

September's hymn of the month

By

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I remember, as a 10 year old, singing this song in the Grafton Baptist Church, Grafton, New York. Pastor William O'Dell was the pastor; Marjorie Myers was the organist; and I was an attendee taking part in the service. Little did I know, at the time, that many years later I'd be writing this story about this great hymn. My how God works in strange ways.

James Rowe came to America in 1890. He was originally from Horrbridge in Devonshire, England, where he was born on January 1, 1865. At the age of 29, he started working for the Irish government, then four years later would leave for the United States. He settled in Albany, NY and married Blanche Clapper. He stayed in Albany for 10 years working on the NY railroad and for the Hudson River Humane Society. It is here that our story makes an interesting turn.

For some reason, James, his wife Blanche and three year old daughter Louise headed south and eventually settled in Lawrence, Tennessee. It would be there that he linked up with James David Vaughan, the father of Southern Gospel music, and started a career of writing songs. Before it was all said and done James Rowe would write for the great publishers of that time—music companies like the Trio Music Company of Waco, Texas; the A. J. Showalter Music Company of Chattanooga, Tennessee; the Rodeheaver Music Company of Winona Lake, Indiana; and of course, James D. Vaughan Music of Tennessee. By James Rowe's own record, he said that he produced more than 19,000 hymns. Fanny Crosby is credited with at least 8,000 hymns. By the way, if A. J. Showalter sounds familiar, he should be. A. J., with Elisha Hoffman, would give us the song, *Leaning on the Everlasting Arms*. (Check out my "A 1,000 Words" page to see just five of Rowe's songs.)

In 1913, James Rowe, with James Denton, would give us the song, *Wonderful Jesus*. With Bentley DeForest Ackley, the world started singing, *I Would Be like Jesus* and *I Walk with the King*. B. D. Ackley worked with the great evangelist, Billy Sunday, serving as secretary and Billy's first piano player. Homer Rodeheaver, who ministered with Sunday as song leader for 20 years, had this to say about James Rowe: "He began writing songs and hymns about 20 years ago—his first song being *Speak It for the Savior* which is still very often heard. The title of "The Bard of Albany" was bestowed upon him recently." The song, *If I Could Hear My Mother Pray Again*, is as popular today as it was in 1922 when Rowe and Vaughan created this great piece. This now leads us to the September Hymn of the Month.

The year was 1912, and I'm sure the sinking of the Titanic was on James Rowe's mind. The loss of more than 1,500 lives was staggering. Drawing from the familiar story of Peter walking on the water (Matthew 14:30-31) and with this tragedy in mind, James would write a hymn with his friend, Howard E. Smith of Saugatuck, Connecticut. Of all the songs James Rowe would write, this one, by my estimation, has remained the most popular. James Rowe would eventually end up living with his daughter, Louise Mayhew, in Wells, Vermont. From at least 1929 until his death on November 10, 1933, James lived and interacted with the people of Wells by leading a musical group called the Wells Warblers and taking part in town plays at the Little Theater in Wells. Together with his artist daughter, Louise, he would write verses for the American Greeting Card Company right up to the end.

Now, many, many years removed from my hometown church, I can still see in my mind's eye Pastor O'Dell up front, Marjorie Myers at the organ, and the wonderful words reaching my heart. The beautiful tune pierced my soul and called me to surrender my life to Jesus Christ. I did just that because I was sinking deep in sin and the Master of the sea heard my despairing cry and from the waters lifted me. Now, safe am I because "Love Lifted Me. How about you? Read the words, sing the music, and allow the spirit to call you into the Kingdom of God. Then, someday, you too can personally thank James Rowe for giving us the hymn of the month, *Love Lifted Me*.

I just recently visited the grave of James and Blanche; and to my surprise, there isn't a grave stone. How sad that the writer of 19,000 songs couldn't afford a memorial for his wife and himself. The caretaker at St. John's Lutheran Cemetery in Colonie, NY, said he would love to help in seeing that the Rowes are properly remembered. I contacted Sonny of Taylor Publication in Montgomery, Texas; and he too expressed great interest in securing a stone for the Rowes. I've never tried to do something like this before, but I am now. If you have any suggestions and would like to help, let me know. The anniversary of James' home going is coming up soon on November 10. What a testimony it would be to honor one of God's great servants. Please pray.

A big thank you goes to Nora, the town clerk in Wells and to Joe of Earth and Time Studio and Gallery of Wells for their help on our research of James Rowe's years in Wells, Vt.

I was sinking deep in sin, Far from the peaceful shore, Very deeply
Stained within, Sinking to rise no more; But the Master of the sea
Heard my despairing cry, From the waters lifted me, Now safe am I.

All my heart to Him I give, Ever to Him I'll cling, in His blessed
Presence live, Ever His praises sing. Love so mighty and so true
Merits my soul's best songs; Faithful, loving service, too, To Him belongs.

Souls in danger, look above, Jesus completely saves; He will lift you
By His love Out of the angry waves. He's the Master of the sea,
Billows His will obey; He your Savior wants to be--Be saved today.

Chorus:

Love lifted me! Love lifted me! When nothing
Else could help, Love lifted me.

The hymn of the month for September: **Love Lifted Me**

