



The Orphans, the Ordinary and the Extraordinary

by ron hampton

The Orphans, the Ordinary, and the Extraordinary by ron hampton
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FORWARD

The Orphans, the Ordinary, and the Extraordinary

It was September 2011 and I was sitting at Christ's Place church on a Sunday morning, absorbed in the worship and the teaching of God's Word when suddenly the Lord spoke, "Ron, I have something else for you to do." He spoke a second time, "Ron, I have something else for you to do." Now, you have to understand when I say "the Lord spoke," I truly mean I had this conversation with God when I sensed His voice so clearly in my spirit and through His Holy Spirit we conversed. It was no less clear than a conversation I might have with anyone over a cup of coffee. I responded, "Lord, what would you have me do?" Immediately He responded with, "I want you to write about your Mother and Father's lives...their testimony." This took me, somewhat by surprise, but not totally because He has spoken to me other times before about things I should be doing and the "call" on my life.

Since the fall of 1984, I have been employed as a professor at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln (UNL) in Lincoln, Nebraska. My area of expertise is Marketing and International Business. When I came to UNL to interview back in the fall of 1983, I also had been talking with other Universities around the country. My expertise in Linear Structural Equations (mathematical modeling) and my background in Retailing (I had managed department stores in the Midwest) were two of the things that the Marketing Department at UNL were interested in me teaching so I visited.

My wife, Dee and I have been married for 49 years on March 6, 2020. We are both from Missouri. She grew up in Carrollton and I have lived all over Missouri since my father was a minister. We therefore were interested in getting an offer from the University of Missouri in Columbia, because it would be half way between our two families at the time.

Well, UNL made me an offer on the first visit which does not happen very often in our profession. My wife and I discussed it and I verbally accepted the offer. At the time we were living in Springfield, Missouri where I was teaching at Southwest Missouri State University (today called Missouri State University) and was Department Chair of the newly formed Marketing Department. Upon my return to Springfield, the very next day I received a phone call from the University of Missouri offering a possible position. "Sorry, you are a day late...I have accepted a position at the University of Nebraska." Dee and I never looked back and settled into a wonderful and fulfilling life in Lincoln.

So there I was sitting in church listening to the next call on my life. The next day I wrote my letter of resignation to UNL. At coffee that morning I was sitting alone at Bruegger's Bagels which is just a block from my office at UNL. I had been thinking about what might go into the book when I sensed I needed to start writing some chapter headings down. In the next few minutes I had 30+ chapter headings written on a napkin. I still have them today.

My wife and I had talked about my early retirement from UNL and she was in agreement with this even though she had some concerns over whether we could make it on a retirement income. Obviously I was concerned as well, but knew I was supposed to do this. Within a few days, the reality of leaving the University set in. The following Sunday morning a friend approached me in the foyer of our church and said, “Ron, I had a dream about you last night.” “Really,” I responded. “Yes,” He said and began to share his dream, “I saw you standing in front of the gates of the University and watched them slowly began to close....that began to fade and was replaced by a little white church or chapel and you were still standing there...and this too faded and I then saw you in front of a barbershop or beauty parlor....”

Well, I was blown away by the dream, and knew its significance immediately. I was leaving the University and was beginning to write about my parents, Clarence and Eileen Hampton. My father was a pastor/minister for 54 years before he died. My mother was a beauty instructor at a beauty school for much of her later years! I had several confirmations like this one over those first several months and thank God for them!

Both Mother and Father lost a parent or parents at an early age. My father lost his mother when he was three and his dad died later when he was only ten years old. My mother lost her father when she was five months old and so the title. That Monday morning at Bruegger’s God gave me the title, “The Orphans, the Ordinary and the Extra-Ordinary.”...and so the challenge began.

The process of writing has taken three and a half years...with interviews with my brothers, sisters, cousins (some who I had never met until I began this project) many friends of my parents, and total strangers. My wonderful wife, Dee, joined me in this endeavor and I could not have done it without her. We traveled to the many churches, that mom and dad pastored, and the towns where they lived throughout Missouri and Arkansas. We took hundreds of photos of these places and began to explore their backgrounds and ancestry. We searched through libraries, public records, graveyards, photos, online and other resources to piece together the story you now have begun to read. I thank God for the call, the inspiration and the truth in helping to fill in the gaps...yet many still remain.

God is Extraordinary. He is the Supernatural. He is the Everlasting. He is Love. May you be blessed in reading my mother and father’s stories as they diligently served the Lord over the years and be encouraged that God wants you to become a believer in Him, the Extraordinary Lover of you and all of mankind.

The Roof is Leaking!

“Eeeeeaaahhhh!” He hit the concrete hard as the tall ladder slipped down the side of the house. “Help! Someone help me!” “Aaah!”

Excruciating pain shot down from his lower back to his right leg, and his left heel which had buckled under him was beginning to hurt something fierce. The feet of the ladder had slipped on the pavement and he had fallen from the roof onto his back. Somehow his left heel had hit the concrete patio first and was crushed, breaking his fall somewhat.

“Can anybody hear me? I need help! Mr. Rigsby, ARE YOU HOME!?” he yelled.

He tried to get up, but the pain was too great and his legs simply would not move. He tried crawling, but couldn’t crawl either. He recalled that people with a broken back shouldn’t try to move themselves or they might do additional damage, so he laid slumped the way he had fallen and began to pray.

“Lord, I need you now. Father in your son, Jesus name, help me.”

He lay for what seemed like hours. Whenever he heard something, he would yell out, when finally a neighbor, Mr. Rigsby, heard his cry and came running over.

“Pastor, what happened?” Mr. Rigsby asked as he ran over to him. People often referred to my father as Pastor or Reverend and by this time he and mother had been pastoring, evangelizing and preaching for 46 years.

My father’s name was Clarence Ray Hampton, but he often answered to C.R., which was typical of the way his father and others before him had shortened their names. C.R.’s father, Thomas Azariah Hampton had shortened his to T.A., but his brother (Clarence’s uncle), Thompson Adam had shortened his also to T.A., and quite often they got each other’s mail, so Thompson Adam simply became Adam after a while and Thomas Azariah simply became Az.

“The ladder slipped and I fell off the roof. I can’t move my legs....too painful! Aaah..!”

Mr. Rigsby ran and called for an ambulance. He also called my mother, Eileen (she also wrote her name as Ilene in the early years), who was at the beauty school in Farmington where she taught. My mother’s full name was Lillian Eileen (Merryman) Hampton. She hated the name Lillian so she simply used Eileen. She said she would meet them at the hospital. The ambulance came and took dad to the Mineral Area Regional Medical hospital in Farmington, Missouri. The trip took less than 20 minutes. Mother had already called people from the church to begin to pray for dad. Several people including Brother Cerutti, the lead pastor, came over to the hospital and in the waiting room they begin to pray.



Mom and Dad's Retirement home in Flat River

The days had been unseasonably hot with thundershowers that appeared regularly in the afternoons. It was the middle of June of 1986 and every shower brought out “the leak” in the roof. That same month, Jonathon Pollard pleads guilty to espionage for selling top secret US military intelligence to Israel; South Africa declares a nationwide state of emergency; and Benny Goodman, jazz musician, Kate Smith, singer, and Len Bias, basketball star pass away; Rafael Nadal, tennis star, Kat Dennings, actress and Shia LaBeouf are born.

My father had searched for the leak in the roof countless times to no avail. He was thoroughly disgusted. The old house where mom and dad lived had multiple roof lines with several long since removed flues. In the early years the house was heated with wood stoves. To patch the roof, dad would heat the tar in an old bucket which had the remains of former tarring attempts. The bucket bottom and sides were blackened and had dents typical of a multi-use container. He had to work quickly before the tar began to harden and became impossible to work with along the seams of the steep roof. It had rained earlier and the drip in the false ceiling in the kitchen suggested another search was warranted. He had carefully placed the ladder up against the low slung addition to the kitchen and the backdoor which opened onto a patio that completely encircled the back area out to a detached garage. Years before he had poured this patio and had used that same bucket for patching cement cracks.

The doctor came out to talk with mom. “It’s too early to tell yet how bad it is, but the first x-rays show he has several vertebrae broken in his lower back and his heel is crushed. We’ve given him something for the pain, and we want to stabilize his back and then we will work on his foot.”

“Thank you, doctor.” Mom said. “He will be fine.”

“Mrs. Hampton, you don’t understand. He has suffered a broken back and we simply don’t know what the prognosis is yet. He may never walk again. “

“Trust me, doctor. Our God is a big God, and He has assured me Clarence will be just fine.”

“Yes, ma’am,” the doctor replied skeptically. Mom and others continued to pray.

The next morning the doctor approached my mother who was now sitting outside the intensive care unit where dad lay. “Well, some good news. Your husband seems to have feeling this morning in both legs, which is a good sign,” he said. “We have his back in a brace and it appears to be stabilizing him. We will check his heel again this morning after x-rays. I will give you an update this afternoon, but you can go in and see him for a few minutes.”

People from the Assembly of God (AG) church in Farmington, Missouri where dad served as the “seniors” pastor continued to drop by and pray with mother. In the afternoon, the doctor returned and reported that new x-rays of my father’s foot showed no signs of broken bones, whatsoever! It was quite the mystery to the Doctor. “Praise the Lord!” my mother responded with a huge smile on her face. The Doctor shook his head, mystified by it all as he walked away. My father remained in the hospital for 12 days and then was released with merely a back brace. Normally a body cast would have been used, but his recovery progressed so well they did not use it.

Within six weeks, my father was walking the railroad track again with his little dog, Patches, named primarily because of the multiple color of his fur, which looked like a patchwork quilt. He was a stray that had simply come to the house one day and stayed after mom and dad began to feed him. Dad and Patches regularly walked the track in front of the house on Mulberry Street in Flat River, Missouri. It was a habit my father never gave up until his final demise. He would walk and pray every morning down toward Elvins, a small town next to Flat River, where their small but comfortable home was located. Later the towns would combine and become Park Hills. Upon their return, they would go in and have breakfast with my mother.

He was totally pain free! This was simply amazing, miraculous, a natural, extraordinary or whatever you wanted to label it, but as my mother had prophesied. God healed my father!

A tarred trail of dad’s fingers from both hands now emblazoned the side of the house where dad had fallen from the roof and had tried to latch on to something. Mom and Dad left the tar trail as a reminder of the day this miracle began.

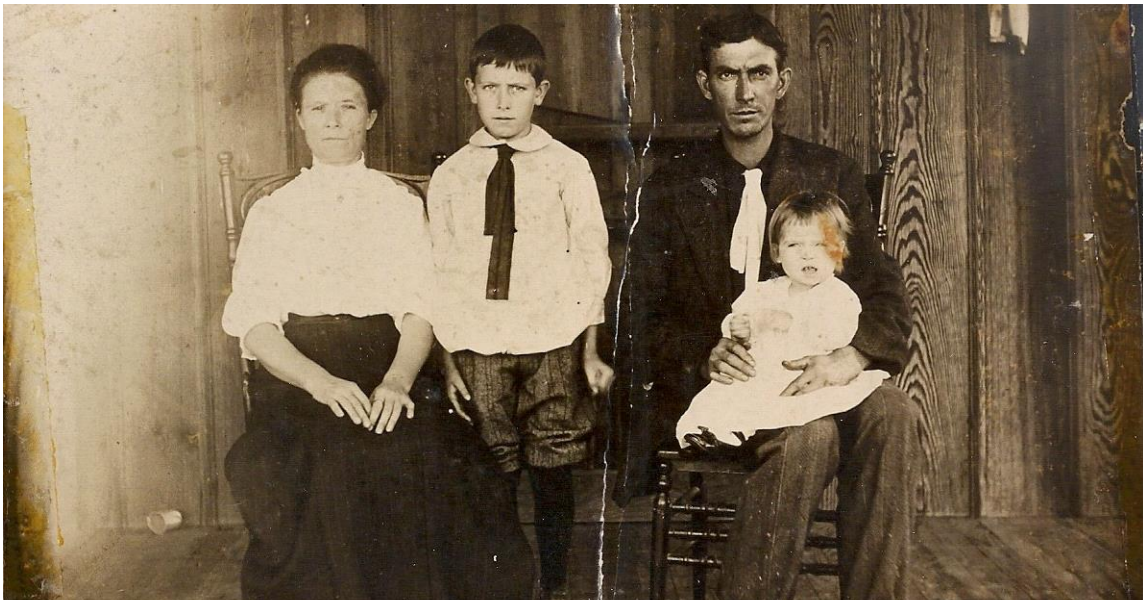
This incident was not uncommon in our household. Throughout the years, there were many ordinary events, but the “extra-ordinary” came to be expected as well.

Clarence's Early Years

My father, Clarence was born on March 15, 1912, in England, Arkansas, to Thomas Azariah Hampton and Louise Hicks. That same year, The Republic of China was established, New Mexico became the 47th U. S. state, the Girl Scouts of the USA was founded, the Titanic hit an iceberg and sank, a fire in Istanbul, Turkey destroyed 1120 buildings, Woodrow Wilson was elected President, and Karl Malden (actor) and Pat Nixon (First Lady) were born.

Thomas Azariah “Az”, well over six feet, was quite tall for a man of his day, while Louise Hicks, of Dutch and Irish ancestry, was less than 5 feet tall. They both worked extremely hard holding down many different jobs during the early years of the family. Thomas Azariah had been born on May 1, 1874 in Van Buren County, Arkansas and was the first child of Middleton Eugene Hampton and Susan Chronister. Az grew up in the hills of Van Buren County, attending the three-month summer school and learning to cope with the rugged wilderness mountain area.

In 1900, Az made his first trip outside Van Buren County to visit his father's brother, Tom Hampton who was a gunsmith and lived in England, Arkansas. It was there Az met Louise “Lou” Hicks, whom he married in 1902. They had four children over the next 12 years including, Clarence, his older brother, Ernest, and his two sisters, Lenora and Viola Mae. Ernest was born August 17, 1903; Lenora, dad's older sister, was born February 13, 1910; Viola Mae was born August 2, 1914, all in England, Arkansas.



Lou and Thomas Azariah Hampton with Ernest and Lenora 1911

Lou was an amazing mother, who doted and provided nurturing and love for each of her children. She was also a dedicated wife and managed the household quite well with Az working long hours.

She was born in November, 1879 to John Hicks and Margaret Lawrence in Liberty Township, Stoddard County, Missouri. Her mother, Margaret was originally from Illinois and was born in 1860. Interestingly John had come to Margaret's family farm to work as a hired hand. John stayed quite some time working on the farm for room and board and fell in love with Margaret who was 9 years younger than he was.

In these early years, Az and his younger brother, Thompson Adam did all kinds of work together including the building of railroad right-of-ways, road beds, as well as general construction in and around England and Lonoke and Van Buren Counties. The work was hard, but the pay was good for that day. They grew quite close in their endeavors and many stories have emerged over the years about their joint ventures and escapades.

As Az grew older he took up barbering and opened a restaurant in England, Arkansas. They lived in a very nice home with a covered porch across the front of the house. It had a large open fireplace in the living room or parlor as they called it and in the winter time, the family would gather in the evenings around the hearth and talk and Az would tell his children about his adventures and stories of "the good ole days."

My dad talked about the games they used to play as kids. Once he spoke about it, "Oh...anything there was to pass the time...you didn't have anything for excitement in those days... if you even had a ball to play with you were so excited with that...and you didn't have a glove to catch the ball with in that time and as a general rule...why...we made those balls out of twine string (wrapping motions with his hands)...and making those balls like that and we would use a split...just a piece of a one by four board as our bat at school...that was our bat...we didn't have the kind of equipment you have today. Heh heh."

Things were going quite well until March 28, 1915 when Lou, dad's mother died suddenly of a heart attack. That same year, WWI was in full swing, an earthquake in Avezzano, Italy killed 29,000 people, Babe Ruth hit his first career home run, the theory of general relativity was formulated, and in WWI the British and German forces declared a truce on Christmas and played a football (soccer) game in "no-man's land between the two trenches. Dad had just turned three years old.

Dad described his mom's death this way in a video interview in the summer of 1987. My nephew, Paul and a friend who was doing an interviewing project for school had asked if they could interview mom and dad and of course they agreed.

The interviewer asked, "What's the first thing you remember, Clarence?"

He replied, "The first thing I remember? Oh, just off hand the first thing I can remember...I just couldn't hardly say...but one of the exciting things...I was only three years old the 15th of March...in uh 1915 and my mother died the 28th of March...we were sitting on the front porch and she died with a heart attack and I can remember her last words even at 75 years of age now and I can remember her last words she said...my mother...she was a little Dutch lady...and I had a brother (Ernest) that was ten years older than I ...and my youngest sister who lives in Bakersville, California...was just a baby...and uh...she was

holding the baby and said, 'Ernest, this is it!'... And she just passed away...I remember that so well."

The next several years Az did his very best to keep his four children with him. He was helped by friends and relatives, but it was too difficult to work full time and try to maintain any kind of family life with children aged 12, 5, 3 and 1.



Thomas Azariah Hampton with his children from left to right Clarence 1 a half years, Ernest age 13, Lenora age 4, and Viola 6 months

Friends and neighbors helped for a while, but, finally, in 1916 he was desperate and he advertised for a housekeeper in the Arkansas Gazette, a newspaper located in Little Rock. A widow by the name of Ida (West) Crabtree answered the advertisement. She brought with her a six year old son, Robert.

A year later Az and Ida married. The new household seemed to do ok for a while, however, it was learned later that my father and his siblings were abused and mistreated by their new step mother who obviously favored her son over Az's children. She quite often beat Clarence and the others, but especially Clarence it seemed. Now Clarence was no angel, but you could tell that he was affected by his mother's death and seemed quite aloof from everyone but especially his stepmother and step brother. These were turbulent years and Ernest finally left home within a year or so of the new stepmother taking over the household. Dad seldom spoke of these years with his new stepmother so we learned very little about them except he did confide in our mother that they were filled with very little tenderness and love from his stepmother. His Father, Az, was often away working for days at time on the railroad right of ways, and so the little relationship that had developed with their dad, Az, was difficult, which was typical for families in those years.

On January 23, 1923, Az died in Dez Arc, Arkansas and was laid to rest in Johnson Chapel Cemetery, Prairie County, Arkansas. That same year Time magazine hits the news stands for the first time, Mount Etna erupts in Italy leaving 60,000 homeless, hyperinflation in Germany with 4,200,000,000 marks required to purchase \$1, the Great Kanto earthquake devastates Tokyo, killing an estimated 142000+ people, Turkey becomes a republic, Chuck Yeager, James Arness, Henry Kissinger and Jean Stapleton were born.

Dad was only 10 years old (he turned 11 on the 15th of March) when he was orphaned. At the funeral, he learned he no longer would be living in the house where he had been born. His stepmother did not want nor could she take care of the children. So Clarence and one of his sisters, Viola Mae went home with Uncle Adam and Aunt Dora. Lenora ended up living with Uncle Adam's sister, Florence Morphis for a while.

It is important to note, that by this time, Uncle Adam had married Dora Cordellia Landrel and they were living near England, Arkansas at the time. Later that year they moved to Russellville, Arkansas. They had seven children of their own when dad and his sister went home with them. This made 9 children all together with one on the way. Needless to say it was a bit crowded and times became tougher for the family. Uncle Adam's sister, Florence Morphis of Russellville decided she would take Lenora home with her while Clarence and Viola remained with Uncle Adam. A minister Ramsey and his wife tried to adopt Viola, but the family objected and so she remained with Adam and Dora as guardians. Dad remained separated from Ernest and Lenora during that first year.

Uncle Adam (actually my great uncle but we all called him Uncle Adam just the same) was very much like my Dad's father, Az in many ways. He was born November 4, 1879. That same year Thomas Edison filed (actually on November 4th) for a patent for the incandescent light bulb, Doc Holliday kills a man who was shooting up his saloon in New Mexico, Gilmore's Garden in New York City is renamed Madison Square Garden, Albert Einstein, 1st Lady Grace Coolidge, and Will Rogers are born.

Uncle Adam was self-sufficient and was quite creative in keeping busy. Uncle Adam was also orphaned early in life and he went to live with his mother's relatives, the Chronisters. It didn't take

him long to pack up his belongings when he was 14 and head west during the early months of 1894. He joined a number of families in route to the Indian Territory (now Oklahoma), and points west. He later described his departure from Arkansas when he crossed the Arkansas River at Morrilton, Arkansas. He said, "I'm never coming back to 'them there' United States!" He worked for his "keep" as they traveled along in the wagon caravan. Some of his caretakers were paternal while others were down right exploiting. When conditions became too severe, he would move on to another wagon. He had heard of the great Wild West and the adventures out there and soon learned to scout for him-self. He took special interest in horses and soon learned how to break, ride, rope and train them. It wasn't long before he was skilled at catching and breaking wild horses. In later years he became quite the equestrian working on numerous ranches around Pecos, Texas.

With his skills, Adam identified with President Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt, as a commander of the fearless Rough Riders who became national heroes during the Spanish-American war in 1898. Teddy led his famous cavalry regiment against the Spaniards in Cuba. Thompson Adam wanted to become a part of this and so enlisted in the Infantry of the U. S. Army on August 9, 1898. He was assigned to the Colonel's stables where he developed additional knowledge of horses. He was honorably discharged on April 27, 1899.

He then went back to work on ranches in and around Pecos, Texas and claimed to have worked on the same ranch with William "Billy the Kid" H. Bonney. The author heard many stories from him directly about his "escapades in the ole West." He often talked about Billy and said he was a regular cowboy who seldom went to town and stayed away from talking about his past. If strangers came to the ranch, Billy seemed to disappear for a while. The author shared this information about Billy with the producer of a TV show entitled, *Unsolved Mysteries*. They had a special show on "Billy the Kid" and whether or not he was really killed by Pat Garrett or somehow escaped with his life in a plot that simply made up the story of his death because Pat had shot the Maxwell boy instead. According to Deluvina Maxwell, who was at the Maxwell farmhouse at the time of The Kid's death, said, "Garrett was afraid to go back in the room to make sure of whom he had shot. I went in and was the first to discover that they had killed my little boy, not Billy!"

An early picture of Uncle Adam is shown and the pose resembles the tin type picture of the famous outlaw, Billy the Kid, standing with a rifle in his hand in his army uniform in front of the ranch house.



Adam Thompson Hampton - 1899

In 1952, Adam wrote the following poem about his adventures:

Days of Long Ago

By Adam Hampton, Nashville, Arkansas

I went to the Indian Territory in eighteen ninety four
For three long years I stayed there, and would stay no more,
For it was lawless country, and as to pleasure I never say,
It was worse than any pine hill in the state of Arkansas today.
I roamed the big prairies and rode around Fort Sill,
I heard the coyote's howling and saw antelope on the hill,
I had some real experiences unlike on a gravy train,
But cowboys rode in saddles, in sunshine and in rain
There weren't any churches, there weren't any schools
It was miles from any settlements and the six-gun was the rule
There were only a few white men, but Indians by the band,
And any ruffled cowpokes were sure to call your hand.
I rode the bucking broncos and swung a lariat
The things that happened to me I am sure I won't forget

I worked the Z-Bar L- Company, I stamped the OK brand
 And got stuck more than one time in the South Canadian sand.
 I saw a gun fight on Campbell and Johnson Range
 While I was still a tenderfoot and all the West was strange,
 When the shooting was over and the wind had cleared the smoke
 Bill Ward fell from his saddle with a bullet in his throat.
 I heard the Comanche “war whoop”, and heard the Cheyenne wail
 We drove great herds of cattle up the ole Chisholm Trail
 Well do I remember when Leb’s ball shot hit a redskin of the horse thief band,
 They had sneaked at night to take some horses and wouldn’t raise a hand.
 The Indian was not buried and the mangy dogs got well,
 Feasting on the body before it began to smell.
 When I left the Indian Territory, I left it on the run,
 with three men behind me and a six shooter in my hand.
 My six shooter was empty as I made for the top of the hill,
 And the men behind me on horseback failed to make the kill.
 When I reached the Kansas border and saw the waiting train
 I was filled with such a feeling I’m sure I’ll never have again
 I was tired of the Indian Nation and I didn’t want a Squaw
 So I came back to the old pine hills of dear old Arkansas
 And I am still in Arkansas today and it’s 1952.
 I have hooked a horse with a long shank spur and still ride around the town
 I’m glad I came back to Arkansas reared a family and settled down.

In 1901, having changed his mind, and having a fill of the dust and “roughins” on ranches, roundups and cattle drives, Adam returned to Arkansas. A year later he met Dora Cordellia Langrell, of Van Buren County, Arkansas. He had acquired a home, saddle, and related horse equipment to do some “cowboyin” in Van Buren County. One day, as he rode by the Langrell home, 12 year old Dora was swinging on the front gate. Adam stopped his horse and said, “Young lady, I’m going to kidnap you.” The Langrells and Hamptons were neighbors. Young Dora had not begun courting and the swinging gate episode continued and in Dora’s words, Adam was the “prettiest” man she had ever seen. On May 12, 1902, Adam did return, took Dora on the back of his horse and rode to the court house in Morrilton, Conway County, Arkansas, secured a marriage license and Rev. S. S. Ferrer performed the ceremony.

Several hours later, William Langrell, a devout Methodist Elder learned his daughter, Dora was missing and formed a posse to go search for her. Azariah, Adam’s brother, wishing to be helpful took his shot gun and started on the search also. As he attempted to crawl under a fence, he placed the gun in the bib of this overalls, but before clearing the fence, the gun discharged, removing the steel cap from his shoe. He only slightly singed his toes with gun powder, but the shoe bore the mark for years to come. Several days later Adam and Dora returned home and after much discourse William Langrell admonished Adam “to repent of his wicked ways, settle down and take care of Dora and he would have the blessings of the Langrell family.”

With more responsibilities than ever before in his life, Adam began to seriously farm. He cultivated one crop in Van Buren County and became disenchanted with his meager earnings. So he moved to England, Lonoke County Arkansas and joined my grandfather, Azariah in building railroad beds for the Cotton Belt Rail Road Company.

It is important to note that Adam was a restless man and he returned to Van Buren County and joined his father Middleton Eugene in several endeavors, but these too did not pan out, so back to England, Arkansas he went. He acquired land, sold it, managed plantations, explored coal mining in Pope and Logan Counties, engaged in menial digging, became an expert in dealing with live stock (especially horses) and continued to explore ideas with Azariah on various entrepreneurial enterprises. He purchased a livery stable and became sheriff of England. He was a Mason, a member of the Woodmen of the World, and an ardent Republican. In 1929, he embraced the Assembly of God movement.



