

Autobiography

Ernest Fentress



And
Evie's Stories
(Reflections from the Heart)

**Autobiography
Ernest Fentress**

And

**Evie's Stories
(Reflections from the Heart)**

To:

Our daughter, Angela, and her husband, Trey,

Our son, Lee,

All of our grandchildren:

Samuel, Josiah, Kristiana, Daniel, Elijah, Eva, Ezra, and Joshua,

Any future grandchildren or great-grandchildren,

*Also to others we call family or friends,
And to anyone who takes the time to read our stories.*

A special thank-you is extended to Evie's sister,

Jan Seagraves,

Who spent countless hours editing our manuscript.

Thank you and we love you!

Ernie and Evie

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*Prologue***Meeting My Wife to Be
Miss Evie Ferrell**

I was 20 years old. It was February of 1971 when our youth group led a Jesus parade through downtown Nashville, TN. Many of the youth groups we ministered to in the area also marched with us around the State Capitol and prayed for our nation and our State leaders. This was the culmination of several months of meetings we had in different churches around the Nashville area. Brother Harold Witmer, Director of Youth Challenge Center, Clarksville, TN wanted to have a Jesus march through Nashville and we all held signs that said, “Turn It Over To Jesus” or “Jesus Is Lord” or “God Loves You.” He also rented the War Memorial Auditorium across the street from the State Capitol. Ironically, I would end up working next to that building for 25 years.

Brother Harold had invited all the youth groups and anyone who wanted to join us to celebrate what God had done in the lives of so many. Many churches brought their youth groups to the meeting. There were probably a couple hundred or so people at the rally. I was up front playing my guitar leading the music when I saw Evie, my future wife, in the crowd. My heart raced as I thought about her and wondered if I would have a chance to talk with her. At that time I didn’t even know her last name.

A few weeks before that day, our youth ministry team went to a restaurant and Evie’s youth group was there. I ended up sitting in the only seat available, the one right next to Evie. I remember being too shy to speak to her. We had never had a real conversation other than the usual “God loves you and I do too” that we shared with everyone. Evie and her youth group had come to some of our other nightly church youth meetings in the Nashville area but I didn’t have the courage to talk to her. However, I knew she was going to be my wife. I had seen her at one of the churches we ministered to and I remember walking from a water fountain and seeing Evie coming towards me one evening when I got up the courage to say, “Hey, God loves you and I do too.” As I was walking away, I looked back at her and added, “I really do.” She smiled and gave me a positive nod.

It was at the end of the meeting at the War Memorial Auditorium that we gave an invitation request for anyone who needed prayer or wanted to know Jesus to come forward and meet with our counselors at the front of the auditorium. Many young people came forward as we sang the Gaither song “He Touched Me.” While I was playing my guitar and singing on stage, I saw Evie

come forward and kneel at the front of the auditorium with one of our youth center's female counselors. The Lord spoke to me at that moment and said, "Go down and talk to Evie." While I was singing, I argued and told the Lord, "I don't know what to say. What am I supposed to do and say?" He just assured me with a peace in my heart that He would tell me what to say and what to do when I got down to the floor level where everyone was kneeling.

Immediately, I motioned to the piano player who also sang to continue singing and leading the worship. I put down my guitar and began making my way off the stage to where Evie was kneeling and praying with the counselor. As I got closer to Evie the Lord said, "Ask her to be your wife." I began questioning God saying, "Lord how am I supposed to do that? I've never done anything like this before. I don't even know her last name, and, besides, she will think I am crazy if I say that." Immediately, the Lord placed "peace" in my heart to walk by faith and continue.

There were probably 50 to 100 people kneeling and praying out loud at the front of the auditorium. The music was playing loudly and people were singing so there was a lot of noise. When I arrived at where Evie was kneeling and praying with one of our female counselors, I gently tapped her on the shoulder and softly said, "Evie, can I speak to you for a moment?" What I didn't know was what Evie had just been praying about with the counselor. I found out later that they had just finished praying about me. Evie was asking the Lord to please hurry up and let her know something about me being her husband. You see, she had heard the Lord tell her that I was her future husband. While kneeling there at the front of the auditorium, she had just told the young counselor she didn't know how that was going to happen since she didn't know me. Evie was asking for prayer of agreement with the counselor that whatever the Lord wanted her to do she would do; however, she wanted God to hurry it up so she could quit thinking about me all the time and put her focus back on Him.

She and the counselor, Sally Burkes, had both said "Amen" when I tapped Evie on the shoulder. Both looked up at me in surprise. I found out at a later time that one evening when Evie was on her way back from one of the youth meetings, she had told her pastor, Jerry Heflin, that she believed the Lord had spoken to her and told her that I was going to be her husband. (Evie's side of the story is much more detailed as to what was going on in her life up to that point).

After I tapped Evie on the shoulder and asked her if I could speak to her for a moment, she got up and followed me as I led her to the backstage stairwell where no one could see or hear us. Walking back there, again I asked the Lord, "What

am I supposed to say?" He just said, "I'll give you the words as you speak." Evie was following behind me as we worked our way to the backstage area. (You'll have to read Evie's side of this testimony to find out what was going through her mind while she was following me).

By then we were standing backstage side by side. I stuttered and said "Evie, uh, Evie, uh, Evie, let's pray." This is what fell out of my mouth. I prayed out loud, "Lord, you told me to do this." Then I prayed, "Lord, I'd sure love to have Evie for my wife, in Jesus' name, Amen." A few seconds went by and Evie was quiet. I thought to myself, *oh no*, I have really missed God. I kept my eyes closed as she spoke in a gentle voice and said, "May I add a PS onto that prayer?" I said, "Uh, sure," and closed my eyes tightly and gulped. Evie prayed, "Lord, thank you for answering my prayer and, yes, I will be his wife, in Jesus' name, Amen."

We both looked at each other rather astonished at what had just happened. I knew I was looking at my wife to be. There we were, immediately engaged to be married without ever having a date, never carrying on lengthy conversations, not knowing anything about each other's respective families, or even knowing each other's last name. She knew she was looking at her husband to be. We both agreed we should get to know each other.



“Pray for the One You’ll Marry” (Evie’s perspective)

“Pray for the one you’ll marry someday,” the Sunday school teacher instructed our twelve year old girls, of whom I was one. My innocent, prayer-like wishes included someone who sang, played guitar, could preach, and didn’t like watching ball games on T.V. or demand quiet to read the newspaper. The latter was driven by the avoidance I felt from my father when he was home on weekends. As an afterthought to my prayer was the notion that it would be nice to marry an “Ernest” and be like Grandma Evie for whom I was named.

Little did I know that God would answer some very specific prayers with the coming of Harold Witmer and The Youth Challenge Center to lead the Fall Revival at church in 1970. Not only were the sermons and testimonies powerful, the praise music was invigorating! It was exciting to meet the young people who either sang or spoke. What talent I assessed as I met the high-schoolers! Or so, I thought. One of the young men, Ernie, said he was a sophomore at his school, supporting my guess - that is until he answered my question *“Where?”* with *“Austin Peay State University.”*

Realizing he could be a potential suitor, when asked if I’d be going on the upcoming youth retreat, I wouldn’t commit. The youth retreat occurred during the Thanksgiving break but I didn’t go. I was fully responsible for my job as a piano teacher in a Nashville studio. When Kay returned from the retreat her statement, “Hey, that guy, Ernie, asked where you were,” confirmed my decision to “not go” to the retreat was right—surmising that going could have provided a distraction to my seeking the Lord.

A couple of weeks into the New Year the Youth Challenge group came back to my church. I’ll never forget how I felt that day when Ernie walked by me. Now that I wanted to get to know him, I gained courage and uttered, “Hello, Ernie.” He kept walking, never looked back and went straight up the stairs to grab his guitar to lead worship. I decided I deserved to be ignored. After all, I hadn’t attended the youth retreat. Months later when I asked him about that moment in time he said, “I didn’t see you or hear you. I was just focused on the upcoming service.”

Revival was taking place around the Greater Nashville, TN area. Often, over the next few weeks our church youth attended. That guy, Ernie, usually led the music – but not always. It was on one of those nights when he wasn’t there that I heard a message about “Giving it all to Jesus.” The preacher encouraged us

to surrender all hindrances to God at the altar. “Come as a hobo and ask the Lord to reveal the contents of your sack. Place those things on the altar. Whatever comes to mind, even if it seems to make no sense, by faith - give it to Him!”

Walking to the altar, I was determined to give it “all” to Jesus. As I didn’t know what I needed to surrender; I pictured myself as the hobo with a sack and asked the Lord to show me what to place at his feet. Quickly, these five things came to mind: mother music scholarship, future, welfare, and community. Returning to my seat, not feeling anything special about my going to the altar, I spoke accidentally out loud, “Hope that worked.”

On a different night at a crowded church and feeling feverish, I made my way to the hallway water fountain. Turning from the fountain to go back to the auditorium I came face to face with Ernie. *Seeing me, did he intentionally come to the water fountain?* He got a quick drink and called out, “Wait, have I told you I love you today?” That question didn’t cause one’s heart to flutter as it was just a common Christian cliché – but his next sentence did: “I really do.”

On the way home that night, I asked Pastor Jerry Heflin if the Lord could tell someone who they were going to marry even before really knowing that person. He chuckled as he answered, “Yes, but it could be the devil or your flesh.” Before I even had time to readjust myself in the backseat of that car this scripture came to my mind, “My sheep hear my voice and they follow me.” I then quoted that out loud to Brother Jerry and added, “Do you know Ernie that plays guitar and sings? I believe the Lord is telling me he’s going to be my husband. And when it happens you can marry us.” My sister, Kay, who was next to me, elbowed me and later at home insisted that I take that back. I could not as I believed I had heard God.

In February, 1971, the Youth Challenge organized a “March for Jesus” through Nashville, TN. followed by an evangelistic service that was conducted in the War Memorial Auditorium. TV news channels reported on both so there was full capacity at the evening service. People were invited to pray at the altar just like a Billy Graham’s crusade and the altar filled up! I was there first as a prayer counselor but when I saw Sally Burkes, I asked her to pray with me. I must have reconsidered my earlier position to my pastor about Ernie, as the conclusion of my prayer that Sally heard was:

“Lord, I think you’re telling me that Ernie is going to be my husband, but... well, I just want to get this off of my mind. So, if he is or isn’t, will you please hurry up and let me know?— in Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Tap, tap, tap is what I felt on my shoulder **exactly** when I said “Amen.” It was Ernie. Sally and I were both surprised to hear him asking if he could speak to me. He motioned me to follow him to the backstage corridor whispering, “Privately.” As I followed him it felt as if time stood still and I was engaged in a different conversation — one with God.

“What’s happening?” I asked.

“I’m answering your prayer. He will ask you to marry him.”

“He can’t do that.”

“Why?”

“Because... I don’t know him. What will Mother say? I have a scholarship...”

As I rattled on it seemed God held up something like a contract and indicated He thought I had given those things to Him but if I hadn’t then...it seemed He might tear it up. *Ah... I remembered the hobo sack*, and threw up my hands to protest His rip and asked,

“What do you want me to do?”

“Say yes.”

“But, I don’t trust a man.”

“Do you trust me?”

“Yes!”

“Then, trust me and say yes.”

Backstage I heard, “Evie, Evie... Evie, let’s pray.” “Lord, you told me to do this and I’d like to have Evie for my wife, in Jesus’ name, Amen.” Ernie kept his eyes closed, seemingly concerned about my response. How should I say yes? American culture had not prepared me for a proposal through prayer. Hesitantly, I asked, “May I add a PS onto that prayer?” He nodded. “Lord, you told me this would happen and that I should say ‘yes.’ Thank you for answering my prayer, in Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Ernie opened his eyes, grinned and said, “We’ve got to get to know each other.” Scribbling the name Ernie and his address on a piece of paper, he said “Let’s write.” I took time to print my *first* and *last* names with my address for him - just before he was summoned back to the microphone to lead one last song.

I listened intently as I heard Brother Harold's voice calling, "Ernie, Ernie, Ernie 'Vintress,' come on and lead..." As Ernie turned to go to the stage he handed me his jacket and asked if I'd hold it for him. There on his monogrammed jacket were **MY** initials: EEF. *So his name must be Fintress?? How do you spell that?*

Thoughtfully debating the spelling of Ernie's last name, I took the two-inch thick Nashville telephone directory, laid hands on it and prayed, "Lord, show me how to spell Fintress. Let it be the spelling that has the most." I don't know if God changed anything in the book or not but the count went to FENTRESS and it was correct!

God is good! He loves child-like faith. I didn't think of myself as a child then but I was just 18. Now, I hope I still have child-like faith complete with awe, wonder, and even some stuff that seems silly. Those so-called "silly" things have been faith builders for me. Think about our initials. My initials "EEF" represent my being named after my grandmothers, Evie Elizabeth (Ferrell), and Ernie was named after both of his grandfathers, Ernest Edison (Fentress). My grandfather Ernest was married to my grandmother Evie. Now I am like Grandma Evie as I am married to Ernest! (I was 19 when we married. Eighteen would be way too young.☺)

Guess what? My heartfelt child-prayer did not go unnoticed! Ernest doesn't like watching ball games or reading the newspaper. He does play guitar, sings beautifully, and was ordained to preach. As a bonus, he plays saxophone. What a guy! He promised he'd always take care of me and **fifty years later**, I can confirm that he has MORE than kept his word!

Now to Him who is able to do so much more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be the glory
(Ephesians 3:20-21, BSB)

Two months later, rings in hand, Ernest and I told Mother of our plans. She boasted, "The first time I saw this young man, with a lump in my throat, I knew I had lost a girl." She soon found out she only gained a son. We married on Christmas Eve, 1971. Jan was my maid of honor. Kay sang beautifully. Pastor Jerry Heflin performed the ceremony and Ernest's pastor, Al Grounds, preached the message and gave an altar call. Our alcoholic and sometimes scary Uncle Buddy knelt at that altar. I believe he responded positively to God's love that day and died in His arms in less than three years.

Autobiography Ernest Fentress

Who am I? I was one of five Fentress children, born to Ernestine and Elmer Fentress. I'm really just a "nobody" but when I was 18 years old, Jesus came into my heart. My life was changed and now I'm a "nobody" going around telling everybody about somebody. That somebody is Jesus. Jesus in me is how I want to be remembered because, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20, KJV).

I'm sure most people wonder at some point in their life: What's this life all about? Why am I here? What's my purpose? My mother, later in life, had a most basic and fundamental saying that she would repeat over and over to us children and grandchildren and actually anyone around her that she could get to listen. She would announce "PEOPLE YOU'VE GOT TO KNOW WHO YOU ARE." By "people" she meant you and me. By "who you are" she would explain she meant "who you are in Christ". She would go on to share that you have got to know that you know that you are a child of the King and because of that you have worth and purpose. She would tell you things like "If you know who you are, then you can face life's trials and difficulties, heartaches and decisions. You will have a peace that passes all understanding and you know that you know you have a heavenly Father who loves you and who is there to see you through and guide you to the end." I can truthfully say that my mother lived those truths till the day she died and I hope that will be my legacy.

We have a lot of surface Christians who barely have their foot in the Kingdom. Through generations of ignorance and poor examples, they really don't know much about this thing called "Life in Him". If you know the Father's voice during those times of great trial and tribulation and when you are asking "what am I supposed to do", you will be given the direction needed. It may be just a little light like a flashlight in a dark night. The flashlight only shows a few feet up ahead of you. Sometimes we just have to take that one step in the light we do have and do what we have a peace about for the moment. If there's one thing I know that I know, I do know who I am. Who am I? I am a child of the King and all that has transpired during this brief life of mine, I owe to King Jesus. Jesus is my purpose, my joy, my peace, my love, my rock, upon which I stand, what my life is all about and why I am here on this earth.

Where did I begin? Well, first let me tell you what I know about both sides of my parents and grandparents of origin because their legacy is what shaped us in our youth either good or bad.

Mom was born to Ella and Ernest Sipe. Granddaddy Ernest died of the flu in the 1918 Flu epidemic. I don't know much about him other than he was a coal miner and they said he was a good Christian man. Grandmother Ella, whom I knew till I was 14 years old, was a Godly woman but ended up alone with five children to raise during the depression years and had a hard life. She never remarried after *her* Ernest passed away. Mom and her family lived on Tale Creek near Jasper, TN in the mountains of East TN. After Granddaddy Ernest passed away, Ella and her five children ended up living in an orphanage in Nashville TN. Mom's oldest brothers got jobs and supported their mother and other siblings as best they could. Mom was blessed with an opportunity to get an education in Nashville and got a job and was able to support herself.

Dad was born to Nancy and Edison Fentress. Granddaddy Edison was a farmer and Methodist circuit rider preacher on Sunday's. He died before I was born so I did not get to meet him. I knew my grandmother Nancy well. She was a Godly woman. I spent most of my early adolescent summers living with her. I have vivid recollections of seeing her sitting in her kitchen by the wall heater, reading her Bible out loud and praying out loud at night for her children and grandchildren.

My father, when describing his dad, would always say things like, granddaddy Edison was a hard man and described him as a very stern disciplinarian. He'd say, "If he told you to do something one time and you did not do it, he would give you a whipping." My father, with tears in his eyes, would say in his next breath, "But your granddaddy loved the Lord with all his heart, soul and mind, and loved preaching the Word of God."

Dad was raised during the depression years in Bumpus Mills, TN which is not far from Kentucky near middle TN. Times were hard in Bumpus Mills during the depression years. There was no room for vacations, having fun getaways, or doing any of those things we do today that we think of as having a good time. They worked six days a week starting before daylight; milking cows, collecting eggs, cleaning out animal pens, and feeding the animals. After walking five miles to school, Dad's job was to build a fire in the wood stove in the one room schoolhouse. Then, after school, they would walk back home and work till late in the evening. They didn't have much in terms of good times because they

worked sixteen hours a day to have food on the table. However, Dad was privileged to make it through high school.

A work ethic is what my dad instilled in me from my youth. It is what allowed me to have the skills I have had that served me all during my early years and later in life, for which I am so thankful. Since Dad was an established farmer in good standing in the community, growing food for the country, he was exempted from the draft during the Second World War. It was near the beginning of the war that Mom and Dad met and were married in Nashville, TN.

My mom was Mary Ernestine Sipe and she married Elmer Ewing Fentress. After high school, Mom completed a two year business college in Nashville and became a city girl. Mom got a job at the Life and Casualty Insurance Company in Nashville and she made friends with one of her coworkers. Her coworker friend just happened to be my dad's sister. Dad was downtown Nashville one day to pick up his sister, Mom's friend, at work and take her home. Mom was on the street corner with Dad's sister, waiting for a taxi when Dad offered her ride to her home. That is how they met. Dad always said when he looked at Mom in the rear view mirror of that old car; Ernestine Sipe was the one he was going to marry.

Mom and Dad dated for a short period of time. After they got married, they lived in South Christian County, KY on, what was called the Bardwell farm. Mom, a city girl who had gotten used to the luxuries of modern life (inside toilet, running water, paved streets, and light bulbs), was plunged back into the dark ages after their marriage where kerosene lamps, outhouses, muddy roads, and cow manure on your shoes was the norm.

My Birthday on 3 days

I was born on three different days. ☺

The part about my being born on three different days is something I found out later in life. I was born at a *young* age at Jennie Stuart Hospital in Hopkinsville Kentucky on the 6th, 7th and 8th of February, 1951. You may ask, "How can you be born on three different days?" Well, when I was 16 years old, I needed a birth certificate to get a driver's license. I found out I didn't have a birth certificate due to a fire that burned our family's documents when I was a child. I had never seen my birth certificate growing up. So for 16 years, my family and I celebrated February 7th as my birthday. I mailed the government agency in Frankfort, KY and requested a copy of my birth certificate. When it arrived, to my surprise it said I was born on the 6th of February. My mother always told me she was definitely

there when I was born and I was definitely born on February 7th. So for curiosity's sake, I checked the hospital where I was born and the hospital records recorded that I was born on February the 8th, 1951. So, from that point on when someone asked me my birthdate and I hesitated, they would ask, "What, you don't know when you were born?" So I'd have to explain.

Ok, these stories were told to me by my mother many, many times. I'm just repeating most of it for obvious reasons. My mother said it was a bitter cold day on the farm way out in the country when she was ready to give birth. It was a pretty good distance from the city where the hospital was located. There was snow and ice on the ground. The roads were frozen mud. My mother was ready to give birth to her fifth and last baby. That morning my father helped his pregnant wife slowly cross the slick snow covered sheet of ice on the yard and sat her in their old, cold farm truck. He drove as quickly as he could to the hospital. Since the rural roads back then were not paved and were mostly frozen mud and ice, they were bumpy and treacherous and it was slow going. The hospital was about 20 miles away in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. Dad rushed Mother into the emergency room and my mother had her baby boy. Mother had excessive bleeding after the birth and Dr. Paine told my father that she had lost a lot of blood and he had done all he could do to stop the bleeding and it was time to pray. Dad had four other children at home and a new baby and now it looked like his wife was not going to make it. But God answered prayer. The doctor and staff knew it had to have been God intervening because the bleeding suddenly stopped. A miracle happened and God spared my mother that day.

They named their new little baby boy, Ernest Edison Fentress. My maternal grandfather was named Ernest. My paternal grandfather was named Edison. I was named after my grandfathers. That was a significant fact that I would later come to appreciate later when I met my "wife to be." My great grandfather, I am told, was a friend of Thomas Edison, the inventor of the light bulb. At one time, I am told a personal letter was written by Thomas Edison to my grandfather and was received by my great grandfather. That letter remained in our family for a long time but we don't know what exactly happened to it. Anyway, my mother and father took me home to grow up with three other brothers (Neal, Kenneth, and Herman) and a sister (Ruth).

Ruth was a year older than me. She got her degree in Guidance Counseling for public schools and later became a salesperson for technology devices for school systems. Neal became a PhD in Mathematics and taught at University. Kenneth had every kind of pilot license that Herman got. Kenneth for a while worked for Delta Airlines. Both had commercial pilot licenses, multi engine licenses and

instructor licenses. Both he and Herman were airplane A&P mechanics or worked on aircraft. Herman taught electronics in Embry Riddle technical school and many other things in his life. Kenneth won awards for his repairs of huge winged aircraft and for a while served overseas fixing helicopters. For a while both Kenneth and Herman worked together in an aluminum fabrication business where I also worked for a short while.

My mom put her education on hold while she was raising her children. Mom got several odd jobs so the older kids watched the younger ones. When the older ones got their education, mom finished her elementary education and teaching certificate. She taught remedial reading in middle school.

During most of my growing up years, my dad was the Maintenance Supervisor and had a job at Fort Campbell Middle School. He was the maintenance supervisor of all the Fort Campbell schools. He always took on side jobs when he got off in the afternoons and Saturdays. My daddy was a very intelligent, industrious man constantly working with his hands. Back when electricity was brand new, Dad and his twin brother Edwin learned how electricity works and began wiring houses. They were grandfathered in with electric licenses for their on the job training.

Religious Roots

My Grandfather, Edison Fentress, was a farmer during the week but on Sundays he was what they called a Methodist circuit rider preacher where he would ride a horse for miles between three different rural Methodist churches and preach 3 times on Sunday. My dad's upbringing was religiously strict. Foolishness wasn't allowed, and Dad often reminded us that his dad would "take a stick to you" if you misbehaved. So it wasn't surprising that my dad was a harsh disciplinarian and especially in regards to things concerning church. We went to church every Sunday morning, Sunday Evening, and Wednesday night and every night of revival week. However, we were Baptists because my mother was a Baptist.

When I was young and started giggling or making noise during a church service and I caught Dad staring at me, I knew I was going to *get it* when I got home. All anyone had to whisper to me was "look at your daddy." He never forgot to do his business when we got home. I think I thought of God as a parent figure and strict disciplinarian instead of a loving friend who was always there reaching out to me - wanting to fill me with peace, love, and joy and to *have my back*.

They told me I was a busy, rambunctious child in daycare. I probably would have been diagnosed with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder), but they didn't know what that was back then. I know my mother told me later in life that when she would take me to the daycare, I studied every door and exit. When someone went in and out, I learned how the latches worked so that when no one was looking I would try to escape.

I remember one day when I was about 21 years old and was in the military, I took my vehicle to a repair shop across from the army base. When I gave my name to the mechanic, the man yelled to his wife in the back of the shop, "Hey honey, get up here quick. You remember Mr. Elmer Fentress's little, wild boy from church? Well here he is all grown up." LOL ☺ Oh well, I know I must have earned that name as I did get into a lot of mischief at church. I also got a lot of spankings when I got home. When I was disciplined at the elementary school, if my dad found out, I would get a spanking at home too.

Early Years

I'm sure the Lord protected me from getting into trouble as a teen. My friends were mostly my cousins: Jimmy Ezell, LD Robinson, Phil Graham and occasionally Edwina and Sherry (Fentress). Daddy's twin brother, Edwin, had five daughters and all of them were beautiful prom queens or cheerleaders at school. I grew up with two of them who were close to my age, Edwina and Sherry. Besides family, I had one good buddy from high school, David Gilkey. David was like my brother.

During the summers of my early teens starting in 1964, I would go live with my paternal grandmother, Nancy Fentress. She lived alone in a house on my Uncle Irl's farm. The first time I visited Grandma Nancy, I rode a Greyhound bus to a crossroad in Herndon, KY. Uncle Irl picked me up at the bus station. I remember Uncle Irl driving his old pickup truck down the long, dusty rock road with his one arm. A few years before, Uncle Irl had his arm cut off in a farming accident.

Herndon was just a crossroad with an "old timey" general store and a gas station. The store had a little bit of everything. An old couple we affectionately called Mr. Kates and Aunt Bee ran the store. If I did a little work for Uncle Irl, he'd take me to the country store for lunch and buy me a big bologna and cheese sandwich. We would drink an RC Cola and top it off with a moon pie. Somehow those memories of going to the little country store were special.

I would help Uncle Irl do things on his farm: feed animals, drive tractors, cut tobacco, pick up hay and take it to a barn and unload and stack it. I helped grandma feed the chickens and worked in the garden.

Grandma Nancy's old wooden home was a structure with big shade trees in the front yard. There was a cistern from which she had a hand pump to pump rain water to wash up in before coming into her house. Grandma had just gotten an inside toilet, however, she still had an "outhouse" behind her home that you used when you were outside working.

I remember lying on the ground in the summer afternoons under those big oak trees relaxing as the wind blew gently across my face. This farm was out in the rural, beautiful farming country of South Christian County, Kentucky. Staying at Grandma Nancy's home were some of the most memorable days of my early life.

At about age 12 or 13, my friend David Gilkey and I had sleepovers. We sneaked out of Grandma Nancy's house to go frog gigging at night. David and I would get up and go down the road to his family's farm house and push his old tractor down a hill to start it. We drove it all over that part of the county on the highways just using a flash light to guide us down the rural roads till we found another pond. When we saw a car coming, we quickly drove the tractor into a ditch and hid in the tall grass till it passed. We waded through ponds up to our necks to gig frogs. We never thought about snakes being in the water. I'm sure there were venomous water moccasins, cottonmouths, copperheads, and rattlesnakes all over those areas we walked through at night but by the grace of God we never got bitten. David and I would cut the frog legs off, skin them, put them in a bowl with salt water, and stick them in Grandma's refrigerator. The next morning when Grandma saw them in her refrigerator she fried them up with eggs, biscuits and gravy. We had the best breakfast ever!

Grandma Nancy couldn't hear anything unless she had her "new-fangled" hearing devices inserted in her ears and still she couldn't hear much. We had to repeat everything loudly. At the breakfast table, David and I would have the best time saying things we shouldn't have said under our breath and laugh and laugh. Grandma was none the wiser.

One summer, my friend David and I found out there was a new cucumber factory in town. They bought cucumbers from local growers. My brother Neal told us about it. Neal offered to buy the seeds and fertilizer if we would do the work to plant and pick the cucumbers. He said he would give us a percentage of the profit. So we planted a half acre of cucumbers. David and I got up at dawn

and worked in the hot sun till about 10:00 AM every morning doing back breaking work. We had cucumbers coming out of our ears. We filled up about eight bushels of cucumbers every morning. Mom would pick us up and we'd take them to town to sell them. I think David and I ended up making an average of about a dollar a day picking those cucumbers, while my brother, the investor, got most of the money.

I never could stand the smell or taste of alcohol and we had no idea there was such a thing as drugs being used until I got to high school. The only drug that I knew was used in our high school was marijuana but I never experimented with drugs. There were a lot of young people that smoked cigarettes back then. We boys thought it was cool to emulate grown-ups in the movies and would sneak out back of Grandma Nancy's house to try puffing on cigarettes. I couldn't stand to inhale smoke. Since it made me dizzy and throw up, I never developed the habit.

We moved quite a lot when I was young; mostly from Kentucky to Florida then from Florida to Kentucky and back to Florida. This happened about every two years with my parents. I'm sure they had their reasons but moving costs a lot of money and my parents were perpetually poor. I think my parents liked the weather in Florida in the winter but when spring came Dad missed Kentucky and planting a garden. He also liked the fall harvest time in Kentucky where the trees were so beautiful. So, when the opportunity to work would arise, we'd move back again. Then he would regret the cold months and think about how warm it was in Florida. However, God provided jobs for my hard-working dad in both places.

My dad didn't like city life so we usually lived in rural areas where there wasn't much to get into. My dad bought me a BB gun when I was about 9 years old. Hunting was my favorite pastime and the outdoors is where I liked to be most of the time. I think the bird population took a dramatic plunge where we lived that year although my dad told me to only shoot the black birds called Starlings.

When I was in the 7th grade, my family moved onto the army base at Fort Campbell Kentucky. Dad was the superintendent of maintenance of the Fort Campbell Schools. We were given an apartment to live in above one of the elementary schools at Fort Campbell. After school, I had a full gym to play in every evening. That kept me busy. Also, my cousin was the band director of the Fort Campbell Jr. High school where I attended. He convinced my dad to buy me a saxophone (as that was the instrument he played). My dad had very little disposable income but he took a big chance and paid a lot of money to buy me a saxophone. So, at Fort Campbell Junior High school, I learned how to play the saxophone. Ironically, 9 years later when I was 21 years old, I played saxophone

in the 101st Airborne Division Army Band, at Fort Campbell, KY. That is another story that I will get to later.

We moved off the army base and into an old army barracks that my dad bought and had moved to a rural piece of property. He remodeled the old barracks along with me and my brother Neal. We dug the sewer lines and septic fields and septic tank by hand.

When I was 14 my dad bought me a 410 shotgun. During the colder months, almost every afternoon after school, I went hunting in the woods. There were some black families near where we lived. One day when I was walking on a rural road carrying my shotgun and a freshly killed rabbit, a black man stopped his car and asked me what I was going to do with that rabbit I was carrying. He told me he would give me some shotgun shells if I let him have the rabbits I killed. From then on, I had a deal with the local black families. I would shoot rabbits and trade them for shotgun shells. I think the rabbit population hit an all-time low within five miles of our home that year.

The Plane Crash

There were few events that impacted me emotionally as much as watching my brother crash his plane. It's funny how emotional events of your life are the things you tend to remember the best. I remember one Fourth of July. It was hot and muggy as usual in Kentucky in the summer months. All my cousins and families were going out to Grandma Nancy's house for lunch. My brother Herman had a four- seater small airplane that he had flown from wherever he was living at the time. As usual, Herman would land on a country road or a cow pasture when he flew in from somewhere. That day he landed in an alfalfa field next to my grandmother's house. He offered to take some of my cousins up in the plane for a joy ride. I remember them taxiing down the field and building up speed. The field was long and had a dip in the middle and it had a fence row and two trees about the width of the plane wings in between at the end of the field. There was a tall corn field on the other side of the fence and trees. I kept thinking, as they were getting closer to the end of the field that he should have had the plane's nose up in the air by now. All of a sudden the nose came off the ground and it looked like it was going to clear the fence but then to my terror, it crashed at the end of the field. The left wing of the plane just barely tipped a limb that was sticking out of a tree on the left and it set the plane off balance. It made a spin up in the air and came right back down nose first into a ditch with the wings straddling the ditch keeping the nose and engine of the plane from being forced back into the passenger compartment which could have possibly killed them all.

I ran down the long field while someone called for an ambulance. When I got there my cousins were crawling out of the wreckage. There was gas pouring out on the ground from the wings and Herman was screaming in terrible pain and he could not move. My cousin Joy had a cut on her knee but the rest of them were okay. Several of the men arrived and helped get Herman out of the plane and into an ambulance. He was in severe pain. They all got away from the plane in case it caught fire. Miraculously, it never caught fire although there was gas pouring on the ground all over the place. Herman was immediately taken to surgery.

A friend of the family and church member was the doctor on duty and general surgeon. Dr. Jack Amis was a Godly Christian man and he was the best surgeon in town. The x-rays showed Herman's knee had hit a radio under the dash of the airplane. The impact of the crash had driven the motor up into the passenger compartment and drove the radio into his knee which pushed his leg back through his pelvis breaking his hip. He was in surgery for many hours.

Finally, Herman was brought to my parent's two story house to recover. He was in a cast from his feet to his chest. It was determined that I would be his caretaker as I was out of school for the summer. My brother was carried to the second floor of our home. The next day when I went to my brother's room, my brother was delirious with pain and meds. He yelled out to me "Ernest, how high are we?" I was puzzled at what he was asking. I looked around the room trying to figure out what he was asking.

I asked, "What do you mean?"

He yelled back again, "How high are we?"

I looked out the second floor bedroom window and said, "I guess we're about 15 or 20 feet from the ground."

He yelled back louder and said "What, you don't know?" "What does your **altimeter** say?"

I didn't know what a medicine- induced hallucination was back then. He thought he was flying a plane and didn't know where he was or how high the plane was in the air. I'll never forget those next few days of caring for him that managed to turn into weeks. My brother was not a happy camper. Many times he begged me for hours every day to get him a hacksaw and help him cut the cast off of his body. He threatened me and got so mad at me. One day after several weeks of begging, I finally gave in and helped him escape his prison because it was making me itch watching him try to get to itches he was having under the cast. He

couldn't stand up. He couldn't scratch and he just couldn't bear it anymore. Although he was supposed to stay in the cast for six to eight weeks, I was relieved that it did not hurt him to have the cast removed a little sooner.



High School

My high school days were full of teenage girls, relationships, hurt feelings, jealousy, and breakups. I suppose I went with three or four girls during those high school days. I played in the Christian County High School marching and concert band. At pep rallies during basketball season, I was the student band director. I led the band playing pop songs and the national anthem.

When I was in the 11th and 12th grades, I received the outstanding actor award. I played the part of a doctor in the Tennessee William's play called "Summer and Smoke." I was not in love with Jesus during those years and did and said things that I am not proud of today. I remember going to outdoor parties after the theater productions that summer. Someone would hand me an alcoholic drink and I would walk around with the glass up to my lips pretending to drink it but when no one was looking, I would pour it on the ground.

When I turned 17, I felt grown up and I told my parents I was going to start attending a church across town. A fellow I played baseball with often went to a church across town called Edgehill Baptist. He invited me to come to his church. He told me our high school choral director was coming to sing the Lord's Prayer one Sunday so I attended. I couldn't wait to hear him because in music history class he openly admitted he was an atheist and didn't believe in God. I went to hear him sing out of curiosity. He sang "The Lord's Prayer" with a lot of expression and compassion. He had a fantastic singing voice. His performance made me wonder if all the people who went to church were just a bunch of hypocrites putting on a show like him. However, I still attended that church throughout the summer.

It helped that there were some pretty girls going to Edgehill Baptist so I had a good excuse to go there. Then, someone volunteered me to play my saxophone. I practiced and played "The Old Rugged Cross" one Sunday night. After that, several girls seemed to like me. Sometimes I went to church and sometimes I'd skip and do something else. Later, I pretty much stopped attending church altogether. My excuse was I saw so much hypocrisy in the churches it made me sick. Somehow deep inside I knew there had to be something else. The real problem was I did not have a personal relationship with Jesus.

A Music Scholarship

At the end of my senior year, I auditioned for a saxophone music scholarship to Austin Peay State University and was accepted. The scholarship required that I play in the college marching band at ball games and in college concerts. Buying a

saxophone was one of the best gifts my father could have given me. I remember sitting in my high school history class one day and the teacher began the class by saying, "Class I have to tell you an experience I had yesterday." He said he was outside sitting in his yard looking up at the clouds when he heard the most beautiful sounds. It seemed like it was coming from the clouds. He said, "I thought Gabriel was playing his horn and it was Jesus coming from the clouds and the second coming of Christ." But then he paused and said, "But no, it was Ernest playing his saxophone across the field from where I live." Everyone laughed. The teacher asked me if I would bring my horn to class the next day and play the tune I was playing so everyone could hear it. God gave me a gift to play the saxophone which He has used to bless many people in revivals and churches over the years.

On Being Born Again

During the summer of my 18th year, after graduating from high school, I began liking a girl whose father was the pastor of a lively, little, rural Baptist church outside of Hopkinsville, KY. It was called Fairview Baptist. It was 1969, the year of the "Jesus Movement" which began in California and spread across the nation. I was getting ready to go off to college but still home for the summer. Some young college students from California had been invited to sing and speak at Fairview. It was different. There was heartfelt worship instead of just singing hymns.

