to provide the strength.

We're both really happy about it, even though we know that there's probably going to be a hard life ahead for us. We don't know if we will be staying in the service or not. We're going to have to depend entirely on the

Lord to show us what His will is for our lives. I'll have to admit that the thought of our getting out of the service scares me at times, but then I always feel guilty for being scared, because the Bible is just full of promises that God will take care of His children.

Things happened quickly now. Within a month Dad preached his first sermon (he was "very, very nervous," he later wrote), was ordained to the ministry, and was installed as associate pastor of East Howard Baptist. In that first sermon, a topical message on the inspiration of the Scriptures, Dad sounded a note of simple confidence in the Bible that would serve as a foundation stone of his ministry and from which he has never wavered:

The most simple, uneducated child of God who believes that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" is infinitely more wise than those educated intellectuals who don't accept the Word because they don't know the Author of it.

Doors began to open, and he preached frequently at East Howard and other churches, and to the down-and-out men at the Gulf Coast Rescue Mission. Selections from his journal for the remainder of 1965 give a flavor of that early preaching ministry.

*11-Apr-'65.* Sunday morning preached "Are You Born Again?" Sunday evening preached "Jesus Only" (one came forward to give testimony).

*30-May-'65.* Preached both services at East Howard. Sunday morning, "The Wise Fool." Sunday night, "A Call to Repentance and Prayer."

*4-Jul-'65.* Preached evening service, LaRue Baptist Church (little country church). My first supply job. Preached "A Call to Repentance and Prayer."

*11-Jul-'65.* Preached Sunday morning service at Mississippi City Baptist. Preached "The Wise Fool."

I heard Dad preach his "Wise Fool" sermon (from 1 Cor. 4:10) more than once. It may or may not have had an impact on others, but it found lodging in the heart of his almost-six-year-old son and perhaps had a role in my coming to faith in Christ. I especially liked the closing illustration of the sermon, where Dad told of a humble Christian who shared the gospel by walking the streets with a sandwich-style board sign draped over his shoulders, emblazoned with gospel texts. Each day he walked past the men eating their lunch outside a construction site, and each day they would hurl abuse and laughter at him as he went by. One day as he approached, they cackled more heartily than ever, because the front of the sign said, "I'm a fool for Christ's sake." As he passed, the laughter gave way to awkward silence. On the back of the sign were the words, "Whose fool are you?"

*20-Jul-'65.* Rescue Mission. "For God So Loved the World."

15-Aug-'65. Preached both services at East Howard. "Hell is Real" and "The Church that was Dead and Didn't Know It."

24-Aug-'65. Preached at Rescue Mission. "What Will You Do With Jesus?"

12-Sep-'65. Preached both services at East Howard. "Revival in Our Time" and "Barriers to Blessing."

3-Oct-'65. Sunday evening, conducted my first baptismal service. Baptized James Richard Frees. I praise God for this privilege!

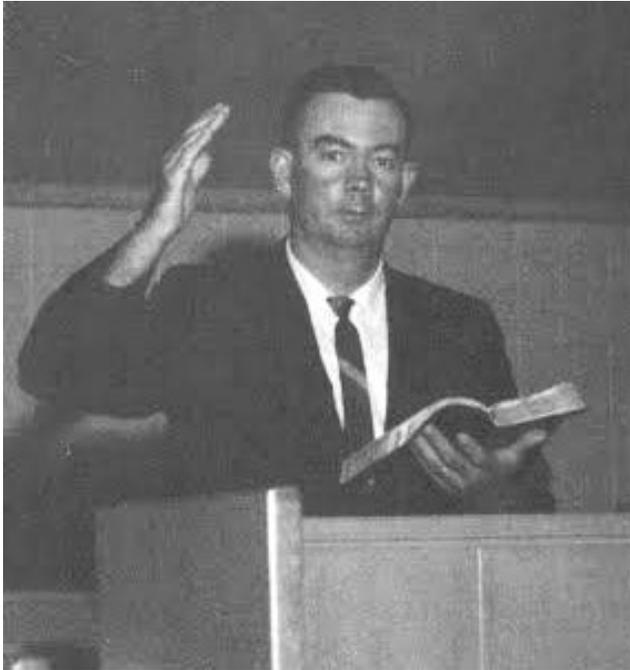
2-Nov-'65. Rescue Mission. "Christ Knocking at the Heart."

17-Nov-'65. Preached at Mission: "Meeting Christ."

24-Nov-'65. Preached at Mission: "The Good Shepherd." I have felt very definitely that the last three messages above were given to me by the Lord to be preached just when they were. Two of these messages were preached without notes using only God's Word. Both the consciousness of having received the messages from Him and the preaching without notes is something new to me. But I praise His name for this grace and greatly desire more of the same. He has promised to bless *His* Word. Sometimes we clutter it up too much with our own. Feel a great need to pray more in everything, especially over the messages He does give me.

There is more of the same for 1966, as God continued to bless Dad with preaching opportunities. We'll pass over the details, but this note from June of that year understandably has a special significance for me:

Preached at East Howard, "A Great Salvation" (Sunday morning). Preached evening service—Mark Frees made profession of faith. Praise God!—all three boys now in the fold! Also a woman came asking to join the church. We visited her Monday evening and won her to the Lord—primarily due to Spirit's convicting work during Sunday morning service. Later in June baptized these plus one more who had made a previous decision for Christ.



**TOP: Dad stands at the pulpit of East Howard Baptist Church shortly after he was called to the ministry. BOTTOM: The church occupied the corner of Maple and East Howard streets in Biloxi. It is seen here from across Maple Street near the lot where our trailer sat.**

INTRODUCTION: - Take your Bible - not going to ask to look up scripture - would like to know if you realize what a precious thing you hold in your hand?? We neglect and mis-use, so much, do not deserve it - Ought to praise the Lord for giving us something as precious & wonderful as His Word. no want to mention 3 things concerning:

I. SHOULD BE ACCEPTED AS GOD'S WORD:

II Peter 1:21 - "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

III Timothy 3:16 - "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

1. Notice word all - Today attempts on every hand to explain away God's Holy Word - Hear such things as: "Adam & Eve not actual human beings"; "Account of Jonah & whale just a myth"; "Jesus Christ was just a good man", Claimed to be Son of God - If not, then not good, but a deceiver

2. Where do we hear?? In local bars? - we might. Are these words of uneducated atheist? - could be. But want to tell you statements such as this being taught as fact in great universities; we hear this in colleges, in high schools - Even more shocking: we hear in many Churches & SS.

3. This being taught by supposedly wise men, educated men, intellectual men - Want to tell you, that the most simple, uneducated Child of God who believes that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God" is infinitely more wise than these educated intellectual who don't accept the word because they don't know the Author of it!

4. God's Word has something to say on this: I Cor. 1:16-2

5. Why do people today deny Gods word? Try to explain where it away? Try to cast doubt on its authority? Simply this: Man doesn't like to look at himself as wicked, sinful person in need of a Saviour and in need of the daily cleansing power of THE BLOOD.

Every time he opens Bible sees himself as just this - doesn't like to try to explain it away.

5. Listen carefully to what God's Word says: John 12:48

Bleed-through on the thin typing paper makes it hard to read, but this is a page from Dad's notes for his first sermon, a message on the inspiration of Scripture preached March 14, 1965, at East Howard Baptist Church.

## CHAPTER 10

### ADVENTURES IN MISAWA

*Quick in a moment, infinite forever,  
Send an arousal better than I pray,  
Give me a grace upon the faint endeavor,  
Souls for my hire and Pentecost today!*



Considering the doors of ministry God was opening, Dad now faced an obvious question. Should he stay in the Air Force, or exit at the earliest opportunity and devote himself full-time to preaching? He had served about fourteen years at this point. The twenty-year retirement point was visible over the horizon, and now a reenlistment decision was looming. He was willing to leave the Air Force behind, and there must have been a certain thrill of adventure connected with that option, but he didn't want to run ahead of God.

There was an older man, nicknamed "Dad," who held a weekly Bible class for some of the Keesler airmen. Dad went to "Dad" for counsel on the situation. This older brother shared his rule of thumb: unless the Lord shows you definitely he wants you somewhere else, you should stay where you are. It did look for a while as though God indeed definitely wanted Dad somewhere other than the Air

Force, for in the medical screening for reenlistment he failed because of high blood pressure. This seemed for a time to make the decision clear, but in a repeat test a few days later his blood pressure showed normal.

I don't want to keep inserting myself in this narrative, but one other factor Dad and Mom had to consider was that their youngest son had a congenital heart defect needing surgical repair. Doctors said the optimal age for the surgery was about twelve, and I had several years to go before that. While Dad and Mom were in the throes of decision about reenlisting, they asked the military doctor whether the surgery could be done earlier, but he continued to insist on the later age. With that in view, and without the clear leading of God to the contrary, walking away from the Air Force with its free, high-quality medical care must have looked irresponsible to loving parents.

So Dad ended up staying in the military another seven years before retiring. A more gung-ho spirituality might scorn his caution in not barging full-speed ahead into ministry, but much valuable service for the Lord took place in those later Air Force years. While there are advantages in being set apart from employment for the Lord's work, it is also true that ministry can sometimes be more effective coming from a regular person (so to speak) rather than a professional preacher. As a child I thought of Dad not as a minister but as an Air Force sergeant who happened to love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ, and this made his example all the more powerful to me. It's worth noting, too, that later the monthly Air Force retirement check helped to pay for Dad's college and seminary education. The income also

allowed him and Mom to serve the Lord in humble situations that might have been untenable otherwise, and to do so without overly burdening the Lord's people financially.

With reenlistment done it was time for a new assignment. The options boiled down to two, Colorado and Japan, with Dad and one other man eligible for the two locations. The other sergeant had seniority and therefore first choice, and he plucked the Colorado opening. Thus the Frees family, still five of us, headed for Misawa Air Force Base near the northeastern tip of Japan's central island of Honshu. Not that we were disappointed—it turned out to be a grand adventure, and Dad and Mom were happy to go just about anywhere that the family could stay together.

In contrast to France with its isolation and lack of Christian fellowship, in Japan we were plugged into a sizable American population, with on-base schools for the military children and a healthy English-speaking church, Calvary Baptist, in the town of Misawa. Dad quickly bonded with Calvary's pastor, and soon found himself installed in his familiar role as associate pastor.

Opportunities for ministry were boundless in this bustling, friendly, pagan country, not to mention the concentration of young American servicemen far from home. It was here that Dad's earlier burden for overseas missions came to more practical fulfillment than in any other period of his life. Several months after our arrival in Misawa, he sent this circular letter to our friends back in the States:

We find ourselves in a country of happy, friendly, and humble people, but also a people shackled by superstition, tradition, and "in whom the god of this world hath

blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Cor. 4:4). Less than one per cent of Japan's one hundred million people are Christian, and many that claim to be Christian are cold, formalistic, and materialistic.

And yet, does this not pretty well describe the people of prosperous America? We covet your prayers for the Japanese, but "lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already unto harvest" right where you are. Those whom Satan has blinded are just as blind in America as they are in Asia.

One thing we feel the Lord has impressed upon us more than anything else since we have been over here is that we must be "about our Father's business"—right now, right where we are. It is good to make plans and look ahead, but it's so easy to overdo that and fail to get down to business for the Lord right now, right where we are. If we will do this, He will take care of the future. And what of the future? I feel His coming is so near—what we are going to do for Him must be done now! And praise God, we have all of His mighty power available to us (Eph. 1:19).

I would like to tell you about what we feel is truly one of God's miracles. From the time we first arrived, I had a burden because there was no place at all to purchase Bibles or good Christian literature. We were very busy getting settled, but I kept picturing in my mind a little store in the city of Misawa where we might have Christian literature available and also a place to witness to the servicemen as they wandered the streets.

About three months ago, the Lord sent Rev. Bill E. to pastor the English-speaking Southern Baptist church we are privileged to have here. He is truly a man of God, full of faith, and has a great missionary spirit. (He has spent eleven years as a missionary in Japan.) Immediately upon his arrival, we discovered that the Lord

had given him a similar burden. As we began to pray about it, the Lord began to work.

Our first need was a building, and He provided one. It is very near the main gate of the base, and we were able to get it at a very reasonable rent and without paying the customary large sum in advance. The building was very run-down and really a mess—it had been vacant for several months. But the Lord provided the necessary workers—carpenters, painters, and many other helpers—one by one, just as they were needed. It was marvelous to watch Him work!

After the building was in shape, we needed furnishings. Once again we petitioned our great, giving God, and piece by piece the furniture came in. Just before we were due to open, we were concerned about two major items—the building needed a new floor, and we needed a couch and chair for the serviceman's center part of it. We didn't see how we could possibly get a new floor. Things like that take a long time in Japan. But we felt led to go ahead and purchase the tile anyway. And praise God! The very night we bought the tile the Lord sent one of the servicemen from the base down to our building. It turned out he was an experienced tile layer, and within two-and-a-half days we had our new floor!

