

*An Ordinary Life in  
Extraordinary times*  
A Memoir by Richard  
Carl Ennis

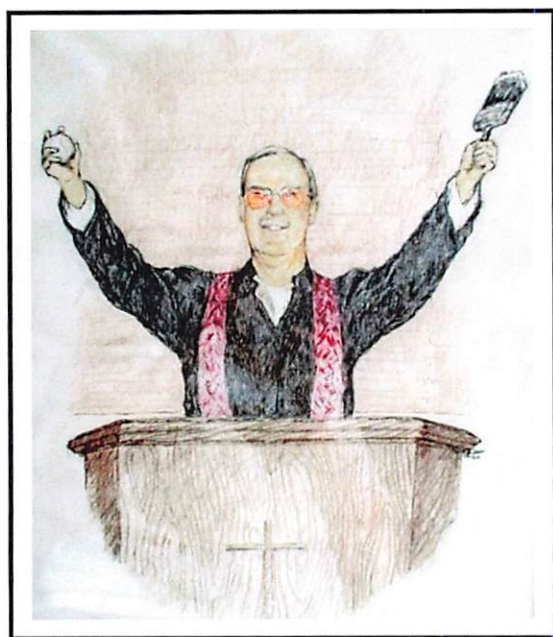


*R. Carl Ennis*

# An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

A Memoir By Richard Carl Ennis

## About The Cover



The cover artwork was commissioned by the United Methodist Cokesbury Church's Youth for the retirement of Pastor Carl in 1999.

The baseball, pulpit, and paintbrush represented their perceptions of fellowship, worship, and service--the emphases of his ministry and leadership

Copyright © 2018 Richard Carl Ennis

All rights reserved.

ISBN-10: 1724734210

ISBN-13: 978-1724734211

# DEDICATION

Dedicated to my Grandchildren  
(In order of their birth)

Ethan	December 4	1994
Jazmin	May 17	1995
Malachi	October 17	1995
Anthony	June 12	1997
Josiah	June 20	1997
Junior	April 25	1998
Patton	January 12	1999
Jesse	December 15	1999
Chiara	January 13	2002
Kelli	December 19	2002
Mirianna	April 3	2004
Lily	October 3	2006
Kephus	May 4	2008
Caelum	April 4	2010
John Paul	January 26	2012
Judah	June 19	2015
Janoah	January 23	2018



**A COMMEMORATIVE DEDICATION**

For

Malachi Daniel Freedom Ennis

The eldest son of Robert & Kimberly Ennis, and my second  
grandson,

Who died on April 22, 2018 at age 22, following an  
epileptic seizure.

His beautiful life remains in our hearts

And minds.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Mini Genealogy	i
A History of Dumfries	v
Introduction	vii
1 The Innocence of Childhood	1
2 Lookout, Here Come The Teen Years	9
3 Breaking Out	16
4 "...Go Together Like a Horse and Carriage	23
5 On the Move Again	29
6 The "Institute Years"	39
7 Return of the Prodigal	56
8 Life Throws a Curve	65
9 The Second Storm of 2005	70
10 Starting Over (Phase Four)	79
11 And Papa Makes Three	90
12 A Taste of Montana	94
13 Major Transitions	96
14 The Whirlwind Year	108
Epilogue	138
Acknowledgements	141

## A MINI GENEALOGY

Mother: Dorothy Elizabeth (Orrock) Ennis, Born July 30, 1904 - Died March 16, 1986

Father: Robert Claude Ennis, Born May 30, 1890 - Died November 7, 1978



**1975 - Mom and Dad's  
50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary**

My family is Scottish/Irish where there are many variations of the name Ennis. People immigrating to America were listed in immigration records when they arrived. Sometimes people coming to the new land could not read or write, and when telling someone their name it was written incorrectly. Various accents were difficult to understand. Also, because of bad handwriting by some, it was difficult to determine the correct spelling. It is possible that a person who arrived with the name of Innis, was then listed as Ennis or other variations. My father's family has been traced to my great-great-great grandfather, Richard N. Ennis, who was born in Virginia in 1799.

My paternal grandfather, Richard Philip Ennis was born in 1853 and died in 1928. His wife, Mary Catherine was born in 1858 and died in 1895. They are both buried in a small cemetery at the corner of Minnieville Road and Cardinal Drive in Prince William County, Virginia. My father was therefore only five years of age when his mother died. Only one child was younger than he. Including Dad (Claude), there were seven children, and to manage, Dad's father brought in a woman to care for the household. It was a scandal to the neighborhood, but he never married this woman. My sister, Jean, said the woman was stone deaf, and very disagreeable. Maybe any woman would be, with the burden of another woman's children and knowing you inherit nothing should the man die. Claude, it seems, was shuttled back and forth between the home in Baltimore, Maryland, and his grandparents' home on Cardinal Drive in Prince William County. The grandparents' home was part of a one hundred seventy five acre farm which during the Civil War was raided by both rebel and Union armies (see Southern Claims Commission Report of 1877, source- Ancestry.Com). My great grandfather, Richard A. Ennis, lost much

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

property to confiscation by those armies. According to the testimony at the claims hearings Richard A. Ennis was an uneducated, illiterate man, but a hard-working farmer. He was badgered by Confederate militias to join the Southern cause, but he said that "those who have slaves should do the fighting for the (right to hold) slaves." My grandfather, Richard Philip Ennis lived and worked on his fathers' farm as a youth. After my mother and dad were married on December 30, 1925 they lived there for a couple years while the house in Dumfries was being built.

My mother's father, my maternal grandfather, William Chalmers Orrock, was born in 1872 and died in 1922, so both of my grandfathers died before my birth. I haven't their wedding date, but he married Martha Hulda Pendleton who was born in 1879 and died 1965. Martha (Mattie) was the only grandparent I knew. William owned a dairy farm in Spotsylvania County, Virginia in partnership with his brother. After William died the farm went to his brother John, and there is some confusion in the family as to what should have been Mattie's share. I should go look up old court records. When her father died my mother, Dorothy, was 18 years old and one of the oldest of nine children. She therefore took over most of the child care while her mother did farm work.

The Orrocks trace their ancestry back to Scotland where Robert Orrock married Margaret Morgan in Dunfermlin, Scotland. They had a daughter, Eliza, before sailing for Virginia where Kate and James were born. James Orrock married Sarah Ann Waller. They had seven children including my grandfather William.

The Pendletons came from England. A document entitled "Pendleton Family of Virginia" begins: "Three miles from Manchester, in Lancashire County, England, is the town of Pendleton, known as a



portion of Salfordborough. Over the door of one of the inns swings the arms of the Pendleton family, exactly like those brought to America by Philip Pendleton.” This document was last seen in the possession of my sister, Jean Smith. The lines of descendency are uncertain, but it seems that Philip Pendleton (1654-1721), a son of a Henry Pendleton, Jr. (1614-1682), came to America in 1674. “Upon his arrival in Virginia, Philip was apprenticed to Edmund Craske, Clerk of Rappahannock County, and in 1678 became deputy clerk of the county.” He died in 1721, the same year that his illustrious son Edmund was born. Edmund became a very influential attorney and patriot during colonial days in Williamsburg, Virginia. His portrait may be found at the old Episcopal church in Williamsburg. It used to hang in the courthouse, but all period portraits were removed a few years ago when there was a movement to make everything there look as it would have in colonial times. The lines from Edmund to my grandmother, Martha Hulda Pendleton (Orrock) are alas very fuzzy, but there she is, a Pendleton.

## HISTORY OF DUMFRIES, VIRGINIA

The following summary was taken from "This Was Prince William" by R. Jackson Ratcliffe, printed by Potomac Press Leesburg, Virginia.

*Of course the Doeg Indians ("Indians" was Columbus' term) were the first known residents of what we now know as Prince William County. According to written records John Smith and his followers were the first white people to see this area when he explored the Potomac River in 1608. There may have been others before him.*

*The town of Dumfries was laid out in a survey done in 1761. Blocks 247.5 ft. by 352.00 ft. were created, each containing 2 acres. Dumfries was chartered on May 11, 1749, but by then the town was well established and prosperous. John Graham was one of the earliest settlers. The town was named after his old home in Scotland. Dumfries was a port town until the Quantico Creek silted in- partly from slash-and-burn*

*clearing and ill-advised farming practices-  
and the barges could no longer reach the  
wharves. The decline of the town began  
about the time of the American Revolution.  
Still Dumfries is Virginia's oldest  
continuously occupied town.*

I refer readers to Jackson Ratcliffe's book for lots more on the history of the area.

My dad bought a lot in Dumfries amounting to two acres at the corner of what is now Route 1 and Curtis Drive, to build the family home. The two story house was built by a carpenter, a Mr. Wood, out of oak timbers from a local mill. Must have killed a couple bulldozers trying to take down that house after the property sold in 1975. Dad also bought a lot directly across Route 1 for a small shop. However that building burned in about 1931 and after which the lot produced only cedar trees, which we cut for Christmas trees until we sold the property sometime in the 1960s. There exists a Dunkin Donut place there now. There is now a Pizza Hut where our garden was located and a little ice cream shop and parking where the house stood. Prince William Estates was built on former farmland where the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) had developed a baseball field in the mid-1930s and where we played many a pick-up game. The forests to the southwest of our home have long since given way to a development called Knolls of Dumfries. Progress.

After the burning of the shop in Dumfries, Dad took over a former grocery store building in Triangle, a small stone structure that the hardware business quickly outgrew. In 1939 a new, larger building was built just behind, and the old one torn down to provide at least minimal parking in front.

## INTRODUCTION

My all-time favorite movie is “The Milagro Beanfield War.” A review on the cover reads a “...delightful comedy of everyday people caught up in extraordinary circumstances.” My life span has occurred during extraordinary times. The Great Depression, during the first ten years of my life began with the stock market collapse in 1929. A 14 billion dollar loss on “Black Tuesday” and an entire country suffering the loss of homes, savings, and jobs resulted. This crisis was followed by the Second World War during which over 60 million people worldwide were killed. The 1950s and 1960s saw deep divides and pains during the Civil Rights and Vietnam War struggles. A technological revolution continues and may never end. We’ve gone from wall and desk phones to pocket phones. From clattery typewriters to computers which now run just about everything. I remember my Dad complaining when automatic transmissions and air conditioners were first developed for automobiles. He said: “Just something else to go wrong.” Change and crises have seemed to grow exponentially all during my lifetime.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE INNOCENCE OF CHILDHOOD



**Roy, age 7; Carl, age 2; Jean, age 5**  
**Notice Carl appears to be wearing a dress!!**



I came into the world, so I'm told, early on March 5, 1932, in Dumfries, Virginia. A snowstorm blew in right after the birth (an omen?) and the temperature dropped quickly: I cried so hard my grandmother took pity and gathered me, the shivering infant, into bed with her. I was to learn later that her name was "Mattie", or at least that's what the adults all called her. She always came to stay with us when big events brewed, or even if there wasn't anything special. She lived, mostly, with her youngest daughter, Joyce (my favorite aunt, by the way) and Joyce's husband, Bill, but when the mood struck she'd hop on a Greyhound bus for the ride from Fredericksburg to Triangle, Virginia. She'd come striding into our hardware store with her carpet bag in hand and we knew we were in for a treat. Mother's mother had a good sense of humor and was full of stories about the "old days" on the farm in Spotsylvania. I learned that after Grandmother's children were grown and gone she had chosen to live mostly with Joyce because her house was across the street from a nursing home and Mattie could go over and help out the "old folks." She'd read to them, take flowers, even give baths. There, she was useful. Mentioning my Aunt Joyce, she was a real cut-up. I never "forgave" her for coming to see me in the hospital-I was about fifteen- and telling me jokes right after my appendix operation. I still remember how the laughing hurt.

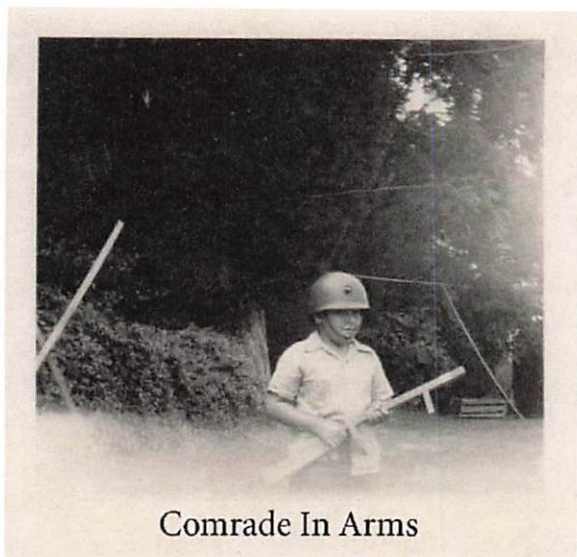
I don't remember this, thank God, but when I was about three I fell into a tub of hot water when my mother, Dorothy, was doing the laundry one day. In those days it involved heating water on the kitchen gas range, the hotter the better, to rinse (even boil) the clothes to kill all germs. She had just filled a large galvanized tub with the hot water when I came running in with a book begging to be read to. Apparently I slipped and fell backward into the tub. Mother's life

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

suddenly took a turn for the worse. Obviously I survived since I'm writing this, but survival was an uncertain outcome for several weeks. My older brother, Roy said he remembered the skin peeling off my back. As I write this, some 72 years later, the scalding scars are still visible. From then on I was a scrawny little boy susceptible to everything. A vivid image still shines in my memory: I'm in bed in a darkened room with Measles, Mumps, and Scarlet Fever, and into the room comes mother with six candles burning on my birthday cake. Seventy years later (March 5, 2008), and it looks like yesterday! In my mind's eye.

Those early memories are like little snapshots: Playing with cars and trucks in the dirt outside our back door building roads, bridges etc.; using an axe to split firewood; lying on a hillside on my back looking only at the passing clouds until I felt I might fall off the earth, climbing trees and putting on acrobatic shows for the neighborhood mothers. My favorite climbing tree was a huge maple with lots of sturdy limbs for swinging, leaping, hanging upside down, etc. Don't remember doing much more tree climbing after I fell and broke the right arm.

By then, Pearl Harbor had shocked the nation and we were going to war in Germany, so our gang--me, as well as my brother Gary, Jackie Cato, the two Andrews brothers whose father was a Marine officer, had formed a local militia to protect Dumfries from spies and other unknown invaders.



We were armed with BB guns, and homemade wooden rifles with old leather belts for straps (see picture above). Being close to Quantico Marine Base it was easy to come by those authentic plastic liners that fitted inside the steel helmets the marines used, and it was really cool to hear the "red" teams BBs ding off the helmet as you hid behind a stump during maneuvers. We made obstacle courses in the woods for training. We did marches and maneuvers. Best of all, we had our own base and lookout tower in the loft of Dad's garage. Since our place was at the top of a long slope up from the Quantico Creek we could watch for invaders and keep Dumfries safe all during the war. Also, during the War everything was rationed. I remember going to the grocery store with mother and watching her count out ration coupons to determine what she could buy. Often there wasn't much available, especially meats. We were lucky to have our own chickens. The butter substitute was a white substance that looked like lard. A little packet of orange

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

stuff came with it which had to be mixed in so that the result at least looked rather like butter.

As I've indicated, our house sat at the top of a long slope on Route 1. The only highway between New York and Miami at that time, the nation's first "interstate" highway. The house sat not more than 30 feet from the road with a screened porch across the front. It was the gathering place in warm weather. Adults would be chatting away, yet the big trucks had to shift gears right in front of our house with quite a roar. It always interested me how the conversation stopped when that happened, just as if you had hit the pause button on your DVD. When the truck was gone the conversation would pick right up. Whoever was talking completed their sentence and the talk went on. Also, in snowstorms cars foundered in front of our house and Dad, my older brother, Roy, and myself would spend hours pushing vehicles up the grade.

Out behind the house was a long 4-car garage with storage space and a chicken coop on the end. Before my time, Dad had owned a dump truck or two, thus the oversized garage. Anyway, most of it was "storage" space, and one day Mom had me out in the garage clearing out trash. I looked up to see a copperhead snake on a shelf just above Mother's head. I yelled and as Mom and I eased out of the garage, Dad came running with our 410 shotgun, propped it across the top of our old 33 Ford sedan his sister had sold him, and fired away. Of course, this old car had a partially cloth top and the shot ripped a neat gash about two feet long right across the top. However, he got the snake also- most expensive snake we ever killed. We stretched him (the snake) out on the ground and as Dad propped open its mouth I reached to see how sharp were the fangs. I never heard my mother scream so loud! I never found out just how sharp they were! Another thing that made my mother scream was to hear

foul language coming from the innocent mouths of her own children. Children do learn fast from the adults they encounter. Mother knew the sure cure: octagon soap. A good mouth-washing with that stuff made you forget any bad word you'd ever heard.

I mentioned the chicken coop. Good news and bad. First the bad. It was my job to clean the "henhouse," we called it. Scraping the dried chicken poop from under the roost and spreading it in the garden produced clouds of dung dust. It's a wonder I don't have lung cancer by now. At least for a while we had a really mean little rooster. I remember one day he chased me into the garden. I ran to Dad and he kicked that old rooster so hard he went "flying" through the air. Of course, then Dad chastened me for being afraid of a little old rooster, but I never felt better about having a father.

I never liked helping mother kill the hen for Sunday dinner. I'd hold the legs and wings while Mother stretched out the head across a chopping block and whacked the neck with a hatchet. If I didn't let go fast enough blood would be splattered all over me. The good news, however, was the best fried chicken in the world and, of course, we always had the freshest eggs. To collect those eggs you had to reach in under a setting hen that had other ideas about you taking the eggs she was trying hard to keep warm. So for a little boy it was a scary proposition. For every egg collected there seemed to be two or three "peck wounds" on my hands and arms. I was lucky if I could get to nests as the hens were on coffee break, or on some other errand in the hens' yard outside the coop.

Dad and the garden. Everyone said our Dad had the best-looking garden in town- must have been all that chicken poop. The government urged people to plant Victory Gardens during the War. Dad's was a little over the top. It was almost an acre of potatoes,



## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

corn, beans, tomatoes, and what all. I used to sneak the salt shaker from the kitchen, sit down in the tomato rows and eat the best tomatoes you ever tasted right off the vine. There was a small cellar under part of our house where mother stored canned beans, tomatoes, and fruit. It was fun to help Mother with the canning—she seemed to be extra careful to keep me away from the boiling water, however. Remembering when I was three, I guess. The produce was scalded, but not cooked till done and the jars were dipped in boiling water. Then, the jars were filled while still hot and closed so that as they cooled, a seal would be formed. These were stored on wooden shelves in the cellar. It always amazed me how food from the cellar, just a ten-foot square hole in the ground under the kitchen, always tasted like it had just come from the garden! There was also a bin for storing potatoes. As spring came the potatoes we had not eaten during the winter were rank with rot. Guess whose job it was to clean them out and prepare for the next years' crop? You guessed it.

Another unpleasant task was collecting and husking the black walnuts that fell from the large tree in our back yard. The stain from the husks could not be washed off and seemed to last forever. After a husking, kids at school would tease us: "Eweu, you got green hands!" After the nuts dried we stored them on the back porch in a cardboard box. When mother needed some for cooking we'd get out the hammer, bust them on the cement back steps, and pick out the meats. It was work, but the result was delicious.

Our house was next to a hardwood forest with many hills and valleys. In the fall the leaves fell thick on the hillsides. We would gather large pieces of cardboard from the boxes that refrigerators and other large appliances came in and have a blast sliding down the steepest hills on them. In the winter the hills

became sled-runs. Dodging trees and other obstacles made it more like a slalom. One day I was lying flat on top of Sam Bauckman, an older boy, zipping down a snow-covered forest hill on a sled when just in time I saw an old strand of barbed wire between two trees. It was about to catch me across the face. I rolled off into the snow and counted myself lucky to have seen it. Sam passed safely under the wire. We never told Mom.

However childhood, like all good things, had to come to an end. It is marked in my memory by a most embarrassing event. I had been elected President of the elementary student body in grade seven at the Dumfries Elementary School. I was so nervous and afraid of getting up on stage and leading my first student gathering that I hid away sobbing in the boys bathroom. A teacher had to come coax me out. I think she finally convinced me I would at least survive if I tried to fulfill the duties of president.

## CHAPTER 2

### LOOKOUT, HERE COME THE TEEN YEARS

Moving to high school, starting grade eight, meant a ten-mile bus ride to Occoquan. The first years at Occoquan High seemed uneventful until Herb Saunders came as principal in 1946/47. He started football, and high school took on a whole new aura.



**Carl's High School Football Patch**

Us guys who played had a mission, and an identity! I weighed in as the lightest at 121 pounds, but as it turned out, just about the fastest. That first year we lost every game until the last, which fired us up for the second year in which we won all but one. At the end of that season, five of us decided we needed more “experience” so we made sure we lacked a credit or so to graduate so we could come back and play as “fifth year seniors.” It’s probably not legal now, but then everything was; even cross-body blocking, a specialty of mine. I’d throw my whole body across two guys running interference, hit them just below the knees and sometimes flatten them both. I played left end offense and defense, so the right side of my chest took quite a beating in every game. We played an offense called the “T formation”, but many teams played the “single-wing.” In that offense, the sweeps around my side were brutal, never more so than in the very first game we played, which was with James Monroe High School in Fredericksburg. They were a larger school. Their team was stocked with older boys (men?) who were veterans of WWII and had returned to finish high school. Remember, this was 1947. The coach said “Carl, just take out one or two guys running their interference.” I think we lost that game 45 to 0. Our second game was on a field in Marshall, Virginia that doubled as a cow pasture. Dodging “patties” was just part of the game. It was the last game my mother ever attended. You see, my head was smaller than the average guy and the team had no regulation helmet to fit me. My friend Jackie Cato had received a helmet for Christmas, however, which did fit, so that’s what I wore. In the very first quarter, the knee of one of those farm boy linemen caved in the helmet and knocked me cold. I remember waking up at halftime when the coach was lecturing us down at the end of the field. They said I walked down with them, but I never remembered it. After that I

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

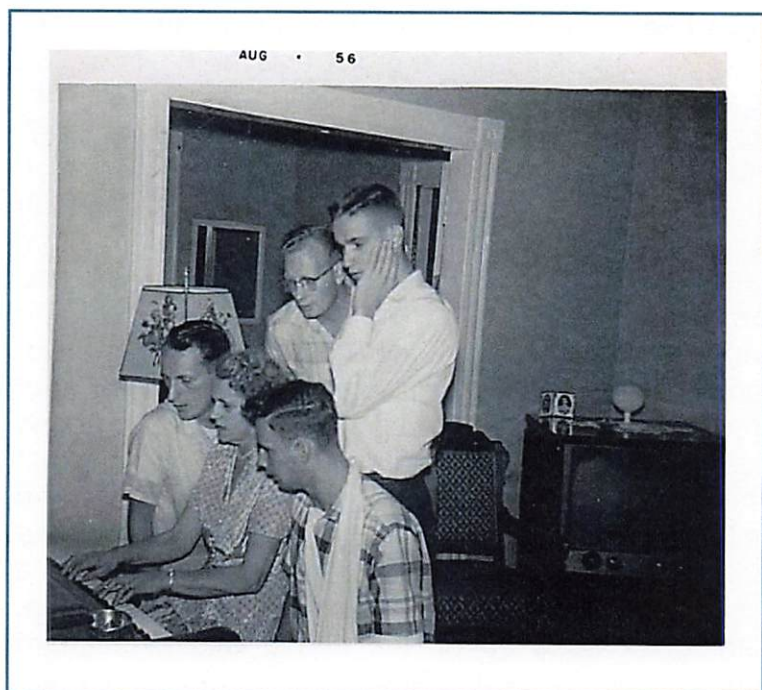
stuffed newspaper in the smallest regulation helmet I could find.

