

GUARDED BY GRACE
THE LIFE AND TIMES
OF
REV. DR. JOHN F. BAGGETT III



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DEDICATION

***Guarded By Grace, The Life and Times of John F. Baggett III* is dedicated to the memory of my parents, John F. Baggett Jr. and Margaret LaVur (Madge) Baggett. My life was guarded by grace the moment I was born to such wonderful and amazing parents. We do not get to choose our parents, but looking back, I know that God could not have made a better choice for me.**

My father was a man of remarkably noble character. He was a hard working devoted husband and father. He was a dedicated lay member of our local church. He faithfully served his country during two wars. He exemplified responsible living, enduring significant personal hardship in order to support his family.

My mother devoted her life to making sure that my sister and I would ultimately devote our lives to making the world a better place for others, especially victims of discrimination. She taught me to be rational, yet, at the same time, to be deeply spiritual. I am profoundly grateful for my Dad and Mom and the impact they have had on my entire journey.



**John and
Madge
Baggett
my
Amazing
Parents**

PREFACE

The title for this memoir, *Guarded by Grace*, is drawn from Methodist theology. I am a Methodist. I was born to Methodist parents. I was baptized as an infant in a Methodist church. My grandfather and namesake was a dedicated Methodist preacher. I was called to be a Methodist pastor at age 18. I was ordained a Deacon and an Elder in the Methodist ministry. In my early adult years, I served as the minister of seven Methodist congregations. After transitioning to a mental health ministry, I stayed actively involved in Methodist churches. When I retired I dedicated much of my energy to Christian teaching and other service to Methodist Churches.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was not only a passionate preacher, but also a profound theologian. His doctrine of grace was at the heart of his theology. Based on his own personal journey and reflections, he spoke of prevenient grace, justifying grace, and sanctifying grace. Prevenient grace was God's work in a person's life protecting and providing in preparation for the experience of justifying grace. Justifying Grace was the forgiveness of sins and assurance of God's love. Sanctifying grace was the work of grace in the life of Christians, growing them into the faith filled loving person's God created them to be.

When Wesley was a five year old child, his house caught fire and he was trapped on the second floor until his parents and neighbors formed a human ladder and rescued him. Based on Zachariah 3:2, and this childhood experience, Wesley in his preaching often referred to himself as a "brand plucked from the burning." Wesley saw the grace of God guarding him and guiding him throughout his life. And that is certainly how I have experienced my own life.

When I think of my own close calls, like being bit by a rabid dog, or the time my teen friends and I were almost hit by a train, or laying on the floor of a flimsy house during a hurricane, or being caught in the crossfire between street gangs, or being put at risk by the fires of a

racial riot, or a scary emergency landing of a plane, I am reminded that my life has long been guarded by grace. But more than that, God's grace has guarded me through significant times of transition. There was the time, for example, when a delayed flight layover in Toronto, Canada turned out providentially to lead to the reunification and transition of my family to a new and promising life in Raleigh NC. And there was the onset of son John Mark's illness, the worst thing that ever happened in my life, and the radical providential meaningful vocational change that it launched for me. Then there was the totally unexpected meeting of the amazing woman who would become the love of my life. If God had never put Diane in my life, it is doubtful I would have survived to reach my 90th year. She had the nursing skills to diagnose and manage my care through a life threatening and life changing stroke, along with managing my other health challenges, while, at the same time, supporting me in my ongoing ministries.

God has guarded me with his grace, and has guided me, giving me meaning and purpose, and a life for which I am eternally grateful. So these pages are not just filled with memories to share with my loved ones, they are a testimony to the amazing grace of the One who has not only forgiven my transgressions, but has guided, guarded, and blessed me with an amazing personal journey. As I have prepared to share my story with loved ones, the words of John Newton, the repentant eighteenth century slave trader, have provided me much comfort:

*Through many dangers toils and snares,
I have already come.
Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.*

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GUARDED BY GRACE

My Life and Times

By

John Foster Baggett III

We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. Rom. 8:28

PART I THE PREPARATION

Beginnings

I was born on a Sunday morning, August 16, 1936, at Protestant Hospital in Nashville, Tennessee. My mother let me know, some years later, that her pregnancy had been unplanned and something of a surprise. She also described how difficult my birth was for her. She was transported to the hospital by my grandfather Baggett. He was a terrible driver and my mother was terrified during the trip. Then, it seems, my birth caused her great pain, evidently more than my sister's earlier birth. She never let me forget that. When I was born, she reportedly looked at me and said, ``You better amount to *something*.`` She repeated that story many times during my growing up years. Talk about pressure.

When and where one is born makes a difference. I came into the world in peaceful Middle Tennessee, in the U.S.A, on a day when people in Spain were being slaughtered by dynamite in a vicious civil war.

In 1936, Nashville was peaceful, but far from prosperous. By then, our nation was already beginning to recover from The Great Depression of 1929, but that recovery had hardly begun to touch the lives of my Tennessee family. So I was born into what would be considered today to be extreme poverty. My father, who turned 23 the year of my birth, worked for Dupont, a chemical manufacturing company, and earned \$25 every two weeks, That was equivalent to an income of around \$280 a week in 2025, an annual income more than \$12,000 below the 2025 poverty line.

Early in their marriage, before my sister Margaret was born on July 2, 1934, my parents lived in a small apartment near my father's work. Their rent was \$25 a month, half of Dad's income. After Margaret was born they moved into a duplex on Forest Street in Nashville, where they shared a kitchen and bath with other tenants. The duplex was heated with a coal stove in the living room which radiated very little heat to the rest of the dwelling.

The Family Farm

Around 1935, the year before my birth, my father, and his brother Harold, purchased a 20 acre farm on Reynolds Road at Couchville Pike in Nashville. The price for the land was \$2000. They paid \$50 down and had to agree to make payments of \$25 a month in order to purchase it. The two brothers each paid \$12.50 a month. Dad later sold his share to his brother and freed himself from payments of half his salary, but his brother, Harold, never paid my father for his part of the deal. Our family later lived in two different homes on that property without having to pay rent.

Not long after the purchase, Dad helped Harold build a house out of the limestone rock on the property. The house was located at the northern end of Reynolds Rd., near Couchville Pike. The stone house served as a residence for Harold and his wife, Jean. Later, that stone house became the home of my Aunt Eva, Uncle Charles, and cousins Carol and Leslie.

In 1937, when I was a year old, my parents also moved to the farm on Reynolds Rd. My uncle Harold and Granddaddy Baggett had built a chicken house by then, located just below the rock house. They hoped to supplement their meagre incomes by raising chickens and selling eggs. The chicken business did not turn out to be profitable, so, my parents, needing a cheaper place to live, arranged to move there. They cleaned out the chicken house, turned the chickens loose, and moved in. The chickens were not happy about losing their home to us and would often

fly in the windows and lay their eggs, sometimes in mid-air causing a mess on the floor.

One day, while living in the chicken house, my mother realized I was missing. She called but no answer. She searched the house but I was not there. She went outside and called, but no answer. Finally she looked under the house where our pigs slept in order to stay cool in the summer heat. And there I was, soundly sleeping with the pigs.

While I was still a toddler, we moved again to a small two bedroom rental on Shelton Avenue in East Nashville. To supplement his income from work, my father bought a hundred baby chickens which we kept in the house with us in the winter, in order to keep them warm. The front room of the place was heated by an iron stove. It would sometime get so hot, the iron would turn red. I was only a toddler, but I can remember burning my pinky finger on that hot stove.

The other memory I have of living on Shelton Avenue was the spanking my mother gave me when she caught me sitting for some reason in the middle of Shelton Avenue. I guess I had been playing in the street, became tired, and sat down.

At some point, Granddaddy Baggett and his boys, my uncles, built a two story cabin on the Reynolds Rd. property. Granddaddy Baggett was a Methodist preacher, but that cabin became his personal retreat, and later, his retirement dwelling. I have fond memories of visits with Granddaddy in front of his fireplace, and large family get-togethers at the cabin on Thanksgiving and The Fourth of July that usually included extended family that were strangers to me.



**Granddaddy Baggett`s
Cabin on the Reynolds
Road Property**

My father, who was always looking for a deal of some kind to help our family make it during those difficult years, managed to purchase what had once been a railroad boxcar and have it delivered to the then unoccupied end of the Reynolds Rd. property. He then used his creative construction skills to convert it into a two room house, with a fireplace vented by a large chimney made from limestone rock collected from the fields of the farm. My Dad was working at a lumber company at the time. Years later, the stone fireplace was all that was left of the house.



Boxcar House

**Stone
Chimney**

I lived at the boxcar house when I was 3, 4, and 5 years old. Our water came from a nearby fresh water stream that emerged from a small cave in the side of a hill nearby. Snakes were a constant presence and threat. The snakes would frequently get in the house. I would often see them before my mother would so I would warn her by saying

something like, ``Mama, there`s a snake in that corner.`` She would grab a hoe and chase the snakes, but I do not remember her ever managing to hit one before it eluded her and slipped out through a crack.

There was no indoor plumbing but we did have a sink for washing dishes in front of a window in the front room, a room which served as both living room and kitchen. The window over the sink looked out onto a big oak tree. At some point, a very large snake began to hang out menacingly in the tree. My mother sent for my Uncle Walter, who was living at Granddaddy`s cabin at the time. Walter was a younger brother of my father and was probably 17 at the time. Walter brought his rifle to the house and shot the snake as it was lying in the tree. I can still remember the snake plopping to the ground after Uncle Walter killed it.

My father constructed a swing near the creek for my sister and me to use. The two long ropes that held the swing seat were tied to a tree limb some twenty or more feet in the air. It was great fun to ride that swing far out over the creek and back.

My grandfather owned a mule named Kate, who, when she was not pulling Granddaddy Baggett`s garden plow, roamed the fenced 10 acres near our house. One summer, we went to the mountains to visit my Scott grandparents for a couple of weeks. When we returned Kate had caught her neck in the ropes of our swing. Fortunately she was able to reach the creek in order to drink, but she was unable to eat. If we had been gone longer she would have starved to death. My dad managed to free the mule, but, from that time on, she had a large white x on her neck, where, as she had tried to free herself, the ropes had worn away her hair and scarred her.

My parents tended a vegetable garden next to our home. For some reason they were very successful at growing turnips. Since we were very poor, my mother learned to fix turnips and turnip greens in a variety of ways. Despite her creativity, I soon became tired of turnips. To this day, I choose to abstain from turnips.

My sister, Margaret, attended first grade while we were living in the boxcar house. She walked, by herself, every school day, a little more

than a mile on a lonely country road to UNA Tennessee, with strict orders not to accept a ride from anyone, which she didn't.

My Rabies Scares

I seem to have been born a dog person. I knew as a very young child that I loved animals, and especially dogs. As a toddler, I begged for a puppy. My father was not fond of dogs. I never knew why. Nevertheless, when a neighbor's dog had a new litter of puppies, my parents gave into my pleading and got me one. Now this was 1941, and my parents either did not have the money to have the puppy vaccinated for rabies, or simply did not realize the risk at the time.



**First
Puppy**

Not long after I began to enjoy playing with my puppy, a rabid fox bit it while it was resting under the boxcar house. The puppy later bit me, and so, at age 5, I had to have a series of rabies treatment shots painfully injected into my stomach. My puppy had to be euthanized. Fortunately, the vaccine existed by then and was available to physicians in Nashville. The shots were given in the stomach every day over a two week period, and were quite painful. But if I had been born in an earlier generation, and been bitten by a rabid puppy, I would have died a terrible death. When and where we are born matters.

Later, during WWII, when our family lived in Portsmouth, VA., and my father served in the navy, I was again bitten by a dog. There was no clear evidence the dog was rabid, but it could not be ruled out. Some fifty doctors in a staff meeting at the naval hospital were consulted, out of fear I had again been bitten by a rabid dog, and

whether it was safe to give me additional rabies shots. The physician staff decided there was greater risk in not giving me more shots than in trusting the earlier shots to protect me. Every day, for fourteen days, my mother took me to Portsmouth Naval Hospital, where I once again received rabies shots in my stomach. (Only 5 shots are required after exposure to rabies today, and they are usually given in the thigh of a child)



Portsmouth VA.

Naval Hospital

The Sewanee Scott Home

In 1942, while my father was working in military related construction near Clarksville, Tennessee, my mother, sister, and I lived with my maternal grandparents, Mimi and Bookie, in their two story home on Tennessee Avenue in Sewanee, Tennessee.



**House on
Tennessee
Avenue
Sewanee**

The Scott home was, in many ways, a magical place for a child of 6 to live. We had a fenced front yard with a couple of large oak trees, a badminton court and a croquet court. The front yard was level, and the land which naturally sloped gently downward on both sides of the house, was terraced so that there were three level playing areas on each side of the house. One of the terraced areas had a large sandbox which Bookie, who managed the local sand plant, had filled with sand.

The sandbox was a great place for us children to play, except for one problem. Mimi was a cat lover, and her many cats and kittens found the sandbox to be inviting for very different reasons,

The cats also played a role in the only spanking I remember receiving from Mimi. I had heard someone say that if cats leap or fall that they will always land on their feet. I decided at that early age to conduct my own scientific experiment to see if it was true. I gathered two of Mimi's younger cats, carried them to the second floor rear porch of her house and dropped them over the railing. Fortunately, they not only landed on their feet two stories below, but were not injured. I was

not as fortunate, as Mimi spied it happening and gave my behind a lesson on kindness to animals it would never forget.



**Cousin Carol Scott
and me in my
Grandparent`s
Sandbox**

One of the things I looked forward to while at that house on Tennessee Avenue was watching the Sewanee Military Academy march by our house, on Sunday Mornings, with drums beating, on their way to church, at the University of the South All Saints Chapel. I loved to run to the front fence and march parallel to them until I reached the far end of the yard.

Another thing I loved to do was to walk about a mile from my grandparent`s home, to the end of Tennessee Avenue, to the cross, a large structure on the side of Broad Mountain, memorializing those who died in America`s 20th century wars. The cross was visible for many miles in the valley below.

The cross was also a favorite place for our family. My parents visited it on their honeymoon, and all of our Scott relatives loved to take a picnic lunch there

.



The Sewanee Cross

Dressed for Any Occasion

I was blessed with a rich imagination. I loved, as a child, to pretend I was one of the characters I had seen at the movies on Saturday afternoons. I had cowboy outfits, Indian outfits, army outfits



and navy outfits, and I had both a Zorro mask and a Lone Ranger mask, along with cap guns, holsters, and a cowboy hat.

School Days

I attended Sewanee Elementary School in the first grade. My family moved back to Nashville for my 2nd grade, but when Dad first enlisted in the Navy we returned to the Sewanee house where I attended third grade.

While I was going to the 2nd grade in Nashville my Sewanee classmates were learning to write in cursive. Cursive was a third grade challenge in Nashville, so I did not yet have that skill. During the summer of 1943, my mother set up a card table on Mimi's front porch and taught me to write in cursive. I learned it well enough to get by, but handwriting has never been my best skill.

While in the third grade, I surprised my mother by inviting members of my class to my birthday party on a Saturday. It was not my birthday, but I thought it would be great fun to have a party. Several children showed up with presents for me. My mother was a wonderful sport about it. She served them all ice cream and helped us play games.



One of the children who came to my fake birthday party was Charlotte Robinson, who I considered to be my girlfriend. She was the precious daughter of the commander of the Sewanee Military Academy.

Sometime later I told my mother that Charlotte and I were engaged. She asked me what it meant to be engaged and I told her that engaged meant that we planned to get married someday but that we could still get out of it. Charlotte evidently liked me a lot. Her father told my mother at some point that she had described me to him as ``the prettiest boy in her class.'' I must confess that surprised me when my mother told me this. I never considered myself a *pretty boy*. Despite our best intentions, the engagement to Charlotte Robinson did not survive my move to Portsmouth the following year.

World War II

When I was 5 years of age, while my father was working in another part of the state, and my mother, sister, and I, were living in Sewanee Tennessee with my grandparents, Flora and Charles Scott, or as I knew them, Mimi and Bookie, World War II was raging in Europe and the Pacific region. We often went to the local movie theater in the local University Student building on Saturday afternoons. It was on those outings that we saw news film of the war then raging in the Pacific. These film clips probably influenced what happened to me a few days before Pearl Harbor was attacked. I dreamed of planes firing and dropping bombs and woke up screaming, ``*The war has come to us! The war has come to us!*'' A few days later, on December 7, 1941, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, and brought the United States into the 2nd World War, it really did come to us. I remember listening to President Franklin Roosevelt, via Bookie`s Victrola radio, as Roosevelt said it was ``*a date which will live in infamy.*'' After the attack, and because of my nightmare, my mother seemed to believe I was some kind of prophet.

My father and two of his brothers, my uncles, Edwin and Walter, would all serve in World War II. Edwin was the youngest of Granddaddy Baggett's children. Edwin registered for the draft, at age 18, in 1942. He enlisted in the Naval Air Force in early 1945, and was killed during a night training flight in Texas on July 16, 1945, when his plane crashed into the side of a mountain. My Uncle Walter was in the army and served during the decisive Battle of the Bulge, the bloodiest battle in WWII, in the winter of 1944-1945. Walter received an injury that caused chronic tearing of one eye. He was an MP (military police) and helped to keep order and guide military traffic when the Allies arrived in Paris.

While Uncle Edwin's death was a tragic training accident, when my family called me into Mimi and Bookie's kitchen to tell me about it, I remember stomping around the back yard screaming my anger at the Japanese.

My father enlisted in the Navy, at age 30, on December 23, 1943. Because of his experience in the building industry at the time, he signed up thinking he would probably be assigned to the Navy Construction Battalion, but, to his surprise, after six weeks of boot training, he was assigned to the Naval Hospital Corp. He spent most of WWII as a psychiatric nurse in Portsmouth Naval Hospital.

In the summer of 1944, my mother, my sister, and I, moved to Portsmouth Virginia where my father was stationed. While in Portsmouth, I attended my 4th grade and began my 5th grade. We lived at Alexander Park, a community of rather flimsy tar papered pre-fabricated rectangle barrack like structures designed for emergency rental to families engaged in ship building and those with family members serving in the navy.



**Alexander Park
WWII Housing**

The Great Atlantic Hurricane

In September of 1944, the Great Atlantic Hurricane, moved up the Atlantic Coast and did serious damage to the Portsmouth metropolitan area. My mother, sister, and I were terrified. It was our first hurricane. Our house was a fragile building not constructed with hurricanes in mind. I remember the three of us lying on the floor of the living room for several scary hours as noisy wind and driving rain pounded the windows and sides of our house.



**My 1944
School
Picture**

One beautiful summer day, when Dad had a short leave, he drove us to Virginia Beach for a family outing. I had never been to the ocean before and was seriously afraid of venturing very far into it. Dad, who was a very fine swimmer decided to help me conquer my fears. He let me crawl onto his back, and then with me riding him like a horse, he swam toward the incoming waves. I was terrified and was soon convinced we were in very deep water, and since I did not know how to swim at that time, I began to scream for him to go back towards shore. Then he stopped and helped me stand up in what was water that barely reached my waist. I was mortified that I had been such a sissy, but relieved that my father had not taken me into the deep waters of the Atlantic.

My father, who reached his adult years during the Great Depression, was a great scrounger, especially of building materials. One day he dumped a bunch of used lumber behind our house. I am

not sure what he planned to do with it, but it had a lot of nails in it, and he put me to work pulling out the nails. In the process one of the boards, which was leaning against the back of our house fell toward me. I put my hand up to catch it and caught a rusty nail in the palm of my hand. That resulted in a doctor visit and a tetanus shot.

Next door to us lived a cute blonde headed girl my age who I decided was my girlfriend. Although it was not her real name, I called her `Honey.` It was both a name of affection and one which honored the color of her hair. Honey had the most amazing comic book selection I had ever seen. At some point, Honey and I decided to go into the used comic book business in order to make ourselves some money. That is when I had a fine idea.

Between Honey`s house and ours was a well-worn sandy dirt path that people who lived in Alexander Park walked in order to get to the local grocery and back. I decided to take the used lumber I had been cleaning up and build a comic book stand, modeled after urban newsstands, where we could sell to people travelling the path.

The stand, built when I was eight, turned out to be the first of many building projects I would complete in my lifetime. I was able to find some tarpaper to use for roofing so that it was waterproof. It handled the wind gusts without even shaking. Honey and I spent many hours in that comic book stand selling her books. After a few months, when we were already running low on comic book inventory, a local Fire Marshal stopped by our stand and ordered us to dismantle it. He explained to my mother that it was a potential fire hazard and worried that we, or other kids, might smoke in it, and catch it on fire. I was heartbroken, but obediently dismantled the structure.

Not long afterwards, the circus was in Newport News, about an hour from our home. My parents arranged for Honey and her parents to go to the circus with us, so both families piled into one car. Everything went well until the trip home. I am not sure, but I must have had a couple of large soft drinks during the circus. As our families rode toward Portsmouth I was desperate to relieve my bladder, but embarrassed to say so with Honey and her family in the car. Finally, when we were on the highway in a dark area of the country, I pleaded

with my father to let me relieve myself on the roadside, which, with my back to the car, I did, in spite of great personal humiliation. Fortunately, no-one in that car that night ever mentioned the circus trip again.

The war ended on September 2, 1945. As soon as it was announced on the radio, the entire neighborhood broke into celebration. Car horns were honking. Guns were being fired from front porches and even out the windows of homes. Some people had even managed to obtain and set off some fireworks. My mother was worried about all the guns being fired in the neighborhood and so we celebrated by lying on the floor of our living room, until many hours later, when Alexander Park grew quiet.

Dad was discharged on December 15, of that year, and our family moved back to 1709 Sweetbriar Ave., Nashville, where Dad went back to work in the building supply business.



1709 Sweetbriar Ave.
Nashville, Tennessee

Living On Thompson Place

Not long after moving back to Nashville, my father bought a lot on Thompson Place, a newly developed street off of Murfreesboro Road, near the Nashville airport. Dad, and my uncle Charles, built a concrete block house there that would be my family`s home for the next eight years, while I journeyed from the 5th grade through High School.



**Home on Thompson Place
Photo Taken Many Years Later**

When we first moved to Thompson Place, our home was surrounded by open fields of 3 to 4 foot tall sage grass. When I was 10, for my 5th Grade school year, I walked about a mile to Murfreesboro Road at the bottom of our hill, and then rode a school bus about 4 miles, past the airport, to Una School, the same school my sister Margaret had walked to from our boxcar house, during her first grade.

I do not remember much about my 5th Grade except that my teacher, Mrs. Bailey, seemed very old to me and appeared to always be in a bad mood. I also attended my 6th and 7th Grades at Una School. I do remember my teacher, Mrs. Thompson, very well. She wanted each of us in the class to succeed and made every child feel special while she also was a strict disciplinarian.

In those times corporal punishment was used by teachers (as well as parents) to keep us school-age children on the straight and narrow. Mrs. Thompson had a large wooden paddle that had a round hole, about a third of an inch in diameter, located in the center of its business end. That hole insured a blister would be left on the bottom of any child who received licks with the paddle. Whenever she punished a student, she would order them to the cloak room, a kind of closet in the back of the classroom where our jackets were hung in the winter, where she would administer the punishment. We could hear the sound of the paddle being used on the rears of our classmates. I never received a paddling as Mrs. Thompson successfully frightened me into strict compliance with her rules. Later, when I was a freshman at Donelson High, Mrs. Thompson's husband was my football coach. For somewhat different reasons, I found him a bit scary too.

Not long after settling on Thompson Place, my parents allowed me to have another dog. Dad's Uncle Comer Baggett, a farmer in the Cedar Hill Tennessee area, owned a Collie that had puppies and he was happy to let our family adopt a beautiful little one we named Honey. Honey would be my best friend for the rest of my years on Thompson Place.



**Honey
My Canine Companion**

During my early years on Thompson Place I loved to roam the surrounding fields and woods. Aside from a couple of houses located between ours and Murfreesboro Rd, we had no nearby neighbors. We were surrounded by fields of sage grass and woods. I considered all of that neighboring land my personal playground. Honey and I would often travel across a couple of nearby farms to Mill creek where we would sit on the bank together, and I would try to fish. I would sometimes catch a bluegill, but nothing sizeable enough to take home for supper. The creek, where I fished, was shallow and not a great place to catch anything. Still, Honey and I loved these adventures together.

I also remember Honey and I exploring the surrounding land each Christmas in search of a wild Cedar tree. The trees grew naturally, especially in the fence rows of what had once been farmland. I would take a hand axe with me, find a tree the desired shape and height, cut it down, and drag it, sometimes several miles to our home, where I would saw the trunk to make it level, and nail cross boards to the trunk to use as a stand. I then would stand it in one of my mother's large washtubs, fill the tub with water so the tree would not dry out, and then I would decorate the tree with lights, tinsel, and ornaments that we reused year after year.

One of my scariest memories from that period occurred because my mother, practicing the frugality of her great depression formative years, refused to pay for trash pickup. Instead, we had a 10 ft. square area near the garden in the back of our house that was marked off by a single layer of used and broken concrete blocks. That was our fire pit.

One windy fall day, my mother set fire to some trash in that area and the wind immediately picked up some burning paper and blew it into the field of dry sage grass next door. The grass ignited and the fire began to race through the field. Fortunately for our house, the wind was blowing away from us. My parents grabbed some small blankets, ran to the fire and began to try to beat it out, but it was too much out of control to be effective and too dangerous to continue. A fire truck eventually arrived and the volunteer firemen manage to find a way to

station themselves about a quarter of a mile from us, on the other side of the field, and successfully kept the fire from continuing to spread to a wooded area nearby. By then, the fire had burned many acres of sage grass.

We had a garden behind the house and it was my job to tend it and grow the vegetables we needed for our family diet. My Dad gave me the benefit of his gardening knowledge but the work was up to me. I planted rows of corn, beans, potatoes, squash, a bed of strawberries and other items. I spent much of the growing season pushing a hand plow up and down some thirty rows, each around 50 yards long. I pulled weeds by hand and harvested the food when it was ripe and ready.

We had indoor plumbing, but depended for disposal of sewage on a septic tank buried in the back yard. Near the septic tank was a peach tree that evidently was happy to drink from the tank's overflow field. It produced great peaches, but the area around the tree became marshy. That is when my father put me to work digging a new overflow ditch. We lived on land that consisted of hard red clay, the kind from which bricks are made. I worked an entire summer digging and shoveling clay, creating a 20ft long, 4ft deep, 3ft wide ditch, putting down overflow pipe, covering it with gravel and roofing material, and then refilling the ditch with clay.

Somehow between school, garden, and digging a septic overflow ditch, I found time to play. I loved sports and was a huge fan of the Nashville Vols minor league baseball team. I listened to their games on the radio, and was even fortunate enough to attend a few of them in person in Athletic Park Stadium in Nashville.

Next to our home, between our house and the next home on our street, was a second lot that we owned. I decided it was the perfect place to put a baseball field. I laid out bases, base paths, pitching mound and then constructed a backstop made of wooden 4x4 poles and mesh wire. A barbed wire fence at the front of our garden served as the left field fence. When I had friends over, we would usually play baseball on that field. In reality, because there were no teams to play on my field, it served my imagination more than it provided recreational space.

