

Grit In My Gizzard

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What's This All About?

For one to publish his life story seems to be a presumptuous display of conceit. It ignores Solomon's advice to "*Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.*" I have not intended to make this a "Hey, look at me," as though I were a person of interest.

In dismay at having so little information about my grandparents and those before them, I determined to record some family history for my descendants. Sending out an email essay each week as I do, however, required all the mental energy and concentration that I have at the age of 87. So I decided to intersperse segments of biography with those articles. The unexpected response of readers has been exciting. Readers have urged that I publish them in book form. But they did not all promise to buy the books!

My youthful aims were not to strive for excellence but maybe to reach mediocrity, and a few times I have come excitingly close to attaining it.

The material is necessarily self-centered, but as I wrote I began to realize a value beyond advertising myself.

In our world of differences and conflicts, I began to see a greater underlying commonality. In spite of all the things that would tend to make us individualistic due to race, age, sex, culture, religion, intelligence, education, and many other factors, we can feel with each other. Due to our human bond, we can share the experiences of happiness, excitement, hope, defeat, disappointment, sorrow, pain – all the grinding stones of life that helped make us who and what we are.

We can ponder together the roles of time, chance, and Providence in supplying both the grit in our gizzards and the menu to be digested.

So I began to see more purpose than just preserving information for my kin. I am still amazed that you would read my stuff.

Maybe you will be moved to write a few pages to leave for your posterity – now, not *sometime*.

No money donated for my working fund is being used in publishing this book.

Since I have done all the proof-reading, blame me for all the stupid things that have slipped through.

At my invitation, my youngest sister, Lois Yeary, has offered some good suggestions.

I have done the general formatting but for the technical work of making camera-ready copy, I have depended upon the technical skills and willing heart of my daughter, Mira Prince, with whose loving family I am blessed to reside.

The cover design is by the oldest of my four grandsons, Daniel Hook, of Tulsa, who is a super graphics artist. Just look at the cover and see for yourself!

If I have given you a few chuckles, caused you to appreciate the grit in your gizzard, or given you some better insight about yourself and others, maybe that will help me justify my audacity.

Cecil Hook; July 1, 2006

Chapter 1

The Gizzard

High on the list of the many odious tasks for a teenager on the farm was the preparation of a chicken for a meal. I seemed to have gotten more than my share of those assignments. I do not mean re-heating of the cooked bird in a microwave oven. It involved catching the particular chicken, pulling its head off and watching it hop and flop “like a chicken with its head chopped off” until its blood was drained and it stopped moving. Then it was dangled in a bucket of scalding water so as to loosen the feathers for picking. That nauseating smell remains with me today. After picking the feathers (saving the softer feathers for pillows), the bird was rotated over a flame to singe the pin-feathers that remained. That repulsive odor was attractive to neither man nor beast. Next in order was the removing of the entrails and cutting the rubbery carcass into pieces for frying. Under the neck just outside the pulley-bone was the craw and just inside was the gizzard.

The gizzard, being different in texture was not a favorite piece of the fried chicken – except for some girls who had heard that it helped the growth of their breasts. Curiously, in cutting into the gizzard, I would find small pebbles, or “grit.” As you know, fowls have no teeth; hence, the country expression, “scarce as hens’ teeth.” As the chicken rustled about the farm it picked up all sorts of available food which went into the craw for storage. Later it passed gradually into the gizzard where the pebbles acted as grindstones to pulverize the grain and other food so it could be digested and assimilated. So what went into the makeup of the chicken depended greatly on the effectiveness of the grit.

Being many years after the Great Depression and Dust Bowl time of my teenage years, probably few of you have ever killed and dressed a chicken. If today you had to kill and butcher your fowls or animals, I suspect that the number of vegetarians would multiply rapidly. You might never have heard of gizzard stones and your acquaintance with gizzards may be limited to giblet gravy. The whole chicken which includes the gizzard that you buy in the market was raised on a chicken farm and fed pulverized food which required no grit in the gizzard. So, even fowls and animals have changed. As far as I know, there was no gravel in Haskell County where our farm was. Any gravel had to be hauled in. I recall early in childhood of our further breaking into bits a broken churn or crockery utensil to provide gizzard-stones for the chickens. Who taught a chicken to eat a few pebbles?

Already, you can see why I have chosen the particular title as I intend to review things affecting my life. Such things may make you and me react differently and hold different perspectives in life. All of us have various kinds of pebbles in our gizzard that affect how we assimilate the fiber of character. As we grow older we are able to understand better why we are what we are and why others have developed differently.

Our children and grandchildren seldom come to us and ask us to tell them about our earlier days. But fifty years after we are gone, they will wonder why they did not! So I am intending to devote more than one issue to some of the story of my life especially for my own family. My life has not been all that exciting or illustrious, so you may delete these installments on sight as you wish. Having not the energy to write these and my regular mailouts at the same time, I plan to intersperse them. If you find them helpful in “seeing where I am coming from” or in better understanding yourself, then I will have accomplished more than just advertising myself. This won’t be heavy stuff; I may be just trying to justify my self-centeredness!

There is quite a pile of gizzard stones involved in masticating our intake. The country, century, society, and

culture in which we live enter our makeup. There is a mix from our ancestors, parents, sibling, and associates. Race, appearance, size, health, intelligence, religious climate, and education are involved in this pulverizing for proper assimilation. Mental, social, and emotional health figure in it – even whether you are more left-brained and logical or right-brained and subjective. Who put in us the desire to accept altruistic challenges for no personal profit? Since I am no psychologist, you may revise this list and disregard my implications. If I make a fool of myself, I will try to laugh with you.

My grandfather, Frederick George Hook, left his family in Switzerland as a youth and came to America in 1855. It is appalling as to how little information has been preserved about his immigration. One story is that, at that time, Switzerland conscripted men for an army which they then “rented” to other countries and that he and a brother wanted no part of it; so they came to America. In Palestine, Texas he married Emily Marks whose family had emerged from France and Germany. Both grandparents died in my early childhood. My father, Solomon Slaughter Hook, born in 1886, was the sixth of their seven children. He received that name from a prominent citizen in Stephenville, Texas where he was born. Sol’s father was a farmer and stone mason and he wanted Sol to be a mason also with him but Dad preferred to farm. Grandpa Hook taught classes in the Baptist church for many years.

My Dad married Lora Dean Moore, born in 1895, the oldest of eleven children of George Washington and Emily McAlister Moore in 1913. Their ancestors were a mixture of English, Irish, Scottish, and Cherokee. When Mom’s father married, he was illiterate with rough edges, but her Mom, whose family was of our Movement, taught him to read using the Bible as a textbook. He was a restless sort who moved his family many times. He took leadership roles in the Church of Christ.

All these assimilated into the American culture. Although Dad was a first-generation American, I never heard him speak one word in German. Looking back, I can recognize the different sources of genes displayed in Dad and Mom. That assimilation was characteristic of the melding of American people with a common language. But now diversity is being sponsored which may become as problematic as the two cultures in Canada and other countries have become.

The boy, Sol, attended a one-room school taught by his oldest brother, Charley. As a teacher he was such a strict disciplinarian that many kids quit school rather than submit to one of his lickings. When Charley promised Dad a licking, he quit school in the lower grades. Dad was a quiet, unemotional person who liked the solitude that farm life gave. I never heard him curse, express himself in anger, tell an off-color joke, use vulgar language, or tell a lie. He drank no liquor. He was so stoic that I often stated that he would die standing up if that were possible. Though he often played with his five kids, there was never a verbal expression of love to any of us. I never saw him kiss my mother. I never heard either of them call the other by name! Though he was a faithful disciple, his timidity never allowed him to speak out in piety, lecture anyone, or pray publicly. The only prayers I ever heard him utter were short memorized offerings of thanks at meals which Mom coerced him into doing.

It was a custom to invite the preacher home for dinner (lunch for you Yankees and other foreigners). In church Dad always sat at the back, and often being the first one to shake hands with the preacher on the way out, we had many preachers in our home! That greatly influenced us children, as I will address later. I suppose it was due to his Germanic culture that he was a rather rigid disciplinarian with us kids. He worked very hard on the farm and expected us to do the same. In spite of his lack of expressed affection and his inheriting such a name, there are six boys wearing the name of Sol in honor of him. The kids all loved him because he did not push himself on

them but, instead, let them help feed the chickens, ride the tractor, and do such things city kids enjoy so much on a farm.

Mom, on the other hand, was from an emotional family that had some damaging internal problems. She had more education but the often misguided and inconsistent strictures of her religion were very guilt-inducing and did nothing to help Mom's emotional instability. Due to one of her scruples, she never cut her hair in her 81 years. She was our conscience. In our early years she would teach us scriptures and pray with us at bedtime. As years progressed, due to bad health and growing emotional disorders, she abandoned such things and became chronically ill. We kids found her more approachable than Dad, so we went to her first to negotiate with him for us. Family life had to be built around her. She would verbally express her love to us children but it was interpreted by us as such an effort to gain our affection that we did not offer much affection in return.

In spite of poverty and what might be thought of as a lack of nurturing and some dysfunctional aspects, our home was a haven. None of us became rebellious and disrespectful. Dad was a quiet, stabilizing factor. So was the cohesiveness of us five siblings. Doing all sorts of house-work together, working in the fields together, playing together, and eating three meals each day together (except on school days) helped to mold us in our own secure society which is what a home should be. We all had the same grit in our gizzards that made for bonding.

The older we have grown, the more we siblings can see the lasting influence of that home on various aspects of our lives. We see the vital roles of father, mother, and siblings. Whether by choice or fate, the home that lacks these three elements is deprived of vitally important grinding stones of character.

When my father died Nov. 4, 1974 I wrote this brief tribute in our church bulletin: "In his 88 years Dad lived one day for each 22 days since Jesus was on earth. He probably lived contemporary with half of all mankind and in the greatest era of freedom and achievement. A first generation American,

he held strong ideals of family life, discipline, morality, and independence. Loving the soil, he chose to be a farmer. He cleared land with his own hands. He lived the quiet, simple life with great patience and hard work. Dad was a faithful disciple for sixty years. Although his modesty never permitted him to sermonize or express his inner thoughts, the strength of his character inspired confidence and respect. He competed with no man. Profanity, vulgarity, and resentful expressions about others were never heard from his lips for they were opposite to his nature. He had trouble with no one because others would have been ashamed to take advantage of his simple honesty and trust. He was not a great leader in any area of human endeavor. But he lived at peace with God and self and lived honorably before his family and fellowman. And that is greatness.”

With this introduction to my family, I will stop for now and hope you may continue with me in later issues. []

Chapter 2

Family Formation

Sol, the bashful bachelor, took notice of the much younger Moore girls on the adjoining farm and began courting Deanie. When they uprooted from Stephenville, Texas and moved to Velma, Oklahoma, Sol soon followed. He was 27 and Deanie was 18 when they married there in 1913. They shared almost 61 years together.

Emily was born to them in 1914 and, after three years, they started back to Stephenville in a wagon. By the time they reached Haskell, Texas, cotton was ready for picking; so Sol stopped to work. There George Foy (Bud) was born in 1916. (We assume that the “Foy” of his name honored Foy E. Wallace, Jr. who lived in the Stephenville area and was two years older than Mom.) Sol was hired at \$20.00 per month to clear 80 acres of virgin soil of its mesquite growth five miles east of Rochester. The only power tools available to claim the land from the prairie dogs and rattlesnakes were his double-bitted axe and grubbing hoe wielded by strong arms with determination.

I can remember when there were still tracts of good land covered with the native mesquite. There was no paved road in the county or in the new town of Rochester formed only seven years previously in 1906. The Model T Ford had not yet fully replaced the buggy.

This return to the farm was during WWI years. Dad was not drafted due to age, family, and poor eyesight. He then rented the land and had good crops until the drought of 1918 which spurred a move to Fort Worth where Dad got a job at the Armour Packing plant making sausages. After that, for the rest of his life, he would never eat bologna or wieners for he knew

what they were made of! Thirteen days after the Armistice, I entered this world in Fort Worth on November 24, 1918. In a few months the family moved back to the farm at Rochester and made a great crop that year. My home town was only twelve years old when I was born.

My mother would help with the cotton picking by working close to the wagon where she left the little ones in its shade to watch the youngest (me) who was put in a wash tub for safety. Sometimes a mother, having no one with whom to leave her infant, would put her baby on her long cotton sack to ride along as she picked cotton. In 1920 Dad had malaria. When he was unable to work, we three kids would be left with him while Mom did the farm work plowing with our two mules, Pete and Kate. By the time we were six or eight, a shoulder strap would be put on a tow sack and we were assigned to pick cotton -- both the girls and the boys -- and we also began to be allowed the joy of hoeing!

No doubt, Mom was working in the fields while pregnant with a fourth child, Sol, Junior, born on Dad's birthday in 1921. In his second year he became ill and lingered for about a month. I think it was nothing more than dysentery for which doctors had no method of treating dehydration. There were no hospitals, funeral homes, or hearses. People died at home and were kept at home until the funeral. I have only a few memories of him but I do remember his death, Mom's grief, and the casket being hauled in the back seat of a neighbor's Studebaker, one of the few cars around. Friends brought flowers from their yards for there were no florists then. Neighbors dug the grave in the Rochester cemetery where Dad had bought four burial plots for \$2.50. Men in attendance at funerals in those times filled the grave as the family and others watched, leaving a neat ridge of dirt the length of the grave. After many decades Mom and Dad have taken their places beside him, and my Elma Lea's ashes lie next to Dad for whom she had a special love.

We tend to protect our children from the shock of deaths and funerals, but such things are parts of life that must be faced. I do not recall any trauma or grief that I felt as a five-year-old. Our parents went to numerous funerals and took us kids along also. I judge that it was more helpful than harmful to us in adjusting to reality. On the farm the killing and death of animals was commonplace. Such things are parts of the grit.

I have outlived my brother by 82 years. That leaves me to question any direct choices of an impartial God. Due to his innocence I trust that he is in heaven though the Bible does not define such things clearly. I ask too many questions, I suppose. Will he be still in infancy in the spirit world? Will he even remember his earthly life? Will we recognize each other, and what would we share in common to talk about? My other siblings have led productive lives; what would he have contributed to society? More grinding in the gizzard.

Eighteen days after Sol, Jr. died, Elda Jean, a fifth child was born and Lois Dean, the last of six, was born in 1925. Children were born at home, usually with a doctor attending, but at times only with a neighborhood woman acting as a midwife. After giving birth in those times, the mother usually remained in bed for a week to ten days. While Mom was in bed after Lois was born, I recall mopping the linoleum floor covering with a wet tow sack. I was seven and had much difficulty wringing the water from the burlap. And because I missed an area in my mopping that Mom could see from her angle in bed and she had to repeatedly point it out to me, she became impatient with me. I recall no joy at the arrival of either of my sisters. Did I eagerly ask to hold them in my lap? No way! I was more embarrassed by them. Mom and Dad had made no mention of their expectancy in preparing us with joyful anticipation. Surprise, the doctor just brought them! That fitted well into, or helped develop, my left-brain inclination.

Children were taught responsibility and to work. This was generally true in all farm families. Such demands on children today would bring the welfare people and police to

rescue the kids. Among other assignments, I was put in charge of my two younger sisters regularly beginning at the age of seven. I also soon had tasks working in the field, gathering the eggs, and putting the chickens in coops for the night. I am writing this on Thanksgiving Day, November 24, 2005, which also happens to be my 87th birthday. The first Thanksgiving that I can remember was when I was eight years old. Being out of school that day, we three siblings had to pick some of the last remaining cotton. It was a cold, blustery day, but we had to “chase” the sparse remaining cotton. Such last gatherings were of poor grade, so they were used especially for our mattresses and quilt-making.

Traveling ten miles round trip in a farm wagon to attend church meetings was a real test of faith and conviction. Though Dad was reluctant, Mom insisted. I faintly remember such a trip. In those times one service on Sunday with no classes was accepted as sufficient. Most of the time a man of the group brought the lesson. During the last song, the contribution was made by people (more often their child) taking the money and laying it on the “communion table.” I recall a “paid” preacher going home with us one Sunday. He was given the collection which he counted after we reached home -- a hand full of coins.

When people visited in homes, they often “talked religion.” None were well-educated and all had a King James Version of the Scriptures. One Bible served our whole family then. I doubt if any had a dictionary or commentary. So, many simplistic interpretations were developed and branded in our consciences by the sincerest of people whose devout aim was to please God. One woman thought “filthy lucre” might be snuff! Since we were to be “peculiar people,” various peculiarities were stressed. Most arguments were about what was permitted in assemblies – details of the Lord’s Supper, the introduction of classes, use of printed literature, use of women class teachers, and singing without accompaniment.

After Mom’s health broke in later years, even though she might have been sick in bed all week, when Sunday came,

she would get up and go to church if at all possible. It was a guilt-induced sense of duty. I do not recommend such a “purpose-driven” motivation but her dedication did have lasting effect for good on the family. That grit in our gizzards helped to make us what we became.

The quietness of farm life then and the inefficient mufflers allowed one often to hear a vehicle long before it came into sight. We were amazed to hear a motor in the sky! Surely enough, we saw an airplane headed our way! Adults and children alike gazed at the small bi-plane intently until it vanished from sight. It was so high! Soon afterward, we had special interest when Charles A. Lindbergh flew across the Atlantic alone and non-stop in 1927. I was nine.

In such a bleak and austere circumstance for the forming family, was there hope? How could they ever fit into a world of privilege and sophistication? Happiness and achievement are not dependent upon affluence or abundance of opportunity. Gizzard stones can grind and utilize the hardest of grains.

Yes, we and my generation were from a different world. We who have survived it have made drastic adjustments in order to conform to present-day society, though we are still notably old-fashioned. For an ancient one to try to be a modern one is to make a foolish spectacle of one’s self, and “there is no fool like an old fool!” We are rightly concerned, however, when we see values we learned through life experience and education forsaken and replaced by a “do what makes you feel good” philosophy and the chase for instant gratification.

Pulverized food requires no gizzard stones. []

Chapter 3

On The First Farm

The farmland of the rolling plains of West Texas was being settled rapidly in the early 1900s. Around the town of Rochester, established in 1906 when a railroad was laid, a family soon occupied most every 100 or 160 acres. Most of the houses we cheaply built and were never painted. Ours consisted of two 14' x 14' rooms and a smaller lean-to room on the back. It was a boxed house of twelve inch boards with a stripping over the joints but with no studding. A heavier plain wall-paper was tacked to the walls and floors were unfinished pine.

Piped water, indoor toilets, and electricity had to wait for many years. Water was kept in the kitchen in a water bucket with a drinking dipper in it for all users. A wash-pan and lye soap were kept beside it for washing of hands. Some families had a cedar water bucket which enhanced the taste, and some used gourds for dippers. At public functions, like when a carnival came to town, a galvanized watering trough for cattle was borrowed from the hardware store; water and a block of ice were put in it, and tin cups were hung around the rim for common usage by all. Germs must not have found their way to Rochester! Or, due to the sharing of germs, maybe we had developed immunity. There was no "big brother government" to protect us from ourselves!

My earliest memory seems to have been when I was about four years old. A man was digging a well near our barn. When it was about four feet deep, he lifted me down into it for a thrill that lingers in my memory. I recall the hand-made windlass the men used to lift the diggings out of the well and the pulley, rope, and bucket by which water was drawn after it was completed. As it turned out, the water was so "gyppy" that

it was unfit to drink. The mules and cattle would drink it only when the surface water dried up.

At the ages of about ten and eight, Bud and I sometimes carried water from a windmill about 300 yards from the house in eight-pound lard buckets, sloshing much of it out on the way. (Armour buckets were straight sided; Swift's Jewel buckets were beveled.) One day, as we trudged along, Bud asked me if I knew how to get rid of an onion without eating it or throwing it away. His solution was to just keep peeling off the layers. The profundity of that ten-year-old impressed his younger brother. You could preach a sermon from that, couldn't you?

Bud and I slept in the same bed in the lean-to room. I slept with him on through college! We never knew anything about private bedrooms and separate beds! One night I created a fuss with Bud because he had a pillow and I did not. After he finally gave in and let me use it, I decided that I did not like a pillow after all. And for most of my life I have not used a pillow. Also, I have learned that many of the things we think we want fail to satisfy after we have exercised ourselves in getting them.

Emily, Bud, and I stood at the table while eating. I am not sure that we had more than the two cane-bottomed chairs. Our fare was limited for there were no fruit trees on those new farms. At rare times Daddy would buy a lug of dried apples or prunes, or fresh apples from a truck in season. At times when we had no syrup, jelly, or preserves for our buttered biscuits, we would boil plain sugar for a substitute. And we often made preserves of watermelon rinds flavoring them with lemon or cinnamon. Sometimes Mamma would make vinegar cobblers when no fruit was available. We never saw an orange or nuts except at Christmas, and we got colorful hard candy then also. I am not sure grapefruit had been developed then.

In such limited space, there were not many places in which our parents could hide the things they bought for our Christmas stockings (our real stockings, not decorative ones). We kids could always find the Christmas cache because we

could smell the apples, but we pretended our ignorance of it – like we do about so many social matters. Dad would get us some firecrackers and sparklers at ten cents per package. Bud and I would get a single shot cap pistol, or if we still had the one from the year before, we only got some new caps for it. Maybe we would also get a sponge rubber ball, a top, or some other such little toy. It was exciting. We did not know that we were “deprived”! We never thought of ourselves as being victims. The world owed us nothing. We enjoyed what we had. We improvised using things like spools and tin cans for toys.

I cannot recall ever having believed in Santa Claus or not knowing where babies came from. There were always too many older kids around to reveal such secrets. Once there was a discussion among the young ones as to whether it was more desirable to be a boy or a girl. The objection to each gender was that girls had to have babies and boys had to fight in war. WWI was still fresh in people’s minds and conversations.

In our home anything that hinted of sexuality was unmentionable. Suggestive language, mention of private body parts or functions, and vulgarity were strictly censored. Being a forbidden word, “bull” became “steer.” No cursing was ever heard, nor were by-words permitted. Pregnancy was an unknown word. Expectancy was not announced; babies just came or the doctor brought them. I remember the pretense under which Dad would haul a cow or sow away and bring her back home again. We kids knew he was taking her to a boyfriend, but the breeding of animals was never mentioned. Even the castration of calves was done while Bud and I were at school. Different grit in our gizzards, would you agree?

In the fall and winter great flocks of ducks would swarm to the shallow area lakes. When the family wanted ducks to eat, Daddy would hide in the bushes along the shore and wait for a pot-shot to get two or three with one cartridge. Bud or I would wade out into the biting cold water to retrieve the ducks. We saved their soft feathers for making pillows. Dad’s old 12-gauge shotgun, oiled only by pouring coal oil down the barrel,

would kick so hard that it sometimes bruised his cheek. One older teenager, Jack Walker, borrowed it. Crouched by the lake, he turned and fired at ducks on a flight approach. The recoil kicked him over into the frigid water.

We always loved and gave names to the cattle and mules and even to the pets we chose among the chickens. Setting hens were a menace to a kid. Children always had the chore of gathering the eggs from the nests each day and we sometimes even watched as a hen laid her egg. At times we hatched chickens in an incubator warmed by kerosene in the storm cellar. We helped in turning the eggs twice daily. There were frequent fatalities among the chicks and I conducted the burial for many of them. One of them met its doom when its “innards” suddenly became “outards” due to my accidentally stepping on it. Bud and I were the disposers of the many eggs that did not hatch. I am convinced that their smell would have nauseated a buzzard.

Some years we would put a turkey egg in a setting hen’s nest. The hatched turkey would follow the mother hen, even a bantam hen, until it was many times her size. One nice turkey looked very promising for our Christmas dinner. But hearing a commotion one day and looking out toward the pig pen, we saw the turkey flouncing and flopping around on the ground. It had poked its head through the cracks in the pig pen eating their food one time too many. A hog had taken his share of Christmas turkey early, biting its head off! So we ate our Christmas treat early also.

While playing alone sliding down the cellar door, I felt a painful grab in my left leg. I tried to stand but fell down. I had caught a large splinter in the muscle which required a trip to the doctor. I still remember the word “peroxide” which he gave to cleanse the wound, and I still have the scar.

At times mosquitoes were really bad and our ill-fitting screens could not keep them out. There were no effective sprays for mosquitoes or flies, and we probably could not have afforded them if they were available. When babies slept alone,

netting was spread over their cribs. Sometimes a fire would be built in the direction of the breeze and cow chips were put on the fire to create smoke in order to discourage the pests.

All kids need a wagon, and Dad had to improvise to provide one for us. He made one, cutting the wheels from a 2" x 12" board with a key saw. He would play games with us. Once he surprised us with a set of nine brown glazed crockery marbles. These "ring marbles" were one and one-quarter inches in diameter and were used in a playing field about three feet square scratched in the dirt. I still have most of those marbles whose color and glaze have long since been worn away because of years of use. Kids today know nothing of the competitive game. Because of lawns, they have no place to play marbles. Our yards were kept free of grass and weeds then. Playing children kept the vegetation worn down, and the knees of our overalls testified to the cause. A new pair of overalls soon had patched knees.

There were only two books in our house then – one Bible and a Sears-Roebuck Catalog. We children often paged through the catalog and were permitted to make cutouts of some of the pages as we "played paper dolls." The previous year's edition was valuable for the toilet. Only the females used the outhouse and we never saw a roll of toilet tissue. At times Dad got the Sunday edition of the Fort Worth Stat-Telegram. The funny paper with "Maggie and Jiggs," "Mutt and Jeff," and "Gasoline Alley," and others were a delight for us kids.

Since our first Model T Ford did not come until 1922, the wagon was our means of transportation until I was nearly five. The rural mail was delivered in a hack, a light mule-drawn enclosed vehicle. When the roads were graded, it was by a separate grader pulled by a Caterpillar tractor. Flat tires were common, and they were repaired where they happened. Because of the magneto and coil electrical system rather than a battery, cars would hardly start in damp weather or run if it was raining. They were started, often very stubbornly, by hand cranking. The crank was known to kick, even breaking an arm.

The cars had curtains that could be snapped on in bad weather. They had small celluloid windows sewn in and a flap which the driver could raise in order to spit his chewing tobacco. And you thought cup-holders were a clever invention! The gasoline tank was under the driver's seat. One night a fellow struck a match to see if he had any gas. Sure enough, he did!

Because Bud had a bad bout with typhoid fever, we kids were introduced to the trauma of vaccination, and I still have the scar on my left arm. The doctor, carrying his mysterious medicine bag, treated most of his patients in their own homes under the care of the family. A family member or neighbor "sat up" all night with the very ill patient.

Harvey Castleberry, a friend of the family was visiting us. Some hounds jumped a jackrabbit a long way across the field and went in full chase. On hearing their baying as they pursued their prey, I thought the sound was from the scared rabbit. I yelled out, "Listen to that rabbit bawling!" The laughter that followed was a terrible embarrassment for a six-year old. Harvey never let me forget, as through the years, when he would see me, he would always ask, "Cecil, have you heard any more rabbits bawling?"

Starting to school was no problem for me for Emily and Bud were ahead of me. And the New Mid school started in October and I was eight years old in November. The two-room school was two miles from home and three miles east of Rochester. Two women teachers presided over two rooms of awe-stricken country kids in six grades. In the first grade the double desks allowed for two students. Sometimes a misbehaving boy was made to sit in the same desk with a girl as punishment! Poor girl! By listening to the recitations of the other classes, I learned most of the first three grades in my first year. We walked to school when weather permitted, carrying our lunches consisting of biscuits in a syrup bucket stuffed with whatever was available. The teacher's lunch consisted of a common country meal of corn bread which she crumbled into milk and ate at her throne/desk.

It was a law of the kingdom among all the parents that, when a kid got a licking in school, he got another when he got home, no questions asked. The teacher was always right. One day while in the first grade I removed a wad of chewing gum from under my seat, threw it, and hit Baylor Walker, my best friend, on the back of his neck. He took it to the teacher and squealed on me. I got a few licks with a ruler. Surely, neither of my siblings would tattle on me, but somehow the news seemed to have reached home by the time I did. I preferred the teacher's style over Mamma's. Mamma lashed both with the razor strop and the tongue!

Horrible tales about mad (rabid) dogs were prevalent. Ol' Ted was our black, curly haired dog. A stray collie took up residence with us also. He loved us and we loved him. One day at dusk when Joe and Millie Hollis were visiting and we were eating ice cream in the yard, someone saw the collie in a seizure and yelled, "That dog's going mad! He's having a fit!" Uncle Joe jumped up, grabbed the axe with which the ice had been crushed, and dispatched the dog with one blow. Then there was such fear that Ol' Ted was infected that they killed him also. That was a crushing blow for us children, and we were not allowed to have another dog for several years.

The big red ant of West Texas is almost indestructible, though the horned frog thrived on them. Because of its painful sting, you did not fool around with them. When Lois ("Pud" we called her for she was Mamma's little Puddin' Pie!) was a toddler in diapers, she wandered into the ants' territory and was stung by several. She quickly became limpid. There was a frenzied dash in the old Model T to get her to Dr. Howell. She would have survived anyway, but the doctor made himself seem helpful by giving some kind of purple potion to apply to the stung areas.

One Sunday we had dinner with the Carey Kidwells. Since fires in the stoves had to be started each morning, it was common to have a tomato can of kerosene sitting under the stove. Surely enough, Pud found it and drank it. Or, at least,

we thought she did. Another frantic dash to the doctor. Such scares greatly impressed us children.

Marvelous innovations began to come. Uncle Jimmy and Aunt Maggie Newberry, neighbors but no kin, bought a Gram-o-phone. With wonder we listened to those spool recordings about “Uncle Josh,” and songs like “The Blue River Train” and “Hand Me Down My Walking Cane.” They also had a viewer of stereoscopic pictures of WWI scenes – 3D pictures. Then the Tibbets got a radio. We were invited over one Saturday night to listen. I think it was a barn dance or old fiddlers’ contest out of Chicago, but there was so much static that I could understand none of it.

No black person lived in our community, and I had never seen one. A neighbor had several young black men from East Texas to help with the cotton picking. I looked with awe upon them even at the distance. They were housed in a one-room shack with a pile of picked cotton for a bed. We could hear their laughter after dark as they splashed in the cattle watering trough. One day Daddy took a load of cotton to the gin and it was dark before he returned. In the dark at a distance from the house we heard someone call “hello!” It was one of the men asking if he could buy some eggs from us. Mamma was so frightened that she denied having any eggs and sent him away empty-handed. Ordinarily, she would have given the eggs without charge. Now we cringe in recalling such an incident, but it was some of the grit in our gizzards.

Who can know how these ten years on our first farm influenced my life and continue to be a part of my subconscious being? Whether for good or bad, all these incidents that I have reviewed were grinding stones in fitting these experiences into my life and character. You can see how you and I might have had many things in common and also many things that gave us different perspectives in life. []

Chapter 4

On The New Farm

In case you might have forgotten, time moves at an agonizingly slow pace during the pre-teen and teenage years. Many gizzard stones were at work as nine years dragged by on our new farm. Crops had been good; so we bought 100 acres of land three miles southeast of Rochester in 1928, two miles closer to town. At that time there was a giggly little five-year-old Holladay girl playing with kittens and making mud pies far away in a place called Daisetta near Beaumont. I was unaware of her and the oil-field town and, as a ten-year-old, would have given her no attention if she had lived on the next farm. But the currents of life were flowing.