Of course, there was more to high school than football. I was also discovering that girls were different! and why the French are always saying "vive la difference." An embarrassing moment came when I took Frances Sanford to a prom, and her gown picked up a pretty bad grease job from the car door of our '33 Ford, Ouch! I saw her at a reunion in summer of 2007, mentioned that event, and she didn't remember it. Imagine that! In what I think was my last year of high school, I met a cheerleader from Herndon High, Barbara Ritter. We dated a few times. On one occasion we went with my brother Roy, his wife Barbara, my sister Jean and her husband Pete to a lake park for swimming and picnicking. After lunch, Barbara (my date), who was an excellent swimmer, dove in and started across the lake. I was not a good swimmer, but what red-blooded boy would admit it in a situation like that? Well, halfway across I got a bad cramp in one foot, and went down. Images of my parents and a scene or two from my earlier life passed by and then, nothing. I woke up on the beach with a lifeguard pounding on my back. Nevertheless, our teen years were sooo easy. Just think; no drugs, no guns except for hunting, no internet-lurking dangers, no text messaging while driving- I'm surprised kids today even survive adolescence.

Speaking of hunting, when I was in high school, Dad gave me a shotgun. I remember killing a few squirrels that Mom cooked up. At least once or twice my good friend Harold Phythian and I went duck hunting on Occoquan Creek. We rowed out to a little island, and sat waiting for the ducks to come up the creek. When a flock would approach they obviously could see us and would fly higher and right over us. We'd blast away but I don't think our shot ever came



near any of them. We could hear their quacking laugh. Another favorite pastime was singing around the piano whenever we could break Mother free from her constant busy-ness.



**Front row: Roy, Mother and Carl**  
**Back row: Pete (Jean's Husband) and Gary**

She played for church as well as at home whenever Dad wasn't watching TV. In the accompanying picture notice the TV in the corner. I've seen those old TV cabinets re-purposed into useful pieces of furniture in more recent times.

Our family's adolescents had the advantage of built-in after-school and summer jobs at Triangle Hardware. Dad had started this business in about

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

1939, and the entire family worked there. It seems that as soon as we could reach the cash register we were waiting on customers. Dad taught me how to make change--this was pre-credit card times. I learned to count up from the sale price to the size of the bill(s) I was given. So if a hammer cost \$14.95, and a customer gave me a twenty dollar bill, I'd count five cents and a five dollar bill as change, or, if items purchased amounted to \$23.63, and the customer gave me two twenties, I'd count up: two pennies, one dime, one quarter, one one dollar bill, a five, and a ten dollar bill--got it? Of course some regular customers had charge accounts with us. Today, many people including myself shop with just a little plastic credit card, and rarely carry cash. The clerk simply swipes the items to purchase through a scanner, then presses a button and the total appears. The most work they do is bagging the purchases, while I swipe my card through another gadget and, "voila", out comes a receipt to sign. On the other hand, in my clerking days, when a customer wanted to charge purchases, I got out the little ticket book and wrote the name of the customer, then wrote out each item being purchased, totaling it on a big old adding machine by pulling the little crank. Then after the customer signed the ticket, I'd tear it out of the book, give the customer the carbon copy, wring up the purchase on the cash register, and place the original in the drawer. My mother sent monthly statements to people with those charge accounts.

I always felt a bit insulted if someone only wanted to speak to Dad to solve their problem or find what they needed. Mother kept the books, swept the floors, corralled the children, waited on customers, and did just whatever was needed.

Dad was really an amazing man. His mother, Mary, had died when he was five years old leaving his

dad with seven children to raise. Because of family disruptions he got only as far as the fourth grade in school. As a young teen he went to Baltimore, lied about his age and worked at the shipyard to help support his family. He at one time, had been a barber and still had the leather razor strop used to sharpen the straight edge razors. I can only remember his using it on us for spankings, which only happened a few times. Nothing stung like that strop. Dad had what he called "horse sense," and told us that was more important than book learning. He also had a deep inferiority complex and uneasiness in social situations. He was quite critical of his own family, especially Roy. Many a meal was a time for Dad to vent. When we complained about his complaining, he'd sometimes break down saying we were all against him. He was a very emotional person. More than once I'd see him get a bit teary-eyed when someone complimented one of his family.

Anyway, as I was saying, a while back, Dad started that hardware store, and it was very successful. That store was jam-packed, and finding things was always an issue, as was getting through the aisles. But people were always amazed at how we carried "just about anything you'd ever need." I remember customers telling one another: "and if they don't have it, they'll get it." Dad made weekly trips to the wholesale places in Washington and Alexandria, and came back with the pickup loaded down with goods.

Many mornings I'd ride to Triangle to help Dad open up the store, then catch the school bus from there. Of course, every day after school or after football or baseball practice I'd go back to help till closing time. For a large business with rotating staffs long operating hours are the rule, but for our little family business it was tough to be open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. six days a week. We kids won a major victory when we convinced Dad

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

to close at six on Saturdays so we could go on dates or play ball. Dad loved baseball, and had played on a sandlot team at one time. Of course we were closed on Sundays. I think blue laws in the south were still in effect. Mother and us kids all went to church at the Dumfries Methodist Church, but Dad ("Those people at the church are all hypocrites.") went to the store and, as Mother put it, "piddled around."

Let me digress for a moment: We had a little collie named Muff who loved going with Dad to the store on Sundays. Somehow she knew it was Sunday because only then would she stand at the door of the pickup as he backed out of the garage, begging to be taken along. Dad would open the passenger side door and she would hop up. Between Christmas and New Year's we'd close for several days for inventory. Counting everything and cleaning as we went was a tedious job, but we loved hating it. I used to tell people that I learned well the names of all the tools, but just never learned how to use them.

I did know a few tools very well, such as the crescent wrench. After a summer of lugging around 100-lb propane gas tanks, installing gas ranges, etc., it felt as though the wrench would be welded to my hand. By the time a summer ended, I'd be in pretty good shape for football season. I still have deep affection for a hardware store.

By my senior year in high school a few teachers were talking with me about college. One who influenced me was Rusty Norment a young math teacher who had attended Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Virginia. I don't remember visiting any other colleges. Mother and I simply went down, signed me up and that was it.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **BREAKING OUT**

In August 1950 I began that new adventure, the first one in my family to go away for college, if only seventy-five miles down the road to Ashland, Virginia. Jean had attended Strayer College, but as a day student, and our oldest brother, Roy, had gone straight from high school to the Air Force for a four-year stretch. Mom dropped me at the Thomas Branch dormitory, with all my worldly possessions crammed into a beat up old trunk that looked like it had come across on the Mayflower.

My first roommate was a big old country boy who partied hard and made a lot of noise. I learned that most of my studying was going to get done in the library!! If I came home to the dorm and found a waterfall coming down the main center stairway, which I did once or twice, he'd be in the center of the water fight, not with water pistols--though they often started that way--but the games quickly escalated to wastebaskets of water. Our room was on the fourth floor, and I must confess to tossing a few water balloons myself out our windows on unsuspecting pedestrians below. I did find that "all work and no play

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

would make Carl a dull boy.”

At any rate I met another “serious” student, Walter (Skip) Earl, during the year, and he and I decided to room together the second year. He was planning to be a Methodist minister. I knew my mother would like to meet him. We actually didn’t see that much of each other since he had a serious girlfriend and went home to Hampton just about every weekend. My weekends had to be spent either at the library, or occasionally hitchhiking up Route 1 to home. More often the hitchhiking meant stopping at Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg, at that time a Women’s College. Incidentally, I learned there to play pool. One of the accommodating women students taught me. Growing up, our local bar/pool hall in Triangle was off limits: too much booze. In those days, on women’s college campuses, dorms had burly “jailers” called Dorm Mothers, and curfews, which put a crimp in the style of some students. Today it would seem strange, but minutes before the curfew hour bell you’d see couples in the dark under all the trees getting in the last smooching.

The highlight of my wandering came in the form of a hitchhiking trip over spring break 1953 to Florida. Skip Earl, Frank Edwards, Walter Whitehurst, and myself set out from Ashland. None of us had more than \$25.00 in our pockets. We soon learned that four together would never get a ride, so we split up, Skip and I, Walt and Frank. Our plan was to meet nights and stay in fraternity houses on college campuses, the first to be at University of South Carolina in Columbia. Walt and Frank made it, but Skip and I got stuck in North Carolina and had to spend the first night in a three dollar room at a flea-bitten motel. However, later the next day our luck changed and a well-dressed old man picked us up in his Lincoln Continental, and regaled us with stories of the Adlai Stevenson presidential

campaign he'd worked on. After buying us dinner he asked us to drive while he napped in the back seat. We tooted into Columbia, South Carolina like royalty, a day late, but a couple of happy campers. We finally caught up with Walt and Frank at our destination in DeLand, Florida at the Lambda Chi Alpha house on the campus of Stetson University west of Daytona Beach. We spent the next few nights at the college. During the days we swam, sunned, rented a dune buggy and got a ticket for speeding on the beach, got the buggy stuck in the sand, flirted with the girls, and generally had a blast.

Into the second year, I began to be interested in the conferences and retreats sponsored by a very active group called the Methodist Student Movement. The adult advisor was Gerry Speidel, a former missionary to China and a terrific guy. A major all-state spring conference was held every year at the Natural Bridge Hotel. Other conferences were more theme-related or regional and held on campuses. At the spring conference in 1954, I was elected President of the organization, and as the officers met to make plans for the next school year we realized that no students from the black colleges like Virginia Union, Hampton Institute, and Virginia State College, had ever attended any of our events. We resolved to invite them, however the Natural Bridge Hotel refused to allow them there. So, for the very first time, we chose to hold the 1955 state conference at a YMCA camp that would be open to anyone. We also planned a model United Nations Conference, which was held at Virginia State College in Petersburg. From then on all our events were integrated- way ahead of the rest of the church, and society in Virginia for that matter. Many of the students who participated in the Virginia Methodist Student Movement in the '50s became leaders in the Civil Rights movement of the '60s.

Another influence on me in college was being

befriended by a senior psychology major, L.T. Hathaway. L.T. needed a guinea pig, someone to take a bunch of psychological tests. It sounded like fun. I took every kind of test available--aptitude, attitude, etc. etc. At the end of it all, as we reviewed the results, he said that it looked as though I should become either a social worker or a minister, and the seed planted at the student conferences was thus watered. I had always assumed that after college I'd go back to the hardware store. When the choice to study for the ministry became inevitable, Dad was mad and Mom was glad. Dad, too, had counted on my coming back to the store. Mom, on the other hand, was as proud as a peacock when I offered my first sermon at the new sanctuary of the Dumfries Methodist Church. As for me, I'm just grateful that no recording exists of that excruciating moment. It was pretty bad, and I'm sure God was embarrassed. "Could I have called this guy to my ministry?"

My choice of grad school/seminary was influenced by a desire to experience a different part of the country, and by Dr. Carl Michalson, professor of Systematic Theology at Drew University, Madison, New Jersey. Most of my friends heading to seminaries were going to Duke University or Emory, but I wanted something different. Dr. Michalson had been a speaker at several conferences, and I wanted to hear more. He was the only person of my acquaintance at Drew.

Again I must digress: All during college I never had a car except to occasionally bringing the family car to campus for a special event. Upon graduation Mom and Dad presented me with a '49 Chevrolet, a two-door slant-back. I stayed at home that summer and fall working at the store and saving some money. In January I drove the little green chevy to Drew, checking in for the second semester. My image of New Jersey, never having been there, was of industrial and urban



dirtyness. How shocked I was to arrive at a beautiful snow-covered campus with lots of trees, sidewalks and lawns in the quaint little town of Madison, New Jersey.

I soon found another student that I did already know. Erin Turner and I had met at a national conference for presidents of state Methodist Student Movements; she came from Georgia and I came from Virginia. It turned out that Erin was one of a handful of women students among the couple hundred men in the seminary section of campus. The women lived in an old house called the Gilbert House. Erin introduced me to her roommate, a really pretty woman from Mississippi, Maggie Skellie. My roommate in the single men's dorm was John Haeberle. John had been an English major at Ohio University and loved drama. He began that winter to arrange play-readings. Interested readers would gather around the fireplace in the living room of Gilbert House. John would have gathered enough playbooks and would assign the roles. One of the women would bring out the popcorn and we'd have a wonderful time. Soon after I arrived on campus a recital was held, by Maggie Skellie and Forrest Stith. Forrest was a big black man with the sweetest tenor voice you ever heard, but what really blew me away was that soprano from Mississippi. I had never heard a more beautiful, crystal-clear voice. I had to get to know that woman!!

Since I already knew Erin there was a ready excuse to hang out (today's term) with her and Maggie. We played ping-pong, studied together, and shared stories of growing up in the South. Where I really scored was in having that little car. Maggie had a job as choir director at a church in Summit, New Jersey some eight miles from campus, but she had no car and had to rely on buses. Yours truly came to the rescue, offering to take her to practices and Sunday services. I also caught her on the rebound from a rejection by Wes

when we were ready to leave St. George's in 1969 we joined with friends John and Peggy Sadler, Bill and Helen Newkirk, and Beth Moore in setting up E.I.'s first staff House in Washington, D.C. I took a sabbatical leave from the Methodist conference so that the 1969-70 year could be spent on the E.I. staff. The girls, four by now, had their first experience of being the only white kids in otherwise all-black classrooms. It was a mind-expanding experience living in an old rented mansion up on 16<sup>th</sup> Street in northwest Washington, D.C. We could walk to the Carter Barron outdoor theatre, and next door to us was a Buddhist monastery. The monks did a procession every afternoon down the street in their saffron robes with drums and gongs. They invited us to their Sunday services. A few Sundays we visited an Eastern Orthodox Church down the street a ways. The girls loved all the music, and the fact that they served communion to everyone, including the smallest child. A little silver spoon was dipped in the chalice of wine, then inserted in the mouth of infants.

The major trauma of that year was the contracting of infectious hepatitis. It affected everyone in the house. Since there were so many of us living in close proximity the National Institutes of Health did a study of us to learn more about the disease. They came once every week and took blood samples of everyone. I was so proud of my girls who'd bravely hold up their arms for the needles, while some other children screamed and hollered. Margaret and I both became very ill and others took care of our children while both of us were hospitalized. I remember that after several days I felt well enough to begin shaving, but decided to leave the moustache to commemorate that momentous year, my 38<sup>th</sup>. It's been with me ever since!

As June 1970 approached, my sabbatical

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

*struggle saw headline after headline of violent confrontations over racial segregation and discrimination. Yet an unnoticed drama was being played out in Fairfax, Virginia where a new start-up Methodist congregation named St. George's and a historically black church, Payne Street Methodist, were working their way toward a union."*

An embarrassing moment, while I served St. George's church, came when Dr. Riddick, my District Superintendent (boss) was visiting. Must have been in 1962. He was holding Ruth in the process of baptizing her, when she reached up and pulled his glasses off his face. I remember rescuing the glasses so the service could continue. Fortunately the congregation found the incident quite humorous.

By the summer of 1966 Margaret and I were looking around for some theological refreshment, and were sent information about an Ecumenical Institute (E.I.) in Chicago that offered a six-week curriculum with a wide range of courses, and FREE CHILD CARE during class time. With three girls 8, 5, and 1 years old, it seemed perfect for us. Margaret was especially excited by the community aspect of the program, in which all the adults took turns with household duties of cooking, cleaning, child care, etc. Margaret had been in similar communal situations with the LISLE Fellowship summer programs while she was in college, and saw it as the "wave of the future." Our girls were at a disadvantage since everything was so new, they were away from us for long hours, and when we arrived at the Institute on the west side of Chicago, they (our girls) were just getting over a case of measles. Mom and Dad had a better experience--the classes were good and we went home inspired. So inspired that

When Dr. Roland Riddick recruited me to begin St. George's church, he told me of a mission church, Payne Street Methodist, which already existed in the same area where I was to begin St. George's. The suburbs had grown up around one street where blacks had owned houses for generations. The congregation consisted of some eight to ten families, and they worshipped in a school for blacks, although the school integration process would soon bring the students to the new school being built in the Green Acres subdivision. The little Payne Street church had a small lot on Ox Road, but had never been able to build a church building. I remember visiting Alex Walker, the Lay Leader, and after that visit our setting up a series of joint get-acquainted services between the two congregations. At the end of the next year the Payne Street church was left without a pastor. We therefore invited their members to attend our services. Some of my members complained that I had no right to such action and that it would kill our fledgling church. It did not. In fact we were ready to break ground for our building on Roberts Road by 1965. While I served St. George's, we merged the two congregations into one, the first black/white Methodist church merger in the Virginia Conference in modern times. I hadn't far to go to find the Civil Rights struggle-it came to me. Nearly forty four years later I contacted Myra P. Lindsey, editor of the Virginia United Methodist *Heritage*, the journal of the Virginia Methodist Conference Historical Society, thinking she might be interested in the St. George's/Payne Street churches story. She was, and we began a collaborative effort resulting in an article published in the Vol.XXXX, No. 2, Fall 2014 issue. She asked me to write an introduction, which follows:

*"The 1960s were painful times for  
the United States as its civil rights*

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

house we welcomed two more daughters, Mary Elizabeth on April 21, 1965, and Sara Joann on May 16, 1967. They were both born at the Columbia Hospital for Women in Washington, D.C. Sara came a little unexpectedly early in the middle of the night, and the car was extremely low on gas. We raced the twenty-some miles from Fairfax to the hospital desperately blowing the horn hoping to attract a policeman's attention, but everywhere the roads were deserted. We pulled into the hospital parking lot on fumes. Margaret said, "No time for paperwork, let's get to delivery!" The doctor said, "Wait for me!" but there was no waiting. Sara was born ten minutes later. We finally found out what was causing the births, and called a cease-fire. Four was enough for then.

In addition to pastoring a growing congregation, I was responsible for starting a campus ministry at the new George Mason College and to find church property nearby. George Mason is now one of Virginia's largest universities. The campus ministry developed slowly since all students and faculty were commuters from outside the surrounding community. A Roman Catholic priest, a Disciples of Christ minister, and myself formed a new ecumenical campus ministry that has grown into today's United Campus Ministry, which covers all of Northern Virginia and multiple campuses. As for church property, we located an eight-acre parcel that ran from Roberts Road up to the college property. Years later, the college purchased the property, and the church moved out on Route 123, Ox Road. The former church building is now called Georges Hall. By the way, the church was named not after George Mason, but the St. George who slew the dragon in old English folklore. The special cross I designed combining the Latin cross and a shield such as St. George is traditionally pictured as carrying, can be seen in the new church building on Ox Road.

Elaine was born at Arlington Hospital on May 29, 1961. The fascinating thing about this baby was that she had one dark and one light eyebrow and a blonde streak in her hair on the left side (it is the left, isn't it, Ruth?) We later tried to convince her that the blonde streak was all the rage.

Another funny story: At that time in my career I wore the clerical collar. In early May, with Margaret very pregnant, we went to Fairfax to meet with an attorney who would be assisting with all legal matters relative to starting the new church. I gave my name to the receptionist, but you know how difficult "Ennis" is. We sat in the waiting area way past the time of our appointment. Finally the attorney came out and very cautiously ushered us into his office. When I introduced ourselves again, a light came on in his face, and a big smile appeared as he handed us the note the receptionist had taken to him after we arrived. It read: "A Father Dennis and a pregnant woman are here to see you." I can only speculate what problem she thought this priest would be bringing to her boss. We laugh over this at every telling.

On "Moving Day" (Methodist ministers know what that is.) 1961 we moved from Arlington into a split-level house in the fairly new sub-division of Green Acres in Fairfax City. Soon Laura, age 3, and even the newly-born Ruth were covered with flea bites. Apparently, no one knew the previous renter had multiple cats. We had to move back out while the entire house was treated. As Margaret was busy with the children, I spent the summer visiting every house in the area until we could start services at Tallwood School in September. As the congregation, called St. George's grew, we moved Sunday services to the Green Acres Elementary School, and in another year the congregation was ready to purchase its first parsonage, another split-level, on Forest Ave. Into this

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **ON THE MOVE AGAIN**

We celebrated my graduation in June 1960 and moved back to Virginia where I was to begin as the Associate Minister at Cherrydale Methodist Church in Arlington. It's funny the little things you remember. When we left West Creek pulling a U-Haul trailer with all our worldly possessions the rear end of the trailer started swaying back and forth across the road. We stopped and I shifted some heavy boxes from the rear of the trailer into the station wagon. I guess we had no more difficulty because that's all I remember of the trip.

The Cherrydale people welcomed us royally, and we were very happy. We must have been, because by the fall Margaret was losing her breakfast again just about every morning. By March we were beginning to feel a bit cramped by the apartment the church had rented for us, so we moved into a cute stone house a little further south off of Lee Highway. But, as luck would have it, our District Superintendent, Dr. Roland Riddick, called me to his office a bit later and asked me to move in June to start a new congregation in Fairfax, Virginia. But first things first. We had to welcome the number two daughter. Ruth

Come Monday afternoon, we'd pack up and travel to our campus apartment, where we'd switch roles. She'd take a full load of classes, rushing home between them to nurse Laura. I did the other household duties and strolled the baby with all the other mothers. On Friday we'd pack up again for south Jersey. In May 1959, the three of us celebrated Margaret's graduation at Drew. That summer we gave up the campus apartment and worked full time at the churches.

I had one more year, so in September, Margaret and Laura stayed in the West Creek parsonage while I rode with other students to Drew every Monday. I obtained an unheated attic room in which to stay the four week nights and used a bicycle to cover the half mile to campus. The winter nights were bitter cold with only my nose visible from under a stack of blankets.



## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

Missions. The Board had rented a dormitory building at the first Goodwill Industries in America. We had a room on the fourth floor and eating/meeting space on the second floor, so we bought a "baby listener." If the baby woke while we were meeting, Margaret would tear up the stairway to care for her. Or, as was often the case, she'd just nurse the baby right through our meetings or meals. With about a dozen students with us for six weeks, half of them women, Laura got lots of attention.

After Boston, I began my student church assignment at the West Creek and Warren Grove (New Jersey) Methodist churches. These churches and towns are located on the south shore about 30 miles north of Atlantic City in the Piney Woods. West Creek had a fair-sized boat building company that gave me many scraps of wood with which I made building blocks for our children, though then we had only one child--read on. Those blocks moved with our family for many years. While we were there the shore had a major encephalitis scare and every evening fogging trucks filled all the neighborhoods with a noxious mosquito spray. We'd hear the trucks coming and rush to close all the windows--no air conditioning, you know.