Adam teeter tottering with one of his horses



Adam with one of his favorite horses. He taught this one to do a lot of different tricks.

Adam and Dora were the parents of eleven children not counting my father Clarence and Aunt Viola. They began to instill in their children the teachings of Christ and the values and character of Him. By this time, however, my father, Clarence had moved out and lived with Aunt Florence for a short while. Later, he described his life after his father's death this way..."I was what you would call an Arkansawyer...uh...before my father died...I was... I would have been eleven years old the 15th of March and he died the 23rd of January in '23 (1923)...and uh...we were taken in as foster children and raised as a foster child from place to place...in the state of Arkansas."

He too had a restless spirit about him and tried different jobs. He even boxed a bit at one time, but first time his nose was busted, he said, "no more of that." Most of his earnings in those years came from the coal mines or for work he had done in foster homes usually on a farm. He once told me, "Ronnie, if I earned a dollar a day back then, I was in 'hog heaven.' I typically didn't earn that much as a youngster." In the coal mines, the men earned more than the children and women.



Top row (left to right): Virginia, Flosia, Thelma, Lawrence, A D, middle row
Adam and Dora Hampton, bottom row Mary Nell, Evelyn, and Dora Ella

Spanish Flu

Clarence's childhood was one of adventure, hard work, and school, but time also for fun and games. After his mother died he seemed to stay away from the house whenever he could because of the dysfunctional home life and so he liked school because it got him out of the house. The town of England, Arkansas was one of adventure for him, his siblings, and the neighborhood children.

The town citizens of England, Arkansas were made up of blacks and whites. The large plantations surrounding the community provided the main source of work and income. England is located about 28 miles southeast of Little Rock. Much of the local industry is still agriculture and in those days cotton was the main crop. There were many different kinds of merchants, shops and stores to support the farm laborers of that day. During these years John Thomas "Tom" Hampton owned and operated a gunsmith shop in England. In addition, Thomas's nephew Adam Hampton bought and sold and rented horses and wagons for a living from his livery business. Azariah worked on the railroad and in the construction business and each of them lived in a comfortable house in the England area. He later would open a café and barber shop in the downtown area on Hinckley Street.

Adam and Azariah were living next door to Fletcher and his family on 2nd street in England during the flu epidemic of 1918-1919. Known as the "Spanish Flu", it was estimated to have killed more people than the Great War (World War I) at somewhere between 30 to 40 million people. In the U.S. it infected almost 30% of the population and around 675,000 lost their lives. It was estimated that a fifth of the world's population contracted the influenza. The strange thing about this pandemic was that it was most deadly for people ages 20 to 40 while most flu epidemics kill the elderly and children. In 1918, children used to skip rope to the rhyme:

*I had a little bird,
Its name was Enza.
I opened the window,
And in-flue-enza.*

Thomas lived across the street, so it was basically a Hampton family neighborhood and was quite close-nit. Aunt Hazel, Adam's oldest, was 13 years old and was involved in nurturing family members that were confined to the bed with the flu. She had to go from house to house to help place cold compresses on their feverish foreheads and keep them covered up when they got the "chills." Without family or friends' help, many people would simply die during this flu epidemic. My father was no exception. Aunt Hazel took care of him and the other children in Azariah's household. Hazel never was infected with the flu, which was a miracle. Dad survived along with the other siblings.

Mother's dad, Will A. Merryman was not so fortunate and came down with flu-like symptoms in early October, 1918. His obituary reads as follows:

Will A. Merryman, well-known farmer and citizen living on Culpepper Mountain, died very unexpectedly about noon, Wednesday, October 16th, his death resulting from hemorrhage of the lungs and bowels caused by influenza. Deceased had been complaining for about ten days but his condition was not such as to call for the attendance of a physician until the day previous to his death. Mr. Merryman was about forty-nine years of age and had spent practically all of his life in that immediate neighborhood, coming to this county and state with his parents, natives of Indiana, when a mere boy. He was twice married in life, his first wife being Miss America Barnes. As a result of this union nine children, two girls and seven boys, were born and all of whom survive. The wife and mother died some four years since. In 1916, Mr. Merryman was united in marriage with Mrs. Janey Mowery, a daughter of the late, "Uncle John" Tucker, who with one child survives. Interment took place at the Culpepper cemetery this (Thursday) morning. Will Merryman, as best and most familiarly known to his friends and acquaintances, was a good man and a good citizen. More than 20 years since he made a profession of religion and joined the M. E. church, South, ever afterwards living an exemplary Christian life. For years he had served his township as a Justice of the Peace and was frequently honored in other ways, always proving true and faithful to every trust in both church and state. In his death his family has suffered an irreparable loss and the state surrenders the citizenship of a true and loyal citizen.

Mother was 5 months old when her father, Will died. Her mom, Janey Merryman was 30 years of age and then began to raise Will's children along with Eileen. The influenza pandemic of 1918 truly impacted every American family, leaving many families with widows and orphans. By 1920, Uncle John, Aunt Myrtle, Aunt Ova and Mom were still being raised by Janey.

Coal Mining

By 1924, Clarence left Uncle Adam and Aunt Dora's and stayed with various families and family members moving from place to place. That same year, President Calvin Coolidge becomes the first President to deliver a radio broadcast from the White House. Kemal Ataturk becomes President of Turkey and the Ottoman Empire is deposed. The Castle Gate mine disaster kills 172 coal miners in Utah. Adolf Hitler is sentenced to 5 years in prison for his participation in the Beer Hall Putsch, which was the attempt to take over Germany by the Nazi Party. Lee Marvin, Henry Mancini, Lauren Bacall and Jimmy Carter were born.

It seemed as though Clarence would only stay a month or two in one place and then he would pack up and head out. He spent most of the next few years looking for work on farms and by 1925 he moved in with the Hawkins family outside of Plumerville, Conway County, Arkansas. Clyde and Effie Hawkins gave him room and board for working on their farm. It was here that Dad had his first set of crutches due to a busted ankle. No one seems to know what happened or how he got it. The Hawkins had three children including Ray, Ilene, and Ormond. Later they moved and by 1930, we find them in Oklahoma and the connection with them ended.



*Clarence using a crutch with Ray, Ilene, and Ormond
Hawkins - 1925*

Clarence continued to move around and finally got on as a coal miner. Coal mining was dirty and dangerous work and Clarence had the worst job you could have in the mines, which was to crawl into 18-24 inch spaces and chisel out a hole for explosive charges. Children were often used for this kind of work as well as the job of hurrier, sometimes called coal thruster or coal drawer that pulled or pushed a collier which was a small coal cart used to transport the coal out of the mine. So it wasn't uncommon for a mine to have a group of children "employed" to take on the tasks which required crawling into small spaces where grown men could not squeeze themselves.



A group of coal mining children workers in Paris, Arkansas – 1920s

The coal fields in Arkansas are located between Russellville and Fort Smith in the Arkansas River Valley. The main core of coal was in an area about 33 miles wide and 60 miles long. The coal in Arkansas was used mainly for fueling the fires of blacksmiths until the 1880s. Burning coal in homes for heat and cooking was a common practice as well. In 1880 the steam locomotive became popular and the demand for Arkansas coal grew, because the coal in this area gave off little smoke and it had low sulfur content. It also is a more efficient fuel rating 13,000 to 15,000 BTU, as compared to 7,500 BTU for coal from Pennsylvania. Eighty percent of this coal came from Johnson County until 1880. Sebastian County became the principal source of coal from then through 1976. Only two coal mines exist today in Arkansas and they are both in Sebastian County.

Clarence was known to be pretty wild in those days...working long hours in the coal mines and then staying out late on weekends and running with a rough bunch of miners, “drinkin and chewin and carryin on like teenagers might did in those days.” He rebelled against any authority figure and considered himself “footloose and fancy free!”

The Visit

One night all this changed. During the 1920s he had moved from place to place as a boarder working for his keep. He had come in from a night of drink and was lying on his bed, when he was suddenly awakened by a “presence” in his room. The room became as bright as a mid-summer’s noon, which almost blinded Clarence. A figure was at the foot of his bed and it scared him something fierce! He felt something like electricity race through his body as the light became brighter. He was overwhelmed by the presence and it definitely had a sobering effect on Clarence. He could not quite make it out at first, and then the light surrounded the figure of a woman. He was afraid! She came toward him and sat down on the side of his bed. As she moved toward him she spoke quietly, “Don’t be afraid.” He could not believe it at first, but it was his mother and he knew it almost immediately as she began to “speak” or so it seemed as he understood her completely. She seemed to reach out to touch him, but not quite. Her presence was soothing...even nurturing, yet direct and she began to speak about her untimely death and how God had a hand in the toughest years of his life and how Clarence’s life was extremely important to God and how God loved him and had a call on his life and her early death was meant to be and the Lord had not forsaken him nor would he ever... My dad did not want the conversation to end but she finally said she had to leave, but that he needed to invite Christ into his life. He later did...and oh...my how changes began to unfold in his life. The meaning and purpose that came with accepting Christ into his heart became quite clear and he knew he was to preach. That night remained extremely personal and private for my father. He seldom talked about it to us kids, but later mom shared with us. It is interesting to note that whether it was an angel of the Lord with the image of Clarence’s mother that really came to him that night or it was his real mom didn’t matter. All he knew was the presence looked, acted, and spoke like his mother in an amazingly motherly way. As years passed, my father never forgot that extraordinary experience, and the overwhelming love he felt that evening. He also later understood the answers to many questions he had about whether God was real and if so, why bad things happened.

The years of living and moving from place to place in his life were like a mystery to most of us. He did not talk about those nomadic years much as he experienced living a hand to mouth existence, always moving on when harvest was over and finding employment wherever and whenever he could. His life was typical of a lot of young men in 1929-1941, the Great Depression years.

Ilene's Early Years

Our mother, Ilene was born June 28, 1918 to Will and Amanda Jane “Janey” Merryman. She never got to know her father.



Lillian Ilene Merryman age 2 - 1920

Will, her father, passed away about noon on Wednesday, October 16. He was 49 years old. That same year World War I ended; the great train wreck of Nashville, Tennessee took place killing 101 people; Congress passed legislation establishing time zones and daylight savings time went into effect on March 31; General Motors purchased Chevrolet Motor Company of Delaware; Oral Roberts, Ida Lupino, Sam Walton, Billy Graham, and William Holden were born.

Will Merryman's first wife was America Barnes. She died in 1915 and left Will with eight children including 2 girls, Clara M. (age 17) and Pearl (age 12) and 6 boys including John “Clifton” (20), William “Harvey” (19), James “Elmer” (16), Henry Orval (8), Sherman (6) and Marvin L (age 3). As noted earlier, Will's obituary reads, “In 1916 Mr. Merryman was united in marriage with Mrs. Janey Mowery, a daughter of the late ‘Uncle John’ Tucker, who with one child survives. Interment took place at the Culpepper cemetery this (Thursday) morning. Will Merryman, as best and most

familiarly known to his friends and acquaintances, was a good man and a good citizen. More than 20 years since he made a profession of religion and joined the M. E. church, South, ever afterwards living an exemplary Christian life. For years he had served his township as a Justice of the Peace and was frequently honored in other ways, always proving true and faithful to every trust in both church and state. In his death his family has suffered an irreparable loss and the state surrenders the citizenship of a true and loyal citizen.”

Times were tough and the marriage of Will and Janey was born out of necessity in part. When they married, Janey took on the responsibilities of raising Will’s children from his first marriage. In addition, Janey had several children including John Edward (age 7), Myrtle Edna (6) and Ova J sired by Janey’s first husband, Samuel O Mowery, who died in December, 1913. Samuel and Janey had lost two children, Opal and Coniver Mowery by 1912. Ova was born on March 3, 1914. So, Janey had 12 children to raise upon Will’s death. This was a big household even for those times, and you can imagine a lot of sibling rivalry for Ilene upon Culpepper Mountain in Arkansas in a little 4 room house.



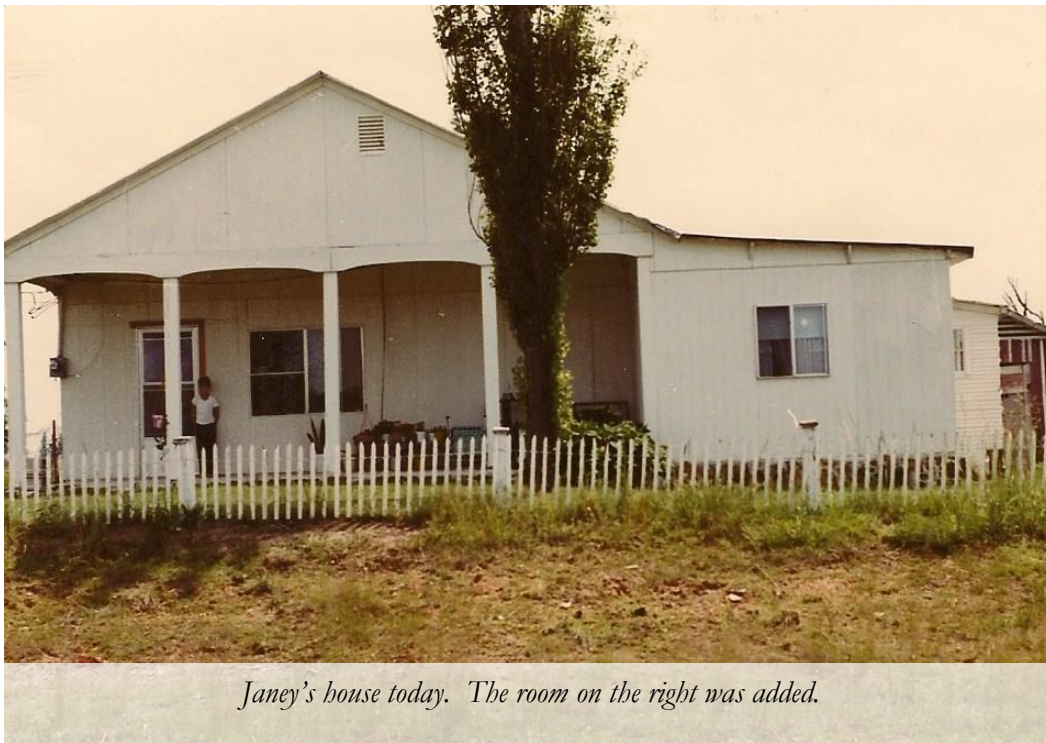
By 1924, Ilene went off to school for the first time upon Culpepper. It was a typical school of that day with children from 1st through the 8th grades all in one room. Ilene walked to school every day and then came home, finished her chores and homework and then by the time it got dark, off to bed.



One day Eileen came home to find the house had caught fire and burned down. Sparks from the fire that was started to heat water in a large black caldron for doing the laundry caught the house on fire. This complicated things dramatically and the family moved in with Janey's mother Nicie Tucker. By this time the family had gotten smaller. As the children began to reach their early teens they would marry and move out.



This was in the late 1920s and in 1928, Janey remarried a Mr. Osborne who owned a country store which at one time had been the school house. It became their house as well and they moved in and lived in the back of the store. The store/house had a single bedroom, a storage room, while the living room, kitchen were part of the store. The well for water was just off the kitchen. You could step out the side door and draw water from the well with a long tube-like bucket. One time when Janey was drawing a bucket of water, she lost her teeth down the well and had to get fitted with new ones. A walnut tree stood in the front yard, and the garden was to the west of the house. The outhouse was just in the southeast corner outside of the garden. A path was quite worn to the outhouse, “but ya better watch out for snakes and spiders” every time you went. The house had a tin roof and when it rained, a loud roar filled the house and store. It was quite soothing for us as we slept at grandma’s house over the years.



Janey's house today. The room on the right was added.

Janey, was a hardworking mother who planted a huge garden every year. When fall came she would begin to can vegetables, fruit and juices to keep through the winter. In addition, she would prepare the potatoes, carrots, onions, and other vegetables for storage in the root cellar. Some of this would end up being sold in the store, however, there were a lot of mouths to feed. Now the two front rooms were part of a small dry goods and grocery store that Sam and Janey had started together. The front porch was covered and screened in so it became a part of the store as well. They carried basic goods along with fresh fruits and vegetables and canned goods in the grocery.

The marriage did not last long for whatever reason and by 1930, Janey was the head of her household again, but only Ilene and Grandma Nicie Tucker lived in the house with her. Mr. Osborne gave the house and store to Janey. The store closed down during this time due to the crash of the stock market in 1929 and as times became even tougher, they struggled and could not afford to keep the store open. Janey and our mother managed with growing their garden, canning, sewing their own clothes, scavenging when they could, hunting small game and sharing with family, neighbors and friends on Culpepper Mountain.

One time Janey was crossing the fence that surrounded the garden to go to the outhouse, when she tripped. She fell breaking both arms as she tried to catch herself. The doctor set one of them wrong and she always had problems with that arm afterwards.



Janey Merryman and Ilene

Now Janey was a firm believer in never cutting her hair. She would comb her hair back and roll it into a bun toward the back of her head. When she let her hair down to wash it and then dry it, it was long enough for her to sit on. After washing it, either Eileen or Nicie would brush and comb it out as it dried naturally. In later years we kids always loved watching her hair being combed out. It was so long.

By this time, Ova Mowery (16 years of age) was living with Charles and Lula Tucker; Marvin Merryman was a lodger with Iva and Cora Nicholson also living on the mountain; the remainder of the Mowery's and the Merryman family members were out on their own, living on and around the mountain.

Revival!

In 1933, while living in Russellville, Arkansas, my father attended his first “cottage prayer meeting.” These were simply people gathering in someone’s home and having a service of prayer, singing, and oft times preaching.

That same year, construction began on the Golden Gate Bridge, the Lone Ranger was launched on the radio, Franklin D. Roosevelt succeeded Herbert Hoover, Mount Rushmore was dedicated, Albert Einstein is granted refugee status from Germany, and prohibition ends. Carol Burnett, James Brown, Dom DeLuise, Hope Lange, Lou Rawls and Jerry Falwell were born.

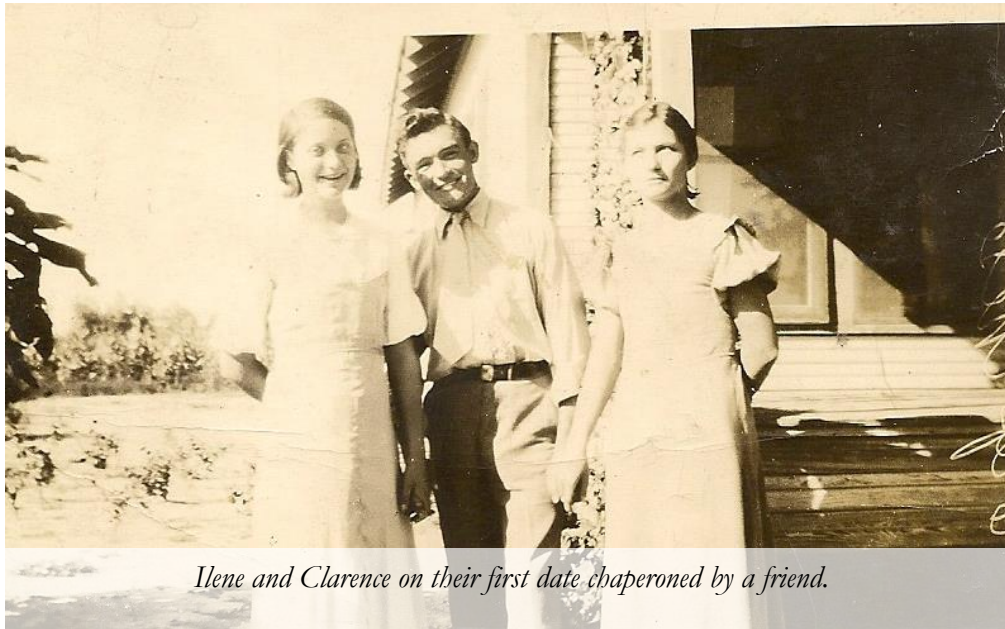
My father publicly committed his life to Christ that evening and felt the call to preach. He was filled with the “Baptism of the Holy Spirit” that same evening and began to speak in “strange tongues.” It was totally new to him, but he felt God’s love more than any other time in his life. The struggles he had experienced as an orphan upon his mother dying left him so empty of any nurturing or love that he felt lonely and separated from everyone. It was such an overwhelming experience that he did not want it to stop and up into the early morning hours he “basked in the love and presence of the Lord. It was like liquid love was being poured over me and into me. I felt it from the top of my head to the soles of my feet!” Now he was certain that God, Jesus Christ his son, and the Holy Spirit were real! The joy was unbelievable! He was changed! The love he felt would never leave him from that time on.



Clarence with his guitar during the time he was holding revivals in and around Russellville

Clarence met a young red headed girl not long after and began to court her. She too, was called into the ministry and she became an evangelist. They became engaged, but the young woman gave Clarence an ultimatum, "If you get me pregnant once we are married, I will leave you!" They stayed engaged for a while, but my father desired to have children, so he was having second thoughts about marrying her. My father began to "hold revivals" in the state of Arkansas.

In the summer of 1934, he was called to hold a revival upon Culpepper Mountain outside of Clinton, Arkansas. My mother, Ilene Merriman attended the revival and for the first time in her life experienced the presence of God and she got “saved” and filled with the baptism of the Holy Spirit and spoke in a foreign tongue for the first time. Even Grandma Janey liked dad’s preaching. She said to dad after the services that evening, “That was a good sermon, if only you’d preached it at the Church of Christ,” which was where she attended services.



Ilene and Clarence on their first date chaperoned by a friend.

During that same year, one of the worst dust storms (the Dust Bowl) that ever hit the U. S. took place, lasting two days; it lifted up massive amounts of soil from the Great Plains. Severe drought, lack of crop rotations, deep plowing, and fallow fields led to the storm’s major impact on the land. The black clouds of dust reached all the way to the East Coast and hit cities including New York and Washington, D. C. They were sometimes called “black rollers” or “black blizzards.” It forced hundreds of thousands of people from their homes and farms and many moved west to California where economic conditions were not much better due to the Great Depression that had continued into the mid-1930s. From these tough times some of the most famous outlaws emerged including John Dillinger, Baby Face Nelson, Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker. That same year Adolf Hitler became Fuhrer of Germany; Japan invades China; the comic strip *Li'l Abner* is published in newspapers for the first time. President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs into law the *Securities Exchange Act*, as part of the New Deal, also called the “3 Rs” including Relief, Recovery and Reform.

Clarence took a fancy to Ilene almost immediately and he began courting her. He stayed with Ilene’s Aunt Eleanor Cleaver. They were quite the “handsome” couple. Six weeks later my mother and father were married. You talk about a “marriage made in heaven,” my dad fell head over heels in love with mother the first time he laid eyes on her at the altar, while she was “prayin through.” It was the revival of all revivals to hear him tell it because people not only got saved and filled with the

baptism of the Holy Spirit, but God introduced him to my mother. “Whoee, it didn’t get any better than that!”



Clarence and Ilene on their wedding day in 1934

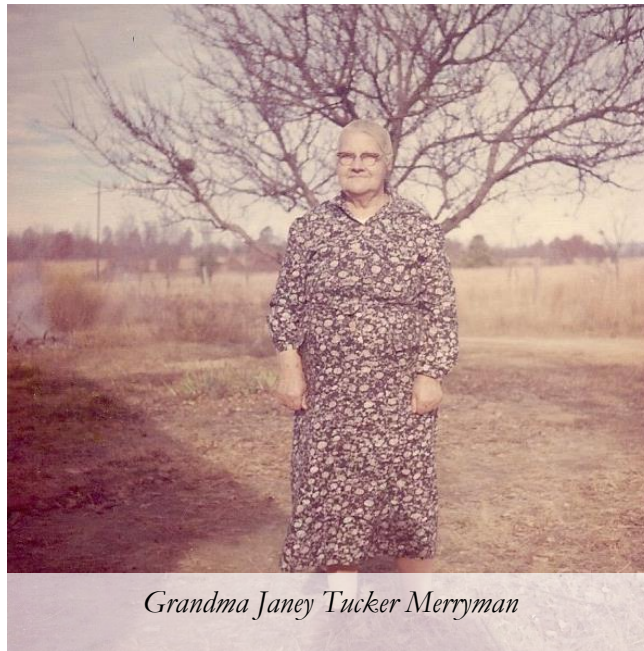
They lived with Grandma Janey for that first year. Again it was crowded, but they seemed to manage well as Dad preached revivals throughout the eastern Boston Mountains.

Hooooooo, Pig, Sooey!

“Sooey! Here piggy piggy! Come on Piggy! I got somethin good for you to eat! Sooey!!” For anyone acquainted with the University of Arkansas whose mascot is the Razorback hog, “calling the hogs” is a strong tradition in sporting events at the University. It also is a tradition with hog farmers about anywhere in the south. In the spring of 1935, one of my Grandmother Janey’s sows had gotten out of the pen. Mom and dad were still living with Grandma Janey.

That same year the dust bowl was blowing something fierce across New Mexico, Colorado, Oklahoma, and Kansas. Much of the topsoil blew eastward into Arkansas and Missouri. That year Adolph Hitler violated the Treaty of Versailles and rearmed Germany; Persia changed its name to Iran. President Roosevelt created the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to get America back to work and he signed into law the Social Security Act. The world’s first TV program is transmitted in Berlin, Germany. Amelia Earhart is the first to fly solo from Hawaii to California.

It had been a dry spring, but it rained hard down on the little farm of Janey’s that day. The old sow was about to deliver a litter of pigs, so it was important to get her back into the lot adjacent to the little barn which was used when sows were farrowing or suckling piglets. Calling her back with the famous hog call was the first attempt. When that didn’t work, you usually had to get a couple of people to try and drive the hog back in. The rain had been heavy enough to cut ribbons of streams down through the rows of the garden and into the pig lot that was already deep with mud and “wallow perfect” for hogs.