The farm was not the best for it was irregular with hummocks of reddish soil. The house was toward the middle in about four acres of mesquite trees with a dug and curbed well near the barn and a surface tank and several large hackberry trees nearby. Toward the road were about eight acres of mesquite, bear grass (yucca), various types of cactus, ground squirrels, horned frogs, and mockingbirds. The unpainted single-walled house consisted of three 14' x 14' rooms. For some unexplained reason, the ceiling of the room we chose for the kitchen was only six feet high. That called for adjustment for Dad who was 6' tall and for Bud and me as we later grew to 6'3" and 6'. Mom and Dad slept in the front room/living room with the wood stove while Bud and I and Emily, Elda, and Pud slept in the other room in two beds. The next year Dad bought a two-door 1928 Model A Ford. No doubt, Dad had intentions to build a better house but unforeseen problems loomed ahead – oversized gizzard stones for everyone.

With the stock market crash, the bottom fell out of the economy without warning. Banks closed and businesses failed leaving millions without money and jobs. Soon adding to the bleakness of the Great Depression was the onset of drought causing the Dust Bowl in the Plains States and Southwest for years. It was an era of unbelievable sand storms. The goal of that generation was not for enrichment, but for survival.

Too, Mom began to have unsteadiness of her nerves as she developed a toxic goiter – an inflamed and overactive thyroid – even bringing on some hysterical outbursts. We knew little about such disorders then. The doctor in the one-doctor hospital (we called it a sanitarium) in Knox City removed her entire thyroid gland. Though she did not become totally dysfunctional, she continued in emotional instability which also brought on organic disorders and reinforced her feelings of spiritual guilt and social inadequacy.

City dwellers who lost their jobs became destitute, but a great part of our population still lived on farms. The self-sufficiency of the farm allowed for survival. We raised our own pork, beef, chickens, fruit, and vegetables. This included a row of watermelons and cantaloupes, some peanuts, and more than a garden-sized space of black-eyed peas. Those peas were our salvation. As one fellow stated it, he more than liked them; he loved them because they saved his life! There was a yarn about the doctor testing an ailing farmer's blood and finding it to be 80% pea soup. I still find fresh black-eyed peas, cooked with bacon drippings, and cornbread hard to beat. Add fresh tomatoes, okra, and cantaloupe from the garden and you have a royal feast. While cotton was the "money crop," though providing little in those dry years with low prices, we raised corn for consumption of family and livestock. Maize was grown for the mules, pigs, and chickens. Sudan grass provided summer grazing for the cows and a haystack of bundled Red Top cane helped the cows through the winter. Milk from as many as four cows at the time was a great part of our diet, and

eggs added much. Sometimes we even had surplus milk to feed the chickens!

Such a system of self-sufficiency seems idealistic today, but let me assure you that it was all labor intensive. It demanded constant labor of the whole family. How could one even go for overnight trips to kinfolks? Cows had to be milked morning and evening and animals and chickens had to be fed and protected. There were no eight-hour shifts or holidays on the farm.

The budget for a family of seven must have been overwhelming. Let's see. Car payment, car insurance, health insurance, life insurance, house insurance, utilities, water, garbage, sewerage, telephone, cable, internet, fast foods, eating out, vacations, haircuts, beauty salon, laundry, dry cleaners, driver's license, income tax, social security withholdings, sales taxes, and movies – grand annual total: \$0.00! We did not even know we needed many things for we had no radio or television to advertise all those things which we cannot afford to live without! And, actually, I think we were about as happy then as people are today.

Most of our grocery purchases were for flour, sugar, meal, oatmeal, coffee, cocoa, and other such staples which we could not grow. Mom made all the dresses for Emily, Elda, Pud, and herself. She would see a dress pictured in Sears' catalog which she liked and make her own pattern like it. At the beginning of the elementary school year, I got two pairs of the cheapest denim overalls, blue shirts, thin socks, and a pair of shoes. Frank's Dry Goods store was not exactly a Neiman-Marcus, so we took the nearest thing to our own sizes in clothing and shoes. Bud and I would also get some new long-handled underwear if those of the last winter were threadbare. In the summer he and I wore no underwear or shoes on the farm. We had Sunday clothes and we wore those same clothes every Sunday. Our worn-out Sunday coats were worn to school. On returning home from school, we immediately changed into our work clothes which were the worn-out school

clothes of the year before. At times Bud would out-grow some article of clothing before it was worn out; so I inherited it. My clothing bill for a year was probably ten or fifteen dollars.

Could such people be happy? Happiness is not determined by possessions. As quickly as work assignments were completed, we kids were playing. We made our toys and created our own games. People had no radios so they sang as they worked. We knew few songs except those sung at church. Some times Bud and I would work side by side in silence; some mornings we might converse for hours, but at other times we would sing from memory every song we used in church. Women sang doing housework, and many men went about whistling. Some church songs were "religious blues" like "Farther Along," but more were songs of hope and heaven. Now it is unsophisticated to sing of heaven or of preparedness to meet God.

Leaving the New Mid school, we now went to Rochester. Each of the seven grades of "grammar school" had a room with a shielded coal stove and twenty-five or thirty desks and students. I do not recall having one of our parents usher us into a new classroom or consult with a teacher. I liked Miss Parker and the room full of second grade kids when I started there in February. Unlike in my previous school, we sang. Some were church songs and some were Stephen Foster songs like "My Old Kentucky Home," and "Old Black Joe." Foster's songs were popular then. We sang them touched by the feelings they expressed. As the day's school dismissed, Miss Parker would say "goodbye" to us individually as we passed her, and she even hugged some of the kids. I was not used to such. Most of the time, Dad took us to school, picking up kids along the way until our little Model A was packed and boys rode the running boards as we chugged along. Sometimes when Dad was working in the field, we walked the three miles home.

Teachers urged us to take baths! Kids were embarrassed as teachers would ask each one when he or she bathed last. Some never bathed in winter. We did well to fire up the kitchen

wood range, heat water, and bring in the washtub for a bath once a month. In really cold weather, we wore the same clothes more than a week because the weather did not allow for washing. I can still smell the boys' feet in the hot weather when we all crowded up the narrow stairway. Teachers surely must have had a high tolerance level to listen to all the sniffing and snuffing of runny noses in the classroom. No boys had handkerchiefs, and tissues were still unknown. So, there were some slimy shirt sleeves! Two partitioned pit toilets for the grammar school and high school were on opposite sides of the playground separating the schools. They were not exactly sanitized! But there was one good smell in school that many of you older ones can remember. Oil-soaked cedar sawdust was sprinkled on the wooden classroom floors to absorb the dust as the janitor swept each day. That cedar aroma lingered.

For sports at recess, there were two see-saws and two swings for the younger ones. The boys had one out-seamed softball and a bat. When they wore out we were left to creativity. For one game, we crushed a can into such a shape that it could roll erratically to use as a sort of hockey puck, and we played "tin-can shinny." All the boys divided into two sides in unorganized competition, each with his improvised stick, to knock the can across the goal line. I suppose it was called "shinny" because of the many bruised and skinned shins. Boys brought marbles and played "keeps" – gambling! Mom would have had a fit if Bud and I played keeps even with the clay pee-wee marbles. The high school started the season with only one softball, bat, basketball, and volley-ball. With play on a dirt schoolyard, they did not last long. The school had no gymnasium, football field, band, nurses, or counselors. No music was taught. The eleven-grade system had no lunch room. Two buses added in 1936 ran two routes each. At times, the school was unable to meet its meager payroll so that teachers were paid partially in "script," a sort of promissory note.

Unfortunately, school started about the time the cotton was ready for picking. (Actually, we quit "picking cotton"

about 1929 and started “pulling bolls” as improved gins were able to separate the burrs.) We would start to school and attend only on rainy days. Some children did not enroll until the harvesting was done. Eventually, this problem was remedied partially by starting the school in August, then a few weeks later recessing for several weeks. Even then we still missed many days of school to pull bolls. When most of the crop was gathered, we still had to hurry home after school and pull bolls until dark. Usually the last of the crop was gathered during the Christmas holidays. Written excuses from parents were required for absences. With five of us and so many absences, Mom would write each of us a whole page of excuses to be clipped and used when needed. In spite of our many absences, four of us siblings graduated in the upper level of our classes.

All of the gizzard stones of the farm could be represented by cotton bolls. Just think of teenagers looking out across forty acres of white cotton that will require two pickings -- or seeing the weeds in ten acres of corn, twenty acres of maize, and fifty acres of cotton that must be hoed. Plowing with our two teams of mules was easier work, but it was slow and boring to go row-by-row across a farm. The maize matured in August when each head was cut off with a knife and pitched into the wagon being pulled along. I can still feel the chaff around my collar in the sweaty heat of the field.

One day we were heading maize, using the narrow-rimmed wagon with “butcher knife” wheels. The ruts leading to the barn were deep. As the team plodded along with a load, I was sitting absent-mindedly on the front corner of the wagon. Suddenly there was a lurch and I fell directly in front of the front wheel with my rib-cage over the rut. Fortunately for me, there was one command that the mules liked to obey at any time. As I tumbled behind Ol’ Kate, I hollered “Whoa!” and instead of the mules giving a frightened lurch, they stopped instantly.

On a very hot, sultry day when I was ten and Emily was fourteen, she and I were hoeing cotton together. There were

some cloud formations in the distance that offered no threat. But as I looked at Em, I saw her “Buster Brown” hair style with much of it floating upwards due to static electricity! I have often wondered how close we were to being stricken by lightening that day seventy-seven years ago. Only God knows all the “close calls” we survived.

Farm kids who worked hard learned patience and endurance. They learned that work is essential and that not all of life is easy. They learned responsibility which made them realize that they had a place to fill in life. They knew that both people and animals needed their help. Boring jobs gave time for meditation and developing a philosophy and goal of life. Mindless tasks fostered creativity for improvement. Children who work hardest usually value their successes and possessions more highly and appreciate opportunity for advancement more deeply. And not least of the learning experiences is that kids learn to add fun to all their activities – even in the cotton patch. Unpampered children have a wonderful capacity to enjoy what they have rather than being depressed by thoughts of what they do not have. Grit in the gizzard serves well. []

Chapter 5

Religion In Rochester

Our one-room frame church building was beside the high school with a concrete outdoor baptistry behind it. It was about 36' x 50' with the podium protruding from a bay window and "amen seats" on each side facing the platform. A blackboard behind the pulpit was an essential and ever-present fixture. A register board boldly gave the statistics of the previous week including how many had read their Bibles daily and the number of chapters read. Clear windows allowed for air circulation and for observation of happenings outside by those dulled by long sermons. Even a snuff-dipper might find it a convenient place to sit and spit. Air conditioning was by cardboard fans provided by local businesses, and our floppy paper-back song books also served as fans in a pinch. It could really be hot with people crowded in those short and narrow cane-bottomed chairs bolted together.

Early in my memory, both the building and baptistry were moved about a block to the main street. In the first setting, the audience faced west but in the new location we looked to the south. Early impressions are so indelible that, to this day, I visualize us always facing west.

The town of about 500 had a tabernacle which was used for community affairs. Each church had its turn for summer meetings and there were some "union meetings." New straw would be spread on the ground. The main groups were Methodist, Baptist, and Church of Christ with a small group of Presbyterians and a later start-up of Holiness people. Since there were no radios, televisions, or other such distractions, many of the community attended those revival meetings. Some, not wanting to be involved, would sit in their cars or on the

fenders. The Holiness group drew spectators who circled their gatherings to watch their erratic behavior when they “got the Holy Ghost,” spoke in tongues, shouted, and exhibited great emotional reactions far into the night.

In those early years before Mom’s health broke, we attended some services of other groups, not as participants but as observers. As a small boy, I was scared by maneuvers employed by some preachers. They would make an emotional plea calling for all to bow and close their eyes while those who were “unsaved” raised their hands to indicate inclusion in the prayer. God seemed to have had peepers on the choir platform who, after the prayer, made a bee-line to those who had raised their hands. Those “personal workers” with pained countenance turned on the pressure in front of everybody presumably to bring the persons to salvation. I was terribly scared that one of them would come to me. Some were induced to go to the “mourners’ bench” for intense emotional prayer. Some “prayed through” but others of less emotional nature presumably fell short of salvation.

In time the churches abandoned the tabernacle and had open-air meetings with temporary benches beside their buildings in the moonlight nights of August when field work of farmers was less intense. There were always good crowds encircled by bystanders. Temporary lighting always drew swirling swarms of flying insects. Being the only time of the year for baptisms, we might have twenty or thirty. Some of our preachers would “lay it on the sects” in bantam rooster confidence calling other churches by name and exposing their doctrinal errors. Christ as our Savior took a back seat to doctrinal issues and the church. Grace was hardly a spoken word, much less an understood and emphasized idea. We were the one, true church which our proof-texts clearly identified. One night was usually devoted to the supposedly damning sin of instrumental music in worship. We had all the proof-texts, so we continued to grow.

Maybe I have painted the picture a bit dark. We did develop a dogmatic system of doctrine but what group has it all put together correctly? Many people were brought to Christ who served to the best of their understanding. The building was packed with the sincerest of people every Sunday. In 1908 D. S. Ligon baptized 75 persons in Rochester. Many well-known preachers conducted meetings during my early childhood including E. M. Borden, Price Billingsly, R. L. Whiteside, Early Arceneaux (six meetings), T. E. Milholland, W. M. Davis, Roy H. Lanier, J. W. Chism, Cled Wallace, and J. D. Harvey. In the 1930s, J. D. Harvey added 45 persons baptizing 21 one evening. Again, he baptized 18 persons in one night in 1933. He administered my baptism in that meeting. It was my privilege to baptize his granddaughters, Layne and Lynn Plemons, 35 and 38 years later.

As a young teenager, I was particularly impressed with Cled Wallace in his white suit and white shoes, then a popular style. He introduced us to the *Gospel Advocate* in which he wrote a regular column titled, "Sword Swipes." That title says it all! I enjoyed reading about his heroic confrontations with various propagators of error whom he called by name. Swipes of his sword always left those enemies exposed in defeat and humiliation.

In 1933 when I was about fourteen, the congregation began using "preacher boys" from Abilene Christian College who came on Sundays. The first was Otis Gatewood who served for three school years. He was followed by Leroy Brownlow, Bill Price, Clifton Rogers, Louie Welch, Ben Newhouse, V. T. Smith, Sr, and perhaps others. Some of these only came during the summer. Louie Welch from the cotton-patch town of Slaton near Lubbock was one of these. He later served five terms as mayor of Houston and is still a friend encouraging my ministry. I doubt if any of the others are still living. Otis Gatewood, from Meadow near Lubbock (whose wine-colored suit with a coat whose lining was threadbare I still remember), had burning zeal for evangelism. Due to his

influence and that of others, there were a dozen or more young people of Rochester who became preachers, part-time preachers, and missionaries or wives of those men. His life-long influence on evangelism was widespread throughout our fellowship.

N. B. Hardeman's books of *Tabernacle Sermons* were the most available source of ready-made sermons for the preacher boys at ACC. No doubt, he would have been pleased and in awe to know how effectively these young men declaimed his sermons from the pulpits of West Texas around Abilene. If they could preach like that, why could I not do so also? Mom's aspiration for George and me was that we become preachers though Dad expressed no enthusiasm in that direction. Preachers, both young and old, were often guests in our "humble abode" on the farm. So, with spoken and unspoken encouragement, each of us began to visualize ourselves in that capacity. The gizzard stones were grinding.

Only in more recent times have I begun to realize the heritage that influenced the doctrinal convictions that I had been proclaiming. It goes back much further than the preacher boys who were near my age. Our Stone-Campbell Movement, begun in the early 1800s, was not an effort to draw believers from existing churches into a "one, true church." Rather it was an effort to break down the walls of rejection that existed between them. The converts of the Stone people and the Campbell people demonstrated this by recognition of each other as brethren in Lexington, Kentucky in 1832 though they did not agree on everything doctrinally or wear the same church designations.

There is a dark chapter in this history that our people generally ignored, however. As time moved on, there began to be insistence upon conformity in doctrine and practice. Argumentation was a fertile field for the development of legalism and proof-text patternism. Carl Ketcherside dealt masterfully with a milestone in our movement which was unknown to me before. It can be read in my edited book, *Our*

Heritage of Unity and Fellowship, Chapter 13, “The Sand Creek Address,” and is worth the price of the book. At a meeting of about 6000 disciples on August 17, 1889 at Sand Creek, Illinois, according to agreement, Daniel Sommer delivered a discourse on “Innovations” followed by the reading of an “Address and Declaration” by Peter P. Warren. After delineating on those innovations, it was concluded that “we are impelled from a sense of duty to say, that all that are guilty of teaching, or allowing and practicing the many innovations and corruptions to which we have referred, that after being admonished, and having had sufficient time for reflection, if they do not turn away from such abominations, that we can not and will not regard them as brethren.”

This was a 180-degree reversal of the aim of the Movement. It was the first call for rejection of brothers in Christ who did not conform to the judgments of others who determined the criteria. This was a sort of birth date of the Church of Christ! Or, maybe it was the time of conception, for seventeen years later, David Lipscomb with the approval of other leading brothers of this persuasion, instructed the Census Bureau to list the Church of Christ as a separate body. That was in 1906, just 100 years ago, just twelve years before my birth! Was Christ’s church finally restored in 1906 after centuries of extinction? Alexander Campbell entertained no such idea. He described his work as unifying reformation. Was it a non-denominational church – the one true church? Sincere and intelligent men still contend that we are not a denomination contrary to the statements of our mentor, Campbell himself. In his latter years he lamented that, contrary to his original aims, he realized that he had added another church, a denomination, to the religious scene. (For more on this, read Dr. Leroy Garrett’s “*Campbell’s Rude Awakening*” in FR 267.)

Zeal, militancy, rejection, and bitterness are generally characteristic of break-away groups. There were conciliatory preachers and teachers, but as I recall my earliest memories two decades later, there was a combative, debating spirit pervading.

Since conformity in every jot and tittle was thought to be necessary for salvation, each had to be defined. Search for definitions generally led to proot-texting, legalism, simplistic argumentation, and patternism. Some zealous contenders for truth were the sincerest and most humble of men; some were emotional; some were dogmatic; some were bantering and arrogant. It was not a fight with the outside world but infighting – brother debating brother with both always winning!

Most of the quibbles made into issues related to the assemblies and what was done in them. Bible classes began to be added using some women teachers and uninspired literature. If women were permitted to teach women and children, when did a boy outgrow her classroom? Some began to pass collection plates instead of “laying by in store” and began offering thanks before the collection. The one cup (actually two glasses) gave way to individual cups (glasses; now plastic “glasses”). Must the “cup” be wine or grape juice (red, of course)? Should the one presiding break the bread before passing it? Was participation in the Supper on a weekday permissible? Should it be served on Sunday evening for morning absentees? Was it to be taken to shut-ins? Who was worthy to partake? Must women wear veils (hats!) in worship? Could an unbaptized boy lead a song? What about solos and quartets? All of these things were debated and often made into divisive issues with fragmented groups rejecting others who did not practice the combination of scruples they espoused. But all were united against instrumental accompaniment, clapping, incense, candles, and other additions to our supposed “five acts of worship.”

These dividing lines were fairly well defined by the champions of their causes during the 1920s and 1930s. In Rochester, wires were stretched across the building with retractable khaki curtains forming “classrooms.” The women taught women and children. Individual cups were introduced and the Supper was available Sunday evening. After debate, various congregations chose their own courses. So, who were

we preacher boys to challenge the champions? We just accepted what we had been taught in our own congregations. We swallowed the grit thinking it was the seed of the kingdom.

All of these groups were entrenched by the time of WWII except for the controversy over congregational cooperation. For me it seemed that issue was created out of party spirit and jealousy by men who devised a white horse to ride on. I did not see justification for rejecting other disciples over the controversy. Even the week before the Tant-Harper debate, I led the singing in a meeting with Yater Tant in Lafayette, Louisiana.

The war opened the eyes of soldiers and others to open doors for world-wide evangelism. So there was a great thrust to reach the lost. Laudable as that was, however, it was a mixed blessing. All of these divisive issues went along as baggage into all the world. It was as though the saving gospel depended upon correctness of all doctrinal details. Devoted workers both at home and abroad often confused proselyting with evangelizing.

If you are judging me as being too harsh and critical toward others, let me assure you that I am being most critical of myself. So many of these divisive gizzard stones were thrown into my diet that I did not realize what they were doing to me. It seems that I should have been able to see more clearly. I am dismayed that it took me so long to begin to see my misdirection. God has been and still is patient with me, and I trust that my labor, even my most misguided efforts, has not been in vain. And I can feel fully with all of you who recognize that we have been shaped so much by the reactionary period that preceded us. Thank God, a more Christ-centered, grace-oriented, and unifying message is being heard in our congregations now.

Those old reactionary gizzard stones did not serve us well in Rochester or in your town. []

Chapter 6

Time and Change

Regardless of your age, times before your memory seem like ancient history. So it is difficult to imagine what life was like a hundred years ago – or even 87 years ago when I came upon the scene. Let us try to shrink some of those years. As I was born 54 years after the Civil War ended, no doubt, I lived contemporary with some veterans of that conflict. In fact, the lives of some who lived when the Alamo fell in 1836 and Texas became a nation might have over-lapped with mine. It is likely that many veterans of the Revolutionary War in 1776 lived contemporary with those of the Civil War. Also, I have been blessed to live one day for each 23 days that have passed since Jesus walked this earth.

In 1903, just 15 years before I was born, there was not a charted road across the United States! In making the first auto trip across our nation that year, they had to follow local wagon roads which were uncharted on any map. By 1905, the 8,000 cars in our country had only 144 miles of paved road to travel. Oklahoma, Arizona, New Mexico, Hawaii, and Alaska were not yet states. Georgia was more populated than California. Our national population has more than tripled in the last hundred years. In the book of history, our nation is a relative newcomer. Unimaginable changes have developed in the lifetime of my generation. Time and change have supplied many gizzard stones making most of us old heads seem out of place, or “quare” as some old-timers of my youth would say it.

Most of the factual material that I am including here is from memory rather than research, so there may be inaccuracies. My county, Haskell, was named to honor Charles R. Haskell who was killed at the age of 23 in the Goliad

Massacre by the Mexican army. (The town of Haskell is the home of current Governor Rick Perry.) The only pavement in the county was brick paving around the court house square. In Rochester the street of the block-long business district was dirt and the sidewalks were wooden – a strip mall! I have faint memories of our first “trip” in our Model T probably in 1924. The route of about 150 miles to Stephenville was dirt road except that we crossed a site where they were paving what I suppose was Highway 80. Black-topping was called macadamizing then. I still remember that strange word.

My first ride on pavement was several years later when Highway 277 was being paved from Abilene to Wichita Falls. Leaving Knox City where Mom was in the hospital, Dad took us eastward where we intersected the road being paved with concrete. In our new Model A, Dad revved it up to fifty miles per hour momentarily as we kids held our breaths. Later we made a 90-mile trip to Spur, all on dirt roads.

As autos multiplied with more speed, town dwellers suffered through the misery of the clouds of dust being raised by passing cars. In the early thirties, Highway 6 was created and paved within a mile of our farm being enabled by Roosevelt’s recovery programs. In order to help local people, farmers were hired with their teams using “slips” or “fresnoes” to make the road bed.

At the time of my birth in 1918, our country had 1,000,000 troops in Europe, WWI having ended thirteen days earlier, after our 116,708 casualties. A moral crusade had resulted in the Eighteenth Amendment which outlawed the sale of alcoholic liquor in 1917. Commentators today will almost gleefully tell what a failure prohibition was because of the moonshiners and bootleggers. But thanks to prohibition, I had seen only one drunken man and not even one person drinking liquor until I left for college. Yes, there was moonshine liquor to be had, but it did not receive social or religious approval.

This may seem unreal to most of you: liquor is still illegal in Rochester! In the Roosevelt-sponsored repeal of

prohibition, it was left to local option. In our precinct including Rochester it has not been approved yet, and Abilene approved it only a few years ago. I had not lived in a city where liquor was sold until I moved to Beaumont in 1944. Many Christians would not eat in a place that served beer or buy groceries where it was sold and it was illegal to advertise it on television in some areas. Preachers could cry out against drinking in those days. And they did! And no one was killed in our community by a drunk driver like the 16,694 killed by them in our country in 2004.

During my teenage years, we hardly traveled into the next county. The Brazos River was six or eight miles due west of our farm but I never saw it there! Going by road through Knox City or Rule, it was about fifteen miles to the river, but I only saw it there three times in my youth. Having no radio then, we were limited in access to the world about us except mostly through the printed page. Cultures, religion, traditions, and dialects were more regional across our nation but radio was about to change that. New grit is always being introduced.

For graduation from high school, I got my first store-bought haircut. Dad cut our hair using manual clippers that had a way of keeping you awake. My first telephone conversation was when I was in college. I never bought a hamburger or ate in a café until after graduation from college. A few times we kids shared a soda pop but I do not remember having bought a whole one for myself. As far as I know, fast food places had to wait until after WWII when the extruder type ice cream maker came into use spawning businesses like Dairy Queen. Our chewing gum was made to last by using only half a stick at the time, sticking it on the window facing for meals and bedtime, and later adding the other half of the stick. Except for candy bars, piece candy was not wrapped. Often when Dad went to town alone, he would buy a nickel's worth of mixed candy providing two or three pieces for each of us five siblings.

For "drummers" (traveling salesmen) and others, Rochester had a small hotel but could not boast of having a

motel. They might not have been invented then, but we had the next thing to it – a “wagon yard.” The Bradleys had a small grocery store and a courtyard area downtown with accommodations for persons traveling by wagon and for their animals. That species, I suspect, is extinct. So is the four-inch, mouth-watering cookie you could choose from a glass container in their store for a penny.

Although cellophane was in use for wrapping some things, plastic had not made the scene. Bread was wrapped in waxed paper and it was not sliced. Kraft paper bags were used for some groceries, but many purchases in various stores were wrapped in paper and tied with a string or secured by paper tape which moistened automatically as it was unrolled. After the butcher cut off the meat for a customer it was wrapped in white paper. Fruit was sold by the piece rather than by weight. On the grocer’s counter was always a special cutter to cut off a plug of Red Tag Tinsley chewing tobacco from a larger slab of it. The only rubber bands we ever got were those used by the druggist to hold the label on the pill bottle. We contested to determine who got each new one to use for launching various projectiles like spit-balls. Old tire inner tubes made of red rubber were used to make our (politically correct) “sling shots.” Glass containers were very fragile, so extreme caution was exerted when pouring anything hot into one. We had one glass gallon jug which was wrapped in tow-sacking for use as a water jug in the field. It would be soaked in water so the evaporation would help to keep it cool. The person working separately would carry his water in an open bucket. It would quickly become warm and ants, gnats, and trash would have to be blown back in order to drink of it. Tobacco chewers and snuff-dippers would always rinse their mouths with the first mouthful. A thermos of ice water? – science fiction!

Watermelons were kept under the bed where it was cool – which only meant cooler than out on the ground in the hot sun. Water pumped from the well was the coolest thing on the farm in the summer. Would you like to try a week without

electricity and refrigeration? In summer most leftovers would spoil before the next day. Fresh meat could not be kept on hand, so chicken was the fresh meat of summer. The milk of the morning would be turning sour (blinky) by supper time.

Some made covered troughs extending from a kitchen window in which water was kept and the milk containers were put and covered with a wet cloth. The evaporation would help, but not always with satisfaction. We had three kinds of milk – sweet milk, clabber, and buttermilk. Farmers were not equipped for pasteurization, and homogenizing was unknown, so the cream rose quickly to the top. Many meals consisted of only sweet milk with corn bread crumbled in it. Green vegetables would have to be picked the day of their use. If the rooster attended to what he does best, the egg would begin forming an embryo immediately. Eggs bought in the store now are unfertilized. All food and beverages would be warm or hot. Cream saved a few days for making butter would become very sour. That, however, was a plus, for sweet-cream butter cannot compare with country-made sour-cream butter.

We had no central heating, running water, electricity, or bathroom. In the coldest weather it could be below freezing in our bedroom. We piled on quilts until they weighed us down. In the morning after a real blizzard our kitchen water, milk, eggs, and meat would be frozen. Before going to bed, sometimes we would place a heated, wrapped brick under the cover to warm our feet. In the morning Bud and I had turns at getting up and starting the fire in the front room wood stove, then almost hugging the warming stove-pipe until it became red hot. Fortunately, it was severely cold very seldom. In the frosty weather of winter one did not leisurely read the catalog while in the outhouse or the bushes. Having no anti-freeze, it was vital to drain the car radiator each night. In order to start the car in the morning, usually some hot water was poured into the radiator to heat the motor so the starter could crank. It could be a real project getting a car started. Cars had no heaters, radios, dimmer switches, automatic transmission, or windshield

washers then, but they did have foot feeds, chokes, carburetors, generators, cranks, curb feelers, emergency brakes, fender skirts, and spinner knobs. No one thought of stopping at an intersection or corner, but we did honk before passing a car.

Because we had no overcoats, sweat shirts, or parkas, in adjusting for colder weather, we put on extra shirts, pants, and sox. By the time outside chores were done or Bud and I had played on the frozen tank, our hands and feet might be numb with cold. But how nice it was to hover the wood stove and prop our feet up near it to feel the warmth penetrating. Patience was important lest we warm our hands too fast bringing on painful throbbing.

It was truly a scene of the past – a family sitting encircled around a stove entertaining themselves with games of their own invention. Little reading or homework was done in the evenings because a coal oil lamp only provided about as much light as a night-light. And teachers gave very little homework then.

The few times we would be snowbound were exciting. Using the flat-top “bachelor heater” stove in our front room, we would cook on it. For an afternoon snack, we would pop several skillet full of home-grown popcorn, for a family of seven could eat half a dishpan full of it. We kids would mix cream, sugar, and vanilla to add to snow for a treat.

But not much time was wasted on a farm. Idle kids seemed to activate the minds of parents to think up chores. One was particularly reserved for winter days. There was an ever-present quilting frame hanging from the ceiling by hemp binder twine. The twine at each corner was wrapped or unwrapped to raise or lower it. So we would have a quilting party which was not exactly a fun party for us kids though we did entertain ourselves while sewing. You can imagine the quality of the quilting of teenagers. Utility rather than art was the objective. Because we had no blankets, many quilts were needed. Cotton batting was available in the stores for nicer quilts, but we used cotton left over from the last bale that was ginned.

I will spare you a discourse on prices in my teenage years. Most every thing has increased in price ten, forty, or even a hundred times what they were then. Your salary may be a thousand times higher than a farm hand's pay! The increase applies to groceries, automobiles, homes, clothes, medicine, doctor bills, movie tickets, education, salaries – everything – everything except gasoline! Now people are screaming bloody murder about gasoline prices which are finally increasing but not yet matching all those other inflationary increases. Expect it to go higher yet, and don't expect it to go down until all these other items go down. It is a fact of life; so we do well to get used to it. Did you refuse to accept an inflationary salary increase or "windfall profit" on the house or anything else you have sold? Do you really want more governmental regulations setting limitations on your profits?

Adjusting to our time, place, and change regardless of the time and place in which one lives, goes far in determining happiness and character. I am mentioning all these things, not to gain sympathy as though we felt deprived, but to emphasize the blessing of the many grind stones affecting our character. We had as much as most other local people. Regardless of their austerity or affluence, few people ever get all they want, or have all desires fulfilled.

We blamed no one for our condition – well, yes, the Democrats blamed it all on Republican President Herbert Hoover, making it a political issue. We called jack rabbits "Hoover hams." We did not feel that the government owed us anything. Later welfare programs gave birth to the "we are victims entitled to government aid" attitude. Due to the independent spirit of farmers, many of them felt disdain toward city people who wanted hand-outs from the government. Instead of poverty defeating us, it created determination to survive and succeed. Farm people shared what they had with others who had less. They cared for their own aged, crippled, disadvantaged, and mentally ill family members. We knew of

no starving person in our country and had sympathy for those starving in China and other places reported in the news.