There's a story I must include here with apologies to people struggling with obesity. At the West Creek church the Sunday School superintendent was very large man. I'm so glad I can't remember his name. Just before every worship service with everyone present he would waddle up to the altar, reach over behind for a stash of kitchen matches he kept there, strike one on the seat of his pants, and light the altar candles. It lifted my day every time.

By Christmas time we had decided that with one more semester to Margaret's graduation, she should finish. The solution was a role reversal. On the weekends I did church duties and she was mommy.

prepare for the wedding. I had now completed three semesters in my three-year program for the Bachelor of Divinity. The Bachelor of Divinity was certified a few years later as the Master of Sacred Theology.

As the semester wore on Margaret began to experience a conflict between early morning classes and early morning sickness. Fortunately, she felt better by late January when exam time rolled around and was able to finish that semester. She was always a top-rated student. She stayed home that second semester and prepared for a baby. Margaret wore these maternity dresses with a hole in the front to accommodate the "baby bump" and with strings to tie across the waist. We had gone to Manhattan with friends for dinner and a Broadway show. During dinner she had untied the strings, and as we ran down the street to catch the subway she had to keep pulling the skirt up off her ankles. Other pedestrians never seemed to notice! On May 10<sup>th</sup> we attended a picnic with other campus couples, and later that evening, she started counting contractions as I fell asleep. I can sleep any time, any place. At 6 a.m. she wakened me with the calm "It's time to go." Around 11 a.m. the first of our beautiful girls, Laura Jeanne, was born. It was Mother's Day, 1958 at a hospital in Summit, New Jersey. Our first major purchase was a baby/child contraption that had a baby bed that could be mounted on a set of wheels or placed in a car, a chair and table that could be combined to make a high chair, or the chair could be mounted on the wheels to make a stroller. This heavy metal thing lasted through all our children. One little sidebar about purchasing: when we married we could buy hamburger three pounds for a dollar, and gasoline for thirty cents a gallon.

The summer of '58 found us in Boston, Massachusetts. where we led a work camp for college students sponsored by the Methodist General Board of

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

with at Mississippi Southern University. We had solos, trios, and instrumentalists. The wedding was a fabulous recital. The bridesmaids all wore emerald green dresses which contrasted nicely with the magnolia blossoms they carried. We both knew the Rev. Sam Barefield, who had been the campus minister at Southern. He was "honored" to conduct the ceremony. One of the four sisters had bought us a first night at a fancy hotel in Mobile, Alabama. We had made reservations for the next several days at a cabin at Vogel State Park in the mountains of north Georgia. Since we got a rather late start the second day, we arrived at the park around 11 p.m. to find everything dark, and with growling guard dogs circling our car. We spent a very uncomfortable second night in the car, but on the third day we got moved into our cabin. By day we could tell that we had chosen an Eden-like spot for a honeymoon: a beautiful, crystal-clear lake with sand beaches and surrounded by mountains with trails leading up to the south end of the Appalachian Trail. Except for a few nights eating out, I remember our eating off a large ham someone had given us, and drinking Hawaiian punch. Romantic, eh?

Returning to the Drew campus, we moved into a married students apartment building. Margaret worked at a Madison day camp for children. I had worked during the school year as night-time janitor at a downtown bank. It had been fun to go in after everyone else had left, to mop floors, dust teller's desks, etc. I'd often be singing as I went and people would come and stare through the windows. Now, for the summer, I worked as a teller during the day, then changed clothes to clean the bank when others left.

By September we were both ready for classes to begin. Margaret had completed one year toward her two-year program, the Master of Religious Education. She had dropped classes in the spring semester to

Gary was recruited to help cut magnolia blossoms early on the morning of the wedding. I was dressed and ready to leave for the church, but Gary hadn't shown up--I learned later that he had fallen out of a magnolia tree and hurt his back. He barely made it to the wedding. Anyway, I decided to walk to the church, dressed in my white tuxedo jacket and bow tie. Along the way, a lady stopped and wanted to know if I was going to the wedding. I almost told her "Oh no, I'm just on a stroll to the beach!" Instead, I graciously, but wordlessly accepted the offer of a ride.



**Margaret and Carl's Wedding Day**

The wedding was a little longer than usual since Margaret had invited every music major she'd been

## CHAPTER 4

### **“...GO TOGETHER LIKE A HORSE AND CARRIAGE”**

Come September it was back to Drew, but Margaret had transferred to Drake University in Iowa, where her favorite music teacher from college was then teaching. We corresponded furiously that semester, and by December she was back at Drew, having sorted out, sort of, her life's direction. That spring semester (1957) she took a few classes and we “worked on our relationship” until we announced our engagement at a little party in Gilbert House. One of our professors, Dr. Graybeal, made the announcement: “Today on his 25<sup>th</sup> birthday Carl has decided to acquire two new things, a new car and a bride.” I had traded the green Chevy for a newer one, a red 1954 station wagon. Margaret went home soon after the party to start preparing for a June 8<sup>th</sup> wedding.

On June 6<sup>th</sup> my brother Gary (He was to be the best man) and I drove to Long Beach, Mississippi. Even though there were no interstate highways in those days, and we had to drive through every city and town, we made the 1,100 mile journey in one day. He and I were housed across town in a neighbor's home.

was, after all, 23 at the time and the only Skellie girl not married. We all went up to Hattiesburg to meet two of her sisters, Elaine and Alice May, and their families with this "other guy" tagging along. I was fuming by the time they dropped me at the edge of town on Route 11 on a Sunday morning to start hitchhiking back home to Virginia. Later I found myself walking through Laurel, Mississippi just as service was beginning at the Presbyterian Church. I set down my bag in the vestibule and enjoyed the service, after which an elder invited me to dinner. Good old Southern Hospitality!

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

Blaha, who went home for Christmas holidays and rekindled an old romance with a high-school sweetheart.

One moment early in our relationship stands out. My roommate and I were to take Erin and Maggie on a double date, but the women didn't know who was to be with whom, so they had decided to stand at the foot of the stairs at Gilbert House and see who made a move toward whom. It would have made a great soap opera scene. Actually, John and I hadn't planned it either. I remember making the first move and chose Maggie. It turned out to be a destinal choice. That June I went back to Virginia where I had a summer job as Youth Director for Christ Methodist Church in Arlington. It was great fun. I mostly coached softball teams and led other recreation events. I lived in an attic room of the home of an elderly member of Christ Church. It wasn't part of the deal, but she loved fixing meals for me. Maggie, meanwhile, had a job in Atlanta directing an interracial work camp for college students. Talk about radical! They were harassed constantly by locals and police. In those days it took a brave soul to lead blacks and whites in any joint venture.

In August, after our jobs ended I took the bus to Atlanta. She had been home and brought back the family car so we could drive to Mississippi and I could meet her family. I loved her mother right away. Momma Laine, I learned they called her, served me the strongest coffee I'd ever had. Of course I was no expert, only having started drinking coffee at exam time in college. Momma Laine set me straight right away--she had no daughter named "Maggie", her name was MARGARET!! The visit was marred by the unexpected arrival of a young man Magg- I mean Margaret, had met at a Lisle camp for college students. She claimed later that he was never her boyfriend, but I could see her family doing a lot of "comparison shopping." She

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

ending, we left Washington and moved to Chesapeake, Virginia where I was appointed to the St. John United Methodist Church. We had an attractive brick rambler parsonage in which to live on a quiet suburban cul-de-sac. The girls thought they had died and gone to heaven, especially since the church provided a free membership in the local swimming pool club. The girls and Margaret practically lived there all summer.

We spent a fairly easy three years in Chesapeake except for a couple of "downers." Mary was tested for allergies and had to undergo a long series of weekly shots. She was well experienced with needles after our bout with hepatitis in Washington. We were amazed at how every week she'd march into the doctor's office and hold up her little arm as if to say, "Shoot it to me, Doc!"

The other difficulty was to discover that Laura had a mild case of petit mal. Sometimes when she watched TV or when the shadows of trees would flash by our moving car she would go into a kind of trance. She took medicine for a while. The doctors said she might outgrow the problem.

While in Chesapeake we became close friends with two other minister families who were serving churches close by: Jim and Mary Ashton Athearn and their boys, and Ott and Betty Davis and their children. We did a lot of picnicking together, and babysitting for each other. We also spent some vacation time together at our little log cabin in Mutton Hollow.

Mutton Hollow!! That brings up a whole 'nother story of my life. Let's back up. During the years we were in Fairfax at St. George's church I participated in a young ministers covenant group that included Phil Hunsicker, Ed Wright, and others. The three of us (Phil, Ed and I) began to talk of interest in finding some inexpensive land we could invest in which would provide a little security for old age. We looked at a map



and chose Greene County because it was one of the poorest areas in the state yet close to where we all lived in Northern Virginia. At Annual Conference one year, we talked to Gene Baker who served the Greene County Charge of Methodist churches. He promised to ask around. In a few weeks we got a call from a man named E.C. Compton who had land in an area called Mutton Hollow. He wanted \$ 8,000 for an undeveloped parcel. The deed read "Ninety eight acres more or less." The land began on Swift Run River and ran up and over Powell Mountain, and had on it a little-run down log cabin. Phil thought it much too "dogpatchy" so he pulled out, but the Wrights and Ennises decided to buy it together. We borrowed the eight thousand from a local bank, and shared both the mortgage payments and the use of the property. Ed and I spent many of our days off cleaning out the old log cabin, building a privy, restoring a spring to provide water, and building up a rock wall to replace rotted logs on the up-hill side of the cabin. The steep hillside behind the cabin had numerous piles of rocks left by generations of efforts by previous owners to create cornfields. We would push a wheelbarrow up the hill, load it with rocks, then try to keep it from rolling over us coming back down. Neither of us had construction experience, but that wall still stands to this day. Digging the hole for the privy was hardest. You ever try to dig a six-foot deep hole in ground that is more rock than dirt, and with only pick and shovel? We'd take turns digging and collapsing. One day during Ed's turn to dig, while I sat on a rock I looked up the mountain and commented, "We ought to climb up there soon and erect a big old cross." Ed's reply was "While you're putting up the cross, I'll be down here digging this privy hole!"

When Margaret and Libby (Ed's wife) saw the pit they insisted that this privy be a "two seater" because, they said, whenever they wanted to use it

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

they just knew there'd always be a child who'd have to go as well. Ed and Libby also had four children. We used a translucent plastic roofing to help let in light and put in a window for the view up the mountain. Fanciest privy in "Mutton Holla" (as the locals would say it).

Ed and I'd leave Fairfax early in a morning, stop at Triangle Hardware for tools, mortar mix, and other supplies, (It sure helped to get the "family discounts.") get to the property by mid-morning and work till dark. We'd be exhausted by nightfall but still laughing over how much fun it was to do something you had no idea how to do.



**A watercolor drawing of the cabin by Libby Wright, given to Carl for his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday**

We spent a number of vacations at the cabin, the children playing in the creek by day, roasting marshmallows and hot dogs over a campfire circle by night. We picked wild raspberries, and blueberries, hiked to the top of Powell Mountain, and had great fun with friends.

There were also some harrowing moments. For our tenth anniversary on June 8, 1967, we had invited three other couples also celebrating their tenth to join us for a picnic at the cabin. Now to get into the cabin one had to ford the creek, which was not a problem under normal conditions. However, soon after we started it began to rain, so we moved indoors to complete the meal, and were listening to a tape of Bill Cosby's NOAH AND THE ARK. As the rain increased we laughed at the coincidence, but soon the other families packed up and left. We had a few more days' vacation so Margaret and I chose to wait it out. The downpour on the cabins' tin roof was deafening. We had to spend a lot of time yelling at each other just to be heard. The creek became a roaring river so that we were stranded at the cabin for several more days, and had some great "quality time."

On another occasion we were packed to leave after a visit at the cabin. I went back for one last look around and to lock up. I got in the car and began driving off. As we were crossing the creek, we heard a child screaming. Margaret looked back to see Laura frantically running down the lawn from the privy pulling up her shorts. After that, I always counted noses or called the roll before driving.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE “INSTITUTE YEARS”

That’s about all for the Mutton Hollow stories, except that in 1973 we heard a calling to return to the Ecumenical Institute, and since we’d be “world travelers” from then on, we sold the larger portion of the mountain to the Wrights, including the cabin, and just kept 40 acres. Surveyors had discovered there were actually 125 acres. We think previous generations estimated on the low side to keep down taxes.

In early 1972 we found ourselves pregnant again, and on October 10<sup>th</sup> the doctor surprised me with “It’s a boy!” I said, “Doc, there’s gotta be a mistake. I just don’t do boys.” He said, “Well, you do now.” Robert Carl became the girls’ favorite plaything. They all wanted to help with him, at least after mother assured them that that “thing between his legs” was perfectly normal. Laura, especially, at fourteen was like his second mother. One of my favorite family photos was a picture of us climbing some mountain with Robert in a baby carrier on Laura’s back.

In December of that year we rented a Winnebago RV, and on Christmas Day we struck out for Florida’s Disney World. We put a little Christmas

tree on the table and feasted on Christmas dinner somewhere in South Carolina. Either Margaret or myself took care of Robert while everyone else took in all that Disney had to offer. It was a glorious family week.

Early 1973 was spent uniting two congregations, St. John and Pinnars Point. The Pinnars Point church was located next to the expanding Navy Yard in Portsmouth, Virginia, and the Navy Yard bought the land on which the church sat. That church consisted of a few older couples and widows. With the money from the building sale we bought a large van to carry parishioners out to Chesapeake, where St. John was located, and the merged church was renamed Covenant. There was also a trust fund set up which later helped build a new sanctuary for the combined church.

By spring we were ready to be appointed to the Ecumenical Institute. Margaret liked the "extended family" lifestyle, I liked the stimulating discussions and community development work. We thought then it would be a lifelong commitment. By dividing the mountain land and selling the larger portion to the Wrights we were able to pay off the land and our credit card debts. We had a humongous yard sale, sold most of my books, left our dog with Gramma, and took off for Chicago--the 1969 Volkswagen bus loaded to the gills. No, it was not painted up like a "hippy van."

At the end of the summer we were assigned to the Religious House in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. However we learned that Laura, at 15, was now old enough to be assigned to another Religious House, and Ruth would be in a "Student House" program in Chicago. So, we'd be separated except for summers and holidays. Laura seemed to thrive on being treated as an adult, but life for Ruth was much harder in the as-yet-experimental Student House. The third floor of the

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

old office building Kemper Insurance had donated to the Institute was transformed to serve as the Student House for middle schoolers. The staff, at least in those formative years, seemed to think of the program as a kind of boot camp for troubled teens. The more normal, sensitive kids had the most difficult time coping in the strange environment.

Meanwhile, in Pittsburg, Margaret and I were the newcomers, and so were assigned to “work out” to help with the self-support of the House. I found a job as Chaplain/Counselor at a Salvation Army rehabilitation center. Margaret worked in a very elite Jewish restaurant downtown. Whereas we ate “frugally” at the House, Margaret got to partake of some pretty fancy leftovers after hours in the restaurant kitchen. As Religious House finances got tighter I got a second job flipping hamburgers at a late-night eatery on the University of Pittsburgh campus. My schedule was ridiculous. We’d all get up at 5 a.m. for morning worship, followed by breakfast and then “collegium” (study of a paper plus planning for the mission and announcements). Then those of us “working out” would be off to our jobs. I usually caught a bus downtown and over to the south side. Then when my second job began, I’d catch another bus after work and ride out east to the campus, and after that a bus home, arriving around 11:30pm. One night I awoke to discover I was somewhere at the bus barn and it was 2:30 a.m. The driver either didn’t see me, or just decided to “let the bum sleep it off.” In the office I found a couple drivers who put me on a bus to home.

In spite of the steep hillside driving in winter, I loved Pittsburgh. Its downtown had just gone through a “renaissance” development, and the streets were lively night and day. In spite of the declining steel industry its economy seemed strong. Like most everything else in Pittsburg, the house in which we

lived was on a steep hillside. We drove in from an alley in the back and parked uphill from the house, yet from the front door there were maybe fifty steps down to the street. The kids loved to go down to a little neighborhood shop on the corner for candies or drinks when they could weasel a little change from one of us. One day Robert, age two, went missing. The young man supposedly watching the children in the third floor playroom hadn't a clue. The frantic search operation finally found him in that little shop with rush hour traffic zipping by. Childcare took on a new meaning after that.

We survived 1973/74 and come August, we found ourselves on a train to Billings, Montana where Margaret and I were to be "priors" (like pastor) of the Billings Religious House. In addition to ourselves, there were five other adults, two youth, and several children including our three: Mary, Sara, and Robert. The house was a large frame building that had been divided into six apartments. We used one apartment as our "common area." We lived in the south side of Billings alongside a heavily Hispanic (mostly Mexican) population. Just three blocks from our house was a large park with playgrounds, gazebo, and lots of open grassy areas. Every spring there was a large Cinco de Mayo celebration, and every weekend in the summer Mexican bands played at the gazebo. We led a number of community development projects. One that stands out was a pothole repair job. Billings had very cold winters and in the spring the worst streets in the city, maybe even the nation! After all, we were in "just" the Southside where street workers rarely showed up. I remember visiting the public works office and telling the officer that we, the people of Southside Billings wanted to fix our own streets. If the City could dump hot asphalt at strategic spots on the streets we'd designate, we'd recruit the community to fill potholes. We established a Saturday work date, chose a six block area to focus

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

on, passed out flyers, talked with community groups, recruited women to provide tacos and other refreshments, rounded up wheelbarrows, shovels, tamp bars, and other tools and prayed. It rained the night before, and we thought we were sunk, but early Saturday fifty volunteers showed up and the sun appeared enough to dry the potholes. The city brought the asphalt and we went to work. There was a job for everyone, young and old. Some of the old men directed traffic while others shoveled and tamped. People would drive by and honk and cheer. I remember a young man in his "low-rider" hot car who drove up and handed me a cold beer out the window. By afternoon, all the piles of asphalt were gone and the streets smooth. We had a great celebration in the park that evening, and on Sunday morning found Southside featured on the front page of the local paper.

During the four years we were in Billings, the Institute developed a Town Meeting '76 program that was adopted as an official part of the national Bicentennial celebration. We had been involved in community development for years and experimented with a "town meeting" format that provided a way for citizens of a community to meet together, consense on a few long-range priorities, and agree on a few action plans of a "self-help" nature. Plus the writing of the town story, a community song, and creation of a symbol. Presentation of these came at the closing celebration.

The pothole project I described above is a good example of the self-help focus of the Town Meeting. The idea came from a town meeting we had held in Southside Billings. The value of such activity lies in the spirit of cooperation and hope engendered by it, not just in the intrinsic accomplishment of a project itself. We held these Town Meetings '76 all over America during the Bicentennial year, 1976. Since it was



funded by the National Bicentennial Committee there was no cost to the communities which held them. Our Billings staff was quite busy that year setting up and leading the events in every city and town of any size in Montana. The next year the Institute focused on having Town Meetings in smaller towns, and endeavored to have at least one in every county in America. In Montana that meant I was on the go constantly driving many miles each day. More than once I'd wake up as the wheels left the road, or just in time to avoid an obstacle. One day I awoke to discover I'd drifted so far to the left that I was headed straight for an oncoming semi. I swerved back just in time, but was so shaken I had to stop the car and walk around for the longest time thanking the amazing grace that had saved a wretch like me.

Meanwhile, on the home front, Margaret had had to take a job to supplement house income. She worked at a sugar beet factory just a few blocks from our house. Until we moved to Montana, I never knew sugar could be made from beets. They weren't red beets like my dad had grown, they looked more like yams, and the factory in the process of making sugar gave off a terrible odor. She'd come home and take long showers to try and wash away the smells.

One night I was giving Robert his bath and noticed a little round burn mark on his stomach. Robert was about 5 years old. I yelled for Mary and Sara, who I knew had been watching him for a time during the day. They insisted "it was an accident." What did they believe, I thought, they'd done it on purpose? The question was, an accident, how? They bravely confessed that they were playing around with a lighted cigarette. One of them was waving it like some sophisticated young woman, and innocent bystander Robert got stabbed in the tummy. To this day none of my children smoke!

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

We also had some great family times in Montana. We purchased an old bus that had been converted to a camper. We took a number of vacation trips in it including a wonderful journey up to Glacier National Park where, in August, the kids threw snowballs at each other. We hiked from one campsite up to a glacier-fed lake where only Robert braved the icy water. On another occasion, we stopped along a deserted roadway for a potty break, but jumped back in the bus when Laura spotted a rattlesnake and signaled the rest of us with a wriggling of her body as though if she yelled the snake might attack.

On still another hot August day I was driving on the lonely road from Crow Agency back to Billings. I had Mary, Sara, and Robert in the car and ran out of gas. We were headed downhill so we drifted maybe a half-mile stopping on the shoulder. There were no houses, no vehicles, or other signs of life in sight. After sitting for a while quieting children and pondering what to do next, I got out, I guess so the kids would think I was doing something to help the situation. As I walked to the back of the car I heard a rattle coming from under the car. Sure enough, in the short time we'd been stopped, a four foot rattler had crawled from the grass under the shade of the car. I yelled for the children to stay put, and not try to get out. Efforts to "shoo" him away, such as tossing some rocks only made him mad. Pretty soon I was amazed by grace again as a pickup appeared in the distance. A rancher and his young son stopped. After hearing our plight he hooked a long heavy chain to our bumper and slowly pulled us away from the reptile, then used the chain to beat the snake senseless. All the while the young boy was yelling, "I want the rattles, I want the rattles." Out West they are prized possessions. Imagine the heroic tales you can tell your friends at school as you shake those rattles in front of their eyes. Also in the West, folks are used to

helping each other. So after the boy got his rattles they pulled us all the way back to Billings, another ten or fifteen miles. We never even learned their names.

At that time, we worked with the people of the Crow Reservation as education consultants. Through an Education Forum we conducted, a priority was established to develop a community college, since young people at that time had to travel so far to receive any higher education. Almost twenty years later Margaret and I made a trip through Montana and visited with Janine Pease, whom we had worked with closely, and who by 1996 had become the dean of the flourishing college. How wonderful it is to see tangible, lasting results of your work.

In January and February of 1978 Margaret and I were assigned to help finish Town Meeting schedules in Oregon and Idaho, respectfully. By then, Mary was in the Student House program in Chicago, Ruth was in the Rochester, New York Religious House and attending high school there, and Laura was attending college in Chicago. While we were away, Sara and Robert were cared for by other staff in Billings. Our family was getting more and more scattered and Margaret and I becoming more uncomfortable. To complicate matters further, Margaret was beginning to talk of wishing to go back to school and finish a Divinity degree. Back in 1959 she had completed her Master of Christian Education, which was a program designed for persons wishing to specialize in Christian education. Margaret's interests now were broadening.