That left the need for a couch and chair set. We prayed specifically about this one night, and the very next morning we saw one advertised in the paper. I hurried to the place and was able to buy two chairs and a sofa almost new for \$75. The original price was over \$200. So, we had our couch and chairs.

Incidents like this were multiplied again and again as the Lord worked out every detail. The amazing part was that not one bit of planning was done about anything; but He, in spite of our bumbling around, worked everything out from day to day just as if we had an elaborate set of blueprints. And in reality we did—His!

Today, just a few weeks later, the Misawa Christian Bookstore and Serviceman's Center is a standing testimony to God's faithfulness and leading. There is now a place where Christian servicemen can come and relax, listen to gospel tapes of sermons and song, and get a little touch of home; a place where they can bring their lost friends and introduce them to the Lord Jesus Christ; a place where servicemen can come when they are wandering the streets looking for something to do; a place where good, fundamental Christian literature is available for growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ—and praise God, it is all His doing! Pray with us that it will be used to lead many to the Savior.

We are serving the church in the capacity of associate pastor. There is only one little problem. Bro. Bill likes to preach, and that means I rarely get to. (He says the job of associate pastor is to do everything the pastor doesn't want to.)

Sara and I both started language school when we first came over. After about thirteen lessons I had so many activities going that I stopped going to classes, but Sara has continued and is now on lesson thirty. I'm really going to be counting on her in the future.

We started a Bible class in our home a few months ago, and we are studying the book of Revelation. The Lord has used it to open up the Word to some, and we have received a great blessing from teaching it.

In closing, I would like to pass on some specific prayer requests for the bookstore and serviceman's center. Pray for consecrated workers. We need several on a part-time basis. Pray for finances. We are operating strictly on a non-profit, faith basis with no official sponsor. Pray for our health. I found out the other day that I have high blood pressure and have been told to slow down—a seemingly impossible task. Sara works in

the bookstore afternoons, and I have been working most evenings and weekends.

We realize that we can do nothing of ourselves, so pray that the Lord will use this work to save many souls and bear much fruit for Him. Praise Him and give Him the glory!

Although I was only eight at the time, and not particularly aware of the details, the bookstore and serviceman's center stands as one of the fond and powerful memories of childhood. I remember learning to play chess there, drinking hot tea with sugar cubes, and browsing the bookshelves populated with as many books as Dad and Pastor Bill could squeeze into boxes and carry back by train from Tokyo. I can still picture some of the books and where they sat on the shelf. I felt in that place the spirit of missionary adventure in the air. Here was a George Mueller-style venture of faith and daring in my own family. How proud I was of Dad and Mom, and what an impression for God was stamped on my life by it all.

Mueller, of course, was the grand pioneer of faith who saw God provide for his orphanage in Bristol, England, strictly through prayer, with no solicitation of funds and without making needs known to others. In those early days of the serviceman's center there were instances of answered prayer that would by no means seem out of place in dear brother Mueller's diary. A couple of these we've already read in Dad's letter above. Another was a poignant and dramatic gift to the ministry from a Sgt. and Mrs. Lint—poignant because the couple was grieving over the recent loss of a son in the Vietnam War and dramatic because the \$250 gift

was miraculously perfect in its timing. In a deeply-felt letter of gratitude, Dad shared the details:

February 29 was rather a gloomy day for us. We had bills due on the twenty-ninth in the amount of \$270, and all we had on hand was \$37. Several of us had been praying about the matter all week, and along about the afternoon of the twenty-ninth I'll have to admit our faith was beginning to waver a little.

I normally only go to the Post Office once a day to check for mail, and I had already been once. But that afternoon it came to my mind to go check again. I did, and received your abundant gift. I could hardly believe it, but then began to shout and praise the Lord as I drove down the street. A little later when I called the others we had a good praise meeting right over the phone.

So the Lord accomplished several things with your gift. He assured us that what we're doing was in His will, He provided for the needs of the Center, He strengthened our faith, teaching me a lesson in faith that I'll never forget, and brought glory to Himself by waiting until the last minute.

We have a great God, and I praise Him and thank Him for faithful servants like you. We are sending you a little token of our appreciation under separate cover. Also enclosed is a picture of our display window at the Center. Once again, thank you so much, and I know your gift has been credited to your Heavenly Account.

After several months, Dad and Pastor Bill felt it would be best to hand over the bookstore and serviceman's center to others who would be better equipped to staff and stock the place. One of Dad's heroes as a new Christian was Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, which

later became the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, so there must have been a special satisfaction in placing the keys to the ministry into the hands of faithful OMF missionaries. OMF continued the ministry with blessing for a number of years. Only eternity will reveal the lasting fruit of it, but surely this faith adventure was pleasing to a God who delights in such things.

Near the end of our first year in Japan, on what began as a run-of-the-mill Thursday morning, our world was shaken—literally. I was sitting in Mrs. Lyshol's third-grade class when the whole building began to rumble and shake. I had no idea what was happening, but Mrs. Lyshol alertly discerned an earthquake and ordered us under our desks. For the eternal minute or so that the quake lasted, I crouched on the floor frightened and crying out to God.

Mom was at home by herself at the time, studying for a Japanese lesson. When she felt the shaking she headed for the utility room, thinking perhaps the washing machine was out of balance, until she remembered she didn't have a load in the washer. Realizing it was an earthquake, she clung to the door frame between the kitchen and utility room, frightened to go outside because she had heard stories about cracks in the ground opening up during quakes. The commotion and noise were horrific, as behind her in the kitchen the cabinets emptied their contents and the heavy counter migrated across the floor. As she looked out the back window, she saw the Japanese construction workers who were building a house in an adjacent field frantically scattering in every direction.

Meanwhile in Dad's radio room on base, at the onset of the quake six-foot-high stacks of equipment swayed precariously, and expensive stuff started crashing to the floor. Dad and another airman at first tried to keep everything upright, but to no avail, and as the frightful shaking continued they abandoned ship and headed for the door. Outside Dad could see the cars in the parking lot bouncing up and down a foot or so off the ground, while across the way the brick smokestack of the steam plant was waving back and forth. As the quake subsided his first thought was for his family. The schoolhouse was only five or six blocks away, so he dashed in that direction. To his relief, one of the teachers standing outside assured him that, yes, there was damage to the building but, no, none of the children were hurt.

At 7.8 on the Richter scale, the quake was Japan's strongest in almost fifty years. Dozens were killed and hundreds injured, though the worst of it was felt somewhat north of Misawa. Just for good measure, a powerful after-shock hit that night about 7:30, almost as strong as the initial quake. Our home escaped serious damage, though the mess was atrocious. There were shattered dishes all over the floor, mingled with broken containers of peanut butter, ketchup, and soy sauce. With utilities knocked out, an inch or two of rain water in the garbage can outside was all Mom had for cleaning. For drinking water, we lugged containers to nearby tanker trucks until service was restored a few days later. During times like this it is often the minor blessings that stand out, and when the morning after the quake Dad found the base cafeteria open and was able

to bring home a steaming thermos of coffee, Mom recalls it as about the best she had ever tasted. Once again God mercifully protected our family, and in the grand scheme of things our hardships were negligible.

Later in our term in Japan the tight-knit relationship between Dad and his friend and mentor, Pastor Bill, unraveled for reasons that are still a mystery to Dad. The two had just come up with a plan to replace the (at the time) doctrinally weak Southern Baptist Sunday School literature with material from a more conservative publisher. Right at this juncture a former deacon of the church returned to Misawa for a second tour of duty and immediately settled in as a close confidant of the pastor. Dad can only assume this had some bearing on the fact that Pastor Bill not only abruptly reversed course on the Sunday School literature—"We're Southern Baptist, and we'll use Southern Baptist literature"—but also from then on became notably cold toward Dad. Puzzled and grieved, Dad tried to discover what exactly caused the rift, but to no avail.

This eventually led to our leaving Calvary Baptist and starting a Sunday morning fellowship in our home, with our dear friends and next-door neighbors, the Burgesses, and others. Dad preached most Sundays, and I still remember some of Mom's children's lessons and flannel-graph stories from those days. Mom also played hostess to a flock of ten or fifteen single airmen, various ones of which would show up at our house church each Sunday and stay afterwards for lunch, a game of softball, and Bible discussions. Mom never knew as she cooked Sunday dinner just how many

she was fixing for, but she enjoyed the challenge. Those were happy days of spiritual adventure and fellowship.

Other than some jottings about the bookstore and serviceman's center, Dad made few journal entries during the Japan years. Those he did write reflect earnest aspirations for God and for spiritual power.

*2-Nov-'69.* Received much help this past week concerning yielding *all* from Ruth Paxson's book, *Rivers of Living Water*. There are still a couple of "rooms" I must open to Christ before I will know real joy and spiritual power. How useless is service for Him apart from the Holy Spirit! Cleanse me and fill me!

*11-Nov-'69.* The Lord seems to be sending blessing after blessing. He has enabled me to continue daily in the Word (five Psalms, one chapter in Proverb, five other chapters). He has been teaching me many lessons. How tender and merciful God is! May I be the same. I have discovered a general principle: the more you abide in Christ, the less critical you are of everything. How I long to display the fruit of the Spirit in my life—to "live above" that Christ might be glorified! God has taught me many things this past year—for instance, respect for others' viewpoints, even though they are dead wrong. You never win anyone by telling him, "You're wrong," and then cutting him down with a proof text.

*11-Jan-'70.* The great need is to be filled with the Spirit. Without this all service is in the flesh and cannot bear lasting fruit. Fill me with the Spirit, O God, that I might have boldness in witnessing, have pure motives in all things, and have power with men for God's glory. Whatever the sphere or circumstances, I should live, act, and speak according to the Scriptures—simply be a radiant, Spirit-filled Christian.



**TOP:** The Book Store and Serviceman's Center, just outside the Air Force base in Misawa, Japan, was a venture of faith by Dad and Mom and others.  
**BOTTOM:** Mom plays the organ at a missionary retreat center near Misawa.

Thursday and literally shredded several communities. Wapella, a central Illinois community of 500, was 90 per cent damaged. Every building in the community (Continued on Page 5, Col. 2)

Vol. 24, No. 137

★★★★★

Saturday, May 18, 1968

**8 Missing, 329 Hurt**

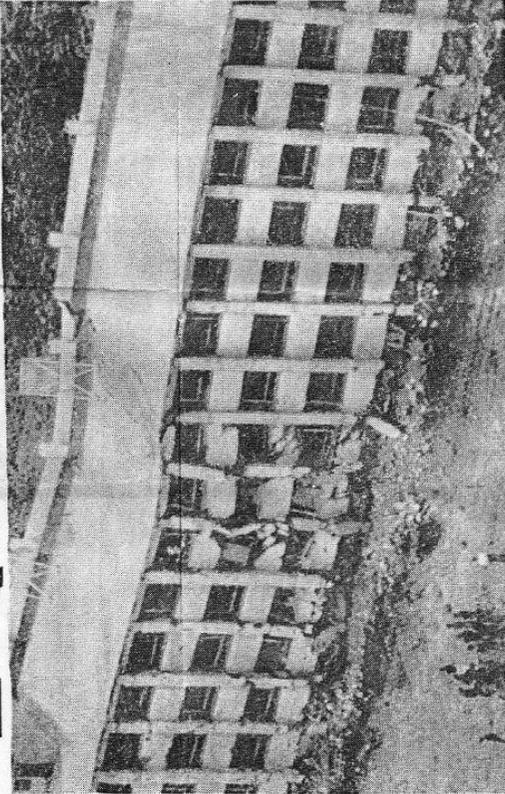
**2 QUAKES KILL 39**

By SPEC. 5  
RUSS ANDERSON  
&  
PHI KEN IRELAND  
Special Writers

**TOKYO — The tremors had stopped Friday but the terror remained as northern Japan counted 39 dead, 329 injured and eight missing from two of the most powerful earthquakes to ever batter the country.**

The two quakes, both only fraction less powerful than the great Tokyo earthquake that killed 5,700 people, struck thousands in 1923, came within 10 hours of each other Thursday.

Hardest hit by the jolts were the cities of Aomori and Hakodate on either side of the narrow strait that separates Japan's main island of Honshu from the country's second largest island, Hokkaido. The devastated area (Continued on Back Page, Col. 2)



Yamafuji Shimbun, Photo

**EARTHQUAKE COLLAPSED GROUND FLOOR OF UNIVERSITY BUILDING ON HOKKAIDO, REDUCING IT TO 3 STORIES.**

The front page of *Stars and Stripes* reports the major earthquake and its almost as powerful aftershock that left us unharmed but, well, shaken during our first year in Japan.