Although I had been brought up going to church, what I was taught by example was a form of "religion." My parents were Christians but the churches my parents attended were boring and lifeless. When I started attending that little church in the country, my faith and walk with Jesus became alive and real for the first time in my life. My love for Jesus began to take root. I was beginning to understand the difference between religion and having a relationship with Jesus. The preacher was anointed to share the "Good News" of the Gospel and he was excited about a relationship with Jesus! His heartfelt messages brought him to tears as he would recount what Jesus did for us on Golgotha's hill. Many young people were being born again in that little church and there were baptisms all the time. I had been baptized when I was seven years old but I did it for my mother. When I was eighteen, I told my pastor, Brother Al Grounds, that I had gone home one Sunday evening after church and in my bedroom I looked up and said, "Jesus, I don't really know you but I want to know you." I told my pastor I asked Jesus to take over the throne of my heart and that I wanted to be re-baptized. I was baptized at Fairview Baptist later that fall in 1969. I picked up an old guitar and learned how to play it. I started writing songs and singing them at

church. (That was back when there were almost no guitars being used in churches.)

I dated the preacher's daughter but when I went to college our relationship fell apart. I began talking to another young lady at Fairview Baptist but that didn't result in anything either. I knew deep in my heart that I had not met the young lady that would someday be my wife. I prayed about beginning a "dating" fast. I told the Lord I didn't want to date or even think about a relationship until He directed me to the one I should marry. I longed for the day God would show me who I was to marry. I served the Lord that whole year and never dated again until I met my future wife.

The first year of college I was a music major. I had to live on campus because I had band rehearsals every afternoon. During that period of my life, I went to college during the week and came home on the weekends. On Saturdays my father and I did handyman jobs: electrical repairs, plumbing repairs, and remodeling homes. Dad was a general contractor, a licensed electrician, and he still worked as the maintenance supervisor of Fort Campbell Schools.

My parents helped me pay my college expenses which included living in the dorm my first year. I lived with three other young men who were totally obsessed with sex, drugs, and alcohol. I was miserable. Their lives centered on wild parties and loud music. Those kinds of things didn't fit into my new life and sometimes caused me to slip and fall a little, leaving me feeling empty afterwards. I was a new Christian. My heart had been taken over by the Holy Spirit but my mind was, and still is, in the process of being renewed for my good. "Old things are passed away, behold all things are becoming new" (II Corinthians 5:17, ASV). Sometimes I would have to escape the dorm and walk down to the Baptist Student Union to try to find some fellowship and get some peace.

There was a young black fellow that I played ping pong with at the BSU who had a real relationship with Jesus. I enjoyed his company and we had good fellowship. One day at the BSU someone told me about a ministry in Clarksville, TN called the "Youth Challenge Center." I attended one of their meetings and told their leader, Brother Harold, I played the guitar. He invited me to bring my guitar to their youth service on Friday nights and sing. After singing a few songs, Brother Harold would invite the newest believers to share their testimonies. My heart had begun a love relationship with Jesus and nothing the world had to offer satisfied my soul.

The fellows in my dorm were atheists or agnostics and they didn't want to hear about Jesus. All I could do was to live a Jesus lifestyle in front of them and

love and pray for them. They often said curse words or took God's name in vain but then apologized to me for doing it. They didn't believe in God but they did try to respect my Christian beliefs. All I could do was love them without judgement and listen to them when they had something to say and just be a friend. That's what the Bible says to do, "Be in the world but not of the world." Eventually, there is a crisis in their lives that provides moments when you can minister to them about the hope that is within you. I listened and let them know respectfully that I did not agree with what they did with girls but I tried to communicate with them in a kind, loving, and non-judgmental way. I also shared with them that Jesus gave me an abundant life with love, joy, and peace. They inevitably wanted to debate about the existence of God; however, I became overwhelmed with questions I could not answer at that time.

There are many mysteries in the Bible that are hard to understand. Some things in the Old Testament and New Testament seem to contradict themselves and be antithetical. The older I have gotten, the more I realize I can't explain away all those things in the Bible. I have accepted that there are some mysteries I can't explain and won't understand 'til I go to be with Jesus. All I can say for now is, "Jesus Loves Me This I Know."

One roommate told me one day that he had a girlfriend in Yonkers, New York who was a church going Jesus freak like me. I began to wonder how that could be. The Lord put it in my heart that this girl was praying for her boyfriend. When I saw an envelope with an address from his girlfriend on his desk, I felt compelled to write her a letter. I wrote her a note telling her that I was her boyfriend's dorm roommate and that she might want to know that I was a Christian who was praying for him. I got a return letter from my roommate's girlfriend saying "Praise God! I have been praying for my boyfriend. I prayed that he would run into a Christian who would witness to him." She thanked and thanked me and couldn't stop praising the Lord. She said she had just been praying that her boyfriend would meet a believer in Jesus and that God had answered her prayers. I never got to lead her boyfriend to Jesus but I trusted I planted the seeds of faith when I was in the dorm room with him. I believe I'll see that young man in heaven.

After that semester, I moved back home. The Vietnam War was still raging overseas. I was only exempt from the draft because I was a college student and I wanted to stay in school. During that first semester of college I was a music major but when I flunked music theory, one of my professors told me I wasn't cut out to be a music major. So the next semester, when I was a sophomore in college, I changed my major to Sociology/Psychology. I liked the professor who taught the

one sociology class I had taken as a freshman. Not only was he a good teacher, the professor openly shared he was a Christian. He often had an office full of Christian students and talked to them about things in the Bible. It was a great place to “hang out” between classes.

I Met My Wife to Be

My sophomore year at APSU was the year I met Evie. Evie, “my wife to be,” was the church pianist at Ivy Memorial Baptist church in Nashville, TN. She also gave piano lessons in Nashville.

During my sophomore year I became more involved with the Youth Challenge Center ministry. The Youth Challenge Center was in an old church building that had been closed for a long time. The building was given to Harold Witmer, the director, to use for the youth ministry. “Brother Harold” asked me if I would like to live in one of the rooms at the center while I was in school and help with the services. I said, “Yes.”

Brother Harold was about 15 years older than me and he had three young children and a wife named Faye. Faye was a piano teacher like Evie. I played my guitar with Faye who played the piano for Friday night services at the Youth Challenge Center in Clarksville. Faye and Harold sort of took me under their wings and mentored me as a young Christian man.

I learned a new song I heard on the radio called “Turn it Over to Jesus”. It was an up-beat song that encouraged clapping and singing. More youth groups from various churches started attending our Saturday night youth meetings. That year a group of us young people from the center traveled to different places to share our testimonies and sing songs. Our youth meetings grew in number and quite a few young people were coming to know Jesus. Word got out and more groups from the surrounding cities, like Nashville, started coming to the Youth Center. People were getting saved and entering into a love relationship with Jesus. I led the music along with Faye Witmer who played the piano. The Lord added a Godly young blind fellow and his blind sister to our ministry. Both of them sang and played piano and we all sang gospels together. During the fall and winter of 1969-1970, our Youth group went out to churches almost every night of the week holding youth revivals.

In the summer of 1970, our Youth ministry was invited to share in a week long Jesus outreach revival in York, PA. (Brother Harold grew up there.) At night we went into the ghetto areas and into the city parks. We witnessed, passed out tracts, and shared Jesus with the black youth. We also set up a movie projector on

top of a van and using a battery in the van, we showed a Christian movie with black actors. While it was being played, we showed love and shared Jesus with the neighborhood children and youth. During the daytime we all sat around the downtown city square and sang Jesus songs and passed out gospel tracts to the pedestrians passing us by. Every evening we would go into a different park. Our youth had no fear and Brother Harold had a lot of faith to take us young people into those areas of the city.

Harold hadn't told us that the city of York had a race riot just the year before, and in one of those parks Brother Harold's sister had been shot and paralyzed. We led a lot of young people to receive Jesus the week we were in the parks. The leader of the "Black Panthers" was one of the miraculous conversions that took place. The mayor of the city found out what was happening in the parks and he became involved. We were allowed to have a "Jesus March" parade through the city and the leader of the Black Panthers carried a Jesus banner in the front as we marched. The parade ended as we marched into a ball field in the downtown area. The mayor allowed us to celebrate by having a rally meeting at the city's ball stadium. Word had gotten out that week to many churches about our Jesus rally, and people poured into the stadium to hear us sing and share testimonies about what God had done in the lives of so many young people. *That* leader of the Black Panthers gave his testimony. He stood up and told the crowd that he had asked Jesus into his heart that week. The mayor of the city also gave a speech. He told the crowd that during the week we were there in those neighborhoods sharing Jesus, that not one murder, rape, robbery, or crime had been reported in the whole city. The mayor said that had never happened before in the history of that city. We had an altar call and invited people to come forward and profess Jesus and pray that He was Lord of their lives. Many responded and came forward that day.

When our youth group returned to Clarksville that fall of 1970, our group was on fire for Jesus. One of the churches from Nashville, TN that had a youth group started coming to our Youth Center. The pastor of that church knew Brother Harold since they were both in the army and in the same platoon at Fort Campbell years before. Brother Jerry Heflin was the pastor of Ivy Memorial Baptist Church in Nashville where my "wife to be" was the church pianist. Our Youth group had a week-long meeting that turned into a three week youth revival meeting at Ivy Memorial Baptist. I usually led the music at the youth meetings. When the meetings were over each evening, we hurried to head back to Clarksville to prepare for school the next day. Many of our group was high schoolers or college students, like me, who had to study for tests. So after the services we might just talk a few minutes with the youth. There was little time to talk to anyone. I remember just

saying “Hi” or “God loves you and I do too” to all the youth as we packed up to leave. I noticed Evie played the piano that first night and on the last day of our three week youth meeting, on a Sunday morning, I heard her play the piano for her church youth choir. She began playing during the services and God spoke to me that she was going to be my wife, but I didn’t know how that would happen. I was only a sophomore in college and had no means to support a wife and besides I was not dating. I had three or so relationships with girls in the past that didn’t end well. It had been about a year since I had dated.

The War Memorial Auditorium in Nashville Tennessee
*(The following italicized portion is in the Prologue of this book.
 It is added here for clarity.)*

I was 20 years old. It was February of 1971 when our youth group led a Jesus parade through downtown Nashville, TN. Many of the youth groups we ministered to in the area also marched with us around the State Capitol and prayed for our nation and our State leaders. This was the culmination of several months of meetings we had in different churches around the Nashville area. Brother Harold Witmer, Director of Youth Challenge Center, Clarksville, TN wanted to have a Jesus march through Nashville and we all held signs that said, “Turn It Over To Jesus” or “Jesus Is Lord” or “God Loves You”. He also rented the War Memorial Auditorium across the street from the State Capitol. Ironically, I would end up working next to that building for 25 years.

Brother Harold had invited all the youth groups and anyone who wanted to join us to celebrate what God had done in the lives of so many youth. Many churches brought their youth groups to the meeting. There were probably a couple hundred or so people at the rally. I was up front playing my guitar and leading the music when I saw Evie, my future wife, in the crowd. My heart raced as I thought about her and wondered if I would have a chance to talk with her. At that time I didn’t even know her last name.

A few weeks before that day, our youth ministry team went to a restaurant and Evie’s youth group was there. I ended up sitting in the only seat available, the one right next to Evie. I remember being too shy to speak to her. We had never had a real conversation other than the usual “God loves you and I do too” that we shared with everyone. Evie and her youth group had come to some of our other nightly church youth meetings in the Nashville area but I didn’t have the courage to talk to her. However, I knew she was going to be my wife. I had seen her at one of the churches we ministered to and I remember walking from a water fountain and seeing Evie coming towards me one evening when I got up the courage to say,

“Hey, God loves you and I do too.” As I was walking away, I looked back at her and added, “I really do.” She smiled and gave me a positive nod of her head.

It was at the end of the meeting at the War Memorial Auditorium that we gave an invitation request for anyone who needed prayer or wanted to know Jesus to come forward and meet with our counselors at the front of the auditorium. Many young people came forward as we sang the Gaither song “He Touched Me”. While I was playing my guitar and singing on stage, I saw Evie come forward and kneel at the front of the auditorium with one of our youth center’s female counselors. The Lord spoke to me at that moment and said, “Go down and talk to Evie.” While I was singing, I argued and told the Lord, “I don’t know what to say. What am I supposed to do and say?” He just assured me with peace in my heart and that He would tell me what to say and what to do when I got down to the floor level where everyone was kneeling. Immediately, I motioned to the piano player who also sang to continue singing and leading the worship. I put down my guitar and began making my way off the stage to where Evie was kneeling and praying with the counselor. As I got closer to Evie the Lord said, “Ask her to be your wife.” I began questioning God saying, “Lord how am I supposed to do that? I’ve never done anything like this before. I don’t even know her last name, and, besides, she will think I am crazy if I say that.” Immediately, the Lord placed “peace” in my heart to walk by faith and continue.

There were probably 50 to 100 people kneeling and praying out loud at the front of the auditorium. The music was playing loudly and people were singing so there was a lot of noise. When I arrived at where Evie was kneeling and praying with one of our female counselors, I gently tapped her on the shoulder and softly said, “Evie, can I speak to you for a moment?” What I didn’t know was what Evie had just been praying about with the counselor. I found out later that they had just finished praying about me. Evie was asking the Lord to please hurry up and let her know something about me being her husband. You see, she had heard the Lord tell her that I was her future husband. While kneeling there at the front of the auditorium, she had just told the young counselor she didn’t know how that was going to happen since she didn’t know me. Evie was asking for prayer of agreement with the counselor that whatever the Lord wanted her to do she would do; however, she wanted God to hurry it up so she could quit thinking about me all the time and put her focus back on Him.

She and the counselor, Sally Burkes, had both said “Amen” when I tapped Evie on the shoulder. Both looked up at me in surprise. I found out at a later time that one evening when Evie was on her way back from one of the Youth meetings, she had told her pastor, Jerry Heflin, that she believed the Lord had spoken to her and

told her that I was going to be her husband. (Evie's side of the story is much more detailed as to what was going on in her life up to that point).

After I tapped Evie on the shoulder and asked her if I could speak to her for a moment, she got up and followed me as I led her to the backstage stairwell where no one could see or hear us. Walking back there, again I asked the Lord, "What am I supposed to say?" He just said, "I'll give you the words as you speak." Evie was following behind me as we worked our way to the backstage area. (You'll have to read Evie's side of this testimony to find out what was going through her mind while she was following me). By then we were standing backstage side by side. I stuttered and said "Evie, uh, Evie, uh, Evie, let's pray". This is what fell out of my mouth. I prayed out loud, "Lord you told me to do this." Then I prayed, "Lord, I'd sure love to have Evie for my wife, in Jesus' name, Amen." A few seconds went by and Evie was quiet. I thought to myself, oh no, I have really missed God. Evie looked at me but I kept my eyes closed as she spoke in a gentle voice and said, "Can I add a PS onto that prayer?" I said, "Uh, sure," and closed my eyes tightly and gulped. Evie prayed, "Lord, thank you for answering my prayer and, yes, I will be his wife, in Jesus' name, Amen." We both looked at each other rather astonished at what had just happened. I knew I was looking at my wife to be. There we were, immediately engaged to be married without ever having a date, never carrying on lengthy conversations, not knowing anything about each other's respective families, or even knowing each other's last name. She knew she was looking at her husband to be. We both agreed and said something like we should get to know each other.

We planned a date for the next weekend and agreed to write each other a letter during the week. I gave her my address but didn't tell her my last name. I just figured she had heard it from someone, however, I found out that I had only been introduced by my first name at the youth meetings. Evie saw my initialed jacket with "EEF". Those were her initials too. She knew that my first name was Ernie but didn't know my last name. At that point, Brother Harold called out my name over the PA and said, "Ernie Fentress, come to the stage" to close the service with a song. So she knew my last name sounded like Fentress since my initials were EEF but she didn't know how that was spelled. So by faith she just took a chance and looked in the phone book at the spellings of what sounded like Fentress and the one that was most common was the one she picked. So we wrote each other a letter that week.

I found out Evie had a piano music scholarship at Belmont University in Nashville and a few things about her family. We had a date that next weekend and met at the Belmont University Baptist Student Union. We had a nervous chat then

I kissed Evie for the first time in the BSU. We went to our respective schools and we saw each other on the weekends. During the next few weeks we wrote to each other and we got to know each other a little better on the weekends. We found out that:

Her mother's name was "Ernestine" and my mother's name was "Ernestine,"

Her grandfather's name was "Ernest" and my grandfather's name was "Ernest,"

Her grandfather "Ernest" was married to her grandmother "Evie,"

My father was a twin and her mother was a twin,

She was named after her grandmother Evie and I was named after my grandfather Ernest,

She had always prayed that her husband would be named Ernest after her grandfather.

The main thing that we both knew for certain was that we both had a close relationship with Jesus, and we knew God had confirmed through the little things that we were meant to be married.

The Appendectomy

One weekend I had an emergency appendectomy. I was rushed to the hospital. Brother Harold's wife, Faye, not only got in touch with my parents, she also called Evie and told her I was in the emergency room. Surgery was successful; the appendix was removed but while in the recovery room I wouldn't wake up. They brought my mother in to see if she could wake me. The doctor said I needed to be awoken from the anesthesia. Mother spoke to me, called my name, and patted my face to get me conscious, but she got no response. Just then Evie arrived by my side in the recovery room. When Evie called out my name, my mother said my eyes opened immediately and I struggled to regain consciousness. That's when my mother said she knew for sure that Evie was the one I was going to marry. My mother and father had already met Evie but they didn't know her well. The Lord used this event to confirm in my mother's heart that He had put us together. I found out later that when Evie and her mother arrived at the hospital she was told that only family could go back to see me. Not liking that policy, Evie mustered up the courage to ask, "Does it make a difference

that I am his fiancé?” She overheard someone in the background say, “Let her in, she may be what the doctor ordered.”

The next day Evie came to visit me in the hospital again. Dad was in the room with me but I had dozed off. Dad was glad to have a friendly visit with Evie but had some errands to run so he hugged and kissed Evie like he would his own daughter and left. My dad had on a bright yellow shirt that day. After a few minutes, Evie wondered why my dad returned to my hospital room, this time wearing a blue shirt. Evie said that she had the same conversation with my dad that she had a little while before. Evie was respectful. She listened and responded to his questions just as before. Then, just as before, she said he got up, kissed her goodbye, and left. After I woke up, Evie looked at me and asked, “Why did your dad come back with a different shirt on, talk to me about the same kinds of things, then kiss me like he did before when he came and left?” I started laughing so hard I almost burst my stitches and it hurt so “bad.” I said, “That was my dad’s identical twin brother, Uncle Edwin.” LOL!

A Gift from Heaven

About two months went by and I didn’t know how I was going to finance a wedding ring. I was still a sophomore in college and did not have a job other than working with my dad on Saturdays. I had been praying that the Lord would let us know when we were supposed to announce our engagement and set a date to get married. Evie said that it didn’t matter to her but she said we’d *know* when it was time to set a date to get married. God would make it clear.

I had not spoken to my second oldest brother in over a year. Kenneth is about 10 years older than I am. He and my oldest brother Herman joined the Air Force while I was still very young. After the Air Force, Kenneth settled in Georgia and worked for Delta Airlines and he and his wife bought a farm near Atlanta, Georgia. Kenneth didn’t know what was going on in my life and I didn’t know what was going on with him and his family. Unknown to me, the Lord had been speaking and working in my brother Kenneth’s heart. Kenneth had gotten excited about his relationship with Jesus and the work of the Spirit had begun in him.

Out of nowhere, Kenneth mailed me a letter. He sold his farm and when he got the money from the sale, he said in the letter that the Lord told him to send me a check for \$200. There was a check for \$200 dollars in the envelope. In 1971 that was like \$1300 dollars today. So I took the money and bought Evie a bridal set of rings. When I gave the rings to Evie, she told me the Lord had told her that when she had a ring, she would know it was time to tell her parents.

So, we went to her home to tell her mother. Her father was away from home most of the time as a traveling salesman so it was Evie's mother I had to face that night. Remember, I was a 20 year old college student with no job or income. When we showed Evie's mother the rings, she told me in no uncertain terms if I ever mistreated her daughter, she would come after me. She said that she had a shotgun in her closet and knew how to use it. I knew Evie's mother had grown up on a farm so I knew she knew how to use a gun. I told her, "Yes ma'am, I believe you." Lol!

Our First Home

Brother Harold found out about Evie and me becoming engaged. I told him we had no place to live but Brother Harold just chuckled and said, "God will provide." When it was getting close to our wedding date, Brother Harold and I were talking and I told him that Evie and I were going to get married in December but I didn't know how that was going to work out since we didn't have money to rent an apartment or house. He told me not to worry about anything. He said, "Just trust God. He will provide a place for you and Evie." About two months later, just a few weeks before our planned wedding date on Christmas Eve, I called Harold and asked him if he had any ideas where Evie and I might live. He asked me if I had trusted the Lord. I said I had. He said, "Well, just this morning I got a call from a family interested in providing the Youth Ministry with an old farmhouse that's on their property. They asked if I had any use for it." Brother Harold smiled when he continued, "I told them 'yes.' I need a house to be used for ministry purposes." I suppose the property owner got a tax write off by letting the ministry use it. Harold told the owner that there was a couple named Ernie and Evie who were part of their ministry that needed that house. They said it needed a lot of fixing up but it was available rent free. It had running water and electricity so I knew I could make it livable.

Evie and I were on Christmas break from school so we worked on the house to make it livable. There were no right angles in any room. The house foundation was shifted and the blocks under the house were cracked. I looked in the attic and saw that the rafters were nailed together with wooden nails. The house must have been over 100 years old. The floors sagged and were slanted. If you put a tennis ball on the living room floor, it would roll to one corner of the room. The window panes leaked air and it was hard to heat so I had to caulk them to make the house warm. I put in a shower and built some kitchen cabinets with what little money we had. We moved Evie's bedroom set from her family's home to the house.

On Christmas Eve 1971, Evie and I got married at the little church where she grew up in Nashville, TN. Evie had been the pianist at that church since she was 13 years old. The name of the church was Ivy Memorial Baptist Church. After the wedding, we drove from Nashville to Clarksville and I carried Evie over the threshold of our first home.

Our Honeymoon

A few days later we headed for New Smyrna Beach, Florida with Harold and the Youth Challenge Center young people he was taking to witness on the beach. He invited us to come and stay for free and play some music for their nightly services at the cottage-like, historic hotel. When we arrived, they surprised us with a wedding shower and the honeymoon suite!

We had some wonderful experiences witnessing on the beach and passing out gospel tracts. Our group assembled during the morning hours after breakfast. We sang and shared testimonies of what the Lord had done in people's lives the day before and then returned to the beach to witness that day. When we were out on the beach the rule was boys witnessed to boys and girls witnessed to girls so Evie and I were separated during the day on the beach. After a week, Evie and I headed back to Tennessee to begin the next semester of school.

Making Ends Meet

Evie transferred to Austin Peay State University where she received a music work-scholarship which paid her tuition. Evie had saved up two thousand dollars from teaching piano students in Nashville. That's pretty much all we had to live on for a while. I did some odd jobs and she got a few paying piano students. I was working on a Bachelor of Science degree in Sociology/Psychology and Evie was working on her music Bachelor of Arts degree in piano.

I got a job working in a chicken place called Rebel Fried Chicken. I made \$1 an hour. One of the perks was that I was allowed to take home whatever food was going to be thrown out at the end of the day. That's pretty much all we had to eat those first few months. We were blessed with barbecue chicken wings, coleslaw, mashed potatoes and yeast biscuits and gravy.

We were struggling financially. Neither of our parents had much money. Although they helped us out in many ways other than money we were pretty much on our own. We led music in youth rallies and provided special music in churches on the weekends. We had very little income other than Evie's piano

students and a few additional jobs I found remodeling old rental houses for a man in our church.

One month we had a large electric bill but no money. We brought all our bills to the kitchen table and laid our hands on them to pray that the Lord would pay “His bills.” We were serving the Lord, helping in revival meetings and we just figured our bills were “His bills.” One evening a friend of ours, Keith Grace, was preaching at a revival that Evie and I decided to attend. When Keith saw us walk in, he asked if we would sing some special music. We sang not expecting payment. As we were getting ready to pull out of the parking lot Keith called out to us, “Wait up! I have something for you.” He pulled from his wallet the exact amount needed to pay our utility bills. He had no idea what we had prayed. We knew that God had provided!

One day, I got a job I wasn’t expecting which pretty much paid our current bills.

Uncle Sam Is Calling

The Vietnam War was getting ready to come to an end soon. The military draft was still going on and my number on the draft list was low which meant I could be drafted into the military if I wasn’t in college in “student deferred” status. I was taking the minimum number of hours to be considered a full time student which kept me in what I thought was “student deferred status.” Taking twelve hours of school is what kept me deferred from the military draft, so I thought. One day, I went to the mailbox and pulled out a letter from “Uncle Sam.” I thought I was okay just taking twelve hours of classes but Uncle Sam had a different rule that I didn’t know about. The rule was I had to be taking eighteen hours of classes to be exempt from the draft. So my exempt status had been revoked and I had no choice. I was to report for military duty.

Joining the Army

The military had two options at that time. You could be drafted and they could send you anywhere in the world after boot camp or you could join the military for at least three years and after boot camp, come back to whatever duty station you preferred. Since we were already living near Fort Campbell, KY, I chose to join the army and come back to the 101st Airborne Division Army base. We had prayed and believed that was the option God wanted me to take.

Basic training would be at Fort Knox, KY. We could continue living in our current home and I would come back to Fort Campbell.

Some weeks before I went into boot camp, Evie and I had been contacted by a chaplain at Fort Campbell who had heard about us. He asked if we would come and share some music on Thursday nights on the military base in a meeting called "The Come Alive Service." Dan Davis was a Special Forces Chaplain and was an officer with the rank of Captain. Since Evie and I were living near Fort Campbell Kentucky, we came and shared several times at the "Come Alive" service. Then one evening, Chaplain Davis asked if we would consider coming on Sunday mornings to lead the music on the base where he served in Chapel 10. He told us that the Chaplain military unit allowed him to pay \$15.00 to whomever he chose to lead the music each Sunday. He did not have anyone to play music for their chapel services. Fifteen dollars was a lot of money back then considering gas was only 25 cents a gallon and we lived close to the army base. So we decided that is what the Lord wanted us to do on Sundays. Little did we know how important that decision would be in the near future.

Serving in Chapel 10 as civilians led to a series of positive events that affected my future job in the military. At Chapel 10 we developed friendships and got to know the people who attended. One of the people we got to know was Sergeant Nolen. Sergeant Nolen seemed to be a lonely man who needed a friend. We even invited Sergeant Nolen home for Sunday dinner a time or two. We didn't know what Sergeant Nolen did in the military; we just enjoyed his company. I'll explain what happened later. Soon the day arrived. I was on a bus to Fort Knox Kentucky for army boot camp.

Army Boot Camp

I enlisted in the army with the option to come back to Fort Campbell for my duty station. The war in Vietnam was still raging on. On the news we saw they were pulling troops out of Vietnam at the time I was going into boot camp at Fort Knox. I arrived at boot camp September 15th, 1972. The drill sergeants told us they would be training us to go straight to Vietnam after boot camp.

Evie and I had only been married for about eight months when I arrived at boot camp. The first few weeks of boot camp were the hardest. We weren't allowed to call home and we had no communication with the outside world. It was like a prison but it felt worse. We had nightly perimeter guard duty. We were awakened at different times during the night. We had to get our gear on and march around our platoon barracks for an hour. Back inside, we'd undress and try to sleep the rest of the night only to get up at 4:30. We'd "fall-out" and do physical

training in the dark, run for an hour, and then go to the mess hall to eat breakfast. We got about four hours of sleep at night.

The mess hall required that you rotate and serve as “Dining Room Orderly’s” or DRO’s as they called us. We were our sergeant’s and officer’s slaves and we had to beckon to their calls. We had to clean the dining hall and help prepare the meals (i.e. peel potatoes the hard way, with knives) and then catch up with the training exercises being held outside. There were drills and marches up and down hills till our feet bled inside our boots. There were endless hours of instruction and shooting range practice during the day and night. We had to crawl under barbed wire on our backs while the cold September and October Kentucky rain poured on us. The wet saw dust would go down our backs when we crawled on our backs under barbed wire fences. We had to stand and wait what seemed like hours in the cold air until everyone had the *privilege* of undergoing what we had just finished. Most of us had pneumonia and lived off of Sudafed and Actifed hoping to make it through the cycle because if you had to go to the hospital, you had to do the whole cycle over again. The gas chambers were the worst trick of all. We were herded into a building with our gas masks on and, when inside, we were told to take off our gas masks as they set off tear gas canisters. We had to breathe and endure tear gas in our eyes for what seemed like an eternity.

Just before going to boot camp I read a book called “How to be a Christian without being Religious.” In it the author distinguished between being “religious” and having a “relationship.” He said that Christianity was not a religion; it was a relationship between you and Jesus. I said to myself, “That’s me. I’m not “religious.” I am a Christian who has a relationship with Jesus.”

It was good that I had that revelation because the first thing our drill instructor asked as he lined us up in the barracks was, “Who of you in here are religious; raise your hand.” I said to myself, “Nope, that’s not Me.” and I didn’t raise my hand. However, I did talk to some of the guys in my platoon about Jesus. There were two professing Christians in my barracks that I knew of. We were allowed to go to chapel on Sunday morning about the fourth or fifth week of basic.

The Chaplain had a Sunday evening Bible study that I attended also. While there, I told him that Evie and I had led the music in a post chapel at Fort Campbell before being drafted. The Chaplain asked if my wife and I would come share some music at his chapel service. Evie came to Fort Knox the next week and we shared an old Andre Crouch song called “I’ve Got Confidence.” Some of the guys in my platoon were at the service that morning. I guess that’s how the drill sergeant

found out I participated because the next Sunday I was the only one denied leave privileges. I had to sit in the barracks the whole weekend while the other guys were out drinking at the bars and coming back drunk. I also was not allowed to use the payphone to call my wife. I got brave and asked the drill sergeant if I had done something wrong to have been denied leave for the weekend. He yelled and told me to get out of his face in no uncertain terms. He refused to tell me and yelled a few more expletives. I am pretty sure that my witness for the Lord at the chapel the week before was the reason for privileges being withheld because I knew for certain I had not been in any kind of trouble during the week.

My New Duty Assignment in the 101st Airborne Div. Army Base, Fort Campbell Kentucky

I graduated from boot camp. I was headed to Fort Campbell at last. When we arrived at Fort Campbell, we were herded into a building where we stood in line for “In Processing.” Clerk typists individually asked us questions and collected all kinds of information from us to put into a personnel file. After sitting with the clerk, I was standing in a line waiting for my assignment. I could be placed anywhere on the fort where there were shortages of soldiers. They were calling out, “The next fifteen of you will be going to infantry. The next 10 of you are going to artillery”... or a number of other assignments across the fort. All of a sudden I heard my name being yelled out from across the room. I was being ordered to step out of line. I didn’t know it but the First Sergeant who was in charge of “In Processing” at Fort Campbell was none other than Sergeant Nolen. It was the same Sergeant Nolen who had attended the chapel we led the music in prior to my joining the military *and* it was the same Sergeant Nolen whom we had invited home for a Sunday lunch. Sergeant Nolen had seen me in line and was calling my name. I didn’t know that he was over all the “In Processing” at Fort Campbell.

Sergeant Nolen grabbed my arm, pulled me out of the line and in private he asked me if I wanted to work for him. I said emphatically, “YES!” He asked me if I could type. I said, “YES!” He said, “Ok, you will work for me as a clerk typist.” I thought, “*God, You are so good!*” Sergeant Nolen had made me an *On the Job* “Clerk Typist.” Clerk Typist was officially my MOS (Military Occupation Specialty). That would be important down the road which I’ll get to in a minute. Instead of having to go out into the field and camp out (Bivouac) in the cold Kentucky winter months, that year I was warm indoors typing up new arrivals’ personnel records. It was a “piece of cake.” I had a Christian Sergeant who was good to me and I got to go back to Chapel 10 and lead the music on Sundays.

I was a buck private (lowest rank you can have) and new to Fort Campbell as a non-civilian army private. One Sunday morning, I remember we were getting ready to start the Chapel Service when someone in a hushed tone yelled to me they just saw the Fort Commanding General walk in the Chapel. That was General Westmoreland, the 101st Airborne Commanding General. I was a bit nervous but Evie and I led the corporate music then shared a special song called “One Thing I Know, I Was Blind but Now I See.” The song was anointed by the Lord and you could tell people were touched. After the service, I was winding up the microphone cables and getting ready to leave when I looked up and there was General Westmoreland walking toward me. I was not in uniform and was indoors so I didn’t know if I was to salute him or not. I remember he got right in front of me and held out his hand. He said, “My name is Barry Westmoreland and I just wanted to thank you for that special song you shared in the service today. It meant a lot to me.” I was shaking in my boots. I said “Thank you sir.” Then this just fell out of my mouth: I said, “Sir, do you have a personal relationship with Jesus?” He stared a hole through me and I thought I had really messed up but then he replied, “Yes, I do.” I thanked him again and told him it was good to know our Commanding General knew Jesus. He shook his head, didn’t say anything else, just turned and walked out of the chapel. Over the next few years, I learned there were many real solid Christians in the military.

After I had been in my office for three months serving as a clerk typist, all of a sudden I came in one morning and found out that my Christian Sergeant was being sent overseas. His replacement was there and he was a foul mouthed, evil man who was hateful and mean to everyone. He cursed everyone daily. I continued to do my job as unto the Lord and tried to be the best clerk typist in our whole “In Processing” unit. I kept my records up to date and was extremely organized.

One day while I was working on my records, I looked up to see a Master Sergeant standing in front of my desk. He was real nice and introduced himself as Sergeant Williams and held out his hand to shake my hand. I’m sure my 1st Sergeant sent Sergeant Williams to my desk as he would have had to have permission to look at my section of the personnel files. Sergeant Williams said, “I am the 1st Sergeant over at the 101st Airborne Band. When we got back from Vietnam quite of few of my band members ETS’d (End Time Service) and I’m short of some instruments.” He said that the Commanding General had given him permission to pick whoever he wanted from any unit on base. He said he would like to look at my files to see if anyone had listed playing an instrument as a hobby.

Immediately I raised my hand and said, "Sergeant Williams, I play an instrument."

He asked "What do you play?

I said "Saxophone."

He asked "Are you any good?"

I replied with an explanation that before I came into the army I had been given a monetary music work-scholarship at Austin Peay State University as a music major my freshman year. He said that saxophones were needed and if I was interested, I could come over to the band to audition. He did tell me that the band sometimes went on the road for weeks at a time playing in parades during the summer months. I talked it over with Evie. At first she wasn't peaceful about it because trouble seemed to have entered her childhood when her father became a traveling salesman and was seldom home. We prayed about it and I told her I didn't know if I would make the cut in the audition so I could at least see if I was good enough for what he wanted. The next day I called and talked to Sergeant Williams and set up an appointment.

When I went to audition, Sergeant Williams pulled a brand new saxophone out of the case and handed it to me. I warmed up a little then he placed some written music in front of me and said, "Play this." I played it and when I got through, he said, "Well, you are 'in' if you want to be." I was shocked and didn't know what to say. I just remember telling him I would like to discuss it with my wife that evening but I really wanted to be in the band. When I told Evie, she was still not peaceful about it. I explained that Sergeant Williams was really nice and my current NCOIC was really rough and I really thought the Lord was leading me to go through this open door. She conceded and boy was she ever thankful she did a year later! *(Stay tuned for more about that later.)*

The next day I told my 1st Sergeant that I had auditioned at the band and that I was told I would be transferred over to the 101st Airborne Div. Band. He went ballistic through the roof, called me every foul name under the sun, and said that I wasn't going anywhere. Later that day, when my sergeant was not around, I called Sergeant Williams at the band. I told him what had happened and what my sergeant had said. Master Sergeant Williams just laughed and said, "Don't you worry about anything. I'll take care of your sergeant." The next day when I went in to work, my sergeant was extremely polite and nice to me and did not call me any names. He was very polite to me until the day I left his office about two weeks later.

The day came and my orders were official. I was no longer "Clerk Typist." My MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) had been changed to a 02L20 (Army Bandsman, Saxophone player) and I was to report to the band the next day. This event of having my MOS changed from a clerk to a bandsman was a God event that I would not realize till later. If the Lord directs your path He will give you strength and peace to make the decisions and courage to carry them out.

The army band was really laid back. We would go to work at about 7:00 AM, do a little PT (Physical Training), and then rehearse music for about an hour. Then we would play ping pong till noon. If there were no retirement ceremonies or pass and review ceremonies or other events that day, we would go home for the rest of the day. In the summer months, however, things were different. We would go for weeks at a time and do multiple parades for all kinds of events all over the U.S. I took gospel tracks to hand out during my spare time and a Christian buddy of mine, Bruce Beckendorf, and I passed them out on the streets after parades. One day I was hanging out of our bus window shouting for the kids walking next to the bus to take the track from my hand. As they ran and grabbed the track, Sergeant Williams saw me and asked me what I was doing. I said I was giving them a gospel track. He told me to report to his office when we returned to the base. I knew I was in trouble. I was really praying that I wouldn't be given an Article 15 (for misconduct military justice), because that would mean I would not be given a good conduct medal upon leaving the service.