In the spring we were assigned to the southern San Joaquin valley of California to start a new community development project in Richgrove. Margaret had researched the graduate schools of California, and her desire to return to school came into conflict with our assignment to direct the Richgrove Community Development Project. Conflict also rose

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

between her and Dr. Bill Goodger, a veterinarian, who along with his wife, Pat, were also on the staff. Goodger was a talented, but brash, outspoken young man. His focus was exclusively on the practical, such as water, sewer, and business. Margaret's concern was with the cultural, interracial, artistic and educational issues. They could have complemented each other but instead tore at the unity of the team. This was complicated by her desire, increasingly evident, to go back to school. Her irritation also began to turn on me as the one who could not "restrain" Bill, or cut her loose to go do grad school. Our internal tensions were to limit the accomplishments.

Richgrove, California, when we went there, was a little village of fifteen hundred settled, year-round inhabitants, most of whom owned their own homes. It swelled to twice that number in the summer "picking season" when many migrants arrived and "camped out" with relatives and friends, causing septic systems to overflow and the town water system already contaminated with agricultural runoff, to run dry. Located eight miles east of Delano and at the southern edge of Visalia County, Richgrove was a forgotten little town never mentioned in county politics. The year-round population of Mexican, Filipino, and Puerto Rican extraction were mostly skilled workers on the orange, grape, and almond farms which surrounded the village. A tiny minority were white Oklahomans who migrated to California in the Dust Bowl days. They owned the small markets and gas stations in town. The vast orchards were owned by whites of Slavic and Polish origins. Their homes were on the farms and they had little connection with Richgrove.

We came to town on the heels of the labor organizing efforts of Cesar Chavez. During the national grape boycott and the worker strikes, the farm owners had tried intimidation to force workers back to

work. Tales were told us of thugs coming to homes and threatening workers. Thus, while the strife had happened in the early seventies, everyone was still on edge and every home had a mean guard dog out front. Resentment was everywhere. The Filipinos resented that the majority Mexicans controlled the school board and held meetings only in Spanish. The Mexicans looked down on the Puerto Ricans who spoke Spanish at a rapid-fire rate. The shop-owners tolerated their customers, but had no further relations with the community. Etcetera, etcetera. The village leaders of the water board and school board, in inviting the Institute to do the development project, hoped to bring about reconciliation and community spirit, as well as to address major infrastructure issues.

We began with a major town cleanup project, erecting welcome signs, and a consultation in which a master plan was developed. We made sure translation was available for all town meetings. We helped organize community celebrations and dances for which the Puerto Rican band in town, Los Allegros Hernandez, played. A town plaza began with a new laundry mat and café. At the same time task forces began to plan for major projects.

Much later in 2003, while Margaret and I were in California visiting Robert and his family, we drove through Richgrove and were gratified to see so much change--entire new streets and houses thanks to the new water and sewer projects, a thriving flea market, a new pre-school, murals depicting Hispanic history, etc. We knew how Moses would have felt had he come back from the dead to see the Promised Land. Even the original welcome sign we helped erect at the edge of town was still in place and obviously cared for.

In May of 1979, Margaret was called to Chicago to help get ready for summer special programs. Her musical talents were invaluable to the summer cultural

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

events. I stayed on and worked through the summer, and then joined her in Chicago, completing sixteen months in Richgrove.

Our assignments for the next three years in Chicago were varied. I spent a year in "Development", which meant making almost weekly trips to other cities doing fundraising for the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA). Most of our work by now was being conducted under this ICA banner, yet our church relations remained through the Ecumenical Institute name, and my ministerial appointment from the Virginia United Methodist Conference continued to be to Ecumenical Institute. The beginning of the ICA corporation name for our organization had to do with the rapid expansion of our secular community work and the decline of direct work with churches.

The other two years in Chicago, Marie Sharp and I were Emerging Generation gurus, planning and carrying out elaborate programs for children and youth of staff members. We held summer camps as well as youth trips and service projects. Meanwhile Margaret was assigned to finish her Master of Divinity degree at Chicago Theological Seminary and helped with special summer programs. I must admit to not understanding why she wanted this degree, since she did not want to leave the Institute or serve as pastor of a church. In some ways we were happy to be in Chicago close to Sara in the Student House, Laura attending college in Chicago, and Robert in his element surrounded by lots of playmates. We were amazed at how Robert would organize all the smaller children on our floor for games and adventures. Ruth had stayed in Bakersfield attending college, and Mary was first in Dallas, then Boston living in staff houses and attending high school. The entire family was together for short times in summer and for Christmas vacations. One outstanding vacation was a motoring trip to Kentucky, camping and

visiting with Margaret's nephew, Michael Skellie and his family. We found a farm that rented horses for an hour at a time. It was hilarious to watch our children, inexperienced with horses, bouncing along on their steeds. Some would barely move, others loved to gallop. Robert got the liveliest and could barely hang on for laughing. We figured that was better than screaming. One of the nicest events of early 1982 was the celebration of my fiftieth birthday. My colleague in Emerging Generation planned a great party, and Margaret gave me a framed plaque of a quote from Nikos Kazantzakis:

*"As soon as you were born, a new possibility was born with you, a free heartbeat stormed through the great sunless heart of your race.*

*You have a great responsibility.*

*You do not govern now only your own small, insignificant existence.*

*You are a throw of the dice on which, for a moment, the entire fate of your race is gambled..*

*Everything you do reverberates throughout a thousand destinies.*

*As you walk, you cut open and create that river bed into which the stream of your descendants shall enter and flow."*

Margaret graduated from Chicago Divinity School with her Master of Divinity degree in the spring of 1982, and that August we were assigned to the Los Angeles Religious House. We knew this would have

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

the benefit of being close, sort of, to Laura and Ruth, and Sara. Laura had transferred to California State University at Fresno, graduated, and was starting her first teaching job. Ruth continued at California State University Bakersfield. Meanwhile Mary was finishing her senior year at English High School in Boston. Sara had finished the Student House program, and would start her high school years as part of the Phoenix Arizona Religious House. I worked that year to help setup a Rural Development Symposium which we held in the midst of the massive California State Fair. We held the symposium, which included displays, speakers, and workshops, in a large colorful tent. Visalia County supervisors gave some great testimonials about our work in Richgrove and with other rural communities in California. Margaret didn't have so great a year. She became ill and slept in many mornings, yet doctors could find nothing. She had been excited working on her graduate degree, but let down afterward. I was out of town a lot, working on the Symposium, and she apparently had some run-ins with other staff. I don't know if this was a factor, but in March of 1983 we were given a special assignment to teach in an eight week Rural Development Leadership School in Jamaica, West Indies.

We'd never been to Jamaica, and were excited by the challenge. The school was held in the little village of Woburn Lawn in the Blue Mountains northeast of Kingston. Robert went with us and had a grand old time playing with village boys. He was assigned reports and other work by his school back in Los Angeles so that he could still pass the fourth grade. We took to Jamaica like ducks to water. The teaching was fun, the celebrations even more so. Margaret and I both lost weight from all the hill climbing and simple diet. Margaret perked up, and felt much better. She was terrific with the young Jamaicans, both students



and staff. After the eight-week school we went to Chicago for all the summer conferencing at Kemper.

In August our full-year assignment was made to Jamaica. We had a couple of weeks to bring our family together in Los Angeles, to store whatever couldn't be taken to Jamaica, and make final arrangements. Laura had completed her first year of teaching, and been accepted in Los Angeles to transfer and teach first grade. She was crushed to learn that we were returning to Jamaica. I suggested the time had come for us to leave the Institute and get our family back together. I was pretty certain that if we returned to Virginia. I could pastor a church again, and Laura could get a job there. Margaret, however had found her re-awakening in Jamaica. It looked as though we were destined for Jamaica.

We borrowed a truck to move Mary into a dorm at California State Fullerton for her freshman year, assuring her that her big sister, Laura, would be nearby. However, Laura found new friends in an elderly couple. One day while Margaret and I were packing up some things on the patio behind the house in Los Angeles, Laura saw an Indian woman dressed in a sari struggling with a load of groceries and offered to help. Laura had spent six months in India and had learned a few words of the language. We discovered later from letters from Laura, that they were Muslim, and Abu, the husband was a fundamentalist teacher. By the end of the year, she had declared her new faith, chosen a new name, and disavowed any relationship with her family. It was a crushing blow to us. In winter of 1984 I made a special trip back to Los Angeles to try and reconcile with her, to no avail. By then Laura was 26, and I concluded that she had the freedom to make her own decisions. In the years following, we honored her desire to be left alone except for brief visits when we were in the Los Angeles area. She and Abu would

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

only visit us on neutral ground in a public park, and for never more than an hour.

In Jamaica, Margaret and I taught in one more school, then I worked with village bakers to form the Blue Mountain Bakery Cooperative. During the village meetings and school we came to know that a number of the villagers in the mountains closest to Blue Mountain Peak, the highest point in Jamaica, had backyard ovens and baked bread. These ovens were hand-constructed out of stone or brick and cement, and were usually about six feet long, five wide and five or six high with a floor two feet above ground. An opening at one end allowed a wood fire to be built inside to heat up the entire structure. While the oven was heating, dough would be prepared in a trough-like wooden container. Formed loaves were set on sheets of tin. Seeing no oven thermometer, I asked: "How do you know when the oven is the right temperature?" Answer: "When you throw a little flour in the oven it has to brown in just the right amount of time."

When the oven was ready, the fire was scraped out through a special chute, the loaf tins were slid in place, and the opening closed with another piece of tin. Everyone said the bread was delicious, but the village storekeepers complained that the bread had too short a shelf life.

After a little research we discovered that adding a little calcium propionate, and packaging the loaves in plastic bags instead of newspaper meant that the bread would stay fresh longer and shopkeepers would readily sell the bread. The next issue was transportation to deliver the bread to the many little shops throughout the villages. No one had a vehicle, but I had noticed numerous mules and donkeys with large wicker baskets slung on each side. Everyone laughed. "They'd call it Mule Bread," they said, but still they agreed to try it.

On the first day of production we used two ovens, paid two bakers and one mule driver. All the bread sold except one loaf we kept for a co-op celebration. The evaluation/celebration meeting was held in a little tin roof shack at a crossroads. Two kerosene lanterns gave light, and when we broke the bread all eyes glistened. Thus the Blue Mountain Co-op Bakery was born.

Margaret worked with the National Ministry of Culture to preserve local songs and stories, and to bring University of The West Indies resources from Kingston to the mountain villages. While Sara and Robert were attending private schools in Kingston, Margaret and I spent many days in Woburn Lawn working on our projects along with the Jamaican staff of young men and one woman. Sara suffered sexual harassment at her school, and so, that winter she transferred back to Chicago. That summer Margaret stayed in Jamaica and helped to host visiting International Rotary Club members. The Rotary Club was, at that time, our largest funding source for the Jamaica rural development work. I went to Chicago to help set up summer conferencing. That summer Robert had a great time on his "Sixth Grade Trip," a kind of rite of passage for students entering middle school and the Student House. This, of course, meant that in August I returned to Jamaica alone, our having been re-assigned there.

We were having what we thought was a very successful year, when in March we were called to Miami to meet with some of the Institute's "top brass." There were complaints that had come from the leading priors in Kingston. It seems that we "babied" the Jamaican staff. I actually think that the priors were jealous of our close relationship with them. At any rate, we'd had enough!! We were offered an assignment to the Brussels Religious House in Belgium, but said "no

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

thanks.” We went back to Kingston, packed up our stuff, and moved out. One of our friends, a professor at the University, offered to rent us his vacant apartment. Margaret quickly got a job with the Ministry of Culture through her friendship and work with Olive Llewyn, the director. For me it was much more difficult since most companies and agencies had policies against hiring ex-pats (non-Jamaicans).

## CHAPTER 7

### RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL

As Mother's Day approached I made a trip to Virginia to see my mother, then a widow living in Fredericksburg. I felt sad that I had seen so little of her during the twelve years we had spent with the Institute. Dad had died in 1978. Then and a few other times I had made the long trek home for visits. She lived in a nice apartment, and next door to Julia Clews, who had become her best friend. Mother had a car, but her failing eyesight and jangled nerves kept her on the passenger side. Julia, a widow of a Methodist minister, was mother's caretaker, chauffer, and confidant. I enjoyed meeting her as well. While in Virginia I took a trip to Richmond to meet with my Methodist bishop. I remember he said "Carl, if you want a church appointment just let me know." I arrived at just the right time since appointments were made in early June. Margaret and I began burning up the phone lines between Virginia and Jamaica. She didn't want to leave Jamaica. Furthermore, she had signed a one-year contract to do music research and to teach a course or two at the University. We decided that she would work out the contract, and I would accept the church appointment.

I moved to the really nice parsonage in Mt.

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

Crawford, Virginia. I was to serve the church there and another down the road at Mt. Sidney. It had been a long time since I had served two churches at once. Robert said, "Wow, they must think you're good!" The system was that when you came "back" from a Special Appointment, you had to start over near the bottom. However, if the years with the Institute had taught me anything, it taught me to be flexible. Actually, it seems that I'd been given, from birth, the gift of being able to be happy everywhere I go.

There isn't any place more beautiful to live than the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, and there I could begin to reassemble the family. First Sara and Robert came from Chicago, and then Mary from California. Both Laura and Ruth were settled in California, and remained so. While at Mt. Crawford I noticed the deterioration of my mother's health. She came to stay a few days with us. One day when she was setting the table for dinner, she paused holding a fork and asked "Now what is this used for?" I knew she was slipping away. She was 81 when in the spring of 1986 a blood clot lodged in her lung and took her life. Margaret came from Jamaica for the funeral, and we laid Mother to rest in Fredericksburg next to Dad.

As June approached, after just my one year at Mt. Crawford I realized that with the three children still to finish college, we needed more money than the \$21,000 that was my salary. I beseeched the District Superintendent and the Bishop. They reluctantly granted a move to Crossman Church in Falls Church, Virginia with a \$2,000 salary increase. Margaret said goodbye to Jamaica and came back just before the move. The increased cost of living in Northern Virginia meant that our feet were still to the fire financially until Margaret secured a teaching job with Fairfax County Schools. We got a second car and became a typical suburban family. Margaret's mind still needed

challenging so while we lived in Falls Church she took courses toward an Ethnomusicology Doctorate, spending long hours at George Mason University and in Baltimore at the University of Maryland Extension. All this in addition to teaching three-fourths time. She also applied for Deacon Ordination status in the Virginia Methodist Conference, yet she didn't think she wanted to pastor a church. She did accept the challenge in 1988 to serve as part-time associate pastor at the Community United Methodist Church in Arlington, Virginia. In the spring of '89 the church dropped the position due to lack of funds, and the Bishop told her there were no other part-time positions available. By then she was teaching full time with pay too good to pass up, and lacked the interest in moving to full time ministerial work. In those days secular employment could not count toward ordination in the church.

During the four years at Crossman Church the church grew very little, but we did install a beautiful new pipe organ, and lay the groundwork for a merger with Christ Methodist, just down Lee Highway a ways. Every organist in Northern Virginia wanted to give a recital on that organ. The merger didn't actually happen till I had moved on. Also, during these years I served as Leadership Development Coordinator for the Arlington District of United Methodist Church, and Chairman of the Virginia Conference Division on Education. The latter required numerous trips to Richmond for meetings. In all this work I found the planning methods learned in the Institute to be extremely helpful. Also, upon returning to the parish ministry, I had found much burnout among colleagues and old friends. All the change and challenges had kept me fresh and hopeful.

Four years in Falls Church was the longest we had been in one place since 1969, and by 1990 we

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

were ready for a new challenge. Sara, "Miss Independence" herself, had moved out of the house, was working, and taking classes. Robert graduated from high school that June, and had chosen Ferrum College for fall enrollment. Mary, having not finished college in California, had begun at Shenandoah University as a music theatre major in 1988. We loved the calm drive up to Winchester and the artistic performances by talented young people. Mary's senior project performance, a one-woman show she'd created, was wonderful.

At the end of June we moved from Falls Church into a much smaller parsonage in Woodbridge, provided by the Cokesbury United Methodist Church. By this time Mary, with an eye to a theatre career, had begun collecting vintage clothing and many other items not of day-to-day usability but with "future possibility." This, combined with Margaret's secure place among the pack rats of the world, meant that our basement was filled floor to ceiling with boxes, many of which were never opened the entire time we lived on Forest Lane in Woodbridge. We were also downsizing from four bathrooms to one, so during the summer before Robert and Mary left for college, and with Sara in and out, that one door took a lot of knocking. Moving to Woodbridge also meant a longer commute for Margaret to her schools in Chantilly and Reston. She was a wonderful teacher, and the children loved her, but she had one class of "Emotionally Disturbed" (school term) children that was stressful to teach. As the only music teacher for two schools, she had all the children, but for only a couple hours a week. Teacher/student bonding was almost impossible. Yet in each school she pulled together at least one major, and very successful, production each year.

Her level of fatigue was increasing. Sometime in the mid-1990s, after her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday on March 20,



1993 she experienced some cramping and spotting, but the doctors didn't seem to be too worried. She told me that her gynecologist suggested "Why don't you have that uterus removed? You don't need it anymore." Margaret said that that old uterus had been with her and served her well all her life and she didn't want to give it up just because it was now "retired." She retired from teaching in about 1996, and with stress levels down, felt much better. By then Margaret had given up on her desire to become ordained in the United Methodist Church, and, in fact found another church home where she felt very much at home. She visited the Accotink Unitarian Universalist Church in Fairfax and loved it right away. It seemed to meet all her needs for a liberal, caring community. Though she attended their membership class and became a member, they also, at least informally, recognized her ministerial status.

Here I must pause and do a bit of explaining for my non-Methodist readers. The United Methodist system changed in 2004, but before then, ordination in the United Methodist Church was a two-step process. One was first ordained a Deacon and was accepted into an Annual Conference. Then one was to serve full-time as a minister for two years on "probation" before the final ordination as an Elder. One could, as a Deacon, complete theological education, but still must have the two years of pastoral service. Margaret had the education, and had been ordained as Deacon and technically was a minister, she just hadn't gone on through the entire process to the permanent Elder ordination. Understand?

My first move at Cokesbury United Methodist Church in Woodbridge was to announce that I wanted to visit in every home before Christmas, and would do little else besides Sunday services and hospital visits. We were lucky to have Frances Adams as church

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

secretary. I'd give her my schedule of available hours and she'd go to work, day and night, making appointments. Every Monday she'd give me the appointments for that week, and I'd give her the available hours for the next. With these visits I got to know the desires and needs of the congregation, and they came to know me better than they did through the Sunday morning handshake. I think those visits set us on a helpful track and were part of the reason I stayed at Cokesbury for nine years. The church kept growing, and there didn't seem to be any right time to move before retirement in 1999. During those years we had an influx of African Methodists from Liberia, Ghana, and Sierra Leone. They didn't seem to have the "race barrier" hang-ups that so many African Americans seemed to have had. Marian Anderson, with her children Rutherford and Lady Diana from Liberia were the first. Marian, now Marian Benson, since she married about ten years ago, is still a faithful member of Cokesbury. Early in the 90s the United Methodist Church published a new hymn book, and we loved singing the new music from around the world. Cokesbury took on an international flavor.

We started a tradition of yearly mission trips for teens and adults. Mike Eland became the driving force for these trips. I remember my surprise when twelve people volunteered after I mentioned in a sermon one year that there'd be no better way to celebrate Thanksgiving than to go help a little Hispanic church in North Carolina recover from hurricane flooding. We left on Thursday evening and spent Friday and Saturday mucking out the church basement and creating a new drainage system. On Sunday, there was a celebratory worship service in Spanish and English. At Cokesbury a recycling system called the Flea Market began with the leadership of Glenn Wirick. We also became a recycling center for Prince William County. When a

new Disciple Bible Study system arrived, we lit into it. I appreciated then all the teaching methods we had used in the Ecumenical Institute. As our adult students read through the Bible I was struck by how surprised and upset they became to discover how much “God-ordained” violence there is, especially in the Old Testament. I don’t think it always registered when we explained that the Bible was written by Jewish and Christian leaders and contains human understandings of what God wills. The writings are “God-inspired”, but not God-dictated. The Bible records the human experiences of God-encounters in the Judeo-Christian cultural context.

The nineties were times of growth and change for me and my family. We had to learn to live in the absence of Laura. Ruth married, divorced, and moved in with us to bring forth a child, Anthony, born June 12, 1997. Mary married with two ceremonies, one in Colorado, and again in Virginia, then produced a son Jesse in 1999. Sara married, entered the Army, and brought forth two sons, Ethan in '94 and Patton in '99. Sara divorced and later married Ariel Hernandez who had two children from a previous marriage, Jazmin and Junior. Then Sara and Ariel brought forth Kelli. After Robert’s second year at college he came home announcing that he needed a break and wanted to travel west: “I’ll not ask you for money, I’ll earn my way.” He knew how “Scottish” I could be. In California he met the “girl of his dreams,” Kim. They also had two weddings, one in Wyoming and one in California, and went to work producing babies. To this writing he has outstripped all the girls in baby production. The first was Malachi in '95, followed by Josiah in '97, and Kateri in '99 and of this writing (2018) he and Kim have a total of 11 children.

Whether acquiring all these grandchildren at once influenced the decision I really don’t know, but in

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

the spring of 1999 I declared for retirement. The Cokesbury people planned an amazing celebration. They presented many gifts, including a quilt with squares created by the various families of the church, and an original sketch of yours truly in the pulpit holding a paint brush in one hand and a baseball in the other. Special music was presented, testimonials voiced, and so much hooplah it was downright embarrassing. Full retirement, however, was yet to be realized. Back in '94 we had purchased the Skellie home place in Long Beach, Mississippi, and had been working on its renovation for our retirement home, but by May it was clear that Ruth would need child-care assistance for another couple years while she completed a degree from George Mason University. We decided to accept a part-time appointment to Grace United Methodist Church in Stafford County. We promised the Superintendent to give him two years. It provided a parsonage, and Ruth could commute from there to work and school. "Part-time" meant that I would do Sunday services and pastoral care, but nothing in the way of program development or teaching, and a minimum of administration.

During those two years we had a memorable trip that turned out to be bittersweet. We had loaded up our old Chevy van and utility trailer with stuff for a trip to Long Beach, some of it construction equipment to work on the house. We were to head west from I-81 on I-40 to meet Robert and family at a retreat center in Kentucky where we would be present for their induction into a Catholic family order. However, the van could not cope with the mountains and died in Jackson, Tennessee. We bought the only thing on the used car lot that would hold us, all our stuff, and pull the trailer. It was a 1999 Chevy Tahoe. We missed the retreat and told Robert we'd meet them in Long Beach. By the time we all arrived Robert and I had only a few days to

convert a dilapidated old porch into an enclosed laundry/sun room. Robert and I had some great bonding moments. We didn't talk religion while we worked. He and Kim were naturally all excited to share their fresh Catholic doctrines. We were less enthusiastic to receive. It made for some tense moments, yet family love triumphed, and we ended our time together with a sunset picnic on the beach.