The most determining grit in my gizzard was the togetherness of family. What a difference if I had been an only child, or had only one parent, or if we had not learned to live together in harmony in austere times, or if my family and community had few moral and spiritual standards. The absence of such family scenes as I have pictured, whether by choice or fate, is probably the most weakening influence in our current society. The family is the foundation of civilized society in any time, place, and era of change. []

Chapter 7

Around the House

As I explained at the outset of this series, these memoirs are being recorded mainly to give any descendents who may be interested a glimpse of how life was for one of their ancestors. I make no claim of being a figure in whose biography you would be interested. A number of you, however, have identified with my experiences and have shared a commonality of influential grit in your gizzards. You encourage me to continue, so I will do so, making no claim that my family experiences were heroic or adventurous.

Dad did no housework though he never sat in leisure while we kids did it. He was always busy with outside work. Mom was off-and-on in her participation because of her health problems. So we siblings did most of the general housework. I began drying the dishes when I had to stand in a chair to do it. Our only cabinet and counter space was a piece of furniture called a cabinet. Its work space was about 24" x 36" and it held all our dishes, and had a flour bin and a pull-out dough board. There George would wash the dishes in a dishpan after heating the water on the cook stove. The wood-burning range was replaced by an inefficient kerosene stove. We had a few white dish towels which we used when company came, but worn-out clothing was used ordinarily to dry the dishes and also as dish rags. Our water was "hard," that is, mineralized. Wonderful detergents not having been invented, much of our home-made lye soap was used in getting the water into a lathering condition. Scum would build up quickly in our pan for hand washing, and dishes were not left as sparkling as we would have liked.

Having no such cleansers as Ajax, we used our own unlimited supply of cleanser – sand! Dampened sand would

remove scum, the soot from smoked lamp chimneys, and other resistant stains and stubborn incrustations. We would clean and polish such items in the plowed field just a few feet from our back door. When a chicken might get in the house and leave its droppings, or one of us vomited on the linoleum or pine floor, or something was spilled, dry sand was poured over it and then swept into the ash scoop. (No dog or cat was allowed in the house even momentarily.) To stop the bleeding and help to form a scab on a scrape or minor cut, I would pour dry sand over it. Dirt is not necessarily dirty!

Having no sink or back porch, in order to brush our teeth we had to step outside to rinse the toothpaste from our mouths. I do not remember Dad ever having a toothbrush or brushing his teeth. Some of the older women dipped snuff. They would make a “toothbrush” by stripping the bark off a twig and softly shredding the end with their teeth, then dipping it into their snuff box and on into the mouth.

As we shared all work on the farm, Bud and I began to share in the cooking though Emily, the oldest and the most diminutive, was CEO of the kitchen when Mom was sick. At times Bud and I would bedevil her in spite of the fact that she had sharp aim with her foot in kicking our shins. He and I would often make up guessing games while we were doing kitchen work. Elda and Lois were still too young for such work, but their turn came later.

Younger ones were assigned the task of churning using the crock churn with a dasher made of a broom handle. When the butter formed, one with washed hands would remove it from the churn, work the whey out of it, and mold it into a mound styled with hand prints. None of us particularly liked buttermilk, but it was preferred for making biscuits and cornbread. Then if any was unused, it was fed to the chickens.

None of the girls milked the cows until Bud and I left home. After being washed, milk buckets were hung outside on the wall and the crocks were set on the ground in the open air and sunlight. In preparation for milking, we would go by the

pump near the cow lot and rinse the buckets of any dust or accumulation. A cow lot is not exactly an antiseptic setting. As we milked, the cows sometimes pawed up trash or switched their tails sending other than milk into the bucket. A fly might land in the foam. Effort would be made to scoop these elements out by hand with the foam. Taking the milk to the kitchen, we would strain it through loosely woven cloth. That is how clean country milk was! Yes, I know how detestably filthy cow lot manure may seem to you of the city or younger generation. Though it was in no way appetizing, it was not all that germ-filled. Composting manure produces methane gas and ammonia. I have never seen house-fly maggots in a cow lot. There must be a fumigating effect during composting. We did not all die from using milk without pasteurization. When it is on sale, I sometimes buy two gallons just for me.

Speaking of flies – they were inescapable, ever-present, and plentiful. Our three-room house had four outside doors! Usually, two of them were nailed shut to help keep out flies, but the screens could not keep them out. There were no effective insect sprays. Some made fly traps which helped a little and there was sticky fly-paper which was futile. Some arsenic fly bait was available. People often kept a fly swatter in their hands as they sat at leisure or visited. Especially when preparing a meal for company, several of us would get dish cloths and drive the flies toward the door as Elda or Pud would open and close the door at the right times. With us, a table cloth was used more to cover the dishes on the table than to use under them where oil cloth served that purpose. Some women would prepare the Sunday meal and cover it with a table cloth before leaving for church.

After I was preaching, I had a meal with some good farm people who had no screens. I broke open a biscuit and there was a fly in the middle of it. Without the others seeing it, I just pinched the middle, dropped it to the floor, and ate my biscuit. It had been sterilized in baking! The table was loaded and a cake with white icing was at the corner of the table close

to my plate. Flies swarmed the cake. I would fan them off between bites as I ate but it was to no avail. After I quit fanning, the flies soon covered it. Nobody refused to eat the cake. And we all survived. Speaking of similar situations, I once heard Homer Hailey comment that he liked watermelons when visiting like that for no flies could get in the melon.

At church the vessels of the communion would be covered by a white linen embroidered table cloth to keep the flies off. Years later in another congregation, an elder complained when they got new communion trays with matching covers and left off the table cloth – they were leaving the Lord’s body up there on the table naked!

Until we were a bit older and received pocket combs as Christmas presents, the family had only one comb – a large, coarse comb which was kept on the dresser in our bedroom. That old dresser had a bigger mirror than the other one in the house. Often I would stand before it flexing my muscles to appraise my (lack of) developing physique. It was always deflating for, though I ate heartily cramming the richest of foods, I was always a skinny bean pole. Some esteem was regained later when I learned that the mirror was defective causing me to look much thinner than I was. Also, in the mind of an insecure teenager, my two front tusks protruded like those of a bull elephant.

On the farm we had to can much of our food, especially peas, green beans, peaches, and corn. The common quip was that “you eat what you can and then can what you can’t eat.” For a family of seven, much canning was in half-gallon jars. When each item was ready, we would take a day or more from farm work to can. We would sit in the shade of the house, moving as the shade moved, shelling peas or peeling peaches, the drudgery being relieved somewhat by our interactions of fun. No radio or phonograph. We never discussed religion though we would talk of church people and happenings. Sometimes a batch of peas would be picked after the day of work in the field, shelled in the evening, and left to be

processed in the pressure cooker the next day. Pud, about ten years old, would be left to watch the pressure cooker! Due to the fragility of glass jars then, sometimes jars would break in the cooker and our labor and the food would be for nothing.

One day in August 1934, while we were shelling peas, one of us returned from the mailbox reporting on the plane crash in Alaska that took the life of Will Rogers and Wiley Post. We still had no radio but, though not having seen him, we knew of Will Rogers because he came to the Cowboy Reunion in Stamford each year.

The canned food would be stored in the storm cellar out of danger of freezing. Like a prairie dog dives into its hole for refuge, all farm people made similar use of the cellar as storm fronts moved in. Approaching storms appear much more threatening at night than in the daylight, so most of our retreats to the cellar were when we were awakened by Dad's call for us to get up and go to the cellar. In the dark we would hastily put on necessary clothes, grab a lamp, and make a frantic dash. After the storm passed, the old single-walled box house was always left standing and we would welcome our beds again. When lightning could be seen in the northwest at bedtime, Bud or I were sometimes assigned to stay up and watch until the cloud passed us by or demanded another dive into the cellar. I can vividly remember the earthy smell of the dugout and our groggy sleepiness as we waited out each storm.

"Laundering" was not in our vocabulary, but we siblings did all the washing of clothes. During school year, it had to be done on Saturday or not at all if the weather did not permit it. The woodpile and wash pot were close to the well near the barn. The curbed well had two-inch piping with a six-foot pump handle and a cypress sucker rod to be operated by manpower. As we carried the water to the pot and heated it, a spoon full of lye was stirred into it to "break" the water. A scum of the minerals would rise to the top and be skimmed off. Then we could add our lye soap and transfer it to the tub with the washboard. Next came the laborious task of rubbing the water-

soaked items until they were clean of spots and stains, and rinsing them in clear water. Always looking for easier methods, Bud and I made our own. We would take off our shoes and tramp a whole running together. Wringing the sudsy water and the rinse water out of bed sheets was too big a job for one boy, so Bud and I worked as a team on that. The only bleaching for white clothes was by boiling in sudsy water. In order to help remaining dinginess, sometimes blue liquid was added to the rinse water. Don't ask me what bluing was! Faultless starch came in powder form, so it had to be mixed with hot water first then poured into the rinse water for clothes to be starched. Next we hung the one clothesline full and then we used the barbed wire fence in front of the house for the rest. At times the wind would be blowing and stirring up dust. On hot days, the first running might be dry by the time the second running was ready to be hung out. Using the left-over soapy water, Bud and I would often scour the pine floor partly covered with linoleum in the kitchen sweeping the water out the back door or through a gap in the floor near the wall.

An eye had to be kept on the cows on wash-days for they loved cotton clothing. One evening all of the girls ribbed stockings were washed and hung out on the barbed-wire fence in front of the house and no one remembered to watch. When someone thought to do so, it was almost too late. One cow had eaten nearly all of their stockings. Once the cotton gloves I used when pulling bolls were protruding from my back pocket as I was milking. Before I knew what was happening, the cow I was milking had swung her head around, had licked the gloves out of my pocket, and was swallowing them.

Static sheets with all sorts of nice perfumes are used now in our dryers, but none of the fragrances can capture the fresh smell of clothes dried out in the sun. Often on sunny days we would put cotton mattresses outside in the sun for a day of freshening. They were solid cotton as innerspring mattresses were unknown and, instead of box springs, bedsprings were bare iron coils.

In the summertime Bud and I would move our iron bedstead outside in the open air. At about 1500 feet altitude our air was light and cool at night and the skies were usually clear. I wonder how many people living in the city have ever seen a clear sky away from any artificial light. It never ceased to be a magnificent sight bringing wonder and awe. We had not heard of the August night when the shooting stars are so spectacular, so we were truly amazed to experience one unannounced, and we could see some meteorites most any night. The mocking-birds would sing into the evening and the scissor-tails would wake us by their crowing routines in the morning. At night the dogs would answer one another across the farms and rove about, then our dog would return to check Bud and me out.

When I took Lea to Rochester in the summer for the first time, having told her previously of our sleeping outside, I had trouble persuading her to give it a try. After the first experience, however, each summer that we went back, she was always quick to suggest getting our bed ready out under the stars. The winds of the worst of sandstorms usually laid at the close of day so that it could be “a beauteous evening, calm and free.” We would shake the sand off the bed and enjoy it.

I saw a more convincing testimony of a Creator while lying in bed looking into the sky than I saw from reading the Bible. *“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge”* (Psa. 19:1-2 NIV). The most unenlightened since creation could discern that *“his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.”* (Rom. 1:20). Living so intimately with nature and musing on and coping with its various elements were gizzard stones helping to make me what I am today socially, spiritually, and even physically. []

Chapter 8

Around the House – Upper Teen Years

In the last issue, I told what fun ☺ we teenagers had washing clothes; now comes the joy of ironing! We began ironing our own clothes as younger teenagers. Even though Lea did most of the ironing during our life together, I usually cared for my own dress shirts and pants through the years, and even to this day. Before we had electric steam irons, we sprinkled the clothes ahead of time. There was a clip-on handle for use on two irons which were heated on the wood stove or oil stove of the kitchen. The padded board rested on the backs of two chairs. Much caution was necessary lest we scorch the clothing or smear it with soot or an unclean iron. So the testing and cleaning was done as each reheated iron was used. To press wool pants, a dampened cloth was spread over the garment to prevent damage of the fabric. My pair of Sunday pants was carefully laid between the two mattresses on our bed where it could retain its creases, such as they were.

Clothing was sewn with cotton thread. Fellows who filled out the seat of their pants, while doing strenuous activity like sports, might hear a rip as the seam in the seat of their pants split. They would make a hasty exit to escape the laughter.

The first freezes of the winter signaled hog-killing time. Butchering was no picnic, especially for the weak-willed and those of delicate appetite. After a blow to the hog's head, the jugular vein was cut so the animal could bleed. In order to make the hair slip, the hog had to be scalded. Usually we covered the body with tow-sacks and poured scalding water on it. After the hair was scraped off, a slit was made above the ankles of the back feet and a single-tree was hooked under the tendons, and by it the animal was hoisted above ground by rope

over a tree branch. Dad always did the odious disemboweling task while we caught the entrails in a tub. It was my fate always to be assigned the detestable job of stripping all the fat from the intestines and other innards to be rendered for lard. Parts like the liver and ribs which could not be cured were often shared with neighbors. Dad salted down the hams and other larger parts for curing. Most of the remainder, including the tenderloin (We never heard of pork chops until "Li'l Abner."), was cut up and ground for sausage in our little hand-cranked grinder. This required much "elbow-grease." Mom and Dad usually hassled over the amounts of the various seasonings. After grinding we then stuffed them into tubes about three inches in diameter made of worn-out clothing and hung them outside in the shade until they were all eaten.

Jimmy Dean, of Plainview, Texas, has seasoned sausages like them, but no one can match the flavor of those home-made sausages aged in the open air. Much fat was left on the meat for we fattened hogs in those times to produce more lard. The major pieces of fat were cut up and rendered in the iron wash pot down at the barn. In both pork and beef, fat adds much to the flavor, so we ate much fat, sometime sopping the extra fat with our biscuit or stirring molasses into it and sopping it. They had not invented cholesterol back then, and we needed the extra energy to burn due to our vigorous life and our poorly heated houses. People with heated houses, warm clothes, and sedentary lifestyle cannot afford to continue to eat like we did then.

You probably have eaten mince-meat pie. Did it have meat in it? Not likely. But a part of hog-killing time was the making of mince-meat. The head of the hog was boiled and the fatty and cartilage type flesh was picked in minced pieces from the bone. Into it were mixed dried apples, raisins, syrup, sugar, spices, and perhaps other ingredients. Because of the excess fat in it, it could be kept for some time without refrigeration. When made into half-moon pies, the fat made the crust rich and flakey -- a real delicacy. There were times when Dad used the head

meat to make congealed souse and the liver to make congealed “liver pudding” in keeping with his German heritage. We kids were not too “hog-wild” over those two porky productions.

After the cut up fat pieces of pork were rendered, the remains were the “cracklins” which could be kept indefinitely. With them we made cracklin’ bread, a kind of hot-water corn bread which was greasy by today’s standards. We ground our cracklings for more even mixing in the corn meal. A food so tasty could hardly be expected to be in today’s approved diet.

Because beef could not be cured like pork, we seldom used beef. But a few times we did kill a yearling in the colder part of winter. We would hang the dressed carcass on the north wall of the house out of reach of dogs and cut off of it as we needed. It might freeze and thaw many times but that only made it more tender and flavorful like Kansas City aged beef. It was quite unlike the water-saturated beef we buy in the markets today. I have known people who had meat to thaw when their freezer failed who were so afraid to eat the meat that they would discard it. We violated all sorts of modern rules about meat, eggs, and milk without dying of salmonella, E.coli, or any other such feared maladies. Ground beef was unknown in our house except for coarsely ground meat for making chili. It contained enough tallow to make block chili which could be kept a long time without refrigeration. Most of our meat was eaten fried.

Home cured ham and sausage were delicious, but laying nostalgia to rest, I prefer to get my meat from the supermarket! We wasted nothing for “waste makes want.” All waste fat and rancid pork skin was used in making our lye soap.

Regardless of the menu before us, there was always recognition that it was a blessing from God as we offered thanks for each meal.

When we had good rains, water drained off the cow lot, horse lot, chicken yard, and pig pen into the surface tank about a hundred few feet away. According to current medical advice, George and I should have died as teenagers of every sort of virus, bacteria, and microbe because we spent so much time

playing in that muddy water. Bud and I enjoyed giving Eldie and Pud boat rides in the shallows in wash tubs. And our half-grown turkey seemed pleased for a tub ride when tadpoles were plentiful within pecking reach.

In summer sometimes Bud and I would take a preliminary bath and shampoo in the tank and then finish it off at the pump. A three-room house with seven residents did not offer much privacy for bathing, so Bud and I would set tubs with water in the wagon or on the hen house to warm during the day and then take our baths in the wagon after dark. Even in our crowded conditions, privacy for the changing of clothes was rigidly respected.

A “car shed” had been built about a hundred feet from the house. A garage was where cars were taken for repair but a car shed was where it was kept. In time a floor was put in the single-walled shack with corrugated iron roof. For a time it became the bedroom for Bud and me. I did not own a Bible, but someone’s large family Bible was in the shack. By kerosene lamplight, I read it through for my first time. Even with our limited space, we had extra kin to spend summers with us at times.

Boys don’t just sit around unoccupied. As soon as we completed our assignments, Bud and I were ready to play, and playing catch required the least preparation and equipment. Countless hours were spent playing catch and batting fly balls in front of the house. We never owned a genuine baseball or glove but we made our own, such as they were. We would unravel knitted glove tops and worn-out socks and stockings and wind the string into balls. Bud cut a leather cover from the sides of worn-out work shoes and we had our baseball. Because we had only cotton string or thread with which to sew it, the ball could not withstand much batting without needing repair. We never owned a football or basketball. We did have one baseball bat, but some kid broke it right away. We made our own tops and yo-yos. We never had skates or bicycles. They would have been of no value on a sandy land farm. To this day,

I have not learned to skate or ride a bicycle. Many years later, Lea and I joked that the only thing we had in common when we married was that neither of us could skate or ride a bicycle.

Even through our upper teen years, we and neighbor boys continued to play marbles using the square ring with nine large crockery marbles with two sets of partners in competition. It was a good game requiring strategy and shooting skills. Our family also made wickets and small mallets for playing miniature croquet using those marbles. For Mom to play we had to make her mallet of a broom handle so she did not have to stoop.

In another game, using smaller marbles as taws, two or three boys would dig four three-inch holes about two feet apart for a game of “rolly holy” where the winner made a round trip of the holes without being hit and sent back to taw line. I can remember when men would pitch silver dollars, but that game deflated into pitching metal washers. We pitched horseshoes also – the real things – worn out shoes of various sizes and shapes.

Preachers denounced card playing along with movies, radio, magazines (especially *True Story* magazines), and whatever else was popular at the time. So Mom did not allow card playing for it had the appearance of evil and would put a kid on the slippery slope to becoming a gambler. Ironically, her parents spent one summer with us and Grandpa taught Bud and me to play Hearts out under the hackberry trees. I don't know if she ever knew that. She would not allow us to own dominoes but, if others brought them when they visited, we could play, or play at other people's houses. In later years she allowed us to own a set, and eventually she became so daring as to play dominoes with Dad.

No music was taught in school; we had no radio or phonograph, and in church we had no instrumental music. So our family was exposed to very little music. A few times in summers a “medicine show” would offer vaudeville type entertainment for several nights. It would be two or three

persons with a light truck whose tail gate served as a small stage. They would sing, do skits, and sell medicine. They always drew a crowd and had good sales of a magic formula that would cure what ails you.

Without entertainment, sometimes a man with a pickup truck load of apples or bananas would park downtown and draw a crowd to sell his wares. One fellow had a load of socks. In his ballyhoo in drawing a crowd, he was tossing men pairs of free socks. I was standing close to his truck and held up my hands for a pair of socks. He started to toss a pair to me but held back, saying, "You are not a man." "But I have a man's foot," I shot back. He tossed me a pair which turned out to be no big prize. You might expect seconds or imperfects, but these were total rejects, one sock being so small that I could not possibly put it on my foot. As to musical training, the church did sponsor two or three "singing schools" in which we were taught to read shaped notes, sing different parts, and beat time. Sunday afternoon singings were common and even allowed for an occasional solo or quartet.

Dad was the last to accept any innovation like a radio or tractor. We kids pled for a radio for "everybody else had them." One day in 1936 we were thrilled when we came home from school to learn that he had taken a cow to Haskell and traded it to a dealer for a new radio! About the third day, the battery was drained. Dad reluctantly had the 6-volt battery recharged. That did not last long, but we did not have to prod him further. He ordered a wind-charger by mail. Soon it came – in a jillion pieces of nuts, bolts, and parts. Dad was devoid of any mechanical aptitude. I never saw him so much as remove a spark plug from a car. So he asked me to miss school the next day so Bud and I could assemble it. Using our tool set consisting of a pair of pliers, a screw-driver, and a monkey wrench, we put it together. Then we attached it on the ridge of the roof over the kitchen where a chimney had been removed and let the brake chain hang into the kitchen. An antennae wire

stretched out twenty yards to a fence post. Our world would never be the same!

It was a miracle to hear programs from Fort Worth and Dallas and as far away as Chicago and across the Mexican border; however, we did not sit around listening all the time. It was turned off during work time. When weather was bad, there was lots of static and too much static was created by the wind-charger to listen while it ran. Due to Mom's nerve problems, it was turned off early in the evening. Having a radio helped us to have the correct time which our only timepiece, a cheap Big Ben alarm clock, failed to do.

In those early days of radio the popular programs were not very sophisticated for we were not ready for sophistication. The singing was mostly Western, ballads, hill-billy, blues, hobo songs, and religious songs. Yodeling was popular. At prime time at noon we could hear Bewley's *Chuck Wagon Gang*, the Stamps Quartet, and W. Lee O'Daniel's "*Light Crust Doughboys*." The whole nation tuned in to hear "*Lum and Abner*," "*Amos and Andy*," and comedy programs by such men as Jack Benny, Bing Crosby, and Fred Allen. It was said, in exaggeration, that when those programs were on, a person in a city in summer could walk down the sidewalk in residential neighborhoods and not miss a word. In those days before air-conditioning, everyone kept their windows and doors open.

In early evening you could listen to "*Little Orphan Annie*" and "*Dick Tracy*." Afternoon soap operas had their beginnings with such as "*Ma Perkins*" and "*Stella Dallas*." Benny Goodman was just starting his big band but we preferred country music. Many of those programs came from WBAP in Fort Worth and a companion station WFAA in Dallas. Their broadcasts would switch from one station to the other. When it switched from Dallas to Fort Worth, it was always signaled by a cow-bell. Even our little town of Rochester formed a hill-billy band that played for a while on Sunday afternoons from KRBC in Abilene.

Preachers were in their hey-day enabled by radio. Preachers from various churches proclaimed their doctrinal positions colored by their own attitudes and personalities so that I could hear one for only a few seconds and usually guess what church he was with. Amiee Semple McPherson was the flamboyant, sensational preacher of the day out of Los Angeles promoting her Foursquare Gospel Church. It was beyond any dream of mine to think I might ever preach by means of radio.

That grit in my gizzard seventy years ago still affects and defines me. Many of you, though not quite as ancient as I am, experienced similar circumstances. Though we did not all respond alike and to any degree of excellence, in general our generation learned self-reliance and creativity in using what was at hand. Patience and determination were learned by doing boring and seemingly fruitless tasks – in doing what had to be done even when it meant overriding sensibilities and seemed callous. Our grit promoted a sense of gratitude for what we had and a measuring of all conduct by an objective standard of conscience. []

Chapter 9

God's Creatures Great and Small

The family life on the farm prior to WW II was an experience of nature with creatures and critters great and small. They all had to eat. Some ate each other. Some were determined to eat what you intended to eat. And you ate some of them. Relations with God's creatures were not all sweet Bambi stories. You met and dealt with reality on the farm.

I am amazed when I try to list all the creatures that lived on, or migrated to and from, that hundred acres. Let's begin with the smallest ones. Gnats, fleas, mites, lice, blue-bugs, ants of various sizes, weevils, lightning bugs, doodle-bugs, mosquitoes, flies, bees, wasps, dirt daubers, lady bugs, squash bugs, stink bugs, June bugs, tumble bugs, spiders, centipedes, mosquito hawks, praying mantis, crickets, grasshoppers, leaf worms destroying the cotton, horned tomato worms, horse-flies, "wolves" in the backs of cows, and various other unnamed insects in worm, bug, or butterfly stages. We were spared from having chiggers, cockroaches, and bedbugs, however.

Winged creatures included sparrows, doves, mockingbirds, scissor-tails, night hawks, orioles, blackbirds, woodpeckers, meadow larks, killdeers, shrikes, ravens (We called them crows.), buzzards, ducks, geese, guineas, chickens, and turkeys.

Bud found a perfectly shaped little flint arrowhead on the farm which would indicate that the Indians once hunted those birds there.

Among the animals were mice, rats, snakes, ground squirrels, gophers, striped lizards, horned frogs, salamanders, toads, turtles (terrapins), cotton-tail rabbits, jack rabbits, civet cats ("pole cats" –also wrongly called skunks), cats, dogs, pigs,

cattle, mules, and horses. There were no coyotes or rattlesnakes as you might have expected in West Texas.

There were no effective controls for fleas, mites, lice, and blue-bugs though creosote, grease, and snuff helped a bit. Some claimed that a banana stalk in the hen house would help, so there were always those waiting for a stalk when the grocer had sold all the bananas off it. Dozens of fleas would infest the eyebrows of dogs. Fleas would accumulate where the animal could not scratch. Dogs and cats enjoyed having the fleas picked from them, and we enjoyed leisurely picking them off our pets. I liked to pull cactus thorns from the noses of mules and horses. They always seemed pleased by it.

Each of the dogs we had was a mixed breed male give-away dog. Based on the OT teaching that the price of a dog could not be brought to the temple, many people, including Mom, thought it was wrong to buy or sell a dog. One of ours had pointer instincts but tried to drive cows or mules by head-to-head attacks and he had no killer instinct even to kill a mouse. Others knew to nip at the heels of animals and then dodge their kicks. Usually, during the day when we were working separately in the field, the dog showed his pack instinct by checking on each of us. No dog was allowed in the house, and the only food was table scraps. I never heard of a person buying dog food. All farm dogs chased cars and left their territorial markings on each wheel of every visiting car. Our cats were not fed for there were plenty of mice for them where they usually lived around the barn. Often, mice could be heard running through the house at night. Traps were set most of the time.

When the maize was low in the barn, Bud and I would shift it by the fork full and watch for the mice to run out. Pinning them down with foot or gloved hand, we would take hold of the tail and slam them against the wall or floor. That was not just sadistic sport. The mice were destructive in our world of survival. On finding a nest of little rabbits, cute as they were, we would kill them, for grown rabbits had voracious

appetites for your crop. Due to the eradication of the coyotes (I never saw one while growing up.), the jack rabbit multiplied menacingly. A government program paid a bounty of five cents for each pair of rabbit ears. That nickel would buy one shotgun shell. So Dad took great care to kill one rabbit with each shot. Bud and I were not allowed to use the gun.

One season, in addition to the usual mice, there was an infestation of big rats. The haystack was nearing depletion and Bud and I knew there were mice and rats in it. So, with the dog on guard, we began moving bundles. When a mouse or rat would run out, he would quickly overtake it and disable it with one crunch. Sometimes two or three would run out at the same time and he would disable them and then go back and make sure they were dead. Once when we moved a bundle, a mouse ran out and he started for it but then saw a big rat coming out. Being near the mouse, he continued toward the mouse, lapped it up and swallowed it without a bite, then returned to kill the rat. I have always wondered how his insides felt with a live mouse struggling in there.

A good many years later when Lea and I returned to the farm on vacation, there had been a migration of field rats that made tunnels a few inches underground. Fay and Emily were there with their old terrier, Pancho, and we had our terrier, Cisco. We had fun watching those two excited dogs dig out rats. Pancho, because of age and bad heart, would dig excitedly until he would keel over in a faint, and Cisco would take over. After a minute or so, Pancho would revive and dig again until he fainted again repeatedly. He survived but did not take part in Cisco's later experience that day.

On a fence row, Cisco found a skunk's burrow and started digging. When he finally encountered the skunk, it was the wrong end! He was sprayed but he continued his attack until he would have to stop, vomit, and roll in the sand to try to remove some of the odor. Then he would attack again. Over and over, he would attack, be sprayed, and then become so sick he would have to stop. At long last, with our help he completed

his mission. It was our turn, however, to endure a long trip back to Louisiana with him with odor which we could not fully eliminate. By the way, the civet of the civet cat is used in making perfumes! We killed them, not for sport, but because they would kill chickens – even several in one night. There was a market for their fur, so some fellows were desperate enough to kill and skin them.

On sultry days gnats could be a nuisance while we worked or sat in the shade. Men often whittled with their pocket knives while visiting. When taking our noontime naps, we usually placed our straw hat over our face because of the gnats and flies. It has been many years since I have seen a tumble bug rolling its marble-sized, perfectly round ball of cow manure backward to its hole where it stored it. As little kids we would capture a colorful June bug, tie a thread to its leg, and let it fly on a leash. It was a challenge to knock down a large wasp nest without getting stung. Their sting matched the red ant in the pain inflicted. Once I learned that red ants had crawled up my pants when one stung me. I shed the pants without ceremony. The ants would clinch into the fabric so that the pants had to be turned wrong side out in order to remove them. The only good thing to be said about red ants was that horned frogs thrived on them. We all liked the harmless horned frogs for they looked like a survivor of the dinosaur age. After turning one on its back and gently pressing its underside for a short time, it would remain still for a long time. But so many insecticides and defoliant have been used in later years that the horned frog, multi-colored striped lizard, turtles, and ground squirrels are hard to find now. I just hope they are faring well in the ranch lands. The turtles were harmless except that they would eat the ripe cantaloupes. If placed on their backs on a hard, smooth surface, they could not turn back over on their feet. Callous kids were known to place them on their backs on the smooth top of a post and leave them to die. “Old Rip” was a nationally famous horned frog (lizard) who survived in the cornerstone of the Eastland County courthouse for 31 years!

It was pleasant to dreamily watch the ravens on a hot day riding the updrafts in circles hundreds of feet upward. They ate much grain and could quickly spoil a whole patch of watermelons. They were so wary that a person could not get close enough to shoot them. Now in the city they will light in the front yard and fly close to moving automobiles. On hot, still days whirlwinds would often develop. It was fun to run to the center of a whirlwind and run with it across the field but barely worth the discomfort of all the sand in your hair and clothing.

Mockingbirds were loved so they got a free pass. The old saying was that it is a sin to kill a mockingbird. The elegant and graceful scissor-tail was never harmed either. Both birds ate insects and were territorial and would chase the much bigger raven away. Being faster and more maneuverable than the raven, they would attack from the rear overhead pecking the raven on the back of the head. The defenseless raven would make a hasty retreat. Many times as I came close to a mockingbird's nest, she would attack the back of my head. The dove, however, uses a different technique. As you approach her nest, she will drop to the ground close by and flutter as though crippled to lead you away from her nest. Jesus advised some preachers to be harmless as doves but he did not encourage their being deceitful as doves. The night hawk (We called them bull bats.) lays its eggs on the flat bare ground while the oriole weaves a swinging sack for a nest using the long hair from the tails of horses and cows for strength. Because sparrows were so prolific, we often tore their nests down.