When we got back to the base, I reported to Sergeant Williams' office and he began telling me how disappointed he was in me for passing out those gospel tracks to people while I was in uniform. He scolded me and told me, "I don't want to **ever** see you forcing those religious tracks on anyone again, do you understand?" I said "Yes, Sergeant Williams. I understand." What's funny about this incident is, Sergeant Williams became a Christian later on but that's a story for later. I continued to pass out tracks after events but I made sure none of my fellow bandsmen or the sergeants saw me. It felt strange that the guys in the band could go to a bar and drink alcohol while in uniform, walk back to the motel while drunk, shout and make noises but I couldn't talk to people about Jesus or give them a track while I was in uniform. The guys in the band seemed to respect Bruce and me but they didn't want to associate with us because we didn't fit in and drink alcohol and get drunk like they did.

We traveled all over this country from the Great Lakes in the north, to California in the west, to southern Texas and many states in between. I had lots of opportunities to witness to people about Jesus and pass out gospel tracks on those

trips. Sometimes we would board big Chinook helicopters and fly short trips to places like Memphis, Tennessee.

One day we were boarding the huge helicopter. It carried the 27 bandsmen and all their instruments. The last person to board the helicopter was the band's Warrant Officer. He announced to everyone, "Well, I think I'll go over and sit by Fentress in case this thing goes down." Everyone laughed and thought that was funny because all of them knew why he was saying that. Of course we made it home but that was a memorable day.

Here's a funny and embarrassing story I've told through the years. We would have to share a double bed with a fellow soldier when we stayed in motels. Evie and I had only been married about a year. One night in the motel, as accustomed at home, I would roll over and hug and kiss Evie. When I raised up to grab her in my arms and plant a kiss on her, I heard a low rumbling voice say, "Watch it buddy." I woke up immediately and apologized, saying, "I am so sorry, I was dreaming about my wife."

One evening after we checked into a motel, I was in my room reading my Bible while the guys were out drinking. One of the GI's came knocking on my door, drunk. Standing there in the doorway, he said he wanted to talk about "God." I let him in and he began crying and asking questions about God and, of course, I shared with him that Jesus was "the Way, the Truth and the Life" and no man can come to God except through Jesus. I explained to him that God loved him so much and explained the plan of salvation. He even repeated the sinner's prayer with me to ask Jesus into his heart.

I talked about my relationship with Jesus to a lot of my fellow bandmen and even to my sergeants. However, I knew I might not see any visible changes in their lives during my time in the service. Once in a while I would share with one of them and see a change for a period of time. Occasionally, one or two went to church with us. I was determined to keep on loving them despite their actions.

When it was approaching the end of my time in the military, my friend Bruce Beckendorf (who was also leaving the military at the same time) and I decided we would jointly buy and give our First Sergeant Williams a Bible with his name engraved on the cover. I wish people could have seen his face when we handed it to him. He was shocked and didn't know what to say. I don't think he had ever possessed a Bible in his life.

After Bruce and I left the military, about a year later, my friend Bruce was working in a pawn shop across from the military base. Bruce called me one day

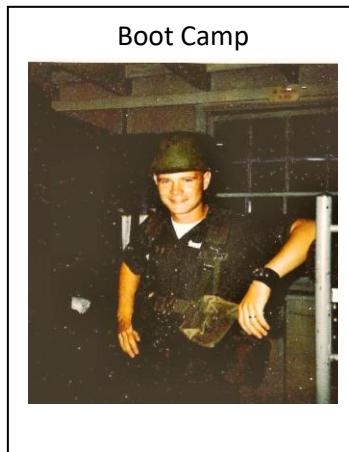
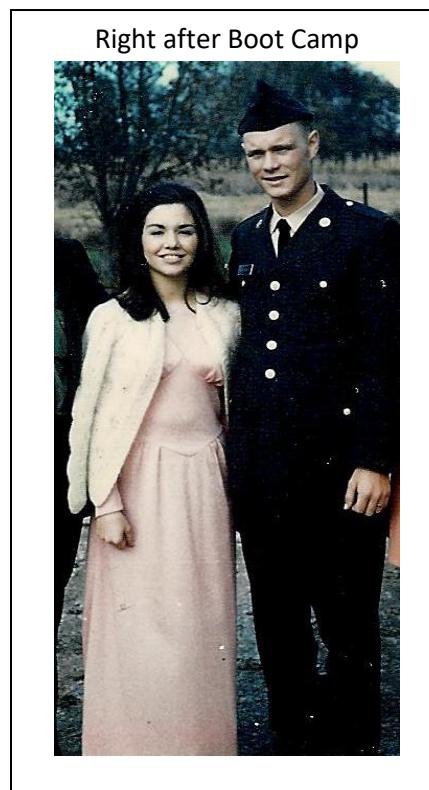
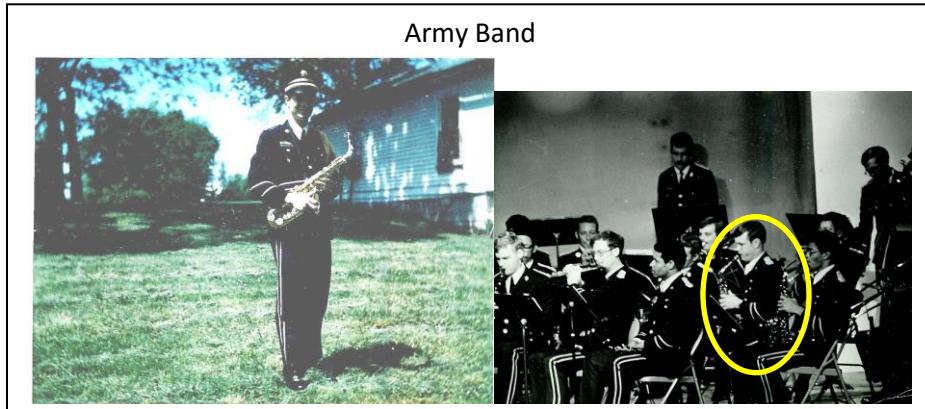
and was extremely excited and praising the Lord. He said you'll never guess who just came into the pawn shop today. He said that our old Sergeant Williams, the one who cursed us all every day, came running over to Bruce and grabbed him and hugged him and said, "Bruce I've been saved!" He said that he had retired not long after Bruce and I left the army. Through a Bible study someone had invited him to; he had been saved and was rejoicing in the Lord. He said, "I am headed to Bible College and I feel God has called me to be a preacher of the gospel." Bruce and I rejoiced and rejoiced over this news and never forgot about the day he and I gave Sergeant Williams his first Bible. Here was a man who Bruce and I had talked to openly about Jesus, who had told me to stop giving out those religious tracks to people on the streets after a parade, and who cursed all of us almost every day. Bruce said that Sergeant Williams told him, "Please tell Fentress about this" and thanked Bruce and me for sharing Jesus openly when we were in the army band.

Another experience I had was with the number two ranking sergeant in the band. Sergeant Curly was an E7 and boy could he take God's name in vain. One day in the hallway of the barracks, Sergeant Curly stopped and talked to me while no one was around. Out of the clear blue he said, "Fentress, do you believe '*once saved always saved?*'" He told me he had been brought up in a Church of Christ. I told him, "Well Sergeant, I guess that depends on whether you were saved in the first place." He thought for a few seconds, didn't say another word, and walked away. That same Sergeant who was so vulgar when he spoke to us soldiers came to know Jesus a couple of years later.

One night Evie and I were invited to a New Year's Eve party near Fort Campbell. We had no idea who would be attending this party but it was a Christian party where they would pray in the New Year. While I was sitting there in the room, all of a sudden I looked up and standing in front of me was my old Sergeant Curly from the band with a big grin on his face. He had his daughter with him. He introduced Evie and me to his daughter by telling her, "Do you remember the guy I told you about that always talked to us about Jesus when I was in the band? Well, this is him." He told his daughter in front of us that my friend Bruce and I were partly responsible for his becoming a Christian and that he had retired from the military. He said he was ministering to Messianic Jews and going to Shabbat services every Friday night.

If only I knew in how many soldiers we were used to plant the seeds of the Gospel. I'll only know when I get to heaven. I only know we need to talk openly about Jesus to all people we work with and associate with on a regular basis. They watch you and read your life like a book. They know who is real and those who

are just “religious.” When they have a crisis in their lives, they know who to come ask for prayer and to seek counseling. You might not ever see them come to know Jesus but our job is to plant seed and sometimes we get to see the harvest later. We just need to be faithful and live out the character of Jesus in front of them.



Buying Our First House

We were blessed to live rent free in the old farm house loaned to the Youth Challenge Ministry. The old house was built on top of a huge, underground, rock extraction cave in Clarksville. I had worked hard to keep up that old house with the cracked and shifted foundation.

One day as I was painting the outside of the house, someone drove up. The gentleman introduced himself as the owner of the house. He said his nephew was getting married so he needed the house back and we would have to move. Evie and I prayed, “Lord, what do we do?” Evie was about 5 months pregnant when we were told we had to vacate the house.

Digging out The Dungeon

We found a little house for sale in Clarksville for about eight thousand dollars. With the income we had, there was no way for us to make a down payment. Evie and I didn’t ask our parents for money but they helped us in other ways when they could. Evie’s mom had no money and my parents didn’t have much either. My mom had a friend that said she could loan me six hundred dollars for the down payment. So we worked it out with the real estate agent to make the whole transaction for no more than six hundred dollars on our part. We had to create a side note to pay the real estate money and also make sure mom’s friend got her money back. We had a house mortgage of about a hundred dollars a month plus utilities. That was a lot of money when I only made about \$400 a month in the army. Evie had several piano students but money was still tight.

The house we purchased was very small but it was sitting on the side of a hill with a partially dug-out basement with a dirt floor. There was room to stand up under the house on one side.

We began looking at what could potentially give us more room. I could cut a hole in the hall closet to make a stairway to the basement if it were dug out. It was a plan! So I worked at the army base every morning and when I got home, I dug dirt till it was dark outside. With a pick, a shovel, and a wheelbarrow, I went down to “the dungeon” and picked and shoveled dirt for hours every evening. I would clear out a few square feet and say, “Evie, now we have room for a small den down here.” Evie would say, “But if you could just go a few more feet and make it a little wider...” I would labor for days and then say, “There, I’ve done what you said.” Then, she would counter, “But, if you could just dig a few more feet we could have a laundry room and a bathroom. Just think, if there were just a

few more feet dug out we could have a big living room.” So I ended up digging the whole basement out.

Each foot I dug was going uphill and that meant I had to pick and shovel tons more dirt. But, with lots of coaxing I finally did it. I dug out the whole basement except for a couple of feet out from the foundation of the house. Our back yard was on a slant when I started on the basement but by the time I finished we had a level back yard. I then began forming and mixing concrete by hand in wheelbarrows and filling in sections for the floor and smoothing it out. Then I built walls for a den, a bathroom, and a laundry room. When completed, we almost doubled the square feet of the home. We were paying for it as we went so when we sold the house a couple years later we made a profit. We got almost double what we paid for it.

Our Baby Girl Was Born

It was the first year I was a soldier at Fort Campbell Army base when we were expecting our first baby. One fall night, Evie began having labor pains during the TV show called “Mission Impossible.” We rushed to the military hospital at Fort Campbell where the next day Evie delivered our baby girl. Our daughter was born on September 28th, 1973. We named her Angela Jenine (juh-Neene). That beautiful baby turned into the cutest little girl. She looked and sometimes acted like Shirley Temple on TV and said many funny things that kept us laughing. We were so blessed to have a little girl of our own to raise. But she grew and became a handful. God had to show us how to deal with her explosive temperament.

Angela Our Precious Little Bundle of Energy

Raising a child was a new experience for us. Neither of us had much knowledge on which to base our child rearing. I was the youngest of five children and I know I had no experience. Evie was next to the youngest sibling and she did not have much child rearing knowledge either. We tried to wing it but there was an explosive little package of ill temperament brewing that we weren’t ready for. As Angela grew, she was so cute that we tried to overlook the tantrums and thought she was just having a pain or she was uncomfortable and she couldn’t express what was bothering her. We didn’t quite know how to handle the ever increasing demands she required. She could be walking down the aisle in a grocery store just fine one moment, then, in the middle of the aisle, she would drop down on her back, sprawled out squealing to the top of her lungs. It sounded like bloody murder. She would scream so loud that she would lose her breath, gulp,

pass out, and turn purple. People would come running from the next aisle over to find out what we had done to make this cute little girl scream so loud and pass out.

This happened many times when we were out in public. We never knew what would set her off. When we went to church we found out we could not keep her in the congregation because she would start screaming for no apparent reason. My mother told us that *probably* what was happening in that little mind was that Angela had an expectation that wasn't being met and she didn't know how to express it. Or, we didn't act quickly enough for her so she began an ever increasing loud and manipulative tantrum.

Evie and I were taking turns babysitting her while the other went to college. I had the GI Bill paying my tuition, unemployment, and insurance and Evie had some piano students. I was still doing some odd jobs and remodeling houses. We drove old vehicles that had to be fixed all the time. It was hard making ends meet and with the extra costs of raising a baby, things were tough. Added to our tight budget and frayed nerves was a little girl that was ruling the roost with her tantrums.

It was my day to take care of Angela. I remember that day so well. It started out as usual. I changed her morning diaper and fed her breakfast. I would try to get her playing with something while I tried to read or study for a test. Then it would happen. Angela would fall out on the floor and for whatever reason, squall for the next half hour. Of course, as usual, I would try to find something to get her attention to try to help her catch her breath and find out what would help her out of her tantrum cycle. When she began a tantrum cycle, spanking her on the bottom did not phase her one bit and did no good.

That day, in frustration, I prayed, "God help me figure out what to do. I can't keep this up. You have got to give me an answer as to how to deal with this." As I prayed, I believed the Lord spoke to me. He told me to do something I had never done before. *Go downstairs.* We had a downstairs with new carpet, a couch, and chairs. As Angela was squealing to the top of her lungs, I picked her up and took her downstairs. I got to the bottom of the steps and I sat Angela on the floor. Then I carried out the Lord's directive, "Turn her around, give her a pat on the bottom and a little push, and tell her to go sit on the couch." Angela was about two and a half years old now. She knew how to talk well and understood everything you said to her. I did as the Lord instructed but the flailing around and squalling seemed to get worse. She began to say, "Upstairs, upstairs." She wanted to go back upstairs to play with her toys and continued to cry uncontrollably.

I was sitting on the bottom of the steps blocking her from getting back up the steps. She kept trying to get around me but I continued to turn her around, pat her on the bottom and say, "Go sit on the couch and then we can go back upstairs." That day was awful. She peed in her panties, took them off, and screamed to go upstairs to get another pair of panties. I said we can go back upstairs and get cleaned up and get a dry pair of panties when you go sit on the couch. Then she peed on the carpet and cried that she needed to have her legs dried off. Again, over and over I would say, "As soon as you sit on the couch, we can go back upstairs and get you cleaned up." The process of turning her around, patting her on the bottom, and telling her to go sit on the couch went on for a solid hour or more. Then, finally when she had no more scream in her and her voice was hoarse from screaming so loud, she walked over to the couch and said, "Ew put me on couch." I told her that she could crawl up on that couch by herself. Finally, she stopped crying and jumped up on the couch. There she was with no panties on, worn out from screaming for an hour or more, and smiling at me. Of course, I praised her for getting on the couch and we went back upstairs and I got her cleaned up. She was fine for the rest of the day. When Evie got home, I explained what had happened. I told her I felt that the Lord had shown me we were to do this same routine and be consistent. So, I told Evie that if Angela threw one of her tantrums the next day when it was her turn to babysit her, she was to do the same thing I did.

Sure enough, the next day Angela threw a tantrum. Evie took her downstairs, patted her on the bottom, told her to sit on the couch and Angela did the same thing. She tore her panties off, peed on the floor, and screamed for almost an hour before going over to the couch and sitting. Then it was over for Evie's shift. This went on day after day, over and over again for two or three weeks. However, Angela knew the routine and she also knew that we were not giving up, so the process decreased to only forty-five minutes then only thirty minutes and then twenty, etc. Finally, one day, all we had to say was, "Ok let's go to the basement." When either of us would say that and start to pick her up to take her to the basement, she would stop the tantrum and be just fine. We found out that when we went to someone's house, all we would have to do is tell Angela in advance, "Do you see that chair over there? "That chair is our couch for this evening." Angela understood what that meant and if she began to throw a tantrum, one of us would take her over to the chair. It was painful and seemed like it would never end but being consistent stopped her tantrums.

Our Angela grew up and became a very mature, responsible, young lady and she married a fine Christian man, Trey Hunter. She became the wonderful mother

of our eight grandchildren (Samuel, Kristiana, Josiah, Daniel, Elijah, Eva, Ezra and Joshua).

Continuing Education

After serving three years and leaving the army with an honorable discharge, using the GI Bill, unemployment assistance, and Evie's piano student money, Evie and I continued our education. Money was tight but we still ministered music on Sundays and in revival services. Sometimes we were given a monetary gift for sharing music but whether we received anything or not, our needs were supplied by God. I still helped my dad some on the weekends, and sometimes people would call me to do repairs or remodeling on their houses. After I completed my undergraduate degree in Sociology/Psychology, I continued doing odd jobs and worked locally. Evie continued teaching piano students. We prayed as I knew that we would have to do something else eventually. My GI Bill was running out and I was on unemployment assistance.

But then God answered our prayers ☺

One day my brother Herman called me and told me that he was coming up to Kentucky from Florida where he lived. At that time, Herman had a greenhouse business close to Orlando, Florida. He said he was flying up to look at a 300 acre farm in northern Christian County, Kentucky that was for sale. He asked what I thought about living up there and helping him to build a greenhouse. He said the farm came with a natural gas producing well and he thought he could heat a greenhouse for free. He asked if we would like to take a trip up to look at the land when he got there. We said "yes" and were excited to see what God might be doing. Herman flew us all around the property. You could see the plateau of the property coming from miles away. We knew this was where God wanted us to be during this season of our lives.

We drove to Florida, helped Herman pack up his tools and furniture and had a convoy of moving vehicles driving north. It was the 4th of July weekend, 1977 when we were on the interstate. I was driving a big truck behind Herman's truck and trailer. All of a sudden, I saw both rear wheels on Herman's truck come off his truck and they rolled down the median in front of us. Herman's truck reeled and swerved as he got off the road on the right. His truck axle was on the ground where the tires once were. I was able to pull over as did Elaine, Herman's wife.

The traffic was awful that day as it was a holiday weekend. It was no *accident* we broke down near an exit with a truck dealership right by the exit that had the parts Herman needed to fix the truck. Herman worked in the hot sun

getting the truck jacked up to put on new lug nuts and stems. Sweat was pouring off his back. I remember a funny thing that happened. Well, it wasn't funny for Herman but we all laughed. Elaine thought she would help cool Herman off by pouring some ice water on his back. He squealed like he had been stuck like a pig. After he told Elaine to never do anything like that again, he continued fixing the truck. Soon we were back on the road headed for Kentucky.

Moving To the Farm

We arrived on the 300 acre farm out in the middle of nowhere. It was beautiful. It looked like we were on top of the world and could see for miles. It also seemed like we were marooned on an island, cut off from civilization. It was quiet except for the chirp of birds. We were in the middle of thousands of acres of pretty much uninhabited, rolling woodland. We drove across the fields in four-wheel drive vehicles. It was beautiful, but bumpy. Angela was about 4 years old when we moved to the farm. She stood on the front seat next to me. When we hit a big rut she would bounce off the seat and hit her head on the roof and say, "Stop it, *Diddy*." She thought I did it on purpose. Ha!

Right next to the property was an old Fire Tower that the state owned but no longer operated. We climbed up the stairs of the Fire Tower and could look for miles to see nothing but trees all around us. The farm was a mountain of about 150 acres pushed up in the middle of 300 acres of land. The top 150 acres was rolling fescue grassland. It had a pretty much flat top that you could see for miles when flying toward it.

Herman had about every kind of airplane license you can get. He had a private, commercial, instructor, multi engines, and A&P license which meant he could refurbish an older plane and get it certified to run. So he found a little airplane for cheap and fixed it up and created a landing strip on the flat area of the farm to land and take off. Later, he used the airplane to help locate the cows that had escaped to the surrounding woods when they got out. We had to install and fix fences around the 150 acres. Herman bought some horses to ride and they came in handy to corral the cows. Those cows constantly got out of the fences and, like real cowboys; we chased them back to the farm. We fixed the fences again to no avail. We had one cow that would walk up to a fence, raise her front legs, push the fence to the ground and out she'd go. The rest of the cows would follow.

There were few phone lines for miles and what phone lines were available were party lines so you had to share a phone with several other rural neighbors. Cell phones had not been invented. We had no electricity, no running water, and no shelter. Herman and I first set up a tool shed from which to

work. He bought an old travel trailer where we ate our meals, rested, and used the bathroom. We were 20 miles to the nearest town where we could get lumber and nails, etc. We had to use generators to work and power the tools. We worked long 20 hour days those first few months. I was 26 years old and Herman was 37 years old at the time.

The next thing we did was build a four thousand square foot barn with six inches of concrete in the floor. The sliding doors we built were tall enough for a semi-truck to pass through one end and go out the back. Summer turned into fall and soon it got chilly outside. Evie and I sold our house in Clarksville and bought a mobile home and had it moved to the farm. Herman also bought a mobile home and moved it to the farm right beside ours. We still had no running water or electricity except for a small generator. Herman worked out a deal with the local electric company to run electric and phone lines at the same time across a deep valley and miles to the nearest electric pole. Finally, after several months, we had electricity and a phone. We had to use pond water for our water supply that year. We ran it through an expensive water purification process. The water still tasted awful but it did not make us sick. Those first few years of living on that farm taught us many life lessons. It was hard work but still it was an adventure.

Building Greenhouses

We ended up building over twenty thousand square feet of greenhouse, put water lines in, ran electricity into it, hung big Modine hanging gas heaters and ran gas lines to them and regulators on the outside. We struggled terribly that first winter of '77. My brother and I worked for weeks in the cold weather digging and planting steel posts in the ground, concreting them in, and then building the steel frame of the greenhouse out of steel angle iron. We used cutting torches and welded the steel trusses together. We mounted the trusses on the steel posts and welded them together.

Then, on one cold winter day, we began putting the fiberglass roof on the first section of the greenhouse. That night there came one of the coldest blizzards ever. There was first freezing rain, then snow, then more freezing rain and more snow and ice. The temperature we were told was about 25 degrees below 0 degrees Fahrenheit with the wind chill factor. The weight of the ice layer on one side of the completed gable roof caused it to collapse in the middle of the night, and we woke up to a tangled mess of bent and twisted steel and mangled fiberglass.

We had to work in extreme temperatures for about three weeks just to get that building rebuilt with a new fiberglass covering. Finally we were able to heat the greenhouses. We had to improvise ways to mix soil and fillers and fertilizer for plants to grow. We had 20,000 square feet of plants growing in pots. Then, in the middle of one extremely cold night, our hanging gas heaters started failing in the greenhouses and it was getting colder because the regulators outside the greenhouses were freezing up. We had to take blow torches and constantly heat the regulators all night praying that what little heat was being supplied was enough to keep the plants from dying. We made it through the night and the next day it wasn't as cold. Some of the crop was damaged from the cold but most made it.

We had to repeat that process over and over that winter. We got very little sleep and took turns staying up all night thawing out regulators. The next year Herman found a solution to the problem and learned what was causing the problem. He said the moisture in the gas coming up out of the earth was causing the regulators to fill with water and then freeze. He found if he ran the gas through a tank filled with alcohol, the gas would not have moisture in it. That first winter on the farm was brutal and it turned out to be only one of many hard things to go through while we lived on the farm.

In the spring of that year we had to hit the road every day hauling hanging baskets of plants we had grown. We drove for miles and miles to every florist in every little town till we sold out. We sold plants at the Kentucky State Fair while living in a camper on the grounds. We'd have to go back to the farm and load up more plants when we were getting low. We didn't make much money considering the overhead of having a booth and paying travel expenses. It took several things like travel trailer hook ups to even get started. However, it was an adventure and we did get to witness to people at the fair and tell them about Jesus.

Mud, Holes and Other Stuff

The first few years, in the spring, the roads on the farm always turned into mud with deep puddles of water. We got stuck so many times I couldn't count. When we had visitors on the farm, we had to pull a lot of them out of the mud. Mud and ice were everywhere in the spring. You had to wear mud boots every time you stepped out of the house. Herman ended up putting tens of thousands of dollars of rock, truckload after truckload, on the road that led from the farm entrance to the barn and mobile homes.

Visitors, you ask? For a while we had a small church meeting at the farm in the barn on Sundays. Neighbors and friends participated. Evie and I led the music and worship. Usually, one of the people who attended had a word to

share. Testimonies and praise reports were also shared. We prayed a lot. We all ate together. We had wonderful worship times and fellowship.

Mud makes me think about other holes. Herman dug a big, wide hole in the yard for our sewer lines. He had a big front end loader. He accidentally backed the loader into the hole he had dug and the loader ended up on its side inside the hole. It was a dangerous task but we had to hook up two tractors and the dump truck to pull it out of the hole.

The first few years living at the farm was one crisis after another. We endured many hard trials but God used all those experiences to teach us many lessons in faith.

During all that hard work and unexpected crises, we had to eat. In the winter we hunted deer. We hanged and skinned them in the barn and ground them up into hamburger and sausage. Everybody helped when we butchered a pig or a deer. In the spring and summer, we planted big gardens. Evie and Herman's wife, Elaine, tended the garden, picked and canned vegetables for weeks. One year they more than filled up a school-sized freezer and canned over 500 quarts of different vegetables.

Raising Cows

The year we raised cows was awful. We had no fences built around our mobile homes so the cows would come between the homes. The only problem was Evie and Elaine had clothes drying outside on the clothes lines. The cows left their cow patties everywhere. Cows weren't concerned about clothes so they shoved through them. *You can imagine!*

Herman and I only had time to string some wire around the premises. We added strips of white cloth (probably an old bed sheet) every few feet hoping the cows would think it was an electric wire. That only worked a few days. Herman and I had no time to prevent the problem so Evie and Elaine rose to the occasion. They went to the nearby wooded area, selected some small trees, and cut them down with an axe, turning them into posts. They dug the holes with post-hole diggers. They attached cross pieces to the posts making their own wooden fence. After that, the cows never were able to get in the yard again. There was probably between three to four hundred feet of fence around our dwellings.

The Shyster

One year, Herman was contacted by a man who said we could cut the hay on a farm if Herman paid him a thousand dollars. Herman paid the man the thousand

dollars and Herman and I worked for three weeks cutting, raking, and baling hay in the hot sun. After we were all done and getting ready to leave, someone drove up and asked Herman what he was doing on his land and that we had no rights to the hay we had cut and baled. Herman found out he had been tricked by the man he paid a thousand dollars. He also found out it would cost more in legal funds to hire a lawyer and take the man to court than it would to just take the loss and live with it. It was one of many hard lessons learned while we lived on the farm.

Sawing Logs and Combining

Herman bought an old sawmill and we installed it on the farm. We had 150 acres of trees on the farm. Some were really big oak trees. Herman and I would go to the woods each morning, cut down about four or five big trees, trim them and cut them to different lengths. We had some walkie-talkies that halfway worked. Sometimes Herman worked down in a valley tying cables around trees while I waited up-top on the tractor out of his sight line. When he said "ready," I would pull the logs to the top of the hill. We used the sawmill to saw them into posts and lumber to build another ten thousand square foot greenhouse.

Herman also bought a combine. We combined not only our fescue fields but other farms around where we lived. I felt like my life was literally going in circles bumping around and around in fields in the hot weather all day. I'd have to stop and fix equipment which was really hard work and I was going *nowhere*. We had no money and I was getting an ulcer. We prayed for direction.

We moved away from the farm. I worked with my father doing carpentry and electrical work for a while and then we moved back to the farm to give it another try. However, I wasn't peaceful. I knew God was leading us away from the farm for good but I didn't know how it would happen.

But then God answered our prayers: ☺

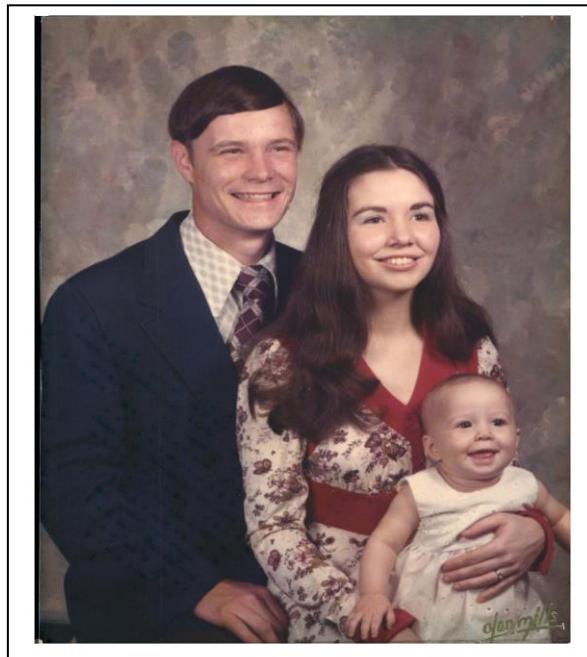
One day after seven long years of barely making it financially, my father-in-law (Preacher Jack) told us that the Baptist Association had a campground that needed a handyman and he thought of me. So the opportunity opened up for us to move to Tennessee.

The association's church-owned campgrounds had a meeting hall, kitchen, dining hall, gym, and cabins that needed repairs and regular maintenance. In exchange, we were given a rent free house on the campgrounds to keep the facilities repaired and the grass mowed. We found out that the local First Baptist Church in our town had no music director. We sang at the church one

Sunday. Evie and I were approached by the committee at the First Baptist Church and interviewed to be their music directors. They paid us \$50 a week to lead the choir and the congregation singing. Still I had to have a job to make ends meet.

All that I had learned by working with my dad building houses, doing electrical jobs and plumbing jobs and the backbreaking work I had done with my brother on the farm had taught me some hard but valuable skills. Those skills provided us with income during those transition years. Word got around that I was a handyman so some church members hired me to do their house repairs. I also felt the Lord directed me to check with the unemployment office about jobs.

I got a temporary job with a company out of Nashville installing restaurant equipment, ice cream machines, and ice makers. My job was to haul the equipment to the stores, install them, teach the owner how to use and clean the machines, and get the contract signed. Installing the equipment often meant running water lines, drain lines, and electrical outlets to the machines. It was a big job that sometimes took days. I was paid well but I was away from home for four days a week traveling a four state radius around Nashville. I did that for six months. Finally, I knew I had to do something else for a living because being away from home was getting old. We prayed that the Lord would provide a job where I didn't have to travel.



Angela-about 2 months old



Angela, age 4- Farm



Angela Kindergarten



Greenhouse



Our Caretaker House at
Campgrounds



Elaine & horses we rode chasing cows



But then God answered our prayers again ☺

I was still traveling and installing restaurant equipment and getting the contracts signed. I was still serving as music director at our church on the weekends. One day my mother- in- law called and said that there was an opening at the Social Services office in Gallatin, TN for a social counselor caseworker. I didn't really know what a social counselor caseworker did but I applied. I was interviewed and hired.

The company I had been working for offered to pay me a couple hundred more a week if I would stay on with them but I took the job with the state. I started out making far less money than when I was installing the restaurant equipment but I took the job because I knew I would be home every day. I also knew God had opened this door. The title "Social Counselor" was a bit of a misnomer. It was a State Child Abuse Investigator job and I had no idea what that meant. Again, it was one of those "God things" that set an unusual course of action and direction in our life journey.

Working For the State Of TN as A Child Abuse Investigator

It was 1985. I got the job that began a five year career in Child Protective Services. Just for fun, I picked up what we would consider today a primitive computer, and at home I piddled with learning some basic programming skills like sorting a group of names or data strings with dates. I started writing computer programs to keep track of dates for reviews, etc. for my cases using a computer language called dbase III+. I continued to develop it and even made programs for my supervisor to track all the cases in our unit of five investigators.

Creating those computer programs not only helped me and my supervisors do our work; I found it was fun. Soon the Director of Internal Audit at the state office heard about what I was doing and called and asked if he could come and look at what I was doing. Back then, the county offices only had one, lone computer per office. It sat not being used except for a few rare circumstances. I ran the program I developed on that computer, and then I bought my own computer and printer to sit at my desk. When the Director of Internal Audit came to look at what I was doing, he exclaimed that this was "*state of the art* stuff." He said he wanted to offer me free programming classes in Nashville if I wanted to take them. I agreed and began taking the classes.

I was doing my regular work for which I was hired, going to classes in Nashville, and continued using my computer skills to help myself and my supervisor. Then another child abuse investigator in our office got a computer and

printer and wanted my program so he could keep up with all the things we had to track by hand. Soon, other supervisors heard what my supervisor was using and they wanted my program put on their computer. So, I began traveling to our district county offices to teach others how to use it. My district supervisor and her director soon requested I set up classes and train county supervisors from all around how to use the programs I was developing. All during this time, by God's grace, I continued my work as a child-protective investigator.

The Birth of our Son Lee

During that year we were expecting our second baby. Due to issues of the pregnancy, Evie had to enter the hospital early and stay for weeks. The doctor said that we might lose the baby. We prayed and while home alone one night, God gave me a Bible verse. I opened my Bible to Philippians and this verse jumped out at me: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." When I read that verse, God spoke to me and said that what He had begun in the womb He would complete it and our son would live. Lee was born a healthy baby but a three pound, premature, and very fragile baby. He had to stay in the intensive care area for about a month before we could bring him home. It was a difficult time. We had our hands full with a new baby while Evie recovered from her early C-section delivery.

God was merciful and gracious to us. He blessed us immeasurably with a precious, little boy. Lee learned how to sing and play the piano at an early age. He sang before hundreds of people when he was young. God greatly gifted him with music. (I love you Lee! Mom and I love you so much!)

Graduate School

One day I found out there was a new opportunity being offered by State Social Services. They were offering eleven applicants from Child Protective Services a stipend to go back to school to get a Master's degree in Social Work. While in school, they offered a regular salary for two years until the degree was completed. The only stipulation was to sign a contract to work for the state for the next three years. I competed against 60 plus other caseworker applicants and was picked as one of the eleven to get the stipend.

While in graduate school, my classmates and I had to attend a course of study in computers and programming. The professor was using dBase III+ for programming. Little did he know I had been programming in dbase III+ for years. He soon found out that I was completing my projects sooner than all the other classmates and I was helping them with questions along with the

professor. The professor saw that I knew more efficient and easier ways to construct the programs to do what you wanted it to do. He soon had me doing some of the class instructing.

During those two years of graduate school, I had to intern as a school social worker and serve as a Clinical Psychotherapist in a public mental health clinic. I was required to present my clients' issues to a panel of PhD psychologists and seasoned psychotherapists and give a diagnosis. I had to include a course of action to help the clients. As the new therapist in the mental clinic, they almost always gave me cases of depressed women to counsel. I'm not sure why they did that, but that's mostly who my clients were that year. That was the year our daughter, Angela, turned 17 and Evie said one day it was like another woman had started living in our home. In jest, Evie called me at work one day and told me she needed to set up a counseling session with me because our daughter had changed so much. I'll just say this; it was especially difficult that year living with a grown daughter with a mind of her own. We had to pray much for ourselves as well as for Angela. We had to remember the teenage years are when teens begin separating themselves unconsciously from their family of origin. They go through hormone changes and mood swings.

Supervising At the County Level

When I finished graduate school, I was asked to be a supervisor in a neighboring county. I was not only the Child Protective Investigations Supervisor but also supervised Adult Protective Services and Foster Care. Each separate discipline had its own learning curve and nuances to learn. I had my hands full. Not only was I further developing my computer program to fully automate all my caseworkers records, but I developed a case intake program to help screen out calls we did not need to investigate and document why we did not investigate. Before I developed the program, it was just "whoever got the call" decided whether it should be investigated or not. They just screened them out or assigned them whether they did or didn't meet certain standards or state guidelines. They recorded limited documentation. The program I wrote guided the local intake person making sure they asked all the right questions. The appropriate decision to investigate was made with a paper trail to review if there was no need to open a case.

I was invited to many counties to help the supervisors while doing my own job. I installed software and trained other supervisors on how to use my computer programs.

As a supervisor, I had to deal with caseworker personality issues, too. Working with people and their dispositions was really difficult. Out of the five caseworkers, I had one caseworker who had really wanted “my job” as supervisor so she undermined everything I did and said. Also, caseworkers called, crying at all hours of the night, telling me they had nowhere to place a child and they were tired and didn’t know what to do. I would have to stay up and call surrounding county supervisors to find a foster home for a child then go in the next morning at the regular time and do my job. There was no such thing as overtime pay and there was no flexing time-off either for supervisors. Finally, all that was demanded of me began to take its toll. I told my district supervisor I didn’t know how much longer I could take it. I came home and Evie and I prayed. But then God answered prayer. ☺

Working In the State Office in Nashville

My district supervisor called and told me that the state was getting ready to hire a company who had programmers who would create a statewide database program for Child Protective Services. The new program would basically do what my programs were already doing on a local county basis but make it viewable statewide. My district supervisor offered me a position in Nashville as a “business expert” to work with the hired programmers. She said I would have an office in the state office building. Since I already knew the manuals and Child Protective processes and rules and knew how to put those processes into computer algorithms, this seemed like a wonderful opportunity. I readily agreed.

One of the first things they asked me to do was go to Washington DC. The Federal Government was demonstrating the requirements of the database collection that had to be in any state developed database in order to gain federal approval for funding. I went to the meetings and took notes and came back to the state office and shared a report of what I learned.