As the spring of 2001 approached I had to keep reminding my District Superintendent (United Methodist Church) that I was really leaving in June and he needed to find a replacement. She actually fell into our lap. In early May a young couple appeared in church one Sunday. He was a Marine stationed at Quantico, and she was a Methodist minister from Pennsylvania. They were getting married in June and would be living in Stafford. I called Lee Shaeffer, the District Superintendent, and by July, she had become my replacement.

We helped Ruth and Anthony move into an apartment in Triangle--not far from the old Triangle Hardware, now a dry cleaning establishment. I had reserved a rental truck, but, the most amazing thing happened--a member of the church who owned a tractor-trailer trucking business offered to move us. I asked, "All the way to Mississippi? You must be kidding." He wasn't. So without costing us a penny we were moved, lock, stock, and barrel. More Amazing Grace! You should have seen that monster truck maneuvering through the neighborhood streets to our house at 106 S. Girard Ave., Long Beach, Mississippi. Then after the Hurricane Katrina that same truck brought a tractor and much other equipment to help with the clean-up efforts, working on my property and two others for a week in November 2005. I've never been able to thank those dozen volunteers enough.

## CHAPTER 8

### LIFE THROWS A CURVE

As we were packing in June 2001 Margaret began to experience pains and bleeding. As soon as we got moved into Long Beach she found a gynecologist in Gulfport who did a biopsy of the uterus. On September 11<sup>th</sup>, who can forget that date, we were on our way to hear the test reports, turned on the car radio and heard the terrible, unbelievable news from New York and Washington. The doctor's news was pretty bad, as well. Some cancer cells had been found and the uterus must come out. The surgery was scheduled for September 16<sup>th</sup>. Many a tear fell over the next few days. We felt that the world was collapsing all around us. The surgery went well, but after a few days the doctors reported that there was some cancer outside the uterus and they couldn't be sure they "got it all." A few days after we brought Margaret home from the hospital the surgical incision broke open, and we rushed back to the hospital. The doctors cleaned her up, but informed us they could not re-stitch because of the risk of infection. Now it would have to heal from the inside out and I would have to dress it twice every day until it healed. I didn't think I could do this without

fainting dead away, and I was doubtful about it healing itself. Nevertheless for six weeks I followed the nursing instructions, so that by Thanksgiving we were both feeling much better. Radiation treatments took up December, and by December 23 we were on our way to Virginia to spend Christmas with children and grandchildren. I wasn't sure we should try that long trip, but Margaret insisted we needed to go. She couldn't make it up the stairs so mostly slept on a recliner in the living room at Sara and Ariel's house. They lavished us with presents and much good food.

Back in Mississippi chemotherapy treatments began in January, one every three weeks through May. Margaret had chosen to be part of a nationwide study involving some three hundred women with similar cancer. There were three chemo drugs being used and the doctors were trying to learn which one was most effective. In order for study protocols to be carefully followed we could have the treatments done either in New Orleans or Hattiesburg. Since the latter was the easiest drive and since Margaret had two sisters there, we made the one-hour trip every three weeks. The doctors said, what we learned was pretty standard: "If you're still alive five years from now, you'll probably be clear." By April our sense of humor had returned and we laughed at her billiard ball head, but the various wigs she tried on were uncomfortable. She opted to just wear hats, courtesy of the Cancer Society. By August she was feeling pretty good and optimistic. Also, by then, she had become active in the little Unitarian church in Gulfport. For my part I stayed busy with housekeeping and projects in and around the house. That old house was constantly needing something. I needed a tool house/workshop. Margaret's sister-in-law Mable was having an old shed torn down so I salvaged lumber and roofing panels and built a pretty decent workshop with a deck on the front.

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

A little later I hired an electrician to run a line and power up the building.

By Christmas of 2002 we thought we really had licked the cancer, and I was itching to be of service again, so in the spring 2003 I applied for and got a part-time job as visiting minister at Trinity United Methodist Church in Gulfport. This was a great job. Ray Phelps, the Senior Pastor gave me work and the freedom to do it. He never pushed me to work more than the twenty or so hours we agreed to and was deeply appreciative of all I did. Margaret was also busy providing a music program and some pastoral care for the little Unitarian congregation. Since Trinity Church and the mental health building where her church had services were just a few blocks apart, we'd often meet after church at some restaurant and share stories of the ups and downs of church life.

The pains in her chest and back began in the summer of 2004. We thought she'd cracked a rib playing around with grandson Jesse, but x-rays showed nothing. Pains came and went all during the fall and winter. It seemed mysterious, no internist doctor, no obstetrician, no neurologist, no one could pin down the problem. Months went by with no definitive answer except it seemed to be shingles. I never felt more helpless in my life than during this time. Sometime in February, I received a call at the church from Margaret. She had fallen and could not get up. As I rushed home, I called 911. I got there before the ambulance and managed to get her up on the sofa. She seemed now to be going downhill fairly rapidly. I was determined to get some answers this time.

She was in the hospital several weeks. Mary came over from Tallahassee. Ariel drove Sara, Ruth and the children down. There was much delay as blood samples were sent to labs as far away as California. All the while Margaret suffered in a hospital bed from



which she could not arise. Once I asked one of the doctors if morphine would help the pain. She told me they only use morphine as a last resort. She meant, "When you're at death's door." Finally the cancer specialist revealed to Ruth, myself, and Sara that yes, the cancer had returned, was all through her chest and might even have reached her brain. Margaret knew it already. One of the last things I could hear her whisper was, "I'm dying." Hospice helped us get her home where a hospital bed had been set up in our living room, and now a morphine drip had been installed. We could see the relief on her face as they wheeled her into our house, the house in which she was born. She was home. The doctor said it could be six days or six weeks. We were prepared for whatever time we could have. Robert came and sang to her. A hospice nurse arrived and bathed her. The very next morning around 9:00 a.m., she simply stopped breathing and passed away. It was March 12, 2005.

I was stunned and bereft. Had she lived three more years we could have had that fiftieth anniversary celebration for which we had begun planning. I was suddenly thrust into a whole new orbit for which I was not prepared. The one thing Margaret and I had agreed upon relative to death is that we wanted to be cremated. As the coroner pronounced the death and the undertakers took away what was left of her, that's all I could think to tell them. Soon calls were going out and coming in, casseroles were being prepared, travel plans being made, visitors dropping by, and many questions crowding into my mind. Uppermost among the questions was how best to honor and celebrate Margaret's life. Robert, Mary, and I began to plan the service. We decided that the memorial should be a celebration worthy of Margaret's talent and life-commitment. Four ministers led the service and many others gave brief testimonies to her generous spirit and

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

service. Robert presented a song he had written in his mother's honor and all our grown-up children sang beautifully. The First United Methodist Church of Long Beach, Mississippi where Margaret had grown up, offered to host the service, and the women's group thereof made ready to serve a meal for the congregants. Assistance and support came from every direction. Calls were coming from family, friends, and church members of churches I'd served. Our refrigerators overflowed with food, and hugs abounded. The next morning we walked down to the beach which Margaret loved and where she grew up, said a prayer, and scattered her ashes in the waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

After everyone left and I went back to work it was difficult to come home to that big empty house, except for the phone calls and the cards, which continued. It was like everyone knew how empty my life would be. The girls called me frequently, and even former parishioners and friends. One of the hardest things that spring was sorting through Margaret's clothes and other personal items. I knew she'd want the clothes to go to people who could use them so I took many of them to a local Methodist mission. I had to guess at what the girls would want to keep. She had many, many books, the result of a lifetime of scholarship and study. I had a local print shop print memorial plaques for the books, some of which I gave to local women ministers, and others I distributed at the Virginia United Methodist Conference in June. At the Conference I received many more condolences and well wishes from colleagues and friends.

When I got home I bought a cute little A-frame fold-up camper just right for one person. It was time to look to the future. God's Grace had supported me and would continue to do so into whatever future chapters of my life.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE SECOND STORM OF 2005

I took a break from the writing of this memoir for a trip to see Robert and his family in California. More about that later. It's now Monday, September 8, 2008 as I sit at the computer once more. Without this instrument I wouldn't be writing. Arthritis in the hands makes handwriting painful now, and on the computer it's so easy to edit, save, and add. I urge all my grandchildren to learn typing and become computer literate as early as possible. I never took typing in high school, and all through college I had to pay someone to type my papers. I took a night class just before entering seminary, which wasn't enough, but got me through, and that, plus the computer make this document possible.

The summer of 2005 was the loneliest time of my life in the absence of my life-partner of almost forty-seven years. The house seemed so big and bare. I missed Margaret and the rest of my family. The phone calls and emails got me through, as well as staying busy at Trinity United Methodist Church. When attending the Virginia United Methodist Conference in

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

June, I reconnected with an old friend and colleague from Cokesbury Church. Linda Crawford had joined the church during my later years there, and seeing her leadership abilities I had recruited her to work with the church youth. Soon after moving to Long Beach, in the summer of 2001, Margaret and I heard of her mother's death and attended the funeral in Pensacola, Florida. While still in Pensacola, she brought her dad over to see our house in Long Beach. We had just bought a used laptop computer, and she set it up for us. After that she had kept us up-to-date via email on happenings at Cokesbury Church. During the summer of 2005 her emails were very supportive.

Sunday, August 28<sup>th</sup> dawned ominously. Even though weather reports on Saturday spoke of a large hurricane headed our way, Mississippi Gulf "Coastians" had seen a number of near misses in recent years and thought maybe we could ride this one out as well. So Trinity had gone ahead with service plans for Sunday morning. We did the first service with a much smaller than usual crowd, but during the Sunday School hour rumors were spreading about a mandatory evacuation order, and about a direct hit of a storm larger than Camille had been years earlier, and it was due on Monday. We started the second service with a song and prayer and sent home the handful of people present ten minutes later. Back at home between frantic phone calls from Ruth, Mary and Sara, and from friends like Linda--all urging my immediate evacuation--I boarded up the most vulnerable windows, and packed some clothes and other items in the Tahoe and little camper. I couldn't take the Camry. I did move it to the north side of the house where I hoped it'd be safe. Luckily I had already packed for a retreat I was to attend the next weekend. By late afternoon, with winds picking up, the sky dark, and a light rain starting, I locked the house and left it to fate.

I heard from radio reports that I-10 east and west was overcrowded with evacuees making it little more than a parking lot. I decided to go north on Highway 49 toward Hattiesburg, not sure where I'd lay my head that night. Soon reports told of police closing streets in Hattiesburg because of heavy evacuee traffic coming up I-59 from New Orleans. I received a call from my brother, Roy, in Mobile, Alabama inviting me over since they were planning to stay put at home. The call came just in time. I hopped on Highway 98 which cuts across from Hattiesburg southeast to Mobile and found the road deserted--no one was headed toward the coast. As it happened, Mobile was far enough east of the eye of the storm to suffer only minor damage from falling trees when it came ashore on Monday. Power in Mobile was out for a couple days, but we'd learned by battery-powered radio that all roads across the coast toward New Orleans and beyond were closed. By Wednesday, since all communication with the Gulfport/Long Beach area was out and I couldn't travel that direction, I decided to go on to the retreat that was to be in the hills east of Birmingham. While there, horror stories began to reach us of total devastation on the Mississippi and Louisiana coast.



**Long Beach Mississippi After Katrina**

However by Wednesday, September 7, we heard that although Highway 90 along the coast was closed and would be for some time (In fact, it took three years to have the Highway 90 bridges rebuilt and opened.) I-10 had been cleared and opened. So I headed back to Gulfport. At the church, volunteers were busy serving meals to whoever needed them. The church building had suffered some roof damage, but was far enough from the beach and bayous to have escaped flood damage. There was no electricity, but a large generator almost as big as a boxcar had been brought to the church by United Methodist Committee On Relief (UMCOR) so that we had lights and part-time air conditioning in the main hall. For the next month I pitched in as the church became a major relief center and distribution center for supplies from baby diapers to scrub buckets. Armies of volunteers from around the country began to appear. In front of the church there were power crews from Ohio. Army and private contractor bulldozers cleared streets of trees, power

poles, and blown-off roofs.

Rescue teams went house-to-house looking for survivors or bodies. When I could finally get through to my house, two blocks from the beach, one window was broken out and numbers spray-painted to indicate the house had been searched by rescue teams. National Guard troops manned all intersections and had placed barbed wire along the railroad to seal off traffic to the worst damaged areas down toward the beach. Homeowners needed to line up for passes to get to their properties.

My house still stood, but suffered much roof damage, collapsed ceilings, and ruined appliances and furniture from three feet of water throughout the house. Roy and Gwen came over from Mobile and took back a few items like hanging clothes and my retirement banner that had escaped the water. My niece Carla helped for a few days. She convinced me to throw out my favorite, but now moldy, travel mug with the promise she'd replace it--which she did! She also made an appeal among her friends and made a cash contribution. The expressions of care and love from every quarter was overwhelming. Volunteer church teams from Georgia and Florida came to help save what we could and pile wet and ruined furniture, refrigerators, mattresses, and other items out on the street.



**My House After Katrina**

Every street was the same. Only one narrow lane was passable between huge piles of debris as people tried to get wet, molding items out of the houses that still stood. My yard was littered with sofas, fences, a metal shed, and many unidentifiable objects that washed up from areas, I suppose, closer to the beach. The word out was that FEMA was hiring trucks and tractors to haul away debris from the streets, but we knew it'd take months. Down on the beach nothing was left. Motels, apartment buildings, restaurants, and churches were all gone. Nothing was left but concrete slabs. Only the sturdy live oaks remained, but with all leaves and the weaker limbs stripped away.

Back in Gulfport I was offered shelter by Tom and Betsy Clark where I stayed until early October, when I said my goodbyes, packed up the Tahoe and headed for Virginia. My sister, Jean, took me in. Though it was difficult to leave my new friends, the church, and my home, I found myself glad to be returning to Virginia. Mississippi had become home,



yet Virginia held my roots, family, and old friends. I knew that Margaret would have wanted me nearer the children and grandchildren. Plus, we had agreed years ago that the one of us left after the death of the other would seek out another partner. Since July, Linda and I had learned by phone and email how much we had in common, and even spoken of a possible life together. Her brief marriage had ended in 1984 and no other relationship had gotten close since. We found ourselves drawn together like magnet to metal, and so by mid-November the announcement of our intention seemed the natural outcome possible, at least to us. Our wedding was set for January 14, 2006.

I still worried over the house in Mississippi, but Ashley Skellie, Margaret's grand-niece, had agreed to buy it "as is." We just couldn't seal the deal until the decision about my "Home-owner Grant" had been finalized. The federal government agency, HUD, had made a deal with the Mississippi Development Authority to give these grants to individuals who'd lost homes in Katrina. However the hoops to jump through to win such a grant were interminable. It would be two years before I would actually receive a check in the mail. My house insurance would cover only a small fraction of the loss, since they said most of the damage was from "flood," and I had no flood insurance. No one in my area did. Never before had it ever been needed.

I went back to Long Beach the third week of November with a volunteer team from Grace United Methodist Church in Stafford where I had served before moving to Mississippi in 2001. As I mentioned before, they took an entire tractor-trailer load of equipment. They stripped the house down to the studs, cleared the property of downed trees and other debris, and at the same time, some of us worked on two other houses. We slept on the floor of a church, made our meals there, and generally used it as our home-away-from-

home for ten days.

In December, Linda and I visited Grace Church to take them a gift, introduce Linda, and announce our wedding plans. Congratulations abounded!! Probably the person making the hardest adjustment to our marriage plan was Linda's Dad, Winston. He had leaned heavily on his oldest daughter ever since his wife died in '01. However, by wedding day he seemed to be in the swing of things. My old friend Jim Athearn performed the family-only ceremony in the chapel at Braddock Street Church in Winchester, Virginia.



**Linda and Carl's Wedding Day**

Then after brunch we all drove back to Woodbridge where Marsha Eland was hosting a more public reception. I was delighted that in addition to local church members and friends, old friends from Randolph-Macon came to the reception--Dick and Pat Faris and Skip Earl. That evening we were staying at the Wyndham Hotel while Linda's family stayed at her (our) house. We no sooner got settled in our room than I became strangely ill. We ended up spending most of the night at the emergency room at Potomac Hospital-

romantic, eh? I felt better by morning and Ruth took us to Dulles Airport. However, she had to come back and get us because our plane was disabled. So our trip to St. John was cut short by one day. We still had a fabulous time staying in a hillside “EcoTent” overlooking a beautiful turquoise bay. One night, the wind blew so hard we thought surely we would go flying off into the rocks, tent and all. I nearly drowned at my first attempt snorkeling, and one day our rental Jeep went skidding into bushes as the road did an amazing hairpin turn. Oh, but we had a fabulous time! It was the perfect beginning for a brand new adventure.

## CHAPTER 10

### STARTING OVER (PHASE FOUR)

I hesitate to start writing about the next chapter of my life for two reasons. First, maybe not enough time has elapsed. You know how it is with old people. We can remember clearly forty years ago, but can't recall what we did forty minutes ago. Second, I wouldn't want any recent happiness to imply prior unhappiness. It would be comparing apples and oranges to try and compare the marriage which occupied so many years of my life to the new one. Both are delicious, but in a very different way. Also, during most of those previous years I was working, and only retired at the end of what I call phase three of my life. Retirement changes so much.

About those "phases." I suppose it's like outlining, or charting life. It seems that my first phase was birth to age 25; growing up, schooling, and marrying. Phase Two, ages 25 to 50 involved family development, and experiencing many work roles. Phase Three, ages 50 to 75, saw me coming back to Virginia, settling down to the sole role of pastoring, retiring, and then caretaking for Margaret during her illness. Phase Four, ages 75 to \_\_\_? begins a new

chapter, Chapter Ten and beyond.

With all the divorces and unhappiness in the world it somehow doesn't seem quite fair that I have actually found two loves of my life. After the first was taken away another came into my life.

Upon returning from the St. John honeymoon the first major task Linda and I had was to make room for two in the Woodbridge town house. Having lived alone in the house for almost sixteen years it would be quite an adjustment for Linda to make. Closets had to be cleaned out, items sorted into "keep" and "toss" piles. She actually had an easier time of it than I. I'd say, "Linda, don't you want to keep this?" The reply was usually "Let it go." I explain it this way: To people who study changing patterns in American culture, you see, she's a Baby Boomer and I'm a Baby of the Great Depression. My early, formative, years were spent in times of scarcity. It was impressed upon us to not expect great abundance, and to save, save, save. The Boomers, however, were born after World War II in a time of great economic growth and abundance. Thus it is easier for them to toss a tiny bit of leftover food, or a perfectly good item which you "may have use for someday." Making room for another adult in the house seemed easier for her than it would have been for me.

Of course, Katrina (the hurricane) had taken most of my worldly stuff, and some of what we salvaged I passed on to my girls, so the moving-in went smoothly.

The remainder of the first year was "get-acquainted" time with each other's families and friends. We made trips to California for Linda to meet Robert and his family when they lived up on the mountain, and to Pensacola for me to meet Linda's extended family. We had known each other for about eight years but only after you're married do you really get to know a person. We were having great fun learning how much

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

more we had/have in common. We both loved spaghetti, chocolate, outdoor activities such as hiking and camping, adventures, taking risks, books, movies, etc, etc. Where we had issues we compromised: attendance at church functions, frequency and duration of Winston's visits, etc. We formed quite a team and worked on projects, meals, and other activities together. You wouldn't think "attendance at church functions" would be an issue for us with my background as pastor. My family had frequently complained about my working so many evenings. Now it was me being left at home as Linda attended this church meeting or that. I guess that's called "the shoe on the other foot." She would say, "You're the one who got me into this," and it was true that back in 1997 when as pastor at Cokesbury United Methodist Church, I had recruited her to be a Youth Counselor. I had also, later, encouraged her to take the seminary courses necessary to become an official Youth Director.

One of our first projects at the Woodbridge house was to hire some landscapers to create a plan for our bare yard, and to plant shrubs and a tree, and to develop a stone patio. We enjoyed the results. Then I installed some solar lights around the front walkway which, though they had been knocked around some, still worked three years later.

We were not too happy to learn that when we had announced our intention to marry, a church lady commented, "That's good, Carl will have someone to care for him in his old age." It was difficult for people to imagine our marriage as mutual. But in fact we have established a deep bond of mutual love and care. We also have much fun and laughter. At first, I worried that Linda would feel uncomfortable for me to talk about Margaret. That was far from the case, and we have shared a great deal about our former lives. Margaret loved angels, and we still have a large wicker-type

angelic figure in our living room. On our first Christmas together in 2006, Linda surprised me with an amazing gift. While we lived in Long Beach, Margaret was given a painting of a young boy going fishing along a pier. The artist had been a schoolmate of Margaret's many years before. I had it rolled up in a closet and had shown it to Linda. Without my knowing, Linda had had it beautifully framed and presented it to me. My favorite Christmas gift that year.

When we married we thought Linda might work another three years before retirement, so we began to talk about where we might settle. Actually, the recession set that goal back a bit further into the future, so that several years later we were still talking about "three years." Anyway, as our first anniversary approached we decided to take a tour of Virginia. We were looking for something quieter and with less traffic than Northern Virginia. I had always been interested in the New River Valley area down below Blacksburg, so we started there. We did find a cute little house on the New River in the town of Fries, just west of Galax. But in the end, we realized that it was just too remote. Would the girls and grandchildren ever visit us way down there? On the way back we toured through Staunton and talked with a real estate lady. That looked very promising. As we headed home we thought it wouldn't hurt to look at a little stone cottage in a lake community in Louisa County. Linda had found it online before we left home. It looked interesting enough that a few days later we called the real estate person listed and made an appointment to go through the house. We didn't think we'd retire there, but it'd be a good investment and one that we and others could use now. It was only an hour and half drive from our home. We made an offer--nine thousand dollars less than the asking price--and it was accepted. We worked on the place and enjoyed it before later renting it out.