Grandma Janey Tucker Merryman

Janey called with her Arkansawyer accent, “Clarence! I need yur help! Git Ileen and yaw come heer and help me get this heer sow back inner pen!” Clarence and Ileen came out to the barn yard and the instructions began. “Clarence, you git over to that side an Ileen you stand over thar and I will be rite cheer by the gate so’s I can shut it when she comes back into the sty. Now when I say ‘go’ you begin to walk her toward the gate. Jest pinch her toward the gate, Ok?” “Ok,” they responded and when Janey said “Go!” they began to drive the sow toward the barn lot gate. The sow wanted no part of it and tried to run back in between them, but they moved whenever the sow moved and continued to guide her toward the gate. Suddenly, the sow bolted toward an opening close to the edge of the barn and Janey immediately moved over to head her off; the sow cut back and Janey did too and was standing firm in front of the gate by this time and the sow headed lickety-split for the barn lot right at Janey. Janey was wearing what she did most days which was a long homemade cotton print dress with a long cotton apron over it. The sow ran right between her legs catching on to the dress and apron, picking Janey up and carrying her backwards into the muddiest and manure filled, wallowingest part of the pen and stopped suddenly dumping Janey full length backwards into the wallow. She spat n sputtered and spat some more and slung mud and stuff out of her face and hair and screamed bloody murder at that sow and of course, blamed Clarence and Ileen, “yaw did that on purpose! The sow just stood there and looked at Janey with what seemed like a pig grin on its face. Now we all know that pigs are smarter than dogs, but they also have a sense of humor almost like a human. Scary!

You ole sow! I oughta kill you rat now and make bacon outa yuh! You stop that laughin (mom and dad couldn’t contain themselves splitting their sides with laughter). You both were in on dis! You nuuu what was gonna happin! I oughta tan both yur hides!” Get me uuup!!! Help me uuup! Watch where you liftin Clarence!! Land agoshin! What gawt intuh thet sow?! Whut am I to-do! I should kill that sow!” Finally, as angry as Janey was, she did have to laugh about it over the years. When she would tell us kids about that day, you could see the angry gleam come back with a statement usually that went like, “they planned it; I know they did. It was not funny at the time!” When asked what she did with her clothes that day, she said she had to burn them, “they stunk so bad!”

Now you must realize that Janey was a mountain woman with so much “spit and vinegar” that most people pretty well did not want to upset her. She had a definite opinion on just about everything including religion, gardening, cooking, and politics. There were many anecdotes and stories about her living on Culpepper Mountain. I recall her telling us about the time she lost her “snuff” box both she and her mom had an occasional “dip”. She said she’d give a nickel to the person “what finds it” and I am sure one of us did.

She grew a huge garden and had one of the largest grape vines I had ever laid eyes on. It ran down the front of her garden lot along the road and hid everything behind it. It was perfect for playing cowboys and Indians with my brothers and cousins. From the grapes she made “juice” but by the time a year would pass after canning, the juice usually had greyish-white mold over the top and was simply called the “canned grape-juice” or “grandma’s recipe,” and we kids were told not to drink any

of it. Of course, one day we did and we paid for it. Not only did we get sick, but she got after us with one of her “switches” and she meant business.

The cow pasture behind her house was loaded with blackberry bushes and a summer didn't go by without the sweet smell of a “cobbler” cooling in the window of the covered front porch outside the kitchen. Of course, we kids were responsible for “pickin blackberries afore a pie could be cobbled.” The picking of blackberries always led to our hands becoming scratched and sore from the thorns on the bushes. After we brought them home, we would always have to be “waitin” for her to spoon the hot cobbler into a bowl and slap on top a tablespoon of fresh butter she had just churned that day. After all we had done the pickin and thought we needed to be the first to do the eatin. Well, one day Michael and Ruth decided to head out with a pail used for picking blackberries. One of the neighbors had multiple fields and one of them was loaded with blackberries and so they headed down the road toward their field. It didn't take them long to find the blackberry bushes loaded with sweet black berries and they began to fill the pail. All of a sudden they heard a rushing sound and looking around in the distance they saw a black bear and it was headed their way. Instantly they turned spilling the pail and headed for the road running as fast as they could screaming all the way. They did not stop until they ran up on the porch and in through the screen door of Grandma Janie's house, slamming the door behind them and latching it. They hollered to Grandma and Mother to explain what they had just seen. Grandma explained that black bears are very territorial and “you youngins was pickin' that thar bar's berries!”



Early Family Life

By 1936, Dad was still preaching in various churches in the small mountain communities around Culpepper, Arkansas. On July 31st, in that same year, Virginia “Ruth” was born at Grandma Janey’s home. It was a glorious day! That same month, Wilt Chamberlain, John McCain, Elizabeth Dole, Don Drysdale and Ruth Buzzi, were born. That same year President Franklin D. Roosevelt is reelected to a second term, the Hoover dam is completed, the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge is opened, five million people die in the West China famine, and King Edward VIII abdicates the throne in England.

In early September, 1937, Mother was expecting her second child. My older sister Ruth recalls it this way:

“They named him Royce Eston. He died several hours after birth due to complications on September 2, 1937. Mom was in the hospital for this birth because of the complications and we almost lost her too. The doctor told Dad that he could not save them both. He either had to take the baby and save Mom’s life or kill mother trying to save the baby. Well, it was hard and Dad said, “I have children to raise. Please, if you can save anybody please save my wife.” Mom would have gladly given up her life for that baby to live, but Dad convinced the doctor otherwise. Royce Eston was buried in the Culpepper Cemetery. That was really hard on Mom and Dad, especially Mom. After Royce Eston died, they brought the baby in dressed so cute; he simply looked like he was sleeping. Mom wanted to see him before he was taken away. They brought the baby to the church for a service and I had run to the back door of the church wanting to see the baby. Dad told me to go sit down and so I waited until the baby was all dressed before I got to see him. Dad sat me right on the front seat then when they brought him in a little casket. Momma didn’t get to come to the funeral. She was still in the hospital at Sikeston.”



Clarence and Ilene (pregnant with Royce Eston) pictured with 2 year old Ruth - 1937

She grieved for weeks afterward. It tested their faith during those years, but Dad continued to preach, and Mom was quite occupied with raising Ruth.

During 1938, Dad, Mom and Ruth moved to a small village north of Russellville and began pastoring their first church. It was tough but exciting times for this young family as they were now on their own having moved out of Grandma Janey's house on Culpepper Mountain.

They stayed a little more than a year and then made a huge step by moving to Risco, Missouri in 1939. My dad had felt the "call" to move and start a church. He also joined the Assembly of God movement and on April 28, 1939, he was ordained as a pastor. Dad began to work for Uncle Herman Smith (Mom's sister, Ova's husband) on their plantation in New Madrid County. He also felt led to start the church in Risco.



Uncle Herman Smith on his Plantation - 1939

Risco, Missouri began as a logging town in the late 1800s. The Southeast Missouri area was covered by a swamp often called the Big Swamp or the Great Swamp, which remained until the early 1900s when a group of business men began a project to drain the swamp and turn it into farmland. The swamp contained a cypress forest with “dark cypress” trees in abundance. This was the mainstay of the economy of Risco until the drainage project began. This consisted of clearing the land of the cypress trees and draining the swam with a series of ditches that ran from the north to the Arkansas border on the south dumping water into the St. Francois River and Big Lake, west of Blytheville, Arkansas.

The project was opposed by four main railroads servicing the logging industry in the area. It began however, and took more than 20 years of hard labor fighting mosquitos and using steam-powered dredges and stump pullers. The network of drainage ditches and district channels still move two million acres of water every year. Ninety percent of the land was covered by timber before the draining began; today 95% of the land is cleared. By 1930 the project was completed.

Out of the project two distinct classes of people were created: those who owned the land and those who worked on it. Cotton, corn, soybeans, watermelon, potatoes and other crops became the mainstay of the economy replacing the timber that had been harvested over the 20 years of drainage. It became a farming community. Such was the case when Mother and Father moved into Risco in 1938.



*A farmhand tending a mare and colt on the Smith
Plantation.*

One of the major landowners of course was Uncle Herman and Father became his foreman during the week while he preached Sunday mornings and evenings and Wednesday night prayer meetings. The little congregation began to grow and even though the vast majority were poor farm laborers, the church began to prosper. The church was held alongside one of the drainage ditches on the outskirts of town. People came from miles around to hear the gospel.

In 1939, my older brother, Paul Kenneth was born. He recalled:

“I was born on November 19, 1939, in a little place called Risco. That same year Germany attacked Poland and so World War II began. Our house was actually out from Risco near a “wide spot in the road” called Baterville, alongside one of the drainage ditches in southeast Missouri used to drain the swamp lands. We lived in a little red brick sided shotgun style house. My earliest recollection of life was sitting in mom’s lap and being fed a chicken leg, and I choked. I remember the house was next to Billy George and Jane McGarity’s house. The little red house was on a farm owned by Barry Finkley. Louise Finkley was my first grade school teacher. I started primary

school in September of 1944. Ruth (oldest sister) basically taught me to read. Whenever I came home from school with my primer, Ruth would work with me using the light of the kerosene lamp. She would say, "This is Dick and this is Jane and this is Spot." And I would remember the words...and I remember Mom saying very distinctly, "Now Ruth, that is not the way to teach him to learn to read...he's memorizing those words!" The little school house was on Kline's Island not far from the house. The school was a two room school and it was all brick. It had outdoor toilets one on one side for the boys and one on the other side for the girls. I remember in the cold winter months, they had to prime the outside water pump to get it to work, because it would freeze and they would have to thaw it using hot water. Out in front they had swing sets and all the kids would swing taking turns during recess. One day Ruth was swinging and I ran under the swing, and the swing hit me in the head and knocked a hole in my head. To this day, I still have the scar right in the middle of the back of the top of my head. I recall that after school we had to wait for the bus to ride home on, but in the afternoon while waiting I would get hungry and scrounge around for something to eat such as leftovers from kids' lunches which might be egg salad sandwiches and I would eat those and felt I was living in grand style. Later the school was added on to and became a Baptist church.

We had a German shepherd dog by the name of Wolf and he was quite smart and very large. One day we were gone to church and when we came home, Mom and Dad found Wolf up in the middle of their bed sound asleep. In the bed with him was a big ham bone left of a whole ham he had eaten. Somehow he had gotten into the icebox where the ham had been stored. Since we didn't have electricity, we had to buy ice for the old icebox. As I said he was a smart dog. Of course, Dad wanted to kill the dog he was so mad, but he didn't. I remember looking forward to Uncle Adam and Aunt Dora coming up to visit from their farm in Grapevine, Arkansas. Every time they came, Uncle Adam would bring us a silver dollar! We thought we were so rich with such a large amount of money to spend!

Dad worked for Herman managing and share cropping much of the large plantation which consisted of thousands of acres of the converted swamp land. The soil was very rich and black. The fields were usually planted in cotton or soy beans and several other crops on occasion. Dad was pastor of the little church at Bird's Corner while working to support the family. The church people could not afford to pay hardly anything to a pastor. Billy George and I used to play. This was in 1943. We did not have any toys in those days, but we had these glass syrup bottles with two finger holes in them and we used these as cars. We would take a hoe and make ourselves

roads in the dirt and run our cars. We added the sound effects...’brbrbrbrrrrrr’. We played in the haylofts, creating our own entertainment as kids, playing cowboys and Indians. We did a lot of cloud watching, laying on our backs and making believe that the clouds looked like a rabbit or a cow or whatever. Ruth and I used to do this as well.

One spring Dad bought two piglets. We raised those piglets into full grown hogs. Later that fall when the pigs were grown, several guys came over and I watched as they shot the pigs between the eyes with a 22 rifle and the pigs just dropped. They then strung them up in trees and gutted them. We smoked them in a smoke house and cured the pork with salt and had pork that winter. We did not have electricity in the house. We had kerosene lamps, outdoor plumbing meaning an outhouse, and a wood cook stove.

Our house, the farm and the church was all within walking distance back in those days. Dad founded the church under a shade tree close to the house. Finally, the church was given a piece of land, and it really wasn’t much of a piece of land since it was located right next to a drainage ditch used to drain the land around there. Everyone helped to build the first church there at Bird’s Corner. When the floods came, the water would lap up under the floor of the church. Dad was some kind of preacher! He was just.....special!”

During this time (spring of 1940) the little house the family lived in outside of Risco was not big enough for the family so they moved just outside of Essex, Missouri (Rural Route #2) up in Stoddard County. It appears Uncle Herman and Aunt Ova helped in this process in order for Dad to continue to work on the plantation. Uncle Herman built a new house just east of Bird’s Corner, Missouri which is west of Sikeston about 9 miles.

Back in those days, women didn’t nurse in public and mom would go down underneath the church to nurse Paul. They had built the church upon concrete blocks or stilts in that part of the country to get it off the ground; and there was space under the floor of the church and women would use it for nursing their babies. They had no indoor bathrooms, but usually would build an outdoor toilet people would use. Too, you could go to the woods or into the fields when crops were high enough to hide you.

Often water would rise because of the rains up to the floor boards of our house and we had to walk out of our house onto big boards that were laid down out to the road. This is about the time old Wolf disappeared. We had a milk cow and the cow had a calf that year. Dad was so proud of that cow and calf. Well the calf got out of the barn lot one day and began to run around and Dad picked up a dirt clod and threw it at him and hit it in the head and killed it. He did not butcher the calf or eat any of it even though we needed the food or money for that calf. He was so sad about it he gave it to the neighbors to butcher and eat.

On September 11, 1943, Dad presided over his first wedding ceremony. It took place at the little church in Bird's Corner, Missouri. The couple that was united in marriage that day was George C. Carlisle of Tanner, Missouri, and Olive J. Burton of Crowder, Missouri.



My father was always one to keep records and details of weddings, tithes, funerals and even his own sermons which he would categorize and file away for future sermons or references. He wore out countless Bibles over the years, marking them, dog earing them until mother would say, Clarence, it's time to get a new one." He would reply, "But I just got this one broke in."

His details of 133 marriages he performed are written in a book entitled, *Record of Marriages Solemnized*, which became the source of the above information. I am sure that many marriages did not get recorded because he also assisted in weddings that were not recorded. The last marriage dad performed was for my nephew Lyndon Blake Bays and Robyn Lynn Janzekobich at Bolivar Assembly of God church in Bolivar, Mo., on the 30th of December, 1988. My niece and her husband Michelle and Trent Humbert were witnesses that day. It seemed appropriate that his last wedding dad performed would be a family member.

Tornado!

Not far from Bird's Corner where Dad pastored was the little brick sided share cropper's house we lived in. It sat on concrete blocks close to the plantation owned by Uncle Herman Smith. Uncle Ernest, Dad's brother, moved in with the family and worked with dad in the fields. It was about 4:00 in the afternoon of Tuesday, April 30, 1940. A storm came up and dad was out on the wagon pulled by a mule team bringing in corn along the levee. Paul was six months old at the time and mom saw the storm coming and she could see that a tornado touched down not far from the house and it was headed straight for them! She yelled for Ruth and Ernest to come in the house. She threw Paul who was just a baby at the time, onto a feather bed mattress in the bedroom and grabbed Ruth and placed her alongside Paul and covered them with her on body, while Uncle Ernest held onto the door to hold it against the wind. The cyclone picked up the house off the concrete blocks and what seemed like a long time, finally sat it down on the ground away from the original concrete block foundation. It had happened quickly, but it seemed like slow motion at the time. The only damage was a glass fell off the counter and broke in the kitchen! Oh, my! Mom was a prayer warrior all her life, and that was a miraculous time when God answered her prayers, again! Dad was out in the midst of the storm, and saw the tornado head toward the house, but he made it untouched too! It was over by the time he got to them, but he had been watching the storm and the house, so he was earnestly praying as well. The family continued to live in the house where the tornado sat it down for the rest of Dad's time pastoring at Bird's Corner. Of course, there was a great testimony from what happened and mom and dad testified to the church the next Sunday morning and a praise and prayer meeting broke out for much of the day! Dad said, "Well, it just goes to show you that you can't have a testimony without a test!"



Charlotte at age of 1 year old next to house after the tornado.

Later we learned that three tornados had hit the area, the first one beginning on Monday night April 29. The second two were Tuesday afternoon and evening. Four people were killed and according to the Sikeston Standard \$300,000 in damages were estimated across Southeast Missouri including the towns of Sikeston, New Madrid, Wyatt, Charleston, Chaffee and others. And out on the plantation, God was answering prayer!

Bird's Corner

Until the summer of 1946 the family continued to live in that house that sat flat on the ground, because they didn't have any place else to go and it was quite convenient to the plantation, the church and the school where Ruth and Paul attended. Dad continued to preach in the area and the church prospered and grew.

December 14, 1944 Dad was drafted into the U. S. Army as a chaplain. He did not serve long but was discharged in the spring of 1945 because of Mother's persistence that she could not make it financially without Clarence. He returned to Bird's Corner and continued pastoring and working on the plantation.

Ruth recalled:

At Bird's Corner we all had the flu one Christmas, but we still received gifts from Santa including an orange and apple and a few nuts that year. We didn't have candy that year. Even dad was in bed with the flu. We piled quilts and quilts and quilts on top of us to stay warm.

Once when Dad was preaching when we lived at Bird's Corner, the Holy Spirit fell and a woman was dancing in the Spirit and it was in the winter time. The wood stove in the church had a pipe that ran up through the ceiling to let the smoke out. Well, the pipe was red hot that night and this lady fell into that stove and pipe and it never even made a mark on her face. That experience was when I knew the Lord was real! God protected her! Out of that first church in Bird's Corner came 25 or 27 (depends on who you ask) preachers as a result of Dad and Mom's ministry. Attendance was about 150 people if I recall.

On June 3, 1945, Mother gave birth to Gary Keith. He lived only a few hours and died with complications. It broke Mom and Dad's heart. Gary was buried in Bloomfield Cemetery a few days later.

Paul and Ruth came down with the mumps during this time while mom was still in the hospital. Aunt Ova came over and took care of the children while mom was sick. The death took our mother to a new level of depression. She could not understand what had happened and felt such guilt about Gary Keith's death. It wasn't long however, before she became pregnant again. There was anxiety as well as excitement in the Hampton household having just experienced the death of Gary Keith just months before.



Author standing in front of the Bird's Corner church in 2013

The Cupboard is Bare

It was not uncommon to run out of food during the depression years and oft times the cupboard would go bare. This especially occurred during the latter part of winter when the canned goods and vegetables would be eaten up. Well finally, it got to my dad during morning devotions. He simply said, “I am tired of eating just mush.” The family had gathered and read the word and prayed before breakfast. Dad felt so discouraged, but said, “Get back on your knees. We are going to pray for food.” So they all knelt again and dad began to pray and cry out to the Lord, “Lord you said in the Word that you would provide for us. We need food, Father. We need it now....He had barely got the words out when a knock came at the door. Mom went to the front door and there was a stranger with sacks of groceries and not just any groceries, but meat, potatoes, tomatoes, milk, eggs, bacon, biscuits (the author is simply providing an example), and o yeah, some candy...and so on. He sat them down on the floor in the doorway. Everyone was stunned! Wow! What a miracle! Oh, I know what you’re thinking..... just coincidence and of course if the story ended there you might have been right. Well, dad had gotten up from his knees to help mom carry the sacks into the kitchen and went back to thank and invite the stranger in, but he had already left. “Hmmm,” Dad said and he opened the door hurried out stepping into the snow that had fallen during the night; and the stranger was nowhere to be seen! Not a single foot print was found in the snow that morning. My father went back inside and told the family what happened. Everyone ran to the front door to look out at the signs of this miracle! My mother began to cry and so did the rest of the family that day. Mom and Dad then began to rejoice and offer up thanks, “thank you Lord for what you have done for our family today!” There was such rejoicing and thanking and wondering at this miracle and the fulfillment of one of God’s promises. Then our first real breakfast in months took place! My, oh my, what an amazing testimony we had to share over the years of the goodness of God on that cold snowy morning!

Canalou 1946-1949

In the summer of 1946, Dad felt the call to apply at the church at Canalou, Missouri which was a small town. The church in Canalou voted Dad to be their Pastor and so we moved. Canalou is located just inside New Madrid County and in those days was a town of farm laborers. There were approximately 420 people living there by 1946. All but three of the streets in the town are named after Presidents which was quite common for small towns.

That same year the United Nations held its first meeting in London, the first Tupperware is sold in department stores, the NFL team San Francisco 49ers is formed, Diane Keaton, Dolly Parton, President Donald Trump, President Bill Clinton, Danny Glover, Steven Spielberg, and Billy Preston were born.

On July 14, 1946 I was born in Sikeston Hospital. My umbilical cord was wrapped around my neck upon birth, so my body was quite a blue color when the doctor delivered me. He immediately began to try to get me to breathe by slapping me on the butt, and finally I took my first breath and began to cry. It was the sweetest music to my mother and father who both began to cry in relief of my birth. My mother told me when I was much older that God had promised her a baby that would help her heal from Gary Keith's death. I felt quite honored to have been destined to help heal my mother and father's grief.

About 20 months after my birth, an incident happened that could have impacted the rest of my life. It was about February 1948 with the sun breaking through and mother as was her custom decided it was a good day to wash and hang clothes on the line. She had finished and placed a pan of starch on the wood stove to boil and heat up before adding to a rinse tub for the shirts and blouses. She sat the hot boiling starch off the stove and onto the kitchen table and ran out to refill the tub with fresh water. Ruth and Charlotte were busy in the kitchen helping mother with some of the laundry, and I was underneath everyone's feet. As I was told later, I decided to crawl up on a chair next to the kitchen table and as I reached to pull myself up, I grabbed the handle of the boiling starch and pulled it down all over me. I let out a scream and my two sisters came running along with my mother who quickly grabbed a cloth. I was using both hands they said to grab at the glue like starch which had already scalded me. Starch was dripping off my head and down both shoulders and my back. My mother was crying and praying and so were my two sisters as they pulled my clothes off. Skin began to come off with the clothes and I continued to scream losing my breath and gasping for air. A neighbor came running over and took my mother and me to the doctor. By the time we had got there, the burns had set and the Doctor shook his head and said, "There is very little I can do. These are second and third degree burns. He really needs to be in a hospital." Of course, we couldn't afford such a thing. He spread Blue Ointment over the burns and told mother to clean the wounds at least twice a day and cover them with clean cloths after applying the blue ointment. He said they would seep and to continue to change the cloths as often as necessary. Although the burns

took time to heal, I began to experience less pain within several days. The doctor said these burns would leave scars all over my body as they healed. I was placed on my stomach in my crib at night from then on until my back began to finally heal. My sister Ruth saved her lunch money and bought me a pair of house shoes to keep my feet protected from infection and they acted like a band aid on the burns. My sisters would pull me around in a wagon with a pillow nested enough for me to lay on my stomach otherwise the pain was too great to the touch.

The scars that the doctor predicted never happened to the extent he thought because of the answer to prayer. My mother prayed specific prayers, “Lord don’t let him be scarred. Lord help us to know what to do. Lord give us wisdom. Lord please give him rest each night.” Lord bring on the new skin just like a newborn.”

I had no skin grafts, no extra treatment and no major scarring with new skin replacing the old. My face had no scarring and even in the hairline which had been covered by the boiling starch, no visible scarring could be seen. My back, shoulders, and arms had been covered, but it is difficult to see them unless you really knew what you were looking for. It was almost as if it never happened! “Praise you Lord for such healing miracles! Thank You! Thank You! Thank You!” She prayed. Even to this day my sisters would talk about that experience. Each of them felt guilty about it, but it was my doing and it truly was nothing less than a miracle!



Locusts!

Dad told us a story of one of the church members who was a farmer who came to him one day during a particular time when his soy bean crops was about to be devoured by a swarm of locusts that had been headed toward our community and the farms around Canalou.

The farmer with a southern drawl said, “Now Pastor, you know I’m a tither, and these here grasshoppers and locusts are comin’ and eatin’ up everything in their path. I want you to come out and pray over my field for protection.”

“In Malachi 3 God promised He would protect our crops from pests and pestilence.” Dad replied, “I’ll be right out!”

Dad went out there with the farmer and knelt down and prayed, “God, you know our brother here is a tither. You said you would rebuke the devourer for our sake. We are asking you to fulfil that promise in your son, Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Dad got up and said, “Let me know if I can do anything else for you.”

Dad shared later how the locusts came right up to the fence row of that farmer’s house and fields and stopped right there and piled up against the fence row. The locusts flew around and over his fields, and went on to neighbors’ fields, but his crops were not touched! Praise God!! God fulfills His promises and He takes care of business!



Our two room house in Canalou (picture taken in 2013).

The Raising!

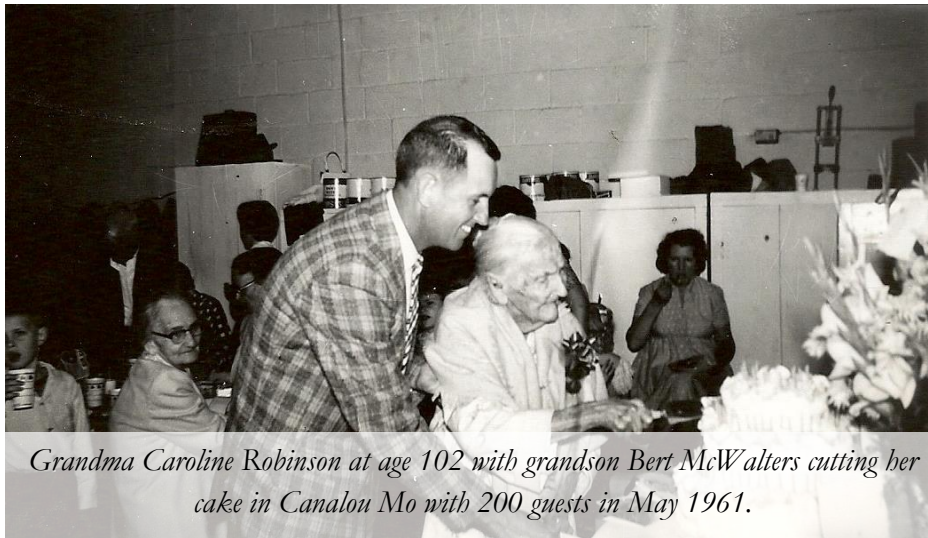
Another miracle took place not long after...Living next door was Grandma Caroline Robinson. She was a woman of faith and had been attending our church regularly. She was well liked in the town and everyone knew her as Grandma Robinson. Life was very rough in those days in trying to provide for your family and yourself. Grandma Robinson was one who provided in creative ways over the years. She could clean, can and cook just about anything. She was getting up in years and by the late '40s she had been quite sick with a heart condition.



One day one of her granddaughters came over to our house and knocked on our door. With tears streaming down her face she said, “Grandma has died of a heart attack. Is the Pastor here? We’re goin’ta need him to come and help make arrangements for her fyunral.” Dad was out somewhere visiting someone or at the church preparing his next sermon or simply praying, but finally he was located.