Next, the Director of Child Services sent me, along with some IT people, to Oklahoma to view the *first* child database system approved by the Feds (Federal Government). Child protective caseworkers were actually using the system in the county offices. I interviewed a couple of caseworkers entering data into the system while the IT guys were there to learn how the infrastructure was put together. We came back and I reported the “good and the bad” of what I learned to our state office.

I was sent to programming classes. I worked with programmers doing whiteboards of the policy and procedures of Social Services. I had to explain how and when child abuse investigations were conducted so they could turn the

information into code. I ended up being given a promotion to Program Supervisor III. That was three steps higher in pay.

During the next few months, on the side, I created a “travel claims” database program that allowed caseworkers to record their travel expenses. The database would calculate and print out their travel claims each month. One supervisor told me that this program saved her staff at least 4/5ths the time it took to do their reports at the end of the month. That time savings was at least a couple of hours per caseworker each month since it calculated rows and columns of numbers and multiplied them by what the state paid per mile then totaled everything without mistakes.

It was then that my social services director was so appreciative of what I had done for the front line caseworkers and supervisors, they wanted me to be recognized for my “above and beyond” the call of duty. So they signed a document that said I had saved the state thousands of dollars in terms of state-time saved from those databases I had created. I was given a monetary award for my efforts and a memorable photo shoot. In the photo, I am pictured with the Governor of Tennessee, all of his staff, my state representative, and the Commissioner of Human Services.

After about three years helping the programmers, the first statewide database called “Kids Program” at a cost of over 50 million dollars to write and implement was completed. Later I learned that they scrapped that database and replaced it with another 100 million dollar program and infrastructure to handle it.

When I finished working with the database developers and programmers, my social services director told me I could continue in Social Services or I could transition into Information Systems. I decided to apply for the position “Information Resource Specialist 4.” They honored me with that job. Not much later, I was promoted to Information Resource Specialist 5 and finally promoted to “Information Systems Consultant.” I was hired by the Office of Information Resources where I stayed for the last 25 years of state service. I was given a seventeen percent increase in pay for moving into information systems.

My job was to repair computers and help the small governmental agencies in Nashville to make decisions on what computers and software they needed to purchase or transfer licenses. I helped them with all their automation needs and developed agency specific databases for their staff. One agency had an office in almost every county in the state; and I made the database replicate to all the servers and offices. I was able to set up, refurbish, and connect their computers to the state network. I also set up their printers and peripheral devices and installed their

agency specific software. I worked as a backup for the small agencies who only had one IT person and supported six other agencies that had no IT support.

I was chairman of the state's only frontline IT group meetings that presented new equipment and software to the entire state. Eventually that meeting was video streamed to all the IT offices across Tennessee. My supervisor also assigned me to the researching and producing of a Microsoft Office white paper manual for all the IT offices across the state. This manual eliminated the duplication of effort. This one manual eliminated the need for each agency to spend hours to stay informed of new changes occurring in rapid speed in Microsoft Office Versions.

For about a year, I was in charge of the state's phone operators before their jobs were automated. There were four persons who answered the state's phone system that directed people to the appropriate agency. I had to do performance evaluations and hire new people. For a period of time I supervised two other technical support persons in our office.

Included in my time as an IT person I supported the State's Department of Veterans Affairs as their only IT person. This was a service God allowed me to provide that I was very proud of because I was allowed to serve those persons who supported our Veterans. Their department was not considered big enough for a full time IT person even though they had over a hundred staff persons in almost every part of Tennessee and all the Veteran Cemeteries. I was much appreciated by the Commissioner of Veterans Affairs. I was always invited to their meetings and Christmas parties. They fed me and publicly recognized me for the support I provided.

Working as the IT Consultant for Veterans Affairs

I fixed and replaced computers used by the Veteran representatives (Reps) in the downtown Nashville area. I worked in the Commissioner's office when I needed to repair something or replace their computers. One day the Reps asked me out to lunch and paid for my meal. One of them asked me what I did in the army. I told the four of them I had been an army bandsman. One of them asked me, "Do you have any ringing in your ears like grasshoppers chirping?" I said, "Yes, as a matter of fact I do." I thought it was weird they should ask that and want me to tell them what it was like being an army bandsman.

I told them I flew in big transport planes and helicopters to play in parades and ceremonies. I recalled how often the canons were placed behind the band and blasted us out during ceremonies. They wanted to know if it hurt our ears when we flew on those aircraft. I said "Yes, our ears hurt for hours after getting off those

aircraft.” When I told the VA Reps what had happened, they told me that their job was to assist veterans who needed compensation for something related to their military service. They had discovered, through the years, that especially army musicians reported hearing problems as a result of being in the army. The Rep also said that the army bandsmen were listed in their documentation as one of those highly likely to have ear damage and be awarded some compensation due to military service. One of them said, “Well, I don’t know what will happen, but I’d go over to the VA hospital and have my ears checked.” Those fellows pestered me every time I’d see them and ask if I had gone over to the VA hearing clinic.

I finally had some time one afternoon to have my ears checked. The VA ear doctor said I did have some hearing loss. She asked if I had any ringing in my ears. I recounted the same story I had given the Veteran’s representatives with one addition. We had no ear protection when the cannons fired without warning. We had to remain at attention without covering our ears. Afterwards, my ears hurt for hours. She asked if I thought the ringing in my ears was caused by what happened in the military. I said it may have. I left that day and never thought of it again. At least I could tell my friends in the Veteran’s Department that I did what they encouraged me to do.

About a year later, out of the “clear blue” one day, I got a check in the mail for a thousand dollars from the government as back pay and a disability judgement from the VA of \$135 a month for the rest of my life for the ringing in my ears called Tinnitus. So ever since that day, each month I have been getting an ever increasing check amount from the VA for the ringing in my ears. That’s how God provides sometimes. I had never heard of Tinnitus before I talked to those VA Reps. First, God provided an opportunity for me to get a job as an IT person (which, by the way, I never had an IT degree or certification for that job). I then met the VA Reps whom I supported as their IT person, and they told me to go to the VA ear doctor. Now, for the rest of my life, I will be receiving not only a check each month from the VA for \$135, but I will also receive up to 15% discount from businesses because I have a military related disability. That has saved us thousands of dollars over the years. I can truly say, it’s not been easy doing the jobs I have had to do, but God provides as we are thankful.

In 2011, I was awarded the state of Tennessee highest IT award, “The IT Professional of the Year.” I found out I had been nominated and picked by all the IT managers across the state. Remember, I had no IT degree! I had no IT certifications and very little training. Most of what I learned, I learned on my own *as I went*. I know God gave me wisdom to fix complex things I had never worked on before. My daddy always said, “Son, you learn by doing.”

I remember going into meetings where I was supposed to be leading the discussion only to discover I didn't understand anything they were saying. I was supposed to set the course of action as chairperson but when they began discussing things, they used acronyms and abbreviations I'd never heard before. I held my breath and tried to ask non-embarrassing questions, take notes, and try to figure out what they were talking about after the meeting was over. These people were the best and brightest in the state. They were the ones who ran the backbone of the state's infrastructure and security systems and most, if not all, had degrees in Information Systems. I stand amazed at the genius God gave those men and women at the table. I prayed my way through those meetings. I gave God the glory for what He did in and through me to help others.

When I retired from the State of TN with 30 years of service (actually, 29 years), I had a much higher monthly retirement check than I would have had if I had stayed in Social Services. I had only worked for the State 29 years but I found out I had over a year of sick leave I could cash in toward retirement. So I got to retire a year earlier than I thought I could. God blessed me during those twenty nine years, doing things I really enjoyed. It also allowed us to have options when we sold our home in Westmoreland, TN and moved to Florida.

Evie and I visited my brother in Florida for a Christmas holiday a couple of years before I retired. We had been so cold in Tennessee that year that when we entered the warm breezes of Lake Placid, Florida, we knew this would be home when we retired.

When we moved to Florida, we wanted to buy a *fixer upper* house but we needed a place to live while we shopped around. We bought a used motorhome RV. My brother, Kenneth, and his wife, Sherrian, graciously let us park it at their home. A few weeks later, we found the perfect house just a few blocks away from their place. We paid about thirty-seven thousand dollars for the house and put about another forty thousand in it. We turned on the electricity and did some plumbing so that we could move the RV to the backyard of our fixer upper.

Meanwhile, I was contacted by my former supervisor in Tennessee. She asked me if I would be willing to continue working remotely for TN because they had no one to replace me. There were agencies that didn't know what they were going to do. I agreed to continue as a private contractor and I just billed the state for the hours worked. The agencies hired new IT staff and I trained them over the internet and phone. They especially needed to know how to update and fix the databases I had developed. So, for almost another year I continued to get paid for doing things I enjoyed doing while working on our new home in Florida. When

the programmers occasionally messed up the databases I could pick out the most recent copy from my backups and get it running again. Eventually they got the hang of it. However, when some agencies called for help, I had to troubleshoot computer problems and update computers with software and run them through diagnostic tests, reboot them and sometimes have secretaries turn the PC's back on. I was repairing and updating computers all over the State of TN, sitting in our RV in Lake Placid.

Angela



Lee



Award by Veterans Affairs
Commissioner



Award by Governor Sunquist



IT Professional of the Year
State of TN



Our Church Family

Evie and I started attending the First Baptist Church just around the corner from our house. We auditioned for the worship band and have been honored to serve as musicians since then on the worship team. We have established close bonds with members of the praise team. We've also had great fellowship and Bible studies in our home. We are blessed to have a great church family.

The Brain Tumor

In 2015, our daughter, Angela, while living in Pennsylvania, began losing sight in her left eye. She had double vision and fatigue too. The ophthalmologist ordered a MRI. He saw no problems in the MRI and diagnosed her with Third Nerve Palsy. She suffered from Lyme's disease as well and was told that some of her symptoms could be from that. She took it all in stride until the summer of 2018.

Angela felt worse that summer but decided Lyme's disease was responsible. Eating a special, healthier diet seemed to alleviate some of her fatigue but by 2019, her left eye was worse. Since moving to California in the fall of 2015, she had not seen an ophthalmologist so she made an appointment. After giving her history and hearing her describe her symptoms, the doctor ordered a MRI. He saw a tumor and said, "Go to a neurosurgeon immediately."

About the same time, Angela found out her husband, Trey, a manager at Lifeway Christian Book Store in Fresno California, was losing his job. She said that all Lifeway stores were closing down across the USA. Trey would be given a severance pay and the bookstore would continue to pay their medical insurance for the next few months. Of course, we told Trey, Angela, and family that they could come live with us in our home here in Florida. *So, what should Angela do about the needed surgery?*

Angela called her friend, whose husband was a cardiologist, to ask who he might recommend for her to call. The cardiologist personally visited the neurosurgeon's office to introduce the need. The neurosurgeon agreed to quickly see Angela. After that initial visit, he confirmed Angela needed surgery as soon as possible. He read the MRI and found a large, egg-shaped tumor behind her left eye. The tumor was pushing on the optical nerve and causing her eye to bulge. The neurosurgeon said she would lose her eyesight if the tumor wasn't removed.

Angela told the surgeon that they would be moving to Florida soon so she couldn't have the operation in California. The surgeon told her that the best surgeon he knew of was in Tampa, Florida and he had been trained and mentored by that doctor, Dr. Loveran. It was a miracle that Angela got an appointment with this world renowned trainer of surgeons in Tampa. Dr. Loveran only had one day scheduled for seeing new patients and it was one week from the day Angela called. She took the appointment and Trey made sure she was on a plane to us so we could get her there. Time was of essence to have insurance coverage. The time schedule to have it paid for was tight, but they made it by the grace of God!

Then the big day came. We drove our RV to a camping park within thirty minutes of Tampa General Hospital. We transported Angela to have the surgery and stayed in the RV Park at night. We traveled back and forth to the hospital during the following days. Samuel, our oldest grandson, joined us so he could sit with his mom especially at nights.

The operation was a success! Although the tumor was benign it had wrapped itself around her optic nerve. Some tumor cells are still there to this day. It was too close to the optic nerve to remove it all; too risky that she might lose her sight. The nerve endings were, and still are, raw. Since the surgery she has regularly had migraine headaches, even now, after two years. Even so, we all are blessed to have her: daughter, wife, and mother!

Trey had his hands full in California closing the bookstore. He and the older children had to sell almost everything they owned so they could join Angela in Florida with us. Not only did our family grow in number, our living space enlarged over time. I removed the window in our bedroom and installed a sliding glass door. Then, I built a deck. Later, the deck became a sunroom with an efficiency kitchen. This extension on the back of our house provides separate living quarters for Evie and me. I added another bathroom and bedroom to their side of the house too. We wanted Angela, Trey, and family to have what they needed and feel at home in the rest of the house.

We are truly blessed to have them! We reap the benefit of seeing them every day. Evie, who is a retired public school music teacher, teaches all five of the grandchildren piano, and helps Angela homeschool the two youngest boys.

CPI

In 2019 I felt compelled to interview for a Child Protective Investigator position in Sebring, Florida. I was hired and worked there right until “Covid” hit our area. I found out that after I resigned, most of the other caseworkers in the office also left. I know God led me there for a season and for reasons *mostly* He knew. Some of the reasons I did know.

I made quite a bit of money during those months. During the time I was working, we had several unexpected big bills come our way. We had to have a brand new air conditioning unit installed. Then our sewer system and septic field had to be totally replaced. There were costly vehicle and house repairs. The money I made during those months paid the extra bills.

I was also there to minister the love of Jesus to hurting families. I let them know I was praying for them. I planted seeds of hope during whatever crisis they were going through. My job was hard and I had to follow the state’s guidelines for documentation and policy, however, I also showed kindness and gentleness to those in despair. I encouraged them to do *right*.

I know I made a positive difference in the lives of children. They were safer, healthier, and happier as a result of home visits. I even had the privilege of handing out Christmas toys that had been provided for them. I know if I reached just one child or encouraged just one mother or father, my work was not in vain.

Because of the nature of being an investigator, improving home situations was *not* part of the job. After our investigation was completed and all evidence collected, we transferred the case to someone else who continued helping the family. However, we were involved in the families for weeks before that transition. During those times, I had the opportunity to talk to them about faith, trusting God and the purpose of and necessity of having a church family. I know *God’s Word does not return void; but it will accomplish what it was sent forth to do.*

Addendum

God has done much more in our lives. I can’t record it all. I’ve seen the hand of God move and direct so many seemingly hopeless situations and bring restoration and hope. No matter what we face in life, we need to have the attitude of *Daniel in the Lion’s Den* when he basically said, “I’m going to continue to pray and serve my God no matter whether you put me in with the lions.” They *did* put him in the lion’s den but God rescued him. Or, how about Shadrach, Meshach, and

Abednego who refused to bow down to a man and were thrown into a fiery furnace? God intervened and rescued them! I understand and can relate sometimes with Job in the Bible. In Job 13:15, Job said, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him.” Do what is right and trust God no matter the outcome. Our God will never fail! Never give up! Just *sing a hallelujah in the presence of your enemies.*

Praising Jesus

There's a scripture verse that I go back to quite often in my mind when I think I've got something figured out in the Bible or I think that I am right about something. It is “The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God” (I Corinthians 8:2). So with this verse in mind, I humbly share what I believe is pleasing to God and that is *how* we worship Him.

I know that what I am going to share only comes by revelation from God. In other words, if God doesn't reveal it to you, you will not *get it* and you may try to justify why it isn't so. Or, you might try practicing what the scriptures teach only to realize you're just *going through the motions*. In other words, we all have tendencies toward performing religious rituals like the Pharisees did when they just followed endless religious customs. If it does not come from your heart, then it is dead works. I love God and I love to praise Jesus. You may not agree with what the Word gives as examples of what pleases the Father. You may want to ignore what that looks like and how that is portrayed in our lives but I would be less than true to myself if I didn't share it. I share this because it has been an integral part of my life from the time I was saved, born again, and filled with the Spirit.

And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

When children are young and not concerned with appearances, they express joy, happiness, and adoration towards their parents at times. For example, when a parent who has been out of town comes home, they jump up and down and then into their arms to hug them. When children are excited about something their parents did for them or a gift they gave them, they dance around, twirl, shout and do all kinds of physical things to show their excitement about it. I just believe our lives and bodies should portray and express that same child-like expression of love and honor towards Jesus. He is the one we love, who lives in our hearts, the one we say we love to commune with and love intimately.

There's an old joke that has stayed with me over the years. It illustrates what I am about to say. It goes like this: The *First Baptist Church of the Chosen Frozen* had 12 deacons who all sat together on the front row pew on Sunday mornings. They all stood with solemn faces when told to stand and sat when told to sit. They opened their hymn books when told. They looked down at their hymnals as the congregation and choir sang but rarely did they sing out loud and never did they show any signs of emotion. Their excuse was "I can't carry a tune in a bucket." One Sunday morning, one of the 12 deacons died while sitting in the pew. When the paramedics arrived they ended up having to take all 12 of them out till they found the right one.

After I'm gone, when depicting or describing my life, the only thing I want people to remember above all else about me is, I loved to praise my Jesus. Sure, I want people to say I loved my wife and family but the greatest thing in my life is Jesus. There is an old hymn that has the words "All that thrills my soul is Jesus." I love that old hymn!

Ever since I was *born again* as an 18 year old and picked up an old guitar and taught myself how to play, I have written and sung praise music. My heart has always been drawn to the heart of Jesus and to lead others to praise and love him. Evie completed my calling to lead people into the presence of the Lord. So, in every place we have worked and lived through the years, we have been involved in leading people in worship. I've had various money making jobs but like Paul in the Bible, those were my "tent making jobs." My real job has been to lead worship music in the midst of His believers.

As I am in my senior years and looking back on leading music in churches, I am continually mystified by all the people that have the name "Christian" on their T- shirts but yet they express no open heartfelt worship, hence, the "Church of the Chosen Frozen." It's really funny what we see from the stage when we look out on the congregation when we lead worship. The lack of participation and stoic behaviors of the congregation really make us wonder sometimes what is going on inside their hearts and souls.

The Word says, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Luke 6:45). My heart is abundantly full of praise to Jesus, my Savior, and I can't help but speak His praises. "His praise shall continually be on my lips" (Psalms 34:1). Through the years, I've seen seemingly good people in church just sit or stand there. They never sing, never show any emotion or outward signs of affection for their creator, but they say they are Christians and love the Lord. In our current church, First Baptist South Oak in Lake Placid FL, it is a lot different

than most of the churches we've attended. In this church we are blessed to be in an atmosphere of praise and worship. There is freedom to outwardly express praise.

I just know people show affection and outward emotion to whatever they worship and adore. Go to ballgames and sporting events and you will see who or what is worshipped. Or, go to concerts or theater events. After a performance they clap, stand, whistle, and continue to outwardly express their emotion of praise for the actors.

There is power and freedom in praise. It is how God created us. It is how He designed us. It is a release of emotion that God has built into our DNA. I believe the evil one has robbed the church without their knowing it. Think about a frog. If you put a frog in boiling water he will jump out, but if you put a frog in warm water and continue to turn up the temperature, the frog will sit still and boil to death and not try to jump out. Through the traditions of men, people have been “boiled to death” while sitting in their pews. They’ve been taught to not show emotion in the church assembly.

Sure, there are extremes of emotion that make us feel uncomfortable that go beyond simple childlike emotion and adoration toward the one they love. I’m talking about the heartfelt visible expressions of love and praise that accompany what we really worship. I believe the enemy of our souls has taught people to suppress the emotion that wells up in them to honor and worship Jesus. So, little by little, people have learned to sit still or stand and be a statue when they go to church.

The question is, “What will be the focus of our praise?” He created us to return affection back toward Him through a grateful heart for what He has done for us. He created our bodies to respond in an open show of affection as demonstrated by characters in the Bible. When your heart is in love with the creator of heaven and earth and you begin to praise, God moves. Praise opens the realm where God lives and operates. “He inhabits the praises of His people” (Psalms 22:3). Sadly, many miss God in this area of their lives.

Praise is active, not passive. It is not something you just think about inwardly in your head or contemplate somewhere on the inside of you. Praise and worship in the assembly of His people is something that you can’t help but express outwardly if you truly have affection for Him. It’s what I call having a case of the “I can’t help it”. When you love Jesus and honor the Father and the Spirit, you can’t help but show outward emotion. The outward visible signs of what is happening on the inside of you when entering into praise (whether at a sporting event, a concert, a theater event, or whatever) are the same as what is described in

the Bible. Here's a breakdown of some of the words and their meanings used for praise in the bible:

- **HALLAL** is a primary Hebrew root word for praise. Our word "hallelujah" comes from this base word. It means "to be clear, to praise, to shine, to boast, show, to rave, celebrate, to be **clamorously foolish**."
- **Your hands being lifted up.** Paul the Apostle said, "In every place of worship, I want men to pray with holy hands lifted up to God, free from anger and controversy" (I Tim 2:8).
- **You're singing or shouting out loud.** Singing and speaking the words of praise in places where the church assembles to worship are outward visible and audible expressions of what is going on in your heart. Worship is not an entertainment, spectator event where you sit or stand and listen to an artist perform. If you can't sing the words, then speak the words out loud. "**Speaking** to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing** and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19).
- **Your hands clapping.** "O clap your hands, all peoples; Shout to God with the voice of joy" (Psalms 47:1).
- **Your body is moving.** "Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and dancing" (Exodus 15:20). "And David danced before the Lord with all his might, wearing a priestly garment" (2 Samuel 6:14). King David, the only person described in the Bible as a man after God's own heart, danced before the Lord without shame in the presence of God's people. To be described as a man after God's own heart and to write the book of Psalms, you might want to emulate the things David did when he worshiped God.
- David's **words and actions** reveal characteristics of the kind of worship that pleases God. First, God desires a broken and contrite heart when we come before Him. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart — These, O God, You will not despise" (Psalms 51:17). King David understood what pleased the Father. "...you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings" Psalms 51:16. (i.e. man's ways of doing things that are not pleasing to the Father).
- King David was a focused worshiper. "You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I

will lift up my hands. I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; **with singing lips my mouth will praise you”** (Psalm 63:1-5).

- King David was a **passionate, undignified, unashamed worshiper**. “But as the Ark of the Lord entered the City of David, Michal, the daughter of Saul, looked down from her window. When she saw King David **leaping and dancing** before the Lord, she was filled with contempt for him.
- Praise is sacrifice: (i.e. you give up something, maybe yourself). “Through him, then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name” (Hebrews 13:15).

Jesus was raised in a Jewish home where they read the Psalms and the story of how King David worshipped. I am sure they followed the words and actions of the Psalmist, King David, when they worshiped. If you ever have an opportunity to go to a Messianic (people who have come to know their messiah, Yeshua/Jesus), Jewish home for a Shabbat service, you will see and hear how Jewish people worship. For years, Evie and I led worship in such a home. I assure you they sometimes acted clamorously foolish in their worship. I’ve also been in homes where people watching football games act clamorously foolish when their team makes a touchdown. *Is that what they worship?*

I’m sure the Jews of Jesus’s day sang the Psalms and the Psalms had references to playing the drums, hitting the cymbals, clapping hands, shouting their praises, dancing before the Lord, etc. All of these were actions-- not passive readings. “Raise a song; strike the timbrel, the sweet sounding lyre with the harp” (Psalms 81:2). They danced before the Lord when they sang their songs of worship, perhaps dancing like King David in the Bible. Remember King David, a man after God’s own heart, danced before the Lord without shame in the presence of God’s people. “And David danced before the Lord with all his might, wearing a priestly garment” (Samuel 6:14). They celebrated with dance during marriage ceremonies, too.

If you’ve ever been to an assembly like Bethel Worship Center or Hillsongs in Australia or thousands of worship gatherings around the world, you will see people caught up in praise and worship. They unashamedly stand with their hands lifted high. They sway back and forth while singing and clapping. You’ll see smiles on their faces or tears of joy falling from their eyes as they unashamedly show their love and affection for their Lord Jesus. “...So she brought an alabaster jar of perfume and stood behind Jesus at his feet, crying. She began to wash his feet with her tears, and she dried them with her hair, kissing them many times and rubbing them with the perfume” (Luke 7:36). Has that act of humble abasement ever been something you have experienced? Not the act of kissing Jesus’s feet, but the total

abasement of your being to bow and openly and audibly worship your Savior. Whatever you show outward affection for is what you worship.

Someone once asked, “Do you think Jesus ever clapped and danced or raised His hands before the father? Someone replied, “I don’t know; but He sure fixed me up so I could.” How about you? Has He fixed you up so you can praise and worship Him? Do you clap your hands and shout in honor of the Lord and all his attributes when you are worshipping in an assembly of believers? “O, clap your hands, all peoples; Shout to God with the voice of joy” (Psalms 47:1).

How about making a JOYFUL NOISE and SINGING out loud “A Psalm for giving thanks:”

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations (Psalms 100:1-5).

Are you too dignified or proud to sing, shout, clap, or raise your hands in surrender and awe before an almighty God? “In every place of worship, I want men to pray with holy hands lifted up to God, free from anger and controversy” (I Timothy 2:8).

If you clap your hands at ball games, or get excited when a goal is made, raise your hands and clap when your team wins but you won’t do the same before your creator who loved you and died on a cross for you, then you’re missing one of the greatest joys in life. You should never do anything as a show. It has to come from the innermost parts of your being. I’m sure Mary Magdalene wasn’t putting on a show (Luke 7:44-47):

“Then Jesus turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you **see** this woman (*what was she doing that seemed foolish?*)? When I came into your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she (*demonstrated outwardly her affection*) washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You (*didn’t demonstrate outwardly*) gave me no kiss of greeting, but she (*demonstrated outwardly her affection*) has been kissing my feet since I came in. You (*didn’t show outward affection*) did not put oil on my head, but she (*demonstrated outward affection for all to observe by what was going on inside her heart*) poured perfume on my feet. I tell you that her many sins are forgiven, so she (*for all to see what was going on in her heart*)

showed great love. But the person who is forgiven only a little will love only a little.”

Can you visualize what it will be like when you stand before Jesus when you are no longer on this earth? Do you think there will be no emotion when you are in His eternal presence? **Every creature will praise:** “And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” **Worship:** “And he said with a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water” (Revelation 14:7). **With loud voices:** “Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” **Fall on our knees:** “I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me.”

I assure you, there will be emotion expressed: singing, praising, shouting, dancing, and physical expressions of joy going on with our glorified bodies when we get to heaven. Why not prepare for it on earth as in heaven? Whom do you serve and worship on this earth? “And Jesus answered him, “It is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve” (Luke 4:8).

Life is not about ball games, golfing, fishing, sports, or other events or anything else. It is about experiencing God, expressing who God is, and honoring him through worship. It is about dying to one’s self and what other people think. Do you know what dying to yourself means? “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). I don’t care what others think when I lift my hands in praise. I am “risen” in Christ. I don’t care what the world says about getting carried away and worshipping Jesus. It is no longer me but Christ in me who lives in me. I am His and He is mine. Our Lord Jesus is worthy of our praise.

Don’t go by what you’ve been taught by example because there are a lot of wrong examples in churches. What you want to go by are the examples in the Word of God. Find out in God’s Word what real worship and affection looks and feels like and how it is expressed with these bodies God has made. Research to see what people did outwardly that showed what was going on in their hearts. You’ll

be surprised. ALL THAT THRILLS MY SOUL IS JESUS. Is that the phrase that sums up your life? Search your heart.

God has blessed us these 50 years of marriage (as of this writing 12/24/21). It has not been an easy road, but we know God is in control and we trust Him.

More later; my story isn't over, I pray.

God bless ☺!

Dad, Granddaddy, Brother, Cousin or Your friend

Ernest



About 9 years old



Senior Picture



High School Band



Before Evie



Angela, Daniel, Josiah, Kristiana, Elijah, Ernestine



Herman and Ernest



Herman, Kenneth, Neal, Ruth, Ernest



All with Ernestine and Elmer



Always building



Recording



Always leading worship



Soon after Lee's birth



Ernest with his mother



Camp Nor Da Tho



Brothers and others



... the family grew



Parents and Siblings



Evie's Stories

(Reflections from the Heart)

Preface

My writing will not include a specific timeline because my purpose is to share the “*how*,” the “*what*” of life impacted and impacts me to run into the arms of the Father through His precious Son, Jesus (that’s what I learned to call Him as a child). That reminds me of something. Are you smiling? I am because I had no idea I’d write *this* story today.

When I was a teenager, I remember finding my mother in tears one day and asked, “What’s wrong?” Never would I have expected her answer,

“All of you call me Mama.”

“Yes,” I replied, wondering what on earth could be going on as most kids in our country use that name.

Mom said, “Well, I don’t like it!”

I simply responded, “Oh. What do you want to be called?”

She thought and said, “Mother.” From that day, I honored her by calling her Mother.

Names of endearment are many and some may only be used by one’s beloved or its misuse can arouse shocking anger. In my high school French class, my teacher related such a story. A word was used innocently, but incorrectly, toward the Frenchman’s wife. The Frenchman responded by biting the poor fellow’s nose!

In the scripture, some fellows used the name of Jesus (*in their language did they even say Jesus?*) to cast out demons. Instead, the demons jumped on them! What is it about a name? Or is it really the name? Or is it about *knowing*? I believe it’s all about *knowing*! Do I know Him in the fullness of His resurrection power? The Maranatha Singers released this song in 1999:

I want to know (praise, serve, or love) you Lord, much more than I do

I want to know you more, much more than I do,

Learn to seek your face and the knowledge of your grace--I want to know you Lord.

Please come to know and honor Him through the following pages!

And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

(Isaiah 9:6, ESV)

Evie Elizabeth Ferrell Fentress
 Alias: Evvie
 Born: August 13, 1952

My Grandmother Evie was called Eva, so I was told. Her parents spelled it E-V-I-E and when she started school, the teacher righted the pronunciation. When Evie relayed the information to her parents they asked what she liked. She liked the “new” name. The teacher chose to start the beginning sound of the “new” name with a short vowel *e*. I have been called the “new” name to this day—well mostly!

Although my birth certificate declared me to be Evie Elizabeth, named after each of my grandmothers, my mother was determined to have others say it correctly and taught me to spell my name E-V-V-I-E. *She reasoned that school teachers would surely know and enforce the medial, double consonant rule—dividing the syllables between the double consonants makes the first vowel short i.e. “rabbit, kitten,” etc.* Wrong! Teachers regularly stumbled through roll call mostly calling me “*Eevee*.” In high school my history teacher just asked if he could call me by my middle name Elizabeth. My agreement caused me to miss out on making new friends. Apparently, I didn’t answer to *Elizabeth* in the hallways and it was assumed I was “stuck-up.” Whenever I reflect on these happenings, I can’t help but wonder if it was one of God’s ways of protecting me. Only listening for *my* name in a largely populated school kept me with my earlier childhood friends with whom I was safe. *Today, when I’m in tune to the voice of the Spirit I stay in the right flock too! And I am safe!!*

Technicalities, regardless how small, seem to cause major problems. When I signed my marriage license the clerk ill-mannerly shoved it back to me demanding, “Who’s that?” I had no idea to whom he was referring. Disgruntled, he humored me with, “That’s not who’s on this birth certificate.”

I still didn’t understand that he meant the “spelling.” How I’ve wished many times I had just scribbled my name unintelligibly! Although I signed with one “v” that day, I continued to sign with two “vs” until I lost my driver’s license twenty years later. Agreeing to be one “v” again shouldn’t have been an identity crisis, but my emotions didn’t know that. As I worked through this “should have been insignificant” dilemma, I discovered God’s sense of humor.

*... I will give a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.
 (Revelation 2:17, NKJV)*

So, Who are These People?

Evie:

Berkeley Clay Ferrell – my daddy
Nana and Papa - Daddy's parents

Jack Goodwin “Daddy Jack” (Step Dad)
Ernestine (Tina) Ferrell Goodwin – Mother

Ernest Lee Edwards - Mother's daddy
Evie Kirby Edwards - Mother's mom
Aunt Chris - Mother's twin
Aunt Boots – Mother's oldest sister (14 yrs. Older)
Uncle Jimmy – Mother's brother

Jan – my oldest sister
Kay - next sibling
Evie (that's me), 3rd child, also Evvie)
Scott - my brother, baby of the family
Dianne (my only first cousin)

Angela - daughter
Trey - son-in-law
Grandchildren from oldest to youngest:
Samuel
Josiah
Daniel
Kristiana
Elijah
Eva
Ezra
Joshua

Lee Edison – son

Ernest - my husband:

Elmer - father-in-law
Ernestine - mother-in-law

Ernest's siblings (oldest to youngest):
Herman (Elaine, wife)
Kenneth (Sherrian, wife)
Neal
Ruth
(Ernest, 5th child)

Edwin Fentress (Elmer's identical twin)

His children, oldest to youngest (Ernest's close cousins):

Nancy
Joy
Glenda
Edwina
Sherry

Close Friends:

Harold and Faye Witmer, Youth Challenge Center

Pete and Johnna Oddo:
Danielle, Chris and Jason

Pastor Jerry Heflin and Jeraldene

Sherry Klein (Trey's mother)

Evie, Jan, Kay and Scott



Kay, Jan, Evie and Scott



Age 4



Kay, Evie, Jan, Scott



Senior Picture



Writing Begins

8/18/2021

“Tell me a story, Grandma.”

“Write the book Mom.”

“When are you going to write that book?” asked a friend.

Hesitation sets in again. I’ve tried several times during my life to write. I’ve never completed any of it. Why should or shouldn’t I write? Could I write? Stories are great. I like hearing yours but why? Ah, I like hearing about your journey. I really do! But why? I had to analyze this so I could determine if you might want to know my stories too. Would there be any value or anything praiseworthy for the Father? You see, when I hear your story I’m listening for something in particular: His voice, His touch, and His unfailing love. Yes! I’m seeking God and ALL of who He is through his Son whom He sent to reveal Himself to us: the One who came to identify with us and lead us to the Father through His death, burial, and resurrection. Not only does He know the way, He said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father, but by me.”

So, today I write page one. Perhaps, if I write one page a day I will not feel so overwhelmed. My entries will be presented as they come to my mind, not chronologically. I’ll supply some dates or maybe my age to help keep some things in perspective. While you may get to know me better by reading these, my goal is that you know Jesus better! Maybe by next year I’ll have some stories for you to read that will not just be a *good read*, but will truly help you follow Jesus. Even when following him gets a little tricky or when He’s just ahead of you around the bend and you can’t see Him, keep walking! May my stories help you keep moving because you will see Him soon!

I will never leave you nor forsake you.

(Hebrews 13:5, ESV)

Evie, age 15: Telling another story ☺



The Golden Rule

What is it in human nature that either wants to promote itself, or doesn't? I was five or less when I stood in front of the television hiding a certain childhood star's performance. I danced, sang, and smiled just as well as she, I thought. *Notice me, not her, my heart screamed!*

We can spend endless hours debating what could have happened, or didn't happen, in my young life to cause me to want, or even demand, such attention. My older sisters will tell you that I wasn't ignored or neglected in any way. Quite the contrary — they thought I was doted on and favored.

My self-promoting disposition, whether viewed as an asset or handicap, did not prevent me from having nervousness or stage fright. Also as a result of it, I wasn't privileged with the ability to "make friends and influence people" easily. Until much older I lacked tact and grace around others, answering their questions honestly but without understanding who they were and why they asked. I learned the hard way that their asking was an attempt to gain understanding, approval, and love. Often, people have their own answers to their questions. It has been said that a good friend is a good listener. A good friend is also a good *listener of the other's heart*.

What we call "The Golden Rule" is very important. *And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them (Luke 6:31, ESV)*. In other words, if you want others to hear your heart more than your words, give others the same grace. When you allow yourself an excuse for your wrong words or behavior, allow the same grace to those you criticize and judge. *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:1-2, ESV)*.

*Be humble before the Lord, and he will make you great.
(James 4:10, ERV)*

Goat in French Class Play



Each Person is Special

Shirley Temple, TV star, was amazing but I thought I was too. Yes, I blocked the TV singing and dancing. I annoyed my older sisters for sure. I don't know why I did those kinds of things, things that seemed like I wanted others' attention. Most of my little girl pictures prove I had no lack of self-esteem. I posed with arms crossed just "so-so" while radiating more than a smile. Do all of us in some way try to gain attention *OR* could we be reacting to the truth?

God created the world and designed each of us. HE said HIS creation "IS VERY GOOD." Do we all, as children, feel that truth – that HE made us special? Can we sing and dance for Father God knowing that HE is pleased with his creation? Are only the stars on TV special? Must we have the audience's approval? Why do we seek confirmation from others? Why do we allow the lies that permeate the world system to say, "Who do you think you are? Be quiet! NO one cares about you!"

Let's not agree with these sentiments. Let's encourage each person, young or old, to realize his or her specialness as truth because God created us, loves us, and wants the best for us. He is a good Father! We can trust HIM, the loving Father that HE is!

It is hard to find special character qualities, talents, and abilities placed in a person by God amidst obnoxious, immature behavior but we must seek to do so.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others (Philippians 2:4, ESV).