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

Inquiring at the homeowner's association office for handymen, we were referred to Steve Tompkins. We hired him to run ground wires for all the switches and receptacles in the house, install an exhaust fan in the bathroom and an outdoor light at the back of the house, and wire up the garage for a future workshop. The front door was badly warped and peeling veneer layers. Linda and I found a beautiful solid door at a Habitat ReStore in Charlottesville, and Steve installed it. When that work was done we asked him about a deck and were assured he could do that as well. After that he was our "go to" guy for handling any emergency, such as a broken water main or a leaking air conditioner unit. Gradually we added power tools to the workshop, and I built two work benches. I find it very satisfying to build simple items, at least when the weather is mild! I suppose you could say that it has replaced sermon writing as my "productive" activity. Actually that isn't a totally accurate statement because the need to serve still beat through my veins. In a District church newsletter I noticed an announcement that Annandale Church was in need of a Director of Caring Ministries. I applied for the job, was accepted and went to work in May of 2006. This part-time position involved caring for the sick, shut-ins, and organizing other forms of pastoral care. The following February I was leading a support group for persons suffering loss of one kind or another. I realized that I could hear very little of what participants were saying, and felt that I was therefore unable to be of much help to them. I was also having to give up night-time driving because of eye problems. Thus, in March 2007 I announced my final retirement. The church newsletter carried my retirement announcement:



*Dear AUMC Friends,*

*Every Beginning accompanies an Ending. (Occasionally it's helpful to point out the obvious.) Without endings there could be no beginnings. Life has its cycles of comings and goings. Did you ever notice the extra delight that older people take in babies and young children? It's the knowledge that new beginnings are coming after them.*

*As I celebrate my 75th birthday this month I delight in watching the youngest generation of ministers, knowing that they'll be here after I've fully retired. They'll carry on and, thanks to modern technology and education, probably accomplish more than my generation ever did. Seeing the ending of my ministry is difficult, as most endings are, but I delight in the accompanying beginnings.*

*I have delayed my final retirement long enough. My faculties - eyesight, hearing, memory, etc. - are fading. It's time to pass the torch. So, as I told Pastor Jim, my goal is to stop working at the end of March. I will have personal new beginnings, and I'm looking forward to all that God has in store for me.*

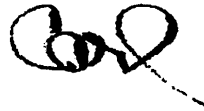
*My life and ministry have been blessed, and I appreciate the opportunities which have been mine, including working alongside the*

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

*wonderful people of Annandale United Methodist Church. The time of working here has been short, but fulfilling.*

*Thank you for the blessing of being in your fellowship, serving our Christ. May every ending you experience bring fresh new beginnings.*

*Grace and Peace,*



I've long had the fantasy that our family could and should make more use of the land in Mutton Hollow, and with access being the chief obstacle we fantasized further that an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) would solve the problem. So, "Now that we have a place to store it" (in the workshop at the lake), we laid out \$8,000 for an ATV that could haul a lot of stuff up the mountain. I discovered, however, that the vibration was very painful in my arthritic hands, so Linda was the sole driver. Eighteen months or so later, it mostly just sat in the workshop. We sold the "fantasy" and bought hearing aids. Those tiny little buggers for both Linda and I cost almost as much!

Sometimes we think it was more fantasizing, but when you have a lake community place don't you automatically think of boats? One night lying in bed, I recalled to Linda the story of when our children were young and we rented a pontoon boat, and actually slept overnight on it out on a lake somewhere in California. It was such fun! I'm still not sure that wasn't just something I dreamed. At any rate Linda went to the computer to that site where you bid on items, and on a lark we made a bid on a 1992 pontoon boat. Before we knew "what hit us," we were owners of a 21' pontoon

boat with a Mercury engine which we weren't even sure would run.



**Carl relaxing on the Pontoon Boat**

The \$3,000 seemed cheap compared to the ATV fiasco. We had much fun with the boat in spite of various problems which kept arising, and we've learned so much. Linda said "I thought you knew all about boats." Well, we do know much more now; like never let a gas tank run dry before switching to the second one (air locks develop); like, don't rely on stale gas unless you've put a stabilizer in it; like, cover the end of the water pump hose in the fall to keep bugs from stopping up the hose with their nest-building; like, don't rely on a flimsy tarp to protect the boat when winter can bring as much as two feet of snow! Oh, and like, flotation tubes on which we pulled the grandkids don't last more than a couple of summers, and propellers can chew up the harness cables which attach the tow rope to the boat. It's no wonder that someone once said that

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

a boat “is a hole in the water into which you pour money.” However, we did have fun with the “old girl” (when she ran).

One member of the family that didn’t appreciate the boat was Jetah, and that’s a whole nother story. In the fall of 2009 Linda and I began to talk about pets. When my girls were little we had a little black dog, Jingles (so named because she came from the pound with a little bell on her collar), and when I lived in Falls Church, Robert came home one day with a black lab puppy. Of course when Robert left for California a few years later I had inherited that dog, “Rasta.” While in Mississippi, Rasta had disappeared. His health had declined, and after a long, fruitless search we concluded he had gone off to die. On a December Saturday-before-Christmas, Linda and I visited the Prince William County Animal Shelter, and were “adopted” by the cutest little black Lab-type dog. The Shelter staff said they thought she was about nine months old and mixed with an unknown. Only in the face does she look “Lab.” The rest of her is more like “whippet.”



**Linda and Jetah**

Anyway, she moves like the wind. We named her "Jetah," in memory of Linda's old Jetta Volkswagen. We said when we were first married that Linda would retire in "about three years." Well in 2009 we were still saying it, we were closing in on it, and knew that we wanted to travel. There's so much right here in the USA to see and do. So when stopping to see Terry at Apperson's camper place to check on the Aliner camper which we left with him in the fall of 2009 to sell for us, we saw a motorhome for sale. It was a 2007 model Fleetwood Jamboree, a demonstrator that had only been used to take to shows and had 2000 miles on it. It seemed like too good a bargain to pass up, and he would take the Aliner as trade-in. By paying off the little Honda, and stopping the cleaning ladies who came twice a month, and borrowing the rest from Linda's dad, we saw that we could make payments, and then pay off the balance after selling the

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

townhouse upon Linda's retirement. Meanwhile we could take short trips, and we had an extra "pad," as Cedric (Ruth's husband) put it, at the lake. Our purchase of the motorhome was in June of 2010. To accommodate the Jamboree, we had the driveway at the lake reworked and a parking spot created. When Winston was visiting in July, we took a "shake-down" trip to a campground in Staunton, Virginia, then drove it to Pensacola, Florida, and back through Ashville, North Carolina for a vacation trip later in the summer. Unfortunately, later that very summer conversations began concerning the need for Linda's dad, Winston, to move in with us. At 84 and living alone, life for him had become problematic to say the least. Also, a next-door college had been pressuring him for years to sell them his Pensacola, Florida home of 56 years. Our townhouse in Woodbridge would not be practicable, so in the fall, Linda and I began looking for a new home as well. Thus, with the need for cash flow, by the next summer the motorhome was gone, kaput, finis, no more. In other words, sold! Easy come, easy go.

## **CHAPTER 11**

### **AND PAPA MAKES THREE**

It was a warm, spring-like day in February 2011 when Linda and I pulled up to Winston's home in Pensacola for one last time. The task was to help complete the clean-out of the house and two sheds, and to escort Pop, as Linda called him, back to our new home in Manassas, Virginia. He had a new pickup and a like-new year 2000 Buick. It had been his wife's car, and he insisted it had to come with us-- in fact it would have to be garaged, and the pickup could sit out in the rain, sun, or Virginia snow. So, a few days later our caravan left Pensacola, with Linda's brother and Pop in the Buick, Linda driving the pickup, and me bringing up the rear in our car. Lynn would fly back to his home in Jackson, Mississippi from Virginia later.

Linda's and my move had been completed on October 16, 2010. Many houses looked a lot alike as we spent late August and all of September searching, but we were struck by the unique character of the house on Wooldridge Dr. in Manassas built by its carpenter-owner. Each room had its own unique

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

finishing touches. Two bedrooms had built-in headboards, one with book shelves. The entire house had lots of beautiful moldings including chair rail in every room. There were five ceiling fans throughout. The house was spotless, with tasteful fresh paint jobs. What really blew us away was a thirty-by-thirty-foot porch off the kitchen door. I said to Mr. Dolinger "You must have had a lot of parties." No, it seems, he just liked to build things. We concluded later that since he worked with his father who built custom homes, he must have brought home left-over supplies from other projects and used them in his own place. Our first project was to hire someone to screen in the porch and then it became our favorite gathering place in warm weather.

Three days after our arriving back from Pensacola, the movers arrived with all Pop's stuff. We had pre-decided that his bed, desk, shelves, collections of miniature cars, CDs, eight tracks, etc. would all fit in the master bedroom and they did, sort of. Linda and I used the second largest bedroom, but that still left two smaller bedrooms for guests. Thanks to Pop, we now had living room and dining room furniture, plus room in the downstairs family room for Linda's and my LA-Z-Boys, our TV, and the computer desk. If you're ever needing advice on how to fit an extra person and their 86 years of accumulated stuff into your house- just ask us, Linda and I are now the experts!

Most of the rest of 2011 had to do with health concerns. Many doctor visits were required to get Winston set up with new cardiologists, dermatologists, primary care, dentists, etc. Since Linda was still working, it fell to me to shuttle Winston to doctor appointments, and he always wanted me to sit in and help be his "ears." It also became my job to take Winston to and from the airport, since about every six weeks he'd be ready for another trip back to Pensacola



to visit his friends and family. In August, I had foot surgery to correct previous surgery mistakes, but by October 1st was healed enough so that Linda and I could take in homecoming at Randolph-Macon College. Campus tour by Segway was fun, and the home team won the football game. An afternoon shower cut short a picnic dinner on the lawn.

“Pop” seemed to love getting to know Ruth and Mary and their families as they spent Thanksgiving and Christmas times with us, and we all loved having the extra space to spread out.

By the winter of 2012, Winston was making fairly frequent trips to the Potomac Hospital Emergency Room due to an assortment of falls and other ailments in between trips to Pensacola, and by the time in 2015 that we actually moved back that way we figured he should have owned quite a bit of stock in the place. After each episode he looked forward to being sent to physical therapy because the attendants, “his girls” all seemed to love his hugs.

By that same time my brother, Gary, had lost his job and home and I made many trips to Fredericksburg to bring him home with us or to take him back when he insisted he had to go. Not only was his physical state deteriorating, but also mentally he was losing touch with reality. Finally there was no place for him to go but to a nursing home. As the song says, “It’s a sad, sad situation.”

One thing we loved about living in Manassas was our long hikes with Jetah along the trail which borders the Bull Run/Occoquan River. Jetah loved to run up and down the steep hills and through the shallow streams. We always said that when she died we’d have to come spread her ashes at her favorite spot. However, as the year wore on my left knee grew painful, especially on the downhill slopes. So come fall I concluded “If ever I’m going to do any hiking on the

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

Appalachian Trail we'd better get to it." So in the late fall Ruth, Linda, and I set out on my first Appalachian Trail jaunt. However, the down-mountain trek became so painful Linda and Ruth had to carry me the last half mile. That settled it. A knee replacement was in my future.

But, first, in the late spring we had begun talking about a trip to Alaska fueled by our conversations with Jim and Mary Ashton Athearn about their cruise. So, working through their travel agent we flew off to San Francisco and on to Anchorage on July 30, 2012. Our group included Winston, his friend Inez Bowman, Linda and I, Linda's brother Lynn and his wife Pat, plus Linda's sister, Brenda and her husband, Danny. The cruise included travel by air, land (rail), and sea, set up by Celebrity Cruise Line. Alaska, America's "last frontier," contains absolutely gorgeous scenery. We returned weary, but eager for more travel. I used a cane for much of the trip.

The preparations to find an orthopedic doctor, set up appointment, have tests, etc took a while, but Dr. Highfill and I were set to go on St. Valentine's Day, 2013. That very evening physical therapists wanted me on my feet," you must be kidding, right?" The surgery itself was a snap; six or so weeks of physical therapy, not so much. "No pain, no gain" is applicable.

## CHAPTER 12

### A TASTE OF MONTANA

Ever since we married I'd been telling Linda I wanted to take her to Montana where I'd spent four years of my life. She had a two week vacation coming up in July, and all she'd seen of the West was: "We flew into Las Vegas (on a business trip) I did my thing and flew out" and, of course our Alaska adventure. I learned that she has a cousin she rarely sees who lives close to Billings, Montana - my old stomping ground. So, after arrangements were made for a visit with Debbie Knop and her husband, Ken, in Laurel, Montana, recruitment of Mary to mind the house and take care of Jetah, we loaded up the RAV4 with camping equipment and other gear for the two week trip and headed west. In Billings we found the old house where I lived in 1976-80, and visited the Pictograph caves. We had a good visit with Debbie and Ken. "You're going to go hiking in Yellowstone? Be sure to get some bear spray!" warned Ken. At the sporting goods store the sign outside the door read "Leave weapons at the front desk"--and we knew we'd come to a different world! The road to Yellowstone National Park over the Beartooth Pass at 10,947 ft.

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

elevation was especially exciting for “flatlander” Linda. She also found Yellowstone National Park to be every bit the magical, mysterious place it is purported to be. On our first afternoon in the park we found a campground and set up the tent, remembering to leave all food and snack stuff in the car (bears, you know) as nightfall approached. What we weren’t prepared for was the temperature dropping that night to 40 degrees. After shivering most of the night, we jumped in the car at first light and headed for a restaurant. So much for tent camping in Montana, even if it was July. After a second day of exploration amazement we took the northern park exit back into Montana and spent the night at the Chico Hot Springs Resort where years ago my family spent a few days at Christmas and swam in the warm water while snow fell on our heads. We took an after dark stroll around the grounds and stood spell-bound under an amazing canopy of bright stars in a dark sky. Montana’s motto “The Big Sky Country” rings so true.

We found a Native American shop with a “moving sale” on in Livingston, made some bargain purchases, then took I 10 to Butte, and on up to Helena and Great Falls where we imagined Lewis and Clark portaging the falls, and where Linda bought a cowgirl hat. Though sad that we hadn’t the time to get up to Glacier National Park, and we hadn’t found the Road Kill Café, which we had read about, the two week trip gave us a good taste of the West, and a desire for more.

## CHAPTER 13

### MAJOR TRANSITIONS

In hopes of Linda's retiring at the end of this year (2014), we met with Principal Insurance representative and Financial Advisor, Paula Cooley. With all the different companies Linda had worked for and varying investments, we knew we'd need help. After a careful study, Paula said: "You're good to go," so Linda announced to the Lockheed people: "On December 31, 2014 I turn in my security badges and say goodbye."

Anticipating more camping adventures, but with off-the ground sleeping, we traded in the Rav4 for a more powerful Highlander and traveled over to Maryland to pick out a new Aliner camper—one a bit bigger than Carl's old one. So the year involved several short camping trips to Gettysburg, Harpers Ferry, and Staunton areas. We developed a routine so that Winston could travel with us. We'd set up the camper then take Winston to a motel and shuttle him back and forth so that he experienced the "best of both worlds." (Linda's note: "Dad loved camping, but he didn't like to camp.")

When our friends Walt and Betty Whitehurst

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

visited us in the spring, we made plans to meet again at the Lake Junaluska Christmas Concert and celebration in western North Carolina on the weekend of December 6<sup>th</sup>. This fun weekend set us up for a wonderful Christmas season. We rushed home to finish preparations for Linda's retirement party being held the next weekend. With the presence of old colleagues, new friends, and family we had a great time of storytelling, of both the fondly nostalgic and the roasting sort.

For our first outing, post-retirement, we decided on a January trip to visit family, not realizing how life-changing would be the consequences. With the four of us (including Jetah) packed into the Highlander, we set out to visit first with my niece Carla and nephews David and Brian and Brian's family in the Wilmington, North Carolina area. Gwen and boys had fixed a nice dinner for us, and Carla gave us a guided tour of the Wilmington area. Plans had been made for us to stay with Winston's friend, Inez Bowman in Pace, Florida. However, we learned upon arrival that Winston's last surviving sibling, Helen, was in critical condition in an area hospital. As her condition declined over the next several days Linda, Winston, Helen's son, Colin, and other extended family members kept a constant vigil at the hospital.

During one of those days as I attempted to find my way around alone in unfamiliar territory, the car GPS led me down a cul-de-sac street in error. A nice house with a "For Sale By Owner" sign caught my eye, and so, curious as always I picked up one of the attached flyers.

Helen died a few days later, and as we waited for funeral arrangements to develop we began to reflect on our lives. One night lying in bed, I asked Linda: "When Winston and I are gone where would you like to be?" I had witnessed the large extended family she has

in the Pensacola area. She said, "Well, I think I'd like to be right here." We contacted a real estate person someone recommended who took us all over Pensacola. We actually signed a contract on one house, but turned it down after an inspection found many problems. After the funeral, and the day before we needed to start back to Virginia to meet doctors and other appointments, I remembered the forgotten house flyer I'd picked up almost a week earlier: "Linda, how about we go see this one. I forgot I had it." So we huddled with Winston, called Jack Wooten, and went to see his house. Before the evening was out we had signed a contingent contract and hit the road the next morning. WOW!! Can your life really change that quickly? The hardest part will be breaking the news to Mary and Ruth: "You're doing What?" The girls weren't too happy, but they were happy for us (I think).

Everything moved fast, and on March 25 we closed on the house in Pace, Florida. We still had some unfinished business in Manassas, so Linda and I returned to do some last-minute cleaning, greet carpet cleaners, and pack up a remaining few items to go with us. This house did not sell for another few weeks, and when it did we were able to close by mail. We were able to return to Florida just before the movers arrived with all our stuff, and that night were able to collapse in our own beds but in a new house! No one could have been happier than Winston to be back in his home ground. He was ecstatic to be able to put new Florida license plates on his vehicles again. Yet he also missed his frequent flyer trips back and forth to and from Virginia. He said he'd been "grounded," but he loved being able again to just hop in his pickup to go visit friends or family.

Amid all the hubbub of buying, moving, and selling, a long-awaited Ennis family reunion had been planned out in Trinidad, California--easier for all of us

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

to travel than Robert with his then nine children and number ten on the way. The baby was born just days before we arrived. The reunion was scheduled for the July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend, and Winston insisted he'd be fine for the five days we'd be gone. After all, there was lots of family he could call on, and he promised to do so should he need help. On our third day, a call came from Billy Mims to inform us that Winston was having some difficulties and he had taken him to the West Florida Hospital. By the first of August the verdict was in, lymphoma in the intestinal area. For a month we cared for him at home, and took him for scans, chemo treatments, etc. Space was found in a hospice unit, yet during the very first night the fateful phone call came. He died August 31, 2015 at the age of 89. He had had four good months back home and one miserable one. He had two last requests: one, that I would give a eulogy at his funeral (see below), and two, that we keep the Buick and keep it in the garage--the car he had bought for his wife, Millie, in 2000, the year before she died.

### *Carl's Eulogy for Winston*

*I'm not sure why Winston wanted me to speak today. I've really only known him for the last ten years of our lives. In fact at first he didn't want to know me at all! He recently confessed what Linda and I already knew, that he was against our marrying at first. He felt that the marriage would distract her from his old age needs. In time he came to recognize that in fact he had gained an extra companion, especially after he moved in with us and Linda was still working. We came to know each other quite well: you might say we bonded. He always had lots of Bible questions, but I think was rarely satisfied with the answers. We'd go*



*together to his doctor appointments (He said he wanted someone to "help me listen"), have lunch together, and share a Rummikub game almost every day.*

*I learned that he was a generous spirit. He'd always remind Linda and I that Fri. was our "date night" when we went out and he stayed home with Jetah, our little dog which he learned to love. He gave generously to his church and to whomever he knew in need.*

*A more outgoing, friendly person you've never met. He loved being around his friends and relatives. When we learned, about 3 weeks ago, that my daughter and her family were planning to come see us over Labor Day weekend; as sick as he was, his immediate response was: "I'll be happy to see them come and sad to see them go." Hardly a nurse who saw him did not get a departing hug from Winston. On Friday night before he died, when a nurse who had been caring for him at the hospital went off her shift, he told her, "I'm trying hard to love you." She said "I'm trying hard to love you, too."*

*Loyalty was his middle name. He was loyal to anyone and anything to which he committed. He religiously supported his church, his family, and especially his marriage. After Millie died he wouldn't think of selling the Buick which had been hers, and a week or so before he died he told Linda to be sure and keep the Buick. I told Linda it's a wonder he didn't ask to be buried in it, as I once heard of a man in Texas who was buried in his Cadillac.*

*He had one weakness, however, which he reminded every doctor he ever saw, and that was, to quote: "I'm allergic to pain." The last*

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

*two months have been very painful for him so we're thankful that he didn't have one more day of suffering. Now if you'll allow, I'd like to add my own prayer to our celebration today. Let us pray.*

*O God, the giver of the good news that nothing can separate us from your abiding love; you are surely our strength and our peace. We know not what a day may bring; we know only that every hour is the time to pray and to love you.*

*We worship you now and praise you for the gift of Winston Leonard Gilmore whose life you gave to the world for 89 years, and who in death you now receive into your heavenly arms. We thank you for him and the gifts of loyalty and compassion he brought to life. We bless you, too, for your grace that kindled in him the love for you and your Church, and enabled him to run the race of life in faith.*

*We pray now that you might bless his family. Give to us the abiding peace which is the power of your presence and love. Help us gracefully to give Winston over to your eternal care, and to make in faith, hope, and love the necessary transitions to a new life.*

*Keep us all in the gracious name of Jesus the Christ. Amen*

Settling his estate proved to be a year-long process, but in between attorney appointments, credit union visits, countless phone calls and endless paper work Linda and I committed to a church mission trip just after the first of the year. The trip was to the United Methodist Committee On Relief (UMCOR) processing center in Louisiana.



**Linda and Others At Work In The UMCOR Warehouse**

Here, goods for disaster relief are collected, packed and shipped to all around the world. They process school kits, layette kits, health kits, and flood buckets. As donations arrive volunteers must go through all of the materials to ensure there is nothing “contraband” that might accidentally go into one of the kits or buckets. Although the countries receiving the kits are truly grateful, we have to be sensitive about including toys of war, such as toy soldiers, guns, tanks, etc., items containing the American flag as decoration, and advertising that typically comes on dental-provided tooth brushes. The volunteers must also ensure all of the items are of good quality and the correct sizes, of the right materials, etc. In addition to providing an outlet for productive work, the trip gave us an opportunity to get better acquainted with fellow church members. It was a great way to begin 2016.

By spring the “travel bug” hit us again, and yet

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

again our thoughts went west. Linda had never been to the Grand Canyon, so that became our first destination target. With Jetah comfortable in the back seat and with the little Aliner camper attached behind, we set out on our first long trip with the little camper. How excited we were that Linda could finally get to one of the most awesome sites in America, and I had much to explore since years ago Margaret and I had only the briefest stop while on a business trip to Arizona years before. We set up camp at a KOA in Williams, Arizona, and a good 40 miles south of the park. Jetah was not too impressed with Arizona. She wanted to know, "Where's all the grass?" On our first day to the canyon, we left her at a doggie day care in Williams, but we weren't impressed with the care, and so, took her with us the second day. As she stood gazing at the awesome space of the canyon she seemed every bit as impressed as were we, plus she made many friends among other visitors.

One of the grand things about the canyon is how the colors keep changing throughout the day. It never seems to look the same twice. In two days we only covered the south side. Hopefully some day we can go back for the north side experience.

We were struck by crowds of people from all around the world. One day at a small outdoor café we ate lunch at a table with two middle aged guys from Germany. They said they flew to Denver, rented motorcycles and were touring the west by bike. Sounded like great fun!

After the third day, we continued west hoping for Yosemite National Park, but on the way we received a call about the death of my brother, Gary, who had been in a nursing home for two years in Staunton, Virginia. We made necessary arrangements by phone including his desire to be cremated. We explained that we were in California, but later in the summer we would make a

trip to Virginia and would pick up his personal effects and celebrate his life. We had a short visit with Linda's sister Brenda and family, and another with Robert and family setting up camp among the redwood trees at the Emerald Forest Campground, in Trinidad, California.