During the summer that I turned 13, Davidson County Schools built a new elementary school on Thompson Place, at the crest of the hill that descended to Murfreesboro Rd. I spent my 8th grade as one of two students in the 8th grade class. Our teacher was Mr. Adams, the principal. He taught a combined class of 6th, 7th and 8th grade students. I was happy about that as I had no interest in my female 8th grade classmate, but the room had a couple of 6th and 7th grade girls that did suit my fancy.

Mr. Adams, like my earlier teachers at Una School, also had a paddle that he seemed to enjoy using. But Mr. Adams also had a drinking problem and was prone to losing his temper. On two occasions, he badly bruised two of my male classmates. Sometime later, while I was in High School, that tendency to abuse caused him to be investigated and forced to retire.

The new school on Thompson Place did not have a name and Mr. Adams held a contest with our class to come up with a name. I offered the name *Glenview* and won the contest. The school is still in existence as I write this and is still named Glenview.



Glenview
The School I Named

My High School Years

My sister, Margaret, who was two years older than me, attended Antioch High School for her freshman and sophomore years where she was a member of the cheerleader squad. She had begun to date a boy named Ormand who worked at a drive-in fast food place near Una. Ormand attended Donelson High School. He also owned and drove a car. While it is questionable that it was justified, Donelson High School had a better reputation academically than Antioch. My parents agreed that Ormand could pick Margaret and me up each school day and drive us to Donelson where I would be a freshman and she would be a junior. Since the bus service for our area served Antioch High School, and Donelson was around 5 miles away, we needed the ride.

At Donelson I tried out for the football team. The Donelson team was a regional champion at the time, and Coach Thompson, the husband of my 6th and 7th grade teacher, was one of the winningest coaches in the Nashville area. I was one of the smallest members of the team. I sat on the bench every game and watched, but never played.



**Sitting on the
Bench my
Freshman Football
Year**

While I did not get to play, my friend Bobby did. Bobby lived a few doors from me, and also decided to attend Donelson. We stayed

after school for football practice and, because we had no other means of transportation home, we either hitched rides or walked home after practice. Bobby had a talent for kicking the football and got to do so several times a game.

Despite my lack of athletic build or ability at that time, I still loved sports. I joined the school press club and became their lead sports writer. That turned out to be something for which I had a gift. So, I not only sat on the bench and had a close up view of our team, I was able to write up an interesting report of each game.

Freshmen at Donelson were constantly hazed by upperclassmen. During lunch hours, when everyone was on the lawn of the school, the older students liked to pick up the freshmen and toss them into the bushes alongside the building. Everyone except us freshmen thought that was great fun. I somehow managed to avoid the honor of visiting the bushes, probably because the leaders of the hazing were older members of the football team.

For my sophomore year, I rode the bus to Antioch rather than return to Donelson. I tried out for football and made the team, but rode the bench again for the entire season.

Since there was no bus service after football practice, I hitch hiked home each afternoon. Those journeys turned out to be adventures. Most days, I would get two or three partway rides home during the 14 mile trip. Some days I would walk much of the way while I was still exhausted from a day of school and football practice. Those evenings I found it difficult to stay awake while doing my homework.

Sometimes the rides were unnerving. I once was picked up and admitted to the rear seat of a Ford coup which was filled with empty beer cans. It was immediately clear that I was riding with a seriously impaired driver. About half way home, I lied and said my house was near the next intersection and bailed out as soon as the car came to a stop.

On another occasion I was picked up by a young man on a motorcycle who had me climb on behind him. He evidently thought it great fun to scare me by going over 100 miles per hour, a speed faithfully recorded on his bike's visible speedometer. I again lied and

said the next intersection was my stop, and I shakily walked the remaining 2 miles home.

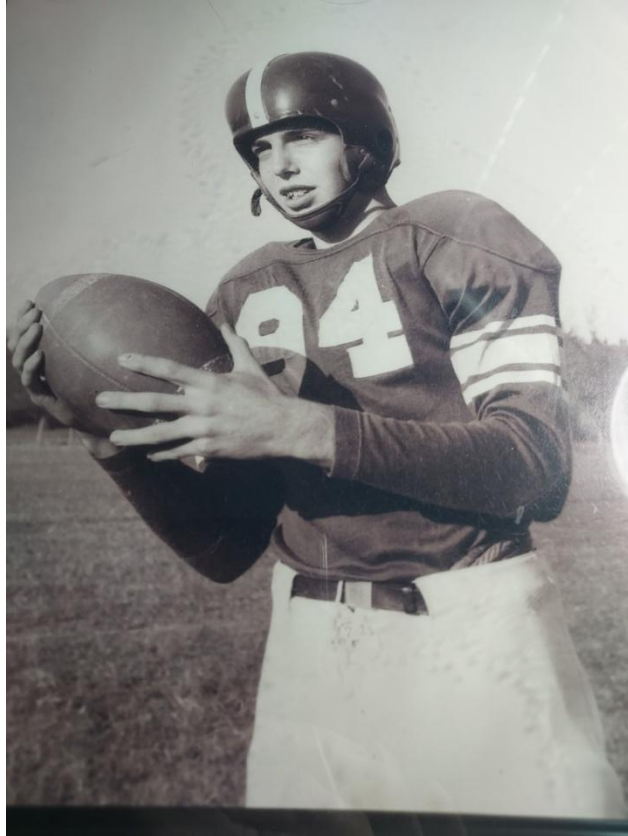
At Antioch, I joined the student newspaper editorial staff and wrote reports of sports and other school activities. It was about that time that I decided that my chosen vocation was that of a journalist.

During my junior year I decided to try to get some playing time by trying out for a guard position on the football team. My father had played a guard when he was in school and I thought that might change my luck. It did not, although I was able to play briefly in a couple of games when we were so much in the lead that all of our bench got a few minutes of game time.

Everything about my football days changed my senior year at Antioch. During the summer of 1953, between my Junior and Senior years, I worked at Berry Hill Lumber Company in Nashville. My father had once been a salesman for that company and they hired me based on their fondness for him. It was a challenging place to work. I had to be up at the crack of dawn and walk or hitch a ride the 5 miles to work, spend the day stacking lumber, loading trucks, unloading boxcars of 100 lb. bags of concrete mix, in 90 to 100 degree heat, then walk or hitch a ride home. I nearly always had to walk my exhausted self, up the Thompson Place hill at the end of my day.

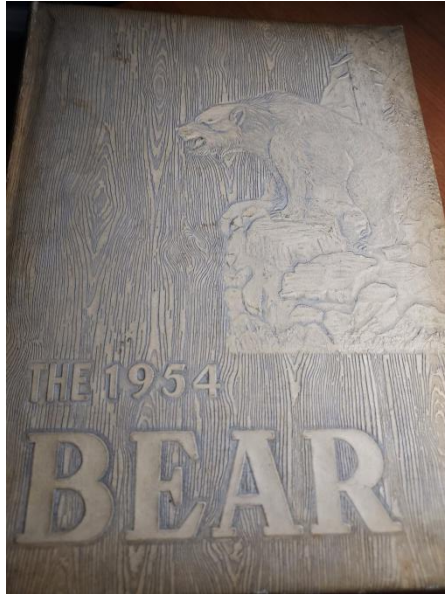
Berry Hill Lumber Company turned out to be an unanticipated blessing. In addition to giving me some much needed spending money and savings for college, it built my upper body strength so well that my football coach saw possibilities in me he had not seen before. When toward the end of the summer, I quit Berry Hill Lumber and attended Antioch football practice, my Coach noted my increased muscles and noticed I was now over 6 feet tall and decided I should play offensive end. It was the position I had always craved.

Then, during one afternoon of practice we were doing a head-on tackle exercise, in which two lines are formed and one player receives the football and runs directly at the other line while the person in front of the second line tries to tackle him. When my time came to be the tackler, I was unnerved by the fact that the person facing me in the other line was our very large fullback, our best and most effective



runner. I resolved to give it my best, ran straight to him without slowing down, hit his thighs with my helmet, grabbed his legs, and not only brought him down but drove him backwards. When I got up, my head was swimming. The coach wanted to make sure he believed what he had seen so had us do it again. Once, more I hit him hard in the thigh pads with my helmet as I drove him backwards and down. All these years later, I believe I still have a hard knot on my head from those encounters. My coach was so impressed that he decided I should play end on offense, and linebacker on defense. I was only one of two players on the team that played both offense and defense. Finally, after three years of riding the bench, I played almost all of every game my senior year.

During my senior year I was the editor of both the school newspaper and the 1954 Bear, the school annual.



The 1954 Bear contained many drawings of cartoon bears which I had fun creating.



Tennessee Press Association

Because I planned to be a journalist I applied for and received a membership in The Tennessee Press Association and attended a 1954 Press Association Conference in Knoxville. I remember very little about the conference except meeting and having a conversation there with Pat

Boone who the association had brought there to provide entertainment. At the time, Pat Boone was a student at David Lipscomb High School in Nashville and had recently won a Nashville talent contest, but he had not, at that time, become the celebrity, artist, and movie star he was destined to be. Both Pat and I were from Nashville and connected briefly with each other at that Knoxville event.



**Pat Boone as a
student at
David
Lipscomb
High School in
Nashville**

PART II: CALLED TO PREACH

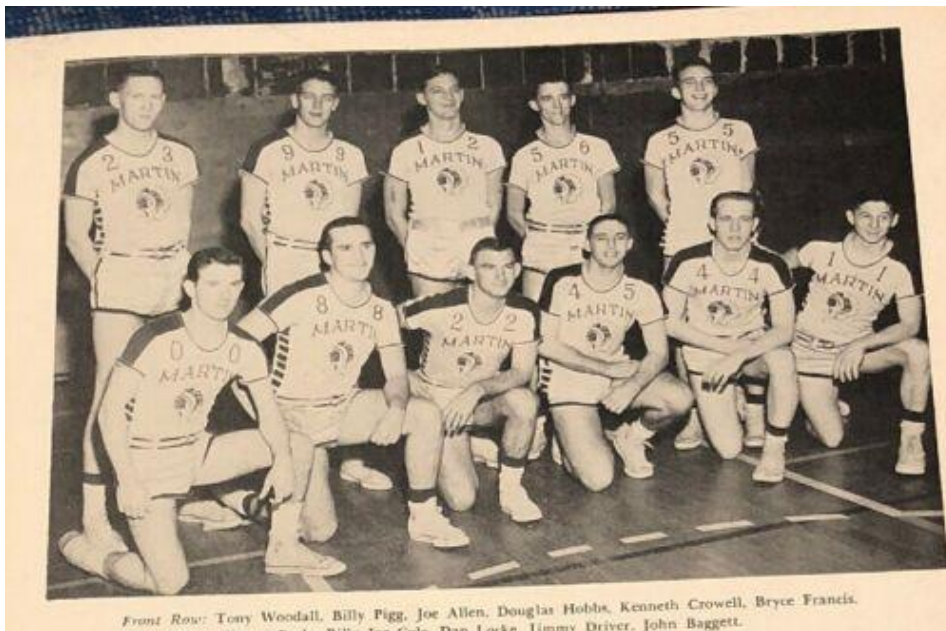
Martin College

While I was finishing my High School years at Antioch my sister Margaret attended Martin Methodist College in Pulaski Tennessee. I visited her there one weekend and she arranged for me to date while there a very attractive member of the Martin girls basketball team.

Joe Britton was also a student at Martin and Margaret and Joe dated and married upon graduation from the two year junior college in 1956. They then attended Kentucky Wesleyan College in Owensboro for their Junior and Senior college years. They would both return to Kentucky Wesleyan after graduate school and become professors there for their entire careers, Joe would teach English and Margaret Sociology.

I liked Martin College and was happy when encouraged by my parents to follow in my sister's footsteps there. It was a Methodist

Christian College and small enough to provide a positive accessible social life. My only objection was the fact Martin did not have a football team. It did, however, have basketball. I tried out for the basketball team, and to my surprise, at six foot two in height, I was selected to be a backup center. Of course I did not play very much but enjoyed being a part of the team and taking the road trips to our away games. I had experience sitting on the bench during my high school football career, so I had little trouble adjusting that position to my basketball career.



**Martin
College
Basketball
Team
Picture. I
am Back
Row Far
Right**

Several of my fellow students at Martin were pre-ministerial students and I became good friends with them. It was my first time away from home and family, and I struggled to find a place in my new social environment. I took a Bible class from President Fowler and was one of the few students who passed it with an A. Several students struggled with the scholarly approach to the Bible, but my mother had introduced me to non-literalistic Biblical critical historical thinking and methodology during our dish washing conversations at home so I was able to be a star in that class. The class also helped me to have a Biblical framework for my then current existential struggle with the questions of ``Who am I? and What am I going to do with my life?``

I soon began to visit a tiny chapel in the basement of the men's dormitory. There was a kneeling rail and an table/altar with a cross and unlit candles on it. I began to visit the chapel every evening for a time of personal prayer. On one evening as I was contemplating what to do with my life, I began to pray the words of a hymn I had learned at Arlington Methodist Church as a youth: *``Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to thee. Take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.``* A sense of peace came over me and I knew in that moment God was calling me to the Christian ministry. I was no longer destined for a life of journalism, but a life of serving God and His Church.

I shared my calling and decision with a friend who invited me to go with a student group that held services on Sunday afternoons at the Giles County Jail located in the Pulaski courthouse. It was there that I soon preached my first sermon. My sermon text from James 4:14, *``Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away``* allowed me to use my own recent spiritual struggle to speak to my jailed congregation about their lives as I reminded my captive congregation, *``Life is but a short journey from the cradle to the grave.``*

Kentucky Wesleyan College

During the summer following my freshman year at college my parents convinced me to go to Kentucky Wesleyan for my sophomore year. I was conflicted about this because I thought I would finally have the chance to play first string basketball at Martin rather than warm the bench, and Kentucky Wesleyan basketball was not an option as that team was way beyond my skill level. In retrospect, I understand my parents were anxious for me to go to school where Margaret and Joe could help guide me. They wisely worried about my immaturity.

Kentucky Wesleyan was also a place of significance for our family. My grandfather, and namesake, Dr. John Foster Baggett Sr.,

had been the President of Kentucky Wesleyan 1950-1951, only 4 years before my arrival, and during his leadership he relocated the college from Winchester Kentucky to Owensboro Kentucky. In 1956, when I was a sophomore at Wesleyan, my grandfather was the Methodist District Superintendent of the Hopkinsville Kentucky District. Later, while I was still a student at Wesleyan, he served as the Administrative Assistant to Bishop William D. Watkins of the Louisville Conference of the Methodist Church.



**Granddaddy
Baggett**

My Life As A Young Preacher

In the Fall of 1955, at the beginning of my Sophomore year at Wesleyan, Rev. Billy Joe Cox, a young pastor, who was attempting to plant a church near the campus, asked me to be his Assistant. It was a volunteer position with no salary, but I was glad for the opportunity and the experience. During the year, in addition to my school work, I pursued a "License to Preach," which involved some correspondence study, mostly about Methodist history, and going before a committee of

fully ordained clergy to be questioned. Because of a shortage of fully trained and ordained pastors, there were too few pastors for the large number of rural (and low paying) Methodist churches in Kentucky. For that reason, the Annual Conference depended on non-seminary trained persons to serve many churches. Some were men who had been in the work force awhile, had families, felt called to preach, but had no way to get the necessary education. Others, like myself and some of my buddies, were college students who were preparing for ministry and needed income to help pay for college.



In June of 1956, I was appointed Pastor of a two point Methodist charge. That meant, at the age of 20, I had become the senior pastor of two churches, Maceo and Bethlehem. Maceo was 12 miles east of Owensboro on the highway to Louisville. Bethlehem was a “country” church located five or six miles south of Maceo. My salary was \$1800 a year (equivalent to about \$22,000 in 2026).

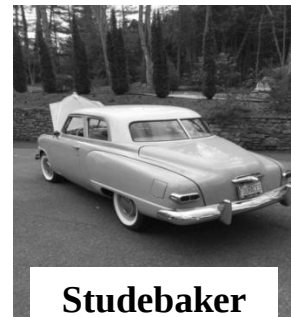
Maceo & Bethlehem Churches

In June of 1956 I began serving the Maceo/Bethlehem Charge (Circuit). I would hold services at both churches every Sunday, but would alternate an early service and the traditional 11:00 a.m. time. At first the congregations welcomed me appreciatively and warmly, but, a few months later, that changed when I began to preach against segregation.

After my appointment in June, I arranged for a special rate at a motel in Maceo as I was not enrolled in Summer School and not eligible for a dorm room. I also managed to purchase a very used 1948 Studebaker coup. When school started back in late August, I moved back into the dorm and commuted the 12 to 15 miles to my churches on Sundays. Every commute was an adventure. When travelling to and between my churches, a trail of blue smoke followed my brown Studebaker. I carried a case of oil cans in the trunk, kept an eye on the oil light, and stopped to add oil at least twice every round trip.



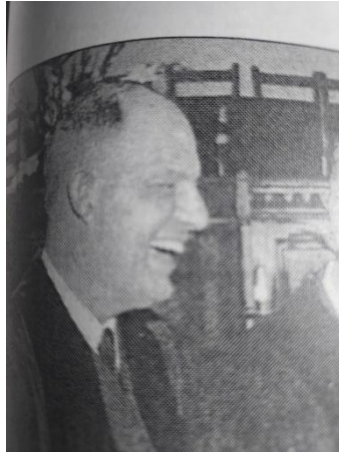
**Maceo Methodist
Church**



Studebaker

Rural churches had a tradition of holding a revival each summer. During the summer of 1960, shortly after receiving my appointment to

Maceo/Bethlehem, I scheduled a revival. I invited Rev. Fenton Warren, the pastor of Arlington Methodist Church in Nashville to be our guest evangelist. Fenton had been my pastor during my high school years and was a good friend of my parents. In fact he was a distant relative on my mother`s side. Fenton was known for his brief but highly moving and often humorous sermons. During the summer before I entered Kentucky Wesleyan. he had invited me to preach at Arlington what turned out to be my second sermon ever, titled ``Watch for Falling Rocks.``



**Rev.
Fenton
Warren**

In preparation for the revival, I had Fenton`s picture put on a poster with the words, ``*Famous Evangelist to Hold Revival at Maceo Methodist Church.*`` When Fenton first saw the poster he was amused and I think a bit embarrassed. I do not think he had ever considered himself to be a famous evangelist or famous anything. During the revival, I led the singing, and Fenton did the preaching. It turned out to be a good start to my ministry at Maceo as the nightly services resulted in our adding a few new people to our church membership.

We also held a revival at Bethlehem Methodist Church. For that one I recruited my Grandfather, the family member for whom I was named, Rev. Dr. John Foster Baggett Sr. At the time he was The Administrative Assistant to Bishop William T. Watkins of the Louisville Conference of the Methodist Church. Bishop Watkins was in ill health and my grandfather was very busy doing the work the bishop was unable to do, but he somehow found time to preach our revival that summer. I am confident he did so as an opportunity to mentor me.

Granddaddy Baggett believed in visiting church members in their homes, and I think we visited most of our church membership that week. He was getting up in years, but had boundless energy. He also liked to find a way to make each visit memorable. For example while we were waiting for a member to answer her door, he helped himself to some hydrangea seeds growing near the porch. Then, at our next visit, he presented the seeds as a gift to another parishioner.



Bethlehem Church



ALL IN THE FAMILY—Dr. John F. Baggett, who is conducting a revival this week at the Bethlehem Methodist Church near Yelvington, greets his grandson, John F. Baggett III, pastor of the church. The elder Baggett

**Granddaddy
Baggett and
Me in
Owensboro
newspaper
article about
Bethlehem
Revival**

Bethlehem Church was very evangelical and fundamentalist in its traditions. Members were active in carrying for and supporting a local camp meeting held in an outdoor amphitheater near the church. Granddaddy Baggett was greatly influenced by liberal and neo-orthodox theologies. While his doctorate was honorary, and he had never actually earned a divinity degree, he was extremely well read, and had spent some time studying at Union Seminary in New York. He used that week at Bethlehem to help me to broaden my own theology, though the Bethlehem members let me know for future reference they preferred a more ``old fashioned`` preacher for their revivals.

The Engagement

During my sophomore year I had dated both a Wesleyan student and a girl from my Maceo Congregation. Neither relationship had seemed right to me. I decided to pursue other possibilities. Then, in the fall of my junior year, I started dating Millie Vaughn. Millie was also a Wesleyan Student and was something of a radical Christian for the times. She was the President of the Wesleyan College Methodist Student Movement, and also the President of the state-wide Kentucky Methodist Student Movement organization.

Millie and I took frequent walks together in a local Owensboro park. It was during those walks that I learned of her passion for civil rights. It seems she had spent the summer of 1956 as a volunteer intern in a black church in Jamaica New York. She had also, on a couple of occasions, chosen to ride a greyhound bus while sitting in the back where black people were required to sit in those Jim Crow segregated years. She did so as a personal protest against segregation. Millie and I connected around church and anti-segregation beliefs.

Together we started a petition addressed to the Kentucky Wesleyan Board of Trustees calling for the immediate integration of the then all white college. We collected some signatures and presented it to Dr. Oscar Lever, the President of the college. Dr. Lever`s response was

to say to me, ``John, if your grandfather had not been a President of this college, and was not on the current Board of Trustees, I would expel you for trying to stir up all this trouble.``

As a local pastor, I had conducted funerals at a local funeral home. The owner of the business was also a member of the Board of Trustees of the college. I went to him during this time to try to persuade him that integration was God`s will for Wesleyan. In the discussion, I said to him, ``When you get to heaven, you will find that heaven is integrated.`` To which he replied, ``If heaven is integrated, then I do not want to go there.`` Such were the times in which we lived.

The first twenty something dates Millie and I went on were all church related in some way. There was a Gospel Mission in a low income neighborhood in Owensboro and Millie and I offered our services to it. Many of our early dates involved leading worship and prayer meetings at the Gospel Mission.

On a February night in 1957 I drove Millie to the Bethlehem Church. She thought I had taken her there so we could pray together. We did pray at the altar of the church, but then I pulled out a ring I had managed to save up to buy and proposed. She said yes and we returned to the college to share our news with our friends.

When I proposed, I assumed we would wait until the following year, after graduation to get married. Millie convinced me that we did not need to wait, that we could get married in June of 1957, and finish our college education as a married couple.

The day following our engagement, Millie and I drove to the parsonage of the local Methodist District Superintendent, Dr. Paul Powell. Dr. Powell, was also a former president of Kentucky Wesleyan, and a current member of The Wesleyan Board of Trustees. When we arrived at his house, there were other cars there and it was clear when we rang the doorbell that we were not expected. ``What are you doing here?`` was his not so gracious greeting. He ushered Millie and me into an empty room and made us wait there alone while he finished his other meeting. It turned out that his other meeting was with the Pastoral Relations Committee of the Bethlehem Church and they were

at Dr. Powell's house to complain about my preaching against segregation.

When Dr. Powell finally met with us, he let me know that he was especially unhappy with me for criticizing the Wesleyan Board of Trustees in a sermon. In an attempt to change the subject, Millie and I shared our news about our engagement. We had hoped that would be well received and that as a married couple we would be allowed to spend our senior year at Wesleyan living in the Maceo/Bethlehem parsonage. The parsonage was located next door to the Maceo Church but was being rented out since I, as their current pastor, lived in the Wesleyan dormitory. Dr. Powell, sent us away that day with us not knowing what the outcome would be. But, not long afterward, we received word that I would be reappointed and that the parsonage would be vacated and ready for us to move in following our Methodist Annual Conference in June.

The Wedding

Millie was a native of Louisville and had grown up in Crescent Hill Methodist Church. Not long after we started dating, she told me about how, when Millie was thirteen, her father had left her mother and taken her five year old sister, Frankie, (Francis Beverly Vaughn) and disappeared. Her father had offered to take Millie away with him but Millie declined because she believed her mother needed her. Her mother, Anna Rose Vaughn, often behaved in bizarre ways. Anna Rose had a nasty temper and she believed some strange things. For example, she was convinced the FBI was investigating and persecuting her family. When Millie told me these things, I suggested that her mother might be mentally ill. I later found out that she had been diagnosed but never treated for schizophrenia.

While engaged in the spring of 1957 we made a trip from Owensboro to Louisville to make arrangements for the wedding. I met Anna Rose for the first time. She was an attractive middle aged woman but seemed constantly agitated. When we told her we were getting

married she became suspicious and angry. This was hardly what we had hoped for. We realized that her mother was in no condition to help with the wedding and that we would have to organize it all ourselves. Since her father was not locatable at the time, he would not be a part of the wedding either. We made arrangements with Crescent Hill Methodist Church, in Louisville to have a rehearsal on the evening of May 31, 1957 and to get married on June 1, 1958.

My grandfather Baggett lived in Louisville, where he served as Administrative Assistant to Bishop William T. Watkins, and we asked him to perform our ceremony. We also arranged with him to stay at his Florida vacation home in Mount Dora, Florida for our honeymoon. We then returned to Owensboro where we asked our closest friends to serve as our wedding party.

When we returned to Louisville just before our wedding date, we had no idea about the trauma that awaited us. In the middle of the rehearsal, over which Granddaddy Baggett was presiding, Millie's mother, sitting in a pew several rows from the front, suddenly stood up and angrily denounced everyone, especially my grandfather and me. Granddaddy Baggett was visibly shaken, but continued with the rehearsal.



**Married on June 1,
1957**

**At Crescent Hill
Methodist Church in
Louisville Ky.**

The trauma, however, did not end there. Millie spent the night at her mother's house while I stayed with a friend's family. Millie packed a couple of bags for our planned honeymoon trip and left them at the house for safekeeping. The wedding itself went well and our fear of another incident with her mentally ill mother passed. Following the wedding, however, when we went to the house to get the bags, the house was locked and Millie's mother was nowhere to be found. We delayed our trip a few hours until her mother finally returned home and Millie was able to secure her bags. We never found out the reason for her mother's delay in returning from the wedding.

I drove my 1952 Studebaker to our honeymoon destination in Florida. During the trip we travelled through the mountains of East Tennessee. On a steep decline my brakes overheated and I began to lose control of the car, but reached a bottom straight away just in time to avoid disaster. Granddaddy Baggett's Mt. Dora house had a citrus grove in back. We feasted off of fresh oranges and grapefruits during our stay.

The First Year of Marriage

When we returned to Kentucky we moved into the parsonage next door to the Maceo church.

During the summer following the wedding I decided one Saturday to go fishing at a local lake. I found a great spot to fish from the shore and began to catch some very large bluegill. The fishing was so good that day and I was having such a good time that I lost track of time and it was dark by the time I left the lake. When I arrived home that evening there was a Sherriff's car parked in the driveway. It seems that Millie had become worried that I was gone so long and reported me missing. I tried to make excuses. Neither Millie nor the Sherriff deputy was very receptive.

A very different experience involving fish happened a couple of months later. Shortly after we moved into the parsonage a

parishioner`s cat had a litter of kittens and the parishioner offered us one. We were both animal lovers and so we agreed to adopt it. The cat turned out to be untrainable, but also very picky about food.

One day, after some torrential rains, the nearby Ohio River flooded and the water in the local creeks rose so much that water covered highway 60 near Maceo. The local residents saw this as a great opportunity to catch fish as large carp from the river could be speared with pitchforks as they drifted across the highway. One of my parishioners gifted me a large carp. I was not sure what to do with it. I cleaned it and Millie tried to cook it, but we soon found carp to be inedible. Even the cat refused to eat it.