Dad walked over to Grandma Robinson’s small house and as he entered he could tell she was dead. She had already turned a dark blueish black...she wasn’t breathing and everyone had already crowded into the house and was crying because she had died...she was about 87 years old at this time...well Dad surprised everyone when he finally opened his mouth and began to pray, ”Sister Robinson! You get on up out of there right now! Open your eyes and come up out of there in the name of Jesus!” And of course she did! She opened her eyes, coughed several times and sat up! Well there was a lot of praising God and rejoicing the rest of the day...Word spread quickly through

the small town and it seemed everyone showed up on Sunday morning for church except the people who were quite critical...”she must have just fainted...she wasn’t dead...she couldn’t have died...it’s a bunch of holy rollers talkin...hooley”...and other things. Needless to say she lived another 15 years and celebrated her 102nd birthday before she finally passed away. More than 200 showed up for her birthday while her grandson, Bert McWalters helped her cut the cake...she made the front page of the Sikeston Herald newspaper. It was a simple prayer offered up in faith by my father. As he later said, “It wasn’t anything I did. I can do nothing without Him. God gets all the Glory!”



Grandma Caroline Robinson at age 102 with grandson Bert McWalters cutting her cake in Canalou Mo with 200 guests in May 1961.



The AG church in Canalou in 2013

Helena 1949-1952

We moved to Helena, Arkansas in the spring of 1949. That same year it snowed in Los Angeles, California for the first time and the storm moved into the plains with a series of blizzards which wiped out tens of thousands of livestock across 6 states. Harry S. Truman was inaugurated for his full term as President; the first VW bug came to the U. S.; David Ben-Gurion becomes Prime Minister in the first Israeli election; the NATO defense alliance is created; Ireland becomes a Republic leaving the British Commonwealth; the People's Republic of China becomes official; Meryl Streep, John Belushi, George Foreman, Lionel Richie, and Billy Joel are born. Margaret Mitchell, who wrote *Gone with the Wind*, was hit by a car while crossing the street in Atlanta and died 5 days later. She was 48.

Helena is located 75 miles down the Mississippi river from Memphis. It was founded as the Phillips County seat in 1833. It became a steamboat port and an important commercial center for the cotton Arkansas Delta area. It was also known for its famous Jewish heritage.

Bill Clinton, former President, Alex Johnson, a major league baseball player, Conway Twitty, a country singer, and Red Holloway, a jazz saxophonist, were some of the more notable people who lived at various times in Helena. In addition, John Hanks Alexander, the second African American to graduate from the U. S. Military Academy and the first officer in the U.S. armed forces to command American forces had grown up in Helena.

We moved into the back of an old Presbyterian church which was in dire need of repair located at 520 Franklin Street. The first Sunday we were there we had 25 people and the offerings were nearly nothing because no one could afford to give much in those days. My father and several of the local members of the congregation began the restoration of the church. It had been abandoned and the Assembly of God organization purchased it.

We lived in what was used as various Sunday school rooms with a long hallway running the full length across the back. We had a side entrance with a set of stairs leading up to a small porch. For me, it was my first recollection of life. I recall that across Porter Street which intersected Franklin Street, were many small houses with porches and everyone would sit out on the front porch and wave as people passed by.



PORTER & FRANKLIN STREETS, HELENA

The old church in the picture was located where the M-C Drug Store now stands.

Old First Presbyterian Church
sold in 1924 to Christian
church

First the Old Presbyterian Church, then a Christian Church and finally an AG Church

It was a friendly inner city neighborhood made up mostly of middle to low income African Americans. We were the minority in our area. Across Franklin sat a new apartment building with several families living. A young teenage black baby sitter for one of the tenants used to talk with us kids. I remember one day she took me into the bathroom and showed me when she washed her hands the color would not come off. It was my first experience with a black person and I loved to go over and play in the apartment complex because the kids were so friendly and easy going. We played all kinds of games including hide and seek, red rover, marbles and even used pop bottles as make believe cars and trucks. A small garden had been planted alongside the building, and we could make roads in the dirt in between plants.

This young woman's mother, if I recall correctly also tended to children in the apartment complex and the neighborhood. Michael, our youngest brother, recalled how she befriended him:

“There was a family that lived across the street that we were allowed to go visit...maybe it wasn't directly across the street but in the neighborhood...and they had a housekeeper...a large African American woman...an Aunt Jemima type...she changed my life and had a spiritual impact on my life that caused me to really rebel against the family traditions of the South of racism...and I didn't realize it until many years later when I was married with my own kids...and somebody asked me of the first recollection you have of a person of

color...and I recall her taking me and sitting down with me...she used to do the laundry...it seemed like she was always ironing...and I recall her making cookies for us...and letting us kids have one and she took me in her lap and talked to me in a way...that you knew there was something deep...deeply spiritual about this person...”

To this day Michael has had such a sense of compassion and love for all races defending the causes of fighting social injustices, not just in our country, but around the world.

We kids would send Michael, him being the youngest, to Mom or Dad to ask for things because we believed that they loved him more than us and wouldn't say no as often to him...of course this wasn't true, but we thought it anyway...

Paul recalled his early years in Helena as well, “Dad was busy refurbishing the church in those first few months. I enrolled in the 5th grade. I guess my interest in school just totally collapsed that first semester because I made 7 “F”s. Boy was I in hot water! They got better after that. Well the only way from the bottom is up so they improved some after that. I used to go swimming in the Mississippi river. Another time I got caught sittin’ on top of a water tower that would provide water for the steam trains. I was dangling my feet in the water. It was down by a big compound, in the rail yards where they were storing cotton bales. The only reason I got caught was I had sat my shoes down at the bottom of the ladder, and a guard came along and he saw my shoes sittin there. And he looked up and there I sat on top of the tower. Heh, heh. It had a trap door there and I thought it was perfect for dangling my feet in. Those were true Tom Sawyer days. We did a little bit of everything. There was a cave outside the back of the school I attended. The cave was down close to Bunky Lynn’s house. Bunky was a friend of mine. Allen was his name but we called him Bunky and he and his family attended our church. He would invite me over for dinner on Sunday after church which was quite common in those days. And we would play then come back that night for church services. One afternoon, Bunky found some money in his mother’s house and so we went down and bought a pack of Lucky Strike cigarettes. We proceeded to smoke some cigarettes...and I came back from playing with Bunky and I smelled to high heaven of cigarette smoke, and you didn’t pull anything over on Dad and he ‘read my pedigree’ that night after church. It was one thing after another. And there was a dirt hill behind the school with grape vines hanging on it and we dug a cave back there out of the side of that hill and would swing out over the top of it and hang out down there. It was a lot of fun. One day another boy was picking on me and I had a pair of leather gloves, anyway I proceeded to put those gloves on and I hauled off and popped him one...needless to say they took us down to the principal’s office and of course, we had to do some kind of penance. One thing they had for us to do was square dance lessons. That was a no-no for mom and dad. I got pretty good at square dancing back then and I enjoyed that in school.”

The community readily accepted my family and we began to see more and more people come to the little church.



The new AG church in Helena in the 1960s

The Senath, Missouri, Years (1952-1955)

We moved to Senath in 1952. I was six years old while my brother, Michael was four. I started in the first grade right after we moved there. I remember my teacher was Mrs. Bacon and she was young and very pretty. I recall learning my ABCs and began to feel more confident about myself and everything even though I still had trouble pronouncing words, sounds and syllables at times. I do recall during a nap period, we were lying on the floor and another boy had some Crayola's. We were close to the wall and begin to color the wall with different colors as though that was what the wall was for. Boy did we get into trouble and I had to stay after school and try to clean up the wall. I'm sure I got a lickin' when I got home that afternoon.



Mother and Dad standing in front of the parsonage at Senath.

The parsonage we lived in was a small 3 bedroom bungalow style house next to the church. One Sunday evening, I recall an incident when my mother and father said that Michael and I could stay home. My older sister, Charlotte stayed with us. Michael and I loved to jump on the bed as most children do at one time or another. My sister was doing something out in the living room and we were jumping on Charlotte's bed, because it was the bounciest bed in the house. We were having great fun until I did a backward flip off the edge of the bed and hit an electrical outlet on the wall with the crown of my head. Blood began to spurt everywhere! I screamed of course and my sister came running and saw all the blood. She immediately ran and got a towel, but the blood continued to flow. She told me to hold the towel to my head and she ran to get mom. In no time Mother showed up and began to comfort me and hold the towel which still hadn't stopped the blood flow. Not surprisingly, she began to pray," Lord, we need your help. The blood just won't stop. It says in Your Word Lord, 'And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live.' (This verse is from Ezekiel 16:6 KJV) Thank you, Lord in Jesus name!" My head stopped bleeding immediately! The open wound closed and healed quickly over the next several days. Needless to say it cured me of my jumping on the bed.

In Senath, we saw television for the first time at a neighbor's house. The show was Disney and it was in color! It came on Sunday night, so we couldn't stay through the whole show because church began at 7:00 p.m. We would scurry over with a friend about 6:00 and watch an episode halfway through then scurry back before it was time to go to church.

We lived in the parsonage on a dirt street behind the church. There were amazingly deep pot holes and when it rained it created these huge puddles along the street which were perfect for wading and using pieces of wood for boats. I remember we would take part planks of wood and cut them into boat shapes and add little squares of wood on the top for the steering house and had great fun. Of course, this led to us getting soaked and muddy, so the clothes had to come off quickly before we entered the house...

Once, someone gave mom and dad an interesting pepper bush...Michael recalled it this way:

I remember a little pepper bush sitting on the kitchen table that just being in the room with it your eyes would water because the peppers were so hot... I think someone gave it to mom and dad...which was quite common...and they were the tiny little dry red and green peppers...if you touched one of those it would burn your skin...and of course, someone was daring me to take one and eat it...and I did and it burned so bad...maybe that was the beginning of my aversion to spicy foods...I don't know...

Michael continued:

We had a dog named Tippy...it was a Boston terrier that loved to bite everybody...we eventually had to get rid of it...

We had a cat that was prolific as a mom...she just kept on having litters...she was an amazing mouser...and finally dad had enough and he hauled her off in a car toward Sikeston, Missouri, about 30 miles away...it wasn't long before she came home...finally he said ok...she would catch mice inside and outside the house. We seldom saw a mouse after that if ever...

The church was made up mostly of farmers or farm workers. Cotton was the big industry and many of the cotton farmers were members. Their children made great playmates and on occasion I and my brother would get to go home with one of them for Sunday dinner and return for church that evening. We would spend the afternoons running the farms and playing in the cotton fields. It was always fun to head out to the farm and help with the chores of my friends. Of course we were fed quite well by my friends' moms.



Michael recalled about living in Senath:

One summer the whole family went to work in the cotton fields and I went along. I remember sometimes I would stay near the wagon and other times my mother and father would tie up an old neck tie to a flour sack and I would pick cotton as well. This is in southern Missouri so we are talking about extremely hot summers and early fall days.

Well, one day I decided I was going to walk home. Our house was several miles...maybe two or three miles from this cotton field...it's a dirt road and I'm walking. This guy pulls up in a pickup truck. "Son, where are you going? Where did you come from and why are you out here?" Said the man. And I said, "My mom and dad are picking cotton back down there and it's ok for me to go to the house. We live in Senath."

He replied, "Are you sure?"

I said, "Yeh."

He asked, "Do you know the way to your house?"

I said, "Yes, I know my way."

He said, "Well, get in the back of the truck and I'll take you there."

So I was sitting in the back of this guy's truck and I told him where we lived by the Assembly of God church and he dropped me off. I had a little wooden rocking chair that I was sitting in on the front porch. My mother and father had looked for me all over that cotton field and down the country roads and along the ditches, many filled with water...scared to death not knowing what had happened to me. Well they were frantic...I couldn't get into the house but just sat and rocked and dad pulled up in a car and his face was so relieved when he saw me on the front porch...I thought he was going to whip me pretty bad...and he didn't because he was so relieved.

He was angry as he asked me, "where have you been...how did you get here...why did you leave the field...but his love overshadowed the anger and he just hugged me and held me.

Cotton Pickin’

From my earliest recollection, my mother and father supplemented whatever salary they might get from pastoring churches with outside work. The earliest of these “part-time jobs” was picking cotton. Now my father had been working for Uncle Herman while pastoring churches at Bird’s Corner and Canalou. Herman’s plantation was quite large and my father managed the laborers on the plantation. Although he did not pick cotton often, on occasion he would jump in and lend a hand as well. He and mom were able to pick as much as 250 to 275 pounds per day each depending on the quality of the field. A bale of cotton weighs 500 pounds and it has been said that in the 1860s a slave might pick as much as three bales per day, but I have never seen anyone pick that much cotton in a day. I suppose if you worked from dawn until dusk you might. When we moved from Canalou to Senath, then I began to go to the fields with my parents. We had several members of the church in Senath, where my parents pastored, who were cotton farmers and invited my parents to come and pick and earn extra money. We would take our lunch which usually consisted of bologna sandwiches and pork and beans from a can. We would wash it down with water from a big jug. My mother took one of her old cotton sacks and cut it down to fit me. So I tagged along side of her or right behind her and she would leave me an easy boll of cotton or two to pick. I think my best day yielded 27 pounds. I felt like a king earning 5 cents that day.



A cotton picker in the 30s who looks a lot like our father.

Cotton is not easy to pick. It is back breaking work. The cotton itself is held in a cotton boll, and when it ripens the cotton breaks out in a fluffy ball within the boll. When the boll opens up and shows the cotton, very sharp thorny like points come to the tip of the bowl like swords waiting to stick your hand as you reach to pluck the fluff of cotton from the boll. Mom and dad used to wear cotton gloves, ironically with the fingers cut out to lessen the chances of getting stuck. But their hands often were covered by pricks and sometimes became bloody in the fields. Iodine or mercurochrome was used to keep it from getting infected. They were paid very little in the early 50s for picking cotton but somehow managed to earn as much as \$2.65 per 100 pounds each. On a good day, they could bring home as much as \$13 or \$14 per day combined. Of course today, modern machinery has replaced the cotton picker here in the U.S., but it is still intensive human labor in Ukraine, Uzbekistan and India that harvests cotton.

Fishin'

Dad loved to fish. Not only was he a “fisher of men”, but he would also go fishing for fish. The first time dad took me fishing, we were living in Senath. I must have been all of 6 years old maybe 7 at the time. He and a man from our church headed over a dirt road that ran in between a couple of drainage ditches in southeast Missouri several miles outside of Senath. We parked along a dirt road and took a path through a small forest until it opened up into a clearing and there was a large muddy looking river flowing and the ditches flowed into this river which later ran into the mighty Mississippi. Dad and a friend loaded their hooks with what I later learned was liver and dough bait and cast it out in to the river and sat down and waited. “The thing about fishin, son,” he said, “is you must be patient. It’s not like they just been waitin for you to come along and catch them. They feed certain times of the day just like you and me. And on occasion they’ll have a snack in between, but it had better look good to them to eat.” My dad had on a set of coveralls and he also had a pair of rubber boots that came up to the middle of his calf. It had been raining that morning and the ground was quite wet, but I was having a great time. He let me hold the fishing pole and showed me how to cast as well. I tried a few times and began to get the hang of it. I was so proud to be along that day. I never forgot it.

Later, when we moved to Bolivar, Missouri, my brother, Michael and I would ride out to the park where there was a small lake filled with fish. We would carry our fishing poles that dad had purchased for each of us. We also had a small tackle box with hooks, line and lures. We did this once or twice a week during the summer. We would have contests to see who could catch the most fish. One year there was a kid’s fishing tournament and Michael and I entered and headed out to fish. We caught more than 100 fish that morning and placed in the tournament and won a small fishing trophy of some kind. Needless to say, we thought we were the best fishermen in the world!

The Tithe

In doing the research for this book, I came across a copy of my father's old tithing notebook. Now if you have never heard of a "tithe" which literally means tenth, it refers to giving a tenth of one's income to the church, synagogue or other religious organization. My father would often preach on the topic from Chapter 3 in the book of Malachi in the Bible, where God is chastising Israel for forgetting to pay their tithes. The scripture suggests that the people of Israel were under a curse for not doing so and that if they would return to tithing, the curse would be removed and a blessing could then be "poured out."

In Malachi 3:6-12 (NIV) it reads as follows:

"I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.

Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty, "But you ask, 'How are we to return?'

"Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?'"
"In tithes and offerings.

You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me.

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.

I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe," says the LORD Almighty.

"Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty.

Mother and Father firmly believed in tithing and offerings and both practiced this call to obedience all of their lives. We thought at times that God did not always honor His promise and mistook tithing scriptures for a right to His bank account, but in looking back over our lives and the lives of our parents not only did God fulfill financially, but spiritually, physically and emotionally; "the

floodgates were opened!” in so many ways and we have been an extremely blessed family lacking nothing of importance.

Dad was meticulous in keeping track of his early tithing and recording them to the last penny for example in 1951 the first page of his Tithing Record at Senath Missouri read as follows:

Senath’s Tithes and Offerings 1951

August 3	Bro. & Sis. Locke	Juices	\$00.50
3	Bro. & Sis. Locke	Butter	\$00.35
August 4	Bro. & Sis. Locke	2 chickens	\$02.00
4	Bro. Harper	veg.	\$01.00
5	Sunday Morning Offering		\$28.99
8	Bro. McNew	1 gal. Milk	\$00.50
8	Bro. & Sis. Locke	1 bunch grapes	\$01.50
8	Sis. Vowell	groceries	\$00.85
8	Sis. Norris	cash	\$03.00
8	Sis Bonner	cash	\$01.50
8	Bro. Harper	tomatoes	\$00.50
August 12	Bro. Seward	cash	\$03.75
August 12	Sis. Schnomga	1 gal. Milk	\$00.50
August 12	Sunday Morning Offering		\$29.50
August 12	Sunday Night Offering		\$10.54
August 12	Cash offering on General Council (G. C.) Trip		\$36.00
	Sis. Wilson	cash G. C.	\$03.00
	Sis. Vowell	cash G. C.	\$03.50
	Sis. Locke	1 pie	\$00.55
	Bro. Locke	cash G. C.	\$07.00
August 19	Sunday Offerings		\$28.84
	Sis. Vowell	groceries	\$01.57
August 26	Sunday Morning Offering		\$32.43
	Sunday Night Offering		\$10.84
August 28	Bro. Bonner	cash	\$04.00

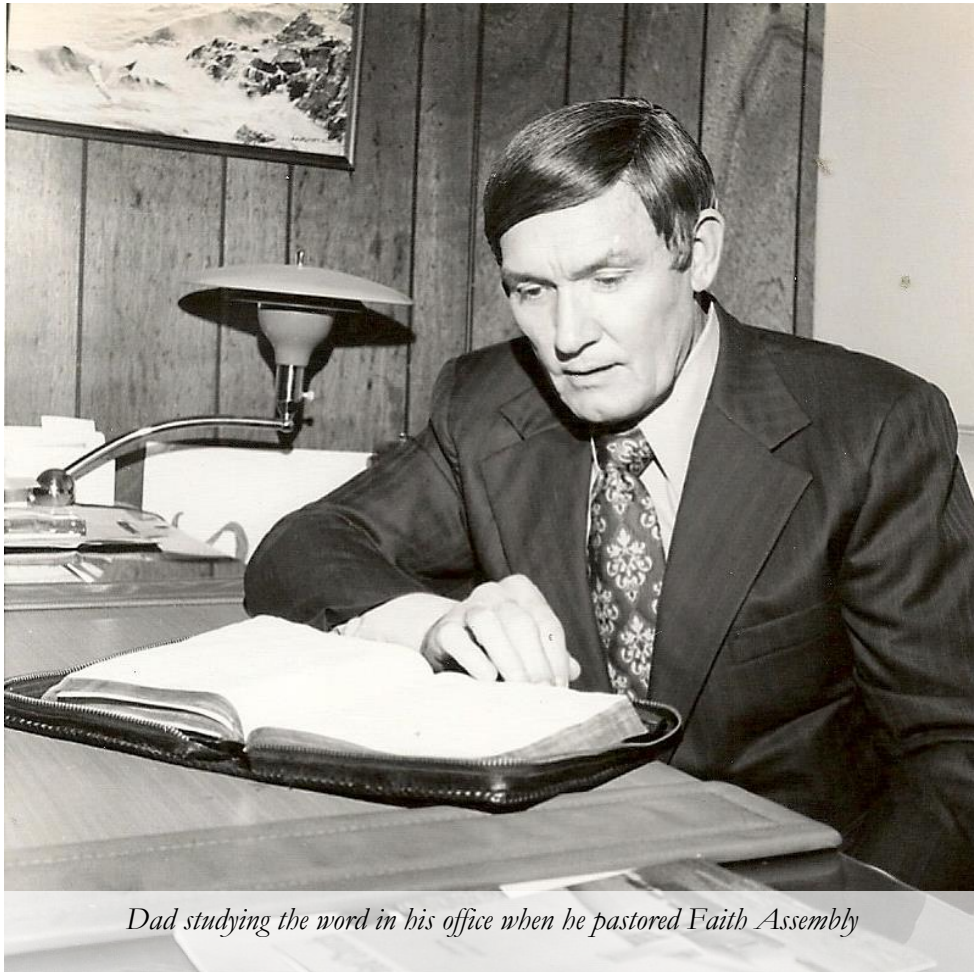
Dad would then total up each week and pay his own tithes either weekly and occasion monthly depending on how the church paid him. He filled up the little tithing journal throughout his 6 years (through 1956) pastoring at Senath. The blessings continued to pour out on our family during the remainder of their lives.



Mother and Father in our front yard at Senath - 1952

The Word

Most people call it the Bible, and of course, so did mom and dad, but they also referred to it as simply “the Word.” It was a part of our lives every single day. As early as any of us can remember in our family we had devotions that consisted of reading God’s Word or the Bible every morning and every evening along with prayer. We began by reading a chapter out of the Bible and then we would pray. When I say “we” I mean each of us was to read a verse or two as we went around the room. And yes, then each of us was expected to pray out loud. This became such a habit for us that if there happened to be a time we didn’t for whatever reason, we felt a void in our day. The Word then became the foundation for our faith but this was also a part of our “DNA” as a family. We prayed all kinds of prayers including “Now I lay me down to sleep...Come Lord Jesus be our guest...Our Father who art in heaven...but mom and dad also prayed simple prayers covering family members that were not there any longer and including sick ones in our church, our neighborhood and our extended family as well as for missionaries and pastors of other churches.



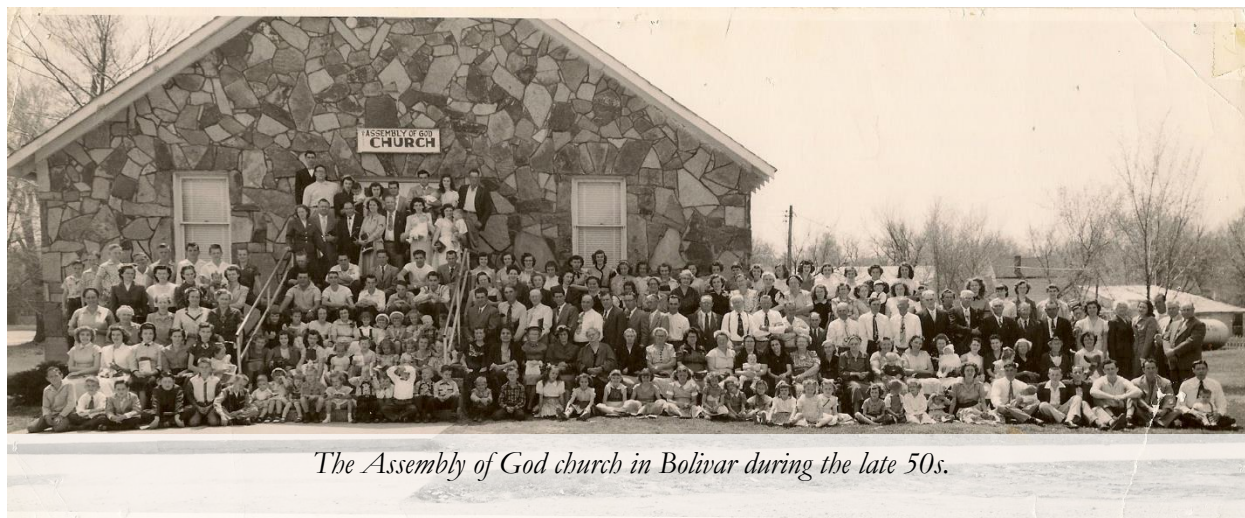
Dad studying the word in his office when he pastored Faith Assembly

Yes a lot of dos and don'ts laid the foundations for our ethics and moral standards throughout life and even today I can hear my father or mother say, "Let's see what God or Jesus had to say about that." So as a preacher's kid (PK) I had a different set of standards laid out for me. I can recall I didn't see my first movie at a theater until I went off to college. I didn't like the strictness of this rule, but can understand today why my parents didn't allow us to go. I can recall I was the only one in my class that was not allowed to go see, "The Ten Commandments." I think I had to more or less beg my parents to let me go to the prom in high school because there would be dancing there.

Giving credit to our parents and their influence on our lives, the Word of God is still a guide post to each of our families in each of our homes touching our children, grandchildren and in some of our homes, great grandchildren.

Bolivar, Missouri

We moved to Bolivar, Missouri, from Senath, Missouri in May, 1955. Clifford Cribbs, a deacon in the Assembly of God church dad pastored, who later became one of dad's dearest friends, moved us in one of his insulation trucks from the Bolivar Insulation company. That same year Disney Land opens in Anaheim California. A TV quiz program, *The \$64,000 Question* and the cowboy show *Gunsmoke* premier on CBS-TV. "Claudette Covin, a fifteen year old African American girl refuses to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, to a white woman after the driver demands it. She is carried off the bus backwards whilst being kicked and handcuffed and harassed on the way to the police station," one newspaper reported. Steve Jobs of Apple, Inc., Maria Shriver, Howie Mandell, and Olga Korbet were born.



The Assembly of God church in Bolivar during the late 50s.

Our next door neighbors were the Stevens family including Art and Naomi and their two children Larry and Arleta. They had the most wonderful dog named Shep (he was a Shepard collie). Art was a cabinet maker and Naomi (Niccum was her maiden name) was a stay at home mom who later was the children's ministry director at the church. They attended church regularly and Ilene and Naomi became great friends just as Larry their only son and I did.



Arleta, Larry, Ronnie, and Michael with Shep

Naomi later recounted in an interview, “I remember when I first met your mom and dad...I thought they was the friendliest people...Ilene had one of the nicest smiles and I always appreciated that in her. You know she was going through some very tough times that first year they lived by us....she went through a year or so of real depression. I remember she came over one morning and she was crying....