After several days it was time to hit the road for our final major stop--Portland, Oregon, where the United Methodist General Conference was underway. We again set up camp, this time in the Columbia River Gorge("ous"-my description), at the Ainsworth State Park Campground. We wanted to take in a few sessions of the General Conference, the policy-making body for worldwide Methodism. In recent years there had been increasing protest against the Methodist policy preventing pastors from marrying same-sex couples. This debate was heightened by the Supreme Court of the United States decision in 2015 legalizing same-sex marriage nationwide. In the Virginia U.M.C. a plan for conference-wide "Holy Conversations" were held to discuss the issue. The following is an article I wrote in the spring of 2015, which was published in the Virginia United Methodist Advocate:

### *A BROKEN COVENANT?*

*During our Holy Conversations proceedings the point was made that "Pastors who have married same sex couples have broken our covenant." This led me to review just what is our covenant?*

*Isn't our covenant to proclaim Christ, to love God, and to love all God's people? There is nothing in our ordination rituals about following the Disciplines' every word. Neither our covenant nor our Faith is a set of rules. As preachers of the Gospel, pastors to the people, and prophets to the world is it not our duty to*

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

*follow the calling we prayerfully discern in every situation?*

*No Pastor needs to marry anyone he or she feels is not ready for the marriage covenant, but the phrases which prohibit marrying same-sex couples should be stricken from the Discipline since they violate the very covenant under which we serve. The prohibition is discriminatory and dehumanizing to the people we are committed to love. We and God have moved on beyond Leviticus and St. Paul on the issue of homosexuality just as we have moved on beyond believing that after my first wife died and I married a woman who had been divorced I therein committed adultery (Mt.5:32). My second marriage is a wonderful covenant full of God's love just as is that of the few same sex marriages of which I know.*

*Certainly relationships are strained between conservative and progressive movements in the United Methodist Church, but let us be clear that our common covenant is with God in Christ, not with Paul, Peter, Leviticus or any other interpreter of God's Will. Our bond is to follow Christ. Those who have broken the covenant are those who fail to preach, teach, and serve Him. Their slogan seems to be "Closed Hearts, Closed Minds, Closed Doors", or, at most, "Open" only to certain ones.*

*Rev. R. Carl Ennis, Ret.*

That May 2016, we took in much more than a few heated conference debates in Portland. We were astounded at the beauty of northwest Oregon: the Columbia River, the many waterfalls, the lush trails,

Lewis and Clark landmarks--we could see why they would have spent the entire winter there before returning to Virginia, as it is truly "God's Country."

By the time we had returned home, however, we had decided two things: that we wanted to do even more travel in our amazing country, and, that we really needed a camper that provided a little more room for two people and a dog. Jetah was a great "travel animal," but her bed on the floor of the Aliner left little "wiggle room" for anything else. By late summer we were looking and met Terry Edwards at Carpenter's Campers in Pensacola, who introduced us to the Micro-lite, a 21foot camper trailer by Flagstaff. We felt it would meet our needs, but would require a bit larger tow vehicle than the Highlander we owned. We eventually traded in both the Tahoe and the Highlander for a nearly new Chevrolet pickup. Now we were back down to two vehicles, since we had sold Winston's pickup earlier that summer: just the new Silverado and Winston's old Buick. That fall we took a shakedown cruise with the new camper to the Cheaha State Park in Alabama. The small camper has a comfortable, queen-size bed, bathroom, kitchen area, sofa, refrigerator, and TV- what more does one need? Linda's brother, Lynn, came over from Mississippi and went with us--he slept in a motel room.

Ruth, Mary, Sara and families surprised us with the request they come and be with us for Thanksgiving this year instead of Christmas. We understood that with their families growing, they have the need to develop their own Christmas traditions and be "on their own," so to speak. So we announced that Linda and I would sleep in the new camper in the back yard, and just turn over the house to the eleven of them. It worked out well and we had a wonderful Thanksgiving, excepting just a few hitches. The result, however, is that Linda and I spent Christmas with no other family for the first time.

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

Even Linda's cousin, Colin Brewton, was gone. He had sold his place in the fall and was staying part-time with us--the other part in New Orleans with his daughter and family.



## CHAPTER 14

### THE WHIRLWIND YEAR

The 2017 New Year started off with a bang: a concert at the Saenger Theater, revelry on Palafox Street (pedestrians only) with bands playing, and the midnight Pelican Drop (Pensacola is big on pelicans, so instead of a lighted ball, a lighted pelican fell at midnight). For our January 14<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary we caught a Carnival Line five day cruise to Cozumel, Mexico. It was fun, but we had been spoiled by our previous Celebrity Line cruise to Alaska with its superior food, entertainment, and excursions.

Shortly before the cruise, I had episodes of vertigo and dizziness, and was even carted off to the hospital for several tests. Nothing serious resulted, and since I felt better at departure time, we decided to risk going. Even to date, a year later, there have been no repeat performances of those problems.

Being ready for another adventure by March we were thinking “South” this time, mostly because we knew where the Washington Nationals baseball team was having spring training, and had talked of maybe

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

seeing a game. However, when we started looking online, it was difficult to find a campground that wasn't already filled. It felt like the entire country must come to Florida in the winter! A few places had a site for one night, but the Everglades National Park had spaces so off we went, headed down the west side of Florida. Maybe the Everglades had room because March is the tail end of tourist season down there, or maybe because the mosquitos were swarming. Arriving at the park welcome center we discovered that the campground was another forty-five mile drive after entering the park. After parking the camper, we set out to explore the area. We took a boat trip on one day, and a trip to Key West on another day, including a stop at "Robert Is Here" Fruit Stand and Farm near Homestead, Florida for a delicious papaya-banana-orange smoothie. In Key West, Jetah found a dog beach where she had great fun, and I found a "Zero Mile Rt. One" sticker for the camper. Readers of this memoir will remember that I grew up on Route 1, in Dumfries, Virginia. I hope before I die to trace Route 1 to its northern terminus at the Canadian border north of Bangor, Maine.

Upon leaving the Everglades, we bought a shirt at the welcome center and left the mosquitos behind. We traveled up the east coast to the Jonathan Dickenson State Park north of Palm Beach. Here we were able to catch the final Nationals baseball spring training game nearby. We liked the Jonathan Dickenson State Park so much that we made a reservation for February of 2018. (We're learning you have to make reservations for many places a year ahead, especially for Florida In the winter.).

A mini-reunion of the girls (Ruth, Mary, Sara) and ourselves in El Paso, Texas had been set for April's spring break time, so off we go again. Sara and Ariel had made reservations for us all to camp over in

New Mexico. Ariel did most of the cooking--what a fine chef he makes. It was fun spending this Easter weekend with at least some of the family.

By this time, into my 85<sup>th</sup> year, we have to fit trips in between doctor appointments and lab tests. Fortunately for me, symptoms seem to come and go. My General Practitioner, Dr. Tenniswood, refers me to Dr. Behari for thyroid checks, then to a neurologist. Then he refers me to a cardiologist. I have MRIs, ultrasounds, blood drawn, and on and on. Yet most tests just show "normal." I take this medicine and that, but have them dropped just as soon as possible. By the time I'm writing this I only take a tiny pill to slow down a hyper thyroid since I was losing weight, another to lower blood pressure, and one to thin the blood and maybe prevent strokes. No wonder old people seem to spend so much time talking about health issues.

Yet my mind is on a few bigger things also. A while back I wrote a little essay which our local paper placed in the "Letters to the Editor" column. My son-in-law, Chris Martin did some helpful critiquing, and the final result follows:

### *A HISTORY LESSON: THE WALL*

*In 1961 the East German Democratic Republic, fearful that too many of its people were being influenced by Western ideologies, and that too many were fleeing to the west, built a wall to completely separate eastern Berlin from the west. Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on one's perspective, the wall was a total failure. When the wall came down in 1989 the world learned that the area was riddled with tunnels under the wall. Many had escaped in that way if*

*they were willing to take the risk of getting caught or possibly having a tunnel collapse on their heads. The rich and the criminal cartels of various sorts were able to fly to other countries, have false documents created and cross over with ease. Others, desperate for freedom, escaped by being smuggled out in the backs of trucks. Some even tried climbing over, so that guards with machine gun mounts were required all along the expanse of the wall.*

*In the end the wall accomplished little. It cost many lives and became a symbol of hatred, fostering an atmosphere of fear on both sides. Border walls are an illusion and an affront, whether to keep people in or the keep them out. The words of U.S. President Ronald Reagan- "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down that wall" summed up the desire of freedom-loving people everywhere.*

*"Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it" George Santayana, or, as Sir Winston Churchill said, "Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it."*

*Carl Ennis  
Pace, Fl.*

On a different note, and closer to the religious arena to which I gave my life many years ago. I have been increasingly concerned about the literalization of the Christian Gospel. The Gospel began as spiritual poetry springing from followers' devotion to Jesus, and their conviction that he was the long-awaited Messiah

which Jewish people had prayed for and looked forward to for centuries. Stories and symbols have great power when they point to realities beyond themselves. Yet they lose meaning when they themselves are “the point.” “Gospel truth” is truth which points to ultimate meaning in and of life. I attempted to address this concern and illustrate it in an essay, “Applause for the Trinity.”

### APPLAUSE FOR THE TRINITY

*The Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, has been a hallmark of the Christian faith since formulated by the early Church, and stated in all the ancient creeds. Yet most other religious traditions regard it as blasphemous to think of God as three-headed, especially the Middle East- originating Muslim and Jewish faiths. Both of these insist upon the “one God” concept. Christian theologians speak of the “three in one” as different from three Gods. Yet many Christians and others are confused about the doctrine.*

*This essay is intended to present a new look at the Trinity, and raise fresh dialogue on the subject.*

*Life itself is Trinitarian. This, I submit is the foundation. In our experience of life we know past, present, and future- that which has been, what we are living now, and that which is yet to be. We divide days into morning, afternoon, and night, human life into childhood, youth, and adulthood. I am one person, but I’m also acutely aware that I carry three very important roles as father, son, and husband.*

*So too our experience of God is Trinitarian. Three different experiences are of the one*

*God.*

*We did not create the universe or life, but experience ourselves in it, and what's more we find creativity as a gift to us. We humans are a creative species. We've faltered, surely, as our misuse of our planet and each other has brought us to the brink of disaster. Many who have claimed the "Call of God" have destroyed the life they thought they were preserving. Think of the devastation wrought down through the ages by the "Christian" Crusades, for example. Yet we've also created inventive, sustainable means of living here on earth. God the Father is not shorthand for a perfect, controlling super being who sits in heaven, who metes out judgment and reward. No, God the Father is shorthand for the very creativity which is the blessing and source of human life.*

*Likewise God the Son is not shorthand for a man who became God, born from the supernatural hand of God. God the Son is shorthand for the goodness, and second-"chancedness" we find in life. First century Christians experienced in Jesus the presence of forgiveness, the joy of hope that was already there in life, but was covered over by oppression, hatred, and despair, by too many walls and not enough bridges. Richard Rohr has pointed out that Jesus, in his handling of the adulterous woman about to be stoned, went beyond the either/or to a new reconciliation, calling hearers to forgiveness which leads to new life.*

*God the Spirit, or Holy Spirit is not shorthand for a ghost-like presence which moves around in life nudging, causing miraculous salvation or pain. No, the Holy*

*Spirit is shorthand for that intangible power present in life which moves us to unity in the midst of diversity, and which leads us “out of the box” to new possibilities. A poem, by Maya Angelo, points out that even with all the differences, humans are “more alike than we are unlike.”*

*Trinity is the way life is.*

*R. Carl Ennis*

I was wanting to say that GOD is not a being, God is life itself, or as the famous theologian, Paul Tillich, said “God is being itself.” To love life is to love God.

The following chart I once created for a sermon on the Trinity.

<b>The Human / Divine Trinity</b>			
<b>Names of God (For Christians)</b>	Father / Creator	Son / Christ	Holy Spirit / Comforter
<b>Grace of God</b>	Prevenient (Before you knew)	Justifying (Reconciling)	Sanctifying (Leading to Growth)
<b>Celebratory Rites</b>	Baptism	Holy Communion	Confirmation Consecration Ordination
<b>Chancel Trinity Symbols</b>	Font	Altar	Pulpit
<b>Human Experience</b>	Belonging	Acceptance	Freedom
<b>Human Response</b>	Faith	Hope	Love

In March, 2017, a phone call came from a former teen-aged parishioner, Rutherford Berry: "Pastor Carl, I'm getting married. I want you to come marry me."

"Rutherford? Where do you live now?"

"Seattle." "As in, the state of Washington? You do know that we now live in Florida, don't you?"

When we hung up the phone, Linda and I just



looked at one another and said, "Road trip!" In previous trips west we had missed Glacier National Park, and thought maybe this would be the year for the northwest.

Following the mini-reunion in April with the girls, we began serious research and preparations for a six-week camping road trip, the longest we'd ever attempted. Following weeks and weeks of planning, phoning for reservations, setting up the truck, and stocking the camper with food and other needed supplies, we struck out on June 19, 2017 for the first overnight stop at Lake Catherine State Park in Arkansas.

We started a journal which began:

*"6/1917, 5:30am Starting on our 6wk.-long trip and immediately discover the most fabulous sunrise!! A good omen after the rainiest June on record. As we pull out, Linda has to tell Carl twice his door wasn't closed tight. Carl comments: "It'll be a miracle if we can end this trip still friends!"*

We did, and the trip ended up being eight weeks, not six! Interstate 22 cuts through the northeast corner of Mississippi. As we crossed into Mississippi, there were dark clouds ahead. Then, a van passed us. A sign on its side read; "Storm Tracker." That left us a little concerned, that he was going our way! Yet by the time we reached Memphis a beautiful sunny day held sway.

Arriving at Lake Catherine State Park in Hot Springs, Arkansas, they gave us the very site we never would have chosen since it was a back-in campsite right at the top of a steep hill. You had to go down the hill and then in reverse, back up and guess at what

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

would be the correct angle to begin turning. We got in place before dark and Linda said I did a beautiful job. Isn't she the sweetest thing? After a good night's sleep, (the comfortable bed is the very best feature of our little camper.) coffee, juice, and cereal with blueberries and nectarines started off our second day. Later, we took a steep and rocky two-mile hike. Toward the end Jetah met two 11-to-12-year old girls and "made their day" with her outgoing personality. We topped off the day with some of Linda's beef stew, a glass of wine, and a scrabble game. It was on westward the next morning with a motel stop the next night in Kansas. On day four, we made it to Cheyenne, Wyoming where we had made a reservation for two nights at the AB RV Campground. On day five of the trip we explored Cheyenne and found a wonderful Museum of the West. Also there were interesting, humorous names of businesses:

A car wash called--"Buggy Bath"

A laundromat--"Dirty Duds"

An urgent care place--"Stitches"

A mattress store--"Bedder Sleep"

Westerners seem to have an expansive sense of humor.

On day six we were on the road by 7:30 a.m., temperature 50 degrees. Heading north through Wyoming we were in rolling plains grasslands with the Laramie Mountains off to the west. Out there it is easy to imagine you're part of a hunting party and spotting a herd of buffalo miles away--you let out a loud "Whoop!" as you gallop after them.

We had a delightful reunion and visit with

Debbie (Linda's cousin) and Ken in Laurel, Montana. We were relieved that Jetah and their Corgi dog, Cody, got along just fine. Heading west along I-10 after two nights in Laurel, we rode into town at Bozeman, found a Starbucks and then a thrift store where I found a beautiful, warm flannel L.L. Bean shirt for \$6.00. By 4:00 p.m. we found our reserved place at the Placid Lake State Park. It was a beautiful spot, yet thick with mosquitos--a ranger explained that they had had much snow in the winter and then a very rainy spring.

We left a day early leaving the bugs behind and arrived at the Whitefish RV Park. We soon learned that there were a number of other campers at the park from Florida, all escaping the heat and humidity of the south. Whitefish, Montana is one of the most attractive small towns in America, nestled between Glacier National Park to the east, a ski resort to the north, and Whitefish Lake on the south and west sides. We've since discovered that one of the U.S. Olympic downhill skiers is from Whitefish.

Out exploring, the next day, we found the best and largest dog park we had ever seen. This fenced four acre doggie playground even included a dog pond (no humans allowed). Jetah had a great time swimming after her little float toy. Of course when we threw it other dogs went after it as well, but her growls usually made them back off.

After leaving the park we found the Buffalo Café for lunch and had chicken salad sandwiches and spinach-bacon soup. All of it was delicious! Back at the camper we were enjoying a glass of wine and a scrabble game when new neighbors arrived with a pop-up camper. They were big talkers so we never finished the game. We retired early to be fresh for tomorrow's visit to the Glacier National Park.

Stopping at the entrance visitors center I had my "National Park Passport Book" stamped and bought a

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

medallion for a walking stick. We followed the "Going to The Sun" road up to Logan's Pass. By the time we reached the halfway point Visitors Center, Linda said she was experiencing "beauty overload." The mountains, waterfalls, glaciers, roadside snowpack were all amazing. Unbelievable, too, was the roadway itself. It was cut through steep, granite, cliff-like mountain sides. Some waterfalls ran under the crossing road. Every mile or so there were pull-off spots with people out snapping pictures, where miles below down the steep mountain sides one could see the winding roadway with lots of toy car size vehicles wending their way. To this day Linda says this was the best day of the entire eight weeks.

On the way back to the west entrance of the park, we drove through campgrounds and were surprised to see a few large RVs, at least at the lower elevations before roadway signs prohibited the longest campers. At one campground we took a little boardwalk through a rain forest type area. The sign said "No Dogs," but then Jetah can't read, and doesn't even realize she's a dog. No other walkers seemed to mind.

On the first day of July, we drove up to the Whitefish Mountain Resort, where in the summer the ski lifts become "Scenic Lifts," so while Linda rode to the top of the mountain and took pictures, Jetah and I hiked a trail. Later, back at the campsite, we taught our neighbor, Betsy (she was from Corpus Christie, Texas) to play Rummikub. One thing we like about camping is that we live most of the time outside and therefore meet many people from all over the country, and beyond.

We're now at the end of two weeks on the road, and we're discovering how easy it is to live long stretches in our little camper. Most campgrounds have laundromats, so we just drop dirty duds at night behind the sofa, then fish them out about once a week and

make a little trek with a bag of clothes and another bag filled with detergent, dryer sheets and quarters. Since food storage cabinet and refrigerator space is limited we don't "stock up." We make menus and buy at grocery stores only what we need for a few days.

On Day 15, July 3, it was a cool 65 degrees outside, and at 7:41 a.m. we're on the road again, having hooked up the truck and camper the night before. A quick stop at Starbucks for morning nourishment, then head west. Next stop Kettle Falls, Washington where we've made reservations at the North Lake RV Park. Discovering they had a weekly rate special, we decided to extend our planned stay. A full week would give us ample time for side trips after we've dropped and set up the camper. The first of those was an exploratory visit through the small city of Kettle Falls. The welcome sign read: "Kettle Falls--1643 Friendly People and One Grouch." Next we traveled south and had a good visit with Chris Martin's mother, Dee in Spokane. She fed us lunch and walked us through some beautiful public gardens near her home.

After my nap back at the camper we made plans for tomorrow's trip into Canada to visit the town of Nelson where, Dee said, hundreds of U.S. Vietnam era draft dodgers had settled. We told the border guard we were only visiting for the day, but could we come back when we get fed up with "the Trump"? He said "Oh sure, and you wouldn't be the first."

I was alarmed when we went zipping around mountain corners at 92, but Linda had previously discovered we could switch the systems on the truck to metric and the temperature gauges to Celsius--neat, eh? Speaking of temps, it's been hot since we've been in Kettle Falls, 99 degrees yesterday. Oh, but it's a dry heat! One of our fellow campers, Pete, who actually is from Jacksonville, Florida was wearing a T shirt, when

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

we last saw him, which pictured two skeletons sitting on lawn chairs with the fires of hell at their feet. One said to the other, "Oh, but it's a dry heat."

While camping at North Lake we were visited by several children, most of whom wanted to play with Jetah, but one boy, about 6 or 7, was just so curious about the camper that Linda gave him a tour and he came out exclaiming "A shower, you have a shower!," then ran out to tell his mother. By that time, she was arriving to find him and apologized. Louise and Rick from Redding, California joined us a couple nights around our campfire. Rick had migrated to California but after his wife died he returned to his origins in New Hampshire and soon got together with an old childhood friend, Louise. They're not married, but Louise concluded the story, "Nobody should be alone." I thought, this sums up lots of stories. I thought back to the time after Margaret died, how empty my life was, and how different it is now.

At the end of our week we wake early, make coffee and oatmeal, and are on the road by 7:30 a.m. for the trip across Washington to Seattle. We head west across Rt. 20 up to Sherman's Pass, elevation 5587 feet. After a little stretch break it's downhill to Tonasket and then to Okanogan where we discover the road over to Cascades National Park was closed due to heavy spring rains and landslides. So we must detour down to Wenatchee and then go northwest to Leavenworth where we had a delicious dinner and enjoyed the sights of this small town modeled after a German Bavarian Alpine Village--a beautiful little town, definitely tourist and traveler oriented. The town has a large free parking lot for RVs, etc., just walking distance of shops and restaurants.

As we head out of town we start looking for another campground since we now are a day ahead of our reservation in Everett. Still in the mountains we

discover the Nason Creek National Forest Campground (just \$12.00 a night) and find a pretty site down by a rushing river. There is no electricity and at 5:00 p.m. the temperature is 67 degrees. We pull out the extra blanket and are cozy warm all night. In the morning we enjoyed coffee by the river watching kayakers on the rapids below.

Approaching the Seattle area we turned to Barbara, our trusty GPS voice, to lead us on to Lakeside RV Park which will be “home” for the next eight days. Everett is an older suburb of Seattle, and very much in the city. We were amazed that there seemed to be a Starbucks on every street corner. The campsites, rather RV parking spots, are extremely close together, but the park does have a nice pond, a fenced dog run about the size of our back yard at home, and very clean well-kept bath houses and laundry room. Also, it is very close to stores of all kinds and restaurants. We called Rutherford: “We’re here,” then settled in with electricity and sewer connected, etc. A little later, Rutherford and Jessica, bride and groom to-be, came by for conversation and glasses of wine. It was fun hearing their stories and sensing their commitment, though a few years ago I couldn’t imagine Rutherford as the “marrying kind,” especially to a woman who already had two children. It turns out that Jessica is from Shelby, Montana, and knew of all the places we’d been. We arrived on Tuesday and the wedding is on Saturday, so we had time to explore Cascade National Park to the north and Olympic National Park east across Puget Sound by ferry. Aboard the ferry we were able to buy lunch from a cafeteria, and have enough time to eat. In each park we were able to get in short hikes, and our little charmer dog got us into some interesting conversations with total strangers.

We didn’t think much of it, but when we arrived

at this RV Park in Everett, we noticed that just next door to the park was a Cruise America place that rents RVs. The very next day after our arrival, one of their RVs pulled in near us. Soon a woman came over to explain that they were from Denmark and that tomorrow they were turning in the RV and flying home. Would we be interested in some items they have left over? Later a couple from Holland and then one from Germany: the same story. Thereby we received: cans of tuna, pancake mix, toilet paper, cartons of milk, a small grill, firewood, avocados, a gallon of still-sealed spring water and aluminum wrap, all gratis. I guess sometimes it's all about being at the right place at the right time!