The cat was so untrainable that we decided it was not house cat material and we gave it to a local farmer who gave it a home in his barn in the doubtful hope that the cat would help keep his barn free from rodents.

That same summer I received the Powell family into membership of the Maceo church. The Powell family consisted of both parents and three young girls, new residents of Maceo who lived on the same street as the parsonage. The parents had never been baptized and I offered them the choices available in Methodist tradition, sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. They had both been raised Baptist and chose immersion. This created a problem for me. Unlike the Baptist churches in the area, I had no baptismal pool available in my church and the only baptisms I had ever witnessed were infant and young child baptisms using sprinkling. I had never seen anyone immersed, much less performed such a ceremony. I managed to touch base with a young Baptist preacher friend, who was also a Wesleyan Student, and he instructed me in how to properly lower someone into the water and lift them back up.

On a Sunday afternoon about thirty of our Maceo members gathered at the mouth of a creek that emptied into the Ohio River. I emptied my pockets, removed my shoes, and, still wearing long pants, and a shirt and tie, I waded into the creek and several yards into the muddy Ohio River. The Powell couple followed me and I recited the appropriate baptism ritual as I lowered each of them into the muddy

river water. As I lowered them, their weight made my feet sink deeper and deeper into the muddy muck. After the baptisms I needed help from a parishioner getting unstuck from the river bottom.

After the congregation dispersed, a couple who owned a boat and water skis arrived on the scene as they had previously promised me they would. Their intent was to teach me to water ski following the baptism. Unfortunately, after several exhausting tries I was unable to get up and remain on the skis. The Ohio River was too much of a challenge for me that day. I never baptized anyone else in that river. And I never tried to water ski again.

At some point during that first year, Millie received word from her mother that her childhood collie, Bonnie, was missing. Millie loved that dog and persuaded me we needed to go to Louisville to find her. Now I was skeptical that Bonnie could be found in such a large city. She could have been anywhere. However, when we visited the local pound, Millie recognized Bonnie, even though she was looking very thin, dirty, and sickly. We rescued her only a couple of days before she was scheduled to be euthanized. She returned to Maceo with us and remained a part of our family for several years.

Millie's father, Frank Button Vaughn, had left her mother when Millie was 13 and disappeared with Millie's 5 year old sister, Frances Beverly Vaughn. During our first year of marriage, Millie became passionate about finding her Father. One week we drove the 240 miles from Maceo to Corbin Kentucky in our Studebaker. Corbin was her father's home town and we talked to several people there in the hope that they knew where he was. One of them was an attorney who gave us hope even though he did not tell us at the time all that he knew. He asked us if we could travel to Memphis if needed. So we wondered if her father was in the Memphis area.

Not long afterwards, we received a long letter from Millie's father. He made it clear that it was still important that her mother not have any information about him due to her unstable condition. In the letter he shared with us the story of his marriage to Anna Rose Esters and some details about his life after leaving. His account included the fact that he had insisted on medical proof that Anna Rose was still a

virgin at the time of their marriage. He also shared that Anna Rose had become paranoid and angry and that is why he had decided to leave her. His intent was to take both children with him but Millie, who was thirteen, chose to stay because she believed her mother needed her. It seems that, after much research to find a good place to live, far from the reaches of Millie's mother, Frank Vaughn and his youngest daughter had settled in Austin Texas. There he had developed and built an apartment building that he rented to University of Texas graduate students. He also had become a local radio personality, Father Goose, and entertained children with poetry and stories.

Millie and I decided, during that first summer of our marriage, to drive about a 1000 miles to Austin to see her father and sister. In Austin, Millie's father enjoyed sharing his creative works with us and showing us around town. That was also our first meeting with Millie's twelve-year-old sister who was now known by her middle name, Beverly. We had no way of knowing at the time that she was destined to become an important part of our lives. After a few days in Austin we journeyed the trip home.

The Rover Tennessee Years

In the spring of 1958, Millie and I graduated from Kentucky Wesleyan. The next stage of my journey as a pastor was to get a seminary education. I prayed about where to go and considered Union Seminary in New York, and also Perkins School of Theology which was near Millie's father in Austin. But, I was from Nashville, and had long admired Vanderbilt. I also believed Vanderbilt made sense as I should be able to serve a Methodist appointment either in southern Kentucky or Tennessee while attending school. Although it would have been nice to have been a full time seminary student, I needed a church appointment in order to support my new family. I wrote a letter to the Tennessee Conference indicating my intent to enter Vanderbilt Divinity School and asking for a church appointment. Fortunately, Dr. J. Dallas

Bass, one of the District Superintendents at the time, remembered my grandfather and namesake and decided this young pastor would be a good fit for a three point church circuit he had available.

I attended the June 1958 meeting of the Tennessee Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church where I was appointed to the Rover Circuit. The circuit consisted of three rural churches, St. Paul, in the Rover Community, Zion's Hill, a small congregation in a remote area of northwestern Bedford County, and Maxwell Chapel in another agricultural community in that county. These three churches were located in the same region of the county as the 2 congregation Unionville Methodist Circuit. The two separate circuits dated to the Civil War era when the Northern and Southern Methodist Churches were split. The Rover Circuit consisted in the Civil War era of Southern sympathizers and the Unionville Circuit, as the name implies, was made up of Union sympathizers.

We moved into the Rover parsonage, a house newly built next to the Rover church only three years earlier. By the time of our move Millie was pregnant with our first child. When school started in the Fall, I commuted the 40 miles to Nashville to seminary four days a week, and devoted the other three days to my pastoral duties.

On Sundays I held services at all three congregations, rotating times between churches, and holding services, at 9, at 10, and at 11 am, with the schedule changing weekly so that St. Paul's in Rover had two 11 o'clock services a month and the other two each had a single monthly 11 a.m. service. I had to watch my sermon time carefully and always leave my first two services during the closing hymn in order to travel by car to another of my congregations. I remember generating clouds of dust behind my car on Sunday mornings as I sped between rural churches on gravel roads. My 10 and 11 a.m. worshipers would sing hymns until I arrived.

Maxwell Chapel was especially noted for its gospel singing. Many of the members had learned how to sing from music with shaped notes. They made beautiful music together. When I arrived to lead the service they would usually be standing and singing an old favorite energetic hymn.

I was fortunate enough to have three friends who pastored nearby congregations who also commuted to school in Nashville - Bud Parmerly, pastor at Unionville, Ray Thomlinson, pastor at Eagleville, and his brother, Bill, pastor at Cottage Grove. The four of us had passionate theological conversations during those commutes. Taking turns driving our various vehicles, we made that 80 mile round trip journey together many times over the three years of my seminary education.

The members of these churches welcomed me enthusiastically and always seemed to respond positively to my leadership. They were mostly farming families with conservative values who appreciated my Biblical preaching and evangelical style.

The parsonage faced highway 41A South and a hundred yards or so down the highway was Carlton`s Country Store. The Carlton`s were loyal members of the Rover Congregation and let me know early on that they would be happy to extend credit to me. My monthly check did not always last the full month so I was grateful for their offer, although, unfortunately, my debt grew over time and would not be eliminated until I was serving a Chicago Church in 1962.



**Carlton`s General
Store**

Our salary was just under \$3000 a year. In 2026 dollars, that would be an annual income just above the poverty line of \$34,300. Not only did we have credit at the local country store, but there was a member of the church who was a local egg farmer. He had hundreds of chickens in large poultry houses. The owner offered and provided us some of the cracked eggs that he was unable to market. So a couple of times a week one of his family members would show up at the

parsonage with a bowl of eggs with small cracks in them. We welcomed the protein rich food.

The men in the community were all hunters and fishermen. Millie bought me a 410 shotgun for Christmas that first year so I could hunt with them. I later purchased a double barreled twelve gauge shotgun from one of my neighbors. Jimmy, one of the members of our church youth group, had a beautiful Collie who loved to hunt squirrels and rabbits with him and Jimmy offered to teach me to hunt and soon I was bringing home and cleaning squirrels and rabbits to supplement our protein intake.

In the Fall of the year large flocks of doves would fly in and feed on the leftovers of harvested fields of millet and other grains. The men of the community would surround a field and shoot doves as they flew by. That is why I needed that 12 gauge shotgun. I killed a few doves, though I was never very skilled at hitting the fast flying birds. Nevertheless, we would remove the dark meat breast of the doves and deep fry them for another protein meal.

I also owned a twenty two rifle that I carried at night to hunt frogs that lived at local ponds. Once home from a frog hunt, we would cut off the frogs legs, bread them, and deep fry them. It was a tasty treat.

Vanderbilt Divinity School

I had grown up in Nashville and been a fan of Vanderbilt sports throughout my youth. Of even more significance, the pastors we had at Arlington Methodist Church when I was growing up were trained at Vanderbilt Divinity School. Vanderbilt made sense to me for seminary because it was in my native Nashville and I was able to support myself and my soon to grow family by serving the Rover Methodist Circuit some 40 miles south of Nashville.

In the fall of 1958 I began commuting to classes at Vanderbilt during the week and doing my pastoral work in the evenings and on weekends. When I chose Vanderbilt, I did so mostly for personal

reasons. It turned out to be a good decision for academic reasons as well. Under the leadership of Dr. J. Robert Nelson, who became the Dean in 1957, following his service as Secretary of the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches, the



Vanderbilt
Divinity School

Seminary transitioned from a radically liberal theology to one that reflected the more current Neo-orthodoxy. Dean Nelson brought in a fresh team of quality faculty who would, over my three years of study, challenge me to grow in my theological understanding.

My advisor was Dr. Langdon Gilkey who had been trained at Columbia in New York by the great Reinhold Niebuhr, author of *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. Gilkey was a professor of historical theology, but also a kind man who provided quiet guidance. Another influential professor was Dr. Everett Tilson, professor of Old Testament, and author of *Segregation and The Bible*, in which he debunked the use of Scripture to justify segregation. He also was a pioneer in clarifying and condemning white privilege. In 1964 Dr. Tilson was arrested for trying to attend worship at Capitol Street Methodist Church in Jackson Mississippi with an interracial group.

The professor who became over time my personal mentor was Dr. Leander Keck who later became Dean of Yale Divinity School. Dr. Keck introduced me to New Testament Greek exegesis and what came

to be known as historical Jesus studies. Under Dr. Keck's mentorship I learned to identify historical layers in the narratives of the gospel accounts of Jesus' life and ministry, and wrote several papers using this methodology. This would, many years later find its fruition in my book *Seeing Through the Eyes of Jesus: His Revolutionary View of Reality and His Transcendent Significance for Faith* (Eerdmans, 2008)

Lea Keck also became a personal friend. At my invitation he agreed to be a Holy Week Series speaker at the Rover Church. I remember him speaking from handwritten notes on a tablet and his tablet falling over the front of the pulpit to the floor as he turned one of the pages. Years later when we connected over lunch he reminded me of this. I was pleased with his Holy Week messages as my conservative congregation was appreciative that my Bible teacher was "preaching from the Bible."

Each year, Vanderbilt invited a distinguished theologian to give the Cole Lectures, a series of presentations in Benton Chapel. I was told that Rudolph Bultmann gave the Cole Lectures there in 1951. I would not realize until years after graduation how fortunate I had been to hear in person lectures by Paul Tillich in the spring of 1959, and H. Richard Niebuhr in the spring of 1961. I did not know it at the time, but each of these theologians would play an important role in my life during my time with the Ecumenical Institute in Chicago in the late 1960s.

During my third and senior year at Vanderbilt Divinity School I was honored by being asked to be the first student to preach at a weekly chapel service. No student had ever been asked to do this as sermons at chapel were traditionally given by faculty or guest ministers. I chose as my text a passage from 1 Corinthians 2: *For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.* It was an ambitious choice as my audience included not only my seminary peers but all the professors. In the sermon I used the theme from a hymn, "the way of the cross leads home." to talk about our struggle to find the peace and safety of home in our lives, but the way to that home as Christians is through sacrifice and often suffering, a path we do not wish to take but is the only way "home." I do not know how the message was generally received, but I do remember that Dr. Gordon

Kaufman, my professor of systematic theology went out of his way to tell me it was a great sermon. That could not have pleased me more.



**Benton Chapel
Vanderbilt Divinity
School**

At the graduation ceremony in 1961 I was honored again – this time I was given *The Owen Prize for New Testament Studies*, an award that honors individuals at graduation who have demonstrated excellence in their study of the New Testament. The award included a modest cash prize, but the honor was priceless.

Vanderbilt Divinity And Jim Lawson

During my first year at Vanderbilt, James Lawson was a student in my New Testament Greek class. Jim was the first, and, at the time, the only African American student at Vanderbilt University. Jim and I became friends. I soon found out he was a former missionary to India who strongly believed in the non-violent protest methods of Mahatma Gandhi and of Martin Luther King Jr.

As a child growing up in the Nashville exurbs, I was quite familiar with the fact that most drug stores, such as Walgreens, “five and dime” stores, like Woolworths, and major downtown department stores, such as Harvey’s, had lunch counters. These did a bustling midday business in the commercial sections of the city. My very first job was as a fourteen-year-old fifty-cents-an-hour “soda-jerk” at a local drug store lunch counter. Because Jim Crow laws required the segregation of

public accommodations in Tennessee, African Americans were not allowed to eat at any lunch counter in public shopping areas. While people of color were welcomed to spend money for merchandise in the stores, prominent signs over the lunch counters read “Whites Only.”

In February of 1960 a group of African American college students held the first modern civil rights era sit-ins, at Woolworths, in Greensboro, North Carolina. The sit-in movement quickly spread to other southern cities, including Richmond Virginia and Winston-Salem North Carolina.



Rev. James Lawson

In the spring of 1960, my classmate, Jim Lawson, who was active in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), as well as a branch of Martin Luther King’s Southern Leadership Conference, led a series of training sessions in non-violent protest for a group of students from the local black colleges and universities. He then helped organize the first lunch counter sit-ins in Nashville, which consisted of small groups of black and white students enduring taunts and physical abuse while sitting and requesting service.

As the pastor of three all-white country churches in Bedford County Tennessee, I soon found myself struggling with the question of whether I should join the lunch counter demonstrators. I recalled that, while serving my first pastorate in Kentucky, I had preached some

sermons against segregation. Because of my stand, the pastoral relations committee had gone to the Methodist District Superintendent and demanded that I be removed as their pastor. In the end, the Superintendent supported my reappointment, though not without first giving me a passionate lecture about my pastoral responsibilities. In 1960, I was very clear, if I were to participate in the Nashville sit-ins, it would almost certainly create unrepairable controversy and opposition among the members of the congregations I served.

I decided to consult with my friend and classmate, Jim Lawson. When I began to convey my predicament to him, Jim interrupted me to tell me, while he appreciated my willingness to consider participation in the demonstrations, he thought I could probably contribute more to the movement by continuing to love, preach and teach in my current congregations. The time might come in which other things would be required of me, but that could surely wait, at least for now. His words were prophetic. A few years later, I would participate in a number of Civil Rights demonstrations.

I came away from my conversation with Jim with the phrase “strategic love” bouncing around in my head. I am not sure Jim used those exact words, but, nonetheless, they made a deep impression on me. As I understand it, “strategic love” means that we are not just called by Jesus to do the right thing so we can feel good about ourselves, but we are called to love people in *effective* ways – in ways that create the conditions for positive life changes, ways that make possible reconciliation with God, and with neighbors, and genuine citizenship in the kingdom of God.

In the spring of 1960, the Nashville papers carried headlines about the sit-ins and named Jim Lawson as their leader. When the news that a Vanderbilt student was leading the movement became public knowledge, The Board of Trustees at Vanderbilt University decided to expel Jim.

The Dean and ten distinguished professors at the Divinity School were so disturbed by the action of the Trustees that each of them submitted letters of resignation in support of Lawson. I was in my



*News Photo of Jim Lawson's Arrest
During The Nashville Sit-In Movement*

second year of a three year divinity program, and, despite my worries about my academic and personal future, I too wanted to do something to support Jim. I wrote several other seminaries to see if I could transfer and complete my degree elsewhere. Then I prepared a letter of resignation to the school. I eventually received letters welcoming me to Perkins Theological Seminary in Dallas Texas, and Union Theological Seminary in New York, but by the time I received them, the Board of Trustees at Vanderbilt had agreed to let Jim Lawson graduate. All but a couple of the professors returned. Greatly relieved, I chose to complete my Vanderbilt degree.

After graduation, in 1961, I became pastor of Community Methodist Church in Chicago. Jim continued to be active in the Civil Rights movement and became pastor of Centenary Methodist Church in Memphis Tennessee. In 1968 he was involved in a sanitation worker strike in Memphis. Most of the workers were African Americans and several belonged to Jim's church. In order to drum up support for the strike, Jim invited Dr. King to Memphis. Dr. King accepted the invitation, and, on April 3, 1968, Dr. King gave his "I've Been to the Mountain Top speech." The following morning Dr. King was assassinated. James Earl Ray, an ex-convict who supported the racist

views of then presidential candidate Governor George Wallace, was soon arrested, charged, convicted of the assassination, and sentenced to prison for ninety-nine years. Consistent with Lawson's philosophy of non-violence and forgiveness, Jim became a personal pastor to the prisoner, James Earl Ray, visiting him many times and even performing his wedding at the Brushy Mountain State Prison in Tennessee. Lawson, along with members of Dr. King's family, eventually came to believe Ray was wrongly convicted, that he was a patsy in a larger conspiracy, and even advocated for a new trial. Ray eventually died in prison.

In the late 1960s, when I was a pastor of Woodlawn Methodist Church, an African American congregation in Chicago, Jim Lawson came to town and was a guest speaker at a meeting of The Inner City Methodist Minister's Fellowship, an association of Chicago pastors. That day, Jim and I were able to renew our friendship. Lawson later became pastor of a church in Los Angeles and continued to speak and teach about the civil rights movement, the non-violent protest philosophy, and its methods.

Jim Lawson later received a formal apology from Vanderbilt University, a distinguished alumni award, and, in 2006, a Vanderbilt faculty appointment.

The Births Of Sarah Elizabeth And John Mark

During my first year of seminary, Sarah Elizabeth Baggett, our first child, was born on January 3, 1959. Our physician was Dr. Charlie Huddleston, husband of my cousin on my mother's side, Dorothy Ann Huddleston. Dr. Huddleston practiced obstetrics and gynecology in Nashville and the hospital where he practiced was over 40 miles from our parsonage in Rover. When Millie began to feel contractions that day we were nervous because we needed to drive so far, but we made it to the hospital in time for our precious daughter to be safely born.

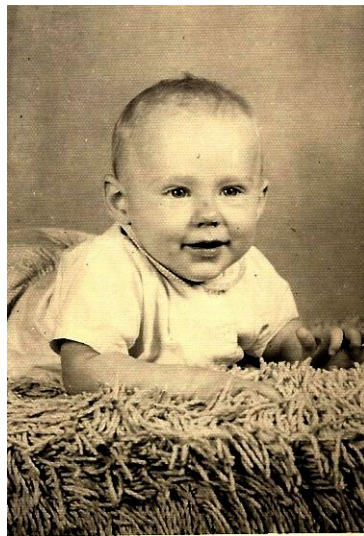
As most young parents have discovered, life with a newborn was a challenge for Millie and me. Lack of adequate sleep became a serious

problem for this seminary student. But there was also something magical about that tiny precious life that had been entrusted to us.



**Sarah Beth with
her Dad in front
of St. Paul's
Church in Rover
Tennessee**

Thirteen months and four days after Sarah Beth entered the world John Mark was born. His arrival, on February 7, 1960, came with even greater anxiety than our first baby, as we barely made it to the hospital before he was ready to be born.



**John Mark at 8
Months**

Our churches and friends were very kind to us as our family began to grow. Our next door neighbors, L.V. and Alan Hudson, loved taking care of Sarah Beth so we could devote our energies to our newborn son. One day when the Hudson's were taking care of her, I went to their home to pick her up and found her sitting on the kitchen table eating sugar from their sugar bowl. When I protested, their response was, ``But she wanted it.`` Such was the quality of our free baby sitter service.



**Sarah Beth at
22 Months**

Bonnie and Noah

When we moved from Maceo Kentucky to Rover we brought Millie's childhood dog, Bonnie, who we had rescued from the dog pound, with us. Bonnie was a great dog, but when a farmer member of our congregation offered us a male collie pup, we could not resist. We named our new dog, Noah. Noah and Bonnie bonded and, when Noah had matured, they mated. Then, one day, Bonnie crawled under our house and had her last litter of puppies. These little collies soon made great gifts for us to give to some of our members who would train them to herd livestock.



**Bonnie and
Noah with my
Dad and me in
front of the
Rover Church**

One day, when I was mowing the lawn, Noah was getting in my way and I was worried I might injure him with the mower. There was an old outhouse in our backyard that had been replaced by indoor plumbing long before we became occupants, but the outhouse had never been removed. I thought putting Noah in the outhouse would keep him from getting hurt while I was mowing. Bad decision. I did not realize it at the time, but there was an active hornet nest inside the structure. No sooner had I shut Noah inside the hornets attacked him. Noah cried in pain. I let him out, but not before a wasp had stung him in one eye, an eye out of which he would never see again. It still breaks my heart to remember this.

PART III: CALLED TO INNER CITY MINISTRY

During my final year of seminary I became convinced that God was calling me to an inner city ministry. I am not sure what contributed to this, but the work Millie and I did in a local Gospel Mission in Owensboro probably helped plant the idea. The Civil Rights Movement was also well underway at that time and I began to feel that I needed to do something to address the conditions of poverty and

powerlessness that inflicted both black and white Americans in inner city communities.

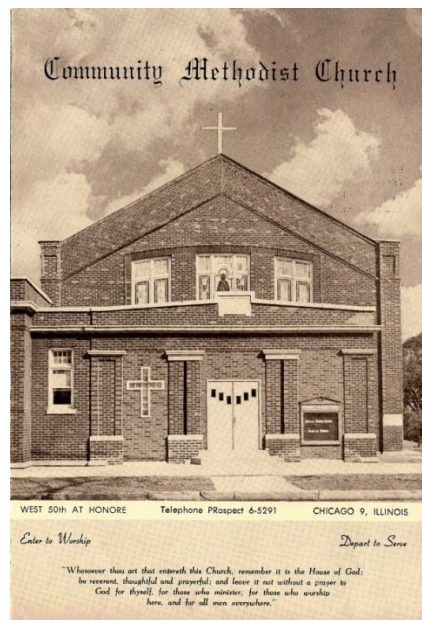
In the spring of 1961, I made an appointment with the Bishop Roy Short of the Tennessee Conference to request appointment to an inner city church. The meeting did not go as planned. I had hoped, upon graduation from seminary to be ordained an Elder in the Methodist Church and assigned to a church in a poor neighborhood in Nashville. The Bishop was offended by my request and said, ``John, in the Methodist Church, you go where the Bishop sends you.`` In other words, I was to have no say in my future as a pastor.

I thought about it and prayed over my future and decided to write a letter to the Bishops in New York and Chicago asking for a possible appointment to an inner city church. I received an answer in a week or so from New York, saying, they were confident they could identify a church for me to serve. Then, an amazing thing happened. A man showed up at my door in Rover and introduced himself as Frank Countryman, District Superintendent of the South Chicago District of the Rock River Conference. It seems that Dr. Countryman and his lovely wife were driving through Tennessee on their way to a Florida vacation and, having received my letter a couple of weeks earlier, decided to stop and meet me. Before they came to the house they decided to vet me. They stopped at a country store in the community where there were several shoppers and two checker games going on. Dr. Countryman loudly asked, ``Anyone here know John Baggett?`` I could not have dreamed of better job references than those spoken to by my future District Superintendent. I was offered a church in the stockyards area of Chicago that very day.

A couple of weeks later Millie and I drove to Chicago to meet with the governing board of the church. The members interviewed me and made it clear they were especially interested in having a pastor who worked well with youth. Since I was still in my twenties, I knew that would be a good fit.

The church was a brick building with an attractive sanctuary that contained a gymnasium with a single basketball goal and backboard. I found out Community Methodist Church served a twenty square block

neighborhood, known as Back of the Yards, in which my congregation was one of two protestant churches, in a community which was also served by 12 large Roman Catholic Churches consisting mostly of Eastern European ethnic peoples, such as Croatians, Lithuanians, Polish, and Czechs. This community was the infamous Back of the Yards neighborhood. It had, for decades, been the home of non-English speaking immigrant stockyard meatpacking workers, those that worked in the horrible conditions described by Upton Sinclair in his book, *The Jungle*. While this was not the black inner city neighborhood I had envisioned, it certainly was one with major social problems. I was excited to be a pastor there, though it was so culturally different from Middle Tennessee I also had some understandable anxiety about the change.



**Community Methodist Church
in the Back of the Yards
Neighborhood in Chicago**

In June of 1961, my neighbor and friend, Alan Hudson, cleaned the cow manure from the back of his open bed truck and we loaded it with all of my furniture, clothing, and possessions and covered it all with a tarp. Then Alan followed my family car in his truck for over 500 miles, mostly on highway 41, into the Southside of Chicago, to 1842 West 50th Street where he helped me unload and set up our living quarters.

By that time, our female collie, Bonnie was dead, and we had given Noah, our one-eyed male collie, to the Hudson family because we did not think Noah would do well in the confines of Chicago. But not long after we settled in Chicago, we sadly learned that Noah had been killed by a car on the highway in front of our previous Rover parsonage.



**PARSONAGE NEXT
TO CHURCH**

1842 W. 50th Street

Chicago, Illinois

THE CHICAGO YEARS 1961-1974

I served Community Methodist Church from June of 1961 until June of 1966. Chicago living was both culturally and physically challenging. I had spent my entire life up to that point in Tennessee and Kentucky. I was not prepared for the bitter cold Chicago winters. I had to learn to wear longjohns (warm underwear with leg covering) from mid Fall to mid Spring. In middle Tennessee the culture required people to wave, speak and smile at strangers. I had to learn that was not only unacceptable on the streets of Chicago but potentially dangerous.

Across the street from our church and parsonage was Cornell Square Park, a recreational park. Throughout the late Spring and Summer, softball was played in the park almost constantly. In the winter, a large section of the park would become an ice skating rink where hockey players competed. The church owned a vacant lot on the West side of the parsonage that was also used by neighborhood youth to play softball. After a big snowfall, I cleared much of the lot and watered the ground until it was covered with ice. By that time our family all had skates. I enjoyed skating there with my children until the neighborhood youth decided to turn my private rink into another place to play hockey.

Despite the challenges of Chicago weather and culture the parsonage and neighborhood turned out to be a great place for our young family. Our yard was fenced and a safe place for the kids to play. A mini-grocery on the corner a half block from our house, was a convenient place to take care of cravings for treats. The bus route that connected us to the elevated train system that gave us traffic free access to every part of the city was only a block away.