I asked her, ‘What’s the matter, Ilene?’

She responded, ‘Well I’ve just about had it.’

‘What do ya mean,’ I asked.

‘Well, by the time the kids get off from school everybody is mad and yelling at each other, and this and that...’

I said ‘cause I was young and dumb, ya know, ‘Ya know if you’d be singing in the kitchen by the time the kids got up for breakfast, they’d go off happy.’...I thought I’as real intelligent I’m sure...

A few days later she said, ‘you know I tried what you said and sure nuff it worked.’ She said, ‘I started singing and the first one that came in would start singing with me and then the next one would join in and purtty soon they all went off happy to school!’”

Naomi said, “Another time your mother during this depression time, came over and said, ‘I get so frustrated with those boys (meaning Ronnie and Michael) that I take them into the bathroom (extremely small space) and I have them kneel down facing each other and make them hug each other and say their sorry.’ She asked, ‘You think that works?’ I replied, ‘I don’t know...be one a my kids I’d be skeered one of their ears would disappear. And she laughed and she laughed and she laughed. I later told her I think I’d let um tone down a bit fore I told um to say their sorry.’”

“During those years of depression, as a pastor’s wife people would come to her for help or encouragement and prayer and she would put on that big smile and reach out to them with such comforting and encouraging words, yet she was hurting more than they were. She genuinely loved them and let them know that she really, really cared. I often looked at her and thought, ‘you feel ten times worse than they do.’ She always tried to cheer everybody else up; take care of everybody; she mothered everybody.”

Naomi continued, “Ilene was a real sweet person, but your dad was a character!”

“He was always calling me and always changing his voice to act like someone else was calling. One day I got in trouble ‘cause my neighbor Burt Cox called me one time and his larynx was cancerous, and I thought it was your dad and I kept teasing him ‘til I found out who it was...and I was so embarrassed and I called your dad and said, ‘Never again.’ Of course, he just laughed and laughed.”

Another memory Naomi shared, “Remember that blue parakeet that Mrs. Harris gave you all...well your dad called me one time and said to me, ‘Come over here!’

I said, ‘What’s a matter?’

‘Ahh, just come over here.’

So I went over to your house and he said, ‘I want you to do something with this bird.’

‘What do ya mean do something with that bird?’

He said, ‘Well, she’d (Mrs. Harris) talk to that bird and it would do anything she said. I can’t do anything with it.’

Naomi recalled, you remember that nasal talk Mrs. Harris had? I told your dad, ‘don’t be dumb, just hold your nose like this and talk like her. He and your mom looked at me funny like and so I just said as I held my nose, ‘cum mere Lucky.’ And that bird flew immediately over and landed on my head. So he held his nose and that bird would do anything he said after that. And we laughed all afternoon. I really never thought about it working...but I guess it only knew that nasal sound.”

Lucky became a family pet and we would open his cage every morning and he could fly all over the house. He learned all kinds of tricks and would squawk and sing. He also would cause a few problems by eating the wallpaper or getting entangled in mom's curtains. We were saddened however, when he finally died of old age. He also learned to talk some and would respond to our voice and before long we didn't have to hold our nose, 'cause he must have picked up our language.

Naomi went on: "Your dad was preaching one day and uh, he was going to "salvage the young people. We thought that was hilarious ya know cause we had a couple years of college and so we knew it all. Another time he preached 'the Lord went to Calvary.' Again we thought that was hilarious at the time and of course we made mistakes too in judging his preaching on these topics. Took us a while to know that. But Brother Hampton was a different person when he stepped into the pulpit. I don't remember him ever looking at his sermon notes and his vocabulary changed when he stood up in front of the congregation. Amazing! When he really got into his sermon, his eyes changed completely. It was a focus that was so different than him. The scripture that says not to worry when you are questioned of men, for I will fill your mouth with the words to say. The Holy Spirit would be the witness every time he preached through your dad."

Dad arose early each morning and began his day with prayer. He oft times would head over to the church, which was right next to the parsonage. He would then return and lead mom and us kids in both morning devotions. Before we were sent off to school, we would sit in a circle and each of us would have to read a verse or two from the Bible. Then he would pray with us and bless our day as we left for school. Upon preparing for bed that evening, he would again lead us in prayer and evening devotions and oft times the Bible reading would take place as well. If he was away holding revivals somewhere, then mom would lead the ritual.

Naomi continued, "I remember your dad's laugh. When your dad got tickled about something, he would laugh and his shoulders begin to rock up and down and this took the laughing to a new level and he laughed and he laughed and he laughed and he could hardly stop, ya know.

On a more serious note Naomi recalled, "I remember another time when your dad turned your brother, Paul into the police," Naomi recalled.

My brother, who was all of 16 at the time, had gotten into running with the wrong bunch of boys who were much older than him and talked him into helping them break into a grocery store, which was only a block away from the church and parsonage. They had Paul stand guard outside the grocery and he also broke out the street lights so it would be darker in the grocery.



“Ya know,” Naomi said, “he saved your brother’s life when he did it, but it was the hardest thing he ever had to do. I often thought over the years that would be the hardest thing you would ever have to do to your child. Your dad knew it was the best thing to do at the time. He saved his life! He actually saved his life! But oh, how it hurt him and your mom.”

My sister Charlotte recalled, “I can remember my mother and my dad fussing over that deal. My mother was just crying, ‘please don’t put him in that jail, please don’t.’ And I can remember what my dad said to her, ‘He (Paul) has to know right now, ‘cause he’s making a choice. Does he really want to live a life in jail? He has to decide right now which way he will go.’

Naomi continued, “I was over at church one day teaching children’s church and your dad would always come in and listen when I would tell stories to the children. He was sitting there as if he was kinda lost, sitting in the back not to disturb the kids. And uh, as I was finishing and starting out the door I just put a hand on his shoulder...he kinda grabbed my hand and whirled me around to stop me and I said, ‘What?’”

And he said, “Did I do the right thing?”

“Well this was quite a while afterwards and so I asked, ‘What do you mean?’

And he said, “Paul.”

“Well I’ll tell ya...the first week, I thought you’re the worst father I ever heard of...but the more I thought about what you did...you saved that kid’s life...he will never let somebody talk him into such as that again. I went on to say how hard that would be to do...how hard!

Big ole tears came into your dad's eyes and the tears began to flow down his cheeks; that big ole grin came on his face ya know what I mean...and he says, "Well thanks, you know different ones have said different things to me.." I said, "Well, shut it all out and go ahead...you did the right thing."

The other boy that talked Paul into driving that night they broke into the grocery store went the other way, ended up robbing a bank, and committed suicide while in prison. My dad went to Judge Barker who was a member of the church. The Judge so admired my father and vice versa. Dad asked him what alternatives there might be for Paul. The judge said, "Well, I see two choices for him. He can either do time in a juvenile detention center (Paul was about to turn 17 at the time) or he can join the service." Paul chose the Navy and dad signed for him to be able to join and Paul's record was wiped clean. Judge Barker had worked with juveniles before and had on occasion asked dad to join him. They became great friends over the years. The Judge admired my father for the tough decision he made with Paul.

Paul spent four years in the Navy and it definitely changed him. He went in as a young immature kid who had dropped out of high school and came out with his GED and a greater understanding of authority and responsibility. He is just like dad in a lot of ways. I always looked up to Paul as my older brother and admired him for his independent and creative spirit and still do to this day. He served his country well, has become a successful stock broker and preaches/teaches for his church. He has an amazing family with children and grandchildren, and a strong faith in God, like mom and dad.



Paul's Navy picture

Next door to us on the north side lived the Magees. Their house was made up of two little “shacks” connected by an open porch. I think one of the rooms was their bedroom while the other was the living area with a kitchen. They pretty much kept to themselves. They were not the neatest or cleanest housekeepers needless to say. They weren’t the brightest star on the block.

Beyond them the creek behind our house turned alongside the north of their property. Across the creek lived old man Talbert. He was a miser and his house was nestled in a wooded lot. You could hardly make out his house except in the winter time. We boys were scared to venture onto his place. We thought it was haunted and wouldn’t even go into the woods during the daytime, afraid that he would come out and try to do something bad to us. One day Larry’s dog, Shep, came home sick and later died. I learned afterward that people thought old man Talbert might have poisoned him. Since we really didn’t know him, in retrospect we probably were believing myths about him. He never really did anything that I saw that confirmed all the rumors.

My Grandma Janey came to live with us for a while. She and mom would setup her quilting frames in the living and dining area using kitchen chairs as a base. We boys would play as though it was our tent or house. One day Grandma Janey was watching boxing on TV. She had a hard time seeing in those days even with her glasses, and so she sat real close. Before long she was so engaged in the match her arms started working as though she was throwing punches. Well one of those punches took out the TV screen. It shattered into a thousand pieces and my mom and dad were shocked into silence for a second. “Are you ok?” Dad asked then went on, “Well now, there sure won’t be any TV in this house for a while!” Dad was right because we couldn’t afford to replace it right away. There was no TV for some time. In those days we boys found plenty to do outside.

During these years, Dad became acquainted with Dr. Doughty who was President of Southwest Baptist College in Bolivar, MO. Dr. Doughty asked Dad to teach a course on the Holy Spirit at Southwest Baptist and Dad agreed. Dad had received a Doctors of Divinity degree from Lighthouse Baptist College in the 1940s, but was Pentecostal in his beliefs. Dad was one of the first Pentecostal preachers to be able to teach at the college during those years and it was simply due to their friendship. He would often come to our house and talk with Dad about spiritual matters. When it got serious, they would go out to Dad’s study at the church and carry on their conversations. Dr. Doughty believed that the students needed to be exposed to some understanding of the Holy Spirit. They had to move his class to an auditorium because so many students wanted to hear. God opened that door for Dad to be able to teach at Southwest Baptist.

Hepatitis

In the summer of 1957, still living in Bolivar, Michael and I came down with hepatitis also called Yellow Jaundice. It was called this because your skin turned a yellow color along with the urine which turned a bright orange color.

A lady from the bank had died a week previously from the disease we found out later and Michael and I had been at the dentist a week after she had been. In addition, Michael had been to the

doctor's office and had his tonsils taken out at the beginning of the summer after school was out. (We found out later that he was much more susceptible than I was.) It seemed we either got it from that dental office or from the doctor's office. That same week our family had planned a vacation to go to Arkansas and we headed south toward Culpepper and later to Russellville to visit Aunt Florence.



Michael's school picture

Michael described it this way:

I was sick all summer in 1957 and into the fall. It began halfway into our vacation trip to Arkansas. During that summer we had been to Grandma Janey's near Clinton upon Culpepper Mountain and were headed to Russellville when I got sick and began to vomit. We attributed it to car sickness. In those days the old roads in the mountains with curves

and steep hills quite often could lead to motion sickness and that's what we thought it was. We got down there and I turned a real yellowish color. Mom and dad took me to a doctor there and he said, "Well, yes you are definitely jaundiced. We've got some medicine that will probably help. The doctor prescribed some awfully tasting yellow syrup medicine which tried to keep us from vomiting. Mom and dad gave us the medicine and took us back to Clinton but the medicine wasn't working. About a week later they took me back to the doctor and he said, "There's nothing we can do for him. If we put him in a hospital they will simply do what I have already recommended. He's got hepatitis and people die from it." After about 10 days I had not kept anything down.

I lost a lot of weight and to this day am sure it caused my growth to be stunted. Dad came into my room one Sunday morning and said, "Michael, can we take you to church with us this morning so that the church can pray for you?" I was skin and bones and later on it took me all summer to start to gain any weight at all. I weakly responded, "I guess so." So off to church we went and Dad carried me into the church and placed me on the altar and the church began to pray.

Later that afternoon Aunt Florence came into my room and asked, "Are you hungry, honey? Can I fix you anything?"...I was obviously hungry and so I said "Yes, I think I can eat"...well she fixed me a piece of dry toast and I ate it all...no vomiting. I then asked for another and I think I finished the entire loaf of bread. Dad said, "Son, God has healed you!" It was truly God because nothing else had worked.

In those days, there was no known cure. We simply were so sick with vomiting and diarrhea, we could not eat and had trouble even drinking and keeping water down.

Truly our parents prayed and cried out to God during these summer weeks as we wasted away lying down most of the day because we were too weak to get up. But upon our return to Bolivar, Michael and I both began to recover and to eat regularly prior to going back to school. It seemed we lost that whole summer however, to the disease.

To this day, Michael and I cannot donate blood because of hepatitis.

Swimming Lessons

My dad loved swimming while my mother wanted no part of the open water. Whether it was a lake, a river, a stream, a pond, or even a large horse trough, dad didn't care, he would take us kids swimming whenever and wherever he could. Quite often, acting like a kid himself, he would dunk us or splash us or simply throw us in, so we learned how to swim or sink. I was somewhat scared of the water, but for dad to take time to play with us was a treat and I was not about to be left out. I wanted to learn how to swim in the worst way! Well, one day we headed down to a river not far from my Grandmother Janey's house on Culpepper Mountain. To me it was a river, but it really was only a stream. The water was cold and not more than 4 or 5 feet deep at anyone spot. We all jumped in and I stayed close to the bank playing. Dad would have none of that and he took the time to focus on each of us one at a time. "Ok Ronnie, it's your turn. Start paddling like a dog and come to me." Well, I gave it my best effort and made some headway, but that didn't suit him. He came my way and took me by the waist and laid me out flat and then said, "I got you and I won't let you drown." Start stroking your arms one on top of the other like Paul there." I looked over and Paul was swimming so effortlessly it seemed. I began to mimic my brother while my dad was holding me and I began to move forward. "Now kick your legs as well." And I did. Wow this was fun.

Later that summer, we headed to the church camp down at Lake of the Ozarks. It was a camp owned by the Assemblies of God church and each week in the summer was reserved for different age groups. I must have been 12 that summer and dad was managing the kitchens that year. During the day there would be a swimming time designated for each camp cabin and my father came down to the dock on the lake to watch me swim. As I got braver and braver, I ventured farther and farther away from the shore and turned back to rest my feet on the edge of the bank and then would venture out again. Well dad called, "Ok, Ronnie head for the corner of the dock," which was a good 30 feet from where I was standing. Well I was always encouraged by my dad's voice and so I set out. Little did I know there was a thick wire cable that held the dock in position and as I approached the corner of the dock, excited about the chance to please my father, my foot caught on the cable and I went under! I came up gasping for air having taken a lot of water into my lungs. Down I went a second time, now in a panic and fighting for my life. The fear was great as I tried to surface again...but simply could not seem to get my bearings and know which way was up....then a strong hand reached down and grabbed my arm and pulled me right out of the water up on the dock! My father looked at me and asked, "You're ok, son! You did great! That cable about got you, but I wasn't going to let you drown! I am proud of you!" Well, he could not have said anything more encouraging and from that day forward, I lost most of my fear of deep water. After a tour in the Navy, I later volunteered as a life guard having learned life saving techniques.



The dock on the Lake of the Ozarks AG Campground

I still remember that day how my father saved my life in the midst of my panic, but also reassured me that I could swim.

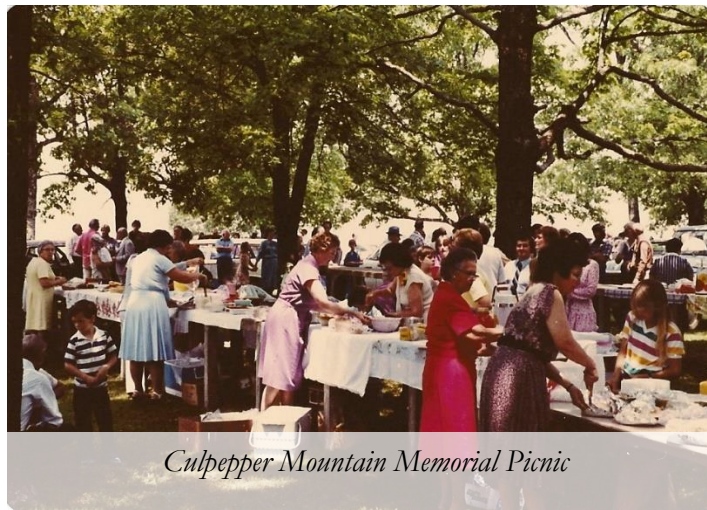
The 180

My mother said one morning, “Ronnie, Michael, we’re going to go get your Grandma Janey and bring her back to stay with us awhile.” We packed and loaded the car and after we said a word of prayer for our safety on the trip we were off. We seldom went anywhere out of town without praying first. We headed out of Bolivar in our 1951 green Chevrolet to Culpepper Mountain which is 9 miles outside of Clinton, Arkansas. We took highway 13 to Springfield and then traveled down 65 highway, both being two lanes of traffic. Just outside of Hollister, Missouri, we heard a loud bang. Blowout! Mother was wrestling with the wheel while we were being bounced around in the back seat. It was scary. The car careened from the left to the right and suddenly we spun completely around facing the other direction. We came to a stop and my mother screamed in one breath, “Boys are you ok? Thank you, Lord!” She managed to get the car off the road and wouldn’t you know it there was a service station next to where we were. Not only were we safe from harm, but we were conveniently next to a place that quickly replaced our flat tire and sent us on our way. A God wink or a coincidence? We definitely knew God was looking out for us. Sometimes we overlook the simple or small miracles. Our trip was without additional incidents as we arrived on Culpepper Mountain and spent several days before our return trip with Grandma Janey.

When our grandmother Janey Merryman returned with us to stay for a while at Bolivar, the quilting frame went up in the living room and my mother and grandmother began to quilt. Now as long as it was good weather outside us boys would be out of the house for much of the day. However, if it was rainy it would force us inside and we simply put our imagination to work and ended up using the quilt in its frame as a tent and of course we were under mom and grandma’s feet. It didn’t take them long to shoo us out of there especially if we made too much of a ruckus and interfered with their quilting or conversations...

Mountain Picnic

Memorial Day was always celebrated on Culpepper Mountain with a huge picnic with everyone who lived on the mountain bringing a covered dish or two or three. There were concrete tables built among the trees at the graveyard. Next to the cemetery was a little white concrete block church which had been constructed to hold services for funerals as well as revivals and regular services depending on whether or not a pastor or evangelist was available to preach. Typically the entire community would come and decorate the graves around Memorial Day Weekend and then have a huge lunch usually on Sunday with fried chicken, ham, mashed potatoes, gravy, coleslaw, green beans, turkey, dressing, homemade rolls, and too many other things for the main course. Then the pies, cakes, puddings, fruit salads, jello and other secret recipes were available for dessert! It was a feast for everyone and people reminisced throughout the day into the afternoon. Then people would gather for a prayer service with singing and preaching. This would often take place outside because the church was simply too small to handle the several hundred people who would come. Our family planned around this event to decorate Royce Eston's grave and though we might be living in Missouri, we would always try to make the journey back to Grandma Janey's over Memorial Day Weekend. It was one of my favorite times with cousins, aunts, uncles, and distant relatives gathered together for once a year. We kids would sometimes head to one of our cousins farms and play all afternoon until dark. Over the years, new graves appeared as members of the community passed away during the previous year. Their names would be recalled and memorialized. It was a tradition that still seems to take place into the 90s but the numbers dropped dramatically as the younger children moved away and seemed too busy to return or their parents or grandparents were no longer living.



The Pith Helmet

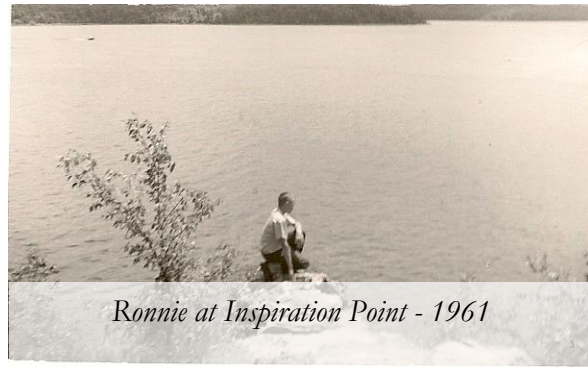
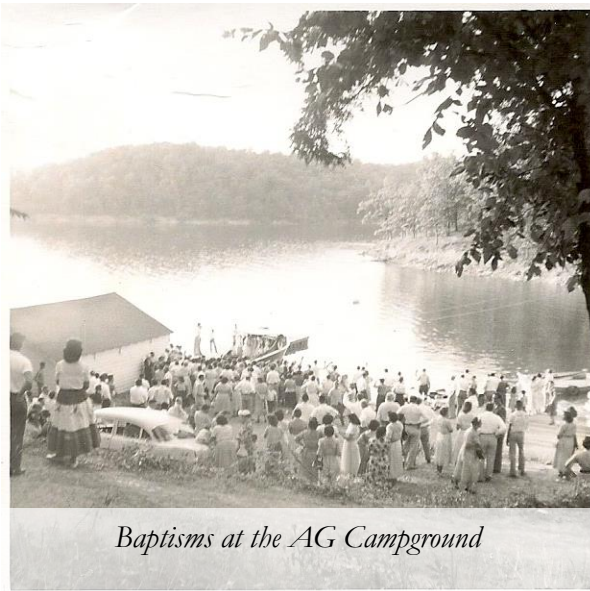
My father was able to fix about anything. Having worked on my uncle's plantation for many years, he was in the habit of repairing, altering, or creating just about anything needed on the farm. Whether it was changing out a wagon wheel, shoeing a mule, laying concrete or building something, he would pitch in and get it going. Larry the Cable Guy's saying, "Git er done!" was my dad's motto. You often heard him say, "Come on boys and let's get er done!" One of my father's trademarks was an old white pith helmet that he wore all the time in the summer working around the house to shade his balding head from the sun. My dad often wore hats and had a few in his day, but the pith helmet was his favorite. To my recollection, he got this while working with Uncle Herman on the plantation back in the late 30s early 40s. Uncle Herman wore a similar helmet in those days as well. The pith helmet is a cloth-covered lightweight helmet sometimes made of cork or pith which is from the sola plant which is indigenous in the swampy areas of Southeast Asia. His was probably tan at first but over the years he would add a fresh coat of white paint. It was lined in green underneath and he left it that way. It was great for shading the sun and was quite cool on hot days. I remember him wearing it often during the hottest part of the summer if he was working outdoors. He mowed the lawn, worked the garden, and repaired fences wearing that hat. He wore it also at church camp down at the Lake of the Ozarks. As he walked across the top of the hill, you could tell it was him by his hat. Everyone admired it and wanted to buy it from him, but he continued to wear it. For us boys, we knew where our dad was most of the time during the summer from a distance by that hat. In those days, one of my favorite things to do was to try that hat on while he wasn't looking, but it would slip to one side or the other, because he had a bigger head than I did. "OK, Ronnie," he would say, "It won't fit you. It was made to fit this head. Whatever you do, don't lose it." When my father died, I looked for that helmet but simply could not locate it. Because of all the moves over the years, I guess it was lost or left behind somewhere.



Pith Helmut

Camp Meeting

During the months of June and July, my parents would take us kids to the Assemblies of God Campgrounds about 9 miles from Bagnell Dam on Lake of the Ozarks. It was so much fun with all kinds of games including softball, tag, swimming, diving, fishing, and simply running. It was a Christian camp and so the center of camp life was “camp meeting” time. We would have services in the morning and then breakout times in smaller groups in the afternoon and a main service in the evening. An old dinner bell would ring on the top of the hill when breakfast, lunch or dinner was served in a dining room overlooking the lake. The camp had been purchased by the Southern Missouri District Council on October 25, 1941. It included 20 acres of trees such as cedar, walnut, oak and dogwoods upon a peninsula surrounded by the lake. According to Brother Nelson Sachs, it was purchased for \$2000 from the owner, Vera Wroten, who was a Baptist, but had received the Holy Spirit and spoken in tongues. According to the archives, “her family didn’t understand her spiritual experiences – especially when she told them that she had a vision in which she saw springs of water flowing out of the hilltop of their land and the water turned into rivers that would be shared with all the world.” This was easily interpreted as “hundreds of young men and women from the various camps (over the years) having been called of God as ministers and missionaries.



I looked forward to going every year and would save whatever I could to use as spending money at the camp. I met many friends there and can remember even having my first real date by simply sitting next to a young lady one night at camp. The spiritual atmosphere was powerful for us and when God “moved upon us” there was praying, shouting, dancing, and people getting “slain in the Spirit”. Many people were “saved” meaning they accepted Christ into their lives. And as Sister Vera

predicted many young people felt the “call of God” on their lives and became preachers, evangelist and missionaries and ended up traveling all over the world.

Today the camp is known as Cross Pointe and more than 250,000 campers have walked the top of the hill there.

Culpepper Games

Grandma Janey and her mom Great Grandma Tucker originally lived a little over a mile from the house I knew. It was down the road from the Smith's home and ended right at their property which consisted of forty acres. It was a place that had been cleared of trees enough for a house, a barn, and a garden spot. Most of the rest was downward sloping toward a creek that ran through the forty. I think my dad ended up paying Grandma Tucker \$100 for the property after the fire burned the house down (talked about in Ilene's early years). We seldom got to go over to it but when we did we would explore down the mountain to the creek which we could cross because of so many large stones lying in it. It was a steep descent to the creek bed, but it was loaded with "hideouts" and made for a great place to play our favorite games of "cowboys and Indians"!

Over the years, my brother Michael and I would take turns playing one side or the other and we made up stories as we went along. We needed no play guns or bows and arrows but "played like" we had them. We also played hide and seek, red rover (if we had enough), and "mumblety peg" which was a game using pocket knives facing each other. Using a peg to mark where you planted the knife in the ground you tried to make it impossible for the other person to take the peg out of the ground as you threw the knife farther and farther away from the foot of your opponent. Because of the danger involved it became less popular over the years, but we could spend several hours with our buddies playing such game. As we grew up we stopped playing these games and began to play soft ball or baseball. Marbles was another favorite of ours however, as the competition increased we would get into arguments, and sooner or later, mother would have to separate us.

Another game we played on Culpepper was corncob war. After harvest in the fall, corncobs were ever present around barns of our cousins. and sides would be chosen and corncob wars began. It was a game that required a lot of skill in throwing and hitting your enemy. Sometimes we would hide in barn lofts and throw down on the enemy. Other times we would simply rush the enemy with as many of us as we could. It was great fun and no one ever was seriously hurt by the cobs, because they would slow down quite quickly after throwing. More often than not, they would simply fall to the ground because they were so light.