My mother acknowledged my interest in music when I was three years old and made sure I sang at church. I remember standing on a chair in front of the Ivy Memorial Baptist Church congregation in Nashville, TN singing "Standing Somewhere in the Shadows You'll Find Jesus." Mother said I also played tunes on her friend's piano for long periods of time while they visited. Because of this, Mom enrolled me in beginner's choir practice with Ms. Rosie Peterson at Grace Baptist Church in Nashville, TN. Ms. Rosie was beautiful and elegant! She wore trimming black dresses, black pumps, the perfect French Twist hair style, and red lipstick which I associated with her name. It couldn't have been more perfect: sing with Ms. Rosie, name the flash card music notes, and eat cookies afterwards. Honestly, I don't know which part I enjoyed the most. It doesn't matter. Good seeds were sown.

*Let them praise his name with dancing.,
(Psalms 149:3, ESV)*

The Father's Protection

August 21, 2021

When leaving, place the youngest child next to the parent.

This is what I heard as I awoke today. It seemed we were leaving a place to go somewhere else. Was I supposed to learn a lesson from this? The significance of placing any child next to a parent, regardless of age, is for protection, guidance, and comfort. The youngest child probably has little or no concept about what is happening. Youngest children may not even be aware of the shift that is coming due to "leaving." They don't know the way they're going, the "whys," or anything about it other than what they perhaps *feel* due to the reactions by those who surround them.

The next day upon awakening, I'm in a dream-like state with feelings of something left undone concerning an older student, maybe a teenager. Somehow I had left this one to flounder on a weekend. I know it is Sunday and I understand I can't make amends today. Then in a brief moment of confusion I think it is Monday so I console myself with the thought that I will find this student has been optimistically helped and then I really wake up...

It really **IS** Sunday! I did **leave** someone to flounder — my son! At least that is what he wants me to think. It sounds awful when I allow my thoughts to be controlled by his thoughts. It **feels** even worse!

Maybe I was the *youngest* child in yesterday's awakening moment. Are *my* feelings based only on my son's negative reactions to the shift? If so, I have been placed next to the parent for protection, guidance, and comfort! If I am the child, and I think I must be, then Abba Father is my parent. He snuggles me under his arm of protection while reassuring me that we'll be "there" soon and all will be well. As a parent, I know this scene. I've comforted my young children during moves and transitions several times during this life's journey. I also remember focusing on my mother's face when I needed an emotional check. Now I must focus on my Father's!

*Seek the Lord and His strength. Seek His face continually.
(Psalms 105: 4, NASB)*

Anger

Be angry and sin not.

My brother came to live with us for a short while when he got out of the navy. There were now four of us in a twelve foot wide trailer (fancier ones were called mobile homes). It was a split-level that provided a tiny upstairs (4 steps) bedroom for our preschooler just off the lower master bedroom. At the opposite end of the trailer was another bedroom that housed our piano, musical instruments, and now a roll-away bed for Scott. Living quarters were challenging at best but I worked hard to provide an uncluttered space filled with love, food, and clean clothes. So, it isn't surprising that when both my husband and brother extended laughter-filled praises to the runners-up of the Miss America pageant on TV one evening that anger boiled through my veins. When I hurled my objections their way, they didn't even notice. I fled with dusting spray in hand and tried rubbing my anger into the wood of the piano.

“*With whom are you angry?*” I began to hear as my thoughts raced. I quickly realized that every answer I gave returned this question, “*Why?*” Ten or so minutes later I discovered that all the reasons led to me being angry toward God. After all, He sees everything, knows all, and could have gotten other people’s attention but He didn’t. Complicated, right?

I know that had I been secure in God’s love and had abided in Him as my one true love, perhaps that evening could have turned out differently. If I had remembered I’m a child of The King, I wouldn’t seek men’s acknowledgement or approval. Maybe after the pageant was over they would have been enamored with the pageantry of the King’s daughter — me! I’ll never know, because either way, a King’s daughter (or son) never sees or takes praise. A true son or daughter gathers all praise for the Father.

What then is my response?

*Whatever you do, do it all for the Glory of God.
(1 Corinthians 10:31, NKJV)*

Remembering:

*I (God) will be a father to you,
and you shall be sons and daughters to me,
says the Lord Almighty.
(II Corinthians 6:18, ESV)*

“You Have to Know Who You Are!”

Matthew 3:17-4:3, ESV

... and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command...”

Why is it I forget too easily that when I am walking as a daughter of God I will be encountered by the devil’s temptations? Jesus was pronounced “Son,” and then was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. It’s notable that the test came when he was hungry. So it is in our weakened state, that we, more than ever, need to be ready for the test. Yet, I forget!!

Food is not the only thing that produces hunger or a weakened state. What about the phrase, “That guy is starving for attention?” Or, “I’m hungry to win.” What kinds of things precede a test or attack from the enemy? It happened to me again today. I was in the middle of cleaning the house and thinking things were coming along just fine when someone condescendingly asked, “You going to wash the dishes?” I completely failed the test. I must have been the guy needing ‘appreciation’ attention so I went on the defensive saying, “I have you know, I’m not finished doing my work and I don’t need you breathing down my neck telling me how to do it!” Then I gave a list of things I had accomplished. I feel pretty sure all ears were closed to my ranting.

What did any of that accomplish? My precious mother-in-law often said, “People, you have to know who you are!” Those of us who really knew her understood she meant “knowing who we are in Jesus.” He (Jesus) calls us His. He loves us and died in our place so that we can live above a life of defensiveness and insecurities. Anything less than an exuberant, abundant life in Jesus smells of death. But Jesus came to overcome ALL death. I don’t need to fall into a death trap! I can do “whatever I find to do, do for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31, NLT). I know I am His. I don’t need to explain who I am or what I do because if I “humble myself in the sight of the Lord, He will lift me up in due time” (1 Peter 5:6, NIV). Hallelujah! Then when I am truly humble, I’ll only have praise to send to the Father. I’ll have no need for praise from men.

Lord, help me!!

*Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth and the life!”
(John 14:6, NKJV)*

“Singing and Making Melody...”

Through the years I’ve always made up songs to sing. At age 12, I sang this one as I skipped up the street toward the elementary school one summer. I still hear the tune in my head to this day and I’m 69 years old.

*It’s a beautiful day outside
The sun is shining bright outside
It’s a beautiful day and I’m happy to say
It’s a beautiful day today.*

But what if it rains? At age 12 would I have called a rainy day a beautiful day? Probably not! Can I call it beautiful now or at least understand that beauty WILL COME as a result of the rain? Ernestine understood and announced, “I want to stay green ‘til the end.” She knew you had to have rain to stay green! She wouldn’t focus on the mud or slick sidewalks of life. She inspired me to write this song in the 1990s:

Green ‘til the End
*There’s life in a tree as long as the sap flows
And the roots go way down deep
That tree holds on even when the wind blows
And the storm comes with a sweep.*

Chorus
*And stays green ‘til the end, green ‘til the end
Weathering the seasons, getting stronger and stronger
And stays green ‘til the end.*

Verse
*In His provisions you’ve already heard
That on Him you must depend
So dig down deep into God’s Holy Word
And stay green until the end.*

Bridge
*You don’t know what life’s about if you think it’s all sunshine
It takes other things to grow, like wind and rain and time.*

Verse
*Let’s be like trees planted by water
Bringing forth ripe fruit in time,
Where leaves stay green and all that matters
Is God’s Word that ALL is fine!!*

Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.
 (Psalms 1:3, KJV)

On Forgiveness

June, 1989

Help me be obedient.
Make me know thy way.
Set my feet upon the *Rock -
Away from miry **clay!

Help me love my enemy.
Make me know that peace
Only comes through forgiveness.
May it never cease!

Once I was your enemy.
Then you took me in -
Fed, loved and protected me,
Removed all guilt of sin.

Now You say I am a friend
Bound for glory land.
Noticing not I hurt You,
Reached back and took my hand.

**Rock - the all-forgiving One*

***clay - unforgiveness is like quicksand*

The Lord of Love

Written for a 15 year old friend a long time ago

Poem/Song

When you are alone and confused
 Rejected, shamed and very abused
 Things you once loved, you now even hate
 No more purpose so you think of escape

Chorus

Look to the Lord of love, He will befriend you
 Never, never will He ever leave you
 He'll wrap you in His love and take your guilt away
 The Lord of love has promised He will stay.

Verse

When society's left you friendless and bored
 And you can't go on that way anymore
 And when the sweet has soured in your mouth
 With unpleasant memories you'd rather do without

Chorus

Look to the Lord of love, He will befriend you
 Never, never will He ever leave you
 He'll wrap you in His love and take your guilt away
 The Lord of love has promised He will stay.

*Greater love hath no man than this:
 That Jesus gave His life!*

*Greater love hath no man than this
 That a man lay down His life for His friends.
 (John 15:13, KJV)*

Jesus is the Way

Do I really believe that Jesus IS the way?

Christian families expect to have a certain amount of bumps on the rocky road of life. They recognize the need for disposition and attitude adjustments – a little dusting off, so to speak, in our Christ-abiding homes. But what do we think about the unexpected boulder that catapults our young adults onto a whole other way of life? We continue to insist there was no boulder. “He just didn’t keep up and then took a wrong turn!”

“Didn’t he see the sign “Jesus Way?”

We argue, “He saw it alright but intentionally took the “Wrong Way!”

One of my favorite pastimes as a kid was riding my bike. I didn’t do wheelies like the boys but I often threw my hands in the air and yelled, “Look! No hands!” Regularly, my knees and legs featured scrapes. I didn’t see the rock that threw me. We excuse these mishaps as usual occurrences for child play but “when we are older we put away childish things.” Going down these roads: Wrong Friends, Slippery Slope, and Addiction Highway is inexcusable! Our attitudes default to “You made your bed; so sleep in it!” Then we pass by on the other side!

What of the Good Samaritan story? Why would *I* have passed that guy by? Surely, I’m not the only one who sees *me* as the knight in shining armor! More honestly my thoughts may have included: *Wonder what that fellow did to justify that beating? Guess he was hanging out with the wrong crowd. What’s he doing traveling alone at that time of day? I think I’ve seen that fellow before; serves him right. He’ll wake up and be okay; if not, good riddance.*

If only I could extend grace to someone in the same way I’d want for myself! What if *I* did ride without my hands on the *handle bars of life* and do something stupid that warranted dire consequences? I’ve heard Christians suggest that certainly *IF* that person wants help, then they’d be glad to help. But what about the one who is left unconscious, even spiritually speaking? Doesn’t scripture say, “The devil comes as a thief to steal, kill and destroy?” Doesn’t that robber, the devil, leave some, if not *ALL*, helpless? Who of us, with our not so obvious and grotesque sins, have ever saved ourselves? Jesus would declare us hypocrites!

*Which of these three do you think was a neighbor
to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?*

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

(Luke 10:36-37, ESV)

The Battle

Just before Ernest and I married he wrote a beautiful song “Two Way Road,” including these words: *It’s a two-way road, but only one way to reality, a life more abundantly. Which way will you go?* As I revisit this song, a tumultuous amount of emotions surface. Hidden in the beauty of this song was a battlefield for me and battlefields are ugly! I died there! It’s probably more correct to say, I began to die. Guess what? Slow deaths hurt.

Don’t ask me to tell you the gory story of the battle. Soldiers seldom can tell it all! They really don’t know the whole story. They only know what *they* know. I took the “Jesus Way” road to life more abundantly but I got captured! My identity was obscured. One day I was stuck in mud and my best confidante left me for hours not knowing I couldn’t get out because it was quicksand. Another time, I was interrogated by my own unit and my motives were questioned. Thank God, one soldier spoke in my defense and I was cleared!

Whew! You think I made any of that up? No! I’m sure your battle included some of these same things. Remember the day you said, “If you think I said that or meant that, you don’t know me at all!” How about the time your friend went shopping or fishing without you because you had trouble making up your mind? What about those relatives that judged you and criticized your decision? See? You have been on the battlefield! But we misunderstand the purpose of the battle. It is victory, of course, but the “Jesus Way” victory only comes through death. The old hymn echoes this truth: *The way of the cross leads home. It is sweet to know as I onward go, the way of the cross leads home.* Paul of the New Testament said, “I die daily” (*I Corinthians 15:31*).

The kingdom of God looks like this: Victory comes through death. Give and it shall be given to you. Lose your life; that’s how you find it. Take no thought for what you eat or wear. “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live” (Galatians 2:20 KJV). What? All of this seems backwards to us, right? We play to win. We try new things and go new places all as part of “finding ourselves.” We spend countless hours on food and clothing during our lifespan. The idea of dying with Christ in order to truly live leaves us clueless. Perhaps that’s why we’re in a battle – to die! As we die to self, we discover life. *And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me* (*Galatians 2:20b NKJV*).

My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.
(Isaiah 55:8, ESV)

Words

9-8-2021

Ernest is writing his autobiography and yesterday, upon my request, he read some of it to me. I have added him to my mental list of capable writers in the family. The list is growing! It includes those who write short stories, speeches, encouraging words in birthday cards, to the powerful one-liners in text messages and everything in between. I wonder; does each person create with words? God said, “Let there be light.” He used words to create everything. Then He said, “Let’s make man in our own image.” Indeed, we create all sorts of things with our words: peace, chaos, and even war. Yet we claim, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” It is truer to admit the worse wounds are inflicted by words.

Words are used to cast doubt upon another’s character in a useless attempt to build up our own character. Wasn’t that Satan’s ploy in the garden, “Did God really say...?” Words are powerful! Even small children know that and demean each other. Sadly, I confess, I did it too! At age eight, why did I point out what I thought was a flaw in another little girl? Jealousy of the attention she had gotten! Why did Satan cast a shadow on God’s word? Jealousy, of course! I’ve also regretted another time, as a grown woman, spewing negative words toward the deceased. Who does that? No matter how much hurt or grief surfaces after a death, the “dead in Christ” don’t feel it. Ernestine counseled me, “If you’re feeling something, it means you’re not dead yet. Dead people don’t feel anything.” When my feelings are hurt, her words sweetly echo.

My desire is to use words in the same way that God did - by first creating light! Upon hearing various conversations, we ascertain, “that sheds light on it for sure!” I also want my speech to exemplify this scripture: *“Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person” (Colossians 4:6, NASB)*. Shouldn’t we give “the benefit of the doubt” to others in the same way we expect it from others?

Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

(Philippians 2:2-3, ESV)

Coincidences

9-9-2021

- Seated with my daughter's future family-to-be in 1992, Trey's grandmother asked me, "Where are you from?" Answering, "Nashville," she began to probe deeper with, "We lived in South Nashville, and you?" When I responded with, "Mostly East, but we did live In South Nashville for six or so months when I was seven." She continued, "We lived off of Haywood Lane."

The conversation bounced in tennis-like fashion until it was discovered that not only did we live in the same community but we had attended the same, newly formed church in a house. And Trey's mother was not just in Haywood Elementary School with me—but was IN the very same second grade classroom with me, with the same teacher! *Coincidence?*

- Holding an initialed jacket in 1971, I spotted MY initials, EEF. I had just agreed to marry Ernie, and then I discovered his initials were identical to mine. I later learned he was named after both of his grandfathers whose names supply those initials. Coincidentally, had I been named after each of my grandmothers that provided mine? I should mention I wanted to be like my grandmother, Evie, and "marry an *Ernest*" and I did!
Coincidence?
- There was concern last week when our "by choice" homeless son had not been seen or heard from in several days. My neighbor's out of town guest, Diane, brought Joann supper from our local Beef O Brady's. Diane told this story to me later that evening: *On the sidewalk, a man pushing a bike in front of me turned and asked to speak to me. Acknowledging an okay, he began to speak about freemasonry and the Knight Templars and wondered what I thought. When I asked him if he was a Christian, he gave strong affirmation. I cautioned him against freemason ideology.* I interrupted Diane saying, "I think you were talking to my son." Showing her pictures of Lee, she confirmed, "Yes!" *Coincidence?*

Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.

(Luke 12:7, ESV)

1962-1964

Musical things and church activities filled up much of my time when I wasn't in school. The ability God gave me to play tunes by ear allowed me the honor and privilege to navigate from class to class on Sunday mornings to play piano for each different age group of children. Funny, how at age 10, I didn't see myself as a child. Each teacher would welcome me into her class and we would sing: "Climb, Climb up Sunshine Mountain," "It's Bubbling," "The Wise Man Built His House upon the Rock," Oh Be Careful Little Eyes What You See," "Every Day with Jesus" and many, many more songs. How the Lord blessed me is beyond words. I soaked in joy and praise, lessons of Christian living and scripture. I even memorized the verses. Last week when I felt fearful, I quoted one of them and saw in my mind the moment I learned that verse. It was in one of those classes. "What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee!"

At age 12, I became part of the Junior Choir. A young man in his twenties (Ronnie) was the director. I had never seen anyone as full of joy, love and encouragement for others as this man! All who knew him would attest to that. Everyone loved him. We loved his family too! His wife looked like Snow White from the Disney movie. I could hardly keep my eyes off her. She radiated peace and serenity.

When Ronnie sang heaven seemed to move. None of us thought he sang enough. Whatever emerged from him caused me to want to be around him and to be like him. I even had Mother perm my hair and wore it naturally curly like his. Ronnie laughed when he saw it and asked what happened. With embarrassment, I discovered that outside appearances would not affect the inward person.

By God's design, I was blessed to have this man as an encourager and a music educator. One Wednesday night, Ronnie approached me and said, "*Ever* (because that was his nickname for me), you're on!" Not understanding, he continued, "I need you to play in church tonight." I was excited but nervous! He needed me to play right *then* and without practicing? I wasn't a good "music" reader but, if I knew the song, I could follow and play by ear. I asked him what song, hoping it was something I knew. It wasn't. I gasped, "'Higher Ground, I don't know it.'"

He said, "Sure you do," humming it to me as we literally ascended the stairs to the service. This began my piano training under Ronnie. It was to last three years.

*Who [with reason] despises the day of small things (beginnings)?
(Zechariah 4:10, Amplified)*

1964-1967

I count it a blessing to have learned to play piano during a time in history without easy access to musical soundtracks and recordings. This limitation forced me to become better at music than I would have had I been competing with the professional musicians with technology. In other words, had there been soundtracks for soloists, I would have had fewer opportunities to accompany.

I cannot recount the numerous times Ronnie would say, “Ever, I’m going to sing a song today.” Handing me the sheet music, I would relax and think, *no problem*, until he added, “But there’s one problem. Can you transpose it? It’s too high.” Anxiously, I changed my thinking and concluded that if I had the sheet music I could watch the chord structure easily enough to transpose.

“Yes,” I would agree I could do that. Then we’d practice for about 10 minutes.

When he thought I felt secure, minutes before going upstairs to sing, he’d announce, “There’s just one more thing.” Lifting my eyebrows, I scrutinized his admission, “I only have this one copy of the music.” (Back then, we had no copy machines either.) While approaching the steps to the auditorium and feeling a pat on my shoulder, the next thing I heard was, “But you don’t need it, right? You’ve got this.” Then he’d flash that big ole smile that engulfed every doubt I thought I ever had. Thank you, Jesus, for this priceless time of my life!!

“*You’ve got this!*” Really? Ronnie knew *he* had it under control. He would pull it off even if I blundered. Isn’t that like God? God is in control! HE conducts the orchestra. We, by faith, although we’ve done our part and practiced, still watch the conductor and follow HIS lead. The performance goes imperfectly forward at times but, in the end, there’s a standing ovation. God, the Creator, the Great Designer, makes “good” of the flaws in the tapestry of life.

Joseph, of the Old Testament, exclaimed, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Genesis 50:20 ESV). In the book of Jeremiah 29:11 (ESV), it is written: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” God gives us beauty for ashes (Isaiah 61:3, NLT).

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.
(Romans 8:28, ESV)

“This number is restricted or unavailable.”

That's the message I got when I called my son last night to simply say "I love you." As that message replayed in my ear I began to sing a Michael W. Smith song." *Crucified, laid behind a stone - You lived to die, rejected and alone - Like a rose, trampled on the ground - You took the fall and thought of me, Above all.*"

"Let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me (Mark 8:34, ESV). Lee used that verse to defend his lifestyle to me. There is a thought in the Christian community that we too must "take the fall" and live a life of loneliness, rejection, physical abuse and even torture to show that we have indeed taken up the cross to follow Jesus. While that could come as a direct effect of following Jesus, we are not commanded to seek it or "call it up." That particular call is restricted and unavailable!

The "cross" (Mark 8:34) is not a symbol for suffering in general. Rather it refers to withstanding persecution (difficult times), by the Lord's power, as He directs the circumstances of life. As Christ's disciples, believers are to hold true – even when attacked by the ungodly. (Copyright c 1987, 2011 Helps Ministries, INC)

"You took the fall and thought of me above all," the truth registers. Jesus is worthy! Only He could die to resurrect! Only He can replace death with life because He IS life! Our best attempt at emulating Jesus' suffering and the cross is meager dependence on our own ability to make restitution with the Father. All of our goodness is filthy rags. We cannot boast in our pilgrimage to right our wrongs or to take on misery to exonerate our sin nature. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "You must be born again." Even Nicodemus struggled with that statement and asked Jesus to explain how a person can return to his mother's womb and start over. Humans want formulas - *Give me the correct equation and I'll fix it.* God sent His Son! The Son, in essence, told Nicodemus to *chill*, explaining that physical birth is just that—physical! The rebirth is a work of the Spirit and it's like the wind, coming and going different ways and times. But, it WILL come!

Someone argues, "But Jesus said 'must be born' so there is something we *must* do!" *Must* is an interesting word. It often states a fact: "To board, you must show your ID card." "You must be over 4 feet to ride the roller coaster." For me to ride that roller coaster meant I had to wait. There was nothing I could do to provide that conditional "must." How wonderful Jesus was born physically to usher in our spiritual birth. He died so that we could have life. He is Master of the Great Exchange!

Flesh is born of flesh, but spirit is born of the Spirit.
(John 3:6, BSB)

I think I was nine.

Summer meant no school and staying outside. Mother didn't like four kids "under foot." On my way out the door one morning I asked, "May I go ride my bike?" Nonchalantly, and with probably lots of things on her mind, Mother answered, "Just come in when you get hungry."

Off I went, first one way then another, visiting all my school chums one by one. I rode to Cherokee St. to check on Debbie and returned by Chickasaw then past Glenda's on Jones Ave. Decidedly, I crossed Trinity Lane to go by Vicki's, Annette's, and Cherie's. I remember Cherie's mother seemed surprised I came by but she smiled pleasantly and let me talk although Cherie wasn't home. All of a sudden it seemed I should go. I was hungry!

Pedaling fast to get home, I didn't want Mother worrying about me being late for lunch. When I got to my street I saw police cars down the way. As I got closer to home, I realized the police were in my driveway. That was scary! Now what? All eyes riveted toward me as I pedaled toward them. "Is that her?" an officer asked. The officers were thanked for coming and then they left.

Mother had me by the shoulders, "Where have you been? We were worried sick and looked everywhere." With a puzzled look I responded, "On a bike ride. You said to come home when I got hungry. I'm here for lunch."

She countered, "It's supper time!" *Now, I understood why the police were there.*

In Mother's childhood church that we simply referred to as The Country Church, I recall this gospel hymn: *Come home, come home, it's supper time - we're going home at last.* As I hummed this, I thought about how Mother was ready to send the police to fetch me when I didn't come home at supper time. In the kingdom realm there is no better bounty hunter than the Holy Spirit to seek a wayward soul. The price for such a hunt has already been paid by the King's own Son. Let's implore the "hound of heaven" to find all prodigals! The Holy Spirit was given as the Great Helper. He is the Paraclete (Greek *parakletos*) who is an advocate, helper, and comforter. He is called to one's aid.

The price for sin has been paid and The Helper has been sent so join me in song: *He paid the debt he did not own - I own the debt I could not pay - I needed someone just to wash my sins away - And now I sing a brand new song - Amazing grace all day long - Christ Jesus paid the debt that I could never pay.*

*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name...
(John 14:26a, NASB).*

Reminiscing 1952 + page 1

Many families were still recovering from WWII in a lot of ways so my early years were probably ordinary. I was the third girl. My sisters, Jan and Kay, were four and two years older than me, respectively. I would be known as the baby girl, while my brother, Scott, born almost five years later, was “the baby.” Jan became our second mama, so she thought. Actually, Mother depended on Jan to be her second pair of eyes. It wasn’t abnormal for Kay to regret my birth as I took over her baby position in the family. Mother said she would catch Kay pulling my feet through the rails of the baby bed and twisting my feet. Jan remembers Kay often stole my pacifier too. Daddy wasn’t happy with me either because Mother decided to breastfeed me, unlike the first two babies. Years later, his disdain was still evident while expressing how he felt when mom went out to see a movie, “You kept screaming to nurse and I felt like throwing you against the wall.” That’s how it all began when we lived with Aunt Boots and Uncle Howard.

Mary Ann was my imaginary friend at Aunt Boots’ house. She shared many tea parties with me until I started school. One day after school Mother asked, “What happened to Mary Ann?” Matter-of-factly, I answered, “She got lost in the crowd.” There was no place I’d rather be than school except for one spanking I got in first grade. (I accidentally tripped the teacher while trying to reach my runaway shoe with my foot). That year it was nerve wracking to be called to the office until I found out I wasn’t in trouble. Or maybe it was *trouble*. I had to take a smallpox vaccination that they tried to give to Kay. Kay insisted she had already had hers. The school nurse called Mother. Kay won! I lost.

Mother made sure we girls were *girly* by sewing our dresses, requiring good manners, and reminding us, “Pretty is as pretty does.” Sometimes she said, “Be pretty.” During our young ages we sported our Easter bonnets. The popular ones looked like space ships or boats of some kind on our heads. When we were older Mother arranged our hair - Jan’s in a French Twist, Kay’s in a shell on top of her head, and mine in long banana curls. *My-my*, we were some good-looking girls!

My parents loved us and worked hard to meet our needs and even some “wants.” We got special treats on all the various holidays and gifts at Christmas. We were encouraged to participate in school carnivals, help build floats for parades, and assist in fundraising events and political campaigns. We attended church and Mother read Bible stories to us at home. Daddy was proud of the family Bible. Those were good days.

*Finally, brothers and sisters, fill your minds with beauty and truth.
(Philippians 4:8, The Voice)*

Still Reminiscing *page 2*

I was seven years old. We had moved to South Nashville. I liked my school and Allen who was in my room. My favorite part of the day was finger painting. When my sisters and I weren't in school we played outside or cut out paper dolls. Scott was no longer in braces as he was during the first year of his life. Daddy had a good job and thought he had money for a dog. He introduced us to Tippy, the Sheltie he had always wanted. Daddy was excited to have Tippy; Mother wasn't.

Things seemed normal enough. We laughed a lot which was great, *except* I had trouble when I laughed. I soon needed clean panties. Dad and Mom played cards with the neighbors while we played with their kids. I had so much fun! I didn't want it to end. Mother was a Brownie leader and Jan was the cutest Brownie! I was allowed to go to a birthday party and came home dreaming of getting ballerina shoes like my friend. Life was great!

Then, something really went awry. Mother had her suitcases in hand as she headed toward the front door to leave. Each of us kids grabbed a limb. She relented, crying that she'd never leave us. I must have made a subconscious decision to ensure she didn't. I stuck to her like glue - going with her on errands, sitting or waiting while she did whatever it was she did.

The front door of that house represented the first big wave of life that almost drowned me. Moving back to East Nashville that same year to a street named Joy Circle could only mean one thing, right? Nope! But I did learn that "Joy Circle" (of love) isn't a place, He's a person—the Son of God. I took refuge in Jesus who has always been with me in the boat when the next waves came crashing. And crashed, they did! Daddy left his butcher position at the grocer's to become a successful traveling salesman. He was gone until the weekends. The more he traveled the more his eyes wandered toward other women. There's no judgment on my part when I say that Mother's critical spirit didn't help. She did bear the brunt of all *hard things* at home while raising four children. He wasn't on the scene. Sometimes she felt she was suffocating. I heard her sobbing during the wee hours of lots of mornings. She tried pleasing Daddy by going to a nightclub with him. That didn't work either. When Daddy didn't come home one night, she threw the rifle in the trunk of the car and went looking for him. She lost hope. She despaired of life. Her friend, Marie, found her unresponsive with an empty pill bottle nearby. I was fifteen. *Where could I go, oh where could I go? Seeking a refuge for my soul, needing a friend to help me to the end...*

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.
(Matthew 11:28, NIV)

Still Reminiscing *page 3*

Mother, after overdosing, pulled through and was admitted to a psychiatric ward in Madison Hospital. Soon she was home gradually recovering from what almost became our fatal loss. Despite her fragility, she reassured me she would be good as new. She admitted that she didn't have a complete recall of everything but she had an optimistic view of the future. Her words settled my heart. *Words are like that; they can either settle the heart or break the heart.*

For it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace... (Hebrews 13:9, ESV). Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone (Colossians 4:6, NIV).

Trusting in Mother's words gave me hope. I knew her. She always kept her word to me. If she said it, I could count on it. I loved her SO much! Sometimes she'd pop by the elementary school unexpectedly and simply step inside the door and smile. My heart would race with love. I'd want to run to give her a big hug. She saw that in my eyes and she would wave bye as she whispered, "See you later." She seemed as glad to see me as I was to see her. What a relationship! She confessed to me years later that she liked to check-in on all of us unannounced and make sure we saw her which guaranteed we'd always be on our best behavior.

She said it this way, "I wanted to keep you on your toes."

I can say these same things about Jesus!

Trusting in Jesus' words gives me hope. I know Him. He always keeps His word to me. He is God and cannot lie. If He says it, I can count on it! I love Him SO much! Sometimes He shows up unexpectedly through the closed door of my heart and smiles. My heart races with love and I want to give Him a big hug. He sees the longing in my eyes and whispers "See you later." He seems as glad to be with me as I am to be with Him. What a relationship! He likes checking in on me to keep me on my toes. He wants me to be ready because He is coming unannounced!

*For this reason, you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour you do not expect.
(Matthew 24:44, BSB)*

“Let Others See Jesus in You.”

9-13-2021

Is it possible to see Jesus in others? The hymn writer thought so, “Let Others See Jesus in You.” Who hasn’t heard this chorus as well: “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine?” According to Jesus, He is the light AND He shines out of us! Our connectedness to others allows revelation. Jesus said, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.”

Paul expressed, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” At times I’ve seen the parallel and in the depths of my soul I’ve heard HIS voice:

“How did you feel when you were ignored? That’s how I feel when you ignore me.” “You were so happy with that surprise! I like surprises.”

Don’t miss it! God reveals Himself through Jesus via others. Jesus purposefully taught with parables, wanting thought-provoking and emotional responses. But the stories didn’t end when Jesus left. Nor are they only told by preachers from behind pulpits. We’re all *in* a story at any given moment! What *character* are we when we’re the recipient of an insult? What about this: *We watch one of our kids grab the last cookie off the plate just in time to see the disappointed expression on another’s face.* Do we take time to consider how God feels when we push to get our own way at the expense of someone else?

As we develop friendships we say things like, “I *get* you. I know you. I know what you think. I know how you feel.” Let’s use the setting of life to “*get* Him and know Him” – to know how He thinks and feels while remembering that all good and perfect gifts are from God.

As I was literally arranging these thoughts, young Ezra came in saying, “Granddad, something terrible happened. There’s a hole in the Jacuzzi. Maybe Meow - Meow accidentally clawed it.” Granddad instructed, “OK, pull the plug and let the water out.”

I noticed Ezra wasn’t worried. Although he didn’t fully understand what Granddad was up to, he didn’t flinch at all about pulling the plug. Ezra seemed confident Granddad would fix the Jacuzzi. Child-faith, that’s what God desires. I know Ernest appreciates our trusting him rather than questioning his intentions. When God pulls the plug and we don’t know what He’s up to, can we remember we’re *in* the parable? Can we see the parallel and know God will fix it?

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.
(Proverbs 3:5, NKJV)*

Is there such a thing as a favorite Bible verse?

“Evie, what is your favorite Bible verse?”

My answer, “I don’t have one.”

“Come on now, everyone has a favorite.”

“Okay, it’s the one that I *need* today, the one helping me *right* now.”

I chuckle as I think of Matthew 4:4, KJV: “*Man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*” But, that’s NOT my favorite verse either.

I only know I need Word every day, just like food. It must be nutritious too—containing the exact vitamin or mineral, etc. that I need right then! When a hypoglycemic person doesn’t get sugar immediately, he dies! Sometimes I feel that without the injected word by the Holy Spirit, I will die! It’s not only reading the Word, but the Word that is infused by the very breath of God that I need. *How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth (Psalms 119:103, KJV).* These are some of my favorite scriptures:

The Word (God’s message in Christ) is near you, on your lips and in your heart; that is, the Word (the message, the basis and object) of faith which we preach (Romans 10:8, AMPC).

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:1-5, ESV).

Jesus said to him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him. Philip said to him, Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us. Jesus said to him, Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father” (John 14:6-9, ESV)?

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, inscribed on our hearts, known and read by everyone. It is clear that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts (II Corinthians 3:1-3, BSB).

Dark Times

Have you ever noticed upon reading Bible stories that the hard part seems to pass fast? In Genesis 37, Joseph was 17 when his brothers sold him into slavery. But just a few page turns, he's a 40+ year old ruler who's been restored to his family. How did all that time really *feel*? Following the story line closely tells me that Joseph endured various shades of dark times in his life. Slavery wasn't pleasant, but better than the alternative - death. Serving in Potiphar's house was gratifying for Joseph until falsely accused, he landed in prison. Those two-plus years represent another dark period in his life. Then at just the right moment, God used Joseph's ability to interpret dreams to propel him into a reign of authority, and a decade later he was fully restored with his family. *You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today (Genesis 50:20, ESV)*.

In Daniel 4, we hear the pronouncement on King Nebuchadnezzar:

They shall drive you from men, your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. They shall wet you with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses. (Daniel 4: 25, NIV).

For seven years, the king insanely grazed as a cow in the fields until: *"I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: (Daniel 4: 34, NIV).*

During our twenties, Ernest and I worked in the family greenhouse business in Kentucky. It surprised me to learn that poinsettias require complete darkness at certain intervals to bloom. City-girl Ernestine, in telling her story of agreeing to marry Elmer and move to the farm during outhouse days, included the counsel she received from Percy Priest, "Unless a seed dies, it cannot produce fruit."

One day last week as I was airing my disturbed feelings about darkness, I broadcasted, "Back in the 'old' days we took camera film to have it developed in the compulsory dark room. Without the dark room, there would be ..."

"No image, His Image!" I was interrupted by sixteen year-old Elijah, as if sliding in at home base for the finish. He added, "When you write about this, mention me." So I did.

*Light shall shine out of darkness
II Corinthians 4:6, NASB)*

Of Music and Such

I played The Blue Danube Waltz for my first piano recital when I was ten. Mrs. Ruby Campbell of B.T. Faith Piano Studio was my instructor. Three other teachers preceded her in my short year of piano lessons. Miss Diane had only given me a few lessons when she announced she was getting married and, poof, she was gone! Mother enrolled me in lessons with Ms. Davidson who lived across the street from the elementary school. Conveniently, I was permitted to miss one school recess time per week to go to her house for lessons. I was always nervous I'd not make it back to my next class, plus I was afraid she might whack me with the long dowel stick she used as a pointer that reached from her wheelchair. I begged Mother to find me a different teacher. She found sweet Ms. Nolan. Abruptly, lessons stopped as Ms. Nolan ended her teaching career to care for her husband who had fallen victim to a brain tumor. It was then that Mrs. Campbell accepted me as her student, promising she could "get me where I wanted to go" just as she had Pat Boone. I remember Mrs. Campbell wanted me to play for Lawrence Welk's talent scout but I just wanted to play in church.

In Nashville, at the Meridian Street Church of God, I liked "big church." I begged Mother not to send me to Children's Church. In *big* church I felt GOD and I watched Ms. Helen play piano. What a church! How inclusive! The worship leader would fill the choir loft with singers, turn to the congregation and ask, "Who else will help us worship today? Come join us." Even a child could go and I did; that is, when Mother would let me. When she didn't, I'd just sing "When We All Get to Heaven" louder than anyone else in the congregation. I was just SO excited about what I felt. (Help us Lord, to always feel YOU!)

One soloist sang: "If I can help somebody with a word or song, then my living would not be in vain." The Holy Spirit imprinted that message on my heart as a prophetic song for my life. As I learned to play and sing it I discovered that I didn't like the second verse. I asked Mother what it even meant "to do my duty as a Christian ought." She gave some kind of answer but I shook my head and said, "No, something's not right." Mother said, "Then, don't sing it." So, I didn't.

Acts 17:28 is "For *in him we live and move and have our being* (*not doing*)." I like praying: Lord, I can't do this. But you said in Galatians 2:20 that I have *been* crucified in You. You can **be** this... You **can** live like this. I need You to believe (be-alive) for me. You **be** who you've designed me to be through me. **Now understand that it is when you can't that you can because you can't.**

*Or do you not realize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you?
(II Corinthians 13:5, ESV)*

More Music and Such

Mrs. Campbell elegantly announced we'd dress formally to perform our recital pieces in "The Blue Flame Room." She conveyed we were privileged and honored to have an audience. She had the same attitude concerning her musical selections for me as well, "You get to play 'The Black Hawk Waltz' in E-flat." She never lectured. She just strategically planted a few sentences that spoke volumes to the idea of being thankful and appreciative that I *could* play.