**Sarah And John Mark
Enjoying The Fenced Yard
Of Our Home.**

Back Of The Yards Neighborhood Council

The Official name of our Chicago neighborhood was *New City*, but everyone called it *The Back of the Yards*. The BYNC had been organized in 1939 by Saul Alynsky and Joseph Megan. The

organization was the testing ground for sociologist Alynsky's social organization model which he articulated in his 1946 book *Reveille for Radicals*. This basic model called for organizing a marginalized community on the basis of the self-interests of its residents by creating an organization of existing neighborhood organizations. In the stockyards area, this included business and neighborhood organizations, but primarily involved finding a way for the various ethnic Catholic churches to work together for the common good of the community.

In the Fall of 1961, Joseph Megan, one of the founders and the Executive Director of the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council visited me at my church and invited me to become a member of the organization. Since there were only two protestant churches in the community, my congregation and a Missouri Senate Lutheran Church that wanted nothing to do with their Catholic neighbors, Joe Megan was motivated by the Alynsky inclusive model to get me involved. So, at the age of 26, I was immediately inducted into the organization as ``Vice President of Protestant Churches.``

I was also made a member of the organization's Youth Welfare Committee. This committee met monthly, or when needed, and was dedicated to helping the youth of the community avoid and recover from delinquent behavior. I soon found that I was the key member of the committee whenever a non-Catholic child had been arrested for some crime. I was expected to meet with the parents and the youth and develop a plan to help the child stay out of trouble. When these kids went to court following arrests, I showed up to assure the judges that the community wanted an opportunity to help assure that would be the end of their criminal careers. The judges were receptive and seemed to appreciate our efforts.

The Muscaduddlers

A couple of the kids I helped avoid jail were members of a local street gang called The Muscaduddlers. They were the only organized

Back of the Yards gang at the time. An earlier neighborhood gang, The Rebels, while quite large in the 1950s, had been disbanded by the 1960s as a result of crackdowns by police following a violent gang war in Cornell Square Park. The Muscadoodlers stepped in to fill the vacuum but they were vulnerable teenagers and small in numbers.

Through the kids with whom I had gone to court I met Angel Gingotta, leader of The Muscaduddlers and about a dozen of their members. The Muscadoodler name came from their partiality to Muscatel wine, a cheap inferior wine that was popular in Chicago following the prohibition era.



**Muscaduddlers
Shirt**

It was not long until members of this gang were dropping by my home to chat with me. Because I had helped some of their own avoid jail time, they seemed to trust me.



**Two of my
Muscaduddler boys
On our parsonage
porch with me**

My relationship with the Muscaduddlers continued for the rest of my ministry at Community. One evening I was pulled out of a meeting at church because a member of the Muscaduddlers said it was an emergency. He told me that a member with the unfortunate nickname ``half human`` was in a knife fight with a member of a Sherman Park gang. It was taking place right then in the park across the street. I rushed over to the park to find a dozen or so Muscaduddlers in a circle around two boys threatening each other with knives. I spied Angel Gingotta in the circle and told him to break up the fight. He hesitated, but immediately recruited a couple of his members to grab, separate the fighters, and disarm them. I immediately asked for a meeting of the Muscaduddlers at my church. We gathered in the gym and I talked to them about how violence was not in their best interests. I challenged them to turn their weapons into me. A few days later, I found by my front door a box of knives, zip guns, bb pistols, brass knuckles, and assorted items that could be used as weapons. To my knowledge, none of these boys ever again engaged in a fight involving deadly weapons.

After I became involved with the work of the Ecumenical Institute I decided to see if I could arrange for the Muscaduddlers to take a weekend course at the Institute. I thought it might help these teens find a more constructive relationship to their futures. The faculty, under the leadership of Donna McClusky developed an Art Form class which did not require academic skills and the reading of papers so common in the other classes taught by the institute. The class my Muscaduddler kids attended was a weekend one using art forms, such as movies, paintings, simple poems read etc. During one of the films, the boys in our group began to whistle and express interest in an attractive girl on the screen. They also expressed disgust at a couple of older women in the film. Donna used this response as a teaching opportunity and effectively called that behavior into question.

The Mugging

On a frigid February morning, a few months after the knife fight in the park, I was awakened by a phone call from the owner of the corner store near our home. He informed me that there were police investigating an incident at my garage located at the rear of our home. I slipped into clothes quickly and went out back to find police in the yard of the neighbor who lived behind me. They informed me they had found and removed a dead body from that location. There were blood stains on the side of my garage that faced the neighbor's yard. Evidently the deceased was a woman who worked as a cleaning lady at a building in the Loop (downtown Chicago). She had exited a bus around 2:30 in the morning, walked across the park and down Honore street next to my church sanctuary. As she reached the back of the building she was attacked by someone in wait who dragged her through the neighbor's yard to the back side of my garage and beat her to death. It was not clear whether it was a mugging or something more personal.

A couple of days later, I was visited by a detective who I knew from my work with the Back of The Yards Youth Welfare Committee. He questioned me at length about whether the Muscaduddlers could have committed this crime. I told him about their turning in their weapons and commitment to me to not engage in violence. I also told him, I could not imagine any of the ones I knew well doing such a thing. As far as I know the crime was never solved.

Birth of Samuel David

“Are You a Father?”

My daughter, Sarah, and son, John Mark, were born during my seminary years while I was serving the Rover Circuit. I became a father for the third time on July 27, 1963, when my son Samuel David arrived.



**Baptism of Samuel
David Baggett**

Two to three weeks after Sam's birth, an African American family moved into an all-white, mostly Roman Catholic, Chicago community that lay between my neighborhood, the Back of the Yards, and Englewood, a community that had transitioned during the 1950s from white to African American. A railroad system separated the two communities, and those who lived on the white side of the tracks thought it to be a permanent barrier, a belief as firm to them as any Southern Jim Crow law.



*Railways are often barriers
between Chicago communities*

One day, while my son Sam was still a tiny infant, I received a call to put on a clerical collar, and to join some fellow clergy in trying to

prevent white neighbors from continuing the riots and threats that had begun as soon as the black family moved in. I could not imagine how terrifying the experience must have been for them. I had heard rumors that some, in similar situations, had rocks, bottles, and homemade incendiary devices thrown through their windows.

For several decades, “blockbusting” had been a common practice in Chicago. Realtors , by convincing residents that the neighborhood was about to transition from white to black, stood to make substantial profits by creating panic in previously all- white neighborhoods. The most unscrupulous real estate investors even paid young African American males to create public disturbances. They ensured, through “For Sale” signs and real estate showings, that white residents got the message their neighborhoods would soon become black ghettos. In the panic, real estate prices dropped dramatically, making the homes more affordable to African Americans. Real estate investors bought the discounted homes at a low-ball price and then sold them to African Americans at inflated prices .



When I got the call to help quell the riot, I briefly panicked, not so much because I feared the danger, but because I did not own a clerical collar. It would have felt ludicrous to wear a “roman collar” around the Rover Tennessee Circuit. My colleague, who requested my help, made it clear a clerical collar was essential. Virtually all of the rioters had been raised catholic. The collar was essential to insure respect and safety. I managed to find one at a religious supply store.

As evening approached, I cautiously drove to the area where a crowd was gathering. I parked, and joined some other clergy in “guarding with our bodies” the home in question. As darkness

enveloped us, the crowd became increasingly rowdy. At one point, a coke bottle whizzed by my head and crashed to the sidewalk of the residence. A few minutes later, a rock barely missed my shoulder.



First Time Wearing Clerical Collar

Some of the growing mob tried to engage me in a conversation. Evidently, for some reason, they did not recognize me as one of their local catholic priests. "Are you a Father?, one of them shouted. I thought about baby Sam, peacefully sleeping in his crib. "Oh, yes. I am a father!" I responded with conviction. The group, who had been crowding my personal space moments before, drew back a few feet. Chicago police soon arrived on the scene. The crowd mysteriously, disappeared. About eleven o'clock that night, thankful to still be alive, I drove back to the parsonage, looked in on baby Sam, and kissed him goodnight.

63RD And Lowe Demonstrations

That same summer of 1963, I participated in my first Civil Rights demonstration. African American parents were protesting against the use of so-called "Willis Wagons." These were mobile classrooms, named

by the leader of the local parents group after the Chicago Public Schools superintendent, Benjamin Willis. “Willis Wagons” were deployed disproportionately on the South and West Sides as overflow space for African Americans whose segregated schools were overcrowded. African American parents argued that these “trailers”, which were typically placed on school parking lots or playgrounds, were being used to keep black students out of white schools in nearby communities. Some of the “white schools” were underpopulated and had empty classrooms. When schools opened that August, the parents led a boycott in which more than 200,000 students, mostly African Americans, stayed home.



Rosie Simpson and Dr. Martin Luther King

The movement began at a school located near 73rd and Lowe, in Englewood on the South Side of Chicago. Parents led protests against the installation of mobile classrooms. Rosie Simpson, a mother of six, led the demonstrations. (Rosie and I would later work together on school problems in the Woodlawn community). As “Willis Wagons” were being delivered to a vacant lot in the area, Rosie’s group picketed the site. Rosie and other demonstrators even placed their bodies on the ground in front of the delivery trucks and the heavy equipment being used to set up the classroom trailers. The protests attracted the press, and subsequent criticism from Superintendent Willis and Mayor Richard J. Daley Sr. who attempted to dismiss the demonstrators as

instigated by “outside agitators.” A cartoon in a local paper suggested these non-violent protesters were arsonists. Nothing could have been further from the truth. The demonstrations attracted members of CORE (the Congress on Racial Equality) some local college student organizations, and local clergy. Several persons were arrested, including a future Presidential candidate named Barry Sanders, who, at the time, was a student at the University of Chicago.

In the midst of this, I received another call from the same clergy friend who had recruited me to help quell the earlier riot. He instructed me to once again put on a clerical collar, so the press would know I was a member of the clergy, and to show up the next day to help picket the site. During the subsequent demonstration, involving more than a dozen of my fellow clergy, I carried a sign which read, “Segregated Chicagoland.” A picture, which appeared the following day on the front page of a major Chicago paper, is on the cover of this book. I was also interviewed by a reporter from another Chicago daily paper, who identified me, the church I pastored, and my quote about the injustice of neighborhood and school segregation. This information and quote appeared on the front page as well.

Since my church, Community Methodist Church, was located in the all-white European immigrant settled Back of the Yards, it is not surprising that a couple of days after the papers ran stories about the demonstration, two rocks were thrown through a front window of my church building. The rocks carried nasty notes that read “No N*****s”. I also received several phone calls containing threats sprinkled with loud profanity. These experiences underscored to this southern born pastor that racism was still very much alive in the white neighborhoods of the northern city of Chicago.



Picture on
front page of a
Chicago daily
paper with me
in the
foreground

Cheap Unity

In the Fall of 1963, several of my clergy friends travelled to Jackson Mississippi in order to participate in church “kneel-ins” designed to expose the segregated nature of Methodist churches located in the south.

White Bishop James Matthews from Boston, (a brother of Joe Matthews, who founded the Ecumenical Institute of Chicago) and African-American Bishop Charles Golden of Nashville were barred by ushers from the Galloway Memorial Church, in Jackson, while nine people, consisting of seven ministers and two African American worshippers, were arrested at the Capitol Street Church. Those arrested were imprisoned and charged with trespassing and disturbing public worship. More than forty visiting worshipers were arrested over a period of several weeks.

Because I was a southerner by birth and had served Methodist churches in the South, I was invited by the editors of *Behold* magazine, in December of '63, to co-author an article about the visitations, with Rev. Phillip Dripps, a chaplain at the University of Chicago, , in order to offer Methodists a theological perspective with which to understand the “visitations.”

The article, titled *Christian Unity, The Methodist Church, and Jackson*” appeared in the December issue of *Behold*, a publication of

Methodists for Church Renewal. The following quotes are representative of the entire document.

“The words of Holy Scripture, the Methodist Discipline, and the newspaper of October 21 present a stark and tragic contradiction in the life of the Methodist Church. By command of God, the church is one; by the acts of men it is torn asunder. The arrest of Christians seeking to worship Almighty God in a Methodist house of prayer in Jackson, Mississippi reveals to the church and to the world that a crisis of the first magnitude confronts Methodism in all its parts.”

“.... Segregation exists in the whole church. That segregation exists both North and South is not only evidenced by the fact that the vast majority of churches are either all white or all Negro, but also by the very existence of the Central Jurisdiction.”

“It needs to be seen that any church that shuts its doors to a brother in Christ because of color shuts the door to Christ himself. Any Methodist church that shuts its doors to a person on the basis of color is in violation of our Discipline and should be faced with disciplinary action.”

“...Genuine unity in Christ is threatened by a false unity which might be termed “cheap unity.”....the prophets of cheap unity declare a unity not in Christ as the Scripture declares (see Ephesians 4:4-6) , but a direct unity found sometimes in class, sometimes in color, sometimes in sectionalism, sometimes in loyalties to family, friends, and nation.

“The whole church in every part of the world needs to re-evaluate its relation to the culture in which it dwells. For whenever a church capitulates to cultural values the unity of Christ’s church is threatened. Our unity comes from the head of the body, the cornerstone of the building, the one Lord of our lives.”

“There are those who suffer in Jackson, Negro and white, because of their witness to the unity of the church. Can these persons be

allowed to remain beaten and robbed beside the road while we attempt to conciliate the priest and Levite who pass them by?”

“Is it too much to expect the Council of Bishops, the general Conference, the Boards and Agencies of Methodism to eradicate the blight of disunity which threatens to destroy the soul of the church?”

“We pray that God will use the church to the full in this present crisis, for we are in the midst of evil days. But we need not despair for the grace of God is sufficient to meet every challenge.”

This article was later quoted in *Racism, Southern Evangelicals and the Better Way of Jesus* by Alan Cross 2014, published by NewSouth Books. Also referenced in *Sanctuaries of Segregation: The Story of the Jackson Church Visit Campaign* by Carter Dalton Lyon – University Press of Mississippi 2017.

McDowell House and Inter-racial Visitors at Community



News Photo of McDowell House

Since the turn of the century, The Back of the Yards neighborhood had been home to McDowell House, a “settlement house”, originally modeled after the better known Hull House.. By mid-century, the programs originally provided to the immigrant community were no longer needed, largely due to the role of The Back of the Yards

Neighborhood Council. In 1964, an African American social worker, then in charge of McDowell House, met me in my office and told me about a new mission of this service agency. Under new leadership, the McDowell House historic building had become a residential facility for persons with Developmental Disabilities. Eight clients were currently living in the home and seeking to participate in “normalizing” activities in the community. She told me there were two African American males in the group. She asked if it would be OK, if these residents came as a group on Sundays to attend my church. While I knew these “strangers” would make some of my current members uncomfortable, I assured her the group would be welcome. The following Sunday, these visitors arrived a few minutes before the service began, walked down the aisle and found seats on the third row. I welcomed the group from the pulpit. I was proud of my congregation that day, and in the weeks to come. They welcomed our visitors and never once expressed displeasure about the disabled inter-racial group who had become a part of our church fellowship. This group attended every Sunday for the rest of my ministry at Community.

Not long after the group began attending Community, I visited a couple who had missed several weeks of church. They had immigrated to Chicago from the mountains of Kentucky around 1960. They had joined Community church shortly after my arrival in 1961. I think my southern accent had made them feel comfortable. But, by the time of my visit, they expressed extensive discomfort with our church. The husband said they could never go to a church with “colored people.” He said, “Brother Baggett, you keep saying they is *human beings*. But we think of ‘em as “being like monkeys.” I prayed for wisdom, and tried to talk to them about the love of Jesus, but they wanted no part of me, the church, or a Jesus who loved anybody but white folks.

In 1965, inspired by the Jackson Mississippi church visitations, and, sadly aware of the segregated nature of Methodist neighborhood based congregations in Chicago, an African American group of Methodists began visiting Chicago Methodist churches in all-white communities in order to test the inclusiveness of hospitality in those congregations. One beautiful Spring Sunday two African American

visitors showed up at my church. Not only were they warmly welcomed, they could not help but notice the inter-racial group of McDowell residents sitting on the third row. While integration had cost us a handful of members, I was greatly encouraged by the way other members had grown into their discipleship.

Happy Family Times

Our young family adapted amazingly well to our Chicago home and lifestyle. Christmases were especially happy times. By this time our family had not only grown to three young children, but also had added an older teenager. Beverly, Millie`s sister came to live with us. It seems her father, Frank Button Vaughn decided we would be able to provide better parenting of a maturing adolescent than he would. Sending her to us also provided him the opportunity to fulfill some of his personal dreams for his own life. He soon moved to the Yucatan Peninsula for his retirement years. Beverly had spent a summer with us in Rover during her 14th year, so we were all able to adapt to this change fairly easily. And soon Beverly enrolled at Kendall College in Evanston Illinois.



**Christmas at
1842 W. 50th St.
Chicago.**



**A HAPPY
CHRISTMAS
MOMENT
FOR SARAH
AND HER
AUNT
BEVERLY**

Selma March

“Martin has known from the beginning that the movement could cost him his life.”

Over the years I have recalled many times these prophetic words spoken to me with serene dignity in private conversation, by Coretta Scott King, wife of Dr. Martin Luther King. At the time, Coretta, Rev. John Porter, and I were sharing a plane ride from Montgomery Alabama to Atlanta Georgia on the evening of Sunday, March 16, 1965. It was the end of the first day of the Selma to Montgomery March. Dr. King, as we all know, was gunned down by an assassin three years later on March 29, 1968.

Coretta, whose home had been bombed during the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, was herself an amazingly courageous woman, risking her own life many times to walk by Martin’s side. We had both marched that day, along with almost 8,000 others, made up mostly of African Americans, but with a sprinkling of white clergy and laity from around the country mixed in. As the four lane road between Selma and Montgomery narrowed to two, only three hundred marchers were allowed by the court to continue toward Montgomery. Most of the rest

of us returned to Selma and some of us headed home. When we shared that plane ride, Coretta was returning to her family in Atlanta, and I was on my way back to my family and church in the stockyards area of Chicago.



*News Photo
of Dr. King
and Coretta
Scott King
Leading
Selma
March*

My journey had begun two weeks earlier on Sunday March 7, 1965, which has come to be known in Civil Rights history as “Bloody Sunday.” On that day I watched the television in horror and disgust as white law enforcement officers and deputies mercilessly beat and tear gassed a non-violent group of 600 African Americans as they marched across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. I knew in that moment that God was sending me to Selma that week.

The following Sunday, I announced to the Community Methodist congregation that I planned to go to Selma. After church, the chair of the church Trustees, handed me a hundred dollars to help with the cost of the trip. I have always been grateful for his generosity.



*News Photo of
Bloody Sunday
in Selma
Alabama,
March 7, 1965*

On Tuesday, March 9, Dr. King led a somewhat larger group back to the Edmund Pettus Bridge, but they turned around before there could be another confrontation. That evening, a friend of mine, Rev Jerry Forshey, who had participated in the Tuesday march, was in downtown Selma at a drugstore along with Rev. James Reeb, a white Unitarian Universalist minister. While Jerry was talking with someone in the store, Reeb left, intending to walk a few blocks back to the African American community. Reeb was surrounded by a group of white men and beaten to death.

I arrived in Selma on Thursday. On Saturday, around 150 of us marched through the Selma mayor's neighborhood to protest the publicly sanctioned violence toward the protestors. Along the way people threatened us with curses and guns. Some of our group were viciously assaulted. We were arrested and herded into school buses where our bodies were packed together so tightly it was difficult to breathe. We were driven to the jail where we were required to stand outside in the hot sun for over two hours. There was no room in the jail so we were led to a community facility for incarceration. After a sleepless night in which we feared the Ku Klux Klan would bomb our temporary prison, our guards disappeared and we marched uneasily back to the movement headquarters at Browns Chapel Church.



The Community Center Where We Were Jailed

Picture Taken on My Return Visit to Selma in 2008

On Tuesday, March 16, thousands assembled outside the church. Communion was served and Dr. King spoke.



Selma March News Photo. I was near the front of the crowd on left.

Now protected by Federal injunction and national guardsmen, we began to march through the streets and across the Edmund Pettus Bridge toward Montgomery. After several miles of marching, the majority of us returned to Selma.



News Photo: Crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 16, 1965



A Long Day's March

That night a kind African American older couple risked their lives to drive me to the airport in Montgomery. I lay covered by a blanket on the floorboard of the backseat of their car. If my white face had been seen by members of the Klan, we would all have likely been killed. Only a few days later, Klan members killed civil rights volunteer and mother of 5 children, Viola Liuzzo, on that same road.

And so I found myself sitting with Coretta on that plane ride to Atlanta. It is difficult today for us to understand the animosity that existed then. I have never before or since heard the level of vile language, or seen the kind of hatred in people's eyes, that I witnessed coming from the white people, many of them no doubt active church members, lining the streets of Selma during the marches.

The Selma to Montgomery march touched the conscience of America. Selma was about voting rights for African Americans in the South. Through a variety of strategies, including poll taxes, voter registration fraud, and violence, African Americans in the 1960s were denied the right to vote. Selma was the catalyst that made possible the Civil Rights Act, which was introduced in Congress on March 17, 1965.

The right to vote is a right of every adult American citizen. It has been paid for by every soldier who ever fought for our country, and by every civil rights worker who died or risked beatings and death to end voter discrimination. No matter what our politics, we must never ever allow any group of people, especially elected representatives, to hinder and deny the legitimate rights of American citizens to exercise their right to vote.

Southwest Clergy Cadre

In 1965, after attending a Parish Leadership Course at Chicago's Ecumenical Institute, and gaining some tools for social change, I contacted several clergy on the Southwest Side of Chicago in the hopes of bringing together an ecumenical group dedicated to racial reconciliation in, and between, the communities we served. Our founding members included Methodist Pastors, Rev. John Porter, Rev. Robert Keller, Rev. John Hudson, but also others from diverse traditions, among them Father Peter Scholtes of St. Brendons Catholic Parish.

My dear friend John Porter, an African American pastor of Englewood Methodist, was the founding President of the Englewood

Christian Leadership Conference, an organization affiliated with Dr. Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Atlanta. At Porter's insistence, the first major project of our group involved planning, scheduling and teaching a community workshop on Non-Violence. The event was held at St. Brendons and included a planning workshop for addressing barriers to racial reconciliation and community well-being.

During the mid-1960s, both Catholic and Protestant clergy were enjoying the spirit of ecumenism birthed at Vatican II from 1962 to 1965. Our little ecumenical group met every couple of weeks and always began by singing a Civil Rights Movement Song, or Christian words sung to a well-known popular tune. For example, we sang Psalm 100 to the tune of "We Shall Overcome."

ECLC, Clergy Cadre In New Classes

Train Area Residents In Non-Violent Movement

IN CONJUNCTION with The Englewood Christian Leadership Conference, in the education of community residents, on the processes of the non-violent movement, Jan. 6, at St. Brendan's Church, 6700 Racine.

The training course, which makes use of the images and resources of the Christian world to provoke an understanding of the problems of the world today, will be held for seven consecutive weeks, beginning Jan. 6, and continuing each Thursday through Feb. 17th. Classes will be held from 7:30 to 10 p.m. in St. Brendan's School, under the leadership of the Rev. John R. Porter, Pastor, Christ Methodist Church, 6401 Sangamon; and the Rev. John Baggett of Community Methodist Church. Some 50 persons attended a lively first session.

"Poverty—Its meaning, its causes, and its cure," was the main topic of the Jan. 6 class. Members of the class also discussed the practice of Democracy in the United States and the awareness of royal situations in today's changing world.

AMID the flutter of song sheets and printed excerpts from the works of two well-known authors,—James Baldwin (The Fire Next Time), and William Stringfellow, (My People Is The Enemy) could be heard the voice of Rev. Porter as he read a selection from the Baldwin book.

Describing the course, Rev. Baggett explained, "This course is not designed to train for active participation in marches and other signs of protest, but to make one aware of the problems that exist, and to cultivate an understanding of these problems." The course will also seek to bring about an understanding of the inter-relatedness of one person to another; of one community to another; and of one country to another.

Local Lawyer Testifies In Tax Hearing

An area attorney was among 33 lawyers testifying at the income tax evasion trial of veteran police department sergeant



Basic "Race" Training

A PLANNING and 'basic-training' confab on non-violence was held January 6, at St. Brendan, 67 Racine. Sponsored by Southwest clergy, in conjunction with the Englewood Christian Leadership Conference, the workshop centered around the history of non-violence, and the methods and attitudes necessary to developing 'soldiers in the field' of race relations.

Pictured here discussing various aspects of the non-violence movement L to R are: the Rev. John R. Porter, pastor of Christ Methodist church, 6401 Sangamon, president of ECLC; and the Rev. John Baggett; and dutifully taking notes is BULLETIN Columnist-reporter Jerri Mosley.

Chicago Bulletin News Story

Not long after our first meeting, Pete (Father Scholtes) brought his guitar and sang for us a song he had written a few days before. Then we all joined in. I remember getting goosebumps as we sang and aspired to live into the lyrics. For several weeks, Pete had been looking

for a hymn for his youth choir at St. Brendons, one that reflected the ecumenical spirit of the times. Not finding any that fit his criteria, he sat down and, in a day, wrote his own lyrics. I believe our little group was the first to hear and sing it. This amazing hymn is now in more than 40 Christian hymnbooks:

We Are One in the Spirit

*We are One in The Spirit,
We are One in The Lord,
We are One in The Spirit,
We are One in The Lord.
And we pray that all unity
May one day be restored.*

Chorus

*And they'll know we are Christians by our love,
By our Love,
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

*We will work with each other,
We will work side by side.
We will work with each other,
We will work side by side.
And we'll guard each man's dignity
And save each man's pride.*

Chorus

*And they'll know we are Christians by our love,
By our Love,
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

*We will walk with each other,
We will walk hand in hand.
We will walk with each other,
We will walk hand in hand.
And together we'll spread the News
that God is in our land.*

Chorus

*And they'll know we are Christians by our love,
By our Love,
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

The Rock River Conference

After graduation from seminary and moving to Chicago in June of 1961, I was ordained an Elder by Bishop Charles Brashers in the Rock River Conference, (This Conference was renamed The Northern Illinois Conference in 1968 when the Methodist Episcopal Church merged with the Church of the Brethren and became The United Methodist Church). In those years, the Conference leadership expected local clergy to serve, in addition to our regular pastoral duties, in various conference ministries and on boards and commissions. Most pastors in the Conference considered the mild summers in the Chicago area as family and vacation time. But, I soon learned, as a new member of the Conference, that I was expected to serve at least a week of my first summer in a Methodist Youth Camp.

Summer Camp

In the summer of 1962, I became a counselor at the Methodist Youth Camp held each year at Reynoldswood Camp and Conference Center in Dixon, Illinois. During that week I was assigned, along with a co-counselor, to “parent” a group of twelve inner-city African American kids, all from Englewood in Chicago. None of these children had any experience with camping. We taught them to set up tents for sleeping, to make camp fires, to cook food over fire, to be kind and considerate of each other, and to sing a lot of camp songs. And yes, we did teach them to sing *kum-ba-yah*.