## CHAPTER 11

### UNCERTAINTY AND LIGHT

*Then thro' the mid complaint of my confession,  
Then thro' the pang and passion of my prayer,  
Leaps with a start the shock of His possession,  
Thrills me and touches, and the Lord is there.*



The next few years were not high on drama but were good and fruitful times. Returning to the States, Dad was stationed again—where else?—at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi. He served for a stretch as interim pastor at East Howard Baptist, worked briefly with a little mission church on Holly Street in Biloxi, and continued to preach as God gave opportunities.

These days were largely passed over in Dad's journal, and we'll skim past them here, too, but the two journal entries that do appear are worth noting. I should preface the first one by saying that, though Dad has never been particularly attracted to the Charismatic movement, neither has he been closed-minded about the work of the Holy Spirit. He has always hungered for reality, for spiritual power rather than stale formalism. It's safe to say his walk with the Lord has not been built around vivid spiritual experiences, but that is not to say he never had any. In

September 1970, not long after our return from Japan, he wrote:

*9-Sep-'70. (11:30 P.M.)* Approximately a week ago, I was lying in bed about 2:00 A.M., not even thinking about prayer, when all of a sudden I was overwhelmed with the presence of God. I began to praise Him and could not stop. (I thought at first I might be dreaming, but I was fully awake.) The sense of God's presence seemed to sweep over me again and again as waves at the sea-shore. I felt impelled to get up and go into the living room, where I fell on my knees and continued to praise God, as the waves of His presence continued to sweep over me.

Then all of a sudden, I began to see how great a sinner I was. I had an awful, humbling view of how dirty I was before an all-pure and holy God. Then, as I began to confess and ask for the cleansing of the Blood, the joy of salvation was restored and I again began to praise God.

What joy and peace were mine in His presence. Praise Him! I do not ever recall having such an experience before—as intense a sense of His presence. I felt I could have reached out and touched Him. Ever since that experience I've had a greater sense of His presence. In addition, many opportunities of service have suddenly opened up: Sunday School class, preaching at the Mission, opportunity to talk with Kelsey, opportunity to share some convictions on Creation with a somewhat unsure preacher.

Then tonight while praying, I had a similar experience. I was pretty low spiritually and was just about to stop praying when the Spirit of prayer came upon me, and joy and peace filled my heart. And, again, I could not stop praying and praising God. I feel that someone is praying for me and, of course, I believe this is part of God's answer to my prayer to be filled with the Spirit

and a fulfillment of His promise (Ps. 81:10—“Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it”).

This feeling of God’s presence—there is nothing greater. However, I do not want to major on *feeling*. I want to be filled with His Spirit that I might have opportunities for service and then the power in that service to bear much fruit for the Lord Jesus Christ and for His glory.

The other journal entry from that period is not nearly as lengthy or dramatic, but similarly joyful and encouraging:

*23-Dec-’70.* I feel that someone has been praying for me for the past two weeks. Have had much fellowship with the Lord and several answers to prayer—boldness in witnessing, opportunities for service.

In the later months of 1970, Mom began to experience unusual physical symptoms. She had suspicions what it might be, and a visit to the doctor confirmed: she was expecting again at the age of forty. When Mom expressed some anxiety about being too old for such a thing, the doctor—to Mom’s grief—offered the option of “terminating the pregnancy.” He gave her the business card of the doctor she could contact to arrange for an abortion. Mom put the card in her purse, but when she got home, she ripped it up and threw it in the trash. In June 1971, fourth son Kevin entered the world to an ecstatic reception by the whole family. As if to underline the reprehensible folly of the doctor’s offer to terminate the pregnancy, Kevin has become a special joy and support to Dad and Mom, especially in

their older years. As Mom puts it now with deep feeling, “The Lord knew what He was doing when He sent Kevin. I don’t know what we would do without him.”

All the while, Air Force retirement was looming closer. Dad’s heart was to train for the ministry, but how and where? The path became clearer when the Lord opened up two offers almost too good to refuse. First, Uncle J.M. offered to sell us the three-bedroom bungalow next door to Pa and Nanny in Huntsville for an absolute bargain, the same house where Mom and the children lived briefly when Dad preceded us to France. At the same time, Dad found that nearby Athens College was prepared to lavish on him a surprising number of credit hours for his life experience and still more credit by examination, which would allow him to stuff a four-year business degree into eighteen months.

So it was settled. Dad stepped away from the Air Force after a twenty-one-year career, having picked up along the journey one wife, four children, three overseas deployments, a sterling record, and the venerable rank of Master Sergeant. We shoehorned our noisy crew into the newly-purchased Frees mansion in Huntsville, and Dad became a forty-year-old college student with the goal of eventually going to seminary.

We joined nearby Central Baptist Church, formerly Lowe Mill Baptist Church. As you recall, this was the old stomping ground for Mom, Aunt Hazel, and Uncle Joe shortly after Mom’s conversion, with Mom serving as church treasurer back in those days. Much like East Howard Baptist Church in Biloxi, this dear assembly of the

Lord's people would have a recurring significance in Dad and Mom's life, and Dad would one day stand in its pulpit as pastor.

Athens College was a United Methodist school, and thus dutifully offered classes in Bible. Dad dutifully signed up for one as an elective. To say the least, love for the Word and sound doctrine were not priorities for his liberal professor:

*10-Jul-'73.* Although it is very difficult having to listen to Prof. Jones tear up the Word of God for two hours each day, and although I would rather be studying the Word under a spiritual man of God, it seems Athens was the only door open at the present time, and it was wide open considering all the credit I was given. Though my mind and heart rebel at the desecration of the Word of God, it has caused me to do some research in order to reconcile many of the points Prof. Jones has propounded, and in so doing I have increased my faith that the Bible is truly God's holy and inspired Word. Additionally, the thought has come to me that I am learning firsthand the viewpoints of liberalism, which would be of great benefit to me should God lead me into a teaching ministry at a later time. So for the present I will accept Athens as God's will for me and try my best not to chafe against the bit.

The old nemesis, migraine headaches, sparked a constant struggle during the Athens College days. Not only did they make studies difficult (on one occasion Dad came close to withdrawing from school after missing an exam because of a severe headache), but they clouded the future as well. How could he hope to be fruitful in full-time ministry with the constant distraction and suffering of headaches? Was it

wise to place himself under responsibilities that he might prove unable to handle?

Mom was his indispensable companion through all this. She helped with assignments, typed papers, and bucked up his flagging spirit with constant encouragement. As graduation approached, he presented her with a breezy but heartfelt tribute that he titled simply, “To a College Student’s Wife”:

*Thank you, Lord, for my dear wife,  
Who sees me through days of strife,  
Days of homework and typing just so,  
Days when I didn’t even want to go.  
She gave me encouragement when I needed it most,  
So of my accomplishments I cannot boast.  
My report card shows that I got all A’s,  
But my wonderful wife deserves all the praise.*

The months after graduation from Athens College became what Dad referred to as a dark night of the soul. Not only was there the ever-present headache issue, but there were no obvious open doors for the next step. He had two fervent desires: to go to seminary and to pastor a church. No church openings presented themselves, and while there were theoretically plenty of options for seminary, none stood out as particularly wise choices for a man with Dad’s family responsibilities. Dad’s journal reflects the desperate search for clarity in those days.

8-Jun-’74. Lord, put me where I can serve You best. You know my talents (few) and my weaknesses (many), but 2 Cor. 4:7—“we have this treasure in earthen vessels,

that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us”.

*10-Jun-'74.* I have been very anxious for several months about what I was going to do when I finish college this summer, but for the past two days have had a peace about doing nothing (as far as seeking out a job or making a decision at this time). Lord, help me to fully trust You to go before and open up the way, and help me to wait on You to show me the way.

*7-Jul-'74.* Up until tonight I had not let go of *my desires* in seeking His will. For many years I have had a deep longing to attend Bible school or seminary. But tonight I am willing for the Lord to put me where I can serve Him best. I am willing to give up my desire to go to Bible school, seminary (which I was really hoping and planning for), and even correspondence school. I want to serve the Lord where *He* wants me to serve, because that is where my service will be blessed and where I'll be able to serve Him best with all my weaknesses (headaches) and limitations. He can see the end—the entire picture of the ages. I can't even see tomorrow. Therefore, He knows what is best for me and what will bring the most glory to Him! Lord, not my will but *Thine*.

*14-Jul-'74.* Why should I become depressed during headaches over thoughts that I will not be able to do this or that in the Lord's service when I finish school? I have asked Him to guide me into the endeavor in which I can serve Him best. If I am really trusting Him to do this, then I know He will not put me into that which I cannot do effectively because of my headaches. “He has chosen the weak....”

*31-Oct-'74.* I need to be more grateful for the salvation of my soul—this will also give me a greater testimony. I didn't earn it or deserve it, but God in His grace and mercy saved me. Lord, how best can I fulfill the Great Commission? I want to be: Your man, in Your place, doing Your work, in Your way, at Your time. Thank You, Lord, for countless blessings. Live in the reality of the heavenly—resort to Jesus continually! (Eph. 1:3).

During these months Dad worked part-time as night watchman for the law library in downtown Huntsville. It was a laid-back routine, walking hourly rounds through the night, punching in at the various clock stations. Rounds took only ten minutes or so each hour and the rest was free time, so there was plenty of liberty for prayer and reflection. One early morning, during the thick of the confusion about ministry and school, he stepped outside the library's front door to get some fresh air. He found himself gazing up at the Episcopal church building in the next block, with its Gothic exterior and 150-foot spire, as prayer began to flow from him. He poured out his heart's passionate desire to serve God, to be used in ministry, alongside heartfelt confessions that he was indeed not worthy of the ministry. It was one of those spiritual crisis moments that stands out in his memory, and it was shortly after this that the light began to break through.

*21-Nov-'74.* I could not get complete peace in my heart about going to Tennessee Temple Seminary. I started my application, but as time passed I became very perplexed about what God wanted me to do. I had just about decided to apply for a civil service job, but couldn't get any peace about that either. One day Bro.

Mel informed me Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary [*then in Little Rock, Arkansas*] was moving to Memphis. Sara and I discussed the possibility of my going there, and I got really excited about the possibility. Then one day Sara said, “I guess you should start in January.” From that moment to this I have had a growing conviction that this is the Lord’s will for me—it just seems natural to do it.

I was concerned about finding a place to stay, but when I called to request an application, I was informed that I would be able to stay in Olivet House right across the street from the seminary for thirty dollars per month!

Last Sunday night following the service, I made a decision to rededicate my life to the Lord. (The Lord really got hold of me during the service.) I have been having fewer migraine headaches these days—praise the Lord!

*2-Dec-'74.* I have no doubts that God is leading me to Mid-America Seminary. Things will be hard in a couple of areas, but I know God will take care of those things (family, finances, etc.). There is not another seminary in the world I’d rather be going to. Praise the Lord for His loving-kindness to me in this matter. I had just about given up hope of ever going to seminary. I talked with Bob P.—I will be able to commute with him (God is working everything out). What a joy and peace to know that I am in His will and that whatever comes my way in seminary in the way of trials, He will enable!

A few days before Christmas 1974, Dad summarized the twists and turns of the previous two years:

- Air Force retirement.
- God led me to Athens College. Tried to quit, but felt that was where God wanted me.

- After graduation, no opportunities to pastor. Wanted to study for the ministry. Tried Louisville/Tennessee Temple, couldn't get a go-ahead.
- Dark night of the soul. Prayed, pleaded for guidance, but heavens as brass. Rock bottom spiritually, ready to quit ministry. Applied for civil service job. Didn't seem right, but I just didn't know what to do.
- The sunshine. Pastor friend mentioned move of Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary to Memphis. The distance was what I always thought of when I considered MABTS. Like sunshine bursting out after the storm—as if Someone had said: “This is the way, walk ye in it.”

So Mid-America Seminary it was. After the Christmas holidays Dad loaded the car and headed out to begin the grand adventure. The seminary's move to Memphis was not till the following fall, so he was faced with a six-hour drive to Little Rock, Arkansas. As he drove along, the excitement of the venture faded and second thoughts began to accumulate with every mile. The prospect of being so far from Mom and the boys for days and weeks at a time brought on a haunting sense of loneliness and apprehension. He made it as far as Iuka, Mississippi. There he pulled off for a break and found a pay phone to call Mom. As they talked, she could sense his deep misgivings. Finally she said in her sweetly sympathetic way, “Why don't you just come on home.” That was all it took. He turned the car around and headed back to Huntsville.

Thus it was not till the start of the second spring term a couple months later that he actually made it to Little Rock, this time with Mom and Kevin in tow—the other boys

being old enough to manage on their own. The three inhabited a snug apartment as Dad launched into his seminary career. Though the academic work was a challenge, the contrast with his dreary Bible class at Athens College could not have been more striking—or joyful. Here he was blessed to sit under the instruction of scholarly, warm-hearted men who loved and defended the Word of God and had a heart for souls and the true gospel of Christ.