I was soon to play under the direction of the acclaimed Mrs. Willa Mae Waid Newman, who was songwriter of one of Tennessee's state songs. She also taught at B.T. Faith Piano Studio specializing in group piano lessons. Being in group lessons soon afforded me the opportunity to become one of Mrs. Newman's assistants and later, at age 16, become the sole teacher of those group lessons. As an assistant, I *had* to read the music notes to tutor struggling students in an adjoining private room. I was determined to teach correctly, many times one measure ahead of my charges. I was twelve. I was well into my adulthood before I understood what a compliment I had received from one of those floundering adult students, whose goal was to play hymns: "You have really helped me today."

From ages 12-18, I was busy going to school, playing or teaching music. I played for all the services and choirs at my church. Each year of high school I gladly accompanied the chorus under Director Francis Sutherland who taught me to never stop. "*When you play, keep going, even if you make a mistake. No one will know of the mistake unless you let them know by stopping.*"

Mother and I frequented gospel quartet concerts where I played and sang too. After one of those meetings, a man from the Joylander's group asked Mother if he could come by our house and talk about my playing for them. When I became their gospel pianist at age 13, I had no idea that was unusual.

Mother worked hard to provide formal gowns for recitals and school proms so when I received sponsorship for the High School Pageant; I put one of them to good use. I got busy handwriting the score for my original piano composition for my talent entry that junior year. I wrote a song to sing the next year. I got caught up in the pomp and even cried when daddy didn't show up *again*.

However, the *real* "me" played piano when no one was around. During those times the Holy Spirit comforted me when I sang, "I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords. I'd rather have Jesus than worldly applause. I'd rather be faithful to His dear cause..."

Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere.
(Psalms 84:10, NIV)

What then?

You shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines (Judges 13:5, ESV)… And the woman bore a son and called his name Samson. And the young man grew, and the LORD blessed him (verse 24). Then he came up and told his father and mother, “I saw one of the daughters of the Philistines at Timnah… Now get her for me as my wife. His father and mother did not know that it was from the LORD (Judges 14:2, 4).

Really? What Samson’s parents knew “to be from the Lord” didn’t include getting in bed with the Philistines! How could it? He was to save Israel from the Philistines! The scripture doesn’t indicate the conversational tone or the manner of scene that occurred between Samson and his parents. I imagine it like this:

“Where are you going now?” asked Manoah.

“To see the Timnah lady.” As Samson exited, he turned back, waved bye to his parents and with a slight smile on his face he promised, “It will be okay.”

Why did I picture the scene like that? As I was praying for Lee after he headed out to go see his so-called friends, I rolled the film in my mind of Samson and asked the Lord, “How did Samson’s parents feel?” *I heard deep in my spirit, “Just like you.” Well, sometimes I’m dumbfounded. I’m puzzled. I’m scared.*

Like Manoah and his wife, Ernest and I knew what God said concerning our son. We know what a miracle he was at birth and how close to death we were at that premature time. We know that God spoke to Ernest; *He that began a good work in you will complete it!* Lee lived. Our young man, like Samson, received the Lord’s blessing as he grew. Then one day, he went into a “Philistine camp” — a contrary camp to his upbringing. Walking out the door with a slight smile on his face he promised, “It will be okay.”

Will it? Our road with Lee has not only included gentle twists, but zig-zags, and at times U-turns. Riding as a passenger makes me wonder who the driver is-- but it’s God, *Hmm, Jesus was asleep in the boat.* He warned me, “My ways are not your ways…” Jesus reminded the disciples through his actions that He is Master of *everything!* And He had spoken: *We are going to the other side.* What then are we to believe when life’s circumstances seem to oppose the word of the Lord? Trust the Master! Lee is right, “It will be okay.” Maybe he trusts the Father way more than I do.

The very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not be afraid…

(Matthew 10:30-31, BSB)

Range of the Strange

When I went back to school to complete my music education teaching degree in 1998, one of my professors described the adolescence years as the “range of the strange.” I’ve come to believe that the “range of the strange” is not only adolescence but it engulfs all the time necessary to ground us in Christ. Everything is out of sync until we are directly related to the Creator.

Circumstances and experiences seemed to dictate my feelings and mood from age thirteen even though I humbly bowed at an altar at age seven. I participated in all revival efforts of the church, invited others to the meetings and volunteered Mother for taxi service. Within five blocks of my house were all these churches: Methodist, Nazarene, Church of Christ, and Baptist. When I had no conflicting schedules, I attended all of their Vacation Bible Schools. I prayed the specific prayer, “Jesus, come into my heart.” I was baptized three different times. I frequented the pastor’s study to ask, “What is God’s will for me?” Brother Heflin gave me Hannah Whitall Smith’s book, *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life*. Mother often said I was a wiggly worrywart and insisted I be still. It sounds like spiritually speaking I’ve been a wiggly worrywart too. Even God says, “Be still and know that I am God.” God says, “I Am.” Do you see it now?

Our “be” word is very interesting. What does it mean? Like God announcing “I AM,” the “be” word has its significance in that it exists. It just is! Think of all the “be” words we use to describe the Christian’s designated life — believe, be holy, be faithful, become, etc. You get the idea. Scripture teaches in Romans 4:5 (ESV): *And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness*, yet, we Christians regularly concentrate on the word “do” as if it means “be.” Nicodemus didn’t understand it either. He responded with a “do” question when Jesus declared, “You must be born again,” asking: “Can *he* “do” that, enter into his mother’s womb and **be** born again?”

The Hebrew “I AM” also expresses these ideas—*happens, falls out, and occurs*. Jesus subsequently answered Nicodemus, “*The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit*” (John 3:8, NKJV). Birth! Whether physical or spiritual, birth is a marvel and both are supernatural. The one who *is* or has been born has absolutely nothing to *do* with it. It follows, ONLY Jesus can live the Christian life through us. We can’t *do* it!

“*Christ in you, the hope of glory*”
(Colossians 1:27, NIV).

Be Pretty, Beauty Comes From Within

Mother was right in grooming us with the words, “Be pretty.” Beauty comes from *being*. *Being* comes from God, for only Deity said, “I AM.” When I was born, I came into being. When I was born again I came into being spiritually.

“*Grace is so misunderstood or ignored. It slams our self-righteousness; not us - Him.*” Pastor Jerry Heflin wrote that sentence and then part of his story:

On Wednesday of that week August 23, 1950, after morning football practice, I rode my bicycle by the tent and my neighbor, Billy Williamson, also a sophomore at Baylor and the song leader of the week and he invited me over. He was thumbing through music.

He knew my life and he shared verses from the book of Romans. NO one had to convince me I was a sinner. I had a PhD in sin. After learning that God had loved me all those years and had died on a Roman cross, and rose from the dead to give eternal life to those who believe, I wound up on my knees asking God to forgive me and asking Jesus Christ to come into my heart. This was not a great emotional experience.

Not sure what to expect from such a commitment, I went to the afternoon football practice. Now, our locker room was a garbage can of lies. More girls lost their virtue by macho, lying boys - dirty jokes galore. Now I didn't tell any that day. Walking home [we lived next to the schools] I remember thinking, “That is so strange.” My choices had changed somehow. The coming days proved that a life change had happened to me when Christ came into me. I now had His Spirit living inside. Church became an important event in my life. I cut out the stupid stuff.

What Brother Jerry didn't know is that when I was grappling with the condition of my soul I had a similar experience. (*Grapple? Is it because we're always trying to “do” the right thing to make it to heaven?*) As I took a seat in the school cafeteria, some kids began to tell dirty jokes. Immediately, I found myself moving to a different table. There was no deliberation. I only knew I didn't want to be there. On a different day I discovered I wanted to eat lunch with a girl whom everyone else avoided. God was changing me.

My husband shares “I can do whatever I want to do. I just don't want to anymore. Jesus changed my *want to*.”

*It is [not your strength, but it is] God who is effectively at work in you.
(Philippians 2:13 AMP)*

Redacted

9-26-2021

Within the past few years, a lot of information has been redacted from political and governmental arenas. However, I haven't been watching the news lately so why did I wake up with the word *redacted*? Why did I mentally link it to our fixing up the "other" house as well? Flooded with scenes of expulsions, first of Lee from our "other" house, then of *Adam* and *Eve* from the garden, I knew God *knows!* Redaction is needed! Blot it out and rework it. Edit it and make it better! Jan is editing my stories, removing certain unneeded things and adding some things for my good. A few times she has rearranged the whole structure of a sentence. This process looks messy but not for always.

Redaction has gained a negative reputation, concealing things that we *need* to know. Redaction is synonymous with *cover-up*. Are all cover-ups bad? In the Bible the drunken Noah was mocked by one son but the other two *covered* him *up*. The latter received blessings. None of us would hang dirty laundry out for others to see, yet we gossip. I remind myself, "Be careful to cover in the same way that I want to be covered." I'm glad for the greatest *cover-up*: "*Blessed are those whose sins are covered*" (*Romans 4:7, ESV*). "*He has clothed me with the garments of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness*" (*Is. 61:10, NKJV*).

God protects me from the enemy too: "*He will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge*" (*Psalms 91:15-16, ESV*).

Adam and Eve messed up. They were expelled from their dwelling place. They tried to cover the problem in their own way. It didn't work. God had to provide. He promises that in the end all things will be restored. He is preparing a new place for us. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. In the meantime, it looks messy.

The pages in our stories of life are being edited and redacted. While the blood covers our sins we still live in the world now filled with weeds. Our son messed up. He experienced expulsion and we are reworking his former dwelling place. God is editing our story. The pages are marked in red! Thank God that red is the precious blood of Jesus. In both the *Eden* account and through Jesus' death God provided the blood covering. In the meantime, we purpose to emulate Noah's two blessed sons and graciously cover others.

Without shedding of blood there is no remission (of sin).
(Hebrews 9:22, NKJV)

Upon awakening, I heard Lee's voice,
"I'd like to meet my father but right now I don't care about anything."

It is 10-2-2021. I question, *another dream? Lord, what do you mean?* Obviously, Lee doesn't need to *meet* his father. Or does he? The word *meet* has several meanings. It can mean "meet as in the first time," but, it can mean arrange a time to get together for a specific reason. I can hardly wait for Lee to read his dad's autobiography! He will "meet" his dad in a whole new way.

We think our kids come to know us by the time they're grown but I wonder? They know we love them and took care of their basic needs and some of their wants. Children figure out how to either please or stay out of their parent's way but have they really figured out who we are? Maybe they've even analyzed who they think we are based on our reactions to who we think they are. The unraveling reveals that no matter how many good books we've read, or how many sincere prayers we've prayed, we are still at God's mercy to be the parents they need.

A few years ago I remember complaining to God about my daddy? "*Why did you give him to be my father?*" His answer was immediate; "*I gave you the best father for you!*"

Wow! God graced me to think about my daddy in a whole new light. These are a few of the unspoken positives I gained from my daddy: Be neat, take good care of your clothes, shoes, and modes of transportation, whether car or bicycle. Take pride in your work and do a good job for the people who hire you. Ernest has always said, "What we learn is more often caught than taught." I do think I "caught" some good stuff from my daddy.

The "word of our testimony" is our witness to God's truth and involvement in our lives. I never want to doubt God's word because Revelation 12:10-11 declares that we overcome the evil-one by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony. For clarification, the evil-one stands as our accuser before God. The Lamb is the Son of God who, through his death and resurrection, absolved all of those accusations. The stories we've written are part of our testimony. While we execute the testimony against the evil-one, we press toward another level of maturity, that of "father" to know our Father, "Who Is." God is love and He is faithful!

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father

(1 John 2:12-13, ESV).

Army

Eight months into our marriage, Ernest got “called up.” He had too few college courses that were required to evade the draft. God wasn’t surprised. He already had some things in place. I’ll explain. Six or so months into our marriage we got a phone call that went something like this: “This is Dan Davis. I’m a chaplain at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. I understand you guys lead worship. Well, I’m starting a “Come Alive” service on Thursday nights. Will you come help me?”

Not only were we privileged to help on Thursday nights, we became the regular music leaders for Sunday Chapel. We had a military church family BEFORE Ernest’s army days. Why then did I doubt God’s provision when Ernest announced he wanted me to find a roommate while he was away in basic training? A couple of days later, just after morning worship at the chapel, a young woman introduced herself to me, “Hi, I’m Cynthia, Chaplain Davis’ daughter. I’ve just moved back and I’m staying at my parents’. I know this may sound, well.... I mean could you possibly need a roommate? I heard your husband is on his way to basic.” God had Cindy BEFORE I needed her. Cindy and I share a “miracle:”

“Evie, the washing machine isn’t working!” I joined Cindy and we checked together and concluded it was hopeless. “What are we going to do?” She continued with a summary of her Daddy’s sermon, “If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.”

I asked, “Do you want to pray over the washing machine?”

With a wondering look, she answered, “I’m game if you are.”

“Let’s do it,” I replied. We placed our hands on the machine, prayed then pushed the “on button” and it worked just fine. God cares about *everything*!

Another day, Cindy wasn’t there when my car wouldn’t start. I sat in the driver’s seat and prayed, “Please start the car. I’ll be late for class.” I tried again to no avail. I prayed a second time. Deep within my spirit I heard, “If you go to the front of the car, kneel and ask; I’ll start it.” I’m not sure why I hesitated. The only thing in sight was the pasture. I got out, quickly knelt and prayed by the car. Back in the car I turned the key. It started and I was on my way.

Later, in English class, the professor said, “Clear your desks. Write an essay about the most exciting thing that happened to you today.” *God, you set me up.* I wondered what grade this professor would give as he often made fun of people with faith. He surprised me with an “A” and a banner: “Zap - God, Big Battery Cell in the Sky.”

My power is made perfect in weakness.
(2 Cor. 12:9, ESV)

Let the Holy Spirit Navigate

Your own ears will hear him. Right behind you a voice will say, 'This is the way you should go, ' whether to the right or to the left' (Is. 30:21, NLT).

It was Saturday. I was seventeen and bored. What was it the preacher said? “Ask the Lord to show you what to do.” I grabbed the keys to my car. As I backed out of the drive I asked the Lord which way to turn. I did this at each stop sign, taking the turn that came to my mind. I pulled into the driveway where recent visitors to our church youth group lived - two sisters. The girls weren’t home, but the Holy Spirit nudged me and said, “William.” William was their brother and a victim of cerebral palsy. He was glad I visited and before I left he prayed to acknowledge Jesus as Savior. Hallelujah!

Four years later, married and in my fifth month of pregnancy, I was in the car asking for directions again--this time directions for a house. We had been living in an old farmhouse (that Ernest *greatly* improved) rent free for a couple of years. The Lord had graciously provided that for us through a willing family that wanted to bless the Youth Challenge where we served. But now they needed the house for their nephew. With Ern’s steady military check we’d be okay.

My prayerful adventure led me to one of three houses that sat empty on Buck Drive. There were no rental or for sale signs displayed so I knocked on a neighbor’s house. My inquiry resulted in finding the correct real estate group that had just acquired the properties. We were able to purchase our first house, 1013 Buck Drive. We could have had our pick of any of the three similar houses. We decided on the house where I originally pulled into the driveway.

Within two years we realized how important it was that we bought the house where the Lord led me to stop the car. The other two houses had flooding issues in the unfinished one car garages in the basement area. Our house was on higher ground and stayed dry. As a result, Ernest was able to double the size of our house with a pick and a shovel. Each evening when he came home from his army bandsman position, I cheered him on as he gradually dug out the entire basement. Upon completion we added a den, a laundry room with plenty of storage, and a half bath to our initial two-bed, one bath house. As a bonus we had a flatter back yard!

*Call to me and I will answer you,
and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.
(Jeremiah 33:3, ESV).*

College page 1

Early in 1973 I was a young, married *student* but on September 28, I became a *mother* who wanted to finish her studies someday. I kept up my college piano lessons and performed my Senior Recital in the spring of '74. I was psyched to do the concert no matter what!

Just days before the event, Baby Angela and I acquired a stomach virus. Thankfully, Mother had already come to take care of Angela so I could rehearse in the concert hall. However, she ended up monitoring us both as we gagged and heaved. The virus left me in such a weakened state that my instructor suggested I postpone the recital. *I could not!* With the grace of God and lots of sugar-loaded orange juice I successfully performed. Among my family and friends who lovingly supported me were Herman and Elaine who had driven from Florida to Tennessee. *Thank you, Jesus, for sweet blessings!*

When Angela started first grade, I decided to return to school. My long road trip to the university on two days each week proved to be almost impossible. After one semester I left school again but with a new chapter to an earlier story:

Go ask Dr. Manolini to go see Jesus with you, I heard in my mind as I headed to the parking lot after class. I stopped on the sidewalk, pondered that thought, dismissed the thought, and began to move toward the car. I felt guilty so I stopped and went back to campus, found a phone, and called Faye whom I knew could straighten out my imagination. She chuckled, and responded, "I'll pray." I argued, *God, What does going to see Jesus mean? I can give the invitation to the philosophy professor if you can give me a clearer instruction.*

Almost a decade before, Carol Manolini had been my instructor. The last project for *that* class had included a presentation by the spokesperson of each assigned group. Against my wishes, my teammates insisted I speak. I don't remember exactly what point I was making but an unusual thing happened. It seemed as if I were standing on the outside peering through a window. Every person acutely listened as I ended up presenting the gospel of Jesus. Upon conclusion, alongside me, Dr. Manolini said, "Class, did you see what happened? I've never seen anything like this! She had such control of your attention." As the class members exited, Dr. Manolini encouraged me to become a public speaker. I assured her that what she experienced was not my *doing* and that whatever she saw in me was Jesus! The puzzled look remained on her face as I left.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

(Matthew 5:16 KJV)

College page 2

What a surprise to hear my thoughts direct me to *this* professor these few years later! *Would she remember me?* As I approached her opened office door I heard the end of a conversation between Dr. Manolini and a few of her students. As they all shuffled into the hall, I heard the professor's excitement in seeing me, "Do you all know Evie?" After concluding we had not met before, they departed and I stood face to face with Dr. Manolini who was still smiling. I knew I had to deliver God's invitation and I didn't want to lose courage so I began.

"Upfront, I want to say I do not know what God means but He said to ask you to go with me to see Jesus." She carefully studied my face before responding, "When you find out what He means, I will." *Whew! I'm not in the crazy house.*

A week later as I drove away from the college campus to do my usual hour-long trip home, the theater marquee caught my attention. It simply read, "Now showing - JESUS." My heart fluttered as I knew without a doubt that was the intended meaning of God's invitation. In 1979, who knew of such a movie production? Not me! With confidence I went back to see Dr. Manolini but was soon disappointed when she reneged. Regardless, I'm glad God trusted me to let a professor of philosophy know He loved her!

My motivation to finish college was shelved for over fifteen years until I heard this on the radio as I awoke one morning: "Do not buy your Christmas presents from China. Family members have disappeared and we fear they are in slave camps making those things you buy." On the tail end of that plea I heard God in my thoughts; *I've only asked you to go back to college. Some of your brothers and sisters are in slave camps. Would you have preferred that?* I quickly agreed that I'd go back to college. I also entertained the idea of finishing my degree online. It would be easier to oversee my 11 year old son and continue all of my usual jobs and responsibilities.

While researching online studies, Angela (who happened to be on furlough from her missionary work to Russia) came by and asked, "What are you working on?" When I explained, she questioned me, "How do you expect to witness to others if you are home on a computer?" She caught me! I knew as well as she that my going to school off and on through the years seemed to be more about the speeches I delivered, the papers I wrote, and the conversations I had with others about Jesus than my actually finishing a degree.

Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

Matthew 5:15 ESV

College page 3

God wanted me on a missionary assignment again *in* the university. I always liked sharing my accounts after they took place; but daily classroom experiences required faith for me to overcome being misunderstood. When following the Lord's directives I easily attracted unfavorable labels. But, it had to be easier than being in a slave camp! I felt so ashamed but ready.

After Nana died in March, 1996 a check showed up in the mailbox. It was enough to provide me with the needed vehicle and expenses for college. I enrolled in the nearby Tennessee community college and physically attended classes. ☺ As suspected, I was shot and interrogated in battle again - this time in an education class. "How can you be a teacher in today's classroom with your strong Christian view?" exploded a classmate upon hearing my presentation. Thankfully, I was the last speaker of the day, class ended and no grenades were thrown.

Attending in the classroom allowed me to learn that Kentucky universities shared reciprocal in-state tuition costs with Tennessee. That meant I could drive a few extra miles to attend a Kentucky university and complete the music degree I started over 25 years earlier. Time was of essence because WKU's music degree program was changing to require all music degreed students to become both proficient band and choral conductors. That program would be too intense for me.

During Thanksgiving week, Ernest and I drove to WKU to set in motion the beginning of the end of my pursuit of the degree that would allow me to teach music in the public schools. I also knew that God called me to be a light in a dark place. One of those dark places was called "Women's Studies." "Here you go," the WKU advisor suggested. "You can take this Women's Studies class to satisfy two requirements. It will save you time and money." *Not my cup of tea*, I surmised. Reading my thoughts Ernest said, "You can do it." It wasn't so much his probing as it was the Holy Spirit's that gave me willingness. I had ridden in *this* rodeo before. I wondered if I could stay in the saddle because I felt a Bucky ride ahead.

Our all-female class met with the woman professor in a very crowded small room, mostly seated in a circle or around a large table. It was no surprise the professor chose controversial reading material and rallied conversations to reason that adults could and should do anything they wanted to do. What probably did come as a surprise was that more times than not I was the last discussant each period.

We are His work. ..He planned that we should do this.
Ephesians 2:10 (NLV)

College page 4

It wasn't planned. It just happened. The professor's style of teaching included obligatory participation beginning with whomever she designated and continued either clockwise or counter clockwise until class time ended. Class sessions often ended with *me* regardless of where she started in the circle. It seems that God intended these mostly young minds to think on *other* things as they left class as opposed to the opinions of one attractive, intelligent, charismatic, and influential professor. I can safely conclude that my classmates were more receptive to a Christian worldview than relativism based on what took place during the last week of the semester.

Lee Stobel's book, *The Case for Christ*, had just come out and I was inspired to purchase several to give away. The day I shopped in the local Christian bookstore the books were on sale so I bought a bag full. I kept them in my music locker at the university which means they were in the Fine Arts Building, not especially handy to other class locations on the hilly WKU campus. I wondered when and to whom I would give all those books.

All of a sudden, one day I *knew!* I had about ten minutes to propel uphill about two-tenths of a mile, navigate lots of stairs and hallways through the Music Building, burst out of that facility to tackle another climb toward Cherry Hill carrying a sack full of books. By a miracle, I landed in a chair, this time situated around a table just as the Women's Studies class began. I carefully tucked my wares conveniently under the table. Had I misunderstood what I felt was God's direction for me? Class presentations were coming to an end and I hadn't been included. I kept watching, listening, and praying and just when I thought it was a lost cause, the girl ended by saying something like, "People in communities should do positive things to help one another." I had a split second to obey God and by His grace I interrupted.

"In keeping with doing 'positive things' I brought books for each of you," I said as I retrieved them. When the confused professor tried to hinder the "give away," all of the students either reached for a book or said they wanted one. It was so crowded I couldn't maneuver without throwing the books across the table. Everyone left smiling with her book, that is, except for the teacher. I later delivered a book to her during an office visit. She kindly spoke, "We could have had some great conversations, but you're just so narrow-minded."

*Enter through the narrow gate.
(Matthew 7: 13, ESV).*

First Recital



Age 16



Evie's Teacher and Evie's Student



Youth Choir



Evie accompanied
Joylander's
Quartet at age 13.

Joy Circle Home, age 16



Scott and Evie, Tom Joy Elementary School in background



Daddy Jack, my brother Scott & Andrea



East High School Choir Accompanist



Daddy and me

Western Kentucky University
Graduation
1999

Lessons on the Farm *page 1*
Or should I say: Lessons of the Heart?

1977-1984

We called it “The Farm” but we did very little traditional farming. Ernest’s brother, Herman, with his family Elaine (wife), Leah, Todd and Lana, moved their greenhouse (*houseplants*) business from Florida to Kentucky. We joined them, hoping that the Lord would also establish a Christian retreat.

At first, we were without electricity and phones. We used the natural gas from the farm for heating our dwellings and for cooking. We had ample spring water. The property was rich and beautiful - all 300 acres!

Herman planted half an acre in vegetables. I volunteered to work in the garden while Elaine got the greenhouse established. After supper, we both worked into the wee hours of the morning freezing, canning, and pickling vegetables. We were constantly cooking too as there were no places nearby to eat. Meals were served to the workers in what we called “The Barn.” It was more like a warehouse or packing house for the greenhouse. Sometimes we served egg salad made from one huge goose egg!

I quickly discovered I needed farm boots and jeans, especially the year we had cows. I helped corral cows occasionally and even rode a horse. Elaine and I chopped down trees with axes, dug holes with a post hole digger, and used an air nailer to build a criss-cross fence around our mobile homes. The almost 350 feet of fence kept the cows from disturbing the loaded clothes line and leaving cow patties where we regularly walked.

This Nashville, TN city girl learned to do a “lot” of new things on the farm but those things were the “fluff” of the real “stuff” that matters. It was on the farm the Lord dealt with me in matters of the heart. Two families reamed together. We lived, worked, played, worshiped, and prayed together. We pooled our resources. We both gave our all.

We laughed a lot and we got mad too. It has been said of marriage that both are sandpaper to the other, rubbing off the rough edges. The same thing can be said of two families, or two of *any* kind of relationship. While we agreed on lots of things, we still had conflict on some things.

Love is patient, love is kind.
(I Corinthians 13: 4 NIV)

Lessons on the Farm *page 2*

I had to eat “humble pie” a few times. Here’s one of those times:

Elaine and I went Christmas shopping. We had little money to spend. Shopping was stressful and as we were leaving Walmart, it started raining. Elaine and I each had a cart plus four year old Angela. Elaine suggested she’d stay with Angela and the carts on the sidewalk under *the roof* while I went for the station wagon to drive up to load. Hectically, we got everything in the wagon and headed home in the dark to unfed, tired husbands.

When we got to our farm entrance gate, Elaine had to get out, open the gate, and wait for me to drive through and then close the gate. “It’s really muddy,” she said. This meant I had to “give it a lot of gas” to make it on our mud road. It wouldn’t be good if we got stuck and had to walk home to get a man and a tractor. We slid home, unpacked and my packages were nowhere to be found!

“Elaine, are you sure you watched the baskets; both of them?” She nodded but she knew she was closely watching Angela too. She brainstormed, “Could we have left them in the cart on the sidewalk?” All to no avail, we called the store to see if anyone could check, hoping no one had stolen anything. It was hard to accept that only *my* stuff was missing. I wondered if someone just walked by Elaine and rolled that cart away without her noticing.

Somehow, Christmas came and went as did the snow and ice. One day, Herman came in from the field asking, “What’s this?” He continued with, “There are all kinds of this stuff strewn out in the field not far from the road.” To our surprise, it seemed to be ALL of the lost packages from the shopping spree before Christmas. Here’s what we think happened: I was driving the station wagon the night I lost the packages. The wagon had a hatchback that probably didn’t completely latch when closed. All was fine until I had to speed up the bouncy, muddy road just inside the farm gate. The hatchback must have opened, a few bags (mine) fell out, the hatch closed, and I arrived home packageless. The snow and ice came over the next few hours and days concealing the lost items until the snow melted and Herman found them. Oh, humble pie did not taste good, and if I didn’t do it justice then, “Elaine, I am SO sorry I blamed you!” I came to a better understanding of this verse:

*“It (Love) always protects, always trusts, always hopes,
and always perseveres.”*
(1 Corinthians 13:7, NIV)

[In other words, I need to love by “giving the benefit of the doubt.”]

Lessons on the Farm *page 3*

During the years we lived on the farm twenty miles from town, there were no cell phones. Fentresses knew how to find you anyway. I was finishing at a check-out counter when the cashier, store phone in hand, motioned for me to wait and then acknowledged me, “You’re a Fentress, aren’t you? Phone’s for you.”

“Hello?”

“Evie, this is Elaine. Herman needs you to go to Cayce Mills and pick up _____. Then go to _____, then _____, and then...” You get the idea. These were common occurrences. I must have needed an attitude adjustment with regards to these kinds of things because one day I heard God (in my thoughts).

He asked, “What else would you be doing?” I envisioned the answer.

He asked, “And?” I gave another response.

He asked, “And?”

Hmm... I finally got it! All of my answers were selfish! I’ve never forgotten that moment when God touched me with the awareness of true servanthood. *Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms* (1 Peter 4:10, ESV).

Many people, especially those in my family, couldn’t understand our being on the farm. Often I heard, “You should be using your musical training.” None of us knew God was training me in different ways. I needed the experience of working long, repetitive hours to empathize with most of humanity. About many things, I didn’t even know enough to ask a question. Let me explain. My job in the greenhouse on a particular day was to put hangers on baskets for ferns and such. I got busy right away placing wires through 3 different holes. An hour later, Elaine came by, picked up a basket and said, “These are all wrong.” I had no idea what was wrong. (A-ha! One could approach the hole from the inside-out or from the outside-in, and I had done it backwards. To this day, I don’t remember her preference but I do remember to always ask.)

She explained, “You should have asked if you didn’t know what to do.” Well now, I thought I was doing it correctly, so I had no question. So, what I learned that day was to always ask this question: “Is there a particular way you want this done?” What a marvelous question to ask when working for anyone! You don’t learn stuff like this in college.

*Any who love knowledge want to be told when they are wrong.
It is stupid to hate being corrected.
(Proverbs 12:1 GNT)*

Lessons on the Farm *page 4*

At this point in time, Angela was still an only child. Living on the farm supplied her with playmates – her cousins. It was wonderful – until it wasn’t. Love or war makes no distinction concerning age. We had both. Angela was adorable but not perfect. She regularly left her tricycle and toys in the driveway but she was blamed for things she didn’t do too:

“The water sprinklers in the greenhouse were left on all night...Angela!”

Herman rounded the corner, entered the greenhouse and upon seeing the water he called out, “Oh no! I forgot to turn that off!”

In the beginning, maneuvering around and with a four year old required patience few of us had while just trying to survive “farm life” and “new business” reality. Later, there were other life issues to walk through when other family members joined us to live and work on the farm. There were all kinds of things to deal with and with our own view of the “nickel.” I see the “tail” of the nickel and will tell you my tale. You see the “head” and will tell what you “think” about it. But, God is only interested in the HEART of the matter! Love covers a multitude of sins!

The “heart” of it all is to love God and to love others! That was Jesus’ answer to “What is the greatest commandment?” “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it:

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.
(Matthew 22:37-39, ESV)

The Farm



Ernest on the Farm



Greenhouses on the Farm



Greenhouses on the Farm



Greenhouses on the Farm



Evie in the greenhouse



Fence that Elaine and Evie Built



Front Gate at farm, Angela and grands.



Camp Nor-Da-Tho and Beyond *page 1* 1984-1990

It was time to leave the farm. We just knew. Ernest prayed, "Lord, open a door somewhere in the U.S. and we will go." Just a few weeks after praying that prayer, Daddy Jack mentioned that the Baptist Association Camp Ground in Westmoreland, TN needed a caretaker. Housing would be provided along with a small income for about three months to bring the camp "up" to Health Department code before they shut it down. However, if it passed inspection, we would remain rent-free in exchange for our work as caretakers of the still functioning campgrounds. We would need other work to provide the bulk of our income while we served as camp caretakers. We moved to Camp-Nor-Da-Tho during Thanksgiving Week of 1984. We were *thankful* for the opportunity to be in a Christian retreat atmosphere. Ernest made sure the campgrounds passed inspection and we remained caretakers for six years.

Not only did a lot of churches use the camp, a Christian school was allowed to rent it. We enrolled Angela in that school for a period of time. It was there she met Brooke, her "best friend forever."

Ernest took a traveling job with a company that installed ice cream and other snack machines in convenience stores. He was usually gone four days per week. Angela, who was then eleven, and I regularly cleaned all seven cabins, bathrooms, meeting room/dining hall, kitchen and gymnasium. I was also responsible for booking appointments, mowing and tending the grounds.

One time when I was riding the mower, I got off without turning the engine off on what I knew was level ground. I also knew I shouldn't do that but I thought I could quickly move a big branch out of the way. As I hurriedly came back to hop up in the seat, I heard the engine "rev-up." I couldn't catch the mower. It plunged into the pond. I called the closest mechanic shop that had a tow truck. The men who only had to travel a mile to help me were still laughing from hearing my goof-ball story on the phone. They asked, "Where was that mower sitting when it rolled down the bank?" When I showed them, they laughed and said, "No, it wouldn't have rolled from there." I couldn't convince them otherwise. They got busy hooking up the cable then pulled the mower back up to the same level spot I insisted was "my" level spot. They unhitched everything and walked away from the mower for a few seconds when my point was proven true. The mower rolled back into the pond. The men were no longer laughing but I was.

Later that week when Ern came home, I told him the story. I was sure he would think it was funny. He didn't. He just lectured that I should have been more responsible. "I know, but it all worked out," I pleaded.

Camp Nor-Da-Tho and Beyond page 2

We were preparing for another group. Angela and I were busy cleaning cabins while Ern took care of the grounds. When the lawn mower shut off, I knew the mowing was completed. That's what it always meant. When I looked out the window from the cabin, I saw Ernest heading toward the house. That wasn't unusual but his expression was! As he passed by me I heard him say, as he shook his head, "Do not say a word." I didn't; but I laughed when I saw the mower in the pond again.

*The Lord protects and defends me; I trust in him.
He gives me help and makes me glad; I praise him with joyful songs.
(Psalms 28:7, GNT)*



Camp Nor-Da-Tho and Beyond page 3

1990

After living and working as caretakers at Camp-Nor-Da-Tho for six years, Ernest expressed, “I sure would like to own a house.” I’m the only one who heard him say that but Daddy Jack called a few weeks later and said, “Evie, I think there’s a house in Westmoreland you and Ern might be interested in.” Members in the church where he served as pastor had older parents in Westmoreland who were auctioning their home the next day. When I called Ernest with the information he asked if there was any way we could see the house when he got home from work that night. Somehow, Daddy Jack received permission for us to go see the house and meet the owners. It was dark but we knew we wanted the house. We made an offer and the couple agreed to accept our promise to buy the house and NOT auction the house. We remodeled and lived in that house for fourteen years.

We didn’t really know how it would work out money-wise because we had none. The house was appraised well above what we agreed to pay. That allowed us to borrow enough extra money to buy materials for the remodel. However, the bank said we needed a co-signer. It was time for Ernest to talk to Charles.

Charles was Ernest’s friend and co-worker. He had shared his life’s story with Ernest and told how he had come into money and property along the way. Charles was working in Child Protective Services because he wanted to help people. He had grown up in orphanages and foster care. He was now wealthy and didn’t need money. One day he offered, “If ever you decide to buy a house and need help, let me know. The worse thing that could happen is I’d take your house if you don’t pay.”

When Ern talked to Charles, he sent us to his bank and said, “Tell them I sent you.” The bankers treated us like royalty. There’s no telling what his net-worth was! In two years or so, after regularly making payments, we were able to have Charles’ name removed as co-signer. Since then, by God’s grace, we’ve been able to maintain a high credit score and help others.

Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.



Public School Teaching, 2000-2014 page 1

In the fall of 1999, I was completing student teaching in music in the same county where I lived - Sumner County, TN. It was at an area-wide music event where upon meeting the guidance counselor of another school, I discovered her principal needed a music teacher. To be hired after Christmas was nothing short of a miracle. I became a circuit music teacher to three different schools in January, 2000. When the next school year began in the fall of 2000, I had the privilege to accept a full-time position in one of these three schools, Wiseman Elementary. I happily taught music there until I retired in 2014.

One of the biggest challenges as a music teacher was learning students' names. One year I had over 700 students! Class management was key to having great learning experiences. That meant getting to know students was a priority. Children, especially the young ones, are very forgiving, *or not*, of grown-up boo-boos. It was my third week teaching. Music classes were usually one lesson per week so this was my third time to see the first graders. (Little ones don't understand why some teachers don't know their names. They know each other well after being with their fellow classmates all day long for three weeks.) I was interrupted by a student just as I called Jimmy's name, "Miss Evie, that's not Jimmy! That's Travis." I apologetically looked toward the child. *How could I gain his trust if I don't even know his name?* That's when I heard the sweetest voice,

"That's okay, Miss Evie. I'll be Jimmy for you." Oh, that's how I want to grace others! We never *really know* what's going on in another person's life. Nor, are all things as they seem! Later in a second grade class, we were having game day. We were in the middle of the two-team relay line when I noticed one little boy kept coming to the front more often than he should. Although I didn't want to embarrass him, I knew it wasn't fair to the other children. To my surprise, when I gently reminded him to stay in place, the entire class began to roar with laughter. I was puzzled until I followed their eyes and heard, "Miss Evie, they are wins!" *Yes, and they were identical!*

School certainly proved to be a most important learning center for *all* of us. Each day I depended on this verse:

"The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you"
(John 14:26, ESV)

Public School Teaching *page 2*

I depended on the Helper in all aspects of my job: remembering names, planning lessons, and musical programs down to minor details. One day as I was preparing a backdrop for the stage, I decided a smiling sun would do well. I thought I should seek help from the art teacher who had the same planning time as I. As I entered her room I asked, "Sharon, do you happen to have a smiling sun?"

When she looked at me quizzically I thought I had not given her enough information. Instead she held up a drawing of a large, bright, smiling yellow sun and asked, "Like this?" We both knew that God was showing how much He loves to surprise us when we least expect it.