Angels Unawares

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Hebrews 13:2 (KJV)

One day we were getting ready to sit down for lunch in the dining room, when a knock was heard at our front door. At that time it was my sister Charlotte and my brother Michael and I living at home. By then, Paul had headed off to the Navy.

My father arose from the table and went to answer. He opened the door and had a brief conversation with a strange looking man who wore a stylish checkered hat with a colorful hat band. I had never seen the man before and my father did not know him either. In no time, father invited and ushered the man into our living room. My mother immediately asked if he had eaten and would he like to join us. Our house was open between the living and dining room and so we all could see the new arrival. He seemed to be ok with just chatting and dad asked him to sit. He sat down and began to have a conversation with my mother and father while we children seemed to pay little if any attention to them while we finished our lunch. Upon finishing I lingered in the living room and shortly the conversation came to an end; the gentleman arose and headed toward the door with my father thanking him for stopping by and introducing himself. Just as quickly as he came, he went out the door and my father turned around and said, “Oh my, he’s forgot his hat.” He quickly grabbed the hat, headed to the door, and went outside to give the man his hat. Dad came back through the door in moments with a puzzled look on his face. He said to mom, “He disappeared! He’s nowhere to be found!” Mom smiled, “Are you thinking what I’m thinking?” And they both responded “Angels Unawares!”

As you read this you may doubt, however, our house was in the middle of the block with nothing inhibiting our view from our front porch which was raised about three feet from the ground and we could easily see both cross streets at the ends of West Jackson street running north and south. Across the street was the back side of the local lumber yard with no entrance for the whole block. To this day, I cannot recall what the conversation was about, but it made no difference. In hind sight, if we had known he was an angel, we of course would have bombarded him with questions.

Mr. Coffee

Dad was a coffee drinker. He would put a pot on before breakfast and have his first cup and then finish the pot in the morning. Later in the afternoon, he might brew another pot and so his day would go. Mom never drank the dark stuff until later in life.

On occasion, my dad would visit a small café close to home and drink coffee with men who were there. He invited me to go along one day and of course, I was excited. As we entered the café one of his friends (he was also our barber) hollered, “Hey, Pastor! Over here! And by the way your coffee is already poured, saucered and blowed!” I had no idea what that meant until dad explained it to me. He said, “Well son, the coffee is so hot when you first pour it into a cup that you will burn your mouth and tongue if you drink it, so we pour a little into the saucer blow on it and pour it back into the cup. Then we repeat the process until the coffee is ready to drink. In the meantime, we test it by sipping it with lots of wind like this.” And he began to show me how to sip and purse his lips to keep it from burning his lips and mouth too much.

However, that is not why this chapter is entitled Mr. Coffee nor is it related to the Mr. Coffee machine. It was 1954 and an elderly looking man showed up at our house. He drove up in a black brand new Cadillac. I later learned he was 92 years old. He slowly walked up our walk and onto the front porch and knocked at the door. I was peeking out my bedroom window that faced toward the front of the house.

My dad greeted him, “Good morning, Mr. Coffee.”

“Good mornin’, Pastor. How yaw doin’?”

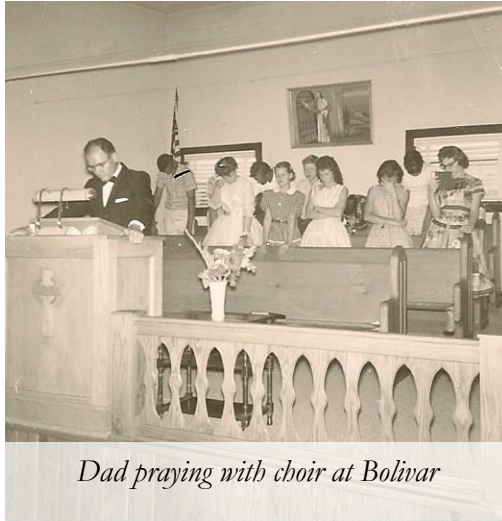
“Fine, just fine,” dad replied. “Let me get my coat and I will be right out.”

Well dad left with Mr. Coffee and later I learned what their time together was all about. A new law had been passed in the state of Missouri that required everyone who was of age and was wanting to drive an automobile had to take a driver’s examination in order to get a driver’s license. Well Mr. Coffee, who happened to be a watchmaker in Bolivar, had never taken a driving test before and he had asked dad to help him learn what to do to pass it. My dad obliged and Mr. Coffee at the age of 92 went to test his driving skills. It wasn’t long until he returned and dropped off my father having passed his first and last driving exam. Later that year, dad took me over to Mr. Coffee’s house and I was amazed at how many clocks Mr. Coffee had in his house which was also his workshop. He had watches, clocks, grandfather clocks, cuckoos, alarm clocks, bell clocks, sun dials...I mean I had no idea there were so many ways to tell time. I wanted to touch and explore every time piece, but knew I had better not touch anything unless my father said it was ok. To thank my father for helping him

pass his driver's test, he gave dad a beautiful wrist watch, which my dad had until he passed away 38 years later. Not too long after our visit, dad preached Mr. Coffee's funeral. I often wondered whatever happened to all his clocks.

Vocabulary Change

It was amazing to watch my father begin to speak from the pulpit. When he began his ministry he only had an eighth grade education and his everyday vocabulary was what one would expect to hear, but then he would begin to speak with the anointing on him, it would bring out words I had never heard before. The eloquence and enunciation of his sermons always made me sit up and watch him during these times. It seemed as though he was two distinct people and of course as I later learned he would respond, “Well that is the Holy Spirit and I am simply His vessel.” He was so well read on the Bible that he seldom ever used a note. He spent his life studying the Bible and as he grew in his knowledge of God’s word, his everyday vocabulary changed as well. He quoted scripture often when explaining something or sharing with someone about everyday life. His counseling of those who came to him was filled with wisdom, compassion, grace and love. Again when asked about how he knew what to say and when to say it, he simply responded, “It isn’t me, but Him who sent me.”



Dad praying with choir at Bolivar

My siblings would say, “They grew up countrified with a heart for everyone...”

In my office hangs my father’s graduation diploma from Lighthouse Bible College for his completion of a Graduate degree in Theology. I look at it almost every day now. It brings tears to my eyes because I know what it meant to him to be able to learn more about God. He and mother are still an influence on us all from the many words of wisdom they gave us. My sister, Charlotte and I were the first ones in our family to graduate from college and our parents were so proud of us getting graduate degrees.

River Summer

In May, in the spring of 1960, my mother and father announced that God was saying it was time to move on again. That same year, the Peace Corps was established by President John F. Kennedy; the American Civil Rights movement began in earnest as Freedom Riders began riding buses on the interstates into southern states, testing the U. S. Supreme Court's integration decision; President Kennedy announced we were going to put a man on the moon; Gus Grissom becomes the 2nd American to go into space; the Berlin wall is constructed restricting movement of east and west Berliners; Roger Maris of the New York Yankees hits 61 home runs beating the record of Babe Ruth. Michael J. Fox, Meg Ryan, Princess Diana and George Clooney are born, and Earnest Hemmingway commits suicide.

Little did we know it would turn out to be a memorable move for us.

“Where are we moving to?” we asked.

“Osceola, Missouri,” my mother stated.

“Where's that?”

“Not too far up north,” she responded.

Osceola was a small town on the Osage River, which fed the Lake of the Ozarks, one of the largest man-made lakes in America. It got its name from a Native American tribe which first inhabited it. The treaties of 1808 and 1825 were signed by the U. S. government and the Osage Tribe gave up all the tribe's land in Missouri. The first white homesteader built a house in the winter of 1835. It grew to a population of 2500. In 1861, the town was sacked by Jayhawkers and was burned and looted. This event inspired the 1976 movie “The Outlaw Josey Wales starring Clint Eastwood.

All but about 200 left after the sacking and it never regained its earlier population, but simply became a sleep river town which boomed in the spring months when fishermen came into the town and spent days “snagging for spoonbill more technically known as paddlefish”. The season began on March 15th and ran through May 15th.

The fishermen would bring their catch up from the river to be measured and weighed in the downtown area along the river. In addition, to the paddlefish, there were river gar that were also snagged. The favorite spot for fisherman was just below the dam because both the paddle fish and river gar came up the river to spawn and could not get past the dam. Some of the paddle fish reached 5 feet in length and weighed more than 100 pounds. They are very good eating and produce a large amount of roe (fish eggs or fresh water caviar).



Osceola Dam on the Osage River - 1960

As soon as school was out, one of the trucks from Clifford Cribb's insulation company in Bolivar came by our house and we loaded up and headed north. It did not take us long to get there. The house we moved into was a simple white 4 room house with two bedrooms, a living room and kitchen. It was small, but my mother made it quite comfortable for us. My sister, Charlotte, shared a room with my brother, Michael and I. We tried not to spend too much time in doors, and it seemed as soon as the sun rose, we would head out of the house to play.

Dad worked at a florist's greenhouse to supplement the income, while mom worked at the Bus Station Café down on the square baking pies every day except on Sunday. I was in the 9th grade while Michael entered the 7th. Our house was located on Highway 13 which went through the little town in those days. Osceola was located on the Osage River which fed the Lake of the Ozarks. I remember us boys heading for the river 'most every day during that summer to romp and play and fish. It was one of the best summers we ever had. We played baseball, but more often than not we ran the river. It was not uncommon for us to stay out until dark almost every day. We had a mail box downtown at the Post Office. Every day I would ride my old bike down to see if I had any mail from a girl I met that summer at church camp on Lake of the Ozarks. The AG church had a large camp ground about 9 miles from Bagnell Dam. Every year my mother and father would work at the camp and take us kids with them for children's or youth camp. It was great fun.

Dad got real sick during that summer with a bout of kidney stones. It was extremely painful and finally he couldn't stand it any longer and so he drove himself to Clinton to see a doctor. He ended up passing them, but for several days he had trouble getting out of bed.

One of the members of our church owned the bus station and café where my mother worked. He also sold insurance and later became the owner of the Cheese Factory in Osceola. He was quite the entrepreneur and became great friends with my father and mother.

I turned 15 years old that summer and Michael my younger brother, turned 13. I began the 9th grade that fall and became quite popular among the kids in my classes and had met several of them during the summer. I played the trombone in the band and we must have had at least 25 members. We played and marched in various small parades around that part of Missouri. I remember my first algebra class and about 2 weeks into the fall class, I finally got it. Math opened a new world to me and I fell in love with it and through the years tutored students much older than me in all kinds of algebra, geometry and math sciences. Later in years, it would be one of the reasons that the University of Nebraska wanted me to come and teach.

Little did I know at the time we moved to Osceola, that the reason my father was chosen to go and pastor there was to overcome the huge debt that the little church had encumbered over the years. By the time we were into three weeks of the fall school year, dad said to us well we are moving again. He had prayed and preached to this small congregation and as a result had reached several quite successful people who became members of the congregation and paid off the debt of the church. What a miracle that God performed in such a short time. The conversation of dad being accepted as the new pastor at Flat River, Missouri, didn't surprise us kids much. Even if we had objected because of the new friends we had made in the little town of Osceola, we all knew that when dad was called somewhere else, we were moving. We learned over the years to make new friends easily and hold on to them "loosely." It gave us all a sense that "places" are not permanent and that to move on is part of the obedience our mother and father chose in God's plans. Looking back it would have been easy to have rebelled against our parents, but none of us did. We accepted it and looked forward to the next "adventure." To this day, I still love adventure, risk and challenge in doing something new or visiting a new foreign country. I have been blessed to be able to have visited more than 60 countries around the world so far, but I owe it to my parents who gave us all a sense of ease in meeting new people and making friends quickly.

Flat River

We left Osceola in the fourth week of the school year during my 9th grade in 1961, and moved to Flat River, Missouri. That same year the U. S. severed relations with Cuba, John F. Kennedy became president, the Mercury-Redstone 2 rockets into space carrying Ham the Chimp, the Beatles perform for the first time at the Cavern Club, President Kennedy establishes the Peace Corp, Alan Shepard becomes the first American to go into space, Roger Maris hits his 61st home run, 18,000 troops are sent to Viet Nam; Eddie Murphy, President Obama, and Meg Ryan, are born.

Flat River was a lead mining town with almost every family having someone who worked in the mines. The towns bordering Flat River included Desloge (pronounced Dee loo jeh), Esther, Elvins, and Leadington. I transferred into the 9th grade which was in Junior High School there. My sister, Charlotte, was a junior in high school and Michael, my younger brother was in 7th grade.

We lived about a mile from school on Field Street in the parsonage next to the Assembly of God church. The church averaged about 200 people on Sunday and my father became quite integrated into the ministerial alliance over the next several years. We made friends quickly and I soon took up with Gary, whose family came to our church, Tom who played a “mean saxophone” in the band and Terry who lived down the street with his grandparents, and an older fellow, Larry who also attended our church. Terry and I would head over to the grade school and shoot “hoops” just about every day during the late summer and early fall. Terry became the star of our basketball team. I never went out for basketball.



Flat River Assembly of God Parsonage – 509 Field Street – 2014 picture

Tom and I hit it off quite well and used to play “Indian ball” with Joel, Dick and Gary on occasion. We were quite creative (we thought) in making up games to play. We would choose up sides with two or three players on a side. The field was between 2nd and 3rd base and you had to hit the ball either on the ground or in the air between the two bases. If someone caught the ball either on the ground or in the air, it was an out. If you hit it pass the infielder on the ground it was a single. If you hit a fly ball and it fell safely, it was a home run. We kept tabs and it was an easy way to get a competitive game going with only a few people.



My class was about 50 students which was very typical of the high school. I immediately went out for band and football and played end on the football team and first trombone in the band. Obviously the band marched without me on football Fridays, but I seldom missed a parade whether in town or out of town. I also went out for track. We were not very good in any of the sports, because we were so small a school and all of the rural kids were being bussed into the surrounding towns.

Because of the lead mines, huge sand hills (we called them “chat dumps”) were scattered throughout St. Francois County that were ideal for playing. One of the largest ones was only 4 blocks from our home and we often headed over to climb, frolic, roll down, play cowboys and Indians and spent time on the very top seeing over the towns. On a hot summer day, you could see for 20 miles.



Chat Dump in Flat River

About once a year, dad would “hold a revival” and on occasion the evangelist would come to town with a big tent and would set up on the edge of town in a farmer’s field laying down sawdust. My friends and I would head over there and help with the set up. Other times the revival would be held in our church and people who did not attend regularly would show up and people would get saved or others who had “backslid” would get “resaved.” It seemed like I backslid every week and so on Sundays, would hit the altar and ask God to forgive me again. My friends would be in the same condition, because they would be right beside me down at the altar or on the first row of pews. I was still wondering about my fleshly desires and how they lined up with what God expected of me. I seemed to always fall short and I lived in a state of frustration about my “sins” always seeming to win out. It wasn’t until much later that I really began to understand about “God’s grace” and how we all “fall short” of His Glory except because of what Christ did on the cross. It isn’t about what we do or don’t do, it is about what He did and learning to accept Him and trust Him.

A typical Sunday began with mother and dad getting us up and encouraging us to be ready for services that morning. It was not the easiest thing to do, but with much harping and threatening we would finally sit down and have breakfast together then head off to church which was right next door across the parking lot. Sunday morning people would begin to arrive a few minutes before

service began at 9:00 a.m. with a prelude or opening by one of the Deacons. The head Deacon for the day would stand up and welcome people to the services and pray and then we would all scatter for Sunday School with children going to classes fitting their age group and adults divided into young adults, adults, and seniors. Next came the song service which was led by the choir director and music leader Sister Naomi Boyer. After three or four hymns, the offering would be taken and then my Dad would preach. Now you have to recognize we were preacher's kids (PKs) and we seldom were still through the whole service. There were several of us boys who would sit on the very back row and entertain each other during the sermons which lasted about 45 minutes. Although my father and mother warned me time and time again about "cutting up in church," it was difficult to keep my focus with all of my friends whispering and playing games. So on occasion, I was punished when I got home not knowing my father could stay focused in the pulpit and preach a powerful sermon and know what I was doing on the back row. I would get only a lecture sometimes, but every so often the belt would come off my father's pants and he would whack me a time or two on my behind.

One Sunday morning in the middle of a sermon, one of my friends, Gary R showed me a plastic sack he had brought to church. It was filled with marbles and of course, I loved marbles.

We used to play marbles almost every day when I was growing up which included trying to win the other persons marbles from them. We would draw a circle in the dirt and "put up" several marbles in the middle and then try to knock as many marbles out of the circle as we could with our "taw" which was a large marble we had chosen as the "shooter." We would place the shooter in front of our thumb and send it flying into the middle of the circle or ring trying to win back our marbles and win the opponents as well.

Meanwhile, I was watching him start to take the marbles out of the bag, when suddenly it burst open. Now the church floor was made out of hard wood and sloped down toward the front where the altar was. The pulpit was on a platform where my dad preached from so that everyone could see him. Every one of those marbles came out of the bag at the same time it seemed and hit the floor with a thunderous sound and began to roll down underneath the seats and as they picked up momentum the sound got louder and louder until the very last one stopped at the front. Wouldn't you know this came at a point in the sermon where my father sometimes would pause and allow the Word that he had just spoken to sink in for the people to ponder or reflect upon. Now I can't tell you what the point of the message was that morning, but I will never forget the sound in the middle of the silence that took people to their feet in surprise and for some (who might have been dozing off) startled them to their feet as well! "Ronnie!!!" My father yelled. "You come down here and sit on the front row this instance!" I embarrassingly arose and came humbly forward with my head down in the midst of laughter and shock of the moment. Needless to say I was expecting the "whooping of my life" when I got home that afternoon, but it never came because my father knew I did not take the marbles to church that morning and he saw what had happened. My mother later said at dinner that day, "Now, Clarence, you've got to admit it was funny!" And she laughed and so

did my brothers and sisters, but I was quiet and didn't want my father to know I thought it was funny. He had to laugh himself that afternoon about the incident but I never brought it up again.

My Mother had some of her most difficult years during this time. She was diagnosed with large cysts in her ovaries and went through major surgery. Prior to surgery the growths were considered to be cancerous. We learned nothing of this until many years later because our mother and father often kept things from us that might cause any anxiety or fear about their health. My mother spent a lot of time in pain and there were many mornings when she would remain in bed while my father would get us up, prepare a hot breakfast for us and get us off to school. "Where's Mom?" we would ask, and my dad would simply reply, "She's not feeling well again this morning and needs her rest"; or he might say, "She had a tough night and had trouble sleeping but she is resting better now." This went on for several years with lots of prayers for her. One day she came back from the doctors and the great news was, she had no more cancer! In the 1960s there was neither chemo nor radiation for her in our small town! It was a miracle!

After this time of healing my mother said one day, "I want to get my high school degree." She had heard about the GED classes and began to drive to Bonne Terre, Missouri to take her classes. Mother was in her late 40s and she was determined to get it done before she turned 50. Well, she finished it within 6 months and sat for the final exam and passed with flying colors!

During the Flat River years, our family settled in and enjoyed living there. There are many fond memories of living in this rustic lead mining community. Each of us made lifelong friends, knew our neighbors, and became a part of the community. My sister, Charlotte and I graduated from high school there while Michael ended up graduating from high school in Lebanon, Missouri.

Melacina

Mom and Dad became foster parents at Flat River. I remember the first time I saw Melacina, the first foster child they took in. She arrived in the fall of 1961. Undernourished, scared, and so confused about her new home, she cowered like a little puppy that had been mistreated. The stripes on her back and legs were the result of numerous beatings by her mother and so she had become a ward of the state and placed with us. She gradually began to trust again and began to come out of her shell. She would come up to us and bow and kiss and caress our hands to try and win our approval and affection. I was 15 at the time; she became my little sister quite quickly and was accepted by us all. Her thick glasses looked like the end of a pop bottle and did little to correct her cross-eyed-ness. She began special school that fall and a van would pick her up and drop her off daily. We gave her some flash cards and her learning continued at home. In many ways she was quite smart, yet there also was a cloud of mystery about her and she simply would be hard to reach into her little world of understanding. My mother prompted us to help with the lessons and before long she was getting almost all of the answers correctly with the flash cards.



Mother with Melacina at church in 1961

My heart still aches today as I write about her. One time my older sister, Charlotte, came home with an engagement ring on her finger. Well Melacina looked at her hand and said, "It's a big and shiny! Look momma, it's a big and shiny! And she clapped her hands together with glee and would jump up and down when she saw something exciting. She loved school and every morning when the van arrived she would be waiting by the door with a smile on her face. She simply became as much a part of our family as any one of us was. The love I had for her was something I could not begin to explain in those days. I would have given my life for her I am sure. That was true of us all.

It was hard on all of us to think that someday she would have to leave since she was with us temporarily. One day it happened. A woman in the community asked if she could pursue an adoption of Melacina. It was truly a miracle that someone would adopt an 8 year old girl who was so mentally and physically challenged. Within a year the adoption came through and Melacina went to live with her new mom. We all cried and I couldn't understand why parting hurt so badly. I recall seeing her many years later (she was probably in her 20s) with that big smile on her face when she attended church service with her mother. I don't know if she recognized me or not. She had been such a blessing to us all. She lived into her 40s before passing away.

My parents took in many more foster children and kept and nourished and loved them until someone wanted to adopt them. Over the years many would return and explain how Clarence and Eileen gave them a loving home and learned how to accept love and in turn to love. What an impact our parents made on their lives. They never turned anyone down to our knowledge.

Tom and Lover

We got our first little dog which was a mixed breed of terrier, and who knows what else. We called her “Lover.” A year after we arrived in Flat River, I got my driver’s license and one of the first things I wanted to do was get a cat. There was an ad in the local “Daily Journal” that said “free pure bred Maltese kittens.’ The address was in rural Elvins, and my mother and dad finally agreed I could go get one. I called the lady who owned them and she gave me directions as to how to get there. I drove along the country road she was supposed to be on and finally after many trips by the little lane I found her place. It had a picket fence around the house with a small gate in front. There were cats everywhere outside her house and one old hound dog. With quite a bit of anxiety I approached her front door and knocked. I was a bit startled when the lady answered the door. She must have been in her late twenties early thirties. She had long black hair which seemed to hang to her knees and her face was a very pale powdery white. She invited me in. She was smoking a stogie which appeared to be skewered on a stick. In the middle of her living room was a huge pentagram on her floor. I had no idea at the time what it was but still remember it to this day. She said the kittens were in the back bedroom, so I followed her back and there on a huge bed covered with a bright red bed spread were about a dozen blue Maltese kittens. They were beautiful. I picked one out and placed it in a box I had brought with me. She then said to me that this cat would be “my” cat and that he would take up with no one else over his lifetime. Wow, was she prophetic, because that is exactly what happened. I named him, Tom. On the way home he did not stay in the box but was scared to death and lodged himself under my seat in the car. I finally was able to coax him out when I arrived home. He immediately took to our house and became fast friends with “Lover”, which is rare for a dog and a cat to be friendly. One day as I was watching them play in the front yard, Lover would begin to run in circles, and Tom would simply turn and stare at her as she ran. She finally took up a pounce position, waited a few seconds then ran full at Lover grabbed her around the neck and hung on as Lover ran around the yard running full speed with Tom hanging on to her head and dangling between her legs underneath. We laughed and laughed that afternoon at the two of them. Their antics and play continued over the next few years. Tom would come into the house on occasion and I would get out a shoe box or a paper sack and he would commence to gradually get into the box and lay or would totally move into the sack and claw the inside of the sack. We had more fun just watching the play of these two during those years until one day Lover did not appear at the back door for her morning feeding. She lay sick at her dog house out in back of the church. We later learned she had been poisoned from something and died within the day. We grieved for her for weeks after that. We buried her by the carport in the back of our house. Tom was never the same and never took up with another dog.

Now Tom was no ordinary cat. He grew quite large. One Thanksgiving week, we weighed him and he weighed 22 pounds. He loved hot biscuits and my mother would make a batch and Tom would smell them and come running into the kitchen and would stand on his hind legs and put his paws on

the kitchen counter tops. He was that long and big. He was quite the mouser too. We never saw another mouse around our house except for dead ones during his years. On several occasions he would catch one and bring it to the backdoor to show us his prize before he devoured it.

In May of 1966, I joined the Navy and headed to Spain 4 months later. I was stationed in Spain for a little over 2 years without coming home. In November, 1968, I finally did take a leave and headed back to Missouri. My parents picked me up at Springfield's airport and headed home to Lebanon, Missouri where they had moved several years earlier. As we traveled mother and dad brought me up to date on all the news.

“What about Tom, my cat?” I asked.

“Well, he comes and goes as he pleases.” Mom replied. “We haven't seen him for three months now.” We arrived at their home and I grabbed my sea bag out of the trunk and headed up their front steps to the porch. No sooner had I started up the stairs, when Tom suddenly dashed around the house and up running between my legs and rubbing his sides on my pants leg. When I finally got into the house and sat down on the couch, Tom jumped up on my lap and begin to purr and roll (as cat's do) on to his back waiting for me to pet him. He was overjoyed to see me.

Mother said, “That is amazing! He doesn't do that with any of us and he seldom even wants to come into the house.

Dad chimed in, “He whips every dog in the neighborhood that dares come around or mess with him. As I looked at him I could see the battle scars including his left ear was torn. Over the remaining years of his life he had many fights with dogs and other cats, but they were short lived as I never saw him lose a fight and he never backed down from any of them. He finally no longer showed up at the back door of my parent's home and we believed he simply had died of old age.

Beauty School

On March 28, 1966, Mom and Dad moved to Lebanon, Missouri with our brother Michael. They took Tom, my blue Maltese cat with them. I remained behind to finish my spring semester at Flat River's Mineral Area College. My brother Michael finished his senior year of high school there. I later joined the family for a brief time before entering the Navy. I left for boot camp in May at Great Lakes, Ill.

Upon graduating from boot camp 11 weeks later, I headed for Charleston, South Carolina, to catch my ship, the USS Canopus, a submarine tender. In August, 1966, we set sail for Spain where I would spend my next two years at the port of Rota, Spain.

Lebanon, Missouri, was originally known as Wyota named after the local Indian tribe associated with the area. It later was changed to Lebanon principally because of Lebanon, Tennessee being the home of a well-respected minister who moved to Wyota. Several famous residents included Walter Reed, a physician who identified in 1901, malaria or yellow fever as being transmitted by mosquitos. In addition, the author, Harold Bell Wright, another resident, penned his famous novel about the Ozarks, *The Shepherd of the Hills*.