For any sort of plowing, I was assigned the gentlest team of Ol' Pete, a light colored mule, and Ol' Dolly, a worn-out old quarterhorse that Dad got for a work horse. In the drudgery of the warm day, I would almost have to wake them periodically to keep them moving. One day, however, as I was working on a weed-sled approaching the lane by our field, I saw them getting really nervous. In spite of my efforts to control them, they were spooked and took off across the field with the abandoned sled. They ran to the corner through a weak barbed

wire fence, circled around and came back into the field on the other side of the corner coming to a stop about a hundred yards into the field. It was fortunate that they did not injure themselves seriously by the barbed wire. What had spooked the sleepy team? It was a boy draped face down across a donkey approaching in the lane.

We never owned a saddle, so it was easier for us to fall off than to stay on. Dolly had a boney back. One day we had a tow sack with some cotton in it which we decided to use for a cushion. We led her under a tree limb, put the sack down her back bone, and lowered ourselves on to her from the limb. Don't try that at home! Dolly was rid of her passengers without moving a muscle.

Once Dolly went under the clothesline with Bud, sliding him down her back, over her rump, and seating him on the ground. Fortunately, he landed in deep sand. Another time he was riding her and for some reason fell off landing on his all-fours facing the opposite direction. I still cannot figure how it happened so quickly but Dolly kept going after leaving her hoof-print on his bottom as her parting gesture.

When I was about fourteen, I had an appendectomy (with a modern spinal block!). I still have a 4 ½ inch scar as a reminder. I suppose Dr. Edwards had to get both hands in there to operate. After two or three days I was back home to remain in bed for five more days. There was fear of breaking the stitches back then. Anyway, Mom's decree was for no horseback riding for several more weeks.

As a few weeks past, Bud was on Ol' Jude, a long legged mule, and I was on Ol' Dolly chasing each other around the mesquites in the pasture away from the house. Suddenly, I fell from Dolly and made the mistake of holding on to the reins. She whirled around and stepped on my right ankle. Though there were some skinned spots, no broken bones were evident, and there was little pain. Fortunately, my ankle had landed in the sand. But that was not the end of the story. I could not afford to let Mom know about the riding and the fall. So I made

sure not to limp. As a day or so passed it swelled and became painful so that I could hardly avoid limping. As more days passed, I could press on the injury and feel a squish indicating that things were getting worse instead of better. Now I was really scared for I would be in big trouble with Mom and Dad. So I determined to “tough it out” as long as possible. In a week or more, the swelling and pain did begin to recede and it soon healed. That secret was kept from Mom for many years.

Dad bought a beautiful draft horse quite out of our class. Ol' Pet was truly a gentle pet that we all loved immediately. She soon had a colt in her image and disposition. She won our hearts also. The church was having midweek services then, so we kids went while Dad stayed with Mom. As we approached the house in our return, the four-months-old colt was in the pasture through which the lane went. Being unaccustomed to the car lights at night, the colt ran directly into a headlight. Getting a lamp, we examined her and saw that there were two deep cuts at the base of her neck. They would need to be sewn. There were no veterinarians around. I had heard of “horse doctors,” but it was usually a derogatory description of an incompetent doctor. So Bud and I did our emergency room residency work that night, sewing up the wounds the best we could with ordinary needle and doubled thread. Daylight examination the next morning revealed that she had already broken some of the threads. So we repaired our work and put a horse collar on her to protect the wound, but it showed no signs of healing as time went on. On the contrary, her condition grew more desperate as days passed. As all hope was gone, one morning Dad said, “Cease, you take the shotgun and shoot the colt,” and he went on to the field to work.

WOW! I had never fired the gun before. I was so shocked that I did not even ask “why me?” or raise an objection. I had been steeled to do shocking and unpleasant tasks that had to be done before but none matched this assignment. She was a loved pet. In preparation I studied her head to determine just where to aim to hit her brain. Then I steadied the gun on the

horse lot fence and pulled the trigger. That was the only time I ever fired that gun.

Whether it is a man or beast, dying is not as quick, clean, and easy as it is pictured in the movies. I will not describe the horror, but it was far from bloodless, clean, and quick. As we later dragged her body to the far side of the farm, I realized that I should have led her over there before shooting her.

We loved most all of God's creatures, great and small, yet life among them was not idyllic. Even with beautiful creatures and beloved pets, there was a balance of reality which often demanded harsh choices. We learned to do what had to be done regardless of the emotion involved. Those gizzard stones have served their purpose in the seventy years since. []

Chapter 10

A Bleak Landscape

If I were to pick one thing that typifies West Texas, I would choose the mesquite tree. Its deep roots often reach the water in the sub-soil though it can survive on little water because its leaves are small and retain moisture. The seed can wait for years to germinate and need to be scarified by animals to enable sprouting. The plant then emerges from the cow-chip which offers food for growth. Because the leaves are so bitter, insects and animals do not eat them, and the branches are protected by inch-long, rigid thorns. No trunk or branch of a mesquite tree is straight, and none is ever damaged by wind or ice storms, nor do they ever bud and bloom before the last freeze of winter. When the tree is cut down, the stump sprouts new growth. The buffalo and other animals that spread the seed thrived on the slightly sweet mesquite bean pod. The Indians ground the pods for food. Because there were no native evergreen plants around Rochester, the winter landscape was bleak and uninviting. I suppose we could say the mesquite tree had its own gizzard stones that enabled the tree to adapt to its windswept landscape and raw weather.

In a similar manner, the settlers who grubbed the trees and replaced them with farms adapted like the trees. They could quip that everything in West Texas had stickers, thorns, or horns, or it stung or bit and only a barbed wire fence separated it from the North Pole. But they saw the good in the land and the new society formed there and judged them to be worth all the negative costs. They felt the freedom of a new society, loved the freshness of virgin soil, enjoyed the sunshine in untouched nature, and relished the calm beauty of early mornings and the painted sunsets and verdant fields. The

barefooted walk behind the plow in fresh-turned soil created a bond with the earth and nature – and the God of nature.

The newly exposed breast of nature was ravaged, however, by drought and wind during the Dust Bowl years of my young life. Investors in the early 1900s saw a great prospect for changing the area from cattle to cotton. They built the Kansas City-Mexico-Orient railroad to enable cotton shipment. Though it fell short of the original plans, it was connected with railroads to the west coast. Most of the cotton of the area was exported through Long Beach, California to ports in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Indonesia. As I was pulling bolls I had no idea that the fruit of my labors was going to the Orient. That railroad came in 1906 and the town was moved to it. The town of Rochester, now dwindled to about 400 people, celebrates its hundredth anniversary this year. But the last rail shipment of cotton was in 1994 and the rails have already been taken up! More diversified crops are being grown now. Still, last season, Haskell County produced 87,000 bales (about 43,500,000 pounds) of cotton, but it is hauled by trucks. Better conservation measures are being used now. The sixty acres belonging to Emily, Lois, and me are being returned to nature. But in my youth the shallow plowing by teams loosened the sand for blowing. And it blew!

There were two kinds of sandstorms. On hot days we might see clouds forming in the northwest as a cool front would be coming in. As it came closer, we could see a great bank of red dust rolling in. As it struck, by the time we could get the teams to the barn from the field, the visibility could be down to a hundred yards, or even less. The winds of those fronts were not usually destructive and they soon subsided, sometimes with the sky being cleared by refreshing rain. Ah, the clean and refreshing smell of a summer rain!

Other sandstorms intensified as the day heated. They would prevail until dusk, and this might be repeated several days in succession. Young plants in the fields could be stung and destroyed by the sand. Shifting sand could even cover

small plants. Drought and wind worked as a destructive team against the farmer and his land. Even the bed on which we slept in the old farm house was not spared. I have seen sand cover areas of the linoleum in the house so that its design and color were almost hidden. We would shake it off, sweep it out, and wait for the next one. No, this was not an every-day occurrence for we had many beautiful days. Sometimes sand would drift across a road. A car can travel on wet sand but bog in dry sand. One day our school bus bogged in a drift across the road and we boys got out and helped push it through.

Fortunately, we never had a total crop failure but we suffered income failure. There was always more cotton to harvest than Dad and we five kids could handle, so we usually had cousins from Erath County to come out and make a little extra cash pulling bolls for thirty-five cents per hundred pounds. We enjoyed having them as that was the only time we saw them. Dad never shared information about family finances with us kids, but I am confident that in some of those years our income was no more than \$500.00. Instead of living in despair, we learned that the best things of life are not bought by money. The rugged mesquite taught us that in the bleak landscape there was still some sweetness in the old mesquite bean.

Looking across the winter landscape with no green thing in sight was similar to the bleak landscape of opportunity for us teenagers. What course offered hope of a better way of life than we had? The only “professionals” that we knew were the few doctors, the few preachers, and a wider field of school teachers, and nobody was thriving in those professions. All five of us siblings intended to go on to college, but none of us had been led to believe that there was a much wider landscape. My boyhood thoughts turned in favor of preaching and teaching out of idealism rather than hope of enrichment.

As Emily was graduating from high school, I was entering as a freshman in 1933 and George was a senior. I always liked school and did not find it too much of a challenge. My grades suffered because of so many absences. In algebra, I

learned to follow the examples to work the problems but the teacher did not know enough to explain the meaning and value of algebra; so it was never of any value to me. A little business education could have served me much better. I was never in the “in crowd” of the popular ones, no doubt, due to my being straight-laced, but I learned to gain attention by making better grades and the use of humor, much of which was self-deprecating humor. And on the school-ground, I could gather a scrub volleyball team and rally them to beat the football boys.

There was an annual “County Meet” of competition between the schools. I did play third base on a sort of scrub, uncoached, and no-win softball team. And I competed in the discus throw. At the meet, the coach told me no one was entered to toss the shot-put and suggested that I enter. For a skinny broomstick as I was, that was ludicrous, but I entered. I was successful in making every other competitor feel better about his throws.

The attitude of students generally was that they were in competition with the teachers. So any method that would improve their grades was used with little thought of being dishonest or unethical. I never cheated for grades, but I must confess that I helped many other kids with theirs, even writing themes for them. A girl was valedictorian of our graduating class and I was salutatorian with the highest grade among the boys, but it was not even a 90 grade average. We boys were not exactly Ivy League prospects, but most rose above the prospects of the moment.

Because of my slow (retarded!) social development, my social landscape was rather bleak also. All the time that we were on the farm, Bud and I played with the three Goode boys across the road from us, but we had no such associations with the boys from town. Our social life was school and church. Neither of us was confident enough to date girls. Were we interested in the girls? Only when awake. For the junior-senior banquet, I almost made myself sick summoning courage that I did not have in order to ask the prettiest girl in school for a date.

She accepted! It consisted of transporting her about two blocks to and from the banquet and sitting by her there. That was my only date in high school. Now, in retrospect, I can say I was waiting for a still unknown girl in southeast Texas who was just graduating into high school.

Emily was headed for ACC in 1933. None of us had been to Abilene, a distant sixty miles away, with a population of about 30,000 people. Bud and I were given charge of that expedition to take her in our Model A Ford. We left home about daylight on Sunday morning arriving before anyone was in circulation. Chambers Hall, where she was to live, was locked. Mom had known then President James F. Cox in Erath County and instructed us to call on him for any help. So we roused him and he unlocked the room for her. Bud and I got back home in plenty of time to take the family to church. We made a second journey for her at the end of the school year.

Bud graduated in 1934 but had no money for college. Neither was Emily able to go the second year, but at mid-semester in 1935, she and Fay L. Wilson, the boy from Tipton, Oklahoma whom she had met at ACC, were married. They had no resources, so agreement was made for Fay to help with our farm while they lived in our slightly remodeled car shed. Then Emily became pregnant and was pitifully sick the entire time. Not having been around an expectant mother before, I had no idea of the misery some women bear through pregnancy. Her year at college had given her the new-fangled idea that there should be doctor check-ups and delivery should be in a hospital. So, at the one-doctor and one-nurse hospital in Knox City, Kay Leon Wilson was born – the first person I knew to be born in a hospital. The next year they moved into a farm shack where Fay worked almost from sun-to-sun for \$18.00 per month.

Of course, Mom was pleased with her first grandson. Kay would be a new generation to share her singing “*The Birdies’ Ball*.” She sang it for us siblings and our kids, and we have continued it two more generations. We did not know who wrote the song, nor have we ever heard it outside our family.

This year, however, I have learned that it was written by Septimus Winner (1827-1902) using the pseudonym “Apsley Street,” but still with no music. Mom’s version below differs slightly from the original.

*Spring has come said the Nightingale,
I mean to give my birds a ball.
Birdies one and birdies all,
Who will come to my Birdies’ Ball?*

*Tra, la, la, la, Tra, la, la, la, Tra, la, la, la, la.
(Repeated after each stanza)*

*Soon they came from bush and tree,
Singing sweet their songs of glee.
Each one fresh from his cozy nest,
Each one dressed in his Sunday best.*

*The Wren and the Cuckoo danced for life,
The Yellow bird danced with the Red bird’s wife.
The sober old Owl and the bashful Jay,
Wished each other a very good day.*

*They danced all day till the sun was low,
Till the mother birds prepared to go.
Each and all both great and small,
They all flew home from the Birdies’ Ball.*

Bud’s college fund was like a mesquite seed that refused to sprout for three years. Otis Gatewood, the ACC “preacher-boy” coming on weekends, was urging Bud to start to college. When Bud told him he had no money, Otis handed him a dime, saying, “George, that is as much as I had when I started.” As my graduation time was approaching, he and I and Fay were making definite plans to start in the fall of 1937.

I had no money either! We had a few dollars, perhaps \$30.00 each. We each were offered the customary 40%

discount for ministerial students by the college. Dad had about four acres of cane to be bundled and was about to hire a man with a binder to do it. Bargaining for the job, we used an improvised sled with a (dangerously) protruding sharpened saw blade pulled by a mule. Bud rode the sled grabbing the cut stalks while I piloted the mule – with frequent hangups. The cane was about six feet tall and it was the heat of August, hot as an oven in the midst of the cane with its irritating chaff. After cutting it, we then tied and shocked the bundles. It was the hardest \$12.00 we ever earned. But \$6.00 was half the price of my matriculation fee, the only entrance fee we paid. In a government program using farmers' teams and manual labor, clay was dug from our dry tank and spread over the almost impassible sandy road south of our farm. Bud and I were hired about a week and we made a fabulous \$2.40 per day. Tuition then was \$5.00 per hour, so with our discounts, we paid \$45.00 per semester for fifteen hours tuition. No church paid the way for a preacher trainee then, and I question the wisdom of it now.

Life was about to change as we planned to leave the bleak landscape of the Depression and Dust Bowl farm for greener pastures in Abilene Christian College. Would we have the grit in our gizzards to deal with the uncertainties before us?

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Chapter 11

Off to College

My graduating class of seven girls and nineteen boys saw no settling of the dust to reveal promise of jobs. Many jobless men rode the rails in freight cars seeking their fortunes in California and other places. Our government offered some youth work programs, and disturbing situations in Europe led our country to increase its military; so that opened doors of opportunity for many young men. Only one other boy to my knowledge attended college, that being Pat Wyatt with whom I was a classmate from the second grade through college. He excelled as a career airman serving as a colonel.

Much of our family communication about important matters was “silent communication.” I recall no family gathering in which Fay and Emily and Bud and I discussed plans or possibilities with Dad and Mom about entering college in the fall of 1937. Our intentions were known generally. Mom strongly favored our going but Dad never gave us any encouragement. He could give no financial help, and we were not expecting to receive any. As we worked in the fields that summer after my graduation from high school, we did realize what impact it would have on Dad’s farm operation with only Elda and Lois left to help.

The day came for our departure. As we talked about it at breakfast, without previous discussion, Dad injected, “Well, Ceace, it looks like you won’t get to go.” There was silence. I made no response and he added nothing more. I just continued with my plans. It was not out of rebellion for I deeply felt with him and his struggle with the farm with both boys leaving.

I wish I had a picture of our departure but our family never owned a “Kodak.” Our company included Fay, George,

and me who would enter ACC, plus Emily and two year-old Kay. But that was not all. In the trailer hitched to the car were a few household pieces and Ol' Rosie, the Wilson's cow! So we were off to fantasy land where we expected some sort of magic to change us into persons we could only hope to become. A new kind of idealistic gizzard stones would masticate our new influences.

Down on Cedarcrest on the creek near Ambler, we rented a guest house by the nice house of a retired rancher. The little brick house which is still there consisted of two bedrooms separated by a small kitchen and bathroom. Now we were getting up in high cotton – living in a brick house with electricity, running hot and cold water, an indoor bathroom, and a gas (open flame) heater. And for Rosie, she was staked across the road in virgin mesquite pasture land extending on to Zellner Hall and across north to the Albany Highway. So that was Rosie's home away from home.

Some other preacher-boys had rooms in residences a bit closer to the campus. I remember Claude and Bob Guild, Murray Marshall, Ted Waller, and Clifton Inman.

We brought available food from the farm, especially eggs and pork. Emily was generous to cook a pot of pinto beans and a pan of cornbread for Bud and me each evening, and we always had milk. So we were faring well. Every few weeks one of us would hitch-hike back to the farm to load our little cardboard suitcase with food. People were considerate to give hitch-hiking students rides though we often waited a long time for one of those generous ones to come along. When I returned home after just a few weeks and walked down the sidewalk in Rochester, I already felt totally out of place.

Around the turn of the century, our Movement emphasized education and started many little colleges. There were about a dozen in Texas in towns like Waco, Fort Worth, Hereford, Midland, Lockney, Gunter, Childress, Lingleville, Thorp Springs, Sabinal, and Abilene. The one started in Abilene in 1906 was called Childers Classical Institute until its

name change in 1920 to Abilene Christian College. After a fire in 1929, the school was moved from downtown to its present campus. Consisting of the Administration Building (minus the added wings), Sewell Auditorium, McDonald Hall, Zellner Hall, Chambers Hall, Bennett Gymnasium, and the Education Building, the rather bare campus, born just as the Great Depression struck, was only eight years old when I arrived.

The depression hit the school severely so that it was in danger of bankruptcy. It was rescued by the Hardins of Burkburnett by a donation that would seem pitifully small today. The faculty and staff of the school served out of dedication to Christian education rather than for money. They believed in what they were doing. The small salaries may account for so many unmarried persons being employed.

At that time, James F. Cox was president of the school, Don Morris was vice-president, and Walter Adams was dean. John Stevens was a popular senior, though no older than I. Garvin Beauchamp, from Roby, was among a number of freshman recruits from the cotton patch to play football. Jack Lewis was a freshman and Louie Welch was a sophomore. Jack is a recognized scholar and Louie has served five terms as mayor of Houston.

I have no record of the classes I took in ACC and my recall is dim. In my freshman year the 35-year old Don Morris taught public speaking to a class of about three dozen of us. He got as much fun from our stupid speeches as we did.

Though Homer Hailey (age 34) was kind and considerate, he was all business, always intense in his teaching Old Testament survey to a big room full of freshmen. Addressing us boys as "Mister," he would hurriedly call the roll, offer a brief prayer, and then go into his lesson with deep earnestness as though it were his last chance to rescue us. He made present-day applications. He was also the forceful preacher of the Highland congregation. In off hours you might find him with his boxing gloves vigorously attacking the punching bag in the gymnasium. He was held in respect.

How we became involved in this, I cannot remember, but Bud and I were in a scrub volleyball team that played a faculty team many nights in Bennett gymnasium. I remember a few of the faculty – Dean Adams, Gilmer Belcher, Earl Brown, Jerome Reese, and Lawrence Smith. We would play almost to the point of exhaustion. Faculty men were addressed as “Brother.” Very few held doctorates.

My first two brave ventures into the pulpit were tolerated by nice people in Sylvester and Truby, communities near Abilene.

Bud and I were in “hog heaven.” Farm life seemed a distant past. But our scant supply of cash was ebbing away. Rent and a few other bills had to be paid. In our long discouraging search for part-time jobs, we learned that some ACC boys worked at the Hilton Hotel. We investigated it and were hired. We helped “poor” Conrad Hilton on his way! (Well, he was saved from bankruptcy in 1931 by the Moodys of Galveston.) His first hotel was one he bought in Cisco, about forty miles east of Abilene. He bought some others and then began building them, the 16-story Hilton in Abilene being the second one he built. It later has been known as the Windsor.

We were assigned to wash dishes and pots and scrub floors from 6:00 to 12:00 each evening seven days each week for meals (not from the menu) and \$10.00 per month. Never did we get out by 12:00 for we had to get everything ready for the morning. Usually we could catch a ride to work, but nobody picked up a hiker after midnight.

One Easter morning after parties had kept me there until after 2:00, and I was approaching the Hill, I saw strange lights in the northern sky. Watching them intently as I walked, I determined that it was the aurora borealis which I had never seen before. I awoke Bud and the Wilsons so they could enjoy that phenomenon of nature.

When you begin making big money, the government gets involved. So, on February 3, 1938 I had to sign up for Social Security so that withholdings could be taken from my

\$10.00 monthly check. For 68 years I have carried that card in my wallet (still cannot remember the number) and have continued to pay self-employment taxes most of the time, but that was the best investment that I have ever made.

Having text-books would have seemed almost like cheating. Bud and I shared a Greek primer and probably four other texts during our four years of college. We relied on listening in class and studying in the library. I did not even own a Bible! Emily lent me her KJV Bible, and I soon bought a pocket-size ASV New Testament. When we worked, we had little time to study but utilized our off periods. We failed no courses but never made the honor rolls.

Five hundred students singing in Sewell Auditorium with its great acoustics was a thrilling experience. For the first time I heard some of the best-loved hymns. And we sang from a hardback book, a thing I had not seen before. It was not the greatest collection of songs but we could not use the much better “Great Songs of the Church” for it was published by a pre-millennialist! Watch dogs in the brotherhood were quick to detect any pre-millennial leanings. Buying hymn books from one who held such beliefs would be a compromise and a dead give-away of a church’s lack of soundness. So ACC was held close to the truth – which happened to be the narrowed scruples of the particular enforcers.

I have attended upward to half of the Lectureships at ACC since my first one in 1938. Students were given cuts from classes to attend. I was appalled at the conduct of some preaching brethren. They were like watch dogs sniffing the air for any pre-millennial scent and barking out ugly-spirited accusations against ACC and faculty for whom I already held respect. I had not seen brethren acting like that before. I will withhold all names in order to protect the guilty! As I look back I can see how we had already come to base our claims on doctrinal correctness more than in a loving relationship in Christ.

Back then, the College Church met in Sewell Auditorium and had a “gospel meeting” each semester. Morning sessions were extended chapel. I cannot remember all the preachers used, but one was an articulate 32-year old red-head by the name of Burton Coffman. Another was the gentle 27-year-old John Banister with his conversational style of delivery. They were both very effective and many students were converted, including Garvin Beauchamp whose name is prominent in ACC history, and most of the other football recruits.

We soon came to know just about every other student and teacher and greetings were exchanged as we passed each other – Texas style friendliness. In my estimation, the most unifying influence on campus was the daily chapel. A brief devotional was conducted each day with great singing and followed by various short presentations of interest. There was a flow of visiting persons of note, including preachers and missionaries, some serious and some in fun, leaving an impression on us. Favorite from the faculty among the students was Paul Southern (age 36) whose relevant messages hit home and his devilish humor made us like it. On short notice he could fill in for a no-show speaker at the lectureship and always give the best speech.

We were forming ties with hundreds of students of similar interests, coming from across the nation, and from different cultures. Some couples began to form romantic relationships. The grit in our gizzards was encountering a new diet to assimilate.

Yes, 1937, 69 years ago, is ancient history to most of you. George H. Bush had just entered his teens and George W. Bush would be born about nine years later. Bill Cosby was born that year. A 22-year-old Frank Sinatra was hitting the airways. That was two years before “*The Wizard of Oz*” and “*Gone With the Wind*.” []

Chapter 12

College Life

For the remaining three years in college, the time and sequence of many things blur in my memory, so I will deal more with general memories. I can say emphatically that George and I were always glad to be in the school. We did not bemoan our having to work but considered it a blessing to be able to pay whatever it cost to attend, and we finished owing no college bills! Our gizzard stones of the farm prepared us for this.

If we had lost any of our crusty farm look in our year at college, we probably regained it in the summer back on the farm. Farm boys wore big straw hats, a shirt with sleeves, and even gloves whose tops met the shirt sleeves. Now men will work without shirt or hat and women want the tanned look and both wear faded and torn jeans and brogan shoes to look like they labor in the sun. Dermatologists will reap windfall profits in a few years by treating their cancers.

After we were back in ACC, we received urgent word to come back home. Dad had a field very “white unto harvest.” (We from the cotton patch had our own understanding of Jesus’ terminology!) A hail storm had beaten it from the stalks. Dean Adams permitted us to go home for a week to help. Our short time away from work had softened our muscles. For both of us, it was a most miserable week as every muscle screamed out in fiery pain.

When we did not work at the hotel, we did all sorts of jobs, some assigned by the college in payment for tuition and others jobs we found or Dean Adams pointed us to. For a while Bud milked the Adams’ cow. I spaded their garden and even baby-sat with their young son. I did a full day of ironing for a

family for \$1.50. I washed windows, passed out fliers, helped a surveyor terrace a farm, and kept the rest rooms in the Ad Building. Bud and I painted with calcimine rooms in Chambers Hall. Having no such help as a sanding machine or paint remover, Bud and I used shards of glass to scrape the many initials and carvings from the oak student desktops. During construction of a two-story home just south of the campus, we did many hours of detail work for less than ten cents per hour. In our senior year Bud and I kept the athletic equipment in the gymnasium.

Less time consuming jobs allowed Bud and me to enter into campus life more. Our participation in extra-curricular Evangelistic Forum and Mission Study fed our zeal and broadened our perspectives. The influence of those associations has spread among our churches in our country and around the world. The college never pretended to be an arm of the church, but it greatly benefited the church through those it trained and inspired. On numerous occasions I was introduced to a congregation with such a brief statement as "He is from ACC."

By the time of my college studies, the stance of our "mainline" churches had been fairly well established. In respecting those parameters, the Bible teachers confirmed what we already had been taught rather than injecting new doctrinal and theological challenges. We were the restoration of the true church basing our claims on the verbally inspired Scriptures argued from a legalistic viewpoint. We saw little hope for those of the religious world about us. Our intellectual inbreeding was hardly overpowered by those more grace-oriented and accepting teachers, but over all, a student did receive a valuable, practical education in Biblical understanding.

I sat in more classes taught by Charles H. Roberson, the head of the Bible department, than any other. He often observed that there was no institution of higher learning in the country that, after one hundred years, was teaching what it was founded to teach. Could that be true in ACU that is celebrating its hundredth anniversary this year? I am confident that change

has been made for the better rather than for the worse. From my impressions now, the teaching is well-balanced putting Christ rather than doctrinal issues at the center, emphasizing grace instead of law, and stressing unity with less judgmental rejection of others due to peripheral distinctions. The strong sense of camaraderie and zeal to serve mankind is still instilled. Now, ten times larger, ACU rates highly among the universities in our nation.

Brother Roberson was a stately, dignified man who almost always had a rosebud or some such boutonnière in his lapel. I thought that was neat and followed his example most of my career.

Though twenty-seven descendants and spouses of Sol and Deanie Hook attended ACC sixty miles away, Dad and Mom only saw the campus once and they never attended a function there. Those of the family attending include Fay and Emily (Hook) Wilson; Kay Wilson, Marlin Wilson, Jim Wilson; George and Margarete (Gardner) Hook, Thomas and Pam (Case) Hook, Kurt and Jeri (Lane) Hook, David and Robin Hook, Tom and Beth Ann (Hook) Baker; Clay Tidwell; Marion Gardner; Cecil Hook, Sol and Linda (Williamson) Hook, Paul and Mira (Hook) Prince; Owen and Elda (Hook) Aikin, Linda Aikin; Herman E. "Tiny" and Lois (Hook) Charles. Several have received advanced degrees. There have been teachers, preachers, missionaries, and devout disciples among us, all greatly influenced by the college.

In our second year we shared a tiny rental house close to the campus with Emily and Fay, while Bud and I worked at the Hilton again. We occupied our room mostly to sleep; otherwise we were in classes, in the library, or at work where we ate our meals. A football player from New Mexico worked at the Wooten Hotel and only needed a place to sleep. So we rented our bed to him! We had two cotton mattresses, one of which we put on the floor for us, leaving the bedstead with springs and mattress for him. Because the room was so small, there was little floor space left.

Not much of the food for employees at the hotel was appetizing, so I found that untouched or larger portions of food left on the plates of customers was preferable. I know how you would feel about that, but you eat raw food handled by others. Half of a good steak returned was too good to go into the garbage which was collected for a hog raiser. I took food like that back for Emily to reuse for their meals also.

One day the maitre d' came scurrying around in the large room in which we worked. He cleared a place and set up a small table in nice fashion. Then he ushered in and seated two men dressed in nice suits. They were of a deep complexion that I had never seen before -- business men from India! I am sure they must have been impressed with Texas hospitality! I was embarrassed for them. Yet, they might have seen themselves on the receiving end of what they practiced in their own caste system in India. Our great country has never cornered the market on denigrating and unjust discrimination.

Although beer was illegal in Abilene, it was served at a few banquets in the hotel. Glasses of it were brought with the dishes returned for us to wash. I had never drunk any but always wondered what magic feeling it afforded for it was denounced in such appealing ways. I drank a few swallows of it and waited for some ecstatic feeling. It did not come. I continued to sip and consumed more than a glass full with no evident effect; so that fanciful bubble was popped -- and who could possibly like the taste of it? The waitresses were the first women I ever heard cursing, using foul language, and smoking.

In preparing chicken for banquets, the butcher ordered live chickens. He would grab a chicken, jerk its head off by hand, douse it in a vat of scalding water, suspend it with a few others while it cooled a bit, pick the feathers with both hands, and then toss it into a container before it quit kicking. By the time he had processed thirty or fifty, he looked like the maniac of a horror movie. He also butchered live bull frogs there. My introduction to shrimp was no more appealing either, as he would dump shrimp in a vat for boiling. I could not imagine

anyone eating shrimp cocktail after smelling such a nauseating odor. A ten gallon pot sat on the floor by the cooks' work table. As they prepared food they would toss all scraps into it – vegetable trimmings, meat scraps, bones, egg shells, or whatever. It looked like our farm kitchen slop that we fed to the hogs. After several gallons of accumulation, it was simmered on the grill for a long time and then we strained it through a dish towel. How about a nice bowl of consume`, anyone? In evening cleanup, one new boy thought an uncooked pot of it was garbage and disposed of it instead of putting it in the ice box!

Each guest setting required about eight or ten pieces to be washed. Multiply that by a busy dinner evening plus a banquet and you have hundreds of pounds of dishes and silverware. One of us filled the trays and fed them through the dishwasher and the other inspected, dried, and stacked them. Since detergents had not been invented, a constant problem was in making the dishes look sparkling clean. And being before the time of Teflon and scrub pads, with much difficulty, cook pots had to be scraped and cleaned by hand. The last operation each evening was the scouring of all floors with hot lye water – which was not prescribed for one's shoes or feet. It did deter the hordes of cockroaches for a few minutes. I had never seen a cockroach before! As the people left and the constant noise of the day faded, a strange silence made the huge area seem eerie and spooky.

I just thought you might like to know about our exotic, high tech kitchen education in the Hilton. So we will close up and walk back to the hill. []

Chapter 13

Out Into The World

Television accounts of graduations show cheering students exuberantly sailing their mortar boards into the air because they are so happy to be through with college. That was a lesser part of the scene at my graduation from ACC for there were more tears than cheers. There was such a bonding of students that the thought of our going separate ways was painful. We were leaving ACC to disperse through the world, never to sing together again in chapel.