Friday, wedding rehearsal day, brought a big reunion of the old Cokesbury Church crowd from Virginia. Rutherford's mother, Marian Benson, and her new friend, John, met us at a restaurant. Rutherford's old teen buddies, Mark Young and Tony O'Brien, came across country to be in the wedding party. Of course, we were meeting Jessica's family for the first time. On Saturday, the wedding went off with only a few "incidents"- I dropped one of the rings, and I had to be reminded of the candle lighting ceremony, otherwise a pretty smooth wedding for an old man. They had wanted a short meditation, so here are a few of my thoughts put to words:

*"It is no wonder that Rutherford and Jessica waited years to marry--marriage is work! The marriage bond is not a contract. There are no limiting terms, just total sharing. The "we" becomes bigger than the "me." If you've lived near water you know that a bayou is a small bay, or cove. Linda and I bought a towel a few years ago with printing that reads: 'I Always Want to be Bayou.'"*



During the dancing afterward I got some good pictures and Linda and I bid our leave by 9:30 p.m.--tis the life of old people partying. During the remaining time in Everett we had a visit with my old colleague from the Institute days, Nancy Lanphear, did a trek to Mt. Rainier National Park and did some housekeeping chores.

On the morning of the nineteenth we're on the road by 6:50 a.m., but there's a problem. A strange noise comes from the truck, sounding to us like a stuck fan motor. Along the interstate we see a Chevy dealer sign and turn in.

Question: "Could someone come listen to our noise?"

Answer: "Oh no, we'd have to hook you up to our computer, and you'd have to go somewhere and drop the trailer first."

All that sounded more ominous than the problem itself. We decided to go on, but we could not easily turn around in their small space with the camper attached. We did finally get on the road again. The noise was irritating, but did not seem to affect truck performance. Many miles and two hours down the road Linda pushed the button to turn on the radio, and, suddenly, the noise stopped! All this time spent and exasperation and it was only off-station static noise--we felt unbelievably embarrassed, but relieved that we ignored the shop people.

The rest of that day, all the way into Oregon was blissful. We stopped at a Starbucks to use their WiFi, check email, and pay some bills. Then on to the Columbia River Gorge and to a campground where we stayed last year.

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

In the morning it was back to I-5 South since our aim was a campground near Crater Lake National Park. From Salem, Highway 22 took us east across the Cascade Range. As we came down the mountain the day was rushing on, and we realized that it would be dark by the time we reached the lake. Down on the plains we found the cute town of "Sisters." We imagined two pioneer women arriving at this spot after crossing the imposing Rockies, and saying "No more mountains! We're going to stay right here," and so they founded "Sisters." In the middle of town was a beautiful park with camping. As we pulled in a sign said "Full." We drove in anyway, talked to the hostess, who said, "We did just have a cancellation called in." "Perfect, we just need one site for one night." In walking around town we came across a "Meat and Smokehouse" store where we bought a nice ribeye steak to grill tomorrow after we're settled at the next campground a few miles from Crater Lake National Park.

The next day, after a wonderful dinner of steak, potatoes, and broccoli, we went exploring into the National Park. Crater Lake itself was formed when Mount Mazama had a massive volcanic eruption some 8000 years ago. When its magma chamber emptied, the mountain could not support its own weight, and collapsed, forming the deepest lake in North America. Its depth has been recorded at 1943 feet. No water flows in or out, so the deep caldera has filled with rain water and snow melt over the succeeding centuries. With no flowing water or erosion the lake water is the clearest to be found anywhere. Precipitation balanced with seepage and evaporation keeps the lake level consistent.

As we undressed for bed that night, I discovered my wallet missing. After searching the camper and the truck to no avail, we replayed the day's events--I had it when we bought gas just before going down to the

park, and I remembered returning it to my pocket. However, I also remembered taking the wallet out as we approached the park to retrieve my Senior park pass, then we stopped so I could go take a picture of the Crater Lake National Park entrance sign. That must be it. So we returned the next day, but it was nowhere to be found--someone must have picked it up. Fortunately, when we contacted the Credit Union they said they would simply stop payment on my credit card. Linda's, same account, but with different numbers, could still be used. The rest of the trip we only used the one credit card, and Linda did more of the driving. A month later, after we had been home several weeks, my wallet appeared in the mail, credit card missing, but everything else intact--driver's license, health cards, etc. No name or return address accompanied the envelope.

On July 24<sup>th</sup> we're on the road again, headed for Emerald Forest Campground in Trinidad, California. Still in Oregon, we passed a sign in front of the Gold Hill Elementary School, apparently put up when school let out: "Parents, Tag You're It. Have a Great Summer. Teachers." More western sense of humor.

At Trinidad we were given the same campsite we had last year when we were there with the little Aliner camper. We prepared for a weeklong stay. Every day we checked on our credit union account, but no unexpected charges ever appeared. The week went by fast with exciting visits with Robert's family--where we learned that Kim is pregnant with child number eleven. When we first arrived at Robert and Kim's home, they were in the process of putting away seven hundred dollars' worth of groceries! I didn't dare ask if that was the weekly grocery bill. We had some delightful excursions with the family including to "Trees of Mystery" in Klamath, California as well as some intimate quiet time with the children.



**Son Robert (in the yellow shirt) with some of his kids, on a redwood tree**

One evening Robert and Kim's eleven-year-old Lily Pearl confided to me, "Most people your age just sit around watching TV everyday." I thought that a compliment, and thanked her. One evening the older kids met us at Moonstone Beach where they wanted to show us their surfing skills. We found that we'd forgotten Jetah's float toy, so I threw in the Frisbee. We learned that Frisbees don't float and that dogs don't dive. She was so frustrated, swimming round and round looking for the Frisbee. The next day we had to buy another one. Even in the midst of much activity, I still managed to get in my afternoon nap, most days.

After a good week of visits, we leave Trinidad on July 31 at 9:00 a.m. with the temperature 55 degrees

and after a last breakfast at our favorite restaurant, The Eatery. We stopped as we had last year, at the Cache Creek Winery to stock up and by that time, about halfway to Sacramento, the clerk said the temperature was 105 degrees. In Sacramento we parked behind Danny Burgan's "Tint Pro" shop and plugged in to electricity so the Air Conditioner would work, then went to dinner with Danny, Brenda (Linda's sister) and niece Jessica.

On the first day of August we're on our way to destination south, Island Park State Park, which is east of Fresno. We just didn't anticipate the twenty three miles of increasingly mountainous roads to get there. After multiple hairpins and corkscrews we finally find ourselves on or near the shores of Pine Flat Lake--built to irrigate the miles and miles of orchards and vineyards through which we passed to get here. In the morning, leaving the camper, we make the long trek back to Fresno and then north to Yosemite. We thought surely there must be a campground closer to Yosemite National Park. After another fifty miles we arrive, and stop for our first hike up to Bridal Veil Falls. The roadways and the trails are crowded, even more so than Crater Lake. Visitors come, apparently, from all over the world. On the trail a woman stopped me for directions, saying, "Pardon me, do you speak English"?

Back at camp that evening we restudy the maps and decide to cut short our stay, head south to Barstow, then northeast to Las Vegas and on to Zion and Arches National Parks. Going through Nevada and southern Utah we keep gawking at gorgeous scenery as we pass by. At Green River, Utah we settled in at the Shady Acres RV Park. We soon met Joyce and Doug Mussey--retired and living in Florida, but the interesting thing is that they had lived in Northern Virginia when Joyce worked for the same government agency where Linda worked, but much earlier. Also, they, too, have

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

a daughter who lives in Woodbridge, Virginia. Small world!!

On the morning of August 5 we begin the one hour drive to the Arches National Park and get in a long line to go through the gates. We are awestruck immediately by the unbelievable landscape ahead. Massive tall walls and cliffs of red sandstone. The colors alone are amazing. Then we drive through miles of changing scenery that is truly breathtaking, stopping frequently for walks and picture-taking. The one disappointment was the sign "No dogs on the Trails." Leaving the park we drove down to Moab, and found that dogs were welcome at the outdoor veranda of the Peace Tree Restaurant where we enjoyed a delicious lunch. When we leave Green River and Utah behind on I-70 on the morning of August 8 we check in with a website called Overnight RV Parking, which informed us that the Kansas Welcome Center does in fact welcome people like us to park free overnight; no utilities provided except the restrooms are open all night. So our aim is to drive straight through Colorado except for a lunch break.

Our last camping day began where it had started eight weeks ago, back at Lake Catherine State Park, Arkansas, and we liked it so much that before leaving we reserved a week in July 2018.

On the way home we talked a lot about what this trip had meant to us, this tiny living combined with large exploring. We never felt cramped for space indoors, and the outdoor space, where we spent most of our waking hours, was constantly changing. The maintenance chores were minimal, especially if we camped in one place for several days. Setup included leveling the camper by driving onto blocks on one side or the other, placing chocks on either end of wheels, then unhooking the hitch and disconnecting the lights cord. The slide-out expands the width of the camper,

and the awning provides outdoor sun and rain protection, both controlled by the press of a button. The refrigerator automatically switches from propane while on the road to electricity when connected to electric power source. For nap times I recline on the bed and Linda on the sofa while giving "lap-time" to Jetah.

Looking back on the two months, we would take nothing for the experiences of finding many of the amazing natural treasures our beautiful land has to offer, for the people we've met, the reunions with family and friends, and the serendipitous discovery of art, such as the metal silhouettes of pioneer settlers mounted on top of lamp poles in Kettle Falls, Washington, or the small bronze sculptures on street corners in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Every day was a day of discovery.

We transitioned back to home life fairly smoothly, picking up on doctor appointments, yard work, etc. Since we kept up with emailing and bill paying during the two months on the trip, there was not a backlog of catch-up chores waiting for us. While we were gone Linda's cousin, Colin Brewton, had kept up with mowing, but there was shrubbery trimming to be done.

The big focus for September was the final preparations for our Ireland trip which we had reserved seven months earlier. Arrangements had been made for Linda's sister, Brenda, to come and be with the house and Jetah while we are gone. With Brenda oriented for home care, bags packed, and passports at the ready we are set to travel again, except--I wake up on travel day very sick. I eat a little breakfast and it comes back up. This has mysteriously happened before so we don't panic, and sure enough by the time to leave for the airport I'm feeling better, just a little weak. The plan is a mid-morning flight to Atlanta, then

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

an overnight flight to Dublin, Ireland. The first week is planned to the tee by Brendan Tours including breakfasts, dinners, bus transportation, special events, and hotels. Our tour director, Anne, said, "Just call me Mother" (under my breath I called her "Mother Superior"). She kept a tight ship with detailed instructions about how many minutes we have for a stop, when and where to leave our luggage after each hotel stay, and so on. She scolded a woman one morning who had left her cell phone in her hotel room and needed to go back to get it which meant our bus would be a bit late leaving.

During late August and September Linda and I had been reading *The Princes of Ireland*, a book by Edward Rutherford, and were familiar with some of the names and places associated with historic Ireland. We knew, for example, about the Wicklow Mountains south of Dublin, so our ears pricked up when Anne announced that Glendalough in the Wicklow National Park would be our first stop as the bus leaves the Dublin area on October 2. Now, for us, the ruins of the old Glendalough monastery were more than just "ruins." They represented real people and events we felt we knew. This experience of intimacy happened again and again for us as we toured our ancestral land. To think that our family members had actually worked and lived in this land across the sea and for some necessity left and settled in the place we now call home. We felt a little closer to our ancestors, both the Ennises and the Gilmores'.

As this bus of strangers from around the world rode through emerald green hills dotted with white sheep, cows, and occasional farm houses, Anne kept up a constant stream of stories and information about Irish history and folklore. The second night in Ireland was at Cork, the southern port city from which many emigrants left for the new world, and which was a last



port of the Titanic. On to Killarney the next day and that evening attended "Celtic Roots," a wonderful "river dance" type music and dance show. The tour included a medieval castle celebration, a visit to a "typical Irish Farm" including a family dinner and entertainment by local musicians, a Flying Ships museum including a replica of the famous Yankee Clipper, a trek to the Cliffs of Moher, a demonstration of the "proper" way to make Irish Coffee, and much, much more. By the time the week was over and we had been dropped off back at a Dublin hotel, we were ready for the next adventure on our own. A shuttle took us back to the airport where we picked up a cute little rental car--with the steering wheel on the right side! For our second week in Ireland, Linda would have to do all the driving since I'm too "old" without having a letter of permission from my doctor. Imagine that! And I was the one with some prior experience driving on the left, even if it was back in the early eighties--in Jamaica. On the dashboard were signs, "Keep Left" and Linda adjusted very well, except for a few "old habits" moments. With me managing the map and Linda behind the wheel we headed west across country and in three hours' time we were on the Atlantic coast at Galway. We had to readjust our sense of orientation, since over there the Atlantic Ocean is on the West coast. On the way we called ahead and made reservation at the Villa De Porres Bed and Breakfast for two nights, since we want to go to the town of Ennis tomorrow. Our host pointed us to the Donnell's Restaurant for dinner. We were given a table by the fireplace and had our best Irish dinner consisting of Irish Coffee, fish and vegetables in a hollandaise sauce, with a delicious custard and bananas for dessert. Back at the Bed and Breakfast Linda made the following entry in our journal: "We are glad to be finally on our own and not tied to the tour's schedule. We feel more relaxed and are looking forward to a good

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

night's sleep."

A delicious breakfast sent us out the next morning refreshed, but did not keep us from taking a wrong turn. Yet soon we discovered a castle, the Dunquaire, and decided to take the tour. Like most of the castles of Ireland, this one was built to protect an entire village of people when (not if, but when) marauding parties attacked. The elite would be safer in the upper levels of towers and others behind lower walls. This castle was built in 1522 A.D. The "shelf life" of this one was fairly short, since with the arrival of gunpowder and cannons sometime around the 12th century, castles afforded decreased protection. The builders could not possibly imagine that the castles would someday become tourist attractions and be moneymakers for this small island by INVITING strangers IN. We did finally find the town of Ennis, a small city about the size of Manassas, Virginia, but more compact. It had a nice pedestrian-only street with small shops and restaurants.

The most befuddling thing about driving in Ireland is the roundabouts. The trouble has to do with knowing which road is the one you want coming out of the circle. We sometimes had to go around several times before we figured out which exit we should take. Yet Irish people are very friendly and helpful. One of the numerous days when we became lost we came upon a man out trimming the hedges by the road, and stopped seeking directions. He tried to explain where we should go, but seeing the blank look on my face he said "Turn your car around and follow me, I'm just killing time out here anyway." He jumped in his car, and we followed him several miles until he could point out our needed direction. Another day, another adventure.



**A street in Ennis Ireland**

In fact still another adventure was to serendipitously come upon a beautiful castle-like mansion, the Kylemore Abbey in Connemara. The Abbey, still home to the Benedictine nuns, was bought by them in 1920 after their home in Belgium was destroyed during World War I. The beautiful lakeside property, including a small gothic chapel, was built in 1867 by a gentleman for his wife, but she died a few years later. The nuns now operate it as a tourist attraction complete with cafeteria, gift shop, and beautiful gardens

Every mile/kilometer we drive we understand why Ireland is called the "Emerald Isle." The entire island greets ones eye as a green gem. The varying shades of green fields are dotted with the whiteness of sheep, although the sheep are usually not fenced. You

may be driving along a country road and be faced with one of Ireland's road hazards, a sheep in the middle of the road.



### **An Irish Road Hazard**

We ended our visit into the past with a couple hours spent touring King John's Castle in Limerick. Limerick, now, is a bustling small city. The castle is located along the Shannon River in the heart of town. The castle is very well-preserved and contains the most complete history and archeological display we had seen anywhere. From atop the castle towers we had a good view of the surrounding city. Back in Dublin, the next day, we drop the rental car and taxi to the Bushwell Hotel for our last night in Ireland, October 12, 2017.

Though we only covered roughly half of the island in these two weeks, we got a good feel for the culture and made note of some of the more humorous

aspects: To warn of a reducing of the speed limit the sign will read--"Traffic Calming" -we sure could use some of those street signs back home! A police car is called a--"Garde Van." In some of our cities an illegally parked vehicle can receive a "boot," but in Ireland it gets a "Clamping." A restroom is very bluntly labeled--"Toilet." In Ireland you don't make reservations, you make a "Booking." If you order a "full Irish breakfast" expect something called "black pudding." Someone, while we were there told us the following joke: "An Irishman on his deathbed was very agitated and said to the nurse--'I wonder if God knows I'm an atheist?'" Love those Irish!

My two-fold focus for the rest of October and November was to first get Linda healed from a broken wrist from a fall in the Dublin airport on our way home. She needed a cast on the right arm until November 28, so I took over many tasks she normally did best. Secondly, we were to host Sara, Ariel and family for Thanksgiving, and needed to prepare menus, do shopping, etc. Thus November became a very busy month.

Topping off this whirlwind year was a trip to West Virginia for Christmas week to meet Chris, Mary, Ruth, and their young men Anthony and Jesse. They'd rented a house at a resort community in Canaan Valley, West Virginia. We had a good time, except zero temperatures made outdoor activities a bit less than fun. However, we did have the beauty of a white Christmas! I was able to report to the family the MRI results from November showing little white spots in my brain, and show off the heart monitor I needed to wear for a month so that Dr. Sultan, the neurologist could tell if any irregularities in the heart could be causing blood clots to form in the brain. I asked the doctor: "Could those white spots be something else? He said, "Possibly." Ah! the uncertainties of old age.

## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

People frequently ask old people like me “How are you these days?” I tend to answer “I’m still waking up every day.” I relate closely now, to an old man in the Milagro Beanfield War movie who wakes in the morning, shuffles over to a mirror, finds his image, and utters, “Thank you, God, for giving me another day.” I say AMEN, for every day is another adventure!

## EPILOGUE

My only sister had died with an aneurysm in November 2008, and when my older brother, Roy, died in June 2017 I became the last remaining off-spring of Claude and Dorothy Ennis. Roy had been placed in a Federal Veterans home in Alabama. He hated being there. He had dementia, but the bigger issue was his loss of sense of balance, and suffered many falls. His wife, Gwen--with her own health issues--could no longer care for him at home.

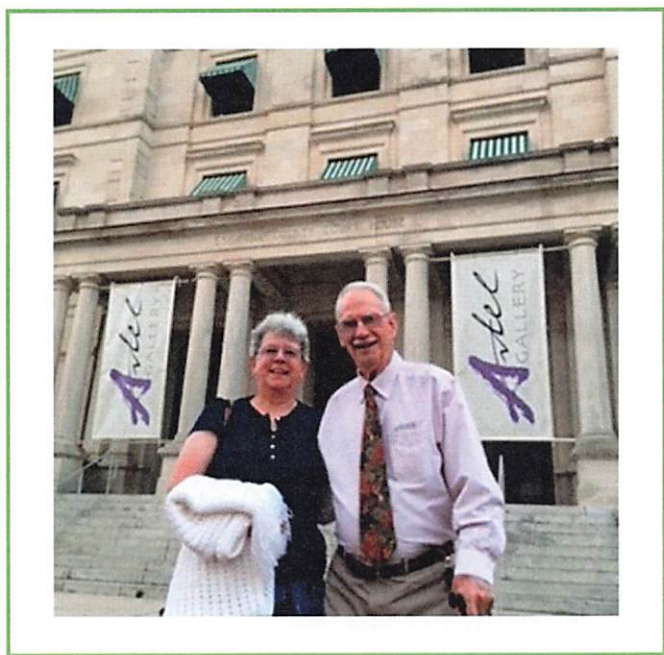
Even though Roy, Jean, Gary, and myself had not been in close proximity during our adult years, and had never had a family reunion, it feels strangely weird to me now to realize that I alone is what's left of the nuclear family of which I was a part my entire life. Is this what Robinson Crusoe felt like after finding himself stranded and alone?

Still, life goes on, and certainly I'm not alone. There's the regular round of doctor appointments--general practitioner, endocrinologist, neurologist, cardiologist, audiologist. Their appointments keep me on my toes. And those have to be scheduled in between our camping trips. Or maybe it's the other way around. Also, the Pensacola area offers an amazing array of lectures, concerts, shows, and other events which we enjoy. Some are free, such as the band and



## An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times

choral concerts at the University of West Florida. University sports events, basketball, football, and baseball costs three dollars with the senior discount. On one of our evening excursions to a concert at Pensacola's Saenger Theater we were stopped on the street by a young couple who wanted to know if we'd like our picture taken. We said, "sure." The result appears below as we happened to be passing the Escambia County Court House where the picture of Linda's grandfather hung on the wall along with other of his fellow county commissioners.



**Linda and Carl in front of the Escambia County Courthouse, Pensacola**

Life has its' ups and downs. The bright days and the dark nights. Nothing attests to this fact more strongly than two phone calls in 2018 from my only son,



Robert. On January twenty third he called to proudly announce the arrival of baby number eleven:

Janoah Blaise Izaiah Ennis . Mother and child doing well.

Robert called again on April twenty third with deep pain in his voice to let us know that his eldest son, Malachi had died. He was on a camping trip with his university music class. Solitary walks in the redwood forests were part of his spirituality. He apparently had an epileptic seizure, while on one of those walks, fell into a stream and drowned. He was found hours later by his classmates. The music department, faculty and students, created a beautiful memorial concert and testimony to Malachi's life.

I know of no better way to end this memoir than with a quote from Malachi's writings discovered after his death.

*"What separates humans from each other? Is it distance? Is it busyness? We all rise from the same source, interconnected by the same riddles, the mysteries.*

*We are bound by One God, one loving, open infinite God.*

*We are One, and yet somehow, someway, it always hurts to say Goodbye. I don't know why I feel this way.*

*I don't know if it'll ever fade. All I know is that I want you to know that I love you."*

- Malachi Ennis

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and last is my indebtedness to my wife, Linda, without whom this tale would never have been told. In addition to being the second love of my life, she has been my computer technologist, my editor, my publisher, my inspiration for this book. These words of thanks seem paltry compared to the patient care she has given to me and the construction of the book.

Myra Lindsey and Betty Whitehurst also contributed crucial editorial material, reminding me that writing a document to be read is different from writing a sermon which will only be presented orally. Thank you, ladies.

My thanks also to friends, the Reverends Libby Wright, Dick Faris, Jim Athearn, and Walter Whitehurst who gave their time to preview the manuscript. Libby said, "I sat down to read a few pages. A few hours later I finished page 86, thanking God for you and your wonderful life."

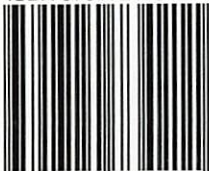


97952909R00093

Made in the USA  
Lexington, KY  
03 September 2018

*This book . . . the tale of  
a secular religious life lived  
through amazing times and  
loving God's awesome world.  
Every moment.  
Another adventure.*

ISBN 9781724734211



9 781724 734211

90000