**Camp
Reynoldswood
In Dixon, Illinois**

There were about sixty kids at camp that week. Each day we were scheduled for time in the camp swimming pool. On the first day, the life-guards required any child, who considered himself or herself capable of swimming in the deep end of the pool, to jump off the diving board, and swim the length of the pool. Most of the kids in my group gathered at the shallow end. Most inner city African Americans in the 1960s, had never had the opportunity to visit a swimming pool, much less learn to swim. One of my group, however, a girl about twelve years of age, lined up to jump off the diving board. When her turn arrived, she boldly leaped several feet forward and into the water. She immediately sank. She then appeared to dangle lifelessly just above the bottom of the pool. When it became clear she would not be making any effort to save herself, one of the lifeguards dove in and pulled her out. The life guard assessed her, and, while the girl seemed a bit confused, he determined she did not need any other life-saving treatment. For the remainder of the swim session she was not permitted to go back into the water. When we returned to camp, I asked her why she had jumped off the board. Through tears she replied, “I thought I could swim, but must have been wrong.”

During that week at camp, I grew close to the kids and they grew close to me. When it came time for us to leave, there were hugs and tears. I assumed I would never see any of them again. I was wrong.

About three weeks after camp, when I had resettled in my parsonage on West 50th Street in Chicago, four boys from my camper group knocked on my door. They had biked through several miles of

traffic on urban streets, the entire way from central Englewood to The Back of the Yards. After they left their home community and entered the all-white community in which I lived, traffic was no longer the only danger they faced. They were harassed by white youth who yelled, “Let’s get those blackies!” and other taunts.

After we had visited awhile and enjoyed some refreshments, I insisted on following the boys home in my car, just to make sure they arrived safely. I loved those kids. For an entire innocent week we had been family. It grieved my heart that, in Chicago, we now lived in worlds at least as separate and menacing as the world of my southern upbringing.

Board of Social Concerns

In the spring of 1963, I became a member of The Rock River Conference Board of Social Concerns, with responsibility for developing and proposing Conference policy on social issues. My primary interest in serving on the committee was to promote racial justice. While we did pass some resolutions about the church and race, we spent much of our time on other issues. During my first year on the committee, we talked a great deal about “separation of church and state.” It seems one of the senior lay members of the committee was very passionate about that particular constitutional principle. After several discussions, I realized his position derived less from his constitutional allegiance than his strong anti-Catholic bias, and his fear that government funds might be used to support catholic schools. Despite his efforts, the committee chose not to support his position. Most recognized that the Catholic Schools in the Chicago Area provided quality education that currently saved taxpayers millions in public school dollars. At some point the committee moved on to other concerns.

In July of 1963, I was elected chair of this committee. While I was successful in getting recommendations for resolutions supporting the

openness of all Methodist Churches to persons of color, we spent much of our time trying to address “smoking” from a health, rather than a moral standpoint.

The other issue, that became quite contentious had to do with the Viet Nam War. Protests against the war were in the news. Anti-war folk songs were popular among older teens and young adults. The country employed a lottery draft system in order to fill its need for troops. Some young men fled to Canada to avoid the draft. But President Johnson, the Congress, and many patriotic citizens, were convinced Viet Nam was a just war. Our committee was seriously divided. I planned and held a committee retreat for the purpose of finally developing a policy on Viet Nam we could recommend to the conference. The retreat resulted in a fairly benign compromise resolution which we presented to the Conference in the spring of 1965. After considerable debate, it failed to pass.

When my term on the board ended in 1966, I felt much relief.

Methodists For Church Renewal

From 1961 until 1969, I was an active member of *The Inner City Methodist Minister's Fellowship*. This group changed its name in the late sixties to *Methodists for Church Renewal*. The group published *Behold*, a quarterly periodical containing intentionally prophetic articles and editorials addressing the problems of racial injustice, poverty and inner-city living. At least two articles I contributed were printed, as were a couple of my pen and ink drawings.

Several of our members were involved in southern civil rights campaigns, including Albany Georgia, Jackson Mississippi, and Selma Alabama. We also marched with Dr. King through Chicago's segregated white neighborhoods. But, most of all, we focused on “renewing the Methodist Church” which had too long accepted and tolerated segregation and racism in its operations.

General Conference Delegate Rev. Edsel Ammons

The General Conference of the Methodist Church, a global assembly of Methodists that meets every four years on a year that can be divided by four. It has the responsibility of determining policy and practice for all Methodist churches. It met in 1964, and again in 1968. Each annual conference elected delegates to General Conference. At the Annual Conference of 1968, our Methodists for Church Renewal group decided we needed to work to get someone elected to General Conference who would represent our concerns for church and society. We first attempted to campaign for some of our own members. Because I was chair of a conference board, my name was one of the ones put forth. During conference balloting, I received 55 votes, not nearly enough to be in the running for delegate to General Conference. No one was elected in that first ballot, but when the second ballot was taken, I received the same 55 votes. My two colleagues who were also on the ballot, did no better. Our group caucused and decided to change strategies. Instead of running members of our group, we decided to get behind one of the few African American pastors serving in our conference, Rev. Edsel Ammons, and push for his nomination. While campaigning for him, we found substantial support for his candidacy among many delegates who were not members of our group. Edsel Ammons was elected and became the first African American delegate to the Methodist General Conference from our area. Nine years later, in 1976, he was elected bishop, the first African American so chosen from the North Central Jurisdiction of the Methodist Church. He served as Bishop of the Michigan Area until 1984 and the West Ohio conference until his retirement in 1992.

I have often wondered if the history of the Methodist Church in the North Central Jurisdiction would have been very different, had Methodists for Church Renewal not decided to back him as a delegate in 1968.

Ecumenical Institute Teaching

In 1962, the Church Federation of Greater Chicago founded The Ecumenical Institute, as a research, training, and community development ministry. A faculty of seven families, led by Joseph W. Matthews, a former professor of Social Ethics at Perkins Theological Seminary in Dallas, and originally associated with The Faith and Life Community in Austin Texas, moved to the former Bethany Seminary buildings, located at 3444 West Congress Parkway. The former seminary had left this community after the surrounding area transitioned to an African American one burdened by the usual inner city problems found in similar neighborhoods.

The Institute families set about enlisting members of the surrounding community in a plan to address the many problems of this troubled West Chicago area. It also began to offer classes to Chicago pastors, laity, and persons interested in learning about community reformulation. I attended a “Pastoral Leadership” program at the Institute a few months after it became operational. That decision would, in a few years, prove to be an unexpected pivotal event in my life journey. (In early Fall of 1969 I joined the Institute Faculty and moved my entire family to the West Side location, where I served the organization in a variety of ways for the next four years.)

Beginning in 1964, I became an adjunct faculty member of the Institute, and, in addition to helping teach classes at the Westside campus, I also flew to other cities to teach courses.

African American History Class

In the summer of 1966, during my last year as pastor of Community Methodist Church, some faculty members at the Institute developed a course in African American History and Culture. Stokely Carmichael, a spokesman for SNCC (the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee) had used the term “Black Power” in a speech delivered in Greenwood Mississippi in June of that year, following the

attempted assassination of James Meredith, a civil rights activist and the first African American to integrate the University of Mississippi. While the term “Black Power” sounded more militant to white ears than the rhetoric of non-violence and racial integration proclaimed by Dr. King the previous summer in his “I Have a Dream” speech, in reality, the term “Black Power,” mostly referred to self-determination, and the use of voting rights, and other democratic institutions to achieve racial justice. Black Power, in the context of inner-city Chicago primarily meant organizing communities to help residents address the problems of their own neighborhoods, rather than expecting the white power structure to provide solutions. Be that as it may, the slogan became a backdrop to the Institute class in African American History and Culture. (This curriculum would also prove to be a defining moment for me, when, in 1968, Pastor Rick Deines, of the Woodlawn Lutheran Church and I began the Woodlawn School of Human Dignity, a ministry devoted to correcting the myths of racial inferiority perpetuated by a variety of cultural and institutional means, and internalized by ordinary African Americans.)

Rev. Dr. Harry Gibson

In 1964, Rev. Dr. Harry Gibson, an African American pastor, and a leader in the Chicago Civil Rights Movement, became my Methodist District Superintendent. Dr. Harry was the first African American to hold this high office in the Northern Illinois Conference. Not long after his appointment, he invited me, along with two other white pastors then serving churches in the Chicago Southern District, to his office, located in downtown Chicago. Evidently, Dr. Harry had quite a sense of humor. Upon arrival he introduced us to a beautiful young African American woman he said was his mistress. After observing the shocked expressions on our faces, he revealed that she was actually his daughter, Joya.

At first, I was not clear about the purpose of our meeting, but I soon learned it was to encourage us to continue our civil rights

activities, and to assure us of his support. I could not help but recall the lack of support I had received a few years earlier from my Owensboro Kentucky District Superintendent because I had offended some members when I preached about desegregation. What a difference!

A few weeks later, Dr. Harry invited me back to his office for the purpose of introducing me to Whitney Young, the then President of The National Urban League. Under Young's leadership, the Urban League became one of the most influential Civil Rights groups in the country. Young had also been one of the key leaders who helped organize the 1964 March on Washington. He marched next to Dr. King at that event, and made a passionate speech at the "Washington Mall," during the same program where Dr. King delivered his famous "I have a dream" speech.

While meeting Whitney Young was a great honor, I began to suspect that Harry Gibson was grooming me for something. I just did not yet know what he had in mind. In the Spring of 1966, as I approached the end of my fifth year at Community Methodist Church, Dr. Gibson's intentions became clear. He asked me if I was ready for a new adventure. It was his hope, during the 1966 Northern Illinois Annual Conference, that a black pastor would be appointed to a white church and a white pastor appointed to a black church. That is when he asked me if I would be interested in an appointment to Woodlawn (Methodist Church). Prior to this, white pastors who had served African American congregations in Chicago had done so only after shepherding their congregations through transition as their neighborhoods changed. Before this, no pastor serving a white congregation had been directly appointed to a black church. I would be the first.

Dr. King Comes To Chicago

In 1965, The Coordinating Council of Community Organizations (CCCCO), led by a Chicago teacher named Al Raby, had been working toward a unified city-wide effort to address the education problems confronting African Americans in Chicago. In the midst of the schools

campaign, it became clear to the Chicago civil rights leadership that the city's school problems could not be addressed apart from the larger issues confronting the city's slums. In early summer of that year, the organization invited Martin Luther King to Chicago.

Dr. King and The Southern Christian Leadership Council considered the invitation and decided the time had come to bring the movement for racial justice to a northern city. Dr. King later explained the rationale:

The only solution to breaking down the infamous wall of segregation in Chicago rested in our being able to mobilize both the white and black communities into a massive nonviolent movement, which would stop at nothing short of changing the ugly face of the black ghetto into a community of love and justice. Essentially it meant removing future generations from dilapidated tenements, opening the doors of job opportunities to all regardless of their color, and making the resources of all social institutions available for their uplifting into the mainstream of American life. (From Chapter 28 of The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.)



*News Photo of
Rev. James Bevel
in Foreground*

Rev. James Bevel, a member of King's inner circle, was sent to Chicago to do advanced strategic planning for the Chicago Campaign. Bevel had been the chief strategist for the voter registration campaign in Selma Alabama, and was a brilliant orator. It was Bevel whose

charisma had once inspired me, during a worship service in Brown's Chapel Church in Selma, to risk my life on a march through the Selma mayor's neighborhood. Bevel quickly became the chief strategist for the Chicago Civil Rights movement.

In January of 1966, Dr. King moved his family into an apartment in North Lawndale, a Westside slum not far from the Fifth City neighborhood where the Ecumenical Institute was located.

On July 10, 1966 Dr. King spoke at a "freedom rally" held at Chicago's Soldier's Field. An estimated 35,000 persons gathered for the event. My entire family attended. Afterwards, we marched with some of the crowd to City Hall, to protest housing discrimination. Sarah and John Mark marched beside Millie and me. I carried "little Sam" on my shoulders. The message of the demonstration was aimed at Mayor Richard J. Daley. It consisted of demands to change discriminatory housing laws and practices in the city, and for the city to address the problems of block busting, of absentee slum landlords, and poorly enforced housing codes.



News photo of July 10, 1966 Chicago Rally

Two days after the rally and protest march, a riot broke out on the West Side of Chicago. It was triggered by the arrest of a black man

who was allegedly wanted for armed robbery. Black people took to the streets in anger. Arson, looting and gunfire followed. Dr. King understood the anger. He saw it as the sudden release of a “pressure cooker” created by slum conditions. He also deplored the violence, and recommitted himself and his leadership team to the non-violent protest movement and to addressing the systemic and institutional causes of northern racism and African American inner city misery.

Later in July, Dr. King led marches through all white neighborhoods in Chicago. On August 23, 1966, I joined Dr. King and several hundred demonstrators in a march through South Deering located in the far southeastern sector of Chicago. South Deering had been the scene of a 1953 race riot. Tensions remained high in the 1960s as residents continued to resist residential integration. I drove three people, in my Ford Falcon station wagon, to the assembly location. As we marched, many young whites gathered along the sidewalks and taunted us with curses and racial slurs. After the march, when my little group returned to my car and started to drive away, several white youth belted my car with rocks. Fortunately, while there were dents on both sides of my vehicle, none of the windows were hit, and no one in our group was hurt. Less than two weeks earlier, on August 5, 1966, Dr. King, was hit by a rock as he marched through Marquette Park, a then all white community on Chicago’s Southwest Side. He would later comment that nothing he had experienced in the American South could compare with the hatred expressed by the people of Chicago’s Southside white neighborhoods.



News photo of Chicago Neighborhood March



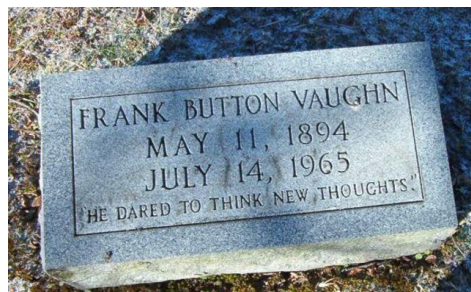
*My Ford Falcon Station
Wagon
Parked in front of
Community Methodist
Parsonage*

Death Of Millie`s Father

In the early summer of 1965 we learned that Millie`s father had travelled from his home in the Yucatan Peninsula to Corbin Kentucky to attend his sister`s funeral. While in Corbin he had what was thought to be a heart attack and was hospitalized. Our family made the trip to Corbin in time to visit him in the hospital. He was released while we were there and he made a point of showing us around Corbin.

One of the attractions he showed us was a local bank where he still had an account. As we were about to leave the bank, Colonel Sanders, of Kentucky Fried Chicken fame entered. Millie`s dad knew the Colonel from his restaurant in Corbin and introduced us. My children thought it a great thing to meet the famous Colonel Sanders and shake his hand.

Not long after we returned to Chicago we received word that Frank Button Vaughn had died. Millie and I returned to Corbin, made arrangements, had a funeral for him and I presided over his burial in the local cemetery. We had a tombstone especially engraved for him.



**Epitaph reads:
``He Dared to
Think New
Thoughts``**

Frank Button Vaughn had never allowed the parochialism of Eastern Kentucky and Corbin to limit his thinking and his worldview. We wanted to honor him in some way and so created an epitaph we felt reflected who he was.

Millie did not handle her father's death well. It threw her into a crisis of faith. Her faith had always been strong, but somewhat naïve. That childlike faith was probably what had first attracted this young preacher. Her father's death seemed to shake her to her spiritual foundations. Millie, not only entered a dark depression, but began to articulate that she could no longer believe in God, much less in life after death.

I was still the pastor of a church and dealing with the faith struggles of my congregation. As Millie withdrew from church involvement it brought about some serious estrangement between us.

Woodlawn

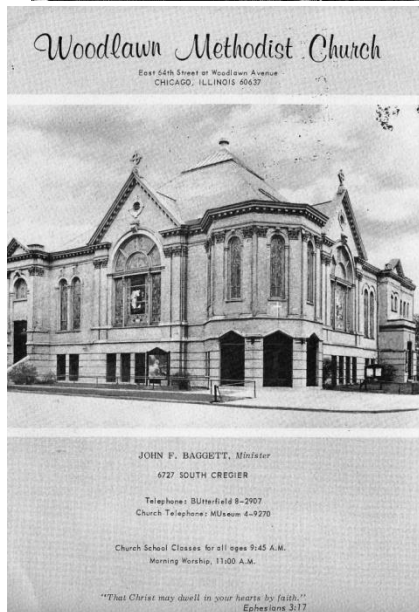
The Woodlawn neighborhood lay on the Southeast side of Chicago, between Lake Michigan on the East, South Parkway (in 1968 renamed Martin Luther King Drive) on the West, Fifty-Ninth Street on the North, and Sixty-Seventh Street on the South. In 1967 it had a population of more than 80,000 people. 98% were African American. Woodlawn had once been a fairly upscale white neighborhood composed mostly of brick multi-story residences on quiet shaded streets. In the 1950s, and early 1960s, initially due to *blockbusting*, the neighborhood rapidly changed to an African American community of mostly lower income families, many living as tenants of absentee landlords.

The Woodlawn Community lay just south of Hyde Park, home of the University of Chicago. The University coveted land in north Woodlawn for its envisioned South Campus. Because the University had a history of using eminent domain and other tactics to remove residents

in order to expand the campus, tension developed between the Woodlawn residents and the University. This conflict became the impetus for the formation of the *Temporary Woodlawn Organization (TWO)*, which was created on the same Saul Alinsky model as *The Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council*. TWO was Alinsky's first of many projects in African American communities.



Saul Alinsky



Woodlawn Methodist
Church



The Woodlawn
Organization

Woodlawn Methodist, while built to hold 1200 people during worship, at the time of my appointment, had fewer than 300 African American members, and five white people who had stayed with the church through its time of transition. The pastor I followed at Woodlawn was a popular African American preacher named Charles Jordan. “Chuck” was appointed that year to an Urban Mission Leadership position in Rockford Illinois. Years later, in 1992, while serving St. Mark’s United Methodist Church in Chicago, he was elected to serve as a Methodist bishop, and assigned to the Iowa Conference of the United Methodist Church, where he remained until his retirement in 2000.



***Bishop Charles Wesley
Jordan***

Soon after I learned of my new appointment, I called Chuck Jordan and arranged time to talk with him about the Woodlawn church. We met first in his office, and then walked to 63rd Street, the

business center of the community, for a cup of coffee. When it came time to pay, I reached for my wallet. It was not there. I wave of panic swept over me. Not only would I need “Chuck” to pay for my coffee, but I had somehow managed to lose my wallet while visiting a ghetto neighborhood. Was this how my ministry to a minority community would begin? I was convinced, I would never see the contents of my wallet again. To my shame and delight, after Chuck picked up the tab and we returned to the church, I found my billfold safely resting on the floor beneath the chair where we had first talked. Evidently, it had slipped out of my pocket when I first sat down. I tried to pay Chuck back for the coffee, but he refused to accept it.

Chuck spent more than an hour orienting me to my new church and community. It was only the beginning of my Woodlawn education. Chuck Jordan, a few years later would be elected a bishop of the United Methodist Church.

The 6727 South Cregier Parsonage

We were pleased to find that Woodlawn had a beautiful parsonage located at 6727 S. Cregier, less than a block from Jackson Park in the South Shore neighborhood. It was a middle to upper class black community several blocks from the Woodlawn neighborhood. It was, by all appearances, a safe and happy place to live. Our next door neighbor turned out to be a well-known black radio personality, and Gayle Sayers, a Chicago Bear football legend, lived just down the street.



**The
Woodlawn
Church
Parsonage In
South Shore**



**My mother and father visiting us
along with the Britton children,
Meg and Scott (Scott next to Dad
and Meg on my Mother`s lap) at
our home on Cregier. Sam, (in
front of Dad) Sarah and John Mark
(in front of fireplace) are also in the
picture.**

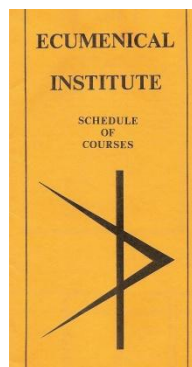
The Spirit Movement

In the summer of 1966, shortly after I had begun my ministry at Woodlawn, clergy from across the nation gathered at the Ecumenical Institute for the purpose of formalizing a movement dedicated to church

renewal. Because I was a local Chicago pastor and considered a church renewal leader, I was chosen to formally convene the meeting.

A small group of Chicago graduates of the Ecumenical Institute Pastoral Leadership Colloquy (PLC) gathered to plan the event. It was scheduled for a large room (room A) in the basement of the Institute building at 3444 West Congress Parkway. Clergy graduates from the North American Continent were invited. Our little group decided the room needed some appropriate Spirit Movement décor. During the PLC we had all been struck by a teaching image of a wedgeblade that symbolized the church in history as the people expending their lives between the no longer and the not yet in order to create a more human and humane future.

I agreed to prepare the décor. I am not sure why, but I had some 4x4 posts and some other lumber in my garage, probably left from the last resident of the parsonage. With those materials I constructed a wedgeblade about 6 feet in length. I transported it to the Institute and mounted on the wall of Room A above the speaker's stand. That moment turned out to be a significant one. From that time forward the wedgeblade became the symbol of the Ecumenical Institute, the Spirit Movement, and, in more recent times, The Institute of Cultural Affairs. The original version of this did not have a circle around it, but that was added at the time the Ecumenical Institute transformed into the Institute of Cultural Affairs.



I also had the privilege of being asked to open the event, which consisted of around 130 clergy from across the continent. I prepared a speech for

the opening session in which I talked about the unique role of churchmen as “spirit revolutionaries” as compared to those who focused on economic and political change. I based much of my talk on an essay by Soren Kierkegaard which had helped me to understand that the revolution most needed by humanity was a spiritual revolution, a revolution in our relationship as human beings to the realities of our existence. Such a revolution was, I declared that day, the key to addressing the economic and political challenges of our time.

As I began to address the group, Rev. James Bevel, who had preached to us in Selma prior to our march through the Mayor`s neighborhood, appeared at the back of the room and took a seat. I doubt he was as inspired by my presentation as I had been by his sermon in Selma, but I enjoyed the moment, nevertheless.

The God Song

The Ecumenical Institute had experimented with putting liturgy to contemporary tunes. For example, the Lord`s Prayer could be sung to the tune of *Hernando`s Hideaway*, and Psalm 100 to the tune of *We Shall Overcome*. One morning, in 1966, while I was showering, I found myself putting the words of Rudolf Bultmann in a paper about God, used in the RS1 class, into the tune of the then popular folk song *Blowing in the Wind*.

GOD

*It is God that is always driving man
To care about the coming day,
And yet God is the mystery that takes
Each man`s security away
It is God that makes man seek happiness
But does not allow his joy to stay.
It is God who gives -- every man his life,*

And God who takes his life away.

*It is God that drives man to search for love,
And yet man is constantly pursued
By that force which finally casts each one out
Into loneliness and solitude
It is God that drives man to knowledge and truth,
But always denies him certitude.
It is God who gives – every man his life,
And God who takes his life away.*

*It is God that gives the desire to achieve,
And yet, death leaves man`s work undone.
It is God that summons man to do good,
And neglect his duty to none.
And yet God is the voice that pronounces guilt,
For man`s war with self is never won.
It is God who gives -- every man his life,
And God who takes his life away.*

The song may have also been a way I was dealing with Millie`s professed atheism. By this time she had completely distanced herself from our church. Where once we had been a ministry team, we were now on very different journeys. Millie was teaching on the West Side of Chicago and making friends among the teachers there. I was deeply involved in the work of my church and The Woodlawn Organization. I was aware at the time that this situation was not the best for our children, but I did not know how to fix it.

One day, when I had been attending a meeting on the campus of The Ecumenical Institute, I went by the office of Dean Joe Matthews. I told him about Millie`s crisis of faith and he immediately became concerned. After some discussion he agreed that he and his wife, Lynn, would come visit us at our South Shore home to talk with Millie and me about the situation.

It turned out to be an amazing conversation. We sat with Joe and Lynn in our parsonage living room while Millie shared her existential struggle. They asked her about her God and she said she did not believe in God - that she believed all that is beyond what we can see or know is *nothing*. Joe picked up on her reference to *nothing* and said he was familiar with Mr. Nothing and that he knew what it was like to live one's life before Mr. Nothing and the question was what demand does that kind of lucidity make upon our lives.

I am not sure I understand to this day what happened, but Millie did say afterwards that she thought Joe was the smartest man she had ever met. I took that to mean that conversation had helped her with her spiritual struggle. This conversation certainly became important later when we were contemplating the decision to join the faculty of the Ecumenical Institute.

Blackstone Rangers

In 1967, when I began as pastor of the Woodlawn Methodist Church, the Woodlawn community was the home territory of a violent youth street gang by the name of the Blackstone Rangers. When, in 1955, the Fort family moved to the intersection of 65th and Blackstone Street, Jeff Fort, was one of ten children in his family. Jeff, with a friend, another black youth named Eugene Hairston, would, between 1961 and 1965, organize what would become, in the mid-1960s, a gang of more than 5,000 members. Later, after expanding branches to other Chicago communities and to several major U.S. cities, this gang would claim more than 100,000 members.



News Photo of
Jeff Fort

I had experience working with the white street gang called the “Muscadoodlers” in The Back of the Yards, but was totally unprepared for the reality of gang violence taking place in Woodlawn. During the 1960s, The Blackstone Rangers were at war over territory with “The Devil’s Disciples.” Woodlawn Avenue bordered the west side of my church building. It was the dividing street between the two gang’s territories. The First Presbyterian Church, located across the street and slightly east of my church, was the gang’s meeting place. It seems, the Rev. John Frye, the white Presbyterian pastor, believed, by providing church space to “The Blackstone Nation”, he and his congregation were taking a stand against, and somehow correcting, the historic humiliation and subjugation of young black males in American society and history.

In my opinion, John Frye was idealistic, but naïve. Fort, Hairston, and the other gang leaders, knew how to exploit white folks, and did so very effectively. From their headquarters in “First Pres,” they plotted and planned criminal activities, including the murder of rival gang leadership. One day, Jeff Fort and three other youth visited me in my church office to see if I would make space available in my church for their expanding activities. I said I would think about it and get back to them. I never did.

Hundreds of young black males, dressed in their colors, marching and chanting through the streets of Woodlawn became a familiar, impressive, and unnerving sight. But that was not my most vivid memory of the Blackstone Rangers. One day, while at work in the church office, I realized I needed to visit a young man who had recently moved into an apartment above a store on 63rd Street. John Rapp, a young white man dedicated to peace and justice, had moved into Woodlawn, had visited my church, and had expressed interest in church membership.

The day I decided to visit him, I wore, as usual, my dress pants, white shirt, and tie. His apartment was only a block from the church. All I needed to do was to walk across a vacant lot between the church and his building. As I cut across the lot, I heard a screech of tires and looked up to see a car stop in front of a service station on the other side

of Woodlawn Avenue. Passengers in the car began to shoot at people inside the service station. Whoever was inside began to fire back. When one of the bullets whirred past my ear, I decided to “hit the dirt.” I dove to the ground, and began to “belly” crawl, as I had often seen soldiers do in the movies. Every inch of the way, I prayed I would not become a casualty of this war between the Blackstone Rangers and the Devil’s Disciples. After I had managed to maneuver about ten feet, the driver revved the engine and sped away. The shooting stopped. I stood, looked down, and, realized my clothes were covered with mud, and, while tempted to return to my office, or go home to change, I continued across the lot to my pastoral visit. I have always been glad I did. John Rapp warmly welcomed me, mud and all. He became the first white person to newly join the Woodlawn Congregation since the early 1950s. He would become a good friend and colleague. A few years later, he would also marry Beverly Vaughn, my sister-in-law, in a memorable Woodlawn wedding.