Sooner or later, children have to “fly the coop” of family life, going out as adults when they may not be quite ready for adulthood. I can think of no better environment for making that transition than a Christian university where the entire faculty is dedicated to the continuation of the development nurtured by the parents. Schools like ACU teach much more than facts and skills preparing one for a career for they nurture character and purpose so essential to life itself. And if the person finds a soul mate for life there, it is an invaluable plus. I owe a life-long debt to ACC for adding grit in my gizzard. Through the intervening years, I have followed the familiar names of students and have lived to see many of them in the obituaries.

If any of our family came to see George and me graduate, I do not remember it. Dad and Mom had never ventured to Abilene. Now we were facing the world and there were no business or church representatives there offering us jobs. There was no source of information about churches needing additional personnel. This was before churches had youth ministers. With no prospects, we went back to the farm. I made application with some congregations but would receive no response. Who would want a single kid just out of college?

Bud and I followed up on leads for teaching positions but, because of the military draft, schools were reluctant to hire men. As summer wore on, I preached each Sunday at Weinert about ten miles from the farm where I continued working.

Then I received a **penny post card** from Dean Adams' office advising me of an opening in the three-teacher rural Pumphrey school about eight miles from Winters, Texas. I went down there immediately – and was hired! – as the principal! -- two weeks before school was to start! It was the year Texas schools changed to the twelve-grade system and they put in a lunch room. I was to teach Grades 7, 8, and 9 in one room and I had never seen one of the text-books before! Oh yes, I was also to be master of a troop of Boy Scouts.

If I had possessed wings, I probably would have flown like a bat out of a cave but having more of a shell like a turtle, I braced myself for the task. For a salary of a bit more than \$80.00 per month, I could endure most anything.

Notification by a penny post card reminds me of a thing that happened almost ten years earlier. There were two good athletes graduating from Rochester High, Jimmy and Johnny Wyatt. Colleges went out of their way to recruit such players. Coach "Bugs" Morris sent the two boys one penny post card inviting them to come and try out. They came and made the team. At half a cent per person, that must be a record expenditure for recruitment!

I was assigned one side of the "teacherage" on the school ground and two single women occupied the other side. I had electricity and a wood stove but no luxury of an ice box or indoor toilet. A windmill supplied the school and me. A small store across the street was helpful. So, there I was stranded without a car. I was badly in need of shirts, so I wrote a note to Sears-Roebuck in Dallas explaining my situation and asking if they would send me three shirts which I specified, promising to pay for them out of my first paycheck. A few days later, my shirts arrived! I still did all my own cooking, washing, and ironing.

How do you teach about thirty kids in three grades in one room all at the same time? The answer: very poorly. I did not teach school. I held school! For spelling, I could teach them all at once, calling out the words for each class separately, then having the kids exchange, check, and grade each other's papers as we went down the list with correct spelling. For other subjects, I could devise similar methods, but much written work was assigned which could be done while having oral discussion with another class. But who was to grade all those papers? Hard as I might try, the stack of ungraded papers would climb mercilessly. It was a real task to read the unfamiliar text-books to stay ahead of the students. Not being accustomed to talking, in the first weeks my throat would ache from having to talk so much. In spite of all, I did learn to love those good country kids. They came from solid homes enriched by a strong Baptist influence in their community.

The lunch room menu was primarily of government surplus foods consisting mostly of pinto beans, peanut butter, and canned grapefruit juice. Neither the kids nor I ever complained about the deliciously prepared beans, peanut butter cookies, and grapefruit juice. One of the teachers or students would offer thanks before each meal, always with complete respect from the students. The meals cost five cents each.

After that year of school, I never saw any of those students again – until 62 years later when George Woodfin visited his son in our congregation here in Round Rock.

Without a car, I was stranded. Grover Ross, who served the Winters Church of Christ, learned about me and began to come for me on Sunday mornings. After several weeks, I bought a used 1938 Ford V-8 for \$350, though it would cost about half of my monthly paycheck. Things were looking up!

I still had my first radio with such poor reception. From it on the Sunday morning of December 7, 1941, I heard the jarring news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Our world changed that day, and my generation bore the dreadful brunt of it with 292,131 battle deaths and 115,185 other related deaths,

and 16,353,851 serving in uniform. Beginning with terrorist attacks in 1979 and culminating in 9-11, our world changed again facing a new kind of unseen enemy whose aim is to destroy us out of religious fanaticism. So far, in comparison to WWII, it ranks with a school-yard fight; yet political opposition has killed the will of many of our people against defending ourselves.

Because needs of the military came first, many items like bacon and ham were no longer available. Cars and tires had to last for "the duration." Ration stamps were required in order to buy gasoline and sugar. Prices of many items were frozen.

On December 20 I performed my second wedding, this one being in Pecos, Texas, in which George and Margarete began 61 years together.

As the year progressed, and even though I had grown more relaxed with teaching, I knew I did not want to continue it. Grover and Thelma Ross had befriended me greatly. Toward the end of the school year he accepted the invitation of a church in Portales, New Mexico and urged me to move there with them assuring me that there were small rural churches there where I could preach. I wanted both to go westward and to be preaching, so that was my opening door. A person of interest had come into my life but that interest did not accrue! I helped the Rosses with their moving.

I quickly lined up regular appointments with churches in Hiway, Rogers, and Causey, and spoke at other area churches at times. The members were hard-working farmers who usually milked eight to ten cows for cream to sell. As I visited among them, I helped with the milking or cranked the separator. At meals I would help clear the table and help with the dishes. I wasn't showing off for I had done such things all my life, but they saw me as different from the usual run of preachers. I think that helped their evaluation of my dismal pulpit efforts!

By the end of July, arrangements had been made for me to conduct a meeting at Milnesand where there was no church

and a business district of one store. Out under the New Mexico sky, makeshift seating was arranged and a Coleman lantern or two were set up. That was my first "gospel meeting" with my first baptism as a young woman asked to be baptized. Using a surface tank, I immersed her in about two feet of water and what seemed like a foot of mud.

A week later we began a ten-day meeting near the Texas border in the Bluit and Bledsoe communities. We met in a school house and a young woman led the singing for no one else was capable. In that summer seven adults and two teenagers were baptized. Three more adults were added at Bluit in a meeting there in 1943. These were all immersed in watering troughs or storage tanks by windmills. One fellow was much larger than I, and we entered a storage tank where the water came almost to my chin. That should make the immersion easy, I thought, but when I tried to put him under the water I began to float! After a brief panic, I managed to put my elbow on his chest and ride him into submersion.

The deep sand of the area made farming marginal. Some of it was for sale for \$6.00 per acre, but I was not interested in farm land. That was before the gas wells were drilled in the area! If it were to rain soup, I would be standing somewhere with a fork in my hand.

Two firsts: I did my first radio broadcast in Clovis January 13, 1943, and I got my first sight of girls wearing shorts in downtown Portales -- until the constable sent the two teenagers home to put on some clothes! Where have all the constables gone!

With this success I was gaining confidence and enjoying the people but I was still restless. So I agreed to serve a bigger church in the oil field town of Sundown, Texas on weekends while taking some courses at Texas Tech in Lubbock. But instead of school, I got a job at Sansom Paint and Paper Company selling wallpaper and artist supplies, and framing pictures. I enjoyed framing hundreds of pictures, even an

original Varga water color, but selling wallpaper to discerning women was sometimes a wee bit tedious.

I learned about this later from long-time friend, Mary Frazier Clark. In my visit in prospect of working with the Sundown church, I visited in the homes of several members including the Frazier family. They were killing hogs, so I pitched in and helped. That greatly impressed Mr. Frazier who was influential in my being accepted! The church folks at Sundown were nice to me and were fun to be around. Well, one good brother did put down a stump that I had to cautiously plow around. He “hinted” that if a preacher ever told his kids that it was all right to go to a picture show, he would never let them hear him again.

On Wednesday evenings I attended Broadway Church which was then near downtown Lubbock and was served by Grover C. Brewer, a man of imposing presence and masterful eloquence. Texas Tech was at the western edge of the city with a military glider training field west of the university.

The war was raging, commodities were scarce, and prices were escalating. An energetic salesman, Cubby Key, selling auto paint particularly, was commenting on how people were buying so readily. Pointing to the floor, he ventured, “I believe if I had a pile of cow manure in the middle of this floor, I could sell it.” How could he have foreseen that a few years later, manure would be sold by the bag at gardening stores and shiploads would go to Saudi Arabia. In time Cubby went on to establish a chain of auto supply stores in Lubbock.

Do you remember Kemtone paints? They were innovative in that they were water based and were sold with a roller which any housewife could operate. The painters snarled at such a thing vowing never to use one of those rollers. You know the rest of that story.

At last, I was not doing my own cooking, for I roomed in a now extinct boarding house in Lubbock, and I was sending my shirts to a laundry. Preparing two sermons each week while holding a regular job challenged my ability and kept me out of

mischief. By working the two jobs, I was accumulating some money which I still spent very frugally. But I still was not on a promising course for my career.

Having majored in secondary education, there were Bible courses at ACC which I had been unable to take. So I enrolled for the spring semester in 1944 – and who knew what might develop? I preached on weekends and enjoyed my classes, forming friendships with a good number who were fun to be with. I had a few dates but nothing sparked. (In my boyhood, courting was called “sparking.”) Toward the end of the semester, a group was planning a mission trip to Utah, and I raised support to go with them. Westward was my direction.

I was living with some boys in the rear of a beauty shop in the first building south of the café and post office in front of the Ad Building. School was out and we were readying for our trip when someone called across to me that I was wanted on the pay phone in front of the café. Who in the world knew to call me there?

It was Harry Payne who worked with the South Park church in Beaumont, Texas, a person of whom I had never heard. He quickly explained that Jimmy, a student whom I knew, had agreed to work with the congregation during the summer while Harry was to be away in meetings. Harry also had a daily radio program. Jimmy had changed his mind at the last minute and had recommended me as a substitute. Bless O! Jimmy’s heart! Could and would I come at once to fill that capacity? WOW! Yes! Yes!

One five-minute phone call from a stranger spun me around 180 degrees! Beaumont in the southeast corner of Texas and Utah were opposite directions from Abilene. My life was to take a new course which I could not have foreseen. God had marvelous surprises ahead for which he had prepared me. His gizzard stones were at work. []

Chapter 14

To the Golden Triangle

After receiving the unbelievable and welcomed call from Beaumont, I went back to Rochester to tell the folks goodbye and started on my 500 mile journey into the unknown the next morning. In order to save gasoline and tires, a federal law had been passed setting the speed limit at 35 miles per hour, so it took me two days to reach Beaumont. Nylon was not yet available for use in tires to prevent sidewalls of tires from splitting and blowing out. As holes came a “boot” would be put inside to prevent the tube from blowing out but it made the ride bumpy. Before the war ended, local companies were equipped to re-tread tires but they still had the weak sidewalls.

Leaving the higher altitude of West Texas for the coastal plains in the heat of June in 1944 made my clothes seem damp and sticky. Because the Golden Triangle of Beaumont, Port Arthur, and Orange was a petro-chemical center, there were various unfamiliar smells in the air. One of the heavy aromas that filled the air and settled in houses was not from chemicals, however, but from the coffee roasting whose dark roast smell settled in the heavy air and blended with the moldy smells.

Rooms or apartments were not readily available, but District Judge Snowden Nichols and his wife, Eva, came to my rescue. These two great people who had a heart for the strays were sent into my life to my great profit in every way. Their son, Bill, was in Texas A&M and then in the navy, so they invited me to occupy his room which was a bit separate from the other quarters. Their cute blond daughter, Mary, was in high school.

Judge Nichols, though a kind and considerate person, had the dignity and persona of a judge. "Aunt Eva," however shunned the very appearance of affluence. I have never known a more selfless person. In her print dresses she was always neat but one was attracted by her intelligence, humor, and care for others. The family had no car, so mine came in handy. I happily became a delivery person, for most every morning she made at least one banana pudding, batch of divinity, or bouquet from her yard to be taken to someone who was sick, lonely, aged, or discouraged. Through that she taught me much about practical religion and opened the way for me to meet so many of the people who needed attention. Many ate at her table while she preferred to serve and watch others eat than to sit and eat with them. A visitor in her home could hardly leave without some thoughtful gift. Children always left with books, and that included my children years later. She was a Bible teacher, loved learning, and received her master's degree after her children were grown.

Harry Payne was in and out during the summer, so I was quickly involved with the daily radio program and pulpit preaching. The kind people tolerated my inadequacies and cheered me on and I enjoyed it. Much of the time when Harry was at home, I received calls to fill pulpits in the area. We made many calls together with me learning much from him.

I owned no watch by which to time my radio and pulpit lessons and none were readily available during the war. Judge Nichols honored and surprised me with an expensive gold Waltham pocket watch which I still treasure. By it, I have timed hundreds, even thousands, of radio and pulpit lessons as it was laid before me. In those times before the prevalence of wrist watches, men's trousers had built-in pockets near the belt-line for pocket watches.

Of course Aunt Eva was interested in my love life, or lack of it. She made mention of the Holladay girl as though I might not have seen her. I had seen her! I can see her yet as she and her mother walked down the center aisle of the crowded

frame building and took seats near the front. Who could miss such a vision of loveliness? At five-foot-five with shapely figure, she had wide-set blue eyes, a classic profile, and a flawless “peaches and cream” complexion that almost glowed when she was animated. She was outgoing and effervescent, greeting others around her without timidity. Yes, I had seen her but I quickly learned that she was dating another fellow.

Elma Lea Holladay, a happy and only child of Watt and Elma Holladay, had grown up in Daisetta, an oil-field town 35 miles west of Beaumont. She was popular in school and dated the quarterback. But during her senior year, Eldred Stevens, who eventually started Preston Road School of Preaching in Dallas, was coming out from Houston to preach in Daisetta. The two began dating and developed a serious attraction, but they soon went their separate ways. She had little encouragement to go to college, so after graduation in 1941 she went to Beaumont where she was hired by the telephone company. Soon her parents moved to Beaumont where he had found a job in the Spindletop oil field. Very quickly Lea advanced to become payroll clerk for 300 operators. Curtis, a man in his thirties who lived in Houston, came to inaugurate a new program which required that he teach Elma Lea to use a slide rule. They began dating and developed a serious relationship. Being a Christian but not of her persuasion, he attended services with her. To make the story short and get him out of the picture, he staunchly declared that he would never change to the Church of Christ and Lea was equally as staunch about ever changing. So they quit dating. I am ever thankful that Lea’s Mom had made her so unbending! The grindings were working in my favor!

As weeks had passed I became friends with Luryl Nisbett, another bachelor preacher in town. We commiserated about our situations. About the time that Elma Lea was free again, he and I had decided to try to start double-dating with various girls for fun without looking like we were as desperate as we were. For our first excursion, Luryl dated Lea and I dated another girl whose name I cannot remember. It was fun, eating

in Orange, crossing the Sabine so I could say I had been in Louisiana, going to Port Arthur over the 177 foot high Rainbow Bridge, and walking the pier into moonlit Lake Sabine.

After services the next Wednesday night, I approached Elma Lea stating, "Luryl and I want to do another double-dating Friday, only this time, I want you to ride in the front seat." She giggled and accepted. After that date I ignored our proposed dating plan!

In 1998 I wrote a tribute to Lea and about our lives together titled, "*Riding in the Front Seat.*" On reading it, she said she would like for it to be read at her funeral, and it was in May 2003. I have included it as Chapter 24 of this book. You may wish to turn to page 163 and read it at this point.

Neither of us attended movies so she would go to area preaching appointments with me. Doesn't that sound exciting and romantic? She enjoyed going to church. On one of our earliest dates we went to a nearby Baptist Church to hear Ben Bogard who had debated with many preachers of the Church of Christ. Walking to the entrance in the dark, I stepped in a pile of dog poop. I cleaned my shoes as much as possible on the grass but the smell was still there to my embarrassment. However, the lingering aroma was overpowered by Bogard's elaborate tale of a man who prepared lunch for his family while they were at church by roasting the family cat. Lea's Dad always had a hunting dog or two, so she was familiar with dog smells, but she loved cats and the preacher's story was more repulsive to her than the odor from my shoe.

As we began seeing each other, I tried not to build hopes too quickly for, though she was compatible, she was reserved. I thought her previous experiences were causing her to be cautious, and I could appreciate that. Our first date was in October and soon one of the elders, Woodie Hamby, proposed that I do some mission work in his home state of Louisiana. So I met with people in Pine Prairie, Ville Platte, Turkey Creek, and Colfax for several weeks in November and December, very

apprehensive about having so little time to cement a relationship with Lea.

At Colfax we were meeting in a vacant store building that had a wood burning heater. Arriving early one cold evening, I decided to build a fire using the stump-like wood in the wood box. Soon after igniting it, the stove began to almost explode. Cutting the dampers back would make the stove try to dance. It became red hot and the stove pipe was becoming red also. In my fright I kept working with the air flow until the flame finally began to subside. I learned that the wood that I had used was pine knots that are used sparingly due to their being a concentration of resin which could be extracted as turpentine.

Back at home, Lea and I began to feel more at ease with each other and had fun together. As I stated above, she began going with me to fill area preaching appointments but we never attended a movie together before our marriage. Feeling that she was growing to love me gave me a sense of peace like I had never felt before.

Our first date was in October 1944 and we were married October 8, 1945. In the next month, November 22 and 24, she became 22 and I reached 27. In Beaumont I had witnessed a formal wedding with all the pomp and ceremony and decided then that I wanted nothing of that sort. Being from a humble background also, Lea agreed that we would have a simple ceremony with family in attendance. Since none of my family was around, that included few people. Film was unavailable, so we had no pictures of our wedding. I suppose professional photographers might have had film but I did not know about them.

The war having recently ended, I was fortunate to buy a set of new tires, and the rationing of gasoline had ended. So we set out to show her off to the family at Rochester by a circuitous route. It was a rainy day and as we approached Houston the sun broke through the clouds low in the west and we sang spontaneously, "Beyond the sunset's radiant glow, there is a

brighter world I know.” Our first night was in Houston. The next day we experienced the awe of a visit to the Alamo then spent the night in Uvalde.

A year before the newspapers had carried a story about the plans to make a divided highway across the country that would have no stop lights and access to it would be limited. We could not visualize such. The main southern cross-country highway then was Highway 90 which was two-lane even through Houston except for a little stretch of four lanes, Wayside Drive, I think it was. Only about fifty years later has IH-10 been completed through Fort Stockton and Phoenix following the general route of Highway 90.

At Del Rio we walked across the bridge over the Rio Grande and were amazed at the difference on the other side. In open markets dressed goat carcasses were hanging in open air and covered with flies. We did not linger long, but we had frequent stops on the trip to put oil in the engine which I should have repaired long before.

Carlsbad Caverns was an unforgettable highlight of our trip. That was before elevators were installed, so we enjoyed the lengthy route in and out on foot. At breakfast in Carlsbad the next morning, Lea had another delightful thrill – bacon with her eggs! It had been so long since bacon was available.

On the way to Rochester Lea got her introduction to the expansive plains of New Mexico and West Texas. And the family and people at Rochester got to see a civilized girl – with no suntan, plucked eyebrows, bright red Tangee lipstick, and nice department store clothes which she had bought with her earnings. And Lea got to see sand! She accepted my Dad and siblings readily as a new experience since she had no siblings. But Mom – well, subtle and not so subtle hints from Mom kept Lea and Mom at arm’s length throughout the years.

The honeymoon was worth the long years of waiting, and it continued back in Beaumont. Though Lea had already been teaching a class of teenage girls, she now was in the new

role of “preacher’s wife,” not just riding in the front seat but sharing in my work making calls with me.

A young bachelor preacher from Tennessee, Edward J. Craddock, came for a meeting at the South Park church in 1945. I jotted down the outline of an impressive sermon of his and made it my favorite and most used lesson through the years. My version of it became Chapter 4, “*Why Is Love The Great Commandment?*” in my first book, *Free In Christ*.

As the congregation was planning its work for 1946, Woodie Hamby told me that they would not be using an associate for that year. In December he told of a vacancy in Louisiana and set an appointment for me when I showed interest. The groups in Lake Charles and Maplewood, across the Calcasieu River and lake from each other, each maybe 50-75 members in number, wanted to pool their resources and share a preacher. Lea and I “tried out” and agreed to move 60 miles farther east into Louisiana. She was always an asset for our trial visits for she was a lot better looking than I was and her singing sounded better than my preaching!

What a gizzard stone that one phone call in Abilene had been! I intended to go west but God used it to send us east. Good grit in my gizzard would enable me to happily adapt to Cajun cuisine and culture with my young bride. Well, I would have been happy anywhere with her! []

Chapter 15

Beyond the Sabine

The moment that a visitor passed over the bridge of the Sabine River at Orange, the introduction into Louisiana was impressive – but not beautiful. One crossed over a mile or more of marshland on a rickety, rumbling wooden bridge over murky alligator infested water growing marsh grass and water lilies. The two-lane Highway 90 was crowded due to oil field operations and there were always barricades for road repair. Still having open-range laws in the state, cattle wandered on to the road. At night cattle would often collect close to the pavement where the passing vehicles would fan the mosquitoes away, and sometimes a cow would decide to cross the road. If you hit one, it was yours for you had to pay for it. At night one of the other dangers was the emerging of traffic from the numerous honky-tonks after a night of dancing, carousing, and drinking. Such scenes were not the most appealing to newcomers.

That was a negative introduction to a lush landscape with towering pines and majestic, ancient, moss-draped oaks along sluggish bayous and a fascinating culture. Adding to their industries of lumbering, sugar cane, and rice, the war had tapped into the rich oil reserves in Louisiana.

Northern Louisiana was more like the surrounding states in national origin and religion while the southern part was predominantly French and Catholic. Lake Charles was a mixture of both cultures while Maplewood was a new planned development of houses and apartments accommodating the new petro-chemical industry during the war. Many of those working in the refineries and plants were implants from Texas and

Oklahoma. These would be our neighbors, friends, and fellow disciples for the next five years.

Due to the influx of people housing was critical. We started in an improvised sort of attic apartment on the outskirts and later moved into Lake Charles to share a small house with a single woman. Soon Otto Koehler, a family friend in Daisetta who owned a dealership, sold us our first new car, a 1947 Plymouth, the payments for which almost drove us into poverty. It was the only new car that Lea and I ever owned. Happily sitting at the wheel wearing her sun glasses, my lovely wife outclassed the movie celebrities! That was worth all those stiff payments – a treasured memory still photographed in my mind!

Very quickly I settled into a routine of work. On Sundays I had an early morning radio program, then I went back for Lea and we always picked up persons who had no ride. I taught a class and delivered my sermon. In mid-afternoon we went to Maplewood for services and then back to Lake Charles for another one. The drawbridge over the Calcasieu River always raised anxiety for we never knew when we would have to wait in a long line of traffic while a boat went through. Often kind people invited for lunch. It would have been a crime to have refused their invitations, but I much preferred going home for a sandwich so I could rest a bit for the later services. Usually there were visits after evening services which I enjoyed as much as my fatigue allowed. We did well to have two or three nights each week alone at home.

Built of green lumber during the war, the small frame building looked pitiful after the lumber had dried! The walls had begun to bulge outwardly so that oil well sucker rods had been run wall to wall overhead to buckle the walls. Few churches had offices in those days, so I did my studying at home. The group in Maplewood met in the school building which was nice enough after clearing out the cigarette butts and beer bottles left over from the Saturday night dances.

Lea began teaching classes and making calls with me just like an old hand at the job. Since she was not timid as I still

was, she was a great team mate. Her lack of timidity gave me a sort of pleasant scare very early. One of the leaders in the church was telling us with some delight about his refusal to pay a black teenager for mowing the lawn for some picayune reason. Lea immediately got in his face like a flogging setting hen giving him the tongue lashing of his life. I give him a little credit for sheepishly walking away instead of any retaliation in anger.

Still ill at ease while speaking in public, I always batted my eyes nervously and that also made some listeners/viewers nervous. As I have stated before, I chose preaching out of idealism rather than because I had any talent in that area. I have always needed longsuffering listeners.

Very early in Lake Charles and then at Maplewood we made volleyball courts next to our buildings and that sort of became my trade mark as I served other congregations later. It brought us together in a fun situation. Through the years, a good number of men were converted after playing volleyball with us.

I received an invitation to speak in a rural church near Merryville. Many in that area near the Sabine marshland were either Franks or related to the Franks. Not knowing the roads, I took a longer route and then was held up a long time by a logging train. But I was not too concerned for it was only about sunset when I reached the building. Two men were outside and I learned later that they were discussing whether to dismiss the congregation after having delayed in a long song-session awaiting my arrival! No time for starting had been mentioned. In West Texas we started at “dark-thirty” but they seemed to end before dark. Many times Lea and I were invited to the Boxwood church at “Booger Branch” as it was nick-named. Those great people who were fun to be around came to mean much to Lea and me.

What would be a novel way to advertise our upcoming “gospel meeting” to the public? By flying slowly and lowly over the city announcing it by a bull-horn! That’s what we hired a fellow to do in Lake Charles – once!

Being from West Texas, there were three things that caught my eye early in South Louisiana. Driveways and parking lots were covered with oyster shells instead of gravel. For the building of larger buildings, pile drivers drove cypress logs deep into the soil which was devoid of rocks. Because of termite problems, dwellings were built on piers with a termite proof metal plate on top and often water could be seen standing under houses.

The air base at Lake Charles closed down and the chapel was to be disposed of, so the Maplewood church made a bid for it and was awarded the nice structure at a give-away price. How were we to get it to Maplewood over the narrow roads and a draw-bridge across the river? A favorable bid from a mover to put it on a barge and tow it down the river to the refinery docks was accepted. The big mistake we made was not in thinking it could be barged down the river, but in making a verbal contract with a contractor who was not bonded. He successfully removed the steeple, cut the building in halves, and loaded it on the barge. But he began to run out of money. At more than one point we either had to abandon the building or come up with more money.

As he got it moving down the river, I called a reporter, and he made some great pictures and gave a good write up for us in the local paper. It was successfully unloaded at the refinery dock and had about two more miles to go. Utility crews and various other helpers were on hand at the time to move out – except the highway patrol to escort it. We waited nervously as all those crews would be paid whether we were moving or not. The contractor told us the police wanted a payoff! He did not have money for that and I don't think we were ready for such underhanded dealings. After waiting helplessly so long, someone gave me the number of the highway police headquarters Baton Rouge. Calling and timidly explaining our situation, I was connected with the head honcho. Just a few minutes later, we had an escort!

With much volunteer help, the building was one to be proud of for it even had thermostatically controlled heating. We worked into Saturday night on last minute preparations for our grand opening the next morning. An excited crowd gathered – in a frigid building! Each of us had depended on someone else to set the thermostats!

I invited members to give the cost of an azalea plant (\$1.00) to go along our property line, and sufficient money was given. Another man and I set them out then collected cow manure with which to fertilize them. Caution: do not try that at home. Azaleas do not like cow manure. Every plant died.

Our work was going well in both congregations as each reached capability of supporting its own preacher. Lea and I were given our choice as to which church to continue with, and we chose Maplewood. There we were blessed to rent a two-bedroom studio apartment that had thermostatically controlled central heating which was still a luxury. There we decided to start our family, but the Lord was not ready.

After two years, on our first vacation to the Rocky Mountains, Lea seemed to have caught a virus whose undiminished misery she endured for nine months. One of the anxieties of women in Maplewood as time of delivery approached was the draw-bridge. When Lea's time came, we breezed right on through on our way to St. Patrick's Hospital. Her misery was repaid as she held Sol Watson in her arms. Having no regulation of visiting hours, dear people began coming by as early as seven in the morning and almost continuously until as late as eleven in the evening. That continued after we returned home with a crying baby until Lea was almost at the breaking point. Her mother who had come to help began to intercept visitors downstairs. When we disregarded the doctor's prescribed feeding schedule and fed Sol when he indicated hunger, he was a most peaceable little fellow soon sleeping all night.

While Lea was pregnant, I went to New Iberia about a hundred miles farther east on the coastal plains for a two-week

meeting. Due to the exciting success, it was insisted that I continue another week. During that week friends brought Lea who was feeling somewhat better. After she returned home she came down with a stomach virus, and while in the pulpit on the last night, it struck me very suddenly. I struggled to speak as I grew faint, but finally had to make a hasty exit. I suppose I have delivered many sermons that should have been cut short but I don't prescribe that method for shortening them.

In the early development of our Movement, there were many "tent-making" preachers, but soon the dependence upon professional preachers began to prevail. Outside men were brought in as new voices and different personalities that generally brought good results – while on a honeymoon period with the church. But their novelty soon dulled and statistics were not swelling, all of which was blamed on these men hired to keep things moving. So a new man was exploited for another year or two – seldom for more than three years. This was a demonstration of immaturity on the part of both the preachers and the congregations. My elaboration on this matter, partly in humor and partly serious, can be read in my second book, *Free To Speak*, Chapter 27, titled "Lamentations of A Mediocre Preacher."

There is much outcry presently against the oil companies prejudicially stereotyped by the imaginary big tribe of "fat-cats" who make such big salaries. I have a much softer view. Most of my support through my career came from people in oil related jobs. They were common, hard-working persons, often doing dirty and dangerous jobs on up through highly skilled jobs and management. Though oil companies treated employees better than most big businesses, none of them became those despicable fat-cats. Maybe a few at the top made as much as movie actors, entertainers, talk show hosts, and athletes – and Elvis who, being dead, made \$45 million last year! The major companies like Exxon have many thousands, maybe millions, of employees for whom they provide insurance and pensions, and over two million shareholders who expect

profits. Exploration, drilling, refineries, and equipment are tremendously expensive. They are always subject to lawsuits from greedy people. They have good times to strengthen their companies and bad times in which smaller companies fail. They, like other businesses, have had to conglomerate in order to survive and to make profits for their shareholders.

According to stories I have heard, Standard Oil Company was rebuffed in Texas by requiring any company operating in Texas to have its headquarters in the state. Being humiliated by Texas, Standard Oil Company created Humble Oil Company, and the city of Humble in the Houston area is so named. Exxon is only one of various names they have worn. Now they are strangled by environmentalists who are forcing them to become more dependent on foreign oil, the price of which is controlled by OPEC.

Getting on with my point, those oil companies have been a tremendous asset in the growth of our country and the provision of jobs. I doubt if any of you really want more government control of businesses, for the government cannot compete with private companies for efficiency. The price of gasoline is just now adjusting to the inflationary rate of other products and salaries since my youth. So, my question for those who complain about the huge profits of oil companies (and drug companies, etc.): If they are making all those big profits, why aren't you buying shares to get in on that source of easy wealth?

In our fifth year in Maplewood, I was told my contract would not be renewed. I use the word loosely for no church ever made a written contract with me. In agreeing to work with churches, very little was ever outlined as to what was expected of me or days off or vacations.

The dreaded preacher perplexing problem had arisen again – where to now? The folks in New Iberia eagerly invited me but could give only partial support. I gained promise of support from churches in Texas, and we looked a hundred miles farther east. Those strange gizzard stones! []

Chapter 16

Into Cajun Country

That one, unexpected, direction-changing phone call in Abilene seven years earlier was still affecting my life as Lea and I, with our six-weeks-old Sol, moved a hundred miles farther eastward into the real Cajun country of south central Louisiana in April 1951.

The French Acadians were deported by the British from Nova Scotia with nowhere to go. Their sad plight was immortalized by Longfellow's *Evangeline*. The *Evangeline* Oak still stands in St. Martinville. After enduring hardship and loss of life, they were eventually dumped on the Louisiana shore and allowed refuge in the then worthless mosquito infested marshlands bordering the Atchafalaya Basin. These gentle and industrious Acadians drained the swamps and developed a prosperous agricultural industry while nurturing their flavorful French-Catholic culture in relative isolation. The identification of "Acadian" soon corrupted into "a Cajun." By the time we arrived, the war had done much to blend their society and their new oil industry brought an influx from other states, yet many of the older citizens still spoke French.