I remember another day feeling ashamed I had forgotten to give my sympathy card to a fellow teacher whose mother had passed. I had a few minutes extra between classes and was urged from deep within to *go now*. I hurried to the hall, thinking I'll have to go fast but there she was outside my door! God knew she'd be right there. It was not a coincidence! As I apologized for my oversight, she had a look of thankfulness and assured me the timing was perfect. I could tell by her expression that she was receiving a special hug from the Father.

Music teachers awaited the budget report every year to confirm there was enough money to support their job positions. Often, after signing the yearly contract, I waited for a space in which to teach. On 9/11/2001, my designated classroom was on the elevated stage at least forty inches from the auditorium's floor. My first grade class was quietly seated in a circle on the stage floor at least six feet away from the edge of the stage. My eyes focused for a split second on the music cart when I heard kerplunk! Children excitedly explained the little girl had done a backwards flip and went over the stage edge.

There she lay unconscious, flat on her back on the gently carpeted concrete floor. I sent a responsible student to the office for help as I prayed aloud. Minutes later when the child's mother arrived, the girl seemed totally fine. When the office staff encouraged them to go to the hospital, the mother responded with a smile toward me and replied, "No, she's OK," and she was! Then the office clerk said that at the exact time my errand runner arrived to get help they were viewing the *real-time* Twin Towers destruction. What a morning! Prayers were prayed at our school all throughout *that day!!*

*Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.
(Matthew 6:8 ESV)*

Public School Teaching *page 3*

Wiseman Elementary became an extended family. We worked, shared conversations at lunch, laughed, cried, and prayed together. We were blessed to have principals and staff who looked forward to circling up, holding hands, and praying together throughout the year. Occasionally I was approached with these kinds of requests, “Could you pray for my back?” And “I have this lump. Will you pray for me?” God graciously let those two coworkers have quick healings!

Here is one answer to prayer that my custodial friend, Helen, and I share. Before morning announcements, Helen asked as she cleaned my room, “How are things going with you today?”

“Helen, I really wish I had time to see my brother. He’s upset and he’s upsetting me.”

“I got things weighing on me with my mom. I could use a day off too.”

Helen and I often had prayer together so we prayed that morning that we’d have focus and energy to make it through the day and have the needed time to help our loved ones. After we prayed, the school intercom broadcasted the principal’s voice, “Teachers, I know this will be an unusual directive. Prepare the children to be sent home. Our toilets are out of order so our school will be closed until the problem is remedied.” Helen and I looked at each other in awe of God who carved out some time for us to show love to our family members. In all the many years Helen worked for the school system she said she had never seen a school close for any reason other than inclement weather. What a *coincidence*? No! What a God!!

My positive experience as a public school music teacher was greatly enhanced by school staff, supportive parents, family and friends. Becoming Sumner County Teacher of the year in 2005 provided opportunities for me to openly honor the Lord in newspaper articles and a radio talk show. The pleasure was all “mine” to get to know and be a small part in the lives of so many wonderful families. The few stories I decided to share represent a minuscule of what I felt was a normal walk with God during my fifteen years in the public schools.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

*And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

(Philippians 4: 6-7 ESV)

Public School Teaching *page 4*

This glimpse into my school adventure wouldn't be complete without mentioning how it came to an end. One Sunday afternoon in May, 2014, retirement was on our minds while en route to attend my principal's retirement reception. Ernest asked, "Should you retire now or teach one more year? You know I can retire by October, 2015 – maybe sooner."

"I don't know. Could we pray about it right now?" We prayed and five minutes later we ascended the stairs into the reception hall unexpectedly alongside my principal, Mr. Wix, who hesitated on a landing, looked at me and asked, "Miss Evie, when are you going to retire? Now would be a good time."

My eyes locked with Ernest's eyes and we both *knew* we had heard from God. The next morning when I asked Mr. Wix for the exit procedure he gasped, "You're going to do it? Miss Evie, I don't know why I said that yesterday."

I smiled, "It's okay. I know. God gave us an answer to our prayer through you."

Unbeknownst to us, Ernest was able to use a year's worth of unused sick days toward his retirement and was free October, 2014. Good thing I was free to be Florida bound, too!

*Do your work heartily, as for the Lord, rather than for people
(Colossians 3:23, NASB).*



Angels

In the eighties we heard reports of people seeing angels. My brother-in-law, Ken, was certain he had seen angels. One of those times involved me. Ken flagged me down as I drove the four wheel drive across a muddy field toward him. Ken peered through my now open window and asked, “Where’s Ernest?”

“I’m alone.”

“Ah... I thought I saw Ernest. He was wearing a big coat like his. Evie, it was Ernest’s angel.” His expression was one of wonderment.

“Well, if the angel was with me, he’s *my* angel.” I added with a smile, “Quit trying to take my angel.”

On a different day some friends showed up to help roof Ken’s mobile home that was in full view of my kitchen window. His wife and I prepared lunch for everyone. Our carefully counted plates were all taken except one. I looked around and asked, “Where’s the bearded guy with the red plaid flannel shirt?”

“There was no one like that.”

“Oh yes there was. He was on that end, I pointed, “hammering along.” Josh, Ken’s son, acknowledged that he saw him too.

More recently, in 2018, after Ernest had been flat on his back for two months, I had to get him to the ER because his pain was unbearable. I called ahead to let them know I was bringing him and that he’d need a gurney. God’s grace allowed Ernest to drag himself with a walker to the rear of the van and tip over onto the prepared mattress. After carefully tucking his legs and feet in I shut the door and drove to the hospital and was met by rude nurses with a wheelchair.

“Why didn’t you call the ambulance? We can’t get him out. You want us to call the ambulance for you?” *I was already outside the hospital emergency room.* Although I was bewildered, I stood silently praying. Suddenly, a slightly bearded, dark-headed, well-built young man approached quickly from the parking lot. Wearing blue scrubs and a smile he kindly asked, “What’s going on here?” One of the annoyed nurses answered “We can’t get him out!”

“Well, I can,” he responded. He climbed into the back of the van in a squatted position next to Ernest, scooped him into his arms and without any strain exited the van and carefully placed Ernest onto the gurney. As the young man steered himself towards the hospital Ernest asked, “Who was that?” In unison the nurses replied, “We’ve never seen him before.”

Some have entertained angels without knowing it.
(Hebrews 13:2, NASB)

Evie's Experiences with Ernest's Back Surgery *page 1*

It was Saturday, February 3, 2018. I took Ernest to the emergency room. Ernest's back surgery had been scheduled for February 14th but I had known for weeks it was doubtful he could endure the pain until then. The ER doctor announced, "I've given him something for pain. There's nothing else I can do. You can take him home. "

I asked, "Can you admit him into the hospital to control his pain? After I take him home, the pain medication you gave him will wear off. Am I supposed to call an ambulance and bring him back each time it does?"

"I'm sorry," the young doctor explained, "Only his doctor can have him admitted."

"It's Saturday," I reminded him, "and waiting until Monday to get help is not an option! Can *you*, as an ER doctor, make a call to another doctor and explain what condition *you* see my husband is in so they are willing to admit him? "

"Oh, I guess I can do that. What hospital has Ernest's' scheduled surgery?"

Soon after giving all the details to the ER doctor, he came with good news, "I spoke to Dr. Baker, head of neurosurgery at The Florida Hospital in Orlando. Dr. Baker said if you want to come, he'll have a room ready." "Yes!" many times, yes. Dr. Baker was the doctor we originally wanted to perform Ernest's surgery! His schedule had been too full to include a timely surgery for Ernest so we had settled for one of his associates.

Positive Medical Transport, an ambulance service, carried Ernest to Orlando two hours away. As I followed behind, I stared at the sign written on the back of the ambulance, "Think Positive!" I was constantly reminded to only think on "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things (Phil. 4:8, NIV)."

By the time I parked and walked to the main building of the complex a full twenty minutes had transpired. To my dismay there was no one in the hospital named *Ernest Fentress*.

LORD, you have examined me and you know me. You know everything I do; from far away you understand all my thoughts. You see me, whether I am working or resting; you know all my actions.

Psalms 139:1-3 GNT

Evie's Experiences with Ernest's Back Surgery *page 2*

"Honey, you'll have to go to the emergency room. If the ambulance brought him, they would have him." It took another ten minutes to walk to the ER. They didn't have him either. I was asked for a description of my husband and told to sit "right there" while someone went to look for Ernest.

A door next to where I was seated swung open and a familiar face looked surprised to see me. It was George, one of the paramedics who transported Ernest. This is the gist of our conversation:

George, acknowledging me, asked, "What are you doing here? We're lost in the maze of this hospital and don't even know where we are and how you happen to be here."

"I'm looking for my husband. No one seems to know where he is." Just as I finished that sentence, the man who was looking for Ernest returned shaking his head *no*, but then heard George announce, "We know where he is!"

When the ER attendant joined us, his facial expressions demanded that he be privy to what had just happened. I introduced George as the paramedic who transported Ernest and said, "He doesn't know why he happened to come through that door as he was lost. But I know he wasn't lost at all. God knew I needed to find Ernest and George knew where he took him."

The man was intrigued and decided to go with me to where George said he took him. We rode a staff elevator to save time. When the elevator opened, my guide turned left but I went to the right. He said, "Ma'am, this way."

"Oh no, he's this way. I hear him."

Ernest was in such pain his screams were heard from one end of the hall to the other end. The pain medication had worn off, the ambulance ride was too bumpy, and the paramedics accidentally lost their grip causing him to fall a few inches onto the bed. It took a couple of hours for the hospital pharmacy to authorize pain medication for Ernest. Ernest's hellish screams were painful for both of us.

Finally, Doctor Baker came to visit us. He promised to prepare Ernest for a morning surgery. Ernest's hope didn't alleviate the long, painful night but each hour brought a nearer end to a very tumultuous two months.

Weeping may endure for a night, But joy comes in the morning.
(*Psalm 30:5 NKJV*)

Evie's Experiences with Ernest's Back Surgery *page 3*

“Surgery was successful,” informed Dr. Baker. “It just looked like something had exploded in there. I also had to route out the canal to relieve pressure off that nerve. He’s going to be fine.”

We were very thankful for Dr. Baker! He could have been celebrating Super Bowl Sunday but for some reason he was the on-call neurosurgeon. In our opinion he made the “winning touchdown!”

*I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart; I will recount all of
your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and exult in you;
I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.
(Psalms 9:1-2, BST)*



Evie's Stay in the Hospital, 1986 page 1
 (Lee's premature birth)

My close friend, Glenda, called one March morning, "How are you?"

Hesitantly, I answered, "Okay."

"What? What do you mean?"

"I just think this baby is pressing on my bladder, and I've got a little leak. It's too soon to be anything else."

"Call the doctor."

"Nah, I'm fine. There are no signs of labor. I'm just six months and the baby's on that bladder, that's all."

"Call the doctor!"

"Glenda, I don't think I need to do that."

"Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm hanging up, getting on my knees to pray and I'll be here all week, if necessary, until you call the doctor." I knew she meant it so I gave in and called immediately.

The nurse took my Friday morning call, checked with one of the doctors in the group practice, and relayed his comment, "Go straight to bed. If you're still having this problem, come in on Monday." I wasn't happy with that at all. Angela was just home from school. I had something cooking on the stove. A piano student would already be on the way for a lesson. Twelve year old Angela saw my disgruntled look and said, "Mama, I'll take care of everything. You go to bed. I'll finish supper and when the student comes, I'll explain everything. It will be fine."

I listened closely from my bed and gloated over Angela's efficiency. The only disturbance I felt came when Angela announced, "Daddy's home," and then ran outside. Her definitive action resulted in Ernest insisting he call the doctor again.

"Ern, the doctor coached us expectant mothers to do our own calling if we are able to talk at all."

Handing me the phone he ordered, "Call, then."

The on-call doctor happened to be the doctor I had most recently seen at the group practice, Dr. Hamburger. Before I could get out two sentences, he asked, "Is your husband with you? If so I'd like to speak to him."

What was all that stuff about the woman making her own phone call if...

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.
 (Proverbs 3:5-6BSB)

Evie's Stay in the Hospital *page 2*

As Ernest hung up the phone, he nonchalantly said the doctor wanted him to drive me to Baptist Hospital just so he could check me out - *no biggy*. Angela started packing my suitcase but I was shaking my head no. She ignored me and said, "You're supposed to do this."

Ernest agreed, "It won't hurt to pack." *I did wonder, when on the way to the car, why I no longer looked pregnant.* Ernest did lay the seat back to allow me to be as flat as possible.

We took Angela to a neighbor's house to visit her friend, Michele, and drove an hour to the hospital. After being checked out at the hospital, Ernest broke the news that I'd be checking into the hospital. My condition was not explained to me. I only knew I had a leak and the doctor said the first 72 hours were critical.

Mother came to the hospital "to stay" she told Ernest. She coaxed him to go home and take care of Angela and go to work the next day. She promised she wasn't going anywhere!

The following afternoon, Ernest came in smiling and said, "Everything is going to be fine. I prayed about it and God gave me this promise, 'He that began a good work in you will complete it.' I know that verse may be talking about other things too, but I know God spoke that to me." I never doubted after that. I was *in* for the completion, *still am!*

When the 72 critical hours passed uneventfully, the doctors were amazed and didn't quite know what to make of it. Up until that time they hoped for the best but tried to prepare us for the worst. Dr. Hamburger came almost every day, often just sitting in the chair in the corner. One time he came by my bed, picked up one of my cassette tapes, and read the title about God's healing and put it back down. He encouraged me to write my questions down so I wouldn't forget what they were when he came by. One day I asked, "When you did the ultrasound, could you tell if we have a boy or girl?"

He answered, "Oh, we're not worrying over that."

Another day I asked a different question and got the same answer. So, I asked no more questions. It was better that I didn't ask because God had already given the real answer:

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ...
(Philippians 1:6 NKJV)

Evie's Stay in the Hospital *page 3*

My forecasted stay in the hospital changed from hours to days and then weeks. Doctors and nurses turned into watchmen waiting for any alarm. A few people moaned, “It would be good if you could at least go visit the premature nursery and *see* the babies.” That’s when I remembered the Bible story about Jacob’s strong, spotted sheep, especially this verse: *Whenever the stronger of the flock were breeding, Jacob would lay the sticks in the troughs before the eyes of the flock, that they might breed among the sticks* (*Genesis 30:41, ESV*). For now, I was consoled to envision a strong, healthy baby.

During the third week of my hospital stay, Jan visited me. I was especially blessed that she came in the midst of her great grief over the loss of her only child just one month before. Yet, here she was! When she said, “I think you should be able to go in a wheelchair to the premature nursery,” I agreed I would *if* they would let me. It only took a few minutes for her nurse’s expertise to gain the doctor’s approval.

What an awakening! I saw tiny one-pound babies whose little heads were the size of prunes. Some babies had all kinds of tubes attached to them. Then just a little further ahead my eye caught sight of giant *babies*. “Let’s go this way,” I pointed. The weight listed for one baby was 3 lbs. 2 ounces. I whispered, “Lord, if I have to give birth early, please let me have one like this.”

Easter arrived earlier in 1986. It was on March 30th which meant that Angela was on school break. We planned for Angela to spend the day with me on Monday, the day after Easter. Neighbors brought Angela to me and she would return home later with Ernest after work.

I wanted the day to be bright and cheery so I dressed in the yellow gown Mother provided. The neighbors visited for a few minutes and left. Finally, I had a day to be with Angela! As I took one sip of cola, Angela began telling me something and at the same time I had a pain hit the lower right side of my tummy. *Probably gas, I thought.* “Hold that thought, Angela, I have to buzz the nurse. I don’t think it’s anything, but I’ve been instructed to signal whenever I feel anything.” She nodded.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 4:7)*

Evie's Stay in the Hospital *page 4*

Nurse Flo came with a CTG machine, strapped it around me and began to study the graphs. Angela quietly watched. Flo left the room, called the doctor and brought an assistant to my room who began to intercept all phone calls. Flo said Dr. Hamburger was on his way. Upon arrival he answered my unspoken question, "You have to undergo emergency surgery. We don't have time to wait for your husband but we will try to reach him. If he does make it, he can't be in the operating room. What can I do to make this easier for you?"

"My only concern right now is for Angela. She is here alone with me." The phone rang. The assistant took the call and politely interrupted, "This is her pastor."

"Let Evie have the phone."

"Evie, Wert Campbell here. What's going on?"

After explaining my dilemma he said, "Evie, I'm in Nashville just five minutes from the hospital. I'm on my way to be with Angela." *What a mighty God we serve!*

It was 1986. Having no cell phones didn't stop God's ability from delivering Ernest to the hospital on time. Ernest worked as a DCS investigator for the State of TN. While working a case in the field that day, he needed to place a call to his office. At the same time, the hospital staff called the same office on another line. The person who took that call said, "We need to get in touch with Ernie. He needs to get to the hospital." The clerk who had Ernie on the phone heard the plea and gave the urgent message to Ernest.

Not only did Ernest make it in time for surgery, the doctor changed his mind and allowed Ernest to be by my side for the emergency C-section. My request to be put to sleep was denied because I had sipped cola earlier. I was grateful for the ones who were with me: the doctor, the anesthesiologist, my husband, and especially, Nurse Flo.*

*Before they call I will answer;
while they are yet speaking I will hear.
(Isaiah 65:24 ESV)*

Evie's Stay in the Hospital page 5

“It’s a boy!”

Ernest asked me, “Is it Lee Edison?”

“I believe so!”

When Lee peed the doctor said, “His plumbing works.”

As the neonatal nurse took Lee, he began to cry loudly all the way to the nursery.

Lee’s birth weight was 3lbs 2.5 ounces. God had heard my whisper.

I remained in the hospital for one more week. Lee came home three weeks later.

*God likes to bless! I take lots of pleasure in what may seem to be a *little blessing*. I share one now: Several months into our new-normal family life, our pastor invited a guest speaker to our church. As I took my usual seat at the piano I scanned the congregation when I saw the back door to the auditorium open. In walked the special guest with his wife - Flo! What a surprise to see Nurse Flo in our church, one of many hundreds of churches in the Greater Nashville, TN area for her husband to grace our pulpit. I’m sure Flo prayed for me *through* March 31, 1986.

Today, the promise God gave to us remains true:

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.
(Philippians 1:6 KJV)

Lee Edison Fentress

March 31, 1986

Lee 1 Day Old



3.5 lbs.



Lee 1 Day Old



Sumner County Teacher of the Year 2004-2005



Fentress named elementary school teacher of the year

Evie Fentress, 52, is the music teacher, K-5, at J.W. Wiseman Elementary School. She has been teaching in public schools for five years. Fentress taught the last half of the 1999-2000 school year at Millersville. That job included teaching three different schools, Millersville, Howard and J.W. Wiseman. She was hired at J.W. Wiseman for the 2000-2001 school year where she's been "happily" teaching since.

Q: How does it make you feel to receive this honor?

A: "I am humbled. As a music teacher, I not only see each student in the school, but I see each teacher. At Wiseman I have the privilege of learning from each teacher as they bring their students to me each week. In my opinion, there are many 'teachers of the year' in my school! To

think they would honor me with that title truly humbles me."

Q: To what do you attribute your success as a teacher?

A: "I am first a believer in Jesus and His Word. These scriptures are the basis of my teaching: Colossians 3:23, And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Ephesians 4:1-2 I THEREFORE, the prisoner for the Lord, appeal to [and] beg you to walk (dead a life) worthy of the [divine] calling to which you have been called [with behavior that is a credit to the summons to God's service. Living as becomes you] with complete lowliness of mind (humility) and meekness (unselfishness, gentleness, mildness), with patience, bearing with one another (and) making allowances because you love one

another. I also understand the old African proverb, 'No one is an island.' It takes the support of the whole school and the entire community to be an outstanding teacher. I have these at J.W. Wiseman."

Q: What do you like most about teaching?

A: "Smiles and hugs! When students are learning and enjoying music, I receive both of these."

Q: What do you think could be done to increase more parent involvement in the Sumner County School system?

A: "By school system, do you mean attending meetings and serving on various committees? Perhaps that is part of the problem. Parents may see the system



Teacher of the year Evie Fentress, of J.W. Wiseman Elementary School in Portland, instructs Selena Cortez, Marshall Thurman and Kasey Content with their music lesson.

See Fentress, Page A6

Began teaching public school music 2000



Angela page 1

In 1973 expectant parents waited to see if they had a baby boy or girl. Most had a name ready for either one, but not Ernest. He said he wanted a girl so he would only consider girl names. I was a little worried whether we'd have a name for *her* but a few weeks before she arrived he said, "Her name is Angela. I will call her Angie." Angela Jenine (pronounced *juh-NEEN*) was born September 28, 1973. We thought we were prejudiced young parents until other people began to confirm, "She's the prettiest baby I've ever seen."

I remember holding Angela toward heaven saying, "I thought I was having a baby but You gave me a grownup in a little body." Angela said "Mama" at four months. Between five and six months she tried crawling which looked more like a frog hop of sorts, often landing on her nose and crying. She walked at seven months and ran at eight months. She was a true Fentress in that she was always in a hurry.

Angela was opinionated from the start. At age two, after her daddy had been calling her Angie, she folded her arms and proclaimed, "I am Angela, not Angie." We've called her Angela ever since. Angela had outbursts of tantrums. She was *the baby* I read about in books; she turned blue and passed out. Ernest diligently prayed about how to handle her and the *couch-system* evolved. He took her to the den, patted her backside, pointed to the couch and said, "When you're ready to stop screaming, sit on the couch." The initial campaign that lasted for over an hour gradually reduced to less than a minute over a three week span. Ernest made sure I understood the technique. The required consistency was worth it!

Other people were aware of Angela's strong will that screamed for independence at age five. One lady came to visit me with a very sincere message from God, "Angela is precious, but..." She tried to put into words what we already knew. I didn't doubt God sent her but I had hoped she had been sent from God *with* the answer!

"What should we do about this?" I asked.

"I don't know. Have her say 'yes ma'am' and 'yes sir?'"

"We do require that." I defended myself.

Shrugging her shoulders she added, "I'm truly sorry. I'm just the messenger."

A wise man listens to advice.

(Proverbs 19:20, ESV)

Angela page 2

For the next several weeks after getting Angela off to school and taking care of the routine household chores, I sat with the Bible open, praying and agonizing over why God sent me a reminder of the problem but no answer. Then at a most unexpected time I heard God.

Angela and I were in the car while she was telling me something. I wasn't really listening to her when I heard God. "When someone asks you to do something, how do you respond?"

"I do it."

"From the heart, or is it a form of lip-service?"

"I see. I'm so sorry."

"The problem is you, not Angela. Her attitudes reflect your heart."

As of today, I do not fully understand but I do know that when I agreed with God, I saw a positive difference in my child. It seems that we are far more connected to each other than we comprehend. Not only what we openly say and do affects others but even the hidden things of the heart affect others. It proves true in the physical realm. Who hasn't heard that stress is responsible for many diseases and ailments? Yet, we cannot see stress and most often we deny having it.

Angela excelled in everything and in whatever school environment she was placed. She experienced school in all arenas: home, private Christian school, and public school. About the home school experience I heard her say, "Second grade even helped prepare me for college." In the Christian school she not only made life-long friends, she entered special events in area-wide to international level meets, winning an international piano competition at age fifteen. The following year, she enrolled in public school that afforded her the opportunity to have a student-led prayer and devotion time before school. (From age thirteen, she had assured us she was destined to be a missionary.) When she graduated from high school, she attended Volunteer State Community College where she met Trey.

Angela met Trey in her first class. She married him the next year and had our first grandbaby the following year. Soon after Josiah's birth three years later, her family moved to California to start training for the mission field. It was during these fast paced and whirlwind events that I thought *she has been in a hurry all of her life to make it to Russia.*

*Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days.
(Ephesians 5:16, NLT)*

Angela page 3

“Russia” didn’t happen before Kristiana was born. Trey, Angela, Samuel, Josiah and ten-month old Kristiana went to Russia where they lived, loved, and served the Russian people for five years. Angela’s strong will, the “messenger” had said, could be directed to be used for good and by God’s grace it was. I’m sure Angela’s thoroughness (that’s the character award she received in Christian school) is what kept her diligently creating ways to show God’s love to the Russian people.

Ernest called one of her ideas “The Bathroom Ministry. “ Poverty sent women to the streets to sell whatever they could to passers-by. Often, it rained and temperatures were below freezing. Compassion flooded Angela’s heart as she wondered how they endured the hardships. Then she worried how far they had to walk to use a restroom. *My apartment is right here. I will invite them to use my bathroom*, she decided.

Next, Ernest and I began to hear about Angela’s “Theater Ministry.” I’ve included Angela’s own summary of how this outreach not only blessed the local people but confirmed God’s faithfulness to her as well:

“My kids were watching cartoons. When it grew dusk, I went to close the blinds. That’s when I noticed three Russian children standing on a mound of snow outside our first-floor window also watching our cartoons. I hurried outside to give them a standing invitation to come anytime. This is when I met ten-year old Anya”

As I listened to her story unfold, I’m sure her welcoming spirit led to these favorable outcomes:

“Soon afterward, some local teenagers began coming to do a Bible study with me. They prayed to receive Christ four weeks later during our study of the book of John. Later I hosted a ladies’ Bible study, led by Nadezhda, a gifted Bible teacher from my Russian church. Anya’s grandmother, Baba Anya, who had been regularly shunned because of her often drunken state, attended the Bible study. About the fourth week, she also prayed to receive Jesus. She began coming to church and was discipled by her mentor, Nadezhda. A few months later Baba Anya didn’t show up. Nadezhda investigated. She called the hospital and was told that on Easter morning Baba Anya died and her body was buried in an unknown grave because no one came to collect the body.

Angela page 4

Though we mourned for our loss, we rejoiced that Baba Anya was with the Lord, precious in His sight, and would one day receive her Resurrected body. We thanked our Lord for this reminder commemorating her death on Easter Day.”

*“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted
(Psalm 34:18 ESV)*

Angela learned how to “see what God was doing” and then joined Him. She used the Bible to teach English to interested Russians. She enrolled Samuel and Josiah in the Russian public school and became a supportive parent and willing helper to everyone.

One of Angela’s special gifts is in recognizing what others’ strengths are and motivating them to use their talents and abilities for the Lord. Consequently, when Trey and Angela returned to the United States, there were new Russian believers who continued what had been started.

Although the word “missionary” is no longer their job title, Angela and Trey are both mission-minded and continue to reach out to share the gospel of Jesus with others. Angela considers her first mission field to be her children whom she homeschools. She especially enjoys teaching apologetics and grooming others to be good speakers and defenders of their faith. Wherever she has lived she has either joined or started a school co-op. The only one of these associations that hasn’t been faith-based is the one she participates in presently, 2021. She’s been prayerfully excited that while this one is not a Christian association, they allow classes that are foundationally Christian. She is optimistic that there will be a harvest of souls with the seed sown through this organization.

In January, 2019 Angela’s phone call from her home in California to us in Florida was the *first* of a chain reaction of events that brought her family to live with us:

- “Mom, Trey is thinking it’s time for us to leave California. We’re checking into our options.”
- In February, Trey was told some of Lifeway Christian Bookstores would soon close. He waited to see if the one he managed would be included.

Angela page 5

- Angela went to an eye specialist in March who set up an MRI as a precaution about her blurred vision.
- By April, Trey received the news that *all* Lifeway Christian Bookstores would close.

Angela also found out she had a brain tumor behind her left eye. When the California doctor wanted her to have surgery immediately, she explained she and her family would be leaving by June to move to Florida. He offered, “My mentor is in Tampa, Florida. He practically wrote the book for this procedure. Call him.”

The call was placed. Only one appointment was available for a new patient and it was in one week, in May. Trey made sure Angela was on a plane to us in Florida. He then shouldered all of the responsibilities necessary to close out a store, take care of five children, sell or ship all their belongings, and clean and exit a leased home.

Angela was away from her family for forty days. In June, 2019 Angela underwent a successful brain surgery with no adverse reactions.

Church family helped at both ends, California and Florida. In California, people brought meals and occasionally dropped by to entertain the children. In Florida, several men came to our house and used their carpentry skills to get it ready for seven more people. Some bought mattresses for our grandchildren’s beds. Others prepared meals to help as we traveled two hours to and from Tampa and especially when we returned home with Angela.

In July, Trey and the children arrived to join Angela and us in Florida. Ernest and I have been blessed beyond words to have this part of our family in Florida. What I haven’t included in this story is how often, for a few years before 2019, Ernest would state one of his desires, “Oh, I wish I could be a part of my grandchildren’s lives.” We didn’t want hardships to provide that opportunity but we are glad we are genuinely part of their lives.

*Delight yourself in the LORD
and he will give you the desires of your heart.
(Psalm 37:4)*

Angela page 6

I regularly help Ezra and Joshua with their homeschooling. I get to teach piano to all five of these grandchildren. There are three more “Hunter” grandchildren but they are grown and living elsewhere. Samuel is an army combat medic stationed at Fort Belvoir in Virginia. Kristiana still lives in California. Josiah married Alexa last year and they are in Tennessee. Oh, the stories that could be told about all of these precious grandchildren! Maybe *they* will tell them one day. They are all capable writers.

Children and grandchildren are gifts from the Lord!

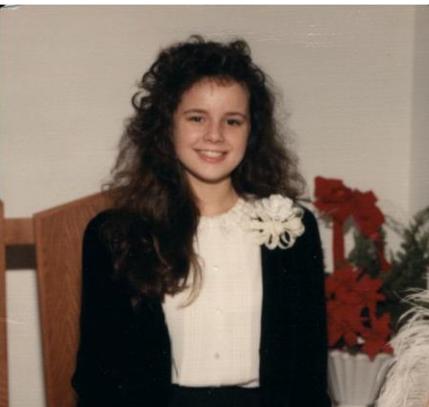
*Grandchildren are the crown of the aged,
and the glory of children is their fathers.
(Proverbs 17:6, ESV)*

*So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me,
until I proclaim your might to another generation,
your power to all those to come.
(Psalms 71:18, ESV)*

Some of the grands on December, 24, 2021
Our 50th Wedding Anniversary

Elijah, Evie, Ernest, Samuel, Daniel & front: Eva, Joshua, Ezra





Music winner

Angela Fentress, a student at Light-house Christian Academy, was first place winner in girls' music composition during an international convention held at the University of North Texas in Denton, Texas. She is the daughter of Ernest and Evvie Fentress of Westmoreland.



This was taken right before Angela had the brain tumor surgery in 2019.

Fruit of our labor page 1

Today, 10-10-21, travel back in time with me to Kentucky as I take a peek at the fruit of our labor. The year is 1981. Angela is in third grade at South Christian Elementary. She has made friends with sweet, pretty Kelly Deatherage, the lawyer's daughter. Her friendship with Kelly is soon accompanied with sadness because Angela feels Kelly's disinterest in her conversations about Jesus' love. Angela begins to pray for her friend.

The girls played together and talked at school. When their teacher announced that each student would need to wear certain apparel for the upcoming Thanksgiving program, Angela voiced her concern to Kelly, "I don't have anything to wear." Kelly assured Angela she had something she could loan and her parents graciously agreed. The day we picked up the pilgrim dress I was surprised to learn Kelly had a step-mom. I think this was the first time Angela had encountered a child who lived with each of her parents on different days. Later, I explained to Angela that it could possibly be difficult for Kelly and praying for her was the right thing to do.

When we left South Christian the next year, Angela never left her love and concern for Kelly. Seven years later Angela heard about a sixteen year old girl named Kelly Deatherage from Hopkinsville, KY who was victimized by abduction and rape. Could it be *her friend* Kelly? Either way, it prompted her to pray for her.

The next year while Angela attended a regional Christian retreat, someone remarked that the good-looking guy on the worship team was engaged to a girl named Kelly Deatherage. Angela was shocked to be the recipient of such random news from a total stranger who didn't know her connection to Kelly at all! Could it really be true? Her heart rejoiced to know that God had rescued her friend and placed her with a Christian.

*Do not be anxious about anything,
but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known to God.
And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

(Philippians 4:6-7, ESV)

Fruit of our labor page 2

Fast Forward to October 10, 2021

Two days ago as I entered Angela's kitchen I heard her talking to her children (my grands) about the importance of prayer. She reminisced about her friend from third grade and how she loved her so much as a child and had many heartfelt prayers for her salvation. "It's okay," she encouraged, "Even if your friends don't really seem to want to know about Jesus, keep praying for them." She recalled feeling rejected when sharing her Christian faith with Kelly and once again longed to know all about her. Daniel suggested looking on Facebook.

Today I received texts from Angela. "Take a look at these Facebook pics of Kelly Deatherage Putty. I think this is the Kelly I knew. Can you tell?" I was sure it was her childhood friend from forty years ago.

After Angela contacted Kelly, via text messaging, Kelly responded:

So glad you found me. I was going through an older bin of things not too long ago when my mother passed and ran across many of your letters to me. I remember you having me over to your house and you guys being Christians and praying and how I didn't understand any of it. I gave my life to the Lord when I was 18 and God has worked miracles ever since. I am on a plane, as I type, flying to Ethiopia. Thank you for all your prayers. God had me covered knowing I would need Him even before I did.

As Angela was sending me Kelly's response I noticed that Kelly and I had a mutual friend on Facebook, Marisa Stam! Marisa is in our Florida church family, and as Director of Selamta, a ministry in Ethiopia, she places orphans in forever homes. Simultaneously, our hearts were joyfully stirred as positive things were buzzing in the spiritual realm:

- *Angela was excitedly texting that Kelly had adopted several Ethiopian children.*
- *I was ecstatic about God's connectedness and "no coincidences!"*
- *Ernest eagerly waited for an answer to his question, "Does Kelly know Marisa?"*

Kelly answered, "Yes, I know Marisa. We have spoken on the phone about ministry stuff and I have visited her center in Ethiopia."

Fruit of our labor page 3

She also wrote this to Angela: "It's pretty neat that God placed you in my life as literally my first Christian friend when I was so clueless. I'm grateful for all your prayers. Only He knew what was approaching in my life. The Lord has turned my life around and I've been blessed many times over."

Parts of Angela's reflective texts to me

- "It is true that Kelly was abducted... Her story of healing and mercy is featured on the 700 Club."
- "Yes, she married the guy who played the piano at the retreat!"
- "God brought her to my mind, no doubt, so I could continue to be a part of her story. I have always loved her so much. It is a joy to be included in His birthing process of new believers. I think it's a foretaste of the joy we will have in heaven."
- "It's quite a story! I'm curious to hear more of her perspective. She said later she would show me my letters to her. I'm sort of sad that I missed out on the past 40 years of her life. But God's timing is always perfect."
- "God knew that one day my joy would be complete to hear that He completed what He started!"

*A friend loves at all times.
(Proverbs 17:17)*

*Pray for one another.
(James 5:16 KJV)*

Lying? I hope not!

A few evenings ago, Ernest and I watched a former CIA agent on YouTube as she lectured on how to tell when someone is lying. In her discourse, she said that the average time we “all” lie per day is twenty times. I hope not! But, if we do, we have *an advocate with the Father and as we confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John, 1-2)*.

In my mid-twenties, while working in the family greenhouse in Kentucky, God dealt with me about exaggerating. When the Holy Spirit pointed it out to me, I argued that I didn’t do that. I must have felt a little like Peter when he denied the Lord and the cock crowed, because it was only minutes later while potting little plants in three inch containers, I said something like “always,” to a fellow worker. Immediately, I heard in my head, “*You’re exaggerating. It is not always!*” The “belt of truth” exposed my sin and God required me to confess it to my potting mates. “How am I supposed to do that? That’s normal conversation.”

I did in fact confess it to my co-workers that day *and* many times since then. Ridiculous, you say? Not to me, because a few years before I had another experience. The conference location provided a nursery so Ernest and I were able to go to several of the well-attended (morning and nightly) meetings to hear Lorin Helm. I’ll always remember the positive impact his powerful testimonies about “hearing the Lord” had on me. One of the points he made was the need to stay current. He emphasized, “Don’t become dull in hearing. Go back to what you know He said and follow through on that. That’s how you continue to hear.”

The very day I told the Lord I always wanted to hear him; He put me through a test. I stopped by our local Christian bookstore and hang-out, bought a book, said something and left. I made it to the first stoplight and then in my thoughts I heard, “Go back and clarify what you said.” I defended, “But, she didn’t take it that way.” God asked, “Do you want to become ‘dull of hearing’?”

I drove back to that store and followed through on the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Just as I expected, the lady had not taken it negatively. So, I questioned God *and* when I continue to question He gives me these kinds of answers: “It’s important you obeyed. You have no idea what others will wrestle with later or what lies the enemy will present to them concerning what you said or did. I counseled Peter the same. Remember? He asked me, “What about John?” My answer for you is the same answer I gave him, “You follow me!”

*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart;
And lean not unto thine own understanding.
(Proverbs 3:5-6, KJV).*

Lee page 1

“Ms. Evie, how do you handle having your daughter and grandbabies living on the other side of the world?” I was frequently asked after Angela and her family went to Russia as missionaries. “There’s no better place for them to be than God’s will,” I said, while thinking how blessed I was to have a son still at home.

When I gave that reply, Lee was fourteen. Most people thought he was only nine. He entered this world as a three-pounder. Now at only 29 pounds and five years old, the pediatrician sent him for a bone scan that revealed his frame was the size of a two year old. The little girls in his kindergarten class thought he was their *live* baby doll. When I questioned my very intelligent, tiny boy why he had wrong answers on his papers (when I knew he knew the right answers) he answered, “Lydia said, ‘Here, mark this.’” When I reviewed this with Lee’s teacher, the problem was remedied by the teacher placing Lee next to a boy with the assurance that, “Alex won’t help at all.”