Considering the definiteness and joy of God's leading to Mid-America seminary, it's a bit surprising that Dad ended up attending there for only one term. God's ways are not our ways, and those who have walked with the Lord for very long at all are well familiar with these twists and turns. No doubt the brief attendance at Mid-America had its wise purpose, and as it turns out, the abrupt end of Dad's time there was for a thrilling reason.

For in the summer of 1975 the old home church in Biloxi, East Howard Baptist Church, found itself without a pastor. It was a fairly obvious move on their part to offer the position to their former associate and interim pastor, now out of the Air Force, finished with college, and eager for ministry. They wasted little time doing so, dispensing with the formalities of an interview or trial sermon. Dad's response must have seemed like a no-brainer as well, but he took it carefully before the Lord, pondering the pros and cons. It wasn't hard to spot the pros: this was the opportunity for ministry he had been praying for, he was familiar with the church and the area, the offer had come with no politicking on his part, New Orleans Baptist Seminary was close enough to Biloxi that he could continue his seminary

training if desired. As for cons, well, he had difficulty coming up with any. Unsurprisingly the answer was yes, and the Frees moving truck was on its way to Biloxi once again.

So it was that against all odds, by the preserving, saving, ordaining hand of God, Lloyd and Enna's little boy from Omro, Wisconsin, was now a Baptist pastor, and the sharecropper's daughter from north Alabama stood beside him as pastor's wife.



**TOP: Fourth son Kevin was welcomed with joy as a late blessing to the Frees clan. BOTTOM: Yes, still in love—this photo shows Dad and Mom during our days in Huntsville after Air Force retirement.**

## CHAPTER 12

### ACTIVE DUTY

*Therefore, O Lord, I will not fail or falter,  
Nay but I ask it, nay but I desire,  
Lay on my lips Thine embers of the altar,  
Seal with the sting and furnish with the fire.*



As Dad stepped to the East Howard Baptist Church pulpit that first Sunday, it was a familiar venue. He had preached there many times before. But there was a strangeness about it as well, standing there now as pastor of the flock. Feelings of inadequacy mingled with the thrill of finally setting about what he was called and gifted to do.

He had been supply preaching for years and had served as an interim and associate pastor, so there was essentially nothing he would be called on to do in this new ministry that he had not already done to one extent or another. And coming back to the dearly-loved friends at East Howard Baptist was less like a new job for Dad and Mom and more like a homecoming. So they joyfully moved into the pastor's apartment carved out of one end of the church's education building and settled in for six and a half years of bustling, happy ministry to the saints.

This living arrangement, with the three-bedroom pastor's residence built right into the church, was one of the unique features of life at East Howard. It had its good points—it was certainly convenient—and its bad. The church was close to some seedy sections of town, and living in the church building they were sure to make the acquaintance of numerous panhandlers and ne'er-do-wells. Mom also recalls an occasional eeriness to living in a big, empty building, particularly later when Dad was off at seminary all week. (The three oldest boys were away by that point, and only youngest son Kevin was still around regularly.) But overall it was a satisfactory setup.

As a sample of the panhandler tales that can be told, Mom recalls one Saturday morning when she was typing the Sunday bulletin in the church office, with Dad in the adjacent pastor's study working on a sermon. A man walked in to ask for money, ostensibly to buy groceries for his family. (I should say that if anyone was hungry, Mom and Dad never turned them away without something to eat. But church policy was to generously support the nearby rescue mission and direct those asking for more extended help there.) Mom for some reason took an immediate disliking to this particular fellow, but he talked a good game, speaking glibly of having been saved at such and such a church. But when Dad told the man he could find help at the mission, he blew up: "I've never fed my children anything I didn't buy from the grocery store shelf, and I'm not going to start now!" Dad's answer was, "Well, I'm sorry," and as the man stormed off he growled over his shoulder: "I can attest to that!" So, yes, some of the colorful characters

that stopped by the church had a bit of an attitude, but Dad or Mom never felt physically threatened by anyone.

As for Dad's ministry at East Howard, there is not much remarkable to record. The small-church pastorate is that way. There is a steady succession of unremarkable labors: hurting saints to be counseled, evangelistic visits to be made, surgery waiting rooms needing a caring presence, weddings and funerals to be conducted, the inexorable two or three sermons to be prepared each week. Yet the glory of God is in these small things. Occasionally the labors are punctuated with gratifying results—the new convert baptized into the kingdom, the tear-stained gratitude of a grieving saint, lives incrementally (but truly) changed by the preaching of the Word.

Even while writing this, I received a brief note from one of the young men who was under Dad's ministry at East Howard. Now closing in on the senior years himself, he wrote simply of Dad's influence in his salvation: "Thank God for him being there that night and giving me a heart and head knowledge of what my personal salvation means to me. I love Bro. Frees for having the love of God and the right kind of message to lead me to Christ forty-two years ago." Through a lifetime of mostly unheralded, non-dramatic ministry, this kind of testimony could surely be repeated dozens of times over.

Fitting for the busy pastor's life, the few journal entries Dad wrote during the early years at East Howard are brief and ministry-related. Here's a sampling:

*12-Feb-'76.* God is bigger than my headaches. He knows all about them. He will divinely enable me to do

what He would have me to do. And if He is enabling, then I know that *how* I do it will be in accordance with His will. Therefore, I do not have to fear and fret when I feel physically unable to do a certain job (visit someone, preach a sermon, teach a lesson, counsel with someone). If I will just trust Him moment by moment to give me grace for the occasion, He will do it.

*4-May-'76.* I must rely upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit—an absolute dependence on the Spirit of God. A change in *me* will begin a chain reaction: a change in my ministry, a change in my church, a change in people of the community. A church that is just sputtering along does not bring glory to the Lord Jesus. On that premise then I can pray that God will glorify Himself and His Son by reviving the work at East Howard—*starting with this preacher!*

*11-Dec-'76.* In preaching, I need to be concerned with my Master's reputation, not mine. I want to preach a powerful sermon that men might honor Him, not me. Lord, give me strength, wisdom, and courage for tomorrow that I might not in any way dishonor my Lord who has ordained me.

Dad never lost the vision of seminary training, and in the summer of 1977 he enrolled at New Orleans Baptist Seminary. It was a grind, driving an hour and a half to New Orleans every Tuesday morning, taking a full load of classes, spending the nights in a dorm room, and driving back on Friday to catch up on pastoral responsibilities and preach two services on Sunday. This would have been grueling under any conditions, but the constant suffering of migraine headaches made it well-nigh undoable. Rare were the days he was not feeling the beginnings of a headache,

enduring the wrath of one, or muddling through the day in washed-out recovery mode.

After six months of this, Dad came close to calling it quits. One dreary morning, after a late night of prayer and wrestling with the Lord, he walked to the Registrar's office with the intention of withdrawing. He literally had his hand on the doorknob when he experienced perhaps the most dramatic example of divine guidance in his entire life. He told the story to the church the next Sunday, and the following is adapted from detailed notes prepared for that testimony (which accounts for the somewhat choppy nature of it).

I began attending seminary in summer. Everything went well. However, in the fall, I began to undergo a personal struggle as to whether it was God's will for me to continue. I sometimes felt like it was, sometimes not, especially when studies got particularly hard and headaches particularly bad. This struggle went on all last fall until Christmas break. I suppose I decided to quit fifty times. As I prayed about it, there was no clear leading one way or the other.

Throughout Christmas and New Year's holiday, I prayed. I wanted a definite answer from God. I was ready to do either and felt God would answer, but no answer came. I was totally undecided. The main burden was whether God wanted me to give undivided attention to the church and to my work here. On the other hand, I felt I was learning a lot of things that would help me to be a better pastor. Mrs. W. encouraged me with words to the effect that I ought not to consider it two separate things, but consider my studies as part of my work here.

I was supposed to have registered this past Monday. I kept praying about it, but did not go to the seminary to register. I thought a few times that perhaps God was waiting until the last minute to show me His will. But after Monday came and went, I felt like the last minute was past! I asked God to reveal to me any sin in my life that might be preventing me from knowing His will. I thought of a couple of sins and confessed them, but still no answer.

Tuesday morning I decided to go to New Orleans, sit in the classes I would have taken if I had registered, and spend the rest of the day thinking about it to see if I could make a decision after classes. That afternoon a fierce personal struggle began. There seemed to be no leading from the Lord. Should I continue or not? Every time I would think of a reason why I should continue, I would think of one why I should not. This continued up until midnight.

About midnight, I decided to try praying again and searching God's Word for an answer. I thumbed through my Bible, and Psalm 107 caught my eye. I began to read. *[Dad's notes are sketchy here, but it's clear the Psalm stirred a sense of desperation and deep longing for God's direction and peace.]* Then I tried to sleep, but tossed and turned till 3:30. I finally decided that something causing this much unrest could not be of the Lord, so I would just pack up my things in the morning, go to the office, fill out a withdrawal slip, and quit. Then I finally went to sleep.

The next morning I packed up my stuff, taking my time. My first class would have been 9:00 A.M., but since I had quit, it didn't make any difference. I walked over to the office where I had to fill out a withdrawal slip to officially quit. It was just about 9:00. I walked up the steps and was to the point of reaching for the door, and the strangest thing happened. Thirty feet to the right was the classroom where my first class was. I

turned and walked into the classroom and sat down. I thought, "What am I doing here? I'm quitting."

The class started. There was a visiting lecturer and he was talking about the ministry. I wasn't really listening much. He was speaking in a conversational tone about the ministry. All of a sudden he looked over in my direction, and he raised his voice: "To be here in this seminary preparing to minister is God's will for you right now!" Wow. I practically came up out of my seat. Immediately I had the calm assurance that God had spoken to me. All the dark and gloom and chains were gone! I went on to the rest of my classes, and that afternoon I went and registered, knowing I was doing God's will.

After class that day, Dad went for his accustomed cup of coffee in the cafeteria and saw the visiting lecturer, a local pastor, at one of the tables. Dad felt led to go over and share this tale of how he was on the verge of quitting and how the Lord had used the pastor's words so mightily to encourage him. The visiting pastor, with tears filling his eyes, thanked Dad profusely and said with emotion, "You don't know what that means to me." God was definitely in the encouragement business that winter morning in New Orleans. Dad concludes the story:

Wednesday afternoon I was driving home from seminary. For the first time I had a chance to really think about what had happened. I thought back about God's promises to guide, and how God had been faithful in hearing and answering my prayer, and how He showed His love. (I still don't know why I walked into the classroom instead of the Registrar's office.) All of this welled

up within me. I opened my mouth and shouted, "Praise the Lord!" It was so loud, I scared myself.

Dad arrived at New Orleans Seminary just prior to the conservative doctrinal resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention. The liberal leanings of much of the faculty were no surprise to him—he had been thoroughly warned of it—but were nonetheless a constant vexation. He learned many useful things and enjoyed the fellowship with other students, but he got to see first-hand the soul-withering effects of a neo-orthodox view of the Scriptures. He often imagined how grand it could be if the Convention would somehow embrace again a conservative doctrinal stance and see its schools churn out young pastors and evangelists with a strong faith and burning heart for the Word of God. Yet it seemed so far from happening, and church history provided precious few examples, if any, of a denomination returning to conservative roots once started down the road to liberalism.

Very late one evening Dad left the seminary library at closing time and stepped into the humid New Orleans night pondering these things. Between the library and dining hall was a wooden bench under a tree, and here Dad sat down to think and pray. The Spirit of prayer came upon him and he began to intercede fervently for a mighty revival to sweep through the seminary and the Convention as a whole, bringing a restoration of conservative, biblical doctrine and love for the Word.

I don't wish to lay too much weight upon his prayer that night; no doubt he was only one of many that God was stirring to prayer in the matter. But it would be just like

God to take the Spirit-wrought prayer of a small-church pastor, struggling his weary way through seminary, and employ it as a tiny cog in a mighty worldwide plan of His. Make of it what you will, it was shortly after this that events began to transpire that over the course of the next decade miraculously did indeed restore America's largest non-Catholic denomination and its seminaries to Bible-believing orthodoxy.

During those battle-for-the-Bible years, Dad faithfully and sometimes sacrificially attended the Convention meetings. He and his humble book of ballots, and often Mom alongside him, did their small part to stand for truth by electing conservative Convention presidents, who would in turn appoint conservative committee members, who would select Bible-believing trustees to guide the various agencies and seminaries. Dad viewed it all as a joyful answer to prayer, and the privilege of participating as a humble foot soldier in this historic fight for truth stands as one of the more satisfying legacies of his ministry.

Dad continued to keep a journal on a hit-and-miss basis during the later East Howard years. His entries, as these samples show, reflect a hunger for the anointing power of God upon his life and ministry and a longing for Christ's strength to be made perfect in much weakness:

*?-Nov-'79.* Lord, I need an anointing with the Holy Spirit, not that I might do great things, but that Your power and blessing might be upon the little things I do. "My grace is sufficient"—not only in sickness but in everything and every situation. His strength is made perfect in weakness, whatever that weakness is. The Word is

powerful in and of itself. It can convict, convert, and comfort apart from any effort or influence on my part. I often manipulate worship services and worry about saying the right things when I should just preach the Word and by faith believe God will use it to accomplish His purposes.