I felt endangered by gang gunfire on two other occasions. The church parsonage was located in South Shore, a mile or two away from the church. One day, when I was travelling from the parsonage to the church I went under a railyard overpass that was more than half a football field long. As I entered the “tunnel” I saw an African American youth running in the middle of the street toward my car. Then, another youth appeared at the far entrance to the underpass. He began firing at the first runner. I looked at the concrete pillars of the underpass. There was nowhere for me to pull my car out of the line of fire. I scooted as far down in my seat as I could and hit the gas. As my car approached, the boy with the gun leapt behind a concrete barrier. I sped away.

The other gang related event that sticks out in my mind, occurred during one of our School of Human Dignity classes. We were teaching a class one dark night in the fellowship hall of the Episcopal Church located at 65th and Woodlawn. The room had windows that opened to an alley behind the church. We were in the midst of our class when we heard gunfire in the alley. We turned off the lights and told everyone to fall to the floor. More shots. We could see flashes through the windows.

We heard a scream, followed by the blue lights of a police car. We learned the next day that a member of The Devil's Disciples gang had been murdered.

James Brown Concert



*James Brown in a
later news photo*

Shortly after I began my ministry at the Woodlawn church, a representative of The Woodlawn Organization (TWO) approached me about the possibility of holding a fund-raising concert in my church sanctuary to benefit the work of the organization. Since TWO had already lined up James Brown, the top R&B singer in the country, a singer/songwriter/artist known as “*The King of Soul*,” for the concert, TWO leadership expected a huge crowd, and believed they would need all of our building’s 1200 plus seats for the event. I checked with the chair of the church’s Trustees, and we decided to agree to the request.

The concert was an experience. While the Woodlawn Church Choir sometimes sang upbeat songs, our facility had never before experienced such blaring music. The pew where I sat began to shake. Throughout the evening, Brown’s lyrics and actions became increasingly raunchy and suggestive. I began to worry. If such a concert had been held in any other Methodist Church I had ever been a part of, it would have created a firestorm of criticism. But, the Woodlawn

congregation seemed not only to accept the event, but members appeared proud to have had a famous African American pop star perform his “funk music” in the sacred space of our church’s sanctuary.

School Of Human Dignity

In 1967, Pastor Rick Deines, of the Woodlawn Lutheran Church, and I became good friends. Together we organized “The Woodlawn Ecumenical Parish,” an interdenominational association, consisting of the local Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopal, and Congregational churches. The association was dedicated to facilitating and coordinating our congregations in meaningful mission to the Woodlawn Community. After Rick and I were exposed to the Ecumenical Institute class on African American Heritage, we founded *The School of Human Dignity*, as the outreach arm of our parish ministry.

I constructed a sign out of plywood and paint containing our logo, a black hand holding a torch beneath the words: *School of Human Dignity*. The sign was posted inside my church’s outdoor bulletin board.



In the summer of 1967, Rick and I put together a comprehensive African American history curriculum for a joint Vacation Bible School. We researched, wrote curriculum, trained teachers, and then, quietly and happily observed our church member teachers and the neighborhood children realize and respond to the reality of their own esteem as African Americans. At the end of the summer, we knew we were on to something important.

In the fall of '67 we offered and taught our first African American Heritage adult class. We decided we needed a strong African American male teacher to co-teach with us, and were fortunate that my old friend, Rev. John Porter, was happy to join us. John was something of an African American history scholar who sprinkled his lectures with facts about African American contributions to American culture and history.

Over the next three years we held additional adult African American Heritage classes. A woman who was an active member of The Schools Committee of Jessie Jackson's *Operation Breadbasket* attended one and decided that all of the school principals in The Chicago School System needed to attend such a class. When Jackson and the Breadbasket leaders negotiated an agreement with the county school administration, part of the settlement required principals to take our class. More than 350 principals, out of more than 600, eventually did so.

Jackson's *Breadbasket* group, through targeted boycotts, and the threat of boycotts, also reached agreements with the management of Montgomery Ward Department Stores, and the Chicago area A&P Grocery chain. Those agreements not only mandated the corporations hire more African Americans, but the top management officials were required to take a course in "White Racism" from our School of Human Dignity. We adapted our curriculum for that purpose. When these highly paid executives arrived at the Woodlawn church, they were clearly nervous. They, no doubt, resented the fact that they were to be instructed by an interracial group of community activists in their early thirties, but it was probably the reality of visiting a ghetto neighborhood they had only previously heard of or read about that made them uneasy. Be that as it may, the executives proved to be good sports. The classes went well and our relationship with Jessie Jackson, and *Operation Breadbasket* was strengthened.





**Photo of me as
Woodlawn Pastor
Ages 30-34**

Operation Breadbasket Boycott

In addition to providing courses for people sent by *Operation Breadbasket*, I also assisted with the boycott of the A&P groceries by carrying a picket sign at a store located in Chicago's Hyde Park, a nearby interracial community. Some people, in need of groceries, ignored our pickets and shopped anyway. Others, when they saw this was one of Jessie Jackson's projects, turned around and left. I remember one white man who saw the sign and informed me that he was a member of a union and had never crossed a picket line in his life, and was not going to do so now.

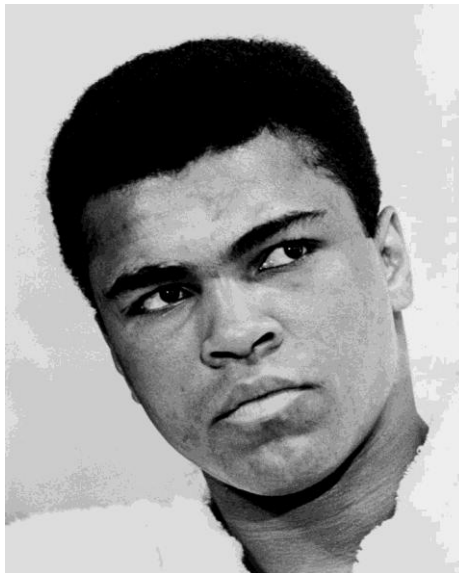
Some of my good friends were very active in *Operation Breadbasket*. My best friend, Rev. Jerry Forshey, became good friends with Jesse Jackson. Another friend, Rev. Martin Deppe was a founding member of *Breadbasket*, and would, years later (2017), publish a history of the organization.

While I never had a personal friendship with Jessie Jackson, my son Sam attended the same preschool as Jessie's son, Jessie Jr. Jessie Jr. would much later serve (from 1995-2012) in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Muhammed Ali

After defeating Heavyweight Champion Sonny Liston in 1964, Louisville born Cassius Clay joined the Nation of Islam, and became Muhammed Ali. In 1966, he refused induction into the army and spoke out in opposition to the Viet Nam war. He was charged with draft evasion, but instead of prison, he was stripped of his boxing title and prohibited from boxing for four years. In the late 1960s, most African American citizens perceived Muhammed Ali as a black hero, not only as “the greatest” boxer of all time, but also as a black man who stood up to the white establishment.

Ali was also one of my heroes. In our African American Heritage Course we had often quoted his words, ‘I am the greatest!’ in order to encourage “black pride.”



News Photo of Mahammad Ali

Ali was a colorful personality. He enjoyed taunting his boxing opponents, and introduced almost rap like jingles, such as “The Thrilla in Manilla,” to promote his fights.

In 1968, The Woodlawn Organization (T.W.O.) invited Ali to be a guest speaker at its annual convention. Over 500 people were in attendance. As I looked around the auditorium, I could not see any

other white faces. Ali used the forum that evening to praise Elijah Muhammed, the leader of the Black Muslim movement in Chicago, and to parrot his leader's anti-white rhetoric. As Ali preached, he repeated over and over, "The white man is the devil. The white man is the devil." The longer he spoke, and the more he described the evil nature of white Americans, the higher my anxiety level rose. I was greatly relieved to make it safely home that evening.

Ali later converted, as did his mentor Malcolm X, from the American Black Muslim faith to Sunni Islam. With that conversion he found a different message and began to preach about racial reconciliation and integration. In the years before death (2016), Ali, largely due to his struggle with Parkinson's disease, also became a symbol of courage for persons with disabilities. Ravaged by the illness, he lit the Olympic Torch at the 1996 Atlanta Games. Most Americans witnessing the event were deeply moved.

The Assassination Of Dr. King And The Woodlawn Riots

I will never forget where I was or how I felt on Thursday afternoon, April 4, 1968 when a friend arrived at my office at Woodlawn United Methodist Church in Chicago, an African American Congregation where I was then pastor. She informed me that Dr. King had been shot and killed in Memphis. I knew Dr. King was there at the time advocating for the welfare of the mostly African American city sanitation workers. He had been invited to Memphis by Jim Lawson, a Memphis pastor and friend of mine during my Vanderbilt Divinity days. Since the 1963 Kennedy assassination, and especially after participating in the Selma march, I had thought it likely that at some point someone would try to assassinate Dr. King. While not that surprised, the news of the shooting still threw me into emotional shock.



News Photo of Dr. King at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis

The friend who told me about the murder of Dr. King that day was the same forty-year-old African American social worker, and mother of six, named Rosie Simpson who had led, in 1963, the Chicago school desegregation movement. She and I hugged and cried. Dr. King was my leader, my hero, my inspiration. I was angry, nauseated, deeply sorrowed, and not a little fearful. The friend, Rosie, had previously organized and led the “Willis Wagon” demonstrations in Englewood. She now worked for The Woodlawn Organization (TWO). She staffed the Education Committee of TWO, I was the committee chair. We were in the midst of a committee fundraiser that weekend in which some of our members and friends had volunteered to cook chicken dinners and donate them to the cause, while other friends and supporters had agreed to buy them. Rosie and I were planning to pick up the dinners from people’s homes and apartments on Friday morning, and deliver them that day to the homes of our Woodlawn friends and supporters who had ordered them.



Rosie Simpson

Rosie and I agreed that our neighborhood was likely to have a rough evening and we decided it best to return to the relative safety of our respective homes that afternoon, and to meet again on Friday morning, as we (foolishly) thought it unnecessary to cancel the fundraiser. The Schools Committee was devoted to assuring quality education for the public schools in our community. Like most ghetto schools, our neighborhood schools did not always have the most capable teachers assigned, or the advantage of having the best educational equipment and supplies. As noted earlier, in the sixties, school segregation and inequality had become major civil rights issues in Chicago, and that struggle had helped persuade Dr. King in 1966 to choose Chicago as the site of his first Northern non-violent civil rights battle. We convinced ourselves that Dr. King would not want us to cancel our chicken dinner fundraiser.

Our concern about what might happen in Woodlawn that night was realized when I started to drive home. There were cars passing me that carried TVs in their open trunks and other merchandise stacked inside the rear seat areas, stuff evidently looted from stores on 63rd Street (the commercial area of Woodlawn a block north of my church). That evening news reports told of riots across the country including Chicago. The West Side was especially hard hit. Woodlawn was the only Southside community that was the locus of a major riot. That night my family did not rest well. My wife, three children, and I, with bags packed for a quick escape, watched the red glow in the sky over Woodlawn, where buildings on 63rd street were being burned, from the upstairs bedroom window of our parsonage, located a couple of miles from all the action.

The fires continued through the night. Smoke hung in the air. In the morning we tried to assume things were going to be normal. We each went our separate ways, Millie to teach school on the West Side in another ghetto community, and me to my Woodlawn ministry, both of us praying our day would be uneventful.



*News Photo of Chicago
Neighborhood Riot Fires*

On Friday morning, April 5, Rosie and I picked up some chicken dinners and delivered them. We were on our way to pick up some more when we came upon a large group of angry neighborhood youth outside St. Cyril Catholic High School located a few blocks east of my church. Those gathered that morning were members of the Blackstone Rangers. I was ready to turn around and drive away as quickly as possible. Rosie stopped some young men and asked them what was going on. They said they were planning to burn down the Catholic School. She asked them where their leader, Jeff Fort, could be found. When they pointed in the direction where Fort stood, Rosie had me park the car and we got out and let one of the young men take us to their leader. Rosie, who conveyed the authority of the stereotypical “Black Mama” when she chose to, walked up to Fort and said, “Jeff, we have to talk.” The two knew each other, as staff of The Woodlawn Organization had been working with the Blackstone Rangers on a jobs training project. At the time, knowing the gang’s reputation, and how angry all black people were over King’s assassination, I feared for my life. I had the only white face in a sea of black ones. Jeff Fort and some of the other kids did know me by sight, as I was fairly well known as the Methodist pastor. But there was little comfort in that.

That day, I believe Rosie Simpson was God’s angel who was able to be the instrument of a miracle. When we went inside the school’s auditorium and met with Fort, Rosie was able to convince him to pull back his gang (the gang numbered in the thousands, several hundred were present that day), and convinced him that it would be better for

everyone if they would try to stop the rioting on 63rd street and help protect the community from being burned down as the rioting would only hurt the black people who lived in Woodlawn. Fort immediately assembled his gang, gave them orders to leave the Catholic School alone, and that they were going to become the “protectors” of the community. The Catholic School, along with the kids and faculty inside were spared. Rosie and I drove away a short time later. I was amazed and relieved. This story did not end there, nor is the ending as happy as I have thus far suggested. The merchants on 63rd street were soon paying the rangers for signs they could hang in their stores indicating the Blackstone Rangers were protecting them. In other words the gang leadership decided to protect the neighborhood by initiating a typical mafia type protection racket.



News Photo of Blackstone Rangers in Woodlawn

In the end, Rosie and I raised over \$300 with our chicken dinner fundraiser, a remarkable day, under the circumstances. And, just as amazing, I was still alive, as, thankfully, were all the members of my family when I got home that evening.

That night (Saturday) the National Guard showed up in Woodlawn and they had orders to stop any group from assembling. On Sunday morning, as some of my church members got off of public transportation and began to walk to the church, National Guardsmen pointed their bayonets at them and ordered them to move along quickly.

When I drove up to the church that morning, after all the looting and fires the last two days, a wonderful African American member of

my church was standing at the door waiting for me. She yelled at me to get my “white face inside” immediately. The woman was Ida Wells Barnett II. She happened to be the daughter of the famous journalist and anti-lynching crusader, Ida B. Wells.



News Photo of National Guard During Chicago Riots

Ida, my church member, had no idea how exposed my white face had been on the preceding Friday. At the morning service, my sermon was in the form of a eulogy for Dr. King. Our overflowing church sang songs of the Civil Rights movement, wept, and mourned together the loss of our leader and hero.

Because Dr. King believed so strongly in non-violence, I cannot help but think he watched the riots, from his home in heaven, with profound sadness. His recorded words from the night before he was killed, were played over and over on newscasts. They continue to resound through my brain these many years later:

Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight,

that we, as a people, will get to the promised land! And so I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!

Dr. King was indeed the God-called Moses of our time who just wanted to do God's will, and did not live to see the fruits of his labors. But what an amazing difference he made for the rest of us.

The Mexico Trip

In July of 1969 our family spent a week of our vacation time in Mexico. We chose to make the trip to Mexico primarily in order to expose ourselves and our family to another culture. It did that and more.

As tourists we tried to use what few phrases of conversational Spanish that we knew, or that were in our pocket language guide. We were also dependent on local taxis for transportation. One day we took a taxi to the local bull fighting arena. We watched the fight but also the crowd. It was bewildering to see so many people excited about a bull trying to kill a man and a man trying to stay alive while bravely inviting the bull to charge him. The whole point seemed to be to see how close the bull could come to impaling the man without it actually happening.

On our way back to our hotel I realized that Mexico City cab drivers must fantasize about becoming bull fighters as they drove in such a way as to see how close they could come to colliding with other vehicles without actually doing it. I had already realized that every cab ride was a scary one.

In addition to the bull fight, we shared several memorable moments on that trip. We visited the Museo Nacional de Antropologia, where archeological remains testified to the ancient history of the Americas. We also visited the ancient holy city of Teotihuacan where I climbed to the top of the Pyramid to the Moon, a place where Aztec human sacrifice had been practiced. AS soon as I arrived at the top an afternoon summer storm could be seen approaching. I suddenly realized that I was a human lightening rod and in serious danger. As I made my way down the treacherous steps, large rain drops began to fall increasing the likelihood of a slip and fall. Somehow I made it to the ground safely, just as a clap of thunder shook the area. I decided that was as close to a human sacrifice as I would ever want to be.

The highlight of our trip was attending the Ballet Folklórico, a beautiful colorful dance production portraying the history of the region. From primitive tribal dance to modern Hispanic performance, the event filled us with awe as it transitioned us from primitive history to contemporary fiestas.

But our greatest awe came during intermission. When I stepped into the lobby I saw a group of people gathered in front of a black and white TV. I decided to check it out. It was around 10 pm on the night of July 10, 1969. On the TV was the live streaming of Neil Armstrong taking the first human steps on the moon.



**Neil
Armstrong
taking the first
human steps
on the moon**

The Ecumenical Institute

Throughout my Woodlawn pastorate, I stayed in close touch with the Ecumenical Institute. In the summer of 1968, the Institute held a summer Assembly for church laity and clergy from around the nation. Close to a thousand, mostly white, participants attended. One Sunday, the entire Assembly rode public transportation from Chicago's Westside to the Woodlawn Elevated train stop on 63rd street, a block from my church. Their presence would make possible the largest Woodlawn Methodist Sunday morning attendance in recent history. I had previously incorporated some of the experimental music I had learned at the Institute into the worship service. One of these was sung to the tune of *Michael Row the Boat Ashore*. Instead of a traditional

***Gloria Patri*, usually sung in a Methodist Church, everyone robustly sang:**

**Glory be to thee O' God, Hallelujah.
Father Son and Holy Ghost, Hallelujah!**

As I looked out over a congregation of interracial worshipers, I was filled with hope for the future. That hope would soon face a new challenge. In 1969, the legitimacy of white pastors leading African American congregations began to be questioned by several of my colleagues. It was the era of "Black Power" and many civil rights leaders held the belief that as long as white folks were in charge of black institutions, including churches, these social entities would continue to embody the era of slavery and white paternalism.

I was not aware of anyone in my church who was dissatisfied with my leadership. But, with the help of several of my African American friends, I developed an increased sensitivity to the effects of racism and paternalism. I began considering other vocational possibilities.

In the Fall of '69, two leaders from the Ecumenical Institute took me to lunch and invited me to join the Institute Faculty. The Institute considered itself a "Family Religious Order." Since The Order was made up of families, accepting the invitation would make it necessary for me to move my entire family to Chicago's Westside. It also involved disposing of most of the possessions my family had accumulated over the years in order for us to move into a tiny apartment in the main building of the Institute. This was intentionally required as a kind of vow of poverty when moving into what self-identified as a religious order.

It was one of the more difficult decisions of my life, one finally made following tearful agonizing consideration of the impact on my family. My children already attended all black schools in South Shore. But this decision would send them to ghetto schools that might place them in significant danger. In addition, the kids would be in group structured classes and activities and have little time for interaction with their parents. It was not an easy decision, but it soon began to feel like

God's guidance. In the Fall of 1969, our family moved into a corner apartment at the Institute, located in the 3400 block of Congress Parkway.



*We Moved to the Middle
Corner Apartment*

While I had learned how to walk the streets of Woodlawn in relative safety, the neighborhood around the Institute confronted our family with new challenges. Traffic was light on the surrounding streets, but there was an ever present risk of being mugged and robbed. One dark night, a female member of the Institute faculty was assaulted and raped when she strayed too far from the building. When it was necessary for me to walk in the neighborhood, I learned to travel down the middle of streets, so that a mugger in wait in an alley, or between buildings, would have to venture away from the shadows in order to rob or harm me.

We kept doors and windows securely locked. There were no armed guards, but Institute adults took turns providing security by sitting at the front door, limiting access to the building, and by roaming the halls and campus.

During my first year at the Institute I worked in the Development Office. Our job was to raise outside contributions for our non-profit work. In that role, I travelled to other cities to call on foundations and potential donors. I had no idea at the time how important that experience would later be when I attempted to raise funds for Louisburg Methodist College in North Carolina, NAMI-NC (The National Alliance on Mental Illness in North Carolina), and Family Promise of Brevard in Florida. On weekends I usually was somewhere in North America teaching one of our classes. Those assignments meant

that I flew over 100,000 miles a year and eventually visited every state in the union.

At the end of that first year in the Order, I faced a heart-wrenching decision. Because the local Middle School was a center of gang activity, the Order leadership had previously decided that rising 6th grade students should be sent to other cities to live in Institute outposts called “Religious Houses,” where they could attend schools in safer environments. It was a well-intentioned policy, but one that also tore families apart. In the summer of 1970, my daughter, Sarah, was sent to a Religious House in Seattle Washington. (The following year, John Mark, was sent to Albuquerque New Mexico). After Sarah had left, I sank into a deep depression. A dark cloud of gloom engulfed my spirit. For almost three weeks, I spent most of my days in bed. I could not bear the thought of what my vocational decisions had done to my kids. But, at the time, I was unable to see a way out, or a way forward. In the end, I remained at the Institute for three more years, first serving as the Director of The Continental Training Office, responsible for scheduling of classes throughout North America, and then as the Deputy Dean of the Academy for Global Churchmen, an eight week residential training program. During my last year at the Institute, I served as the Dean of the Academy.

The Academy



**Teaching an
Academy Class**

Teaching in the Academy

The Academy was an eight week training program for local churchpersons from around the globe. Most attendees came from North American urban areas. The curriculum consisted of Religious, Cultural and Practical courses intended to provide attendees motivation, contextual understanding, and skills, for the renewal of the church and the transformation of local communities.

During my first year teaching in the Academy, Millie was also assigned there as a teacher. She had spent our first two years at the Institute continuing her vocation as a public school teacher in the Chicago system. Millie proved to be a highly effective teacher. At one point, Joe Matthews, the Dean of the Institute shared with me a conversation he had with one of his sons who attended the Academy our first year there. Joe asked his son to tell him who was the best teacher at the Academy. His son's answer, to Joe's surprise, was ``Millie Baggett``. Millie would later put the skills she developed at the Institute to good use teaching public school in Chatham County NC, where she would also be something of a star.

The Academy operation was located in The Program Center, a building which had once been used for industrial purposes. It was located several blocks from the main campus of The Ecumenical Institute. It had a large area on the second floor that served us well as a lecture hall where our participants, which sometimes exceeded two hundred persons a semester, could gather at tables and take notes. Both faculty and participants lived in The Program Center, most in dorm-like set-ups with multiple beds. Privacy was in short supply. Because the streets between the main campus and academy building were unsafe, the Institute created a shuttle service, utilizing member's cars, to transport us between locations.

One of my more vivid memories consists of our experience with Chicago rats at The Program Center. One of our development leaders had managed to obtain sacks of outdated grits as a contribution from The Quaker Oats Company. Grits appeared on the table at most of our

meals. Large sacks of grits were stored in The Program Center basement. Somehow, some street rats were able to penetrate the concrete foundation of the building and slip into the basement to feast on grits during the black of night. One evening, I descended the stairs to check out the basement and a rat the size of a huge cat ran across my feet. My heart leapt into my throat. I had seen lots of field and river rats in my life, but nothing to compare with that one. Chicago urban rats can truly grow to become huge, and can often be seen scurrying across alleys.

Living In 5th City

The Ecumenical Institute, located at 3444 West Congress Parkway, Chicago, was surrounded by one of the poorest ghetto communities in the city. With the help of local citizens, the Institute leadership set about designing a community reformulation project, called 5th City, as a way of addressing the problems and needs of this neighborhood.

The name, *5th City*, grew out of the sense that this urban community was intended to be entirely different from the four socio-geographic “cities” that usually describe modern urban societies: downtown, inner city, neighborhoods, and suburbs. This new community was intended to be based not on geography, but on the empowerment of its citizens.



Iron Man Symbol
and 5th City Statue

The problems of this urban ghetto did not vanish as hoped. Immediately following the assassination of Dr. King, in 1968, rioters burned and destroyed a number of stores and community resources. Arsonists even invaded the Institute's main building, moving from training room to training room pouring gasoline in the center of the rugs, and setting fires. One of the faculty members followed some distance behind them and doused the fires with an extinguisher. Thieves sometimes broke into member apartments and made off with televisions and other valuables.

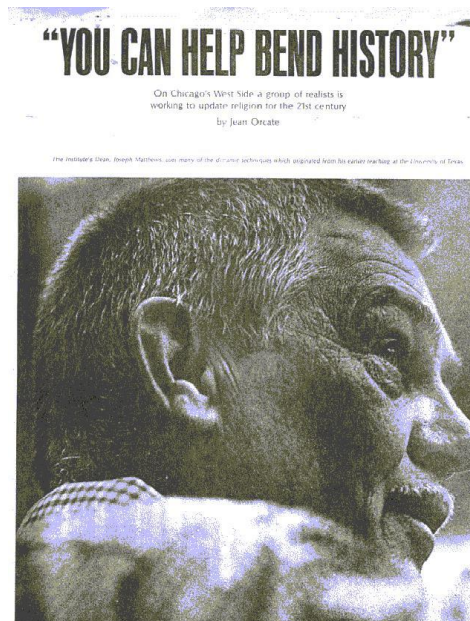
During our third year at the Institute, my family was reassigned to an apartment a block north of the main building. During our fourth and final year there, we continued to keep that apartment while my family was assigned to work at the Kemper Building on Chicago's Northside, the new headquarters of the Institute. One day I received word that there had been a break-in at the apartment. When I arrived to examine the damage, I found our possessions strewn around the rooms. At the time, I still possessed a twenty-two rifle I had owned since my hunting days in Tennessee. I never thought of it as a means of protection. I suppose I still had the fantasy I would one day live where I could go hunting again. The rifle was still there when I arrived at the apartment, but it had been moved to our breakfast table, bullets and some old shotgun shells I had kept for some reason were scattered about. It is clear the thief was tempted by the weapon, but only some loose change we kept in a top drawer appeared missing. I was grateful I had been away during this home invasion. One of my colleagues who lived on a lower floor of the same building had not been so fortunate. A few weeks earlier thieves had caught him in his apartment, tied him up, threatened to kill him, stole his wallet, and other personal possessions.

I took away two lessons from these inner city experiences. The first lesson was the realization that no possession is as valuable as your life. The second was the awareness that guns that are legally owned are often the target of thieves. I have since learned that most criminals do not try to purchase guns legally, but buy them on the black market where stolen guns are sold. It is something for every legal gun-owner to consider.

PART IV CALLED TO RENEW MY FAMILY

The Decision To Leave The Ecumenical Institute

While I had significant roles at the Ecumenical Institute, including membership on The Panchayat, the 12 member governing body of the Religious Order, I began to have grave doubts about the nature and direction of our organization. The Institute was a cult like culture that viewed the leadership of Joseph W. Matthews as virtually infallible. He was a brilliant man whose wisdom I would draw upon throughout my life, but he was also a fallible leader.



**Joseph Matthews
Dean of the
Ecumenical Institute
Chicago 1960s**

While we considered ourselves a Family Religious Order, I learned from some of my colleagues that children were being physically abused and mental health concerns were being ignored. In fact I began to view some of our children's programming, not just individuals in the program, as psychologically abusive.