That same year, NASA launched Surveyor 1 which was the first U. S. successful soft landing on the moon. The Black Panthers were formed. Charles Whitman kills 14 and injures 31 on the campus of the University of Texas. The TV show Star Trek debuts. The U.S. has half a million troops in Vietnam. The Miranda Rights comes into being as the Supreme Court overturns a conviction. The Aberfan disaster occurs when a large slag of rock slides down the Merthyr Mountain covering a school and killing 144 people including 116 children. Adam Sandler, Janice Jackson, Mike Tyson, Halle Berry, and Gordon Ramsay were born.

One of the more distinctive pieces of history was the discovery of “magnetic” water after a well digger in 1889 found that his tools could pick up nails when the water from the well covered them. As a result, bathers began to come and bathe in the “healing waters” in Lebanon and the Gasconade Hotel was built to accommodate them. This lasted about 10 years and the rumor subsided. The high school yearbook is still entitled “Magnet.”

Bennett Springs State Park, located 12 mile west of Lebanon has been long associated with the community. Every year thousands of anglers come from across the U. S. for the opening of trout season during the month of March. Being a state park, it also catered to campers, and tourists, as well as fishermen. There were cabins in the park for lodging, restaurants around the park and a large swimming pool where I became a volunteer life guard during the summer of 1970. Several stables were available and horseback riding was a must for many campers during the season.

Lebanon with more than 14,000 residents is located on former U. S. Highway, Route 66 which transverses the country. It was made famous by several songs over the years. Today Interstate 44 travels by Lebanon.

Mother decided she wanted to get her beauticians license and a lady who was a beauty instructor had befriended her and invited her to join a class. She began her schooling there and continued until she received her license from the state of Missouri. Interestingly, I never had thought about my mother's intellectual ability until she sat for the boards for the state wide final exam. She headed to Columbia and took her exam. Several weeks later the results came in the mail. She had the top score on the exam for that class! She went to work for a while until they moved to Joplin.



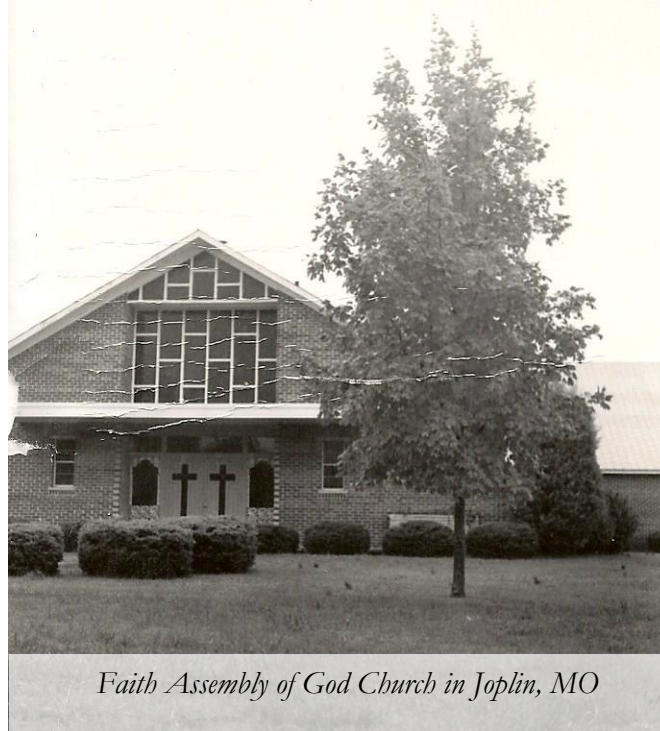
Miracles in Joplin

Dad had accepted the Senior Pastor position at Faith Assembly in Joplin, Missouri on January 11, 1972. He and mother moved from Lebanon, First Assembly. In 1972, the British Army kills 14 unarmed nationalist civil rights marchers in Derry, Northern Ireland. The Irish Republican Army led anti-British riots throughout Ireland. The Winter Olympics is held in Sapporo, Japan. U. S. President Richard M. Nixon makes an unprecedented visit to the People's Republic of China for 8 days meeting with Mao Zedong. Bobby Fischer defeats Boris Spassky of the USSR and becomes the American World Chess Champion.

Dad and mother enjoyed the move and quickly became a part of the Joplin community and watched as the church grew to more than several hundred members. On the morning of May 11, 1973 a storm began to brew. Dad described it as a tornado that simply was turned on its side or a black cloud that rolled along the ground. They had no basement. Dad yelled to mother as he saw it approaching and they ran for the dining room and crawled under the dining room table, a large thick legged table they had traded for when pastoring at Flat River. They pulled one of mom's heavy quilts over them and began to pray for God's protection. According to Historic Joplin, the tornado hit with winds roaring at 70 to 100 miles an hour.

A Mrs. Lea Kungle, who headed up the county civil defense team later said, "They say you can't have a hurricane here, but it was like a hurricane."

Three people were killed and more than one hundred were injured. The parsonage was next to the church on Indiana Avenue. The church experienced roof damage and a wall caved in just down the street at the Joplin high school gymnasium. Mom and Dad's house was untouched as the cloud rolled right over the house and down Indiana Avenue. God was praised for their protection!



Faith Assembly of God Church in Joplin, MO

Several years later in early April, 1974 dad awoke and began his daily routine. He brewed a pot of coffee and with a cup in hand headed to the church next door to spend time in prayer and studying the word. He more often than not wore the knees out in his pants from spending time on them in prayer. Later that morning, he went out to run some errands. As he was driving, he experienced a tremendous pain in his chest. It was so great he had to pull to the side of the street! He began to pray. "Lord, I need you right now! Help me Father, in Jesus name!" He then began to pray in his prayer language. Some would refer to this as 'praying in tongues.' The pain subsided enough to allow him to drive to his doctor, who was a member of Faith Assembly. He entered the doctor's office.

Now it is important to note that this doctor was blind from a swimming pool incident in which he had dove into the pool to swim but it was full of freshly added chlorine. He immediately lost his sight, but went on and got his MD as a blind student.

The Doctor heard Clarence holler and sensed instantly what was happening. He asked his receptionist to call for an ambulance and went to my father and began to treat him by giving him a nitro-bid tablet, placing it under his tongue. The pain was so great, my father passed out and became comatose. He was rushed to Oak Hill hospital, which later became part of the Freeman Health System.

Mother, who had been working at home, was called and she immediately went to Oak Hill. Each of us children were called. At the time, I was an assistant manager of the Woolworth store at Northwest Arkansas Shopping Center in Fayetteville, Arkansas. When I received the call from my

brother, Paul, he said dad was in trouble and probably was not going to live and that I should get to Joplin as quickly as I could. It was a two hour drive for me and I soon arrived at Oak Hill. My sister, Charlotte, was already in the waiting room with Mother. They were frantically working on dad. My brother, Paul arrived and came in with the news that he had just talked with the doctor and the preliminary diagnosis was a massive heart attack. As the day progressed more bad news came. X-rays showed a hole the size of a half dollar in the wall between the auricle and ventricle. To most this seemed impossible that he could still be alive. Of course, prayer was the main source of comfort and hope as my mother, the siblings, and the church continued to seek a miracle for my father. As the day wore into the night, we stayed together and comforted each other sometimes dozing and most of the night simply awake. Little did we know during the night dad flat-lined and they had to use a defibrillator throughout in order to restart the heart.

The next morning my father awoke from the coma. He began to talk with the male nurse who had looked after him during the night.

“We almost lost you,” he said to dad. “We had to jumpstart your heart.”

“I know. I was watching you.”

“Oh no, you weren’t! You were flat-lined!”

“Oh yes,” Dad replied with a weak voice. “I saw what was happening.”

“You couldn’t have!”

“But I did.”

“No way, sir!”

“I can prove it to you,” my father replied. “You dropped your fountain pen when you put the clappers on me. It rolled under the bed and it is still there now. You looked all over for it but I was looking down from the ceiling and watching everything and saw it roll under this bed.”

The nurse immediately looked under the bed and found his pen. His mouth dropped open as he straightened up, he said, “Well, I’ll be...how, how could you have known?”

They later talked about this incident and my father explained how God has a way of working miracles through people. Dad said later to mom, “I saw demons while I was in the hospital.”

“What do you mean,” Mom asked. “I think they were trying to scare and taunt me, but they finally gave up,” Dad replied.

Further x-rays no longer showed a hole in the heart! Praise God! My dad still had some blockage in the arteries, but he began to get better and better. He was released from the hospital later that week. He resigned from Faith Assembly and a short time later, sensing that God had told him to retire and moved with my mother back to Flat River, Missouri.

The Shoe Sales Woman

While living at Joplin mother grew restless and began to think about going to work somewhere in Joplin. She sensed in her spirit that it would be a chance to not only provide additional income, but be able to minister to people in the “marketplace.” She found a job rather quickly working at a shoe store. Before long, she was selling shoes to many customers and with her positive outlook people began to not just buy shoes but share some of their problems with mom. The store began to fill up with people not only from Faith Assembly, but with strangers and the word spread about the shoe store there in town. Sales began to soar and mother really enjoyed the opportunity to witness to her customers. Her boss was so pleased with her work he promoted her and before long, she was opening and closing the store. Mother’s ability to listen and provide counseling and spiritual support came easy for her and people over the years seemed to gravitate to her and confide in her their deepest problems and issues. Her ability to sell shoes and the gospel (although it is free) worked hand in hand.

At the time Mother and Father were pastoring in Joplin, My wife, Dee and I were living in Springdale, Arkansas which was only a little over an hour away. We would visit her at the shoe store and she would say, I have some shoes for Sheila (our daughter who had a narrow foot) that I think she will like. She would always pay for them and would not let us pay. We also received lots of shoes as gifts for birthdays or Christmas. She was blessed and was a blessing to hundreds of people during the “shoe” ministry time at Joplin.

Retirement in Flat River

Mom and Dad moved back to Flat River after the major heart attack in 1974. That same year, Pepsico is the first American company to sell products to the Soviet Union; Hank Aaron ties Babe Ruth's home run record; The Watergate Scandal forces President Nixon from office; the Rubix Cube is invented; Jimmy Fallon, Ryan Seacrest, Christian Bale, and Amy Adams are born; Duke Ellington, Chet Huntley, Charles Lindbergh and Agnes Moorhead pass away.

Mother and Dad's lives changed only slightly as Dad continued to preach and fill in for pastors who were on vacation or for churches who were needing an interim Pastor while they searched for a permanent one. Dad told me once, "Son, I seem to be preaching more now than I did when I was full time pastoring."

One Sunday evening at the church in Farmington, where dad had become the part time "seniors" pastor another miracle took place. Dad was down at the altar praying with people when he suddenly just dropped to the floor. He had had another heart attack! People gathered around him just to make sure he hadn't been "slain in the Spirit," which was common at some of the revival meetings over the years. No, his heart had stopped beating and he was no longer breathing. People began to pray and a Sister Turnbull reached over and prayed over him until he opened his eyes and looked up, startled at her. Then he snapped, "What were you thinking? I didn't want to come back! I was in heaven with Jesus! It was so wonderful! I have never experienced that kind of painlessness! You should've left me there! I didn't want to come back!" He slowly got up mumbling to himself, and then began to talk about the brief encounter of what it was like to be in heaven. He and mother related this story to us every so often when we would ask them to "tell us again about the time dad died at the altar."

Mother found a job working in Farmington at a beauty school with the owner, Mary Ruth and they became good friends. Mary Ruth had encouraged mom to get her beauty instructor's license and so she took classes and in no time sat for the exam in Columbia. It was no surprise to learn she had again scored at the top of her class.



Mary Ruth and Mother at the beauty school in Farmington, MO.

Each year mom and dad planted a big garden. It was actually two gardens. They were separated by an 8 foot section of grass between them, all surrounded by a chain link fence to keep the rabbits out. On one side they planted lettuce, onions, radishes, cucumbers, beets, carrots and various herbs. In the other garden were green beans, pole beans, tomatoes, okra, squash, and occasionally watermelons. They also had two or three rows of strawberries next to the little tool shed. The pole beans were planted along the fence on the east and north side of the garden.

Then there were the irises. Oh my, my mother and father had a passion for irises and roses and they could grow them! The irises were lined up along the west fence in the back yard and you could see them from Highway 8 as a traveler heading toward Elvins and Bismarck passed by the fence. People would often stop and ask if they could get a bulb from some of the more rare irises planted there. One of my favorites was one mom called the African Queen because it was a beautiful black iris adorned like a queen.

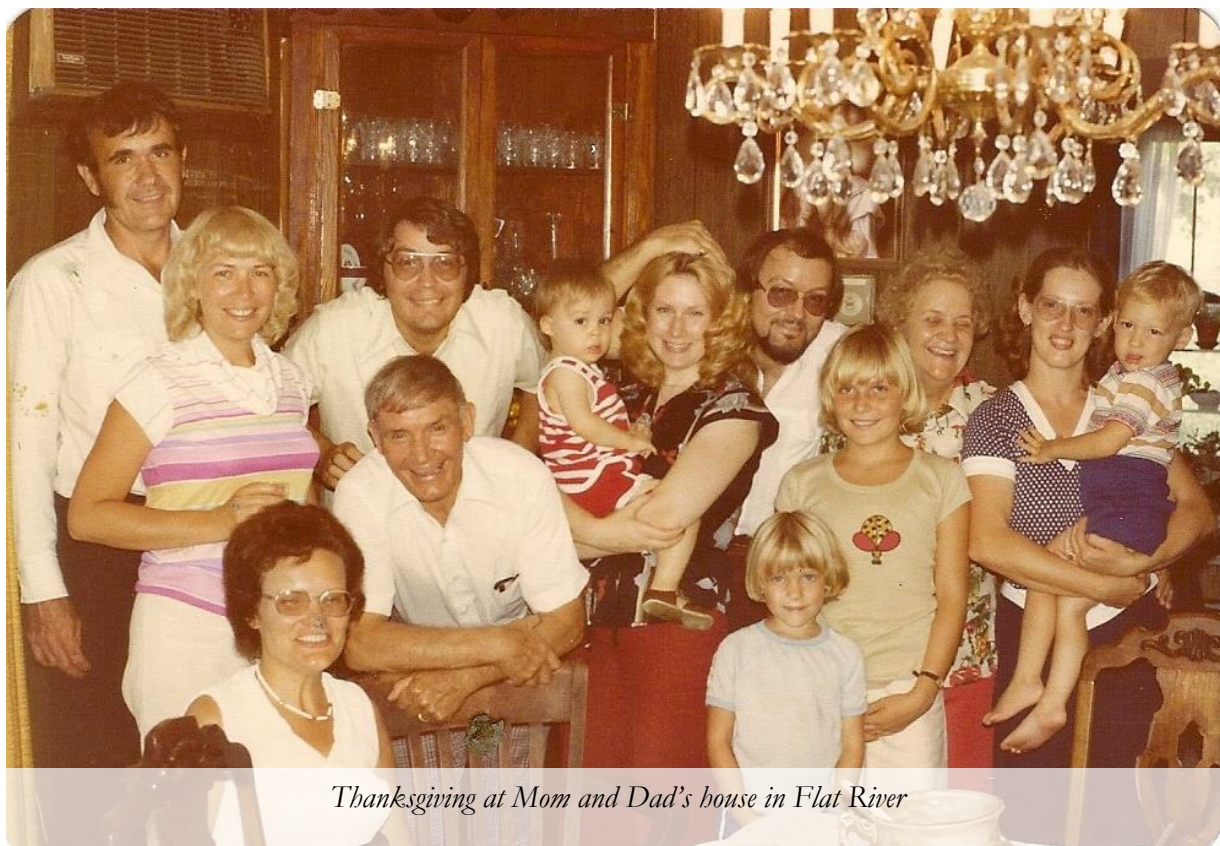
My dad always had a farmer from the church provide us with a truck load of manure and every year we would get a fresh supply. Before he would use the tiller, he would spread the manure over each garden during the late fall and then turn it under the next spring. By the time spring rolled around it was quite dry and mixed well in the already fertile soil.

Their daily routines included mother driving every morning to Farmington to the beauty school and teaching. It was a ministry field for her where she helped so many learn the trade of cutting, tinting, and styling hair. She said one day, "I have a customer who always pays me in 50 cent pieces. I am

saving them for the Grand Kids and some day will give them to them.” She lived up to that promise and before she passed away, she gave each of them these 50 cent coins.

Dad stayed around home most days and did the gardening, yard work, house work, grocery shopping and quite often he would have dinner ready for mom when she came home. He learned how to cook to some extent at an early age, but really took it seriously after they retired to Flat River. His old standby meal was cornbread and milk for himself. He simply cooked the best cornbread in an old black wrought iron skillet. He would fill a tall glass with milk and shove several pieces into the milk and that would be his lunch. I actually learned to like it as well. Once when we were visiting, he cooked another favorite which was poppy seed cake. My wife, Dee always loved his recipe for that cake which he would cook in a Bundt pan and sometimes in an angel food cake pan.

After dad died mother commented, “Ronnie, those were some of the best years of our lives. We had such precious time together.”



The Lessons of Giving

Mother and father were avid blood donors over the years, but dad gave every three months until he had his first heart attack. He gave gallon after gallon over the years and supported any blood drive in the various towns in which he lived.

He not only was a pastor, but a contributor to the community by heading up these blood drives, taking the census, and sponsoring various fund raisers. He would preach from the pulpit many sermons on the power of giving to one's "neighbors" and he practiced what he preached. He was involved with the ministerial alliance, Lion's clubs, the Red Cross, Boy Scouts, and spoke at various functions including high school commencements and baccalaureates. He gave the invocations at sporting events, graduations, and various celebrations. He believed that community was critical to his serving Christ.

Mother in turn was quite the giver as well. Not only did she volunteer as a pastor's wife, but she baked cakes, pies and pastries and would offer them to friends and neighbors. She would can quart jars of green beans, pickles, relish, and tomato sauce and store them in boxes in their bedroom and every time one of us would visit we would head out the door with a load of canned goods. Everything she canned was of the highest quality and was a favorite of ours compared to "store bought" goods. During the fall my mother would harvest the beans in tubs and sit in the back yard and snap the beans. On occasion, my sisters and my wife would join her in the back yard and break beans with her. Then the canning would begin and over the next few hours you could smell the aroma of cooking fresh green beans throughout the house and into the yard. "These were wonderful times with your mom," Dee would later say.

Whatever my mother and father came to have as possessions whether it was their house, cars, furniture, food, they would share or simply give it away. When they saw someone in need they never hesitated. Dad and Mom would both quote the scripture, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Every one of us children are givers today because of the teachings of mother and dad on giving and sharing whatever we have. I see it also in my children Sheila and Gabe and their families, as well.

Cherry Tree Surprise

My father was a jokester at times. He loved to kid people and could do it with a straight face, but always with a twinkle in his eye. He never wanted to hurt anyone, but could pull a prank with the best of them. One early summer day in Flat River, dad heard the blue jays chirping loudly in his cherry tree in the backyard. He looked out the small family room window directly toward the tree and could see the birds having a heyday in the cherry tree. They were picking at and dropping ripened cherries left and right. This simply riled my father and he made a comment to mom. “We’ve got to do something about those jaybirds stealing our cherries!”

He headed out the door and left in the car to run some errands and returned a short while later that morning. Mom was wondering what he was up to when she saw him take the ladder out of the shed in the garden area and place something up in the tree. He later came back into the house and sat down in his recliner to read the Daily Journal newspaper.

“What’s going on.” she asked.

“Nothing, I can’t handle!” he exclaimed with a sheepish grin.

“What’d you do?”

“I fixed them Jays so’s they won’t be eatin our cherries,” he replied.

She thought no more about it. The next morning she had finished a load of wash and began to hang the clothes on the line in the back yard. As she was hanging the clothes, she heard a loud squawking coming from the cherry tree beyond the fence. She looked to see what the birds were fussing over and went through the gate to explore further. As she approached the cherry tree the squawking got louder and louder. She reached up and pulled a limb down to get a better look when out of the tree fell a long thick snake that immediately curled up on hitting the ground.

She screamed! Now she had plenty of run in with snakes over the years having grown up in the Ozark hills of Arkansas, but she hated the critters and this one was no exception. She jumped backwards and turned to run for the gate. Dad had heard her scream and came running out to see what had happened and mom yelled, “Get the hoe, quick, snake! Snake!” She ran through the gate and finally looked back as dad passed her and headed to the tree. He reached down and picked up the curled snake behind the head and held it up for mom to see. It shook in his hand simply because he shook it....making it appear to be real.

He advanced toward her holding the snake and said, “You mean this little ole snake? Why it won’t hurt you but it sure kept the birds out of our cherry tree.”

He reached up and put the fake blowup snake back into the cherry tree and began to chuckle “Heh! Heh! And then really began to laugh slapping his knee! Now when my dad laughed, his shoulders would shake. Well this was certainly one of them shoulder shaking times!

Mom looked at him with eyes that were snapping with anger! “Don’t you ever scare me again that way!” Of course, she forgave my father and laughed as she recalled the incident several times over the years.

Every trip we made to Flat River after that, our children Sheila and Gabe would head out to the backyard to see if the snake was still in the tree. When mother finally sold the house and moved in with my sisters, the snake did not make the move.

Reunion

During the mid-80s my extended family including brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins and distant cousins began getting together in what we called the Hampton and Heddon family reunions. As time passed my cousin (we called her Aunt Hazel) began to interview family members in order to compile a family history of the Hamptons. The very first Hampton family reunion took place outside of Grapevine, Arkansas in the mid-80s. It took place usually over a weekend beginning on Friday and ending Sunday. Relatives from all over the country gathered at Uncle Adam and Aunt Dora's home place which now was owned by cousins Lonnie and Edith Crabtree. Edith's father was my dad's first cousin, Lawrence whose father was Uncle Adam.



Dad speaking at the Hampton family reunion 1988

It was a beautiful log home with a pond off the back porch. Down the road lived many of our cousins including the Heddons who married several of Uncle Adam's girls. Now Vanus Heddon was a world champion bull rider and later became a judge at many of the famous rodeos around the U. S. Just down the road from Lonnie and Edith's, he raised championship quality bulls for the rodeo. In addition, they grew some of the finest Arkansas hay in the valley that was exported to Kentucky for thoroughbreds stabled for the running of the Kentucky Derby. It was a fertile valley and not far was the Assembly of God church where we would end the reunion on Sunday with a special afternoon service for family. We would gather and sing, and there were many in the family who could really sing well. Then Dad, Sam or Bill McGarity, or another of our cousins would get up and provide a sermon or two. Sam would always tell jokes in the pulpit to get our attention, but boy could he ever finish with a powerful sermon just like my dad. The McGarity boys got saved in one of Dad's early churches in Missouri.

That first reunion, they roasted a whole hog by digging a pit, lining it with stones, building a fire using hickory or some other kind of fire wood and letting it burn down to charcoal, then placing the hog rolled up in a damp gunnysack and covering it with a tarp or piece of tin roof to hold the heat in and cooking over much of a day. They usually would bind the hog with chicken wire or cords after having gutted the hog. The skin was thick enough to keep the juices in and the damp gunny sack aided in keeping the meat moist. Oh my, was it ever good! You can add barbeque sauce if you like, but it was so tender, juicy and deeeelicious! It was served with all kinds of home grown garden vegetable dishes including country potato salad, barbequed beans, radishes, pickles, carrots, celery, corn bread and stuffing. Then came the sweets including pecan, chocolate cream, coconut cream, banana cream, sweet potato, pumpkin, chess and many other pies. There were also puddings, cakes and candies...Umm Umm! Of course there were stories and talking and singing around a fire or two.

My Aunt Hazel (she was actually my father's first cousin, but we always called her Aunt Hazel since she was like a sister to Clarence) interviewed every relative that showed up at that first reunion. She had a questionnaire that helped her develop our family history and so by the time the reunion was over she had a good start on the family history book. She was a former census taker and knew how to research family history. Much of the history of my parents was inspired by her. She provided each family with a copy in June of 1991 at another family reunion Dee and I hosted in Lincoln, Nebraska. Every several years we would have a family reunion, usually down at Grapevine, Arkansas. Those were memorable occasions and we continue to stay in touch as best we can with the extended Hampton family.

The Second Bypass: Dad's Final Goodbye

It was early January 1990, when dad entered Barnes Hospital in St. Louis. A week before, the U.S. invaded Panama and ousted General Manuel Noriega. That same year the first McDonald's in Moscow, Russia opens. Boris Yeltzin is elected as the first president of Russia. President George H. W. Bush takes office. Barbara Stanwyck passes away.

Dad invited us boys into his room to speak to us. My brothers Michael and Paul, brother-in-law's Gene and Lyndon and I were there when he prophesied these words, "I love you boys dearly, but I don't think I will be coming out of this hospital." In denial, we said, "Don't say that dad; you will be just fine..."

The surgery did not go well due to all of the scar tissue from his first by-pass. His lungs were punctured during the surgery and he struggled to breathe on his own from that day forward. He was placed on a breathing machine and spent much of his time in intensive care in an induced coma to help his recovery. It just did not happen the way we wanted it to and he continued to deteriorate.

His 78th birthday was March 15. It was a Thursday. Mother went in to see him in the intensive care unit. She cried.

My mother was at the hospital every day. She went home with my brother Paul on occasion, but then the hospital provided her with a private room to spend the evenings. Toward the end of the 4th week of March, the doctors decided to bring him out to a private room so family members could begin to say their goodbyes. Needless to say it was a tearful time.

On Sunday, March 25, many of us gathered in his room and begin to sing hymns together. It had been 61 days by this time that he had been in the hospital. He came out of the coma and joined in. I remember standing at the foot of his bed and he looked directly into my eyes and winked (something he often did to accentuate a moment whether it was a funny story or something he was thinking). I totally was caught off guard and could not figure out what he was winking about but learned several years later what it meant. He obviously wanted us children to all know Jesus Christ as our personal savior. At that time Michael and I were not believers, but he sensed God had reassured him that it would be all right. My brother, Paul had been praying for my father every day that God would totally heal Dad. As Dad got weaker and weaker, Paul continued to pray. That very morning, Paul's pastor came over and had breakfast with Paul and me. He told Paul, that he had a word from the Lord and that Paul needed to let Dad go...he was the only one of us that had not emotionally done that yet. We wept together and even though Paul certainly didn't want to, that day he did release Dad in his spirit.

That Sunday was one of enjoyment for Dad as each family member who came by had the opportunity to reach over and hug and kiss him...most hoping it wouldn't be the last, but knowing

it probably was....we laughed, we cried, we talked, we sang, we prayed, we sighed, we remembered good times, we came and went...