*11-Dec-'79.* Praise the Lord! What a great time of refreshing from Him this morning. Hallelujah! Felt like I was literally in His presence! I have never felt such a powerful anointing of the Spirit. Almost over-powering in its intensity. Also, have noticed new strength against temptation.

*18-Dec-'79.* A renewed sense of God's love for me in recent days. Regardless of my frailties, sin, unfaithfulness, circumstances, failing health, He loves me! I cannot comprehend that. I can only praise Him.

*25-Jan-'80.* God *must* have a purpose in allowing me to suffer with headaches. I probably should resign myself to the suffering until He chooses to take them away or to reveal His purpose. Lord, even though I keep asking why, help me to trust You.

*22-Feb-'80.* In the name of Jesus I claim victory over the Devil this day. All my thoughts, ministry, etc., which have been in a muddle the past few weeks seem to have all fallen into place today.

*6-Mar-'80.* Lord, You have promised all power, yet I exhaust myself laboring in the flesh. Oh, the promises I fail to claim! I hereby claim the promise of John 7:37-39 ("rivers of living water"). Not so *I* can be a better witness, intercessor, etc., but because I want Jesus Christ to be the Lord of my life and be glorified in me.



**TOP: Pastor Frees is hard at work on a Sunday sermon in his East Howard Baptist Church study. BOTTOM: Relief appears to be the dominant emotion after Dad's hard-earned graduation from New Orleans Baptist Seminary.**

## CHAPTER 13

# KENTUCKY DAYS

*Truly He cannot, after such assurance,  
Truly He cannot and He shall not fail;  
Nay, they are known, the hours of thine en-  
durance,  
Daily thy tears are added to the tale.*



**T**hat January morning when the Lord pried Dad's hand off the Registrar's office door at New Orleans Seminary and kept him from withdrawing in discouragement, who would have guessed that Dad would complete not one but two master's degrees before hanging up his seminary briefcase in triumph? After finishing the standard pastoral degree, he took a deep breath, restocked his supply of coffee, notebooks, and endurance, and proceeded to tack on a master's in religious education. It only took about a year, and conditions were more tolerable this go-round, as Mom and Kevin commuted back and forth to New Orleans with him and set up housekeeping during the week in an on-campus apartment.

As his work on the second degree neared an end, Dad increasingly felt that his ministry at East Howard was drawing to a close as well. He felt he had done what he

could there and perhaps both he and the church would benefit by a change. Severe headaches continued and had led him on more than one occasion to consider resigning. Dad always had a love for teaching—hence the religious education degree—and he wondered if, even with his physical limitations, he might be of use to a small Bible college somewhere. Teaching young preachers in an academic setting would be a dream job of sorts, he felt, something that would play to his strengths and be richly rewarding. He decided to send out a few application letters, but as a few weeks went by with no response, he more or less forgot about it.

Behind the curtains God was at work. About a month later, Dad held in his hand a letter from the president of Mid-Continent Baptist Bible College in Mayfield, Kentucky, inviting him to come for an interview. He set down the letter with quickened pulse. Could this be an open door from the Lord? It was certainly worth exploring, and he and Mom hastily made plans for a visit. Things went well, and Dad was impressed with the college and the potential ministry there. After having to constantly sift through the liberalism at New Orleans Seminary, it was an exhilarating change to have the men at Mid-Continent carefully examine *him* to make sure he was conservative enough for the school.

So in the summer of 1981, Dad and Mom left the salt air of the Mississippi coast, bound for the tobacco fields and gently rolling hills of western Kentucky. It was a step of faith. Things were tight financially at the school, and the pay was not lucrative to say the least. Nor was it a full-time position. He was to be paid according to the number of

classes he taught, and he started with just one. This soon expanded and he would typically teach two or three classes per term.

The teachers at Mid-Continent were often in demand for supply preaching. One Sunday Dad and Mom drove a dozen miles north of Mayfield to tiny Lowes, Kentucky, to fill the pulpit for Mount Olivet Baptist Church. The country-style church with its friendly, unpretentious people was without a pastor. One thing led to another, and within months of moving to Kentucky, Dad had entered upon his second full-time pastorate. He would minister at Mount Olivet for the next six-and-a-half years, while continuing to serve on the faculty at Mid-Continent.

Dad later looked back on the Kentucky years as probably the most joyful and fulfilling time of his ministry. As he had anticipated, he relished teaching his classes at the college—Bible, religious education, church administration, whatever was needed. Many of the students were country pastors or pastors-to-be, not highly educated for the most part and not exposed to much solid teaching before coming to the college. To see the light go on in their eyes as he taught was gratifying, as was the assurance that he was having an impact not only on them, but through them on the Lord's people in the churches they served.

Though at first blush it doesn't sound particularly energizing, Dad's favorite class through the years was his "Methods of Teaching" course. As the students filtered into the classroom on Monday mornings, many of them had spent the previous day in churches where "teaching" meant opening a sleepy Sunday School class with prayer and then

tediously reading aloud from the lesson materials. The notion of using preparation and creativity to help people truly grasp the material was completely new for some, and many testified of benefit it brought to their churches.

This did lead to some amusing moments in class. In one exercise, Dad had students take turns demonstrating an attention-grabbing opening for a lesson. One young man stood to introduce a lesson on the fullness of the Holy Spirit. He set a glass of vinegar on the podium and proceeded to pour baking soda into it. The mixture began to bubble up—and kept bubbling up, overflowing the glass, running down the front of the podium, and gurgling its way down the classroom floor to the back of the room. “That’s what happens,” the student said, “when you get filled with the Holy Spirit.” Whether or not he intended for his attention-getter to involve the janitorial staff, it truly *was* a fitting picture of the Spirit-filled life!

Then there was the time the Dean happened to walk by during a role-playing demonstration. Dad had asked a few students to act out an imaginary church dispute. The students, in good fun, were having a particularly energetic go at it, yelling at each other in the best Baptist business-meeting-gone-bad tradition. The door was closed, but the Dean could hear the commotion as he passed by. He poked his head into the student break room across the hall to ask if anybody knew what was going on over in the classroom. No one knew, but it had been going on for a while, they said. After class Dad was greeted with: “Brother Frees, the Dean would like to see you in his office.” But once the Dean

learned that the hubbub was the demonstration of a teaching technique, not the start of a riot, all was well.

The journals of that period reflect continued wrestling with physical weakness:

*25-Nov-'82.* To improve my spiritual health I need to get my eyes off my “thorn”—even though I suffer greatly with it, and even though God has greatly helped me by graciously enabling me. Because I have dwelt upon it, I lack confidence (my confidence should be in Him), and I am overcome rather than being an overcomer. In addition, I may need to simply realize my limitations, stop trying to do so much, and stop feeling guilty because I can't do a normal amount. Lord, show me what You would have me do. My motivation in ministry must be love for my Lord and a desire to serve *Him*.

*23-Jun-'83.* In my service for Christ, I need to be governed by the spiritual, not the physical. Too often I've let my body dictate my ministry (in everything from sermon preparation to visitation) rather than obeying impulses of the Spirit. When there is something to be done and I don't feel like it physically, I need to get on my knees until I *do* feel like it. And if my body is in such bad shape as it seems and would keep me from ministry, then I need to seek God's healing.

*12-Aug-'83.* As I was thinking about what I would do with the rest of my ministry years, the thought came to me that I have only a few years left of ministry. My activities and pursuits should be those that would most honor Jesus Christ.

*9-Apr-'85.* It is possible to live in the realm of the supernatural. Lord Jesus, may I always seek to live there. The realm of the supernatural (walking daily with God):

(1) Living with eternity in view. (2) “Not my will, but Thine.” (3) Living in the Word and by the Word. (4) Loving not the world. (5) Keeping myself from idols. (6) Obeying the Great Commission. (7) Living by faith—prayer, save the lost, heal the sick, church needs, church ministry. How? Being filled with the Holy Spirit!

About this time, Dad shared the following testimony in the Mount Olivet church bulletin:

Last week, my leg suddenly became inflamed and swollen. Even though it was very sore I didn’t think much about it. After a few days the swelling went down, so I was not concerned—until I went to the doctor this past week. The doctor looked at my leg and said, “You must pray some strong prayers!” He said I had phlebitis with three blood clots and somehow it had healed itself! He said further, “That just doesn’t happen,” and that I should be dead!

The usual testimony of healing tells of having a sick body and then, after prayer, God’s healing. In my case it was just the opposite. I experienced God’s healing *before* I even knew that I was seriously sick! Nevertheless, I believe it was God’s healing power at work in my body, and I’ve praised Him for it again and again since my visit to the doctor. My leg is still very sore and will be for a while, but the crisis seems to be past.

On a Sunday morning in August 1985, Dad preached a sermon that he called “one of the most important messages that I will ever preach from this pulpit.” The subject was, “Why does an all-loving, all-powerful God allow suffering?” The good people of Mount Olivet Baptist could tell this was not theoretical stuff plucked from a book of sermons. This was hammered out in the furnace of faith-wrenching expe-

rience. These excerpts from that Sunday morning message not only give a good sample of Dad's preaching style, but also distill perhaps more clearly than anywhere else the life message God forged into Dad's soul throughout his ministry.

On many occasions I've asked that question, why? Especially with these migraine headaches that I have so many of. I've prayed, Lord, You know I have a desire to be a good preacher. You know I have a desire to be a good teacher, and serve You. Why do I keep having these headaches that keep me from serving You in the way I feel You'd have me serve?

Why, Lord? I've asked this question many times. And let me say I believe it is normal and natural for anyone who is suffering to ask why. It doesn't make you any less of a Christian or any less spiritual because you ask why.

Many times I've had to come into this pulpit sick with a migraine headache—weak. I've had to pray over and over again, "God, help me." And there has been a sense of dependence upon God at those times that I wouldn't have had if I were feeling good.

There have been times when I visited folks in the hospital, and I've felt like I needed the bed worse than the patient did! And I've had to pray for strength.

Yet sometimes after I've preached or after I've visited, I felt like I didn't do a bit of good, and it would have been just as well to stay home or not preach, and then later I would find out that someone had been blessed because of it. It was because God had heard my cry for help in my time of suffering and need. I've learned the lesson that without Him I can do nothing.

Now, I still ask why many times when I suffer. But I've learned the truth of our Lord's words to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made per-

fect in weakness.” Our weakness, my weakness—that’s where God shows forth His strength. Suffering will humble you like nothing else will.

In every trial we have there is a corresponding grace to go with it. He may not give it before you need it, but He’ll give it when you need it. Peter talks about the “manifold trials,” and then a bit later he talks about God’s “manifold grace.” The word manifold simply means many-colored. We have troubles in many colors, but God’s grace is sufficient for each one.

Sometimes we can’t see God’s purpose. In the loneliness of our suffering our hearts cry out, “Why, God?” But it’s possible that even if God revealed to us why, we wouldn’t understand it. Have you ever thought about that?

I read a story of a little boy who broke one of his prized toys. He came crying to his father and said, “Daddy, why doesn’t it work?” The father saw immediately what was wrong with the toy. He could have told his boy why—could have given him some technical reason. But he knew his little son would not understand. So instead he simply reached down and picked up his son in his arms. He brushed away his tears and said, “It’s all right. Daddy loves you.”

There are times when our heavenly Father does not give us an answer to our suffering because we wouldn’t understand it anyway. But there is never a time when we cannot know the presence of our loving heavenly Father. You may be suffering in some way today, and I say to you that God will never fail you.

One other journal entry stands out from the years at Mount Olivet Baptist. Dad did not often refer to his mostly unhappy upbringing, which makes the following thoughts from him as a fifty-four-year-old pastor of particular inter-

est. Struggling for the best way to phrase it, he reflects here on the lingering effects of his childhood troubles.

*12-Jan-'87.* I recognize that I am a naturally selfish person. I have a propensity for seeking to turn every event, situation, and circumstance into that which would benefit me—put me in a good light. (I am having difficulty finding the right words here to express what I am writing about. I'm not sure selfish is the right word.) I just feel like I want to protect myself in all circumstances. I never had much when I was growing up. I hated my home situation and circumstances. I tend to do whatever I have to do to shake off the last vestiges of those days. So whatever is to my advantage, I'm going to have it or do it. I have no desire for a lot of things or even the best of things. But I do like *nice* things (furniture, car, all the conveniences)—anything that will help me build a wall around my past. (I still don't feel that I've adequately described how I feel.) Lord, help me to overcome the above, to minister with pure motives.