From Lafayette westward was rice country but to the east sugar cane was the main product along with peppers, canning, and salt production. By the way, the "La" of Lafayette is not given the Spanish sound like in "Las Vegas," but it is as in "lack." Their flavorful cuisine is legendary but it was not like the supposedly Cajun foods I have found elsewhere that blistered the mouth with fiery peppers. They used peppers for seasoning, not for torture. Their recipes were developed by the poor who might catch a couple of small "pumpkin seed" perch or kill a duck or chicken and make a gumbo or some other dish

sufficient, along with rice, to feed the family. Many families hand-ground their own dark roasted coffee which was served with dessert and in demitasse cups between meals.

South of New Iberia were Avery Island and Jefferson Island, not really islands completely surrounded by water, but uplifts of terrain created by huge salt domes partly surrounded by sea. I was privileged to go down about 500 feet below sea level in the salt mine in each of these. I rode the electric mine train used to bring the blasted salt to the elevator a few hundred yards away. They excavated by “floors,” leaving support columns in street and avenue fashion. The similar mine in Jefferson Island used large trucks instead of the train, their parts having been lowered by the piece by elevator and assembled underground.

Years after we were away, a drilling rig was at work in Lake Pigneur on the Vermilion River and adjoining Jefferson Island. There was a historic “oops!” for they had drilled into the mine! That shut down both the rig and the mine for the day – and forever! All workers had sufficient time to escape.

Avery Island was owned by the Avery family with son-in-law McIlhenny later developing their industry. You have McIlhenny’s Tobasco sauce in you kitchen, no doubt – maybe salt also from there. At that time at least, all the peppers were grown and processed on the Island. We were shown wooden barrels of the sauce in the four-year aging process.

With an egret sanctuary over an alligator infested lagoon and the growing of many oriental plants, a Jungle Garden with a real Buddha shrine was exotically scenic. Only by following strict rules, such as having no drilling rigs operating in egret season, was drilling allowed. They drilled and produced oil while maintaining the pristine nature of the island.

The small congregation was rather new being composed mostly of transplants, but the fascinating history of Churches of Christ in the area dated back to 1915. Evariste Hebert (pronounced *a’ bear*) was born in Vermilion Parish in 1886 and, after finishing high school in Crowley, entered a seminary

to study for the priesthood. After three years he had to drop out to provide for his family. In his eagerness to serve he was permitted to do “missions.” Doing one in a school house south of Mermentau, an attending Methodist preacher asked him to prove this teaching from the Bible – a book which he had never held in his hands. That set this humble 28-year old man on a life-changing search. His own most fascinating account of his conversion may be read in FR 176, “*The Conversion of Evariste Hebert.*” He was a man of strong mind and commanding presence. After months of being self-taught, he began preaching what he had learned being sponsored by no one. In response to his first sermon, “*What Must I Do To Be Saved?*” forty-eight persons were baptized the same hour of the night. After his second sermon, there were eleven more, and that night sixteen more! At the time my source was written, he had converted over 6,000 people in the area.

As time passed, churches in the Midwest began to “help” them while introducing divisive issues. It is unforgivable that, when my dear friend, Dan Woodroof, came to work in Crowley and I was invited for a meeting, there were four churches of that movement in Crowley with neither in fellowship with the others. As members from these churches moved about and came into our congregation, I welcomed them as fellow disciples without asking which group they were from.

We were greatly influenced in our decision to move to New Iberia by our regard for Susan Dabney Cogdell. She was a dorm mother at ACC and was working on her degree so that she, her son Gaston, and I were in the same graduating class. She had taken over the operation of the bus station café from her older son. Being an industrious and astute business woman of dignity and culture, she offered much stability to the little group and gave Lea and me enthusiastic encouragement. We occupied one of her apartments across the street from the court house. In the middle of the street in front of the house, ran the Missouri-Pacific Railroad with its tremendous steam engines that almost made the houses dance on that gumbo soil. The

train that whistled and roared through the first night woke Sol but after that night they never bothered us. About midway through our stay in New Iberia, a three bedroom brick house was built beside the church building.

Evidently, the earliest meetings began in one of Susan's houses. Foy E. Wallace, Sr. served with them briefly, then for a number of years Kenneth Badgett commuted from Port Arthur. Local members like Lewis Nelson and Ray Lewis, a high school student, brought many lessons. A 40' x 60' concrete block building was erected on Ann Street in 1950.

In order to have a rotation of free radio time, I began meeting with the Ministerial Alliance, which sort of thing was always a no-no because it seemed so compromising. I quickly learned that the few other members were equally as scrupulous as I was and they carefully respected each other.

Soon a second radio station was begun and we got a Sunday morning broadcast. Then the station made us a tremendous offer for fifteen minutes additional time at high noon Monday through Saturday. A church in Alabama helped us pay for it. So, very soon I found myself doing eleven radio, class, and pulpit lessons each week. Lea and I met each Thursday evening with a group of devoted sisters in a community hall on Anderson Street. As was true during those horrid times of segregation, they were welcome to attend our gospel meetings if they sat on the back seats. They were labeled "colored" instead of the current "black." Lea's singing with and teaching of the numerous children was enjoyed by us adults also. Eventually, those ladies with little help or leadership from men saved frugally to build a small block building putting me in charge of the construction. In our eight years there, we missed very few Thursday meetings with them.

We usually had two "gospel meetings" each year using preachers who were supplied by other congregations as mission efforts. Some of the preachers that I remember were Jack Exum, Thomas B. Warren, Dan Woodroof, Bill Crews, Luther Blackmon, Elmer Moore, Leonard Johnson, George Thompson,

Robert Lyles, Walter Calvert, and Glen Purdy. We had known Tom Warren while he taught school in Liberty, Texas. Dan Woodroof became one of our dearest friends. In his meeting with us 21 persons were added by baptism. It was my joy to baptize seventy converts in New Iberia, a number of them having been reached through the radio program. By the time we left, the congregation had grown to around 120 members after about twenty becoming charter members in a new church in Franklin.

Even though it was no part of a work agreement, in addition to my eleven lessons each week, I was “allowed” to mow the lawn, do janitor and repair work, wax the floor, deal with all beggars with no resources supplied, visit all the sick, newcomers, and delinquents, and to hold a few out-of-town meetings.

By this time Lea was a seasoned teacher of both the ladies and kids and was an organizer of projects such as Vacation Bible School. She loved doing those things but resented people expecting her to do their work because she was the preacher’s wife. Our inexperienced song leaders depended heavily on her clear voice to help with the singing from her seat. Too, we were trying for a second child but the Lord seemed not to be cooperating.

In about three years the congregation became fully self-supported due to the loyalty and self-denial of the members. Being excited by the outreach and growth, they willingly, without complaint, sat in straight-backed, cane-bottomed chairs. We never had elders in the group but got along better than in most of the congregations I served where we had them. It was exciting that people were being brought in. Looking back, I can cringe at some of the simplistic and narrowed concepts I taught, but basically I was preaching the saving gospel in simple terms. Continued responses kept an air of expectancy alive in the group.

Is there a sense of expectancy where you attend? When that is lost, it indicates that we have abandoned our mission and

we turn inward. With vision focused inwardly, a group tends to raise tedious, divisive issues and to want things that make their meetings more comfortable and less boring, with things designed to be less embarrassing when visitors come. But visitors do not come for soft seats and artistic décor; what they want is the answer to their real needs. Others are more impressed with people excited about their message who unselfishly give up conveniences. Crowded buildings carry a message lost in a spaced-out audience. The great people in our congregation kept that zeal alive for years. And we grew! Groups that become more grace-oriented are vulnerable to turning inward and losing their zeal to convert. Continued lessons promoting spiritual growth may have reverse effect in making sanctification seem complicated and unattainable. The listener may interpret the messages to mean his faith is too weak and that he can never trust, learn, grow, give, pray and do enough to reach the high goals demanded.

In our second year a 64-year old man, in his first visit, asked to be baptized. He explained that he lived in Loreauville, a neighboring town and had been listening to our broadcasts. Much we learned about this courageous man later. Many years before, his wife had left him for another man. Upon his remarriage his church rejected him. He lived years with that injustice but then began a search by listening to all sorts of radio preachers. Earnest Pitrie was illiterate but intelligent. In spite of extreme opposition he had come that morning. Now he had an impelling ambition – that of learning to read the Bible! His age, poor eyesight, and illiteracy made it seem impossible. I bought for him a record player, a recording of the New Testament, and an extra-large print New Testament. By the age of seventy he had worn out the records so that I had gotten another set and he had followed along the printed page while listening until he could proudly read the text. I have hardly given you the flavor of the story here, but reading Chapter 6, “You Are My People Now,” in *Free To Accept* may bring tears

of admiration for Earnest Pitrie who gave up all to serve Christ. He was one of the most memorable men I have known.

The radio station stood by me even when a delegation once came trying to put me off the air and another time when kin of Earnest Pitrie mounted a call-in protest.

When I arrived at the building one Sunday morning, two men were standing outside waiting to ask a question I had never been asked before. They wanted to know if it would be all right for them and their family to worship with us. They explained that they had been listening to my broadcast and also to those of a French-speaking brother in Crowley. They had gone to him for baptism; he had taught them how to have family worship in their home in St. Martinville; they had been doing that for a long time, and now would it be permissible for them to meet with us. Who could but welcome such inspirational people?

They began attending and were welcomed gladly. It was two weeks or more before Lea and I drove over to visit with them. Enjoying the hospitality of this intelligent family, a strange awakening came upon us. They were "colored!" -- not by complexion but by remote ancestors. I came to learn that those gentle people lived in a social vacuum -- rejected by both white and black! I was happy that they were being loved in the congregation in that time of the great civil rights movement.

After a long time, maybe two years, I was blindsided in a business meeting with the men. Evidently, they had discussed it in a private session without me and, in view of rumblings from the community, had decided to rescind their welcome. Being stunned, I ask which one of them would go out and give them that news. Then I volunteered, for I wanted them to hear it from someone who loved them. When Lea and I went to them and told of the matter, that dear brother reacted so humbly that I wished I could slip out under the back door like a cockroach. I promised to meet with them each Sunday after my early broadcast. Usually taking a high school boy with me, I did that for the rest of my tenure there. What was another lesson added to the many I already had each week! They

continued to express love for the congregation, and years later were invited back where some are still serving.

Wanting to adjust their schedule which would slightly change my time spot, the station offered to give us a second broadcast free later each afternoon Mondays through Saturdays! So for the next fifteen months I had eighteen lessons per week. I cannot remember what I did in my spare time.

One time I figured that we had 2,340 consecutive days of broadcasting and 2,800 broadcasts, some being done by guest speakers during our meetings. My count also indicated that during my more than eight years in New Iberia, I taught over 4,000 lessons from pulpit, radio, and classroom. Because the church supplied no recorder or tapes, most of the broadcasts were made live from the station. With the cooperation of the station, I did make a number of recordings which I used when out of town. In later years I led singing for a meeting in Lafayette and Winn Hawkins gave me \$100 with which I bought a recorder, but I still went to the studio much of the time making the outreach more personal. On days when Lea taught the ladies' class, five-year-old Sol would sit in the studio with me quiet as a mouse while I spoke. Many times I began speaking into a defective microphone and had to start over. In one case I shifted to the other studio where that microphone failed also and I finally did the broadcast from the control room in the announcer's seat. I still have three worn-out ten-inch vinyl records of the ACC A Cappella Chorus' rendition of "*A Wonderful Savior*" used as the theme to begin and end about 2,800 broadcasts.

Only two medium-sized buildings served the 15,000 / 20,000 Catholics in New Iberia by their scheduling masses at two-hour intervals beginning a 4:00 a.m. They did not feel that they should all meet at the same time like we have done at great expense. Many devout parishioners went to mass every morning, and the radio stations broadcasted the rosary at 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. daily for recitation in their homes.

I have many happy memories of the great people in New Iberia, one being our playing volleyball together. We were volleyball freaks. Mixed choose-up teams played even in winter when we wore gloves to protect our hands and when the outdoor court was like a “slip and slide.” A number of men who first came for that family fun were led to obedience to the gospel and later grew to be leaders in the church.

During those years a handsome and eloquent Baptist preacher my age with the boyish name of Billy was beginning to gain popularity. Ever hear of him? Another handsome fellow, a newscaster my age also, was honored guest at the Sugar Cane Festival in New Iberia. As he rode in the parade he spotted Lea standing close by, fixed his gaze on her with a mischievous grin, and gave her a wink. He had an eye for beauty! Lea always remembered Paul Harvey’s flirtatious wink with delight! []

Chapter 17

Back In Texas

Among the continuous flow of new persons moving into our congregation in New Iberia were a few who knew little of its background but began to promote change. After more than four years after our first broadcast, it was discontinued and nice pews were installed and other improvements were made to the building. There was some change of spirit that I detected and I could feel some disaffection toward me developing. Surely it was understandable that I would become tiring to them after eight years. To keep the batteries of our cars from draining, we have alternators that keep charging them. Congregations generally made no provision for the draining batteries of their preachers by providing time for study and attendance to seminars or providing money for helpful books. It was easier to exploit new preachers until their batteries drained.

Even though many loving and lasting friendships are made, it is always disappointing when decisions are made for a change. There is always a renewed sense of failure just as anyone would feel if his employer saw need to replace him.

In August of 1950 we were relieved again to be back in Texas with the congregation in Port Neches between Beaumont and Port Arthur where the church was larger and the support better. It was back among the petro-chemical smells including a strong one from the synthetic rubber plant. The locals called it the smell of money for most of them had good jobs in those plants.

This time I had a church office – about the size of a closet with no room for a chair for a visitor. We began to form new friendships with the good people, but a different spirit prevailed than we had known in New Iberia. The many

different unresolved doctrinal scruples prevailing among them had to be respected making for tension as I taught.

There was prospect among them, however, so that their crowded assemblies called for a new building. With our facilities being bought readily by the Mormons, we hired a foreman and built mostly by donated labor on four acres in a choice location. It was no picnic – well, we did have lots of miserable fun and camaraderie, but it was during a rainy winter. We almost despaired of keeping water out of the trenches long enough to pour concrete which we did with wheelbarrows. When finished it was attractive and the most conveniently arranged church building I ever worked in. A hallway entirely circled the auditorium and it was circled by classrooms. It is sad to note that years after we were away, the congregation finally dwindled so that the few remaining members sold the building and gave the money to Boles Home for children.

While we were working on that building, Lea became sick with some sort of bug – the same kind that had lasted a full miserable term before. Having given up hope, we were truly surprised and delighted. We named her Mira Lea after her mother and her grandmother whose name was Elma, but kinfolks called her Elmira. Along with his friend, ten-year-old Sol held her in his lap as we brought her home. Sol and Mira have always had a strong love for each other and for each other's family.

During our three years in Port Neches, we especially liked being so close to Elma Lea's parents who had moved back to Daisetta, but we felt it wise to leave Port Neches. The Handley church of the Fort Worth area invited us for a visit. In the motel while preparing for services and while Lea was bathing Mira in the lavatory, Mira grabbed and turned a faucet which sent scalding water down her side and leg. Speeding to the hospital, a policeman stopped us but then led us on the unfamiliar route to the hospital. After the situation was being cared for, I went on to the church and preached. We were accepted in the center of Church of Christ country of Texas!

Again, we enjoyed the nice reception the 350-member group gave us. The preacher's home was extra nice. Mira was born with a muscle imbalance in her eyes so an ophthalmologist in the congregation did two surgeries on her eyes. The correction was not perfect but it was thought to be as good as was possible. She has always had some difficulty in focusing her eyes but has never let that bother her. She is a constant reader and a beautiful person.

A very intelligent younger man and I developed a friendship. Although I do not recall ever telling him about it, he taught me two lessons that I always remembered. He explained that if a speaker wastes ten minutes of time of an audience of 360, he wastes sixty man-hours, and if he wastes thirty minutes it would amount to 180 man-hours. And in commenting on a lesson, sometimes he would ask only one or two questions that would wreck the logic that I had presented. He was not being mean to me, but he made me more conscious of gaps in logic. And I have learned that when I write out my thoughts, I can detect those logical gaps more readily. I have tried to apply those lessons on brevity and logic but my listeners would surely argue about my success.

One day I was making calls and came to a house where they were intently watching television. President Kennedy had been killed. I could have been in Dallas and witnessed that but had not cared to go. I had opportunity to attend a breakfast for preachers but had not accepted that either. A short time later I had a funeral with burial at the cemetery down the way from our building. Someone pointed out the fresh mound about fifty yards away where Oswald was buried, but I went no closer.

Though it was always a part of my ministry to visit the sick, shut-ins, and hospitalized, a new area for this work was encountered in Fort Worth – the nursing home. Entrance into such a crowded, odorous housing of the helpless and aged was repulsive. In some of the once elegant homes, beds were crowded allowing no privacy and one had to pass through other bedrooms to reach some of the patients. In time great

improvement has been made in every way but, while being thankful that the helpless are being cared for, I have described them cynically as evils made necessary by medical science.

As it was in Port Neches, I began to discern that there were as many peripheral doctrinal scruples there as a dog has fleas. Too, in reading some historical data about the group, I saw that they had had numerous preachers, some “name brand” ones, and many had served only a year or two. With tenures of five, eight, and three, I had a better record than they, but I knew to be on guard. However, once without thought I mentioned how a man in our congregation in New Iberia who lived fifty miles from the church attended every service even though he believed in evolution. That raised a tempest in a teapot, but it seemed to settle down.

In my eighteenth month there I brought a lesson concerning elders. Elders are not necessary, for many small churches have no elders. They are expedients appointed at our judgment to better facilitate the work of the congregation. The authority that they have is that which the congregation gives them. And those who appoint them can recall them. Well, I did not need my evening sermon! I was out – notified by telephone without conference or discussion, evidently having treaded on holy ground. Some of the folks were shocked and came to us with supportive sympathy but that only resulted in the elders’ request that we vacate the house shortly.

What do you do when you suddenly face homelessness with no money in reserve, have household furniture, and have a boy in middle school? You panic! Then you go to kinfolks after nice folks give you a place to store your furniture. We had an unscheduled vacation with Lea’s parents in Daisetta where we enrolled Sol in the school behind their house where his mother had attended.

Weeks dragged by painfully as I sought contacts and made visits with a few churches. I filled local pulpits some on Sundays and received gratuities which helped. After two visits with the Ferguson Road congregation in Dallas, agreement was

reached for us to move there. Reaching the house with only what we had stuffed into our car, we happily slept on the floor that night. The next day two good brothers provided a truck and brought our furniture from Fort Worth. We stopped on the way back for Cokes and I did not have even the thirty cents to pay for the drinks. The house had needed attention, so before we came, a volunteer crew had repainted the interior with cheap paint that did not cover well. It was the color of a paper grocery bag, painted over walls, ceilings, facings, and the plates of outlets and light switches – without discrimination! No range was in the kitchen so we cooked in an electric skillet for a while. But it was great to be back at work with an income.

Several months after Mira was born, Lea began to have unexplained mood shifts which were very puzzling and disturbing. We had observed similar moods in a few others but I do not know if even the doctors had defined bi-polar disorder or manic-depressive behavior. The depressions began to hit her occasionally in Dallas making her listless for a week or more at the time but she would bounce back into a buoyant mood. In our third year there, I also began to have slumps in energy and loss of concentration. Sometimes a cup of coffee or sweet snack would give me a lift, but then at other times it would send me into a deeper funk. I attributed it to the added tensions. All this was affecting my work and I could feel the pressure from the congregation, especially from a newly appointed elder whose disaffection for me became evident.

Our neighboring congregation was Shamrock Shores served by Winston Atkinson. They needed to expand but had no room. Located a block from Loop 12, we had a good location with acreage but an inadequate building. I suggested to Winston that we propose a merger of the churches, and having done so, the congregations became sold on the idea and thus the White Rock congregation on Ferguson Road was conceived. The elders from both congregations would be retained but neither preacher would be chosen over the other.

As things progressed I visited a congregation in Cleburne and agreed to serve there. The next Sunday I announced my intentions with my resignation. The next night I received a telephone call from the elders in Cleburne canceling their agreement! Someone from Handley had called and warned them about me, so they did not bother to discuss with me. I requested an extension from the elders at Ferguson Road but the new elder would not hear to it. So there I was strung up by the heels and hung out to dry.

Enough was enough! With Lea's approval I was ready to abandon the pulpit. I began looking for a job but there was no market for a man nearing fifty except for sales jobs in which I would have been a miserable failure. So Lea and I took an apartment managing course and were hired by a complex in Garland operated by a Christian brother.

The current manager was a sister of the operator. She was to introduce us to the work as the complex was expanding, but very quickly we saw that she was possessive and jealous of our intrusion. After several weeks the operator dismissed us but allowed us to remain in our apartment for a time of relocation. Was it the grit in our gizzard or the diet? We were at our wits end. My sense of adequacy as a preacher, which was never high, was shattered. I was disillusioned by elders, as well meaning as they were. Now I was introduced to the cruelty of the business world.

Again, I began seeking leads to vacancies in churches. One evening I was given an interview by elders in Commerce, Texas. In that session an elder asked what my major in college was. When I answered that it was in secondary education, he commented that their last preacher had not majored in Bible, hence, was weak in the pulpit. When I offered that I followed Paul's example thinking of the possible need for being a tent-making preacher, he asked, "Don't you think that showed a lack of faith?"

Sol got a job in a convenience store which was robbed while he was there. I filled area pulpits several weeks and

received a little money from that. I distributed phone books. Some of our friends from Ferguson Road gave us a bit of help. We were surviving but going nowhere.

Having heard of a vacancy in Lovington, New Mexico, I contacted them and was given an appointment right away. For some reason, Lea and the children were not able to go with me. On Tuesday after my return, they called offering me the work, and I accepted – the biggest decision I ever made without consultation with Lea. It proved to be one of my better ones.

In that year, 1967, 50,000 people joined an anti-war march in Washington. Riots by blacks in Newark killed 26 and injured 1,500. Riots in Detroit killed 43 and injured 2,000, and burnings there left 5,000 homeless. []

Chapter 18

Out West Again

The invitation to move to Lovington, New Mexico revived our spirits, even though Lea only remembered the state from the little she saw on our honeymoon. We arranged for Mayflower to be at our place at eight in the morning. Eight came but no van. Another hour and no van. I called the company and got an unconcerned reply that their van was full and would not be coming our way. Was this some sort of omen?

In the telephone book I saw the name of an individual mover, called him, and explained my needs. Well, yes, he drove a short-bed van, lived in Alamogordo, wanted to be there that weekend for his birthday and would be happy to move our goods. Upon further conversation we learned that he was a brother in the Hispanic church in Alamogordo. The Lord was working in our favor!

Lea, Sol, and Mira followed in our second car and later told me they kept asking, "What has he gotten us into?" Passing through irregular areas mixed with farming and ranching, just past Post, a steeper climb for about a minute lifted us into a new world. It was level farming land all the way to the horizon. This plain extended the hundred miles to the border, sixteen miles on to Lovington, and another twenty-five miles to a shallow Pecos River valley, then on to Artesia. Those plains were level to the eye, but beginning from Post there was a gradual climb until a few miles past Artesia. Then another hundred mile climb through foothills continued into the Sacramento Mountains at over 8,000 feet. On top of the mountain the town of Cloudcroft is perched at 8,663 feet where one can look past a drop-off to an expansive floor below where

the first atomic bomb was detonated at the Trinity Site in 1945. Going down hill 4,329 feet in sixteen miles takes one to Alamogordo at 4,334 feet leading to the White Sands a few miles farther.

In that spacious state 85% of the land is over 4,000 feet elevation. The lowest point in New Mexico is higher than the highest points in a third of the other states. The air is light and crisp, the stars are multiplied, the clouds are low, and the lightning is close. Because of the lack of humidity, most homes were cooled by “swamp coolers” instead of compression air conditioners.

The Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area which we had left had more people and autos than the entire expansive state of New Mexico. Except for church acquaintances, I could go about in Dallas all day and see no one I knew. The Monday after our first assembly in Lovington, when I walked to the post office, a number of people greeted me by name! It was a world with real people again! A visitor from many of our states might think in terms of desolation and isolation, but residents soon come to feel freedom and individuality.

New Mexico became our 47th state in 1912. One of our elders had come in a covered wagon as a boy while it was still a territory. The original church building was adobe and it was still in use as a fellowship area. In the church Mrs. Jim Love, for whose family the town was named, had been an early settler there. This town of probably 8,000 was in cattle country to the west and irrigated farming to the east, and then there was a great oil field operation. The congregation of 450 had an attractive building that could seat 800 and had the largest attendance of any church in town. It was unusual that so many of the members were business and civic leaders in the community. There was the same general friendliness as I grew up with in West Texas.

Though the church was traditional, it did not dwell on doctrinal issues. It was progressive and of good standing in the city. I attribute a better spirit among the churches of the plains

to the balanced influence of G. C. Brewer, Norvel Young, Bill Banowsky, and Joe Barnett who had served the great Broadway Church in Lubbock about ninety miles away.

Lea and I breathed in this fresh air and our spirits began to revive. Lea's first Sunday with them drew many comments about her beautiful singing which was distinct even in the larger crowd. Sol, having been moved from school to school, had learned to adjust and to assert his leadership, and he was happy to have so many others his age. Being assigned to teach the high school class on Wednesday evening, I could hardly believe we could have thirty to thirty-five in attendance, as we did. Sol quickly found his place as a junior and in his senior year was president of both his class and the student council. Mira started her schooling there. Numerous helpful teachers were from our congregation.

Even when we were in Louisiana, the vacations we took other than to kinfolks were camping trips to the Rocky Mountains. They were the only kind we could afford, but we would have chosen camping anyway. Sol and Mira loved camping, campfires, and eating the food cooked outside and Lea and I liked to cook outdoors. An oft recalled memory is of the night in Yellowstone when the bears cleaned out all our supplies. Living in Lovington, we could be set up in a campsite at Cloudcroft in three hours. Our love for the state grew. Much of the land was owned by the government and all citizens were free to roam in it. There was freedom. The state is appropriately advertised as "The Land of Enchantment."

Having gone through the tumultuous time of the civil rights movement, I was curious to learn first-hand the effects of it in New Mexico. I knew that the state which had four distinct groups – whites, blacks, Hispanics, and Indians – never had segregated schools. I wanted to see the effects on their education.

One of our deacons was a dedicated teacher in middle school who pressed minority students to get their education. In dismay one day he told of a student who came to school

Monday morning to pick up her Crayolas – for she had married over the weekend. That speaks for the general disappointment. Very few minority students graduated from high school. The failure is in the home and culture rather than in segregation.

Lovington had a small hospital and numerous doctors, but there were no specialists. In my constant visits with the sick, I came to greatly appreciate small town, isolated doctors. Not having specialists to pass patients on to, they learned a much wider practice of medicine than the big city doctors dealt with. And when they determined that a patient needed a specialist, the ninety mile dash to Lubbock over wide-open Texas roads did not take much longer than for some trips to, and finding a parking place at, hospitals in large cities.

With the consent of the elders, I initiated a unique program. At least, I had not known of one. I visited most of the pastors whom I had already met and proposed that the young people of all the churches in town visit with each other's youth group in their church to broaden their acquaintances. The pastor or priest would tell the youths of their beliefs and practices. The youth would then be free to ask questions, but no sponsoring adults would do so. This would rotate until each church had hosted the group. Six or eight churches cooperated in what I believe was a very educational experience for the kids. They asked appropriate questions but always in inquiring attitude rather than for argument.

Sadly, our 800-seat auditorium was filled once. A woman in our congregation was married to a policeman and they had three sons aged about eight, ten, and twelve. The father took the boys fishing on a lake in Texas. In a boating accident, all four of them were drowned. It was a tragedy that touched the heart of the entire community. With the help of a Baptist preacher, we conducted the funeral in our building. Even our large building seemed to shrink with four caskets extended across in front of us. Such an awesome sight lingers long in the mind.

Having finished high school, Sol was preparing to go to Abilene Christian College. I was amused at his mother trying to live that experience through him. She wanted to get him a nice car, which was out of the question for us. She collected all sorts of supplies for him as though he would be at a remote outpost. I, however, showed my usual frugality. I found a car for \$300.00. At that price, need I describe it to you? It looked like a salvage from a wrecking yard -- a 1960 Ford Falcon with dents and bruises all over, dull red with patches of repaint. To his credit Sol had self-image high enough that he did not let that hold him back. In fact, he and some of his friends had lots of fun with it.

It was the time when students were growing beards and long hair, against which there was such strong dislike that none of the boys with long hair were asked to lead prayers or serve the Communion. At college Sol was to play the villain Mordred in "Camelot" and Dr. Fulks gave him written permission to grow a beard and long hair on campus. On a visit back home, he was asked to lead the prayer, which he did very thoughtfully and reverently. There were rumblings so that it was approached in the next elders' meeting. I showed them a picture of Alexander Campbell whose ears were completely covered by long hair, but that did not make it right, they contended. Finally, I ventured that I wanted my boy to always respect us enough to come back home. That was a sort of low blow to some whose sons were already being alienated. To their credit, no one became angry and the subject was then dropped.

During our six years of 1967-1973 in Lovington, great change was working in our nation. The disastrous war in Vietnam was raging. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy were killed. Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. Woodstock initiated a new type of musical culture. Developing mainly in California and glorified through cabled color television, the sexual revolution brought miniskirts, unashamed "shacking up," children out of wedlock, single parent families, the drug culture, general promiscuity, acceptability of abortion,

and Roe vs. Wade. The political Watergate scandal was trivial in comparison to the social and moral changes destroying the Judeo-Christian standards in our country. What better place could we choose for our teenage son than Lovington for such radical times? Anderson Carter from our congregation won the Republican nomination for the U.S Senate but lost to a Democrat. The last year we were there, we saw Pete Dominici up close and personal in his campaign for the U. S. Senate. That was in 1973 and he still serves with the second highest tenure for a Republican.

Lea continued to have her bi-polar shifts but generally kept her balance so as to participate in church activities. When she did have times of more debilitating depression some would interpret it as attitude problems. That lack of understanding helped no one. She did have some very supportive special friends. She leaned heavily on doctors but they knew little about treating her disorder then. Other health problems sent her to the hospital a few times. She was in Methodist Hospital in Lubbock after surgery when the devastating tornado swept through downtown Lubbock.

Back in 1958 while working in New Iberia a shocking discovery disturbed my thinking about my teaching. I conducted an unsigned poll in my midweek class of twenty-two people, some of whom I had converted. We think of midweek attendees as being the strongest spiritually. One question was: If you were to die now, do you think that you would be saved? The answers: 11 yes, 4 no, 7 undecided or equivocal! Fifty percent were confident; fifty percent were burdened with feelings of guilt and insecurity!

Since that time I had been trying to instill more hope, assurance, and comfort but, due to my lack of understanding of the problem, I was undermining confidence by emphasizing the necessity of knowing all the right doctrinal answers, obeying each detail properly, and fully accomplishing righteousness through constant dedication, reformation, and works. I was still confusing a system of salvation by grace through faith as a

system of law and works. I cover this more comprehensively in Chapter 1 of "*Free To Change*."