Even though Lee struggled to complete assignments, he had a successful elementary school experience. He attended kindergarten through fifth grade all at the same school. His report cards had mostly A’s. He seldom, if ever, misbehaved. Teachers regularly commented how he quietly sat and worked studiously all day. It remained a mystery why he had so much difficulty finishing things.

From age 3, Lee joined in singing with us when we were asked to lead music in revivals. He was known for singing, “A Christian Cowboy” and “The Football Song.” Not only was he pint-size cute, he sang beautifully on pitch. When granddaddy Elmer, who played harmonica, gave Lee a harmonica, Lee immediately *could* play too. My first grader was walking through the house playing “Silent Night.” He let his music teacher know he could play it and upon hearing him, he was asked to play it on the school’s Christmas program. He didn’t miss a note.

When Lee was seven, we were singing with a gospel quartet, traveling on a bus each weekend. Occasionally, a pastor would invite us to sing to his “less than thrilled” congregation. That’s when Lee would start the program by singing, “I don’t know what you came to do, but I came to praise the Lord.” After he sang, true praise and worship took place.

Lee page 2

Lee also began to announce, “I want to play drums.”

“Lee, we don’t have money for drums. How about this? When the Lord wants you to have drums, He’ll bring them.” One month later, our bass singer, who didn’t know about Lee’s desire, brought in an electric drum pad and asked if we could use it for anything. Lee immediately *could* drum.

When most boys were pushing lawn mowers and playing sports, Lee was so small he *couldn’t*. Instead, Ernest placed him in front of a computer and Lee, age 8, was like a fish in water. He became a computer whiz and within one year developed his own animated webpage. Ernest said Lee was savvier than he in some computer skills.

It was Lee’s sixth grade year when we decided to enroll him in Southside Christian School. The self-pacing curriculum used there, we believed, would alleviate some stress due to Lee’s non-finishing issues. Lee attended Southside through his sophomore year and then we Homeschooled his last two years of high school.

Since my parents lived close to Southside, Lee spent lots of time with them. They helped transport him to and from school, fed him and much of the time, he insisted, “Only, Grandma knows how to do my clothes.” They not only helped to teach him how to drive but they gave him a van when he got his license. The gift was two-fold: they planned to move away for their retirement but they wanted him to have transportation to travel to and from school. When it came time for him to drive twenty miles one-way to school, he said, “I can not!” Forcing him was not an option but homeschool was.

Our close friends, the Oddos, were also homeschooling. Their kiddos and Lee spent much time studying and socializing. We all served in the same church. We were blessed to enjoy Christian fellowship with them. *Could life get any better?*

Lee was singing, taking saxophone lessons, and I required piano lessons with me. He played drums on the praise team at church.

*Praise him with cymbals and a big bass drum,
praise him with fiddles and mandolin.
Let every living, breathing creature praise GOD!
(Psalms 150:1, MSG)*

Lee page 3

Lee had a simple but concrete message in his heart that he literally preached to us when he was seven: “*Love God. Do good and go to church.*” He never liked doing things for *show* but adamantly gave a message in word or song when he felt an urge from the Holy Spirit. At six, when church was closed due to ice and snow, he scurried to his bedroom. I peeked in and saw him flat on his tummy praying. He emerged a few minutes later saying, “I’m going to preach!” He meant right that minute. He brought his Bible, looked around the room and said, “I need one of those things to stand behind.” After that, Ernest constructed a small podium for Lee to use for his preaching moments. While that may all seem “cute,” God spoke through Lee and it was inspiring.

When Lee was fifteen, 70 year old, Pop Oddo (Pete’s dad) came to live with us after undergoing an intense back surgery. He became a precious addition to our family for the next year. He reported to us how often he heard Lee playing piano. “He plays for hours a day. It’s really something.” Lee had not liked music notes and told Grandma Tina, “I just want to play my stuff.”

“Then do it,” she encouraged him. Since then, he has played hundreds of improvisational music pieces and written and sung songs to glorify the Lord.

Then, something went awry and Lee began to stray. *I should have recognized the signals.* I’ve often blamed myself but I didn’t *see* it coming. Maybe, just maybe, Lee asked a lot of questions we didn’t satisfactorily answer. Sometimes I thought he asked in jest or perhaps to “play the devil’s advocate.” It was too late when we discovered differently and he took us down a dark hole. Our plunge lasted for the better part of three years. Alone at home one day, while pacing and angrily crying, “Why can’t he see? They are not his friends!” I heard the Lord.

“Do you scream at the physically blind?”

“No, but that presents another problem. I’ve asked You to open...”

“Evie.” I heard a tone in my spirit that meant “that’s enough.” Then He continued, “I’ve done all I’m going to do about it!”

That’s a fine “how-do-you-do”... *I was interrupted, not with words, but with an understanding about God’s best from heaven, HIS ONLY SON, sacrificed for my mess and EVERYONE’S mess!*

Shame crowned me and I scolded myself, “The audacity that I questioned...!”

Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things!

(Psalms 98:1, ESV)

Lee page 4

God gently reminded me that he sent **us** to heal the sick, open eyes, open ears, and raise the dead. I knew he meant spiritually too because He asked, “What are you going to do?”

I’ve learned there is a difference between prayer and warfare. Prayer is a conversation with God and sometimes includes getting marching orders. Warfare is carrying out those orders. Years ago we sang this chorus: “I went to the enemy camp and I took back what he stole from me.” Abraham, of the Old Testament, did exactly *that* when he rescued Lot and other family members from a kidnapping ordeal (Genesis 13-14). Abraham didn’t just pray about it; he *did* something about it. So, when God asks, “What are you going to do?” it thrusts me into putting on my *Ephesian’s armor* and going to war.

This war is different. We’re not fighting to win, we’ve *already* won! Jesus declared, “It is finished.” He won the war. That’s the good news we are called to share. I’m learning how to declare and decree what God says about my family and circumstances. Sometimes, in a “nanna, nanna, boo-boo” kind of way I sing, “Little ones to Him belong. They are weak, **but He is strong.** Yes, Jesus loves me, yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me for the Bible tells me so.”

Ernest and I began to release authority into the spiritual realm using the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Gradually, we began to see the tide change.

So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

(Isaiah 55:11 NKJV)

“Deeper - Wind of the Spirit” page 5

Lee soon wrote, sang and lived this song.

*Wind of the Spirit captures my sails so I can propel
 To that place where grace prevails
 I want to go farther; I want to go deeper,
 Just want to be near my Father’s heart
 I want to go farther; I want to go deeper,
 Just want to be wrapped up in Your arms-- In Your arms*

*I’ve set my sails and I am waiting on the wind
 To carry me farther to the ocean, to the horizon with no end
 I’m lost in Your presence, so I’ve lost my compass.
 I’m headed in Your direction now.
 Lost in your presence, Become my compass.
 I’m headed in Your direction now. I’m lost - but I’m found.*

*I can’t escape You, I can’t delay You, even if I wanted to.
 You are my journey and destination, beginning and the end
 And everything in between, and everything in between
 I want to go farther; I want to go deeper,
 Just want to be near my Father’s heart
 I want to go farther; I want to go deeper,
 Just want to be wrapped up in Your arms-- In Your arms*

We enjoyed about seven years of calm seas. Lee worked for our Messianic Jewish friends, Yochanan and Hannah Marcellino, as webmaster for their ministries, City of Peace Media/Films and Heart for Israel. We all participated in a Messianic Sabbath in their home each Friday evening. The Marcellinos’ love for God and covenant relationship within the body of Christ became a haven of rest, not just for us, but to at least forty other people each week.

Oceans are unpredictable and when least expected, God allows waves to rush in and perhaps whisk away our trust in the “calmness.” He delights in our trust in Him. He surely wants us to know Him according to this verse:

*“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you
 (Isaiah 43:2, ESV).*

Lee page 6

Lee was lured to Wisconsin and then to Colorado. He had only been gone a few months when we got his phone call, “I don’t really know what I’m doing here. Are you all still willing to help me go to school or something? I mean I think I’m supposed to be in Nashville at The Foundry. It’s a ministry and school of praise and worship.”

“Absolutely,” we rejoiced.

Lee told us that as soon as we said “yes” he literally threw his things in the van and started driving. He simply gave away the old camper he had bought to live in. We were very encouraged with his quick obedience when he heard the Lord. Lee was at The Foundry for about fifteen months. Not only did their training include music and worship, they ministered evangelistically in downtown Nashville. Meals were provided for the homeless. Backyard Bible clubs were conducted for the children. We were thrilled that Lee was using the gifts and talents God had given him. In December, 2015 Lee joined us in Florida.

“Any” time we’ve had the opportunity to be with Lee has been one of God’s gifts to us. That doesn’t mean our time has been void of challenges and concern. Lee still probes us with questions. His conversations, more than any others’, provoke me to pray and seek the Lord for Who He is. I’ve discovered I’ve been judgmental and prejudiced and I would have never believed that possible. I’ve come to understand grace a little better, knowing-- “It’s not by works of righteousness that I have done but according to His mercy He saved (rescued) me.” Any “right” thing I have ever done is all because of His mercy. I’m learning how to extend grace to others. I’m waiting on God to fulfill His promises. Waiting is hard!

Lee is on the move again. He says he’s following the Lord but it looks like a dark tunnel to me. He called from Tennessee last week. I miss him. What I know is that God is faithful. I know He will complete the good work He started according to Philippians 1:6. This is the same scripture God spoke to Ernest before Lee was born concerning the gravity of the premature birth that seemed inevitable.

I am confident that the Creator, who has begun such a great work among you, will not stop in mid-design but will keep perfecting you until the day Jesus the Anointed, our Liberating King, returns to redeem the world.
(Philippians 1:6, Voice)

Can two walk together, except they be agreed? *page 1*
(Amos 3:3, KJV)

Much of what I've prayed about was referenced in Sunday's message. But not all questions were answered. I have set before myself what seems to be an impossible task, that of cap-sizing my thoughts while presenting my questions with a teachable heart.

"I want to be with you and walk alongside you in love even though I do not agree with you." Yesterday, I basically said that to my son. He hung up on me. You see, in his mind *loving* him, means *agreeing* with him. The retort is often, "He must not be a believer. We are only called to walk in unity with believers, not unbelievers." Yet, despite his less than Christian-like behavior right now, he strongly testifies that he is a believer. He further states he doesn't want his mind controlled by "whatever it is" that changed the *Lee* we've known into this "other" Lee. But when I suggest what caused "it" he becomes defensive.

I quote from today's message, "I'd love to be unified with you but *you raise your hands and sing those songs*." That seems easy enough to "get over" compared to this: "I'd love to be unified with you but *you _____*." But some say, "That's different?" How so?

This is when it seems to get complicated. I am able to judge overt sins. Sins, not observed, are less of a nuisance. In the church, we rectify our position to categorize others based on their behavior with explanations that excuse our lack of supernatural power toward the enemy of their souls. We'd rather delegate it as their responsibility to "put on the robe of righteousness" than to admit that perhaps a "strongman" is holding their arms in such a way that they can't put on the robe. *God, please remove the barriers!*

It seems that Lee has been taken captive by the enemy and brainwashed. Others don't see it that way. It's easier to *not see* it that way. When we resign ourselves to the notion that he is there because he wants to be there, we can walk away and let him come out when he wants to. Sometimes we're arrogant. We tend to forget the message of grace and how God was "at work in us to will his pleasure" and we mistakenly think "we" did something right.

Great is your faithfulness.
(Lamentations 3:23 ESV)

Can two walk together, except they be agreed? *page 2*

When we truly recognize that the enemy is seeking whom he may steal, kill, and destroy we must be ready to rescue! We are called to “bear up” each one in the body. We have to steady the boat. Jesus’ wisdom still prevails: *While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

How do I, or how does the church, overcome the demons and take back the captives? Jesus gave us power over the demons yet it appears we are powerless. On a daily basis, more of our society is being ravaged by drugs, pornography, illicit sex, and confusion over gender - just to name a few. I believe the fight is against the “rulers in high places” according to Ephesians 6.

Last week we were reminded to *suit up*. Today we acknowledged that we need a “unified each-other.” I’m in the thick of spiritual ambushes at times. I want reinforcements now! As I’ve listened to others’ stories, I know I’m not the only one! Everyone is battling what appear to be more enemy attacks than ever.

How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? (Psalms 13:2 NIV)

*But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation
(Psalms 13:5 NIV)*



Lee, age 5



Lee, age 12 at Indian Hills Baptist Church



Lee, Ernest and Angela



Trey, Angela and Lee with the older 4 grandchildren.



We praise the Lord for Lee's
beautiful gift of music.



Lee and Samuel



Maternal Grandparents

Ernest and Evie Edwards

“Ernest, go to Kirby’s Store and get this baby some cereal.”

“What kind?”

Four eyes were on me so I answered, “Cocoa Krispies.” Following Grandma’s eyes as she looked toward the back door, just to the lower right corner next to the milk pail, I heard her add, “And milk, she isn’t used to warm milk.”

I think I was five and I don’t remember why I had the privilege of staying alone with my grandparents. I only have good, warm, fuzzy feelings about it. When Granddaddy returned he set Cocoa Puffs on the table and defended, “That’s all they had.” I looked at Grandma’s face and her expression assured me it was okay. And it was because Granddaddy had supplied cold, “store” milk.

I had enjoyed a good night’s sleep in the bedroom just off of the kitchen. That room also housed the narrow staircase that led to the upstairs bedrooms where my siblings and I usually slept. When it was cold, layers of home sewn quilts kept us warm while mom reminded us that hot bricks were added to her bedding when she was little.

I never tired of asking Granddaddy to “cypher.” We call it “mental math” now. Granddaddy could add and subtract lists of numbers lightning fast. He appreciated education, evidenced by the fact that school teachers of the one-room schoolhouse often boarded in the Edward’s home. Mother’s own sister, Boots, was her first school teacher in that school. Mother esteemed highly educated people and wanted her children to speak just *so*. She worked extra hard to get the “rs” out of our southern drawls, “Where is the ‘r’ in that word, W-A-S-H?”

Granddaddy had some habits Mother didn’t want us to pick up. He used his table knife to lift the creamed potatoes then dip it into the green peas to collect them. When I followed suit, I felt mama kicking me under the table. I looked up to see her lips tighten while she slightly shook her head “no.” We got the same discipline if we talked or giggled at the table. Children were seen--not heard!

It was a sad day in 1959 when Grandma Evie died. It wasn’t the colon cancer that killed her; it was the blood clot after the surgery. I was seven. Mother had just gotten home from the hospital when the phone rang. Tears streamed down Mother’s face as she said, “She’s gone.” She was so sad! I was too! Even now, I can’t write this without tears.

Precious in the sight of the LORD

Is the death of His saints.

(Psalm 116:115 NKJV)

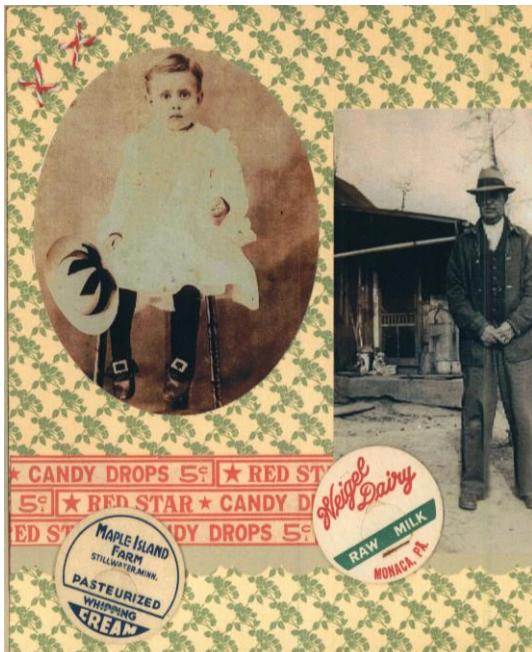
Maternal Grandparents page 2

Grandma Evie left us thoughts of love, laughter, and the day-old biscuit drawer. She came to know Jesus when she was about 30 years old. She was brave and courageous to have Preacher Cowan come to the house to pray over a polio-stricken child (my mom) because Granddad got the shotgun out after religious folks. She did hope Granddaddy wouldn't return from his errands too soon on the day the preacher came. Mother reported that not only was she healed from polio, but deafness. Mother was thought to be stubbornly listless at times but she corrected, "I couldn't hear well."

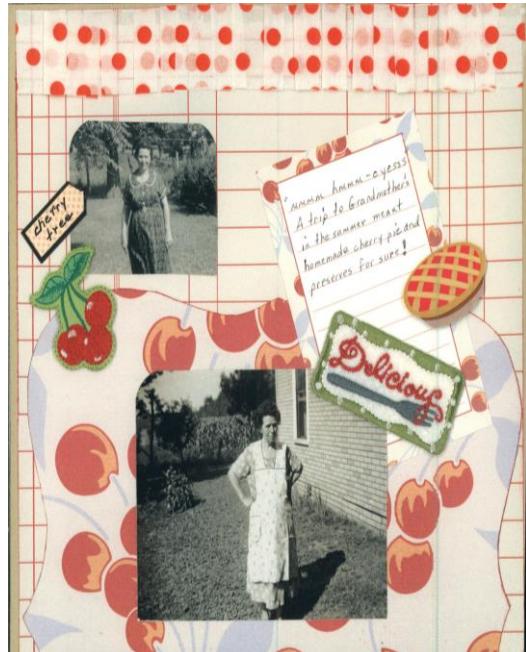
Feelings of gray clouds seemed to linger over the next few years when another woman came into Granddaddy's life. The woman was *much* younger than Granddaddy. Mother consoled herself with the "silver lining in that gray cloud:" Granddaddy wasn't in the best of health and at least Dean was there to look after him. Granddaddy died when I was fifteen.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

(2 Corinthians 1:3-4, ESV)



Granddaddy Ernest Lee Edwards



Grandma Evie Edwards

Paternal Grandparents *page 1*

Berkeley Clay and Gladys (Elizabeth) Ferrell, Sr.

Nana and Papa traveled from Richmond, Virginia to Nashville, TN to visit once each year. Mother always said people from Virginia talked funny, pronouncing words like “house” as “*hoose*.” So, “Nana” and “Papa” sounded like “Nanaw” and “Papaw” to me. The latter is what I called them. I especially liked seeing Papa. He didn’t say much but I felt love oozing out of him.. For some reason, it seemed I needed to stay out of Nana’s way.

I was about eight the last time they came. It was a school day and too excited to focus on school lessons. Tom Joy Elementary School was just about six houses from ours, so we kids walked to and from school. I rushed home from school to check the driveway for their car. There it was all black and shiny with a round-like backend.

Papa greeted me with a lovely smile. I think I would’ve been content just to sit next to him the whole time. *Nana*? I was undecided. I must have just started piano lessons because the grown-ups decided I got “music” from her. She played a few chords on the piano. I didn’t recognize a tune but no one else on either side of our families played piano so I guess I did get music from her. I only know I felt discouraged. If I got music from Nana and I couldn’t recognize her tune, then maybe my aspirations to be like those wonderful pianists at church were in vain.

There was little time to figure it out. It seems Nana and Papa arrived one day and left the next. I only remember looking out of the bedroom when I heard sets of footsteps in the adjoining hallway. Nana appeared to be on a mission. Papa followed close behind. They returned in minutes from their bedroom, but Nana had her suitcase in one hand and clutched her purse under her other arm. She looked straight ahead. Papa followed. Out the front door they went. They never visited again. That was the last time I saw Papa.

When I was older, Mother explained what happened. Not meaning to, Mother had hurt Nana’s feelings. She just had something she needed to work out with Nana but the confrontation didn’t go well. What a mess!

Thirty-plus years later I had a God given directive to go see Nana who was still living in Richmond, VA. Within a few days I discovered Mother had the same prodding of the Holy Spirit. Ernest agreed we should go so Mother called ahead. Nana said, “Do not come.” Mother and I knew it was better to “obey God rather than (wo)man.”

Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”
(Luke 11:28 NKJV)

Paternal Grandparents page 2

When we arrived at Nana's house, she greeted us with, "I told you not to come." She didn't invite us into the house, probably because she was embarrassed she didn't feel well enough to "keep house" anymore. We had a short, pleasant visit on her front porch. We didn't indulge details of the misunderstandings but amends were made. We spoke of Jesus and His love. She assured us she trusted Him. She and I agreed to have phone conversations, and we did over the next four years until her death in 1996.

A few of us traveled to Richmond for her funeral. It was then that I met some of my dad's cousins (dad was an only child). I saw some pictures of Nana when she was young. My sister Jan and I favored her very much. She was one of eight children and she outlived them all. One of the cousins repeated this story told through the years about Nana:

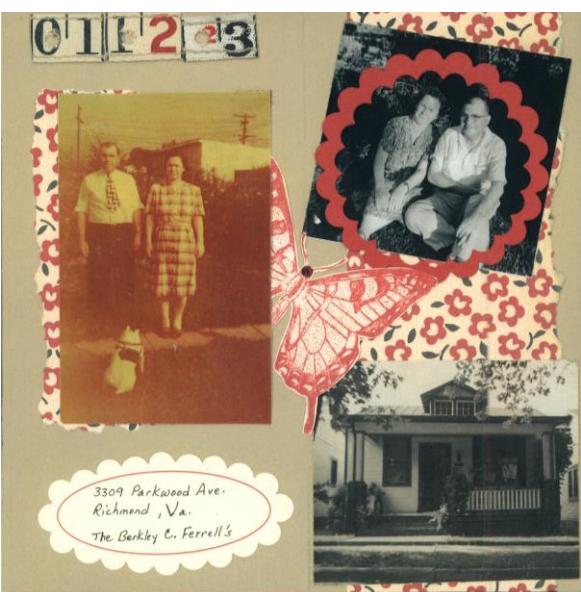
Gladys' mother, Lucy, required good manners from all of her children. When leaving from someone's home each child was to politely curtsy or bow and say, "Thank-you. I had a nice time." Upon one such outing, when it was Gladys' turn, she folded her arms, refusing to honor her mother's wishes. What then came out of her mouth was, "Didn't enjoy it and I'm not saying it."

No one offered if she suffered any consequence from that outburst or not. I only know that story disturbed me much the same way her playing piano had. *If I look like her and have her musical genes, what else might I have? And will I like it? Or will anyone like it?* I was so troubled with all these thoughts that later when my pastor asked how the trip went, I blurted the entirety of that out. He gently reminded me that "the accuser of the brethren, that lying devil" was up to his same old tricks again. He was right. I once again *fixed my thoughts on what was true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and admirable.*

After Nana died, all of us grandchildren unexpectedly received some money from her estate. The money I received paid for the completion of my music degree. That allowed me the privilege of not only teaching music in the public school system but often put me in a position to raise a banner for Jesus. My Christian principals fully supported opening musical programs with the pledge to the flag and prayer. Over the course of fifteen years as an elementary school music teacher I easily had 10,000 people either attending classes or musical productions. Who would've thought Nana's musical genes could provide seed for that potential harvest!

Thank you Lord, for Your Ways are higher than our ways!
(Isaiah 55:9, ESV)

Nana Ferrell



Papa Ferrell



Evie especially loved seeing Papa's smile.

Lee and Nana 1992



Evie, Tina (her mother) and Nana 1992



Ernest and Evie are NOW grandparents to these 8. (Angela is holding the baby.)



Grandparents page 1
Ernest and Evie Fentress

With the birth of Samuel Martin Hunter, I became a grandmother. I was only forty years old. I still had a seven year old at home. My little grandson lived only an hour away but it wasn't that kind of time that prevented my interacting with Samuel as a doting grandma. It was the "time of my life" when I was still parenting a young child who was struggling to make it through a school day, homework, and get to bed early to try again the next day. I tried to see Samuel on the weekends.

Toddler Samuel would excitedly wave and laugh when he saw me approach the door, or so I thought! Following his eyes, I realized his eyes went right past me onto Lee who was trailing behind. Samuel always loved Lee. When Samuel was born, Lee would sit and stare at him for long periods of time. I said, "Lee, you can talk to him. He's a real, little person." Later, I overheard Lee introducing himself to Samuel, "Hey, I'm your Uncle Lee, but you can call me Lee for short."

Three years later, not long after Josiah's birth, my little Hunter family moved to California to begin their missionary training. There went my "grandma opportunity." Twenty-three hundred miles separated us except for a couple of times we took a plane. It was one of those times that Lee and I went to take a turn with Samuel and Josiah while Trey and Angela were in the Ukraine. The plan worked like this: The other grandparents picked us up at the airport *that* night. They boarded a plane during the same night, leaving us to "do life" with the grands the next morning. In particular, I was concerned for 15 month old Josiah waking up to find me as *probably* a stranger. I knew Samuel would be okay; after all, Lee was with me. As I heard Josiah stirring the next morning my prayer was, "Please don't let him cry, don't let him cry, don't let him cry," all the way to his baby bed. Wide-eyed, he stared at me as I reminded him, "It's okay. I'm your grandma." He never cried.

*Our LORD, you bless those who live right,
and you shield them with your kindness.*

(Psalms 5:12, CEV)

Grandparents page 2

What a week! I was driving a vehicle I wasn't familiar with in a city I had never been in with 3 little boys. We didn't have access to GPS then. Angela had promised that four year old Samuel knew the way to MacDonald's from anywhere in that vicinity. I could easily locate their apartment from there if I got lost. I never thought I'd need that piece of information but I didn't know what awaited me at the check-out lane in the grocery store either. The cashier took my debit card, returned it to me and said, "It's not working." *How could that be? Ernest had taken all the correct steps to make sure I had money.*

Stepping out of line, with a full cart of groceries and my "trio," I tried not to panic as I called Ernest. He said, "Hang tight. I'm calling the bank." When he called back he said, "Go to any bank and they will work with our bank to straighten it out." I asked customer service where I could locate a bank, explained my situation, and asked if they'd safe-keep my cart so I wouldn't have to shop a second time. Everyone kindly assisted.

Glancing toward the exit all I could see were the *now new* rain-drops on the windows! So far, the only easy thing that took place in my less than 24 hours in San Francisco was "Josiah didn't cry." I had Josiah in his stroller and insisted Samuel hold my coat tail. I instructed Lee to stay right with me. We managed to get everyone buckled up in the car and put the stroller in place. I made it to the bank, only to work the process backwards to go inside. The marble-like floor in the lobby had large square patterns that worked to my advantage. I placed the boys inside a square, got their attention and demanded obedience, "Do not move and be quiet so I can get money for food." They understood. Praise the Lord! It all worked out. I made it back to the store, paid the bill, and loaded the groceries, boys, and stroller.

Do you remember playing "pin-the-tail" on the donkey? You blindfold the person, spin them around, and then expect them to pin the tail. That's what I felt like as I settled in behind the steering wheel. I wasn't quite sure where *home* was. "Samuel, where's MacDonald's?" He plastered a big grin on his proud face, stretched his little neck, looked around and pointed, "That way!" We made it home, bonded, and built memories.

The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.
(Proverbs 16:9 ESV)

Grandparents page 3

As a bonus, during the course of my stay, I gained a new appreciation for my daughter's determinedness. Doing routine chores was hard, especially the laundry. The apartment complex where they lived was built on terraced levels. Sidewalks with steps intermittently joined the levels to the top to the laundromat. Here's how the scene played out:

“Samuel, your job is pushing the stroller.”

“Lee, you carry this basket of clothes. I’ll carry this one.”

We walked about thirty feet to the first set of steps. “Lee, set the basket down and help me lift Josiah up the steps. (*Of course, he’s in the stroller.*) After ascending the three or four steps we repeated this process a couple of more times before arriving at our destination. Whew!

Grandbaby three, Kristiana, was born in California. We did have the pleasure of being with her a little while prior to their missionary move to Russia. She was about ten months old. The delight I had in her regularly reaching for me gradually turned into a comical realization when I discovered she only came to me because I could find Granddaddy. I remember saying to her, “I feel the same way about him!”

A few months into my public school teaching job in 2000, we received the news, “Another baby is on the way!” Angela and Trey would need some help with the other three children when this baby arrived. We knew the approximate due date in September and the location would be Germany. But knowing exactly when I should depart was a mystery. My principal was willing for me to take leave, but on which days?

There was only one logical answer; my mother would go. What a sweet, wonderful, and much needed offer from my 72 year old mom. It’s a good thing I didn’t go on the dates I had picked out, because Daniel was born on the day I would have been returning home.

The grandchildren and Angela were especially good about sending letters along with lots of original drawings. Although our cell phone capability was somewhat limited in 2000 compared to now, we were able to communicate with our “Russian” family. All-considering, we fared well as grandparents. The Lord reminded me of history: Bible times, Explorers, Pilgrims, The Westward Movement and such. When families moved away, often they were never heard from or seen again! I had much for which to be grateful.

*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.
(James 1:17 ESV)*

Grandparents page 4

In 2002, we were blessed to have Angela and the family nearby for their six-month furlough. Upon their arrival, Daniel was immediately thrust into my arms and onto my hip. *Again I prayed, “Don’t let him cry, don’t let him cry, don’t let him cry.* We were in what seemed a whirlwind of hugs, luggage, and the need for the restroom. Daniel appeared to be “all eyes” as he tried to keep his mom in sight but he never cried. He studied my face and listened. It is amazing that family resemblance settles the heart. *That will preach.* When others hear and see The Father in us, they too, will relax. Calmness will flood their hearts. We don’t have to “work” that up. Families grow together, look and sound like each other. People just *know* you’re family.

After five years in the missionary field, Trey and Angela called home and said, “We believe we’re supposed to return to the states.” We had just built a new house but we had not sold our “old” house so we took it off of the market. Now the Hunters lived within four miles of us! Another baby came the following year and ON my birthday! God spoke to my heart, “See, I haven’t forgotten you!” God didn’t forget the other grandmother either, because, like her, Elijah is *the* left-handed grandchild. What an amazing God we serve!

Two years later while Angela and I were taking a walk she confided, “I’m frustrated over people’s attitudes.” “Anything in particular?” I asked.

“Well, yes. So, you need to know we’re having another baby. People just question our having babies. Rhetorically she asked, “Which of my children would you want to be without?”

Smiling with understanding, I said, “Don’t worry about it. Maybe you’ll have another girl.” Teasingly, I added, “And you can name her after me.”

“Mom, I have thought if I had another girl I’d like to name her Evie. I like your name.”

“I like my name too but name her something *they* won’t mispronounce.”

Eva Faith was born in 2007. Here’s the “fun” part of the story Angela didn’t even know. Angela knew I was named after my grandmother but she didn’t know that Grandma was really named Eva! It was just misspelled and Grandmother chose to be called “Evie” with a “short e” when she started school. Our names came *full circle*. I love that!

*A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches,
Loving favor rather than silver and gold.
(Proverbs 22:1 NKJV)*

Grandparents page 5

The economy took a downward plunge in 2008 and Ernest announced, “We need to sell a house.” We even considered selling both houses. We looked for property that had two houses and almost signed a contract. On that day, with a contract in hand, a thought flooded my mind. Now, understand, I wasn’t even familiar with *any* of what came to my mind so I knew the Holy Spirit was placing it there. I gained courage and asked this question, “Are there any stipulations that come with this property?” The real estate agent said, “Yes, there are. I’ll get that to you.” She delivered a half-inch booklet of deed restrictions and community covenant regulations. There could be no room additions or shop built, etc. It was absolutely ridiculous and a no-brainer. We could not buy that property! Look how the Lord “covered our backs.” He did NOT let us make a mistake.

“Why can’t this new house *BE* the property for two families?” Ernest asked. He continued, “We have ten acres. The house is three levels. I could turn the downstairs into a two-bedroom apartment for us. Trey and Angela could have the two upper floors. Wouldn’t that work?” It did! For the next four and a half years we lived duplex style in what I’ve come to call 9388, the house number of that property.

It was on that property I watched our oldest grandson, Samuel, sprint up and down hills for hours at a time. It was there I saw Daniel proudly remove the dog’s (Danny Boy) newest, delivered prize to the door—the raccoon that braved the doghouse. Kristiana frequented our apartment and discovered her love for music in playing piano. It was there that four year old Eva broadcasted, “My mama doesn’t wear a dress like this because my mama doesn’t have a dress like this! And I’m done talking!” (I was delicately trying to teach modesty when her spaghetti-strapped dress kept falling.) You’ll need to ask Josiah about struggling to read chapter books now that his college degree is in English. Elijah’s gift of speaking and explaining dazzled us too. He was six when he slipped downstairs to visit. Granddaddy asked him about his friends. He told us all about one little girl whom he said he would marry someday. But we knew of another little girl he was “crazy” about too so when we asked, “What about _____?”

He answered, “Oh, she’ll live next door.”

Oh what fun we had! Then Trey took a job in Pennsylvania.

“The glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.”
(Isaiah 58:8, ESV)

Grandparents page 6

It was now two years later with one more grandbaby and one more “on the way” when we moved to Florida. We lived out of a RV for a short while so we planned to use it during a month-long visit in Pennsylvania. Three months after Joshua’s birth in April, 2015, God graced us with quality time with our family in Pennsylvania. It was there I saw the first hint of one of Ezra’s personality traits, a strength that will be valuable all of his life. He is a people-person!

This is what it looked like when he was two. His parents put him in the toddler bed, said goodnight, and closed the door. They regularly found him asleep by the crack between the door and the floor the next morning. He would lay there, more content to watch feet pass by than to feel alone in his bed. *Note: Take care to consider what gift may be driving a behavior. Not all behaviors need correcting. Some need understanding.* Ezra truly is charismatic. He flashes a smile and easily engages in conversations in welcoming ways. He is sensitive to other’s feelings (maybe except for his younger brother’s) and loves to pray.

Joshua is growing in favor with God and man too. The beautiful red hair on his cute, little, six-year old body draws positive reactions. Just last week, he received an especially reduced price for some knick-knacks at the thrift shop. Angela reminded him that Jesus surely blessed him. His response was, “They like my red hair and me.” He nodded affirmatively when she repeated, “You know, God blessed you, right?”

Spontaneous blessings occur often while we are once again living in a duplex style home with our Hunter family. I’ve had lots of loving nick-names come to mind through the years for my children and grandchildren. They are listed randomly so you can imagine to whom they were assigned: Sweet Pea, Lee Boy, G. Girl, Doodle Bug, Pumpkin, Gift Baby, Hip Baby, Name Sake, Lil Joe, Munchkins, Thing 1, Thing 2, Leemony and Snickelfritz.

And Lee?

No children. That story: *To Be Continued*

Daniel, Eva and Elijah



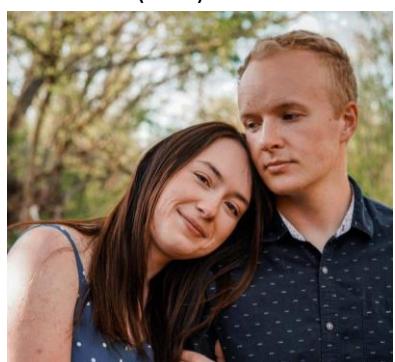
Tall to short: Elijah, Daniel, Eva, Ezra & Joshua



Daniel, Elijah, Samuel 12/21/2021



Alexa (wife) and Josiah



Samuel and Kristiana, 2019



Trey and Angela (Proud Parents)



Gone Wild!

This morning, 11/10/2021, I believe the Holy Spirit gave me two powerful words: how and who. Each word contains the same three letters! I believe the Lord wants us to rearrange our thinking in the same way as these letters. The “w” at the end needs to “go wild” and move to the front! Our “*How* is this ever going to turn out for good?” needs to change into “Look at *Who* is in charge!”

In the preface of this writing, I stated my purpose was to share the “*how*,” the “*what*” of life causes me to run into the arms of the Father through His precious Son, Jesus. In reviewing some of my life stories with you, I’ve “gone wild” remembering the “*Who*” of the “*how*.”

Who is He? He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. He holds everything together and without Him there is nothing. He is the light that shines out of darkness. He exchanges beauty for ashes. He restores my soul and He wants all things restored to Himself. He will get what He wants. It is His desire that each person comes to Him and He says He will reconcile all things! He is “wild” about us and He wants us to lavish our love and praise on Him too.

God is faithful. He is full of mercy and grace. He is just. He is forgiving. As Creator, he never runs out of ideas and knows how to bring each person to himself. Focus on *Who* He Is! “Magnify the Lord!” The magnification process does **not** change what is observed. It only changes how we see! How big is God?” Can we fathom *Who* He really is? We preach that He loves unconditionally. Do we believe it? We correctly proclaim, “For by grace **you have been saved** through faith. **And this is not your own doing;** it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9, ESV).

He's still God and He will not fail you

He's still God, He has not changed

I know He's still God and He's fighting for you

Just like Daniel, just like Moses

Just like Shadrach and Meshach, Abednego

He'll do it again, He'll do it again

Yes He will, just take a look

At where you are now, And where you've been

Hasn't He always come through for you?

He's the same now as then (Don't you know God has not changed)

You may not know how, you may not know when

But He'll do it again.

That's WHO HE IS!!

It's Josiah, but looks like Ezra.



Samuel, Jack, Jan, Tina and Kay



Recording.



Fentress Gathering



Ernest, Evie, Lee, Kenneth and Sherrian



Elijah, Angela, Joshua, Eva and Ezra



Trey and Angela

50th Wedding Anniversary