Then there are these lines Dad wrote during the Kentucky days. Simple, joyful, faith-filled—they strike the perfect note to bring this chapter with its bittersweet reflections to a close:

*Where would I be without Jesus?  
What could I do without Him?  
Where could I go without Jesus?  
I have no hope without Him.*

*He gives a light for the future  
And gives me grace for today.  
All of His promises are sure;  
His changeless Word is my stay.*

*Oh, praise the dear name of Jesus—  
Wonderful Savior is He!  
Oh, worship my Lord, King Jesus;  
He gave of Himself for me.*



**TOP:** Perhaps the most rewarding facet of Dad's entire ministry was teaching young preachers at Mid-Continent Baptist Bible College. **BOTTOM:** Mount Olivet Baptist Church in Lowes, Kentucky, became Dad's second pastorate.

## CHAPTER 14

### CHANGES AND STRUGGLES

*Gentle and faithful, tyrannous and tender,  
Ye that have known Him, is He sweet to know?  
Softly He touches, for the reed is slender,  
Wisely enkindles, for the flame is low.*



“I must be more open to the Lord’s will and leading for my life. He may want to use me in a new direction.” So Dad wrote in March 1988. After six years at Mount Olivet Baptist Church, Dad began to sense that perhaps God had something else for him. He sifted through the multitude of possibilities: serving as minister of education somewhere, pastoring part-time a struggling smaller church, home missionary work, church planting. After a few months of mental tossing and turning, he decided to adopt a position of restful surrender to God in the matter and, in his words, “stop trying to engineer and manipulate.”

Very soon after this, God did indeed change the direction of his ministry and in an unanticipated way. He found himself offered the position of Mid-Continent librarian—to one with his delight in books a kid-in-a-candy-shop scenario. He would be able to continue his beloved teaching too, but there was one sticky part of the equation: librarian was

a full-time commitment, so taking the position would mean leaving Mount Olivet church and the pastorate. But we've seen that his heart and mind had been running along those lines already, so after much prayer he accepted the job as college librarian.

Part of the arrangement was that the school would give him a leave of absence and ship him off to the University of Kentucky to earn a Master's in Library Science. (Mid-Continent was in the midst of the accreditation process, and having a trained librarian was a requirement of the accrediting agency.) So the same man who nearly quit Athens College, and who had his hand on the doorknob of the Registrar's office at New Orleans Seminary to withdraw, now was headed to Lexington, Kentucky, for his third graduate program.

Dad was not so young anymore, and the year in Lexington was rigorous to say the least, a trial of faith in many ways. Particularly odious were the grueling final comprehensive exams, or "comps." It's hard to say which was more stressful, the exams themselves or the dreadful anticipation of them. He was never one of those happy-go-lucky types that live above anxiety about tests or assignments, but this took the stress to a new level. After all, he was here not only for himself, but for Mid-Continent. They had essentially given him a year off and paid his way here. What if he went through the whole year of studies but washed out in the comps? Anyone familiar with Dad knew this was not a likely outcome, but he could hardly be blamed for feeling the pressure.

In the end, he did indeed notch his third master's degree and returned to Mayfield to settle in as full-time librarian. But it had been a rough go of it—for body, soul, and spirit.

*17-Jun-'90.* I have followed the Lord afar off for many months—a lack of faith, commitment, just plain ignoring Him in my life—too busy with school work, library work, my own pursuits. God be merciful to me a sinner. It has been so difficult trying to get back to God. I have grown so cold. Lord, help me to experience a personal revival.

*18-Aug-'90.* I returned from U.K. on the third of May. I still feel mentally, spiritually, and now physically drained. Many headaches, worn out all the time. Seems like my only desire is to do my library work (which I greatly enjoy) and then relax. Only occasionally do I have a desire to preach or teach. Many times even attending church is a burden. I have preached as a pulpit supply on two occasions since I have returned from U.K., but on both occasions I was not spiritually prepared and therefore it was a burden. Therefore, I decided a few weeks ago not to accept any preaching assignments for the time being.

I'm still feeling very guilty because I did not really trust God at U.K. God led Sara to fill my wall at U.K. with comforting scriptures concerning trusting Him in all situations. I would not have made it without those scriptures, even though my faith was lacking. I cannot testify to my trust in Him, but I can testify to His faithfulness in meeting all of my needs in spite of my lack of trust in Him. Praise the Lord! "He is faithful..." Thank You, Lord, for everything You did for us at U.K. Thank You for a faithful wife to guide me in my time of darkness.

I feel very definitely that God led me to U.K. and that my serving as Mid-Continent librarian is His will for me. As to preaching and teaching, I don't know yet, but I must seek His will. It is possible He is graciously giving me a much needed rest.

Gradually though, "He restoreth my soul" became a reality for Dad as it always does for the Lord's sheep. More spiritual vigor seeped in, and he began to ease back into the preaching ministry, mostly in a pulpit supply role.

*16-Dec-'90.* Had a great time of communion with the Lord last night. Could not sleep, so I got up and spent time with the Lord. Had another good prayer time tonight. Asked God to heal me physically. Seriously considering supply or interim preaching. Lord, lead me! As I preach in various churches, my authority for preaching is not in myself, but in my message from the authoritative Word of God. Of each sermon I must ask: Is it from God? Is it Scriptural? Is it Christ-centered? "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

*23-Feb-'91.* Began to pray about preaching again. Since graduating from U.K. I have had no desire to preach, and I have not been able to discern why. I thought that as soon as I graduated from U.K., after a few days rest I would be ready to hit it again. I wasn't. I couldn't seem to "get with it" physically. I was always completely worn out almost from the time I woke up in the morning until bedtime. I had no desire to do anything but lie around evenings and weekends. The thought of preaching was repelling to me (not so much the actual preaching as the effort it would take to prepare the messages). After working at my library job during the week, I just couldn't stand the thought of any other responsibility

during the weekend. Most weekends were just one long period of headache and physical exhaustion.

It wasn't until the beginning of the year that I finally began to feel a little better physically. I began to realize that I was suffering from a bad case of burnout. I thought I knew what burnout was, but I didn't. I had no idea it could affect a person physically, even long after the cause of burnout had been removed. But after doing some study on the subject, I discovered that it could and evidently did.

Another thing that has kept me from preaching: Over the months I have felt very guilty over the fact that during my final weeks at U.K. (as comprehensive final exams approached), I was not able to trust the Lord. I would pray—give the Lord the heavy burden of my studies, and then a few minutes later take it right back again. Further, I sadly neglected my spiritual life because of the pressure of studies. As a result I have not felt worthy to preach to others after not trusting the Lord myself. I have been feeling like I needed to be preached *to*, and totally unfit to do any preaching. So I have been refusing all opportunities to preach. I realize now, though, that even if I can't testify to my faithfulness, I can testify to His.

Of late I have felt a restlessness about simply attending church, and not ministering in any way. I feel like the Lord may be gently nudging me back into preaching again.

*20-Mar-'91.* I don't have a lot of time left to worship and serve the Lord. Lord Jesus, help me to make You "Lord of what's left."

*26-Jan-'92.* For too long I've mainly been concerned about myself and my sermon. It matters no longer that I be well-received or liked, or that my sermon is "a good one" or interesting or homiletically correct. It only mat-

ters that I faithfully preach the Word and seek to please my Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, and have a love and a concern for those who listen, trusting the Holy Spirit to apply the Word to their hearts. This will enable me to preach even though I have a bad headache or have been without sleep, because I will not be concerned about what “they” think of me or my sermons.

I must also become a man of the Book and walk daily with my Lord, so that I will be able to preach out of the overflow, even though I might not have a well-outlined sermon. Lord, help me to trust You for all of the above. This is not to say that I should not spend adequate time preparing to speak for the Master. If anything, it means I should spend more. But in it all, trust and not worry, seeking only to please Jesus.

*10-Sep-'92.* Have been extremely stressed-out lately working on Mid-Continent’s accreditation. After going to bed last night, a spirit of great anxiety suddenly came upon me (which I knew would continue to intensify). But I claimed Christ’s peace and the anxiety left me as quickly as it came—and I went off to sleep!

A little over a year later, at age 61 and nursing a multitude of physical maladies, Dad closed out one of the most fruitful periods of his life by retiring from Mid-Continent. A brief blurb in the *Mid-Continent Herald* noted that he had “no specific plans for retirement, other than continuing to serve the Lord as He leads.” Dad and Mom returned to Huntsville, Alabama, and settled in for what turned out to be a short-lived retirement.

Before we depart the Bluegrass State on our way south again, let’s pause to celebrate one other shining moment from the Kentucky years. We’ve seen that Dad first

graduated from college in his early forties. In May 1990, Mom did him one better, snagging a bachelor's degree in religious education from Mid-Continent at the age of sixty. She originally started taking classes just to try it, not thinking she would ever complete a degree. But her previous exploits (Mrs. Chestnutt's business school and a few college courses she had taken in Huntsville while Dad was in Japan the first time) earned her a sizable cache of credit hours, and she was able to finish in just a couple years.

In spite of her age, Mom fit into the college scene just fine. The young ministerial students seemed to enjoy having her around, and she had a big time bantering with them as well. They had the advantage of youth over her, and while she would slog through a week or two of hard memorization for a major test, they would brag about beginning their studies at midnight the night before the exam. But the proof was in the pudding, and Mom accomplished what few of the young bucks did: a perfect 4.0 grade average. And, yes, she did take at least one of Dad's classes and did quite well, thank you—even though she claims, with a twinkle in her eye, that he was extra strict on her compared to the other students.



**TOP:** The 1988 Southern Baptist Convention in San Antonio was a crucial event in restoring the denomination to its Bible-believing roots, and Dad and Mom were there to do their small part. Here they take a sight-seeing break at the Alamo. **BOTTOM:** Mom graduates from Mid-Continent Baptist Bible College in May 1990 at the age of sixty.



**This beautiful portrait was taken during the latter years in Kentucky, while Dad served as Mid-Continent librarian.**

## CHAPTER 15

### RETIRED AND UNRETIRED

*Eager and faint, empassionate and lonely,  
These in their hour shall prophesy again:  
This is His will who hath endured, and only  
Sendeth the promise where He sends the pain.*



Things seemed to cluster in threes for Dad in his professional life and ministry. There were the three master's degrees, three churches pastored, and three retirements—first from the Air Force, now from Mid-Continent Baptist Bible College, and one more yet to come.

Back in Huntsville, familiar Central Baptist Church became once again Dad and Mom's church abode. They loved the people there and the feeling was mutual. Pastor Don Stevens was a good man and became a loyal friend to Dad, and vice versa. Not surprisingly, Dad suffered the malady common to retired pastors: he found it difficult at times to sit in church services without the gnawing feeling he should be preaching. So whatever may have been Dad's intentions of retirement, it wasn't long before he was giving thought to the possibility of taking up the reins of pastoral ministry once again.

5-Jan-'95. All that Christ is for me, He is for me right now—this day, this hour, this minute.

6-Jan-'95. Many excuses and reasons why I should not seek to pastor again, but it seems God spoke to my heart from *Daily Bread* for January 5: “Ye have compassed this mountain long enough” (Deut. 2:3).

18-Apr-'95. As I was thinking about my lost neighbors, their indifference to the claims of Christ and their sinful lifestyle, it didn't seem likely they would ever be saved. I then thought about my weaknesses and inability to witness to them in a way that would cause them to turn to Christ, and it seemed like a hopeless situation. But suddenly the thought came that God is an all-powerful God—His “hand is not shortened.” *He* can save them no matter what hard cases they may be! The further thought came that my part is to pray for them, which will set in motion His power, and then witness to them as God leads me and gives opportunity. God can overcome hard cases. The power is in the Gospel.

2-Sep-'95. For the first time the other day, after committing a sin in my life, I immediately had a sense that I had hurt the heart of Jesus. Instead of feeling guilty in front of a judge as I normally do, I felt I had deeply grieved Jesus. That, in turn, caused me to feel godly sorrow over my sin. I need to keep feeling this each time I am convicted of my sin. “Grieve not the Holy Spirit.”

Late in 1995, Pastor Don retired from the ministry, leaving Central Baptist without a pastor. (You already know how this story will end.) It was a simple decision for the church to ask Dad to serve as interim pastor. He accepted, jotting this note in his journal: “Two things I know. I must

look to Jesus in everything. If I will look to Him He will enable me to do all that I will be called upon to do.” When the predictable next step occurred and he was asked to become full-time pastor, it was in the same spirit of looking entirely to Christ in weakness that he said yes, and a new chapter of ministry began.

As he launched into his third full-time pastorate, Dad copied this prayer from Martin Luther into his journal and made it his own:

Lord God, You have made me a pastor in Your church. You see how unfit I am to undertake this great and difficult office, and if it were not for Your help, I would have ruined it all long ago. Therefore I cry to You for aid. I offer my mouth and my heart to Your service. I desire to teach the people—and for myself, I would learn ever more and diligently meditate on Your Word. Use me as Your instrument, but never forsake me, for if I am left alone I shall easily bring it all to destruction.