Ira Rice's *Contending for the Faith* came to the church regularly but I never let the elders see his negative onslaughts for I had grown beyond such belligerent sectarian concepts. I began to receive tapes of lessons of Wesley Reagan in Pasadena, Texas. Although I had read all the slanderous things about Carl Ketcherside's writings, I became bold enough to subscribe to his *Mission Messenger*. I faintly recalled having seen Leroy Garrett as a student in ACC, and I had read warnings against such a divisive radical, but I subscribed to his *Restoration Review* also. Surely enough, these fellows were teaching things I should have been listening to all along. Winston Hamby, the pre-teen son of Woodie Hamby in Beaumont when I went there in 1944, worked as an associate holding many liberating concepts, and Bob Williams who followed him had advanced even further. I was only on the road rather than being near its end. I did introduce some refreshing thoughts in Lovington which were favorably received. A new kind of grit was grinding in me.

As the years passed my energy and concentration continued to decline. A cup of coffee or refreshment no longer gave lifts but only aggravated the problem. Being in my sixth year there, I realized that my work was being adversely affected both by the long tenure and the mental fatigue. I attributed it to tension. Once when my regular doctor was not available I went to a new doctor. Even he did not know the real problem but started giving me a vitamin shot every two weeks to keep me going. That helped but did not cure.

Although her message did not surprise me, the message bearer did. One night a woman who was sort of on the outskirts of the kingdom, evidently bolstered by a few drinks, called to inform me that there was talk of my dismissal. I still do not know how she got that information. God has used some strange spokespersons in history. Sometime after that, the elders set a

termination date generously giving me six months in which to relocate.

Our six years in Lovington was a happy chapter in our lives. Mira was now ready for middle school. Sol finished high school and college and, having found the love of his life, Linda Williamson of Vivian, Louisiana, had married. Though Lea and I were having health problems, we were refreshed in spirit by the church and community and by more liberating concepts of grace and unity. A better grade of grit had been grinding. []

Chapter 19

The Trauma of Change

The game of musical chairs when preachers vie for pulpits does not come into full play until June when school is out. Weeks and months passed with few leads and no prospects. But as “fruit-basket-turnover” time drew near, Dan Woodroof, serving then in Kerrville, gave the names of persons to call in New Braunfels, Texas. That led to our acceptance of the invitation of the church there – back in our home state.

I had heard of New Braunfels as an old German town but had never been there. On IH 35 the city of about 25,000 was twenty miles from the city limits of San Antonio and fifty miles from Austin. The beautiful, industrious city has done much to preserve its German flavor in rustic architecture and with such events as the annual Wurstfest to which Mryon Floren brought his accordion for many years. Their long-time fabric milling and garment making gradually gave way to tourism with such notable water parks as Schlitterbahn. The city is built on the Balcones fault line dividing it into two levels, the lower level starting the rolling terrain leading to the coastal plain and the upper level beginning the oak and juniper covered Hill Country. At the base of the escarpment great springs from the Edwards Aquifer coming from many miles farther west form the two-mile long, cold and clear Comal River which begins and ends within the city with its flow into the Guadalupe River. A dam north on the Guadalupe created Canyon Lake. With these affording so much water recreation, weekenders and vacationers flock to them.

As I entered into my work I was disturbed that my problems with concentration were not relieved. As the third weekend approached, I was so distressed that I went to a doctor

and asked for a vitamin shot. After he learned my symptoms, he replied that he did not think I needed vitamins but a glucose tolerance test. He told me to be there at 8:00 Monday morning, at which time blood samples were taken at intervals before and after I had drunk some potion he gave. That done, about eleven o'clock he called me into his office asking, "You didn't die in the waiting room, did you? I don't know how you got out of bed this morning!" Then he explained that sugar is the fuel for the body; that the pancreas secretes insulin to utilize it, and that a disorder caused mine to send too much insulin counteracting the sugar, like a car with a flooded carburetor. I was trying to run without fuel. There was no medication to help. It was sounding serious! But he explained that I could control it by a diet of protein and fat leaving off the carbohydrates. Shortly before getting up to preach, I was to eat a piece of candy. I took him literally at his word and very quickly began to feel better. Gradually including some carbohydrates, after six months he dismissed me telling me to adjust my diet as I felt the need. My hypoglycemia, "low blood sugar," was finally diagnosed and favorably controlled. What a relief!

Even though the congregation was not a choice "plum" in our estimation, we gave it a plus because it was between both sets of our aging parents. The church of about 250 crowded into a poorly accommodating building located on IH 35. Soon after our arrival, a busing program for children was begun which quickly began to overflow our facilities, so plans were started for a new building. We began to feel disheartened that the church bound traditional strictures that we had outgrown. Lea and I discussed the matter and decided to begin teaching some broader concepts we had learned, well aware of the problems it might bring.

Knowing that people accept changes slowly, I began to venture a fresh idea every now and then, and the response was positive. The congregation was evangelistic and growing, so I did not want to dampen that enthusiasm or turn attention to

peripheral issues. Both by conversions and members moving in, we were growing in an exciting manner.

My father died the next year and in our third year, Lea's father had a bad stroke and we moved him into a nursing home in New Braunfels and her mother was accepted to share his room also. With as many as ten residents from our church in the care homes and always persons in the hospitals, visits to them were a great part of my ministry. Soon after we moved, Sol and Linda moved to San Antonio where he worked for Allstate Insurance, and Daniel and Ryan were born there. Sol, however, had the misfortune of being a white male. Although he outperformed others in the office, promotions had to go to women and minorities. So they moved to Louisiana.

Some of the women, including Lea, began to play bridge. Eventually, they wanted to get their husbands to play with them but few of us knew much about bridge. Why not start a beginners' bridge club? One was started involving younger couples, except for Lea and me. About twenty of us met monthly and enjoyed a pot luck meal along with it.

Our nice, new building was built beside the older ones. Its capacity of 450 was reached at the first service. Including bussed children, we often reached that figure. During most of my career I complained that sometime I wanted to preach where all our members went for vacations. New Braunfels was that place! We most always had more in attendance than were on our roll.

As the years passed I continued to toss out corrective ideas but some began to hear strange sounds. As people shook my hand on the way out after service and were enthusiastic about the new thought I had presented, I came to know that I would have to give account about it at the next elders' meeting. After a time of cooling off, I would challenge some other of our traditions made into dogma. By this process more people were responding positively all along. Once an elder stated in a class he was teaching that he did not think the use of instruments in worship was wrong. Another elder in that class later got on my

case because I did not refute the teaching elder though he had not done so himself.

About this time Carl Ketcherside published *The Twisted Scriptures*. That book was almost like a new revelation for me. Everyone in our Movement needs to read it. I was appointed to teach a midweek class of middle-aged adults. I asked the students if they would like to have a class that restudied many of our traditional practices openly and honestly without anyone getting upset at what others might say. They all agreed. I began going through Carl's book lesson by lesson. The class was excited to learn new corrective concepts without feeling threatened.

At the beginning of another quarter, a few new ones came into the class, one of whom was a good woman who had taught the small kids for years. She was well-versed about Adam and Eve, creation is six days, and about Noah and the ark but she was shocked by what she heard in the class. The next week she had our oldest elder with her. He was on guard. Quickly he contested a point someone made and the students as quickly showed his error. That happening several times quieted him down. But he was an elder, not just a student, and had to correct the situation, so that started what might be called a three-year running battle involving the congregation.

All along during our meal at the bridge party the group would discuss the new concepts they were gaining. As the matters intensified in the church, they were almost forgetting to play bridge. A suggestion was made that we turn it into a discussion period, and all agreed.

I quickly formulated some rules. We would not talk about the local situation. We would not talk about people. We each would be free to express opinions without the others being judgmental and taking offense. And we would not tell others about our discussion class. All agreed. They were all educated, responsible people who kept their word.

I would write out a lesson for open re-study, criticism, and correction. After the discussion I would revise it to include

any new elements I might have gained from the class. This procedure was followed until many of the chapters of what would later be included in *Free In Christ* and some of *Free To Speak* were finalized. This was the most honest, searching, and exciting class I ever participated in. There was no motive of ill-will or effort to deprecate people or the church. Why would I have to wait forty years for such an intelligent study?

As these years were passing, my mother died. Lea continued to deal with her bi-polar disorder. Then after many complications and much suffering Lea's father died. Since Lea's mother did not need nursing care we brought her to live with us. That showed more love than wisdom, however, for she became very lonely. Understandably, few church folks visited her for she was with family. The trouble was that we were the only ones she ever saw. In our in-house association with her we recognized that Lea had inherited her bi-polar disorder from her mother. Why had we not seen that before? Even though Elma Lea (she had always been called by both names) and Elma loved each other devotedly, two bi-polar people living together became very problematic, to state it nicely. That's when Elma Lea decided that two Elmas in one house were too many, so she asked us to just call her Lea. It is remarkable how quickly everyone accepted that including her mother in her eighties.

Ordinarily, when a preacher's teaching met opposition, it was resolved readily, not by studying together, but by dispatching the preacher. The elders and I had studies together to no good effect. I would have been gone and forgotten except that three of the six elders and much of the inner core of the congregation were in agreement with my teachings. None of us wanted division so effort was made to promote unity. I was approaching the age of sixty-two. An agreement was reached to engage a new preacher who would fill the pulpit three Sundays each month and I would give him relief by filling the other – and I would do the janitorial work being done by professionals at the time. I could begin drawing Social Security.

I suppose it has been an unconsciously developed technique of defense that I have been able to fade out or block out traumatic memories. I have recounted the things being reviewed here so little that I cannot remember time, sequence, and developments with any true accuracy. I gain no satisfaction in trying to recall them. I hold no ill-will toward any of those involved which would tempt me to mention their names. A great number of the major characters have already gone to their rewards which I hope are with the redeemed.

A very gifted younger preacher was being considered. He called and talked with me at length to gain my perspective of the situation. As I informed him of my grace-oriented and liberating teachings he expressed much excitement and agreement. I was pleased to welcome and serve with him. However, from the pulpit, even though he gave brilliant lessons, I did not hear any reinforcement of the things we had agreed upon. So his and my messages from the pulpit did not always mesh and that intensified the unrest instead of solving the problem. I would have preferred the cotton patch to escape all the conflict but our divisive legalism which allowed us to reject others in Christ was soul-threatening and needed correction.

After a time – I cannot remember how long – the elders called me into a meeting and very sincerely and humbly asked me what I thought could be done to relieve the situation. I told them that Lea and I had been looking at mobile homes and as soon as we could arrange for a place to live, I would resign – but I would like to retain the janitorial job. I left them for any discussion or decision they might make.

A few days later, when our bridge group met, our rule against discussion of the local situation was broken. The group told us we were not going to live in a mobile home. They discussed buying a house for us. Also, they admitted to having been letting me bear all the onslaughts while they said little, so they agreed to stand up and assure the elders that they also held the views that I was teaching. Some of them talked with the elders explaining that because housing had been a part of my

salary through the years, I was actually helping churches pay for those houses, and then was left with none of my own in which to live.

With softened attitude the elders began to discuss how Lea and I might continue to live in the house rent free. No proposal that could be devised was satisfactory for it would be counted as income and wipe out my Social Security. Well, there was one route available and they followed it – giving Lea and me a deed of gift based on “love and affection”! It would be ours as long as either of us lived in it and, if we moved out, they would reclaim it after paying us any increase in value that might have accrued. I could not have asked for or dreamed of such a gracious solution. So, in 1984 after ten years I was relieved to trade my office for the janitorial supply room! I have since heard from other preachers who wished for such a trade.

As all this was developing we put Lea’s mother in a care home after keeping her with us for seven years. She was much more adjusted there among her peers and Lea was much more relaxed also. We had not lived alone since Sol was born. Her mother was staunchly traditional in her beliefs and did not know of our changed perspectives due to her hearing difficulties. She still held fears of dying and facing God until Lea spent much time teaching her about the mercy and grace of God. She died peacefully at 92 in a care home.

Earlier also, I had begun to send articles to Reuel Lemmons who greatly encouraged me by publishing them in *Firm Foundation*. Leroy Garrett seldom used contributed articles but I sent one and he published it and invited more which he used for years afterward. People were reading my stuff! I set a lofty, unattainable goal for myself – not to repeat what others were saying but to always challenge traditional error so that readers would always identify my name with newer viewpoints. I also filled the pulpit in Seguin a good number of times teaching what I was writing with great reception. I came to have a deep appreciation for those people. Reuel Lemmons

spoke there one Sunday and I went over to hear him and ate lunch with him and others. That week the Showalters had sold the *Firm Foundation* and dismissed him from his long-held editorial position. He had become too liberal for them. Had I helped Reuel lose his job?!

Lea and I lived eleven more years there during the tenures of three preachers before moving to Oregon. After my return to Texas ten years later, friends arranged a reception for me in their fellowship room. It was a happy reunion with people dear to me. []

Chapter 20

Free At Last!

I was free at last! Although my pulpit work had been reduced for a while, I never felt the freedom from it before. After a long incarceration a freed prisoner feels an uncertainty about readjusting. I realized more than ever that my whole career had been one filled with tension. No longer did pressures build as the weekend approached calling for two sermons and maybe classes. We could now visit family and do the things others had always been doing on weekends which we could never do while serving a congregation. We could leave town without asking permission or notifying anyone of our schedule. Although my concern for God's people remained the same, direction and problem solving of the congregation were no longer my responsibility. A better comprehension of grace had brought me inward freedom; now I was free from our structured system.

My concentration span has always been short. After reading technical material in study for a time, I might find myself staring at words without any comprehension. So I have always had to take breaks during which I might do odd jobs of upkeep and repair. Since my youth I had taken a short nap after lunch or done some work requiring activity like visiting the hospitals. Now I could work at my own leisure without any feeling of guilt.

Because we always had to pinch every penny, I did the upkeep and repairs of my cars as much as I was capable, even to the overhauling of VW Bug engines with no hoist or anyone to help remove or install them. Lea would help me balance wheels on our cars by revving the engine while I added and adjusted weights to the back wheels hoisted by a bumper jack. I repaired

and repainted the house in which we lived, even installing additional electrical circuits. I kept the yard, and in our twenty-one years in New Braunfels, I had a big garden which I enjoyed. Upon retirement I could feel free to spend as much time as I wanted on these projects or to leave them undone if I chose.

I continued to write, not to prepare sermons, but to deal with our traditional interpretations which we had made into dogma. Writing was new for me for through the years I had never written out my sermons but had just spoken from notes. My experience in writing was limited to church bulletins through which I learned the value of being concise. Even until this day I can never write an essay at one sitting but I do much revising and eliminating of excess verbiage. My efforts were for sharing thoughts with others. I never started out with any thought of publishing my material.

As my essays began to accumulate with some being published in *Restoration Review* and *Firm Foundation*, I began to mail an accumulation to various friends and acquaintances. Almost without exception I would receive word back that those articles needed to be published in book form for wider availability. I selected the minimum number of them which I thought properly stated my message and began to send the manuscript to some of “our” publishers. For some strange reason ☺ no one would touch it! Then I sent it to College Press. A few days later Don DeWelt called saying he would publish it and I would receive royalties from it as it sold. Great! That was exciting – but not for long. A few days later I received a most apologetic letter from the dear brother explaining that the board had over-ruled his decision. I do not relate this to diminish the memory of that great man but to honor him for being willing to risk the publication of my controversial material, a risk that none associated with the Church of Christ had been willing to take.

Charley Elrod was a younger member of our congregation with whom I had little acquaintance. He came by our house bringing us a turkey, if I recall correctly, and I gave

him a copy of the manuscript. A few days later he called to say he would pay for the printing of it. I expressed my gratitude but advised him that a private publisher has no channel of marketing for the advertisement and sale of a book. He replied that he did not intend for them to be sold but to be distributed free of charge! WOW! Let's get going!

I had the twenty-four chapters ending with "*The Free-Flowing Stream*" but somehow felt that it did not round out my message. It was like a revelation that the message of the climactic chapter, "*What God Requires*," evolved in my mind.

Stopping at a crowded print shop I had passed many times outside the city limits, I received a bid for the printing. It was operated by a dedicated older couple who had been missionaries in Latin America who provided thousands of free copies of the *Pentecostal Evangel* in Spanish. Charley had agreed on 1,000 copies but, in my foolhardy zeal, I ordered 3,000 for a much better price with me paying for the additional copies. As it turned out, Charley insisted on paying for them all. May the Lord reward Charley Elrod richly for enabling the first of twenty-seven printings amounting to 90,000 books. He has suffered some financial losses and other difficulties since which I think are relieved now. He has helped many thousands to enjoy freedom in Christ. I chose *Free In Christ* for the title and the Liberty Bell to symbolize it.

How would I advertise the books? While awaiting their printing, I began to address 6' x 9' clasp envelopes to people on my address list, but that was a short list. I looked in *Firm Foundation* and other sources and gathered 250 addresses of individuals and churches. These were all stamped and addressed by hand ready for stuffing. I sent them all out and then braced myself for the onslaught which would surely come.

Very soon the phone began to ring. People could hardly believe they had found something in print that was so liberating. They were relieved, grateful, and enthusiastic and began to spread the word. In the first eleven weeks, I received requests for an average of 26 books per day. From December 1984

through April 7, 1985, 2,900 books had gone out. Ordering a printing of 5,000 after less than six months, we sent out 6,950 the first year averaging 19 books per day.

I have never asked for money but readers began sending money, one family paying for all the postage. As the first printing was depleting I invited people to help pay for the second printing. After that I began paying for the printings and also selling the books. However, I did continue using money sent to my working fund to send free books with me recovering \$1.00 of my investment for each book sent free. I have continued that through the years even though that does not cover my cost by any means. Toward the end of the first year I paid for my first printing which was for 10,000 copies. In the first two years we sent out 12,750 books averaging 17 per day.

Requests began to come from other countries, particularly from various African countries, Australia, the Philippines, and India. These were sent free but mailing costs limited the amount we could send.

Dr. J.M.B. Prasad eagerly distributed them in India. He and others translated *Free In Christ* into Telugu there and, by our sending money for much more economical printing there, he has printed and given out 4,000 copies.

Sunday David Essien is the grandson of the Nigerian brother who began the work there through correspondence. Being a follow-up man for World Bible School, he has extensive interactions with believers there and surrounding countries. He kept requesting more and more books including all my titles. Because printing is so much cheaper there and no mailing cost is needed, through the good people who continue to send funds, I have been able to pay for nine printings of *Free In Christ* in Nigeria amounting to over 20,000 copies. He has distributed a printing of about 4,000 already this year and is begging for more.

Through a generous donation by a Texas couple whom I have never seen, Roger Dickson has been able to print 4,000 books in Cape Town for use in his advanced teaching program

which usually involves about 2,000 preachers in various countries.

Through the leadership of Moises Lujan in El Paso, the book was translated into Spanish with a printing of 1,000. Due to a different mindset, however, there has been no great demand for the books, but 15 have gone to Cuba. In the other countries mentioned, however, we can never satisfy the requests. I have received very little negative feed-back from those countries.

My other books have been added: *Free To Speak* – 1985, *Free As Sons* – 1988, *Free To Change* – 1991, *Free To Accept* – 1994, and my edited book, *Our Heritage of Unity and Fellowship* – 1992. The total for these six books is 113,460. Playing with figures and counting an average of 25 chapters in each book as separate sermons to individuals – I have preached 2,836,500 sermons, or thereabouts! And multiply that by the number of persons who read each book. Including the books by Carl Ketcherside and Edward Fudge that I have reprinted, the total in print has reached 121,456, or thereabouts!

Through the generosity and trust of hundreds of partners, most of whom I have not met, 55,413 copies of *Free In Christ* have been distributed free of charge with me receiving no profit from those distributed overseas and recovering a dollar each from those whose printing I paid for.

When I began selling the books, I set a price like \$4.95. Then I began to think how that is a manipulative device of salesmanship. My writings were plainly honest; so why should I use such a manipulation as though I were trying to sell you a product. So I changed to even dollar prices like \$5.00.

You may see my presentation of these figures as prideful boasting. Maybe it is -- for **I am proud of the many partners who have made this possible and I am boasting for them.**

May they be greeted and thanked in the next world by those whom they have helped to reach that eternal home. []

Chapter 21

A Cyberspace Church

As teenagers when my brother and I slept out under the endless sky of West Texas, a thought of me ever having 100,000 books in print would have been as foreign as the thought of a man walking on the brilliant moon above us. We dreamed no such dreams. Yet I have been a guest in the home of Brigadier General Charles Duke who was the tenth man to walk on the moon and I have packaged almost 100,000 books with my own hands. Through the grit working in our gizzards, God can work that which is beyond our imagination.

I was frustrated that no one would publish my book but that, too, worked for my advantage. Through your contacting me instead of a bookstore to order books, God has sent thousands of you great people to enrich my life. I began my records on index cards and found it inconvenient to change later when I got a computer. I have about eight feet of those cards. Many have only one entry; many have entries filling both sides, and still others have required multiple cards. I treasured your letters by filing the first 1,800 in the early years but gave up on saving them long ago.

Lea was my full and equal partner from the beginning. A great number of you have become partners in different ways. Some have helped by notes and calls encouraging us. Many have bought books and passed them along to others – even by the hundreds. Those who recommended the books to others became a part of the ministry. Often you have written your check for a few more dollars than your payment. Some have sent larger contributions while others have given continued support for longer periods of time. I have never met many of you who have become such vital fellow-workers.

I have never met or had much personal communication with Dr. Jerry Gooch, a cardiac surgeon in Memphis, who has been the longest regular sustaining partner with the greatest financial help to this effort. May God reward him.

To all of you I can say in all sincerity and honesty, it is not **my** ministry but **our** partnership in service. It is awesome that you have put so much trust in me. Because of the complication of my selling books and distributing free books in the same operation, I have never been able to keep accurate records to report to you, yet you have trusted me anyway.

All of my books were written in our home at 1350 Huisache in New Braunfels with my office crowded in our spare bedroom with the bed serving well as a place to collate papers. By hand I have folded thirteen zillion papers and brochures. Until the over-reaction of our government to the “uni-bomber,” I stamped many packages and mailed them in drop boxes saving a six-mile round trip to the post office. The first books were done mostly in handwriting at our kitchen bar. Even though I did not know I needed such a contraption, some of you bought a computer for my work and it quickly became indispensable, making composing and revising so much easier.

Then Vic Phares of Shreveport, Louisiana whom I had not met proposed setting up a web site for me. He still graciously maintains it, sending out my weekly *Freedom's Ring* articles and posting them at my site. By this he has extended our outreach around the world and beyond comprehension.

Since there is no counter, I do not know how many of you receive the weekly sendout, but many of you have been kind to reply, some saying you often send copies to others. There is a counter on the web site itself which indicates that it has received 2,096,164 hits in the last twelve months.

In my frugality I searched the dumpsters for packaging boxes. Adapting to the various sizes of packages, I began to encase the books in a panel of cardboard, wrap it in white kraft paper, and write the address by hand. I used more than a mile

of paper before I started buying padded mailers by the case and addressing labels. This work was a joy.

At least a single book or one package has gone into 56 countries. My curiosity led me to list them: Zambia, India, Singapore, Canada, Namibia, Hong Kong, Australia, England, The Philippines, New Zealand, Hungary, Uruguay, Netherlands, Republic of South Africa, Nigeria, Costa Rica, Kenya, Austria, Ghana, Natal, Japan, Colombia, Puerto Rico, Guatemala, Brazil, Bulgaria, Spain, Malaysia, Cameroon, Malawi, Zimbabwe, The Bahamas, Ireland, Russia, Benin, Germany, Poland, Taiwan, Cuba, Switzerland, Greece, Chile, Norway, Guam, Egypt, Argentina, Scotland, Mexico, Guyana, Togo, Belgium, China, West Indies, San Salvador, and Liberia. Roger Dickson has probably sent them to preachers in many more countries. Many in the military with only APO addresses have been helpful in distributing books also.

Interesting stories have been told to me by readers as to how they came across the books. One man related the complex circumstances by which he received his book explaining that it was interesting to him to trace the route the raven flew to feed him.

After Herbert Armstrong died leaving disillusioned followers, a good number of them ordered my books. Quite a number were read by those in the International Church of Christ, and after their recent shake-up that number has increased.

After publishing *Free In Christ* I was dismayed to see how many typographical and grammatical errors had slipped by my proof-reading. Willing to let you see my lack of sophistication, I let them remain until the eighth printing in which I also made a few textual revisions. For a long time Brian Casey proof-read and critiqued all my manuscripts, but now I rely again on my own proof-reading for all FR articles.

I have been reluctant to mention the names of any who have been such helpful partners in this effort because I would be failing to mention hundreds more of you. God has been

working through people unknown to each other scattered around the globe. All this leads me to suggest that all of you and I who share in common through this means are a sort of **cyberspace congregation** – a spiritual fellowship without physical presence that includes believers who do not all serve under the same church name. You probably assemble with other disciples regularly but you extend your fellowship through this miracle that ignores locality and distance. Surely, Peter and Paul would enjoy this sort of fellowship if they were on earth today! They would have web sites!

My writings have neither deserved nor received recognition from the academic community. I am not qualified for that but have reached out to the pew-people whom I formerly taught in my sincere misdirection. They all might not have been from the cotton patch as I was, but they have had some of the same grit in their gizzards.

It would be a vain wish and a naïve expectation to look for approval of all readers. Maybe the Lord has been protecting my lack of self-confidence by deflecting extreme opposition. Though many have made honest inquiry in good spirit, I have received few calls or letters expressing hateful opposition. I have been told of many instances where my writings and I were denounced publicly from pulpits and I have been accused of dividing churches where I have never been. It seems a bit paradoxical that one can be accused of dividing churches by teaching unity. It is similar to the statement I heard just a few years ago from an otherwise rather sensible preacher. He told of a nice, sizeable congregation that was almost destroyed by the preacher emphasizing *love, love, love!*

In 1987 eight men mostly from Oregon published a 201-page book critical of *Free In Christ*. In 2003 a brother from Kentucky published a 315-page book with 152 pages of it being an effort to refute my book. And in 2000 a brother in the West Virginia area devoted 146 pages in *A Cloak of Malice*, not just in an effort to refute my teachings in *Free In Christ*, but questioning my integrity as the title would imply -- that I was

deceitfully and maliciously working to lead disciples astray into apostasy. Several other extended unbound discourses have attacked the book, one being co-authored by a former major league baseball pitcher.

My copies of those books are still in good condition. Why would I waste my time reading slanderous words of a man who, though never having seen or conferred with me would condemn my character? I scanned a few pages and put it aside. Having scanned a few pages of the other two books, I also retired them. Sixty or more years earlier, before I learned the difference between grace and legal works of righteousness, I could have made the same arguments that they were launching into. None of those brothers in Christ had discussed their concerns with me. I only hope that God is as patient with them as he has been and continues to be with me.

Please do not conclude from these narrations that my ministry was always in conflict and constant controversy. One can still enjoy joy rides even though some are over rough roads with an occasional flat tire or even fender benders. The conflicts I encountered never involved personalities but were about teachings. In those conflicts, never to my knowledge did anyone bring an accusation against my character, nor did I impugn the motives of others. That does not mean that I always displayed the best judgment, dealt with the most tactful manner, and communicated sufficiently. Even when our motives are pure, our lack of consideration and diplomacy may be irritating. So I am making no claim that all conflict was the fault of others. Differences of convictions are inevitable.

We emphasize that each of us study the Scriptures for ourselves to learn the truth rather than depending upon others. I have not heard of, and never expect to hear of, elders telling their preachers and teachers to be free to teach their new-found truth in the congregation. I cannot really blame them for that would create chaos due to different conclusions reached by the various teachers. Churches hire preachers to confirm their creed – written or unwritten -- rather than to teach change. Any

reformer is branded as an insidious undermining “change agent” among many. So how can any corrective teaching be done in a congregation without rocking the boat? That problem has prevailed through history and will continue to prevail. Authoritatively structured churches like the Catholic Church are more successful in avoiding change and the disunity it might bring, but even among them a reforming Martin Luther sticks his head up ever now and then and is driven out with those who accept his corrective teachings.

There always has been and ever will be differences of opinions and convictions among the sincerest and most informed of disciples. Our gizzard stones grind the same grain differently. That is not the problem. The deathly disease is in our judging and rejecting other servants of God who disagree with us. How dare we reject others who hold the same confidence that they are children of God as we cherish! It is not the difference of opinions and convictions and meeting separately that is sinful; it the rejecting of one another that is damning. We would all do well to memorize Romans 14.

Generally, both unity and change come through individuals rather than religious organizations. My books have gone mostly to individuals instead of churches. A few churches have bought books, the first that I recall being the Oak Hills church in San Antonio even before Max Lucado began work with it. That church has long since outgrown any misguided or arrogant claim of being the only ones meeting God’s approval in a courageous example for all our churches.

When I came to Round Rock two years ago, the elders urged me to “place membership.” They have no problems with my teaching. They are great men leading a grace-oriented congregation, but I have chosen to attend without having my name on the roll. I do not want the congregation to suffer any embarrassment due to my teachings and I do not want my teachings to have to meet the approval of any group. With all due respect to elders who have overseen my work, if I had waited for their approval, none of my books would ever have

been printed. Structured religion stifles learning rather than promoting it. I enjoy a freedom which few who serve congregations can experience. I am free to share associations locally and to enjoy you in the cyberspace congregation also.

It is regrettable that, in the inevitable grinding of love and differences, the conflict has been allowed to be so destructive. However, the very fact that you are reading this indicates that some good change in favor of love is working. []

(Cecil Hook: May 2006)

“I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).

Chapter 22

Off Into the Sunset

Bleak! That was a recurring word. As I was finishing high school to face the world, the Dust Bowl created a bleak landscape and the Great Depression made job prospects equally bleak, but there was hope for rains to come and for the economy to improve. Even more frightening was the bleakness of my retirement prospects as I approached the age of sixty when my earning power would be diminishing or lost as I grew older.

Few congregations had any retirement plan for their preachers. Old preachers never die; they just move away. Having lived in the church-supplied parsonage which they had actually helped to pay for, few would have a house into which to retire. That is one reason so many preachers left the pulpit by middle age. The support of a mediocre preacher was mediocre so that, if his wife did not work, it was impossible to accumulate a retirement fund. From our earliest life together Lea had often sung, "We'll build a little nest away out in the West and let the rest of the world go by," but as we faced the sunset in the west of life we did not have so much as a nest egg for that little nest which should have already been built.

You cannot see the grinding of the gizzard stones in a chicken but you can be assured of their workings by watching the development of the chicken. The grindings of God's grit in our lives are seen in the outcome.

After Lea's father had a severe stroke, we brought her parents under our care putting them in a nursing home and then we kept her mother in our home for seven years after he died. I was drawing Social Security while Mira was in college. Due to her industry and our help, she left no unpaid bills at school. Then she married relieving financial dependence on us.

Throughout the years I had paid into Social Security as a self-employed person with nothing matched by the church. That, however, would hardly provide rental on a place to live. I have already related how the church in New Braunfels solved our residential problem by giving us a deed of gift on the parsonage. That lifted the clouds dramatically! I had contracted to do the janitorial work for the church. I filled the pulpit in Seguin for a while. You tax payers helped some through a government farm program paying me \$40.00 per acre per year to let my twenty acres of farmland go back to nature.

Along with all this I began selling my books after the second printing of *Free In Christ*. It was not a gold mine but it helped significantly in building some financial security. Now, however, most all *Free In Christ* are printed and distributed in other countries and I receive no income from them. I have kept my prices low in order to help distribution. On a small order, by the time I count the printing cost, the mailer, the postage, and a six-mile round trip to the post office, I may not break even. If I had to hire help for that little chore, I would lose money. But I am thankful for the added income and more especially for the response that I get from you readers.

When Lea began to draw Social Security, we gave up the janitorial work. To no longer look to the church for a check for any reason gave us a final sense of freedom. Years earlier we had given ourselves a raise by paying cash for everything we bought.