By that time, John Mark was living in a Religious House in Albuquerque (a kind of outpost of the Institute religious order) and

Sarah was living in a Religious House in Montreal Canada. She was a 13 year old 8th grade student there and understandably unhappy. She and a boyfriend decided to run away. I think their plan was to come to the States. I received a call in my Acaademy office that Sarah and a boyfriend had left the Montreal House and were believed to be hitch-hiking across Canada.

Millie and I immediately booked a flight to Montreal in the hopes of getting there in time to find the fleeing couple. To our didsapointment, we could only get a flight with a three hour delay in Toronto. Then, to our amazement, while sitting in the front of the Toronto airport during our layover, we looked up, and in walked Sarah and her boyfriend. They had managed to get rides to Toronto and had decided the safest place to spend the night was the airport. I have always believed we received some much needed divine intervention that evening. Once again, guarded by grace. We let Sarah know that she would be travelling with us back to Chicago. Her boyfriend would be on his own.

I never learned what happened to the boyfriend but Sarah did fly home with us. She finished the eighth grade at a Catholic School in Chicago, but her desire to no longer be a part of the Order soon led to my own decision to leave. The stress of the experience on our family was also taking a toll on our marriage. Millie and I were both stressed over the situation but coping with it in different ways. Millie, who had been raised by a schizophrenic mother, and had experienced abandonment by her father, protected her feelings by withdrawing emotionally and adopting the role of a martyr. I, on the other hand, became seriously depressed, and could not seem to find a way out of it. Millie and I grew further and further apart emotionally.

In the Spring of 1973, while stationed at the old Kemper Building on Chicago`s Northside, I discovered that I was scheduled to be assigned to the religious house in New Delhi India. My children would be deployed elsewhere. I was not about to have my family scattered all over the world. I decided that was the last straw, I needed to leave and try to save my family.



**Old Kemper
Building –now
ICA
headquarters**

In the summer of 1973, I called my Father in Raleigh NC and asked if we could come there until we figured out the next step. My Dad had never liked the fact I was at The Institute. His response was: ``Come on!!!`` He sent me a small loan and I was able to rent a second vehicle. We drove the Chevy station wagon to Milwaukee where Sarah had been reassigned to a religious house and picked her up. Both John Mark and Sam were in Chicago at the time. We loaded my VW stationwagon and the rental station wagon with our children and all our limited possessions, and Millie and I each drove the 800 plus miles to Mom and Dad`s apartment near Crabtree Valley Mall in Raleigh.

RALEIGH (1973-1981)

My parents welcomed our family of five with open arms, but their apartment was crowded, partly because my mother was an obsessive compulsive hoarder, and there was not much room for us in their two bedroom apartment. We were financially broke and I did not have a job. I immediately began to explore possibilities. I had thought perhaps my Dad could hire me since he was the manager of Diamond Hill Plywood Company in Raleigh, but the Raleigh business was only a local retail outlet for a much larger regional company and their policies prohibited my Dad from giving his son a job.

Since I was still technically a Methodist minister, and had developed some good teaching skills at the Ecumenical Institute, I decided to see if there were any possibilities at two Methodist related colleges in the region, one located in Louisburg and the other in Fayetteville. I found out that both colleges had openings for Development officers, whose jobs were to raise charitable gifts for their respective colleges. Since I had experience with development, I applied at both locations. Dr. Cecil Robins, President of Louisburg College, a Methodist Junior College, interviewed me immediately. He knew a little about Joe Matthews and the Ecumenical Institute and thought that I might be a good fit for Louisburg.

Louisburg College was some 30 miles from Raleigh and, although Dr. Robbins tried to convince me to move to there, I was not about to take my children and move to Louisburg, after rescuing them from out Institute experience. The college at Louisburg was a beautiful peaceful place, but the town was a parochial village that still had a somewhat active Ku Klux Klan. I wanted the kids to attend public schools in Raleigh which had a strong academic reputation. My plan was to commute to the college each day. Fortunately, the school provided me with a car, intended for the purpose of raising funds across central North Carolina, but was given permission to use it for commuting until such time as I could move to Louisburg. I knew, but the college administration, did not, that I would never be moving to Louisburg.

Once I began to work and receive a salary from the college, I began to look for an apartment near the best schools in our county. I found one, not very far from my parent's place, in a complex named Landmark Apartments located in the Meredith Woods neighborhood of Raleigh, a neighborhood near Meredith College. A small shopping center was located nearby. It was a safe, prosperous newly settled community, nothing like the inner city neighborhoods we had left behind.

The Meredith Woods neighborhood was relatively new and still growing. Millie had managed to get work as a substitute teacher, since she had teaching experience in Chicago. While the apartment was very nice, we began to dream of having our own home. We found a two story

home we liked that was being built on Blue Ridge Rd only a few blocks from our apartment. We made an offer and were able to scrape together a down payment. Moving there allowed the children to continue in the same nearby schools they were attending. It also gave our family considerably more livable room.



Our House & Shed (at rear on right)

3428 Blue Ridge Road

For a while, our life on Blue Ridge Rd. seemed to be everything we had hoped it would be. Millie and I enjoyed working together planting flowers and bushes in our yard. We even planted a small vegetable garden in the far back yard.

My father needed to get rid of some lumber from a torn down building and asked me if I could use it. I thought I needed some kind of outbuilding on the property for my gardening supplies and possibly a

workshop so I agreed. Dad had one of his employees deliver the used lumber and I spent several weekends cleaning my free building supplies, removing old nails, then designing and building a shed, a shed that still stands more than 50 years later.

But difficult times lay ahead. Despite the fact I had a job at Louisburg College and Millie was now teaching at nearby Stowe Elementary School, our investment in a new home had strapped us financially. I decided that I could make a little bit of extra income by becoming a tutor and a counselor in the evenings after work. I put an ad in the local Ad Pak that went to everyone's residence in town offering my services. I soon had students coming to our house evenings where I tutored and counseled them in our living room. I drew upon my Academy experience using teaching methods to help my clients develop study skills.

It was also a time when our teenagers, like so many others, experimented with drugs and alcohol. Millie and I were both away and working when our children got home from school each day, so they had free time they did not always use wisely. Once, when Millie and I decided to take a weekend away, we returned to find the remains of a teen party. It was a scary time for us as parents.

I decided I could no longer work at Louisburg. Once again, I felt it necessary to prioritize the needs of my children, who had been through a great deal of trauma during our four years at the Ecumenical Institute. I blamed myself for all their problems. Besides that, raising money proved to be something I could do successfully, but it has never provided enough meaning and purpose for my life.

I called my tutoring and counseling business, *The Creative Education Institute*. By quitting my job at Louisburg, I was able to schedule children in the late afternoons, between their schooldays and family dinner time. It also allowed me to keep an eye on my own kids in that same period of time. Probably the most successful thing about my new business was an SAT preparation class I created and taught numerous times. These classes consisted of High School students who were scheduled to take their Scholastic Aptitude Tests in preparation for applying to college. The SAT classes met a felt need in the more

affluent neighborhoods of Raleigh and provided our family with much needed income. I am also convinced they also helped many local kids get accepted into the colleges and universities of their choice.

JOHN MARK'S ILLNESS

In the winter of 1977, shortly after John Mark turned 17 on February 7, he began to act strangely. He played music very loudly in his bedroom. He punched holes in the plasterboard walls of the house. I knew he had smoked marijuana and probably had experimented with LSD, so my primary concern at the time was his drug usage. Then, one day, a friend of John Mark's was visiting him. The friend left John Mark in his room upstairs, and came to Millie and me in our Den on the first floor, and said, "I am worried about John. Don't you think he is acting strangely?" John Mark's friend assured me this was not about drugs. My immediate thoughts connected his behavior to that of Millie's mother. I went to John Mark and asked him what was going on. He said that another friend, named Brad, was trying to give him a heart attack by telepathic means.

Suddenly it all made sense. I did not want to believe it, but I had listened to John Mark's loud playing of Bonnie Tyler's, *It's a Heartache*, over and over. I had repaired the holes in the walls. I had seen him pacing back and forth for hours. I finally realized that John Mark was having symptoms of paranoid psychosis. These symptoms may have been triggered by drug usage, especially by a hallucinogenic like LSD, but they were now signs of a serious mental illness.

We made an appointment with a psychiatrist that a friend recommended. The psychiatrist examined John Mark and then shared with us the Schizophrenia diagnosis. It was devastating news, but in our naïve consciousness, we thought there had to be a cure, if only we could connect him to the right treatment. We began to investigate treatment programs in the region. In that pursuit we identified Highland Hospital in Asheville, North Carolina as a possibility. We found it had once served some famous people, including Zelda

Fitzgerald, the wife of F. Scott Fitzgerald. We even travelled to Asheville and visited the hospital. We met with some psychiatric staff there who painted a dark but realistic picture of John Mark`s future should we not get him treatment. They may not have said so explicitly, but we left the meeting believing that they could fix our son if we could pay for the hospitalization. But we had a problem. Highland Hospital was prohibitively expensive.

By this time we had faithfully paid enough on our home mortgage that it was possible to take out a second mortgage, which we did, and used that money to pay for several weeks of treatment at Highland Hospital. John Mark was discharged after a brief three week stay. Following his return to our Raleigh home, his symptoms were better for a few days, but then he decompensated again and his symptoms were just as bad, if not worse, than before. At this point we were so deeply in debt, due to the hospitalization that we were at risk of losing our house.



Highland Hospital

I was not handling all of the stress very well. In retrospect, it is clear that I was experiencing both profound grief and a crisis of faith. I could not believe God was allowing my gifted and talented son to suffer with schizophrenia. He did not deserve this. I had made mistakes with my family, but I did not deserve it either. I had answered the call to go to the inner city of Chicago and served faithfully there for over a decade. I had put my life in danger on several occasions on behalf of desegregation. I had faithfully answered God`s calling, and I think I believed that God and I had a deal, and that God would not allow harm to come to me or my family. That illusion was now burst and beyond

repair. I went through a series of stages of grief over the next few years. These included denial, escape, victimism, questioning, anger, depression, and eventually, after several years, acceptance, calling, and affirmation (I share this journey in my 2013 book, *Finding the Good in Grief*).

During my denial phase, I kept trying to find the magical cure. Once, John Mark was reasonably stable on his medications, I thought he just needed to return to a normal journey for a young man his age. While he had not been able to complete his High School journey, he was able to obtain his G.E.D. which made him eligible for college. I persuaded Louisburg College, where I still had some pull, to enroll him as a student. He was unable to complete a semester. Despite this setback, I persisted in my illusion that, if he only would be able to get a college degree, he would be able one day to have a normal life. Since paying for college was a problem for our financially strapped family, I researched the possibility of a public college or university. After many discouraging efforts, he was accepted as a freshman at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee North Carolina. That would turn out to be one more disaster.

John Mark was assigned a dormitory roommate at Western. At first, that seemed to be a good thing. But then, he and his roommate were soon obtaining and using drugs together. John became psychotic again. Early one morning, John Mark woke up seriously paranoid about his roommate. He grabbed a pocket knife and stabbed his roommate in the chest, barely missing the heart. The roommate screamed and other dorm residents arrived and called 911. The roommate was hospitalized, but recovered. John Mark was arrested and jailed on a charge of ``secret assault.`` The family did not press charges, probably because they did not want information about drug usage to become public knowledge, and because we agreed to pay for the boy's hospitalization. Millie and I drove to Cullowhee and brought John Mark back to Raleigh. That was the end of his academic career.

We all gave up on the college cure for his illness at that point, but what I later identified as *secondary denial* persisted. (Secondary denial acknowledged he was mentally ill, but refused to believe it was as

serious as it turned out to be and refused to accept the reality that he was disabled for life).

At this point, we began to hope that some kind of job might be what was needed. John Mark subsequently went through a series of minimum wage jobs he was unable to keep due to his illness. These efforts were spaced between several short term hospitalizations at the local Dorothea Dix Hospital.

SARAH EXCELS IN SCHOOL

While John Mark was unable to handle the pressures of school, Sarah was excelling. She transferred from Sanderson High to Broughton High where she earned credits that made it possible for her to apply for admission to The University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.

Sarah decided to pursue a similar career to the one her mother had taken. After her graduation from Broughton, she began, in the fall to work on a degree in Early Childhood Education.

In November of 1978 the news was full of the story of the Jonestown massacre in which cult member Jim Jones led over 900 followers in a suicide ritual. Sarah, for one of her freshman college courses, wrote a brilliant paper about this event, a tragedy which had stirred memories of her own cult like experience as a child in the religious order of the Ecumenical Institute.

GRADUATE SCHOOL

About this time, John Mark moved to a group home near Boone NC and Sarah left to attend college. I decided to recover privacy in my home again by moving my tutoring and counseling business to an office in Oak Park, off of highway 70 in Raleigh. I also decided I needed to do something to take care of my own mental health. By this time I had sunk into a deep depression triggered by my helplessness in finding a

cure for John Mark and could not find my way back to any semblance of happiness.

Then, in 1979, at age 43, I had an idea I hoped would lift me out of my depression. I had always wanted to go back to school to earn a Ph.D. I had a life-long fascination for both anthropology and religion and decided to consider a doctorate in The Anthropology of Religion. When I mentioned this to Sarah, she recommended I get an appointment with Dr. James Peacock, a senior professor of Anthropology at the University of North Carolina. I shared with Dr. Peacock some of my background in ministry and with the Ecumenical Institute. He was a kind and gentle man and seemed to think I would be a good fit for their program. Jim Peacock would turn out to be a great mentor and a good friend as well as serve as chair of my doctoral committee.

In order to earn a Ph.D. in anthropology, it was necessary to first earn a Masters Degree. That involved taking a series of introductory courses, and identifying and pursuing a major within the department. I chose a major in The Anthropology of Religion, and took such courses as *Culture and Personality* and *Symbols and Consciousness*. (Later, after receiving my MA, I would, as a Ph.D. student, teach both of those classes at UNC.)

During my studies I became acquainted with the work of anthropologist Edmund Leach a British social anthropologist who had pioneered in the structural study of mythology. He had even written a work on the structural nature of myths in the Biblical book of Genesis. I was well schooled from my seminary work and from my Ecumenical Institute studies in the demythologizing method of Rudolf Bultmann, who viewed Biblical mythology from an existentialist theological perspective. Both of these thinkers rejected the Western popular view of myth as unbelievable and untrue. While neither were naïve enough to think the stories in Genesis were literally and historically true, they both found truth in the stories. For Leach there was cultural cognitive truth that helped us understand human mental functions and cultural expressions. For Bultmann there was truth about the meaning and purpose of human existence. When it came time for me to write my

Master's Thesis, I chose to compare these two methods of interpretation, and titled my work – *The Hermeneutics of Biblical Mythology*.

The conclusion of my Master's Thesis was as follows:

We have seen how both structural and historical exegetical hermeneutics begin with different presuppositions, and proceed by different rules to accomplish results of differing types. It should be obvious that neither method is an ``exact`` science and that it is possible for independent researchers to follow the same set of rules of analysis and arrive at varying conclusions. As in many scientific endeavors, truth is a commodity, dependent upon the ability of a given set of statements to persuade others that the statements themselves provide superior illumination of a given set of phenomena. Both the structural hermeneutics of Edmund Leach and the historical demythologizing of Rudolf Bultmann have demonstrated this ability.

Upon completion of my Master's Thesis I was required to defend it to my faculty committee. At the end of my defense, they determined that I had not only passed, but had passed with honors. But there was no time to celebrate, as I was immediately immersed in my Ph.D. program, a degree I would not receive until August of 1989. Throughout this time, I continued my tutoring and counseling business in Raleigh.

MT GILEAD WOODS

By the time I was working on my M. A. degree we were being harassed by bill collectors and were in danger of losing our house due to being behind on both our first and second mortgages. I was commuting to Chapel Hill almost daily, and we wondered if there was a way to move closer to my school, reduce our cost of living, and free ourselves

from debt collectors. We also had a fantasy that living in a rural area might be a better place for our boys who were still living with us. We first checked out some properties in Chatham County fairly close to the Orange County and Chapel Hill boundary line. Nothing seemed to work. Then we found a rural area near Lake Jordan called Mt. Gilead Woods, a newly partitioned woodland area about 8 miles from Pittsboro, a neighborhood intended to become a community of 5 acre lots. The land was relatively cheap and mobile homes were acceptable. Our thoughts were to build a cabin on the property while living in a mobile home we could later sell. We decided that was our future, so we put the house on Blue Ridge on the market and signed papers on the Mt. Gilead Woods property. The house on Blue Ridge sold and that allowed us to pay off our debts and to purchase a new mobile home and have it delivered and setup on our Mt. Gilead Woods lot.

Installation of a well for water supply was one of the more fascinating experiences during our transition to Chatham County. The realtor who sold us the land recommended a ``well witch`` to help us find the right location to drill for water. We were skeptical, but since it was a local custom, we decided to pay the modest fee for the man to divine where the well company would drill down through the rock beneath our land. The ``well witch`` was a man in his sixties who brought with him a divining rod consisting of a pointed stick about three feet long with a fork of two branches at the top. He held the two branches in his hand and walked an area of the hillside where we planned to have our home. After a few minutes of exploration the long pointed end of his divining rod suddenly went down, and he marked the spot. The well company, which was standing by, moved in and began to drill the hole. About forty feet down they struck through the rock and found a good supply of water, enough to provide some 40 gallons a minute after the pump was installed.

We had a road built with a driveway in front that circled an old oak tree. We had a beautiful new mobile home delivered to the hillside above the circle, and had a plumber plug in our new water supply. We also had a septic field installed as far away from the water supply as

feasible and had pipes run to it from the house. We then packed up our belongings and moved from our Blue Ridge Home to Mt. Gilead Woods.

Since the home was positioned on the side of a hill, with the downslope in front, our front door was several feet off of the ground. We had to access our new house through a rear door which was only a foot off of the ground, using a temporary stepping stone.

I soon set about building a deck with stairs to the ground level on the front of the home. To do so, I cut down some large cedar trees on our property and cut them into lengths appropriate for posts supporting a deck. I skinned the cedars, and set them on concrete pavers to prevent future rotting. When I had framed in the porch with 2x8 lumber attached to the cedar posts, I installed a floor made of 2x4 treated lumber and built a stair to the ground at one end.

Our plan was to live in the mobile home for a year or two and then to build a cabin on the hillside nearby. The cabin never was built. By this time Sarah, who had taught school in Wake County after graduating from UNC, was now a teacher on Okeechobee Florida. Sam lived with us for a while before packing up and moving to Okeechobee too.

John Mark lived with us in Mt. Gilead Woods for much of our time there. It was not easy for any of us. John Mark was unable to settle down at night and could be heard moving around the trailer. We kept our bedroom door locked but it was still difficult for us to sleep when he was pacing the floor and talking to the voices in his head.

At some point, John Mark left. We were worried sick about him. We did not know where he had gone. After several months, we saw him one day coming up the driveway. It seems he had hitchhiked across the south as far as Texas, and had experienced several very real dangers. We were relieved to have him safely home, but were once again stressed by his presence.

PART V: CALLED TO MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY

We tried at some point to get some mental health treatment for John Mark from the Mental Health Center in Pittsboro. At the time that did not last, but it did lead to a transforming moment in my life. In the winter of 1984 I received a letter from a social worker in the Mental Health Center office in Pittsboro telling me about the planned organizational conference of a state National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) affiliate. The flyer excited me and on March 17, 1984, I drove my little pickup truck to Greensboro for the first statewide conference of NAMI NC.

I learned that some 20 families with mentally ill relatives had first come together in October of 1983 to plan the conference. When I looked around the conference center that day, attended by several hundred people, I realized at a profound level that I was not alone in my journey as a parent of a seriously mentally ill child.

Two specific memories stand out from that day. Two of the speakers, Jackie Parish and Eugene Douglass, the then Director of the Division of Mental Health for the state (yes, the same position I would serve in more than a decade later) spoke about how wonderful deinstitutionalization was, and how marvelous it was that so many mentally ill people were no longer hospitalized.

My experience was that John Mark had spent some horrible times on the streets because of deinstitutionalization. I had taken care of him when he should have been in the hospital. I became angry and before I knew what was happening I stood up and made an angry speech about how deinstitutionalism was not working very well. The audience clapped when I finished speaking, though I learned later that some present that day, who believed strongly in deinstitutionalization, were troubled by my comments.

As I drove home in my pickup truck that day, I felt a profound calling, as clear as the one I had received in that little chapel at Martin College when I knew I was supposed to be a minister. This time I realized I was called to be an advocate for persons with mental illness. I

may not be able to find a cure for my son, I reasoned, but I can help families who are struggling alone to find support, and I can help advocate for better services for their mentally ill loved ones. I decided during my 60 mile trip home that afternoon that I was going to go back and organize a local affiliate of the NC Alliance for the Mentally Ill. So, in addition to continuing my graduate school work, as well as my tutoring and counseling business in Raleigh, I set about trying to organize a Chatham County affiliate. As I worked on that mission it became clear to me that it would be a much stronger affiliate if it included both Chatham and Orange Counties.

With the help of the local mental health centers I was able to send letters to family members in those two counties and invite them to an organizational meeting of the Orange Chatham Alliance for the Mentally Ill. We began with a support meeting approach, in which we shared our personal stories of mental illness in our families, we availed ourselves of NAMI educational information about mental illness, and discussed ways in which to advocate for better local services. Not long after beginning our group and letting the NAMI NC board know of our existence, I was invited by President Elaine Purple to become a member of the state board and began to attend the board's monthly meetings.

Because I lived and worked in the Raleigh Metropolitan Area, I was asked to serve the board as a co-chair of the legislative committee. As a result I spent considerable time attending legislative meetings, especially The Mental Health Study Commission, and calling on legislators in their offices to talk about the problems and the needs of the mental health system. Since we were a statewide organization, almost all of the members of the legislature had constituents who were NAMI members. Sometimes those members would contact their representatives to help us gain access.

The Emily Cannon Tragedy

On December 5, 1984 a major tragedy occurred with one of our NAMI-NC Board members. Emily Cannon, a 40 year old African

American high school history teacher was killed by her 20 year old son, Bobby, ``because she was getting on his case.`` The tragedy produced national attention due to the fact that the Mecklenburg County mental health system had failed for weeks to respond to her pleas for help with her son.

Emily had persistently contacted the mental health center several times and attempted to share information and obtain appropriate treatment for Bobby`s illness, his use of street drugs, and acts of violence toward both his parents. Emily had repeatedly attempted to get the agency to assess her son for treatment. When a doctor did finally agree to see her son, he refused to talk with Emily and therefore failed to have the full story of Bobby`s dangerousness. Four days before Bobby stabbed and beat his mother to death and dumped her pajama clad body face up in a wooded area, Emily wrote a letter to the Mecklenburg County Mental Health agency stating it ``has failed my son.`` The Thursday, December 6 Metro Final of the Charlotte Observer devoted four full pages to the tragedy. The story was picked up by the New York Times, and, almost a year later, on December 1, 1985, it became a sub story of a CBS 60 Minutes episode on Schizophrenia with host Ed Bradley. The 60 Minutes episode, partly filmed in Charlotte, interviewed members of NAMI NC, including Millie and myself, about the challenges of getting help for family members with schizophrenia.



**Emily Cannon
Photo used on
60 Minutes**



**Ed Bradley on 60 Minutes
December 1, 1985 program**



**Millie, Me, and Some
NC AMI Board
Members on 60
Minutes Program**

Millie shared how John Mark had once tried to get himself hospitalized for his illness, was evaluated, and turned down by Dorothea Dix clinical staff. He then went to the rest room at the hospital and slit his wrist. At that point the hospital admitted him. Her sharing of this was one of the more dramatic moments of that 60 Minutes show.



**Millie and my beard on 60
Minutes Schizophrenia Show**

Chair of NAMI NC Legislative Committee

In January of 1985, while the trauma of Emily Cannon's tragic death was still rippling throughout the NAMI-NC community, I was spending considerable time attending meetings of The Mental Health Study Commission of the General Assembly that was working on some recodification of state mental health law at that time.

At one of the meetings I shared the story of Dorothea Dix, for whom our local state psychiatric hospital was named, and described her compassionate efforts to create humane asylums for people with psychiatric illnesses. I talked about how we now, with deinstitutionalization, were returning to the same conditions of homelessness and individual and family trauma that had motivated her to work for reform in the early 1800s. When I finished, a legislator from Charlotte, commented that I might just be today's version of Dorothea Dix. I appreciated the compliment, but let the committee know that what I would appreciate more were changes in the statute that NCAMI was recommending.

I had previously drafted four desired changes in North Carolina mental health law. Three of these, influenced by the Emily Cannon tragedy and my own experience with John Mark, dealt with the definition of dangerous to self or others. The intent of these changes was to provide a more realistic assessment of dangerousness for magistrates, judges, and clinicians to consider. Our recommendation was (1) for those doing involuntary commitment assessments to take into consideration extreme property damage (often a precursor of personal assaults) in determining dangerousness, and (2) consider any history of previous dangerous behavior in determining appropriateness of commitment. Our recommendation that family members be represented on the boards of the 41 Area Mental Health Programs in the state was not agreed to at this time. It was approved at a later meeting.

At a March 25, 1986 meeting of the Legislative Committee on Psychiatric Hospital Admission and Discharge Policies, I gave testimony

in which I talked about why the problem of a system wide refusal to admit, and the quick release of psychiatric patients, was a practice placing both patients and family members at great risk.

In my statement I talked about the reasons why this problem existed and why it was so difficult to solve. My argument included the following:

- 1. There is tremendous pressure, including legal threats, to reduce hospital bed utilization at the psychiatric hospitals due to the cost of inpatient care. In the case of Dorothea Dix hospital in Raleigh these pressures include the local political desire to appropriate the land and facilities for other purposes.*
- 2. The lack of consistency on the part of both the legal and clinical decision makers in determining the standard of dangerousness necessary to require inpatient care. The biggest failure resulting from this is the inconsistency in applying the idea of ``dangerous to self.``*
- 3. Physicians often determine patients are ready to return to the community based on a reductionistic inpatient clinical view rather than in consideration of family and community experience and concerns.*
- 4. The lack of appropriate aftercare and the paucity of community services available.*
- 5. The laws are designed to protect the less seriously mentally ill from inappropriate treatment and stigma and not to assure the seriously mentally ill their right to treatment.*

After making these points I recommended 7 amendments to the Mental Health laws of the state addressing these problems. My 8th and final recommendation was for an appropriation of a minimum of 10 million for the psychiatric hospitals and 20 million for the Area Mental Health Programs.

While few of these recommendations received serious attention at this time, they did provide guidance for NAMI NC advocacy for several years to come.

NAMI NC BOARD MEETINGS

Every second Saturday of the month, during the mid 1980s, I drove to Greensboro for a day-long meeting of the NAMI NC Board of Directors. These meetings were characterized by passionate discussions in which we hammered out our advocacy policies.