The Strawberries

Toward the end his doctor had told us to make arrangements; it was apparent that we needed to purchase a cemetery plot, and so Mom and I talked to the doctor on Monday, March 26, and he thought it would be ok for us to head to Flat River to make the arrangements. Dad had a cemetery in mind out toward Bonne Terre, so we headed that way. Interestingly enough, we actually went to a different one thinking in our minds it was the one Dad chose, but it wasn't we learned later. My sister, Ruth remained to sit by dad's bedside that afternoon.

We arrived outside of the cemetery about 4:45 p.m. and began to look around for the keeper. Earlier we had called and someone had told us he was out at the cemetery and if we hurried we could catch him. We found him as he was just leaving. "You know you're lucky, because I was just about to leave town and wouldn't have been back for several weeks." We found the perfect spot on a hillside overlooking highway 67 not too far from the entrance. As mom and I looked out from the spot, we could see a fruit farm across the highway and there was a field of strawberries! Dad loved strawberries and grew them in his garden. We knew this was it. We signed the purchase agreement and headed to mom and dad's home on Mulberry Street in Flat River. We decided to spend the night to catch upon some things at home. Mom asked, "Would you go out and uncover the strawberries?" "Sure," I said and headed out to the garden. It was about 6:00 p.m. by this time and was getting dark. I hurried and took the rake and began to rake the straw from the berry patch. They were already greening up and were quite thick by this time of the year. There were more than two dozen plants, but I finished and headed back to the house. Not long after, we got a call from the hospital that we should return. Dad had turned for the worse. We packed up and headed back to St. Louis. The hospital was about 60 miles from my parents' home or a little over an hour's drive. We arrived and went to his room. Ruth was there and we asked how he was doing. She responded, "He was doing ok, but then he simply went back into a coma. While he was awake, he said the strangest thing....he said, 'I can see the strawberries. Can you see them?' And then he said, 'Oh my, look at all of the people.' It was like he was seeing old friends and acquaintances from the past..." "What time did he say, I can see the strawberries?" I asked. "Oh, it was about six." I then told her what I had been doing exactly at 6:00 that evening! Amazing how God looks down and comforts us! Later that year, my daughter, Sheila wrote an essay about her grandfather and this event. She received an A on the paper and was not able to read it to the rest of her class because of her tears. Her teacher read it. There were quite a few tears that day. Here it is in my daughter's own words:

"I Can See the Strawberries."

My grandfather loved strawberries and apples. Every summer when my brother and I would come down and visit, we would eat strawberry shortcake or apple crisp with my grandparents. They use to spend many hours tending their wholesome garden. This was

their way of getting exercise. I'll never forget the blowup snake, which looked so real, my grandfather put in the apple and cherry trees to scare away the birds. He mostly scared grandmother by hiding the snake somewhere inside the house so she would run into it. Grandfather's witty personality always brought a smile or laugh to anyone's face. He had a passion for people in need. For example, he would visit the sick and old, counsel those in depression, and much more. My grandfather's life was dedicated to God. He was a Reverend for many numbers of churches. A day would not pass without a prayer for the many people he knew and loved including his family and friends. Being in my grandparents' home, I always felt a sense of the Lord's Spirit there with me.

My father, grandmother, aunts and uncles all sing so joyfully the songs they would sing in church as they look at the pale, fragile, helpless, exposed body which lays on white, holy-like sheets in the hospital. This body which has for so long been afflicted with pain but despite the pain, still carried the wholeness of love to the very end. This body was my grandfather. They sang the songs for the grandfather, father, husband and friend who gave them so much in life. His soul now feeling no pain but joy and peace in his new life.

It was four years ago that my grandfather needed a 5 by-pass operation for the cholesterol infested arteries in his heart. The operation went very well and he was out of the hospital in no time.

Late last year, my grandfather began feeling chest pains again. After two months of chest pains, he decided to see his doctor. Following many tests, the results showed he would need another triple by-pass operation. Hearing the news, he debated on whether to go through the operation or not. He decided to go ahead but it was mainly for my grandmother. My grandfather, who was always organized, gathered together his will and important papers just in case anything should happen to him during the operation.

He entered St. Barnes Hospital in St. Louis, Mo. On January 22, 1990. Two days later, the operation took place lasting nine and a half hours. After the operation, he began to recover. His recovery wasn't like that of his last heart surgery. Upon several days following his surgery, his condition had improved little. On Tuesday, the 5th, the doctors said his heart was healing great, but pneumonia had attacked his lungs. Having a difficult time breathing, my father was put on life support. My cousin, a nurse from North Carolina, flew into St. Louis to try to wean him from the life support unit. She succeeded for about four days, but again he needed to be put back on the machines to keep him alive.

About a month passed, when my Aunt Charlotte was sitting beside my grandfather's bed reading Bible scriptures to him. As she read the scripture dealing with "the valley of death," my grandfather pointed to the ceiling as though telling her he was ready for heaven. After my dad called us here in Lincoln, and explained the incident, I felt so afraid. It was almost as if my grandfather knew he was dying. Every night, whenever the telephone would ring, I was so scared it was the news I didn't want to hear. It was so heartbreaking when my father

would call us one day telling us that my grandfather was improving and then the next day he would be worse. My mother, brother and I were not able to see my grandfather in the hospital. It was too difficult for us to get away. My father made the ten hour drive about 5 or 6 times to St. Louis and back to Lincoln. It was really hard to find the right words to comfort my father.

Around the second week of March, my grandfather was taken off of life support. It wasn't long before the need for life support was a must again, but my grandmother refused to put him back on it. She was now beginning to accept the fact that he was dying. She stuck with him since day number one in the hospital.

It was Sunday, the 25th of March when my grandfather went into a coma. He was completely off of the life support but still had oxygen. The following day, my father and grandmother decided to go to my grandparents' home town, Flat River, Mo., an hour's drive away. My grandmother picked out the grave site located on a hill overlooking an apple orchard and strawberry field. My father and grandmother headed back to my grandparents' house to take care of some odds and ends, but mostly to get away from the hospital. My grandmother told my father to go out into the garden and uncover the strawberries covered with hay, so that they could receive some sunlight. He began uncovering them about 6:00 p.m. and finished around 6:30. Around 6:15 p.m. at the hospital my grandfather came out of the coma and said to my Aunt Ruth sitting at his bedside, "I can see the strawberries. Look how beautiful the strawberries are." My aunt really had no idea what he was saying. It was amazing because the whole time he was in the hospital, no one ever mentioned anything about strawberries.

My father and grandmother headed back to the hospital after hearing that my grandfather's condition was getting worse. He had gone back into the coma again after seeing the strawberries. It was now Tuesday the 27th of March, sixty-four days of pain, heartbreak, confusion, exhaustion, joy, sorrow, and love had passed. My grandfather was still in the peaceful coma as on the previous days. The nurse came into the room and told the family that sometimes if you talk or sing to the person in the coma, they might hear you. For this reason, they all sang spiritual songs around his bed.

As my grandfather's breath grew weaker and weaker, my grandmother so compassionately, continued to stay by his side. As he took his final breath he spoke these words, "Thank you, Jesus." Everyone was surprised, not by the words but by the fact he was able to utter them.

Although my grandfather is gone and has left a void in our lives, I will always remember him. I will miss the laughter and love he brought to my heart. Being the religious person he was, allowed him to share many great testimonies which make me strong in my beliefs in God. My life goes on but I will never forget my grandfather, Clarence R. Hampton.

Dad's death was hard on us all. I was certainly questioning why God took him so early; even though he was 78, it seemed like he should have lived into his 90s. Several years later the good Lord gave me a scripture that really answered why he died. It is *Isaiah 57:1-2 (NLT)*

The righteous perish, and no one takes it to heart; the devout are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.

This has comforted me over the years. My mother lived another 18 years after dad passed on.



Sheila, 3 years old, following "Grandpa Hampton" at the Flat River home.

One of Mother's Lessons: “I will never leave you nor forsake”

My wife and I and our two children were living in Lincoln, Nebraska where I was a business professor in the College of Business Administration at the University of Nebraska. Every other Friday afternoon, I would head to St. Louis, where dad was trying to recover from his second bypass surgery in Barnes Hospital. I owned a small sports car, a 1987 Mazda RX7 Turbo. It was amazingly fast and I could make the trip and pull into the parking lot of Barnes Hospital in 8 hours on a good trip, so if I left at 5:30 or 6:00 p.m. I could be there by 2:00 a.m. on Saturday morning. One day I left for St. Louis and it was pouring down rain. This was about the first weekend in March, 1990. I only stopped for gas and to go pee on these trips. I usually made them alone because Dee was working for Lincoln Public Schools and both children were in school as well. As I was entering St. Louis on 40 highway in the eastbound lane, I had just gone under the overpass of 270 Highway. I was in the passing lane with a rail right next to me with no shoulder or place to pull off. A car was traveling my same speed which was about 70 miles per hour on my right. It was raining hard. I noticed a red car coming down the ramp at a high rate of speed onto 40 highway with plans to enter in front of us. The car hit a large area of water draining off the ramp and did a 180 in front of us. It seemed like everything went into super slow motion. I looked into the eyes of the passenger who was extremely scared. The car's rear end was several feet from the rail right in front of me and I braced for the inevitable collision and had no time to apply the brakes and neither did the car on my right. My life flashed before me it seemed and the next thing that happened is totally unexplainable. I cannot for the life of me explain the extraordinary events. Even while writing this I can still see the situation leading up to the unexplainable...in a millisecond something seemed to push the red car to the right, out from in front of us, and I continued on my journey...all I know is no accident happened, and no one was hurt and only God knows how He brought it about. As I shared this with my mother about 6:00 a.m. in the waiting room of the hospital, she simply said, “Ronnie, I prayed for you before I fell asleep last night just like I always do. I pray for all you children every morning and every evening. You know, He says, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ God has been faithful to me all the years and He isn’t about to stop now.”

I was not following Christ in those days and of course I knew what my mother was telling was true, but it wasn’t until a year and a half later that I accepted Christ into my life and gave it to Him. He does the impossible for us unbelievers even when we don’t deserve it because someone (my Mother) asked Him to because He loves us so!

The Call

After my father died, I went on with my life as a professor and associate dean in the College of Business Administration at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, Nebraska. By the fall of 1991, most people considered me the epitome of success. I had a PhD and was the Holmes Professor of International Business at a major university; I had a wonderful wife and two fantastic children; we lived in one of the country club areas in a large two level home; I had money in the bank, sports cars, everything a person could want; I traveled worldwide; I had the titles, positions, respect...everything the American Dream had to offer...and yet...and yet...something was missing.

Students would come into my office and sit down and ask me, “Dr. Hampton, how did you get to where you are today? The reason I am asking is I want to become a success just like you have.”

Little did they know on the inside there was an emptiness...something WAS missing. I would think to myself, “NO! You don’t want to be like me!” I was miserable, depressed, and yes, even thought of ending it all. How could I not be happy? Looking back, I had no close male friends. Oh, I called a lot of people my friend, but I did not open up to any of them. Would not let any of them into my most private thoughts and life. Did not even open up my early life to my wife.

My wife recognized the depression and unhappiness in me. One day she said, “Maybe you should go down to that church down the hill over there on Old Cheney Road. You could be missing the spirituality part of your life.”

So one Sunday morning, I went down to that church. It changed my life! That fall I accepted Christ as my Lord and Savior and was overwhelmed by Him. It began the most amazing chapter in my life...

Now keep in mind that this book is about my mother’s and father’s lives. However, I needed to set you up for what happened with my father after he died.

In that fall of 1991, I began to live a journey in seeking God more than ever before. Oh yeah, I could pray when I got into trouble or needed something before then, but now I really began to talk with God...I would call it real prayer and we would have conversations in the morning before the sun rose. I was always an early riser from my Navy days and quite often would be at the office at least an hour before anyone else. So by 5:00 a.m. I was wide awake and would slip into our bathroom which included a large walk-in closet; I showered, shaved and dressed for the day, then slipped out quietly to not wake, Dee, my wife and head off to the church to pray. When I arrived I would put on worship music and quietly begin to read the Bible, meditating on what I was reading and then would simply talk with God. I oft times would not be alone because others who had the

same idea I did would come and pray in various parts of the sanctuary. This went on through the 90s; rising up, starting the day in prayer and reading scripture and then heading off for a cup of coffee before heading to the University.

One of these mornings, I happened to linger longer than the others and while I was sitting alone on the front row of the sanctuary, I felt a presence beside me. I opened my eyes and looked to see but no one was there in the physical. I still sensed a powerful presence and then I had this vision (I seemed to be in a dream) of my father sitting down beside me. He had a torch in his hand and he reached over and handed it to me. "What is this?" I seemed to ask in my thoughts. "You'll know in good time," he seemed to respond. It was so real that I began to weep wondering what this was about but knowing that I was so blessed and honored to have this happen to me. It wasn't until later that the meaning of this event was partially explained to me by the Holy Spirit...your father's anointing, is passed on to you. Do what he did. Obey me and receive the call to share your faith with others. Tell, live and act on my behalf just like your father and mother did, such that people will come to know that I love them...and desire to commune with them as well, just as I have with you." I will never forget the experience and long for the day when I can sit down with my father and talk with him again.

Broken Ankle

When our mother finally knew she could no longer take care of herself, she began a new life living with my two sisters. Oh, yes on occasion she would visit us boys, but not to stay for any length of time because she needed help bathing and dressing herself during the later years of her life. She moved in with my sister Charlotte and her husband, Lyndon Bays. They were living at the time in Mount Vernon, Missouri, where Charlotte was the principal of the grade school and Lyndon was teaching science and agriculture in high school in one of the nearby towns. It was January 15, 1999 and by this time, both of Charlotte's children were on their own and so mother was at home alone. Mother was 81 years old.

That same month the Euro is created in the European Union. *The Sopranos* television show debuts on HBO. China announces restrictions of the use of Internet. And one of the largest drug busts takes place with the coast guard interception of a ship loaded with 9500 pounds of cocaine headed for Houston.

As Mother was prone to do, she headed out to get the mail by the side of the road one day. The night before had brought snow and ice and the porch, steps and sidewalk was quite icy. As she stepped onto the side walk, her foot slipped and went off the edge onto the lawn which was several inches lower than the side walk. She heard the "SNAP" and the pain hit her immediately and she knew she had broken something. She fell head first into the lawn. She immediately tried to get up, but every time she tried putting weight on her right foot, she would fall again. She finally looked down at her foot and saw that it was completely sideways to her leg and hung limply below her pant leg. It had completely broken apart above the ankle and her entire foot had dangled from her lower leg we later learned.

When she had tried to stand on it of course she was doing more damage as the bone pierced more of the flesh. The snow and icy rain still was falling as she began to try to crawl back toward the side walk. She began to cry out for help. "HELP! CAN ANYONE HEAR ME?" Fear began to raise its ugly head in her mind for the first time. She could hear nothing but the icy rain falling and her own breath as she fought back the tears. She was going to have to try to help herself. She began to pray earnestly, "Lord, I need you! Please help me get inside to the phone! I can't do this without you! Lord, I need you!"

With a new found strength she inched her way to the edge of the sidewalk. She couldn't recall how she did it but she pulled herself along the icy sidewalk and finally reached the first step to the front porch. Now, how was she ever going to get up these icy steps?

“Lord, thank you for getting me this far. I need you, Father, in Jesus name!” A stabbing pain shot up her leg each time she dragged it forward, the bone penetrating her flesh. With much effort she was able to pull herself up each step. The minutes turned into an hour, before she finally was able to get to the front porch. Her fingers were numb from the cold as she continued to inch her way across the front porch and in through the front door.

She left the front door ajar as she crawled toward the kitchen where the wall phone was hanging. When she got below it she realized she could not muster the strength to reach it and felt the fear began to rise in her again. She prayed, “Thank you, Lord for getting me this far! How am I going to get that phone down?” Immediately, she spied a dish towel hanging on the oven door handle. She inched over to it and grabbed the towel and crawled back again under the phone and began to swing the towel at the phone hoping to knock it from its cradle. Suddenly it dropped to the floor and she dialed Charlotte’s number at school.

Within the next half hour she was taken to the hospital in Mount Vernon and was later transferred to Mercy Hospital in Springfield, Missouri for surgery. The doctors told us she probably will not walk again. Too much damage to her foot, ankle and lower leg would prohibit her from walking without a crutch or she might be confined to a wheel chair. Well, none of us wanted to hear that nor did we want to believe it. I recall we all began to pray for our mother. I remember driving down to Springfield and entering her hospital room and praying a simple prayer, “Lord, your Word says to “ask” and today we are asking for complete healing in mom’s leg in Jesus name.”

Within six weeks she was up and about on that leg and before long you couldn’t tell she had ever broke it clean through! Praise God!

Alzheimer's

Over the next several years Ruth and Charlotte took turns hosting my mother in their respective homes. Mother moved in with my sister Ruth and her husband, Gene in Troy, Missouri in the early 2000s. They had a beautiful country home in a small community outside of town. Mother enjoyed living there and contributed to the household helping out with various things. Ruth had such a big heart and simply sacrificed her time helping mother and Gene with about everything. In later years, she would help bathe and handle her hygiene needs. She also did this for Gene after he lost his leg and was confined to a wheel chair. They were a lot to manage, because both were quite large and somehow Ruth would simply pray, “Lord, I need your help. Give me strength to lift my mother and husband today.” And amazingly she was able to help them with their daily routines in the bathroom and shower.

In July 2008, Ruth experienced what everyone thought was a mild stroke or heart condition, and she began to struggle with her routine. She called my older brother, Paul who lived in Ballwin, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis, at the time and worked for a stock brokerage firm out of his home. He said to bring her to him and so Ruth and Gene did. Well mother was struggling with basic things including eating, using the bathroom and clothing herself, something that Ruth simply had been helping her with for quite some time. Paul and the rest of us siblings had no idea that our mother had begun to have these kinds of problems. Paul immediately took mother to a specialist who gave our mother a series of tests and determined she was in the latter stages of Alzheimer's disease. None of us really knew what this meant, but I googled it and found out what the stages were about and began to recognize that our mother had been having these symptoms for a period of time. I immediately called each of my brothers and sisters and gave them the Alzheimer's website. We knew Ruth could no longer take care of mother. We began to try and find a rest home that would take an Alzheimer's patient. Every home in the St. Louis area seemed to have a waiting list. It was on a Thursday when we had learned from the Dr. that our mother would need to have 24/7 care. Ruth had been in and out of the hospital and could no longer take care of mother, Paul was scheduled to be out of town from Sunday for a week. We needed a place for Mother and there simply was nothing available. We began to pray. On Saturday morning, a bed came open! It was in the rest home in Troy, Missouri and became such a blessing to Ruth and Gene who now could visit mother almost every day and help feed her and comfort her! Another miracle!

Now if you haven't ever been around an Alzheimer patient, their short term memory is something they begin to lose. My mother could have just eaten, but not be able to tell you what she had to eat. But ask her to recite a poem she learned when she was young and she would not skip a single word. We tried this on occasion and one day my wife went with me to visit and Dee asked, “Mom, do you remember any poems you learned?” She immediately perked up and said, “Why sure honey. Here's one:

Hang up the baby's stocking
be sure you don't forget,
The dear little dimpling darling
has never seen Christmas yet.
I told her all about it,
she opened her big blue eyes,
I'm sure she understood it for
she looked so funny and wise.

Dear, what a tiny stocking!
it doesn't take much to hold.
such little pink toes as baby's
away from the frost and cold.
But then for the baby's Christmas
It will never do at all;
Why, Santa wouldn't be looking
For anything half so small.

I know what I'll do for the baby,
I thought of the very best plan.
I'll borrow a stocking of Grandma's,
the longest as ever I can.
And you hang it by mine dear Mother,
right here in the corner so.
And write a letter to Santa Claus
and fasten it on the toe.

Write, "this is the baby's stocking
that hangs in the corner here.
You never have seen her Santa,
For she only came this year.
But she's just the blessedest baby!
And now before you go
Just cram her stocking with goodies
From the top clean down to the toe."

"Do you want to hear another one," she asked. "Yes," we replied. "Well my mother," she said, "would stand me on top of the kitchen table when I was just 4 years old and she would say, "Ok, Ilene tell us whatcha memorized at school," and I would begin to quote a poem like this one:

The Lord had a job for me, but I had so much to do.
I said to get somebody else or wait till I get thro'.
I don't know how the Lord came out or how He got along.
But away down in my sneaking heart, I knew I done Him wrong.
One day I needed the Lord real bad and needed Him right away!
He wouldn't answer my prayer at all, but I thought I heard Him say;
"Away down in My bleeding heart I got so much to do.
You can find somebody else or wait till I get thro'.
Now when the Lord has a job for me, I never try to shirk.
I drop whatever I have in hand and do the good Lord's work;
My affairs can roll along or wait till I get thro'.
For nobody else can do the work the Lord has for me to do!

It was difficult to watch her deteriorate so quickly and every chance we had, we would head toward Troy to see her. Sometimes we would simply sit with her as she ate or we might see her in her room or we rolled her in a wheel chair out and took her to her favorite restaurant in my sisters van that was equipped to hold wheel chairs or simply push her out into a small garden area located inside the center of the home.



The author, my mother, Ilene, Gene and Ruth in the garden at the rest home in Troy.

Cancer!

In September, 2008, I went to my doctor for a full checkup. My wife and daughter both had been on my case over the years to do this. In early August I sensed in my spirit that I was supposed to go. Well, after the blood test and checkup the doctor called me back for a consultation. He said, “Ron, you are in great health! The only thing that causes me a little concern is your blood test shows you have a high level of iron (ferritin). I would recommend you go see a specialist and have a more definitive test of your blood. I will set up the appointment for you.”

Off to another doctor I went and a more complete blood test of the Serum Ferritin, which is an indication of the amount of iron in the blood stream. Men normally range from 12ng/dL to 300ng/dL, or nanograms per deciliter. Mine showed a dangerously high level approaching 1000ng/dL. The doctor then recommended I have an ultrasound of the liver since iron is stored in the liver. Iron is also distributed out of the liver into the blood stream and normally with high levels of iron it tends to damage the liver first. Iron is also stored in the spleen, bone marrow and muscles. He set up an appointment for me with a local hospital and I went for the ultrasound which showed little damage to the liver, but led to the discovery of a golf ball sized tumor in my right kidney! On November 4, 2008, I had my right kidney removed, and the tumor was cancer. My surgeon told me, “Ron, you showed no symptoms of cancer. You had no bleeding in your urine, no pain in your back or side, nothing at all to indicate anything was wrong, but this was growing for some time now. This is truly a miracle that we caught this in time!”

Within three weeks of my surgery, I returned to the University of Nebraska for my MBA class that I was teaching that fall. I received no radiation or chemotherapy and today I am still cancer free! God gets the Glory! This is to say because of my parents’ obedience and faith in the Lord, our families continue to see miracles and blessings today! This has strengthened our faith and resolve in the Lord.

We kept this from my mother who was struggling with memory lapses and oft times did not recognize us when we visited. She continued to lose her ability to eat and more specifically had trouble chewing and swallowing food. She began to deteriorate such that she had trouble lifting her head.

My daughter had made plans for our immediate family to spend Christmas in Florida and even though it had only been a few weeks since the surgery to remove my right kidney, I agreed to make the long trip by car. We stayed from Sunday, December 21 through Saturday, December 27. On Sunday, December 28, 2008, as we were traveling back from Florida to go home we went through St. Louis and stopped by the rest home in Troy, Missouri. I went in and found my mother out in the TV room. She was sleeping with her head down. I said hello to her and she did not respond. I tried for several minutes trying to shake her awake but to no avail. Then I sensed in my spirit that I should begin to quote her favorite scripture, the 23rd Psalms:

“The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me lie down in green pastures.
He leadeth me beside the still waters
He restoreth my soul.
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,
For thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.
Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell
In the house of the LORD forever.”

I had been taught to memorize scriptures by my mother and father as a child and so I began to quote these scriptures, and Mother began to lift her head. Her lips began to move as she recited the Psalm with me. She began to nod her head as so to say yes as I quoted. I finished with tears in my eyes and I saw one on her cheek as well with a slight smile on her face. I stood up and hugged her and turned to go. When I looked back her head was down on her chest again and I knew it was not going to be long before she would pass away. But that little miracle for me was so dear. My mother acknowledged the Word of God that afternoon, while nothing else could penetrate her Alzheimer raked mind. It is still a comfort to me today as I write this.

Dee and I continued home and Monday morning got the call from my sister Ruth, that we had better come back. We packed up and left for Troy that day and spent the next several days with mother and with many family members. My brothers and sisters and most of their children had the opportunity to come and go in her room that day and into the next to say their goodbyes. Dee and I returned to our hotel room on Tuesday evening when the phone rang about midnight. Ruth said, “She is about to go but if you hurry you can be here...” We arrived at her room before 1:00 a.m. on Wednesday, December 31, 2008. She passed on to be with the Lord shortly thereafter.

We are so blessed to have been the children of Clarence and Eileen Hampton! I would not have traded them for the world! What an impact they have had on us that has forever changed our lives! I am so grateful to God for being their child! I still have so many fond memories of our times together including the ordinary and the extraordinary events that took place. Many stories have been left out of this brief testimony and tribute to their lives. I love them and look forward to someday planning to join them for a family reunion in heaven.

SDG (Soli Deo Gloria) Glory to God alone!



Mother and Father's 50th Wedding Anniversary at Flat River in 1984

Afterword

My sister, Ruth passed away in 2012. It was quite sudden and it was the result of a brain tumor the size of a baseball. Several days before she died, my brother, Michael and I were sitting in her room about 5 pm. She had just transferred from the recovery room to her hospital room. We talked with each other for over an hour. During that time she related, "I see mother. I know mom, this chicken and noodles (she had said she was hungry for some chicken and noodles which was on the menu that day) is not as good as yours. I can see her and she's laughing!" Tears came to my eyes for Ruth's faith had never wavered through the years. To this day she is missed because of how strong in her faith she was in our families and extended families.

These are just a few of the amazing stories of our parents Clarence R. (CR) and Eileen Hampton. There were so many other stories that brought laughter, tears, pain, joy and love. We continue to be blessed by their Godly influence on our lives.

Well I must get on with publishing this testimony online. God has told me to give this away for free. So here it is: May you experience God's love and compassion in reading Clarence and Eileen's testimony in Jesus name! Pass it on for others to read if you so desire. God bless you!