For the first time in our married life, we had no financial worries! I could take Lea out to eat when she wanted – a thing we always had to be stingy about before. We could have bought a new car or done some traveling but we no longer felt the need for toys and efforts of escape. One time I pointed to the stacks of books lining the wall of our garage and proposed in jest that if we sold all those books we could buy a new Lincoln Continental. Lea's immediate reply was, "I had rather have the books." That was a shared feeling for it had become a most rewarding way of life for us. It was more a ministry than a

business. Despite Lea's continued health problems, this was a peaceful and happy time that the two of us enjoyed together.

Paul and Mira had moved to Palo Alto, California where he had a job with Litton. We made two trips by car to visit them in California and one trip to Salt Lake City where Paul and Mira both took some courses at the university. Tom was born in Palo Alto. Then they moved to Portland for Paul to work on his doctorate. Lacking only his thesis, he got a summer job with Intel. Intel quickly recognized his brilliance and integrity and began advancing him so that he never wrote his thesis.

In the meantime, Lea's health problems became more acute. The cardiologist thought her problem was pressure in the chest cavity around her heart. While she awaited surgery in San Antonio, Mira called on December 21, 1992 to announce the safe arrival of Joseph Cecil Prince whom she was holding in her arms for the first time. Sol's family came for the surgery. Lea came through the surgery well enough, it seemed, but they had found nothing wrong after that drastic operation. So she still had her problem. Sol's family went back to Louisiana.

Lea's system began shutting down with retention of fluid. The doctor permitted her to munch on crushed ice which she craved even while her body began to swell. There is plenty of reason to question the skill of the doctor in this whole situation but bringing suit against him would not remedy anything any more than one of you readers bringing suit against me for my mistakenly giving you spiritual misdirection.

Her condition became critical with her body greatly distended. Two doctors conferred in the hall that Christmas Eve and then motioned for me to join them. They suggested that I call family or friends to come and be with me because Lea might not live through the night. Sol's family could not have come in time and I did not want to disturb family gatherings of my friends for it was Christmas Eve. I felt that I could handle the situation alone. The doctor gave desperate dosages of heart stimulant and diuretics. Through the night she would drift in

and out of consciousness with low moans of “Oh, Cecil” as I stood by in helplessness trying to comfort her. I had seen similar scenes experienced by other families but now I was facing the real facts of life with many thoughts and prayers. But by morning Lea was showing improvement, and it continued. In about three days she had lost twenty-eight pounds of fluid.

As weeks passed she became strong enough that we flew to Portland to see Joey and the family. Paul’s work with Intel was advancing so that they thought of Tigard as being a more permanent residence. So Paul and Mira proposed that we move there “so we can be family,” as Mira put it tactfully.

We were settled in New Braunfels for the duration, we thought. There was no more desirable place we would have chosen to live. After returning home and pondering the matter, however, we realized that we would have been doing our children a disfavor by living so far from them when disabilities would overtake either or both of us. They could not leave jobs and families to take care of us. We knew that Mira’s loving concern included the desire that we be close as a family and also near enough that they could attend to our needs. Who could deserve such loving children? And who could refuse such a sensible and unselfish offer? So we agreed. In a short time we would see the positive effect of the grinding in our gizzards.

We had worked with the church in New Braunfels for ten years and then remained for another eleven years. As the three preachers succeeding me served, I became one of those pew warmers! I was most pleased to stay out of the way and let others bear the responsibilities – and they were equally pleased! I was happily writing, packaging and mailing books, and responding to correspondence – things I could do at home while attending to Lea’s needs also.

Mira took the lead in searching for a house for us. She found a good three bedroom, two bath house that needed much refurbishing. I readily agreed to help with that in order to save lots of money. I had just completed repainting our house both

inside and outside. In turning it back to the church, it was appraised \$21,000 higher than when we received it. The church paid us the difference. We gave a portion of it to Paul and Mira to use as down payment on the house being bought. So very quickly, as a phantom out of nowhere, we had our “little nest away out in the West!”

I don't see how any place could rival the state of Oregon and the city of Portland for their lush scenic beauty and cleanliness. We made only short excursions exploring the area, however, due to Lea's fragility. I had a great garden in Texas but it could not compare with the fruitful and easy working soil in Tigard. At that late stage in our lives we were at last able to enjoy an innovative congregation in Beaverton that was freed from most of our traditional hang-ups. Tim Woodroof, who served the group, was a keynote speaker for many special gatherings across the country – and he produced that quality of lessons each Sunday. Mira entered into their work programs and Paul soon led the special singing group. I spoke to the church two times in the ten years there.

In our second year in Oregon in 1996 Lea had a slight stroke. She quickly regained most physical losses but less evident effects on spatial perceptions lingered. She had difficulty in following procedures like those in cooking, so I took over that and all housework completely. She had difficulty folding anything and in remembering what day it was – and I was not much better at that myself. A good result was that she had no more headaches as had plagued her all her life. She was the right-brained one and I was the left-brained one. After her stroke in her right brain she never cried again – even when she had much to be emotional about.

Such an emotional time came on July 20, 1997 when I had been invited to speak at the services at Westside in Beaverton. All of Sol's family came for the occasion. After the usual time of singing and the Communion, Ron Stump, the family life minister, got up to introduce me -- I thought! He introduced a surprise for Lea and me. The remainder of the

service was given to honoring the two of us for our life's work! Daniel lovingly reviewed our life of ministry. Sol, with humor and emotion, told of our family life with touching tributes to his mother and me. Robert Rowland, also with fun and feeling, paid high honors to us. Ron announced that a scholarship had been established with Cascade College by the congregation in our honor and also presented us with a framed certificate of recognition by the congregation. A late-comer among the 400 present might have thought he got in on our funerals! Lea and I had never received such expressions of love from a church before. And I am willing to let that stand as my memorial when I leave this earthly scene.

We lived more than ten miles from the church and Paul's work, and the Princes decided to remedy that. They bought an extra-large house across the street from the Beaverton building and within a mile of Paul's work. It had a large adjoining "mother-in-law apartment" which opened into the kitchen area of the main house. That was ideal for our situation. We still lived independently but were more like a family.

In spite of Lea's constant and varied health problems, we enjoyed some good times there. Any time we were out of the house I steadied Lea to prevent her falling – somewhat like the blind leading the blind. She enjoyed giving hugs to the folks at church. Being unable to keep her hair well, she began to wear hats. When we went to Target or such stores she always looked at their perky cheap hats and she accumulated about fifteen of them. So she gained identity by those hats. My hair turned white many years ago but, rather than hers turning white, it became what I termed "mousy gray" and she never used coloring.

By our eighth year in Oregon Lea's health went on a steady decline with visits with many different kinds of doctors, emergency room visits, and hospital stays. She entered the hospital on May 6, 2003 due to an evident mini-stroke. (The day before, my brother, George, died in Texas.) I brought her back home May 11 and with my help she walked into the house.

Two hours later she began to have slight seizures caused by more mini-strokes leaving her left side paralyzed. This left her unable to turn in bed or to sit up, with difficulty in swallowing, with little communication, and lack of clarity. The doctors saw no need for taking her back to the hospital. I had long prayed that God would spare me to take care of her to the end. Mira and I agreed to keep her at home. We had some visits by nurses in the next two weeks, but Mira and I attended to her needs. I could not have done it without Mira. The end seemed very near in the evening of Sunday, May 25. At last her beautiful complexion had turned ashen. She seldom showed signs of being conscious. I kept moisturizing her mouth as her breath grew shorter.

Long ago I had learned that persons in a coma might still hear and be affected by it. As she stirred a bit, I bent close and asked, “Do you think God will let us be together again?” She grunted faintly, “Uh-huh”, puckered her lips, tried to raise her head, and gave me a passionate kiss! A few minutes later I called Paul and Mira and we held her hands and assured her that she could let go for God was with her. She left peacefully in the same confidence with which she had lived.

We had agreed on cremation, and Mira had previously checked in with people who had been recommended. She called them to come and while awaiting their arrival we tried to indelibly imprint that last image of her in our minds. As the very kind husband and wife team took her earthly form away we trusted that God, whose Spirit had indwelled her, had already endowed her spirit with immortality. She was “beyond the sunset’s radiant glow” that we had sung about.

We had not called friends to be with us. This was a loving sharing with family, an intimate bonding with treasured memories.

To enable friends to better attend, we waited until Saturday afternoon to conduct a memorial service for her. Paul and Ryan led us in songs. Daniel recalled happy memories of his grandmother – even how good she always smelled. A

friend, Andrea Henderson, sang one of Lea's favorite songs, "*His Eye Is On The Sparrow*." Fulfilling Lea's request, Ron Stump read my "*Riding In The Front Seat*" tribute. Sol gave a loving tribute to his mother recalling many happy things that brought laughter in the midst of our tears. In going through memorabilia Sol had found a valentine she had made for me many years ago. On the outside it read, "You are the answer to my prayers." On the inside it continued, "You were not what I was praying for but you were the answer I got!" In a time of informality various friends expressed feelings about Lea.

It was October before we gathered at the family plots in the cemetery in Rochester to bury here cremains. With not even a caretaker there, the family dug the burying place in the plot next to my father. Lea always loved and teased him. After burying her ashes the family offered impromptu comments, songs, scripture quotations, and prayers. Again, it was a family experience to live in our memories. Even though she is gone into the sunset of the west beyond our sight, God can use her influence through succeeding generations.

When I returned to the site months later, a modest granite double marker had been erected bearing her and my names (and those of Sol and Mira on the reverse side) with two dates under her name and one under mine – the other date to be engraved soon. Our vows were not just "till death do us part" fifty-seven years later but also "till death brings us together again" for eternity.

In his work with Intel Paul had come to Round Rock in the Austin area quite often to coordinate projects with Dell. He saw a better opportunity with Dell and decided it was worth becoming a Texan. In June 2004 the family became happily situated here – in spite of my tagging along with them. They let me share their luxurious house. Mira and I are pleased to be back in our home state and to let Tom and Joey become Texans.

As the shadows lengthen behind me, the glow in the west grows brighter. []

Chapter 23

“And In Conclusion”

How does one conclude the story of his life? By his demise? A few rumors have indicated its occurrence. Maybe it has happened and I am just slow to catch on. At least on the farm it would be said that I am so slow that the dead lice are dropping off of me. They say that wine is made better by age. If the same is true of people, then I am almost perfect!

When I started this project I cannot remember having any specific point to prove or conclusion to reach. My aim was primarily to preserve some data for those in future generations who may share my genes. I mentioned various elements in our lives with which each must deal in determining the course of life – the differing grit in our gizzards. I have not attributed all actions and reactions to the intervention or providence of God. In concluding this series, let us explore this aspect a bit more.

Kind responses from many of you outside my tribe have led me to recognize an added value to sharing my story, that is, that we can recognize a marvelous commonality, even though each of us is shaped differently by the various factors with which we have dealt individually. When we are not competing we can embrace one another in recognition of brotherhood. Though from different nations and cultures we can have mutual sympathy if we do not let envy, suspicion, and malice lead us to ignore and deny that brotherhood.

Somewhere I read, “No man is wiser than man.” No individual or group should become so conceited as to think they

can outgrow and discard the wisdom derived historically through the commonality of mankind.

As you have read you have identified the particular gizzard stones and menu that have worked in you. In a self-centered way I have pointed out many of those, whether pleasant or painful, that I am able to recognize. Shall I attribute them to chance, to the influence of humans, or to the interventions of God? Who knows how many influences I have been unaware of for there are things seen and things unseen at work?

Many things beyond our comprehension are at work. I can prove this computer is in front of me by physical senses. I can manipulate some of its functions. I cannot see how it reaches you and influences you either positively or negatively. I cannot comprehend how memories and thoughts stored in my brain for decades can be transferred into and stored in your brain or cause reactions in your life by use of this computer. If we grope with insights of the physical world, how much more difficulty we must expect in dealing with the mental and spiritual components of our being in a parallel, invisible universe that some think may exist.

Rather than having reached ultimate conclusions, I am still reaching in an infantile manner. The infant does not even wonder about his crib but he begins to be aware of, and reach for, the colorful mobile of butterfly images his mother has hung above him out of his reach. Extending beyond his instinctive motivations, he is beginning his learning process which is never brought to a final conclusion. I am still looking upward and reaching to touch what is beyond my limitations.

Does the Intelligence that programmed a chicken to swallow a few pebbles also work in my life? The Scriptures take God for granted without answering all the questions about his infinite existence either past or future. Thinking persons of all generations have pondered his nature. Paul explains, *“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his*

invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made” (Rom. 1:19-20). Infinite power/energy is the nature and character of God.

We would not generally think that Einstein and other physicists were searching for God but maybe they have come closer than many theologians. Physicists have concluded that energy can become mass and mass can become energy – that mass and energy can alternate. These changes produce heat making a fiery universe. If electrical impulses can make us humans conscious, storing facts and controlling a body composed of physical elements, may these things be infinitely true in the Almighty Power? It is not a matter of which came first for the energy, mass, and electromagnetism are integrated. The universe itself has been a holistic revelation of God to all who have lived.

Our evident source of power on earth is the sun; so it is only to be expected that tribes and races have worshipped that part of the whole as the power and deity. “Sunday” has even crept into the Christian religion. Among those pagans at Athens who were seeking and feeling after God like groping blind men, Paul quoted their more enlightened ones who had proposed, “*In him we live and move and have our being*” (Epimenides) and, “*For we are indeed his offspring*” (Aratus) (Acts 17:26-28). Even not-so-pagan pagans had ventured that every person is in the image of, and has a relationship with, the eternal power and deity.

You may rightly laugh at my infantile babblings. If you have a better understanding of God’s nature, go with it. What does my probing about God have to do with grit in my gizzard? Much in every way.

Each of us is a sort of speck in the universe with the nature of the whole – energy/mass with the invisible creative nature also. How can we determine what portions of the grit and menu are the workings of physics and what are unique interventions we call miracles initiated by intelligent design?

We cannot. We might affirm that this intelligent power is aware of every atom in the universe and maneuvers them in answer to prayers and for providential protection, yet we cannot prove it. I have seen and experienced many things I cannot explain but I have never seen an action which I can say with certainty was a miracle, an intervention changing the physical laws of the universe. I credit God with the good things of my life through faith rather than through demonstration discernable through the physical senses. Faith is more than subjectivity, imagination, or wishful thinking; it is conviction based on evidence that falls short of proof.

Matter can neither be created nor destroyed even though it can be changed from one form to another. For instance, in burning combustible material, the original atoms are not changed but they reassemble in new combinations. The elements of the universe are composed of protons and neutrons -- positives and negatives. The Almighty Power also must deal with negative power. That power is called the adversary, the Hebrew word being *satan*. That negativity has been personified. Our translators have capitalized that word as though it were a created personage -- Satan -- who would necessarily have been created by God. We, being made of these positive and negative forces incorporated with a measure of the energy, power, and consciousness of God, must deal with this constant positive-negative struggle. They are the gizzard stones and menu that work within us according to the laws of physics except for the special intervention of God. So everything that comes into our individual lives is not sent as a specific intervention by God, nor are we controlled only by cause-effect determinism.

In his omniscience God knows, not just every hair on your head, but also each atom in each hair, and he allows the same things to work in the lives of all, letting the rain fall on the just and the unjust, allowing the rules of the universe to apply to all.

Yes, there is such a thing as chance, a random coincidence. From my teen years I have been impressed with Solomon's observations: "*The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all*" (Ecc. 9:11 NIV).

In working his over-all plan to bring salvation to Jew and Gentile in one body, God over-ruled even the rebellion of his people to work for good to accomplish it. In this setting Paul assured, "*We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose*" (Rom. 8:28).

Based on Paul's words, my mother often stated "Everything happens for the best," and we hear many today saying, "God is in charge and will work out everything for the best in the end," but Paul was not saying that. Did God work for the good of those he destroyed in the flood or the nations Israel destroyed in Canaan? Did everything work for the best for all who have resisted him? His gizzard stones had been grinding through the centuries and reached his redemptive goal in spite of lapses and rebellions in Israel and grievous conduct of individual pagans. Rather than saying everything works for the best, Jesus urged, "*Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few*" (Matt. 7:13-14). God works for the good with the few who love him and answer his call.

What of the future? In the cotton patch I could have had no clue as to what changes I would live to see. How could I now be so enlightened as to predict what will happen in this century – much less the next ten or forty thousand or million years? I might hope that mankind will learn to live in peace and unselfish cooperation but I have no basis to claim that the nature of man will change to accomplish that. I might as rightly

predict that mankind will obliterate all life from the earth by use of radioactive weapons.

I might predict that our country will be a model for freedom for centuries to come; yet I might foresee our freedom becoming licentious anarchy to be followed by totalitarian dictators during the lifetime of our children or grandchildren.

I might envision the resources of earth being used to provide each family on earth a comfortable dwelling. Or I might expect the continued use of those resources in warring against each other. I might foresee rioting mobs destroying the homes of the wealthier world-wide out of hatred and jealousy.

It seems that all generations have felt that the end of the world was imminent. Misapplications of Biblical texts have been made to teach that this universe will be destroyed and time will end. Recently someone pointed me to a list of over two hundred dates in history in which zealots claimed Jesus would return and bring universal destruction. There has been a money-making revival of such disappointing teachings in our generation. They tend to draw more ridicule than trust from the secular society.

The invisible nature of the Almighty is eternal power, the source of all energy. At least some of his energy has been transferred into the mass of the universe whose elements cannot be destroyed. To claim that God will destroy this universe would call for his self destruction. It is extremely simplistic to demand that the eternal power, the very nature of God, became active only about six thousand years ago and that it may be obliterated at any moment.

The Bible deals with redemptive history, not the history of the universe except incidentally. The last days were the final days of God's dealing through fleshly Israel. The end of the world/age was the finality of his covenant of law with Israel. Redemptive history was completed-made perfect with the full inauguration of his spiritual reign. The use of physical symbols to predict this procedure must not be interpreted as history of

the physical universe and evidence that he will destroy his own power – his eternal nature.

Yes, I am still reaching upward toward the butterflies. If it proves that there are none there – that there is no Intelligent Designer – none of us will ever know it! All is meaningless and futile. I have many skeptical questions, but if I have only a thread of faith compared to a cable of doubt, I will follow the faith for only it can give any meaning to life or hope for endless relationship with the Eternal Power of the universe. A trickling spring of hope offers more satisfaction than an ocean of doubt.

Without this conclusion all the grit in my gizzard would be for nothing.

Paul's concluding exclamation after reviewing God's workings have long been a favorite quotation of mine: "*O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?' 'Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?' **For from him and through him and to him are all things.** To him be glory for ever. Amen.*" (Romans 11:33-36).

In concluding I will exit with my much-used tag line: "*I believe; help my unbelief!*" (Mark 9:24). []

Chapter 24

Let Me Tell You Of The Pretty Girl

Riding In The Front Seat

So that was the Holladay girl of whom a would-be matchmaker was quick to apprise me. I can see her now as she and her mother walked to seats near the front in the little frame building of the South Park Church of Christ in Beaumont, Texas. Both she and her mother were of such simple beauty and pleasing countenance as to catch the eye of all. I would need no matchmaker to point her out!

Was I interested? Cool it. Don't get excited! Two mountainous barriers separated her and me. First, she gave me no notice for she was already dating a handsome young executive of the telephone company where she was payroll clerk. Second, I was devastatingly timid. My painful lack of social confidence and my immaturity in developing relationships had made a 25-year old bachelor of me. "Faint heart ne'er won fair lady."

After graduating from Abilene Christian College in 1941, I taught school one year, began preaching around Portales, New Mexico and at Sundown, Texas, and returned for the spring semester of college in 1944. The semester completed, I had immediate plans to go northwest to Utah with a group, but one unexpected telephone call spun me to the opposite direction to Beaumont to become an assistant preacher. Serving a different congregation there was another bachelor with whom I began to associate. We commiserated but gave each other little confidence. After a few months, however, it became evident that the Holladay girl and her fiancée had broken up. My friend and I decided to make a daring move. We

double-dated – he with Elma Lea Holladay and I with another girl. We went in my 1938 Ford. It was fun! Let's do it again!

After the next midweek service, I approached Elma Lea and explained, "Luryl and I want you to double-date with us again Friday evening -- but this time I want you to ride in the front seat." She giggled, and agreed.

Yes, you are ahead of my story. She has been riding in the front seat ever since that date fifty-four years ago! More than a year later, on October 8, 1945, that seating arrangement became permanent, by the grace of God.

No, it was not love at first sight for either of us, but as we began dating, our common interests and somewhat similar upbringing made us comfortable with being together. She, too, grew up under the hardships of the Great Depression. Elma, her mother, was from the Big Thicket of southeast Texas of a strong heritage in the Church of Christ which she instilled in her only child. Her father, Watt, from Alabama, was a good and loving man who had made no commitment to religion. Having only minimal education, they gave Elma Lea no encouragement to go to college. She remembers a happy childhood growing up in the oil field town of Daisetta, 35 miles from Beaumont and 50 miles from Houston. In high school she was sought out by the popular boys. Finishing high school, she moved to a job in Beaumont, and soon her father found a job in the old Spindletop oil field, and the family was reunited in Beaumont.

In our developing relationship while dating, I began to feel her strengths filling areas of my weakness. She was outgoing and confident, a leader by nature, and socially mature without sophistication to stifle her spontaneity and buoyancy of spirit. These qualities, along with her communicative skills and expressive affection for others, were lacking in me. In her personality I began to feel a complementing of my person. Maybe love has a selfish aspect, for we are drawn to the person who compensates for our inadequacies.

It was fun being with a girl of such exuberant happiness. Even though many of our dates were to my preaching

appointments, that was fine with her for she loved going to services. In fact, she liked preachers, having dated preachers before. We never went to a movie during our year of courtship!

My lack of social confidence was so deep that I think I could never have come to love a woman who was not attractive. This girl had beauty to spare. When she entered a room, everyone noticed! She received the special deference that people unconsciously give to those with physical charm. And she thrived on it! This twenty year-old, slim and shapely girl entering my life was 5' 5", had high cheeks with wide-set blue eyes and light brown hair. Whether they were untouched or crimson, her thin lips were tantalizing. The pleasantness of her countenance was enhanced by a fair and flawless complexion which radiated when she conversed with animation – a special glow which, unfortunately, was never photogenic. Clothing of delicate pastels of beige, peach, or pink accented her complexion and femininity. When she looked at a person individually and smiled, her love and acceptance were felt, and her transparency made her easily approachable. Her unaffected beauty even without makeup was striking, and in her "Sunday best" it was exquisite. Sometimes she wore a flower, such as a red hibiscus, in her hair. At other times her hair was pulled closely around a "rat" so that the pure features of her face were highlighted. Often she wore broad-brimmed hats which accented her classic profile. Some said she looked like Greer Garson, a movie star of that time. As you would expect, the attention given her boosted my self-esteem. Too, I could see that her delightful beauty emerged from inward spirituality and intelligence.

After several dates, we were returning to her home from one of my appointments. Impulsively, feeling that the time was propitious, swerving to the curb and stopping the car, I reached around her to pull her close, and gave her our first kiss. But in that motion, I toppled her broad-brimmed hat off into the back of the car! She giggled, but that should have been an omen to her forewarning of my lifelong inclination for bumbling

romantic gestures. The kiss was memorable, and she continued riding in the front seat!

Although Elma Lea was not quite as prudish and rigid as I was, she was clean and wholesome. We both detested profane and vulgar speech. In fun she could be impishly flirtatious and would sometimes respond in coquettish "baby talk" which, to me at least, was most charming.

As the several months passed, I grew to love her deeply. Her acceptance of me was a bit more cautious. I could appreciate her wanting to be sure. To this day, however, she has had no way of comprehending the change she was making in my life. As I felt her growing love for me, a sense of indescribable peace calmed my being. I suppose it was like the peace that passes understanding of which Paul wrote. Though there were the urgent fleshly passions, they became secondary to the sense of loving and being loved. All seemed right in my world with her in the front seat.

Because of conscience, neither of us would allow ourselves to violate the sexual sanctity that belongs to marriage. More than that, we counted it as part of the delightful romance of love to be wholly fulfilled with each other as a holy bond. Premarital expression would have destroyed an essential part of the true love story by allowing sexual urges to rule over love.

Soon after our marriage we began our thirteen-year stay in South Louisiana. There the young bride truly became "the preacher's wife." Then, and thereafter, she rode in the front seat with me, not just as a passenger. We shared the driving. Throughout our years we worked as a pair and shared decision making.

Church activity became our life. She soon found her place teaching classes on Sunday and Wednesday evening, and then the ladies' Bible class. She has made countless calls with me in homes and hospitals. She has organized and led activities and has been involved in countless showers. She has prepared and helped serve enough food to feed the troops. Most visiting preachers stayed in our home. Elma Lea liked this role except

when people began to expect her to perform duties because she was the preacher's wife. She resented those who would take advantage of her in that respect.

Leading with her heart, she was sometimes hurt by less thoughtful people. Criticisms, which come inevitably, cut her deeply. I think she has always felt the stings inflicted on me more than I did. While sitting through forty years of my lackluster pulpit efforts, she has always been my kindest critic. Even in my most glaring displays of stupidity, she has always been gracious and forbearing.

Some of you may be surprised at my referring to her as Elma Lea. She received the Elma from her mother but never really liked the name. About twenty years ago, after her mother had come to live with us, two Elmas in one house seemed to be too many! So she asked everyone just to call her Lea. Surprisingly, all friends and family, and even her mother in her eighties, dropped the first name immediately.

Although Lea had done little cooking when we married, she learned from her mother whose country cooking was unexcelled. Soon, however, Lea could give her competition in cooking Southern, country, and Cajun kinds of dishes. We always shared housework even as we shared in church work. From our first days together until now, I have prepared breakfast each morning.

Because she has liked to sleep later, she has not always indicated that I was doing her a big favor in awakening her for breakfast! I have admired her for her spotless housekeeping and for always being fresh and clean in body and dress. Though she had to operate frugally, she always managed to keep the house tastefully decorated and to choose clothing that accented her beauty. Even with no formal training, her artistic creativity was evident in color coordination, flower arranging, china painting, and free-hand sketching, but her delightful femininity excluded all things inventive, mechanical, and athletic.

In the singing in our smaller congregations, Lea's rich voice could be distinguished in the crowd. The song leaders

leaned on her to help start and carry on the singing. She sang at funerals and weddings. On trips with our children we enjoyed long sessions of singing as we traveled.

After a few years together, we made the big decision to start our family. But it was not that simple. Years passed with no prospect. When we had about given up hope after five years, on our first vacation to the Rockies, Lea seemed to have caught a virus – one which lasted a full, miserable nine months. But as she held Sol Watson for the first time, all the misery was forgotten.

Plans for another child went even worse. Years passed and hope died, but in the tenth year after Sol's birth, after a full term of unrelieved misery, Mira Lea turned it all into joy.

How blessed our children have been to have Lea for a mother. They received her full devotion. She was the ever-present communicator and nurturer developing confidence and responsibility in them in a happy, loving home. She is rewarded in seeing their exemplary lives and beautiful families.

See what I mean about my bumbling efforts to be romantic! I intended this to be a romantic tribute to Lea but have made it an analysis in retrospect! Her forbearance with my less emotional nature has not been without my appreciation all along. While her right-brain and my left-brain temperaments have generally complemented each other, there have been inevitable gaps allowing for insensitivity. I know I have allowed routine of life to dull our journey together at times. Probably many, many more times than I have realized, my selfish or insensitive words or lack of emotional support have grieved her. Yes, we have spoken harshly to one another at times. In those instances we deprived ourselves of happy moments, but at no time did we doubt our love for one another. There were no wrecks, but only bumps and potholes, on our road of marriage. At all times I was happy that she was riding in the front seat with me. There would have been no happiness for me otherwise.

One of the distresses felt in our marriage was the frugality bound on her by my minimal income. In church life, most of our associates had much better incomes than we, and that put a limitation on full social participation with them. We were never in want, but it would have been nice for me to have been able to treat Lea to a few luxuries like freedom to eat out and to buy new clothes, and less limited trips to the hairdressers and department stores. Literally, she was able to ride in the front seat in only one new car, a 1947 Plymouth.

Except for the few years that Lea served as a church secretary, she was the true homemaker, as the children and I liked for her to be. I count it as a singular blessing that most every day of our married life I ate three meals with her and was at home at bedtime each night. In that role she was truly my partner. Although she never prepared a sermon or wrote an essay for me, I give her equal credit for whatever good or ill may accrue from those I formulated. I am honored that her name is joined with mine on the title page of the many thousands of books we have published.

Like Paul learning to accept his "thorn in the flesh," Lea has dealt with persistent headaches with patience and stamina. Then, while Mira was still an infant, a truly disturbing and enduring problem intruded. Like some diabolical power intent on suspending both mental and physical function, periods of depression would render her listless, introverted, and disconnected. Doctors knew little about bi-polar disorder then and had practically nothing with which to treat it. Acquaintances offered ill-advised opinions. Longer periods of relative relief have allowed more stability of mood in spite of the ever-present lurking of inexplicable, abrupt bi-polar mood swings. Depression affects the organic functions of the body. Consequently, she has suffered from various other disorders which have demanded constant supervision of doctors. With admirable courage and determination, she has kept her sweet, loving spirit, has learned to bear patiently with pain while still

reaching for the joys of family and friends, and has continued in worthwhile activities.

The relentless encroachment of time has taken its toll from both of us. The sensuous embrace has given way to our clinging to each other to steady our faltering walk as we go about. Yet that is an affirmation of love, and no touch from her hand goes unnoticed. Lea is now very weak and feeble. It pains me to see her difficulty with such simple things as in buttoning a blouse with her arthritic, trembling fingers or as holding a spoon steadily enough to eat with it. But beneath this overlay of the bodily effects of time and disease, I can still see the shapely, energetic, and buoyant love of my life riding in the front seat at the various milestones of life.

On the farm in my youth, we had a pair of mules – Ol' Pete and Ol' Kate. They were a team, working together. Kate was more spirited, and resisted being bridled. But Pete was compliant. As you bridled and began harnessing him, Kate would come and stand beside him waiting to be harnessed also. After working long hours together and being turned out to pasture, they would graze side by side. Then they would stand contentedly side by side facing in opposite directions dreamily fanning the flies from each other.

That sort of pictures our married life, with us now being in the latter mode! (Now, is that romantic – or what! See what I mean?)

Thank you for listening. I wanted you to know more about this pretty girl who has changed and filled my life. Has my depiction been more idyllic than real? Have facts been distorted and embellished by nostalgic enhancement and tricks of memory? Be that as it may. The marvel is that my memories are of a life of happiness and fulfillment enabled by Lea's lasting love rather than of bitterness and regrets over incompatibility, jealousy, heartaches, and rejections.

Other than for Lea's health problems, our life in retirement has been peaceful, happy, and rewarding. With enduring love we try to enjoy each fleeting day. If the Lord

wills, on October 8 we shall have been married fifty-three years and on November 22 Lea will be 75, and two days later I will reach fourscore.

Although we are not eager to leave this life, the imminent transition holds little fear for us. Without morbidity we are opting for the simplicity of cremation with our cremains being buried with the least of ceremony close to others of my family at Rochester, Texas.

When we put off this mortal vesture, we shall be clothed with immortality which, I think, will be immediate. Flesh and blood do not inherit the world of the spirit. Not much is told us about heavenly relationships except that there will be no marriage. Will we recognize each other without fleshly identification? Will we still love each other? Will we remember our life on earth? I cannot know, but I can trust.

When you cross over, look me up. There beside me, I think you will find that pretty girl still riding in the front seat! []