For Mom, things had come full circle. The congregation she had joined many years before as a brand new Christian—Lowe Mill Baptist Church it was called back in the day, with its church treasury in a coffee can—now looked to her as pastor’s wife. She was fully at home in the little church with its double-digit attendance, simple-hearted people, and high concentration of senior saints. This was her element, and she thrived in it. The interpersonal relations so important to small-church life have always been her forte. She desired to see the Lord’s work increase, of course, but the big-church spotlight never held

the slightest attraction for her. In her circular letter to friends for Christmas 1996, she wrote:

In February, Dick was called to pastor Central Baptist Church, where he had been serving as interim Pastor for a short time. It is also the church where we had placed our membership when we moved back to Huntsville. It's a small church, averaging between fifty and sixty in Sunday School. Although we're small in number, we're big on fellowship, and we are enjoying our ministry here. Since the majority of our members are senior saints, we have had much sickness and even death. It has also been necessary for some of our most faithful saints to stop attending services and join the ranks of the shut-ins. But the Lord has been good, and we continually praise Him for our church family. We are both happy to be back in the pastorate again.

In his journal entries from that period Dad was, as always, sternly analytical in reviewing his own spiritual life and service for the Lord.

*7-Feb-'96.* I am to be a channel for His grace and His Word to His people. I am here by God's appointment; not to impress, avoid embarrassment, or perform, but to be a channel for God's Word to His people that He might meet their spiritual needs and that I might bring honor and praise to my Savior.

*8-Feb-'96.* In the past, the sermon itself was the goal—a "good" sermon, properly and logically presented, with entertaining illustrations, with a view to impress or at the very least avoid being embarrassed. As a result, while preaching I have felt I was (and I was) performing rather than delivering God's message to His people to

meet their spiritual needs and bring honor and praise to my Lord. In the future, may I be concerned only with preaching Your Word to Your people seeking only Your approval—remembering I am only a channel. In sermon preparation, one of the first steps must be to ask Jesus: “What do You want to say to Your people through this Scripture?”

*12-Feb-'96.* “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.” The will of God and His glory must be my supreme obsession in life. I must never hurry or cut short my devotional time in order to get busy preparing a sermon or lesson. My preparation will only be burden-free and my message effective as I spend time with Jesus—and preach from the overflow.

*4-May-'96.* Still have problems with perfectionism. Lord, You know my frame. Help me to stop trying to be perfect and simply commit myself with all my imperfections to You to use me as You see fit. Help me to seek Your glory, not my perfection, Your approval, not approval of others.

*20-May-'96.* Lord, You are the only Perfect One. If I can ever learn the lesson of committing everything to You, moment by moment, everything will be as perfect as it needs to be without all my striving. Lord Jesus, be the approval I seek through perfectionism. Meet that emotional need. May I seek only Your approval.

*?-Oct-'96.* I need to be more concerned about being a “man of the Book and the bended knee” and less concerned about administration and professionalism.

Dad felt that his ministry was marred by what he still calls the “three P’s”: professionalism, perfectionism, and

prayerlessness. It's not my job to exonerate him from these self-charges. I'm sure they are true to a certain extent. It's worth noting, though, that many small-church pastors are out there shooting from the hip week by week whose congregations might appreciate a higher dose of professionalism and perfectionism, if these are defined as careful thought and preparation in preaching and ministry. Adrian Rogers, legendary Southern Baptist pastor and Dad's hero in the ministry, was a model of professionalism in that very best sense, always ready with a well-crafted, well-delivered message, yet not lacking spiritual power.

In Dad's case, perhaps the "doing it correctly" emphasis was overdone. He certainly seems to think so. Yet I think it was an occasional miscalculation of his to assume that his ministry was without spiritual power. I know from experience that the mega-church trend of today can make any smaller-church pastor feel insignificant and unfruitful. None of the churches he pastored were positioned geographically or culturally for major growth. Yet to look over Dad's ministry log is to see a record of steady, faithful teaching of biblical themes, avoidance of doctrinal novelties, loving ministry to the saints, and not infrequently souls saved and baptized. All these things matter in heaven, even if some of them are sniffed at on earth. And as I read through his journal, I find the "three P's" overshadowed in my reckoning (and I suspect in God's) by a fourth: a *passion* to honor God and be used by Him.

So Central Baptist Church and the ministry of our faithful pastor and his wife hummed on, as did life itself with its simple joys and vexing trials. In the same circular

letter we cited earlier from Christmas 1996, Mom wrote of Dad's latest medical adventure:

Last month we experienced what we have been calling a Thanksgiving miracle. Dick had been having back pain for several weeks and finally went to the doctor, who ordered a CT scan. During the procedure, the doctor happened to discover an abdominal aneurysm in addition to the back problem. Because of the size and type of the aneurism, immediate surgery was required to prevent it from rupturing, which probably would have resulted in death. So, after the surgery, three days in intensive care, and five more days in the hospital, he is slowly recovering. The back problem still exists, but we are praising God that the aneurysm was discovered in time. A real Thanksgiving miracle! He was discharged from the hospital the night before Thanksgiving.

It was a Thanksgiving miracle indeed, but the recovery was long and slow, and the accumulation of physical trials was taking its toll.

*1-Aug-'97.* Psalm 92:12-14. "The righteous will flourish like a palm tree.... They will bear fruit in old age." I was feeling old, and worn out, and thinking about retiring—accidentally stumbled on this verse—felt like God gave it to me as encouragement.

*1-Sep-'97.* Tired and discouraged. I have reached the point in my life and ministry where I feel I need to recognize certain limitations: limitations of what can be accomplished at Central, physical, mental, and emotional limitations. I know God can do anything with anyone, and I can do all things through Jesus Christ who strengthens me. I am not giving up or copping out on my ministry. I just feel like I need to recognize my limi-

tations and begin working within their boundaries. I remain wide open to any move of God or His guidance, and I must continue to seek the rest and peace available by abiding in Christ.

*17-Nov-'97.* The Lord gave me a time of refreshing at the Alabama pastor's conference (held at Whitesburg Baptist Church), but very "down" in evening. From *Daily Light* God gave me Gal. 6:9—"We will reap if we do not lose heart."

*5-Aug-'98.* Josh. 23:14: "Not one good thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you, and not one word of them has failed." The thought came to me this morning: God doesn't want me to just get through the day or the task, but to get through it *victoriously*.

## CHAPTER 16

### FACING FORWARD

*Let no man think that sudden in a minute  
All is accomplished and the work is done;  
Though with thine earliest dawn thou shouldst  
begin it,  
Scarce were it ended in thy setting sun.*



There is, after all, a happy ending to the story of Dad's particular thorn in the flesh, the severe migraine headaches that plagued him throughout his adult years. He had managed some temporary relief while pastoring in Kentucky by using a folk remedy he read about in the newspaper. He doesn't remember what it was—some simple kitchen herb. It gave significant relief for some months, but the headaches soon returned. It was during his last pastorate, at Huntsville's Central Baptist, that the real breakthrough came.

In desperation over the continuing headaches, Dad appealed to his doctor for something—anything—that might help. Perhaps in desperation mode himself, the doctor scheduled him for a sleep study, which revealed that Dad had narcolepsy, a chronic condition affecting the brain's sleep control mechanism. The doctor prescribed a stimulant

and, remarkably, as soon as Dad began taking it the headaches, at least the severe migraine kind, went away. Whether the narcolepsy was causing the headaches all through the years, or the cure for one just happened to overlap with the cure for the other, either way this was a mercy from the Lord.

It's almost as if, like Paul's thorn, this particular affliction was issued as special equipment from the Lord for Dad's ministry—and then near the tail end of his ministry finally removed. By this time other physical maladies had continued to accumulate, so this was by no means a return to robust health. (Those who know him would smile at that thought.) I suppose there is some irony in the fact that one disability (headaches) was cured by the diagnosis of another (narcolepsy).

I say there was a happy ending, but the true blessed finale is yet to come. There is no reason to think that Dad's headaches and other physical ailments fail to qualify for Paul's exhilarating word: "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." Many of the things that so gall us now, we will praise God for with tears of joy then.

Speaking of physical trials, it was about this time that a particularly alarming episode took place. We are blessed to have, via his journal, Dad's record of it and the exercise of soul that accompanied it.

*24-Aug-'98.* After MRI on Aug. 20, Dr. H. informed me today that I had a small brain tumor near left inner ear, which would require surgery. What does the Lord have for me in this? I must practice what I preach (during

the ordeal) concerning God's presence, comfort, healing. Lord, help me set a good example for my members, the doctors, and nurses. Began praying for a miracle of healing. May Thy will be done in this matter.

*26-Aug-'98.* Prayed for miraculous healing. My motivations: God's glory and an increase in my faith. Whatever You have for me in this, may I accept it, and may Your purpose for it be accomplished in my life.

*7-Sep-'98.* Continuing to pray for miracle. Night before first consultation with surgeon. Feel very apprehensive. Dreading all the travel that will be involved—the nausea and headaches and other temporary and permanent effects of surgery. Concerned about how long I'll be incapacitated. Yet I know God is near. He loves me. My times are in His hands!

*8-Sep-'98.* God gave us a safe trip to Nashville [*where the surgeon's office was*] and back. Hectic morning traffic in Nashville. Missed turnoff, but took another one without any delay. Arrived at Dr. S. office “all shook up” because of traffic and the unknown and the upcoming surgery. Very tired—up since 5:30 A.M. Met Dr. S. for first time—very likeable—took lots of time explaining things to me. Made me feel better about surgery. Gave me another hearing test. Hearing has decreased more in last two months. Doctor said I will likely lose all hearing in left ear. Scheduled for surgery on Oct. 9.

*12-Sep-'98.* Continued to feel very depressed (uncharacteristic for me). One reason: my sugar reading has been increasing drastically every day without cause. Had difficult time preparing messages.

*13-Sep-'98.* Woke up still feeling low. But after prayer, the Lord took away the depression, and I began to feel

great. Had good day in church. My blood sugar dropped back to normal. Hard to believe stress could affect it that much. No worry about surgery. Church members very supportive.

*14-Sep-'98.* Still praying for a miracle (for God's glory and my edification). Nevertheless, not my will, but Thine.

*15-Sep-'98.* I continue to be reminded that there are so many with worse physical conditions than mine.

*21-Sep-'98.* I am sensing prayers on my behalf. The stress and depression have not returned. Extraordinary peace of mind and heart about everything all day yesterday (Sunday)—very unusual. (Even though some problems—air conditioner leaking water on the floor, having to return to house to get cookies for preschoolers, etc.) Possibly people praying for me? Felt very extroverted, wide-awake, very confident in all.

This last entry was written about two weeks before the surgery. As the day approached, he became more and more apprehensive. It was not so much the surgery itself he feared, although no one would relish such a thing. But there was also the intense nausea he always experienced after anesthesia, the long recovery, the pain and discomfort, the potential for lingering nerve and muscle damage. Shortly before heading to Nashville for surgery, he found sweet consolation from Psalm 121.

Great Psalm of comfort, but it was verse 8 that God used that morning. "The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in." I turned the two words "com-

ing” and “going” around. God would watch over me going to Nashville, and coming back.

And God did. The surgery was successful. The ordeal was unpleasant, of course, and the recovery long, but God had brought him through.

A number of months went by before he again wrote in his journal.

*3-Apr-'99.* Num. 13-14. Caleb followed wholeheartedly and exhibited faith in God in spite of obstacles. Fear sees the obstacles; faith sees opportunity.

*29-Sep-'99.* Eph. 3:14-21. A majestic passage. What Paul is talking about here is not meant for some super-spiritual Christian who spends all his time in prayer, but rather it is meant for ordinary Christians in their everyday living. Paul speaks of power, and power has to do with others (power to preach, teach, and witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ). Power to overcome the trials and problems of everyday living as we relate to others. Power to overcome temptation and oppression from Satan and his demons.

*17-Nov-'99.* Thinking much about retirement lately, primarily because of my health. Can't do all of what I should do or would like to do as pastor and preacher. (Lord, help!) My only reason for continuing to pastor must be to serve my Lord, not because I think retirement might be too boring (which it probably would—even though I could use a long rest). What a great privilege and blessing and gift God has given me to serve Him as pastor-teacher. Your will be done, not mine.

*21-Feb-'00.* I am so weak in so many ways. Because of this, I am easily discouraged and depressed. Yet Jesus

said: “My strength is made perfect in weakness. My grace is sufficient for you.” (1 Cor. 12:9) Help me to remember this, Lord. Abide in Him, and thereby experience His grace and strength in all of my weaknesses.

*15-Jan-'01.* I believe the truth of God’s Word. I believe God keeps each of His promises. But I need to begin to experience the fulfillment of specific promises I claim by faith as God speaks to me in His Word. I need to claim specific promises for specific needs and then look and wait expectantly for the fulfillment. In other words, believe God’s Word and act upon it.

In an April 2001 entry Dad makes a passing reference to “opposition and discouragement at Central.” One of the remarkable features of Dad’s ministry was the lack of church conflict he encountered over the years. It was not lacking altogether, as this note in his journal shows, but there was little of the proverbial infighting with deacons and members that seems to form a staple of many pastors’ experience. This had much to do, though he would never claim this, with Dad’s humility and lack of an authority complex. He simply was never caught up in the notion that because he was the pastor things always had to be done exactly his way, regardless of the feelings of others. Mom has always been superb, too, at treating church members with honor and smoothing any ruffled feathers.

We are near the end of the entries in Dad’s journal, as also we are approaching the close of his active ministry. On June 8, 2001, Dad’s sixty-ninth birthday, he found himself encouraged by 1 Chronicles 28:20, “He will not leave you nor forsake you until you have finished all the work for the

service of the house of the Lord.” Dad wrote: “Not yet time to retire.” But a month later he notes continuing discouragement and occasional depression, along with thoughts of retirement. This he attributes mainly to a “lack of self-confidence, due much to aging of body and mind.”

Later that year, Dad reluctantly stepped away from Central’s pastorate and retired from active ministry. In one of life’s little curiosities, it turns out that he served in each of his three beloved pastorates—East Howard in Biloxi, Mount Olivet in Lowes, Kentucky, and Central Baptist in Huntsville—for six and a half years.

Unless he is craftily keeping some later pages under confidential wraps, there is only one journal entry after Dad’s retirement. Its last words, with a shepherd’s heart, express concern for the church that was now without a pastor because of his own retirement.

*8-Jan-2002. From Daily Light this morning: Eternal security for those who know and trust You! Look to God for His blessing and help as we seek to serve Him. Ps. 90:17 – “Establish the work of our hands for us”—(For the church as they seek a pastor).*

By bringing this account to a close with the end of Dad’s pastoral ministry, I don’t mean to imply that his life and ministry are over—not at all. God may yet grant years of life and fruitfulness ahead. Certainly Dad’s preaching days appear to be through, but it would be just like God to save in some ways the best wine for last. Given the power attached to the prayers of the feeblest saint, and the flaming anointing of God’s Spirit that can fall upon the weakest,

quiet word of testimony, who can say that Dad and Mom's deepest fruitfulness is not still to come? It's possible that one day they will find that the hidden prayers and quiet words of their retired years wrought greater victories for God than all the public duties of the pastoral ministry.

Since his conversion Dad has always been, as he has always aspired to be, a man of the Book. He was converted by the reading of a simple Bible verse. His first sermon was a ringing defense of the truthfulness of Scripture. In spite of owning three graduate degrees, he has never wavered from a child-like confidence in the Bible or fallen into the deadly trap of liberalism or neo-orthodoxy. Mom has been his faithful soul-mate in all of this. So these words from Professor E. M. Blaiklock's little book, *The Bible and I*, recorded by Dad in his journal back in July 1988, offer a splendid recap of Dad and Mom's own life and testimony:

Mine is not a Lord who strews my path with roses, finds me a parking place, and strikes down the foe before our swords have crossed, but He had turned, over wide tracts of experience, what I thought disaster into triumph, lifted me from stumbling, pressed hard on all unworthiness, gave blessings beyond all listing and a satisfying purpose in life. If the way is hard as I reach the last ridges, can I not go on believing that He who has led will lead on? I cannot tell how much longer the way is to the fords of Jordan, but, long or short, the Bible and I will always go together now. It tells me, however desolate and lonely the path, really I am not alone. It leaves agonizing questions unsolved, but assures me that none are not included in the wise plan which embraces all of life.

Dear Dad and Mom, I gratefully rise up and call you blessed. Thank you for your steadfast testimony, for loving the Scriptures, for honoring the Savior, for obeying the call of God, for persevering through pain, for serving the Lord's people, for devoting yourselves to one another, for loving us. Above all, thanks be to God for the matchless, sovereign grace by which you both through these many years have been called and kept.

## APPENDIX A: SIXTY YEARS

On February 1, 2014, Dad and Mom reached that sweet and rare milestone: their sixtieth wedding anniversary. May God grant many more!



*Sixty years! They seem so far, yet near, now—  
Those happy scenes beside the Mobile Bay,  
Where true love caught a spark and fanned an  
ember,  
And two young lovers pledged their lives away.*

*Sixty years since, in a humble chapel,  
With nervous, holy joy the deed was done;  
Before the smiles of men young love completed,  
Before the eye of God, the two made one.*

*Sixty years of faithful, sweet commitment—  
That jewel our fickle age has spurned and lost;  
For love is now the passion of a moment,  
And lovers heed no vows and count no cost.*

*Yet sixty years these two have stayed the rudder,  
Have set their sail with joy and bravely fought  
Against all counter tides and stinging storm winds,  
And gave the thought of quitting not a thought.*

*Sixty years? Let others draw their notions  
Of love from vapid songs and prating fools,  
For me, I'll turn from Hollywood mirages,  
And learn from wiser teachers, better schools.*

*Give me those sixty years as my instruction—  
I'll gladly read love's meaning from that page;  
I'll take those sixty years and those who lived them  
Above the novel theories of the age.*

*Sixty years—a milestone and an altar,  
A testament of sovereign goodness poured  
Upon the heads of two unworthy pilgrims,  
Made worthy by the mercy of their Lord.*

*Yes, sixty years—may many more be granted,  
With grace and mercy ever multiplied;  
May God our Savior smile upon their pathway:  
Onward, upward, Christ-ward—side by side!*

—MAF



## APPENDIX B: SOURCES

Below are selected sources used to piece together the family history of the first few chapters, plus a few additional items of interest. Note that in the old newspapers brief items are often buried in larger community news articles, which accounts for the sometimes unrelated titles of articles given below.

### **John Favor Pingry and Ann Whitehead**

John Pingry obituary, *Omro Journal*, May 14, 1908, p. 1.

Brief biographical sketch, see “John Pingry,” *Omro Herald*, July 23, 1931.

“Woman to Observe Her 98th Birthday,” *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, February 14, 1931, p. 3.

*The History of Omro*, by Mariam Smith, 1976, p. 26. Available online:

<http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/WI/WI-idx?id=WI.WFHistoryOmro>.

Brief biographical sketches of John’s brother William, a fellow Omro pioneer, appeared in the *Omro Herald* in 1931 (August 6, August 13, August 20, August 27, and September 3). Also see *The History of Omro*, by Mariam Smith, p. 291.

### **Elwin Converse and Ennie Luella Pingry**

For Elwin Converse’s first marriage (to Mary Holmes), see collection “Wisconsin, Marriages, 1836-1930” at familysearch.org (link below—note that Elwin’s name is transcribed in error as Edwin). The 1880 U. S. census shows that Mary Holmes was a “servant” in the household of Elwin’s parents, and gives her age as twenty-two and his as seventeen.

<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/XRGX-YYH>

Elwin and Ennie Luella’s marriage, see *Omro Journal*, January 11, 1900, p. 1.

## APPENDIX B: SOURCES

---

“Death of Mrs. E. P. Converse,” *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, June 27, 1902, p. 6. See also *Omro Herald*, June 27, 1902.

“Mrs. Converse Obituary,” *Omro Journal*, July 3, 1902, p. 1.

Elwin P. Converse obituary, *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, January 3, 1916, p. 4.

“Elwin Converse is Dead at Home of Son-in-Law [should read, Brother-in-Law],” *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, January 4, 1916, p. 12.

### **Sennett and Addie Pingry**

Death notice for Sennett and Addie’s infant child, *Omro Herald*, July 6, 1894, p. 5. Later census data indicates the couple had no other children before adopting Dad’s mother, Enna Converse.

Sennett Pingry elected as town clerk, see “Elections in Towns,” *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, April 3, 1902, p. 3.

An article by Addie Pingry entitled “Blossoms in Winter” appears in *Annual Report of the Wisconsin State Horticultural Society for the Year 1902*, p. 247. Available online at [books.Google.com](https://books.google.com).

Addie Pingry’s entertaining skills, see “Omro Horticulturalists,” *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, March 12, 1906, p. 10, and “Town of Omro,” *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, January 20, 1921, p. 4.

“Mrs. S. O. Pingry Expires at Omro,” *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, August 21, 1923, p. 5.

Mrs. S. O. Pingry funeral notice, *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, August 25, 1923, p. 10.

Sennett Pingry has auto accident dropping Enna off at Omro Junction school where she taught, see “Omro Students at the Teachers’ College are Hurt in Auto Accident,” *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, May 15, 1930, p. 2.

Brief biographical sketch, see “Adda Laiten Pingry,” *Omro Herald*, July 30, 1931.

Sennett purchases farmhouse to share with Lloyd and Enna following their marriage, see "Buys Farm," *Omro Journal*, November 19, 1931, "Allenville Pastor to Speak at Omro," *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, November 21, 1931, p. 4, and "Town of Omro," *Omro Journal*, November 26, 1931.

"Sennett O. Pingry Dies at Omro Village Home," *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, September 8, 1939, p. 19.

Sennett O. Pingry funeral notice, *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, September 11, 1939, p. 17.

### **Della Pingry**

My reference to Della Pingry and Enna Pingry as messengers to the Winnebago Baptist Association annual meeting is from the Omro Baptist church clerk records (see Omro Baptist Church below).

"Miss Della H. Pingry Dies at Farm Home," *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, January 19, 1932, p. 4.

### **Enna Pingry Frees**

Graduates from eighth grade and wins second place in arithmetic, spelling, and writing contest, see "Pupils Win Events," *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, June 5, 1917, p. 2.

Bakes a cake for her grandmother's birthday, see "Town of Omro," *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, February 25, 1921, p. 12.

Vacation Bible School teacher, see "Vacation Bible School," *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, July 14, 1924, p. 5.

Christmas program at Maple School, see "Many Attend Funeral for Mrs. Safford," *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, December 27, 1927, p. 11.

Shares story of Lincoln's favorite hymn at joint Baptist-Presbyterian worship service, see "Omro Senior Class Presents Fine Play," *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, May 29, 1929, p. 16.

Junior girls' teacher at Omro Baptist Church, see "Special Programs on Children's Day Held in Churches at Omro," *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*,

June 16, 1930, p. 18, and “Young Child Dies at Farm Home Near Omro,” *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, March 11, 1928, p. 7.

Teacher at Omro Junction School, see “Community Club to Hold Meeting,” *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, March 31, 1931, p. 8.

Enna hosts Baptist Social Workers meeting at her home, see “Omro Auxiliary to Legion Installs,” *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, October 11, 1934, p. 17.

Has accident and falls into cistern, see “Missionary Group is Entertained at Omro,” *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, October 23, 1937, p. 18.

Severe stroke and recovery, see “Catholic Women Name Delegates to Diocesan Event,” *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, September 23, 1952, p. 15, and “Potluck Dinner Meeting Held By Omro Homemakers,” *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, November 20, 1952, p. 33.

“Mrs. Lloyd Frees Succumbs Today,” *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, September 2, 1959, p. 5.

### **Omro Baptist Church**

For the church history of Dad’s immediate family, Phyllis Draws of the Omro Area Historical Society helped greatly by abstracting Frees and Pingry data from the old Omro Baptist Church records housed at the Society’s museum.

Also useful was the printed program for the church’s centennial celebration, *One Hundred Years of Christian Service, 1850-1950, First Baptist Church, Omro, Wisconsin*, available via interlibrary loan from the Wisconsin Historical Society.

### **Edward Tritt**

Joins Omro Baptist Church, see “Omro Churches Have Taken in New Members,” *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, March 29, 1937, p. 17.

“Omro Man is Killed in South Pacific,” *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, November 7, 1952, p. 9.

“Tritt Memorial Rites Will Be Held at Omro,” *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, November 20, 1952, p. 33.

“Legacy: Walter Erikson and Edward Tritt,” by Nancy Kennedy, *Horizons* (magazine of The Evangelical Alliance Mission), vol. 4, issue 2, 2009, p. 73. Available online:

[https://horizons.team.org/static/uploads/Horizons4-2\\_Legacy\\_EriksonTritt.pdf](https://horizons.team.org/static/uploads/Horizons4-2_Legacy_EriksonTritt.pdf)

### **Frances Chestnutt**

Obituary, *Birmingham News*, May 26, 2011. Available online:

<http://obits.al.com/obituaries/birmingham/obituary.aspx?pid=151301981>

### **Rev. J. Otis King**

“Baptist Revival Crusade Starts Tonight in Lima,” *Lima News*, April 22, 1959, p. 10.

Brief description of Rev. King, see *Stories Behind 50 Southern Gospel Favorites, Volume 2*, by Lindsay Terry, p. 118.