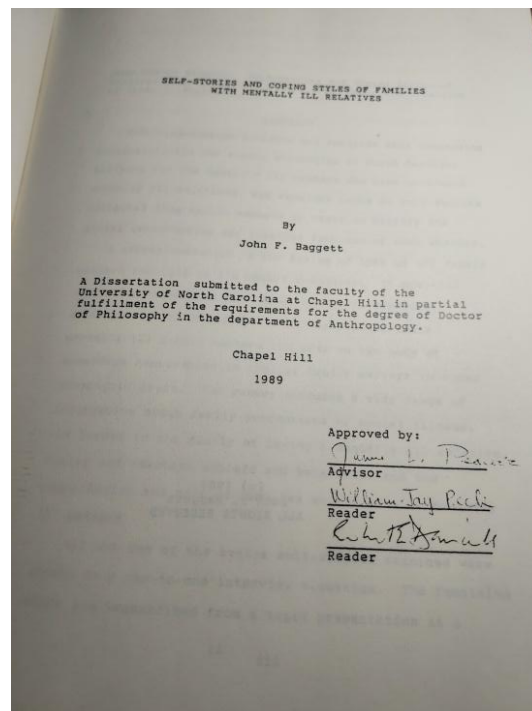
The early meetings revealed a division between those who primarily saw NAMI as needing to advocate for better psychiatric hospital accessibility and care, a topic highlighted by a great deal of press coverage at the time, and those who were passionate about their belief in the need for better outpatient community based services. After much emotionally charged debate we arrived at the conclusion that both types of treatment services were needed and began to speak of the need for a ``continuum of care.'' Moreover, we decided that the hospitals would always be needed as an important ingredient of that continuum, while much improved community services were needed in order to assure successful discharges from those facilities.

As a co-chair of the legislative committee, I felt it my responsibility to educate the legislature and their constituencies about this continuum of care vision.

PH.D. Dissertation Study

While I had chosen to seek a degree in Anthropology out of a longtime interest in the relationship of culture and religion, I discovered during my first years of study unexpected insight into mental illness, treatment, and their cultural manifestations. Early on I became fascinated by the relationship of religion and psychotic thought. Many persons with psychosis articulated their experiences in religious terms. Some believed the voices they were hearing came from God. Some believed they were messianic figures, even identifying as Jesus Christ, as a famous study called *The Three Christ's of Ypsilanti* illustrated.

These phenomena fascinated me, and once I had completed my Master Thesis in the Anthropology of Religion, I began to research ``religious ideation in psychotic thought.`` I managed to convince John Umstead State Psychiatric Hospital in Butner NC to let me interview some patients whose psychoses included religious symbolism. While my NAMI work at the time soon led me in a different Ph.D. dissertation direction, I did, at the time, conclude that many people experiencing psychotic thought tended to interpret those experiences by using the transcendent language and concepts of their own cultural reality, in other words religion, at least partially, as a way to validate and normalize their bizarre thoughts.



Doctoral
Dissertation

Approval
Document

While such a subject interested me I soon began to want my dissertation to be of some use to our NAMI movement. Many anthropology students did field work overseas in other cultural settings. Because of my family obligations I did not have that option. I did learn that other anthropologists had done field work in this country among certain populations. One of my professors, Dr. Sue Estroff, had studied mental patients released to the community in Madison Wisconsin. Her

work had turned into a book titled: *Making it Crazy*. I soon decided and received permission to do my fieldwork among the family members of NAMI North Carolina.

During my faculty experience at the Ecumenical Institute I had been exposed to the idea of the importance of self-stories and their relationship with coping styles and strategies. I later learned self-stories were usually the focus of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Narrative Therapy. I knew, at the time, from my own NAMI family support group, and from attending NAMI NC Board meetings, consisting entirely of family members, that families needed to tell their stories, to share their pain, and when they did, other families experienced healing. I decided to call my dissertation research, *Self-Stories and Coping Styles of Families with Mentally Ill Relatives*. My fieldwork then involved recording family narratives of their journeys with mentally ill relatives, and reflecting on the ways in which those stories revealed their methods and styles of coping.

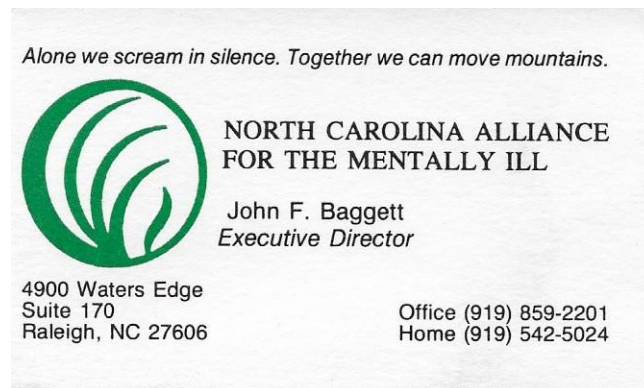
It was my hope that my work would someday help mental health professionals understand and empathize with families. While psychiatric pioneers, like Dr. E. Fuller Torrey, had changed the paradigm of serious mental illnesses, like schizophrenia, from one of psychological family origin and blame, to one of brain dysfunction and disease, there were still many mental health professionals that held to outdated and cruel blaming beliefs about family members. Such beliefs damaged family members, especially parents, and, by extension, persons with mental illnesses.

Beginning in the winter of 1986 I began interviewing 12 members of NAMI NC. I would ask each one a single question: ``What is your story of mental illness in your family?`` I also conducted a survey of 176 NAMI NC families that provided demographic information about family members, their mentally ill relatives, and treatment experience.

I did not complete and defend my dissertation until 1989, after which I was awarded a Ph.D. By that time several other major changes had occurred in my life.

Executive Director of NAMI NC

In the Winter of 1986, the Board of Directors of the North Carolina Alliance for the Mentally Ill applied for and received a \$20,000 seed money grant from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation for the purpose of opening an office in the Raleigh area and hiring an Executive Director. Since I lived and worked in that region of the state and had already been doing much of the work of an executive director in my advocacy efforts with state government, the board asked if I would be willing to take a leap of faith and become their first executive director. I knew the grant would not be enough to provide security for me, but I was glad to have the opportunity, even if it meant having to raise the money for my own salary. The board set my original salary at \$50,000 a year, with the understanding I would need to raise the money necessary for that to happen.



At the time my associate, Dr. John O`Connell and I were operating a tutoring and youth counseling practice in the Oak Park community of Raleigh. I sold my business to Dr. O`Connell but continued for a few months to use my section of the office as the NC NAMI headquarters. The Raleigh and Durham NAMI chapters provided unpaid volunteers to help staff the office in those early days. I later moved our headquarters to an office on Waters Edge Drive, on the west side of Raleigh.

During those years, much of my time was spent in meetings with the Coalition for Persons Disabled by Mental Illness, which included representatives from professional associations of social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists. The coalition allowed me to influence the advocacy agendas of those associations and increase the effectiveness of our NAMI legislative efforts. I also wrote letters to editors of local papers and letters to members of the General Assembly of North Carolina, especially those who were members of the Mental Health Study Commission. My advocacy was focused in those early years on the problems of overcrowding and understaffing of state psychiatric hospitals, and lack of priority in community services for people with serious mental illnesses. On January 25, 1987, I was featured in *The Raleigh News and Observer* as the *“Tar Heel of the Week.”* in which both my personal story as the father with a mentally ill son, and my advocacy role with NAMI NC were highlighted.

Fighting for the rights of the state's mentally ill

By GUY MUNGER

John F. Baggett says a "strange kind of journey" led him to his job as executive director of the North Carolina Alliance for the Mentally Ill. It was an intensely personal journey, pushed along by the illness of a son.

The boy was 17 when the Baggetts were told he was seriously ill, schizophrenic. There followed long years during which they learned the hard frustrations of finding adequate care. Now 26, he has an ill and hard time being able to work, Baggett said, but he takes care of himself, his home and his two dogs.

Baggett said he was willing to talk about his son's illness because "the opportunity to tell the story, to impress other people with the reality of the experience, to help other people, justifies whatever risk is involved."

"I guess I have always been someone who has been active in trying to set right some of society's problems," Baggett said. "But it was only after learning to cope with this illness that I began to get concerned about the broader social responsibility. I had to learn from personal experience the mentally ill's relationship with services for the mentally ill, about the way the legal system works."

"I had to learn to be an effective advocate and bring to the job my own personal experience."

Baggett, a heavyset, bearded man of 55, was trained for the ministry at Vanderbilt University and was pastor of two Methodist churches in Chicago, director of development at Lehigh College and owner and director of the Creative Education Institute, a Raleigh youth counseling and tutorial service, before becoming the first full-time executive director of the N.C. Alliance for the Mentally Ill last June.

"I really feel that the work of the alliance is my ministry," Baggett said. "I wouldn't have chosen it for myself, but it has been chosen for me by the circumstances."

As the city's paid employee of the statewide alliance, Baggett answers questions from members, puts relatives of the mentally ill in touch with agencies that can help them, lobbies legislators and presides on behalf of mental patients wherever he can.

"Fortunately John is a workaholic," said Doris Davis Jeter of Raleigh, a member of the state alliance's board of directors. "He writes and speaks with a foundation of knowledge about mental illness and fills every job slot we need filled."

Louise G. Fisher of Raleigh, another board member, added, "Until you've walked the walk, you can't talk the talk. He has made the walk, and he understands the pain families go through."

Baggett's reputation has spread beyond the borders of North Carolina. Calls for help come to him from out of state, and at a last weekend sponsored by the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, a delegate from Tennessee told the group, "One of our goals is to go back and find a John Baggett of our own."

The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill was formed in late 1979 by a couple of hundred families in Madison, Wis., and is now "the fastest growing, self-help consumer organization in the country," Baggett said. National membership is 37,000 families, more than 1,500 of them in North Carolina.

Baggett was introduced to the alliance in March 1984 when the first North Carolina affiliate was formed in Greensboro.

"My wife and I had really done a lot of suffering alone with the problem," Baggett said, "and we found that first meeting very helpful. There was something about it. For the first time we were encountering other people with similar problems."

"One of the most important functions of the alliance is that it

of the mentally ill say, "Neither I nor the alliance wants the pendulum to swing back if it means putting everybody in the hospital, locking them up and keeping them there," Baggett said. "Certainly I do not want the least human rights of the mentally ill endangered in any way. (That) the right to receive treatment is being violated by the present system as it works and functions."

And the right to receive treatment means, preponderance over the right to refuse treatment, Baggett said.

"... If it's 9 degrees outside and you come up to somebody who thinks they're the Virgin Mary of an alley by a trash can and you say, 'Wouldn't you like to go to a shelter?' and they say, 'No, then I think society has a responsibility to provide some care for that person.'"

Society also has a responsibility to protect itself, he acknowledges. The issue was raised recently when patients known to have been violent were granted passes to leave Brunswick Day Hospital temporarily, then failed to return on time.

Feeling that home leaves help prepare patients to re-enter the outside world, Baggett said, "I certainly do not want to tie the hands of the physicians, but we do have to look at where there have been problems. We want to protect the public but we don't want the patient ground down. He is not a monster who did something through malice."

How effective is Baggett as a mental health spokesman? State Human Resources Secretary Philip J. Glick, who has occasionally crossed swords with Baggett over such questions as funding for mental hospitals and overcrowding, said, "I thought at first that he came on too strong, but I've changed my impression about him. I think he's sincere and I have grown in our jobs. He usually has his facts straight. He also has been involved in the

mental health system because of experience with his son and that makes him doubly effective as an advocate."

Baggett and his wife live on a 10-acre wooded tract in rural Chatham County. "I like to putter around, watch the deer come up and eat out of the yard," he said. Baggett did get in some fishing over the Christmas holidays and proudly displayed a snook of a catch in Lake Okechobee, Fla.

Baggett, who is working on his doctorate dissertation in psychology and sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, remains hopeful about the future for the state's mentally ill.

The alliance is actively pushing research," he said. "At some point, we want to see some breakthroughs. We want to see the nightmare end."

For the record

JOHN F. BAGGETT III
 Born: Nashville, Tenn., Aug. 16, 1930.
 Family: wife, Mildred Vaughn Baggett; three children, one grandchild.
 Education: B.A. in English, Kentucky Wesleyan College, master of divinity, Vanderbilt University; master's in anthropology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
 Career: Methodist pastor, Chicago, 1950s; dean of training academy, Institute of Cultural Affairs, 1970-72; director of development, mental hospitals and overcrowding, 1973-76; owner and director, Creative Education Institute, 1975-86; executive director, N.C. Alliance for the Mentally Ill, 1986-present.

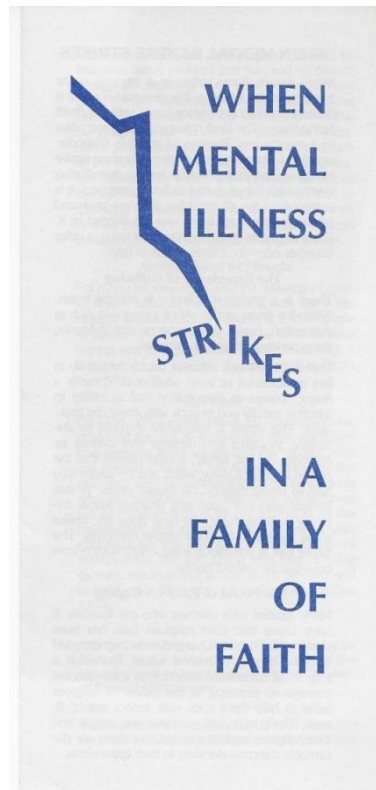
I was also featured in a cover story in *The Leader* magazine on May 4, 1989 titled *“John Baggett Fights for Sanity.”* Another cover story appeared in *Southern Exposure* magazine in the Fall of 1989 titled *“Like Lightning Striking”* which also shared my personal journey along with my advocacy role.



In addition to my advocacy efforts, during my Executive Director days, I spent considerable time on the road, travelling the length of North Carolina, organizing new affiliates and speaking to existing ones. Through those efforts we were able to secure enough grass roots financial support to fully fund the office, to increase the number of local affiliates from 13 in 1986 to 42 in 1990, one for each local public mental health agency in the state, and to significantly increase NAMI effectiveness in gaining the support of legislators from all regions of North Carolina for our advocacy goals. Through our fundraising efforts, especially the monthly contributions of our growing membership we were able to increase our annual budget in 1990 to \$220,000.

During this time I became a delegate to a *Pathways to Promise* convention which NAMI nationally sponsored. Pathways was an organization of persons from faith based communities dedicated to helping their constituents understand mental illness and to respond therapeutically and compassionately to persons and families challenged by mental illnesses. I was given the responsibility of designing a

brochure to be used for this purpose. The brochure was published and shared widely during the early years of the Pathways organization.



I also contributed an article to the October 1988 edition of The North Carolina Medical Journal for Patients, titled ``The Mental Illness Awakening.'' In it I spoke of the paradigm shift in understanding and treating mental illnesses that now distinguishes between the biologically based serious mental illnesses of the brain, and the life adjustment mental health concerns to which everyone is subject, a distinction necessary for enlightened mental health policy and effective professional treatment.

A major accomplishment in the early years of the NAMI NC state office was the establishment of a 1-800 Helpline which provided guidance for mental health consumers and family members throughout the state in accessing mental health services.

We later moved to an office in the North Hills area of Raleigh. One of the things we did at that time was to submit a grant application to the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and

Substance Abuse Services to help organize and provide office space for a North Carolina Mental Health Consumers Organization. We received the grant, interviewed candidates for the organizations Executive Director and hired one of them. We also provided office space for that organization.

Because I often spoke at local NC AMI affiliate meetings across the state news articles featuring my message often appeared in regional and local papers. For example, an April 22, edition of The Asheville Citizen carried an article about a presentation I made to the local NAMI affiliate titled ``Families Not at Fault for Mental Illness.``

14A The Asheville Citizen, Friday, April 22, 1988

Families Not At Fault For Mental Illness

By CATHY McJUNKIN
Staff Writer

There was a time when John F. Baggett was too embarrassed to discuss his son's mental illness with anyone outside his own family.

But as years passed and more and more information about schizophrenia became available, Baggett realized there was nothing he could have done to keep his child safe from the disease.

"I know now that this illness is a biological disease, that it was not his fault, it was not my fault, it wasn't anybody's fault," said Baggett, executive director of the N.C. Alliance for the Mentally Ill since its creation in 1986.

"I consider it a tragedy that my son is men-



BAGGETT

tally ill, but given his illness and my experience with it, it really helps me to help other families going through the same thing."

Baggett, who spoke to members of the alliance's Western North Carolina affiliate Wednesday night in Asheville, said he often relates his personal story as he travels across the state as an advocate for the mentally ill.

His son, now 28, became ill at the age of 17, and has been fighting an uphill battle just to survive since then, Baggett said.

"He's not able to work, he's not able to concentrate and he has days when he's too depressed to do much at all," Baggett said. "I know what it takes to cope with something like this and talking about it openly helps."

As executive director of the Raleigh-based state alliance, Baggett spends much of his time organizing new affiliates and counseling families experiencing problems with services for their mentally ill members. Meeting with coalition groups concerned with insurance, vocational services and

other issues is also his responsibility.

"We're trying to help families to figure out what their choices are for the problems they're facing," he said. "We're constantly involved in making contact with people in the administration, the governor's office and the legislature to educate them about the needs of the mentally ill."

Advocates of the mentally ill in North Carolina are particularly interested in development of a system that would provide continuing care in the absence of family members, Baggett said.

"We're not always going to be here to take care of the mentally ill in our families," he said. "There needs to be a system that would see that the needs of the seriously mentally ill are met. Having the resources to do that means a serious commitment on the part of the state of North Carolina. That's what we're working toward."

The state alliance is a branch of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, the fastest-growing self-help organization in the country, Baggett said.

The Orange Person Chatham Area Mental Health Board

After forming the Orange Chatham NAMI chapter I realized that it would help our effectiveness to have representation on The Orange Person Chatham Mental Health Center Board of Directors. In 1986, the same year that I became the NCAMI executive director, a vacancy occurred on the OPC Area Board for a representative from my home county of Chatham. By that time I was already in my NC AMI Executive Director Role and was well known in the area as an advocate. I reached out to the County Commissioners and asked to be appointed to represent Chatham County. A couple of our local NAMI members

put in a good word for me and at their next meeting the Commissioners voted for me to represent the county on the area mental health board.

The Executive Director of the program immediately recognized it was in his best interest to get on my good side and welcomed me warmly. Within the year, the current chair of the board rotated off the board and I was selected, at the recommendation of the OPC Executive Director, to serve as board chair, a position I held through 1989. That role gave me insights into the local mental health programs in North Carolina, important to my later advocacy and my role as state Mental Health Director.

Throughout the late 1980s I continued vigorous advocacy and found myself frequently featured in news coverage throughout the state.

P.I.C. - N+O - Aug - 6-'86 Martin asked to provide funds to expand psychiatric hospitals

By SHARON OVERTON
Staff Writer

Advocates for the mentally ill called on Gov. James G. Martin Tuesday to declare a state of emergency in North Carolina's four psychiatric hospitals and to provide funds immediately to expand the capacity of overcrowded admissions wards.

John F. Baggett, executive director of the N.C. Alliance for the Mentally Ill, said emergency funds were needed to open new admissions wards at each hospital and to establish a separate admissions ward for dangerous patients.

Although safety problems have been highlighted in recent months at Dorothea Dix Hospital in Raleigh, the safety of patients and staff at all of the state's psychiatric hospitals is threatened by

overcrowding and inadequate staffing, Baggett said.

"We're asking for substantial amounts of money to be provided from the governor's contingency fund to deal with the problem until the budgetary process can begin to catch up," he said in a telephone interview. Baggett said he could not give an estimate of how much the new services might cost.

Martin was traveling and could not be reached for comment, said Tim R. Pittman, the governor's press secretary. Pittman said Martin had been in contact recently with state Human Resources Secretary Phillip J. Kirk Jr. concerning safety problems at Dix.

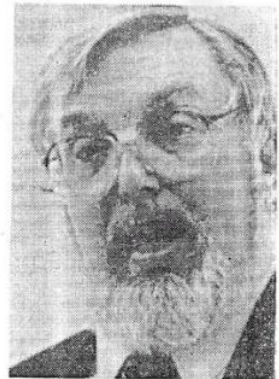
"He will certainly take a look at the request," Pittman said.

Kirk called Friday for an examination of crowding at Dix after a memorandum from hospital Safe-

ty Officer Robert H. Dowling warned that the hospital risked catastrophe if it continued to ignore problems on its three admissions wards. The memo said conditions on the wards were "unacceptable and even frightening."

Two recent incidents have illustrated the problem of mixing dangerous mental patients with those who are less aggressive, advocates say.

In June, a 54-year-old Dix patient died after being severely beaten by another patient with a criminal background and a history of violence. And last week, four male patients were arrested and charged with second-degree rape after an incident involving a 19-year-old female patient. One of the men had been released less than two weeks earlier from Cen-



John F. Baggett

tral Prison, where he was serving time for murdering a police chief.

Kirk said Friday that he would consider increasing the capacity of the admissions wards at Dix if the review warranted it. Kirk also said he had asked for \$4.8 million in fiscal years 1987-88 and 1988-89

See MARTIN, page 2C

Cherry Hospital Conditions Lead To 'Warehoused'

By KAREN GARLOCH

Overcrowding and understaffing at Cherry Hospital in Goldsboro, one of four state psychiatric institutions, is resulting in "warehousing" of patients and dangerous conditions for patients and staff, advocates for the mentally ill complained Monday.

At a news conference in Goldsboro, John Baggett, executive director of the N.C. Alliance for the Mentally Ill, blamed the Gov. Jim

Martin and the General Assembly for not spending enough money to eliminate problems at Cherry and for the state's 84,000 chronically mentally ill people.

"These conditions are the direct result of the lack of adequate funding to develop community-based alternative services in North Carolina, particularly in the eastern region . . . and to hire an adequate number of direct-care staff at (Cherry) Hospital," Baggett said. Besides overcrowding, Baggett

"These conditions are the direct result of the lack of adequate funding to develop community-based alternative services in North Carolina. . . ."

— John Baggett

said, patients are often released from the institution, before they are ready and without having ap-

propriate therapy, to make room for new patients. Although incidents of violence

to patients decreased in the third quarter of 1988 over the same period in 1987, Baggett said violence to staff members increased in the same period. Minor injuries to staff increased from 10 to 24, and major injuries went from zero to two, he said.

One of the problems, Baggett said, is that seriously mentally ill people often are brought to the hospital in handcuffs, escorted by two armed sheriff's deputies, and then turned over to a single hospital employee. The employee must bring the patient, unhandcuffed, to the appropriate ward without assistance because of insufficient staff.

Dorothy Whitted Hardy, president of the Goldsboro-Wayne County branch of the NAACP, spoke on behalf of Cherry health-care technicians who recently came to her for help. She said the staff-to-patient ratio at Cherry is

See CONDITIONS Next Page

Conditions At Cherry Hospital Result In 'Warehoused' Patients

Continued From Preceding Page
sometimes 2-45.

"In situations like that, those technicians cannot provide even minimal care. They are dedicated people. They are frustrated, though," Hardy said.

Baggett called on legislators to approve Human Resources Secretary David Flaherty's recommendation for \$5 million in 1989-90 — including \$600,000 for Eastern North Carolina — for community

residential services for the chronically mentally ill. He also urged approval of Flaherty's recommendation for nearly \$1 million, specifically for Cherry, in 1989-90.

Terry Stelle, N.C. deputy director for mental health services, said, "We are quite concerned about the overcrowding that has continued now for quite some period of time."

Although Flaherty's initial budget request was for nearly \$6 mil-

lion in extra money for the mentally ill in 1989-90, Stelle said, "We just don't know where it stands."

"With the kind of revenue shortfall we seem to be looking at in the next biennium, we're just not sure where this priority is going to sort out. There are just so many priorities facing the governor and the legislature. It's not a good year for expansion requests."

The Charlotte Observer
Tuesday, December 20, 1988

'Hold The Governor To His Promise'

Understaffing May Be

By William Holtzman

Goldsboro/Wayne chapter of the NAACP Dorothy Hardy says her organization is joining hands with the North Carolina Alliance for the Mentally Ill in calling the public's attention "to what we believe to be a violation of the rights of some mentally ill patients who have been committed to Cherry Hospital."

Mrs. Hardy's comments came at a press conference aimed at dramatizing what is being described as a crisis situation with the understaffing of health-care technicians at Cherry and three other state institutions.

Mrs. Hardy called upon all citizens to appeal to Governor Martin, legislators, and the division for mental health services "to take immediate steps to remedy conditions that violate the rights of patients and staff at Cherry Hospital."

Jerney Minshew of Wilson, a member of the N.C. Alliance for the Mentally Ill and father of a 35-year-old son now under treatment at Cherry, outlined a grim story.

Minshew said his son is now on Christmas leave.

"It is my wonder that my son remarked to me that he will commit suicide rather than the alternative of staying at Cherry Hospital," Minshew said.

He contends that prisoners in maximum security prisons receive better care and treatment than is provided by state mental hospitals.

He called the U-2 Admissions Unit at Cherry "a hell-hole."

Since his son's arrival at Cherry last August, Minshew said any type of therapy is unheard of. "Most of his day is spent sitting around waiting for his vital signs to be taken,

waiting for the bathroom or for food."

He said his family and the life of his son has been a nightmare and attributed it to "inadequate treatment afforded the severely mentally ill in North Carolina."

He said his son is now in the third extended visit at Cherry and has yet to receive any therapeutic treatment.

"Cherry Hospital," he said, "and probably the other state mental institutions, take the position that they have successfully treated a patient whenever that person becomes stabilized on the anti-psychotic medication prescribed. This can occur in as little as five days and the patient is then released to society."

Minshew also said that county mental health centers, particularly in western North Carolina, have not taken the lead to develop living and treatment programs.

Instead, he said, they tend to spend their funds on more popular programs such as drug and substance abuse.

And, added Minshew, "The main reason Cherry Hospital is so terribly overcrowded today is due to the failure of the county mental health centers to formulate living and treatment programs for the severely mentally ill."

Another parent and member of the Cherry Hospital Human Rights Committee, Emily Moore, expressed deep concern.

"We are giving poor, less than minimum care for our sickest, most helpless citizens," she said.

"We have the mentally ill, the mentally retarded, the substance abuse, the aggressive and assaultive, those who have committed crimes—murder, arson—all

thrown in together. Is this not a disgrace," she said.

Mrs. Moore asked, "Does no one really care?" N.C. Alliance for the Mentally Ill Director John Baggett said that Governor Martin has written Alliance members saying that the funding of services for seriously mentally ill persons would be a priority in the new year's budget.

"It is time for the Governor to make good on his promise and the Legislature to give him bi-partisan support," Baggett said.

He said that advocates for the mentally ill in this state need the support of the people "to convince the politicians that mentally ill persons deserve better."

Baggett even hinted of legal action, but said he is hopeful it will not have to come to that.

Baggett outlined three major areas focusing on recommendation aimed at reducing overcrowding and improve staffing of Health Care Technicians.

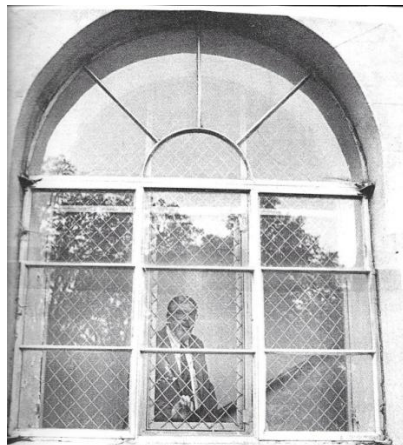
He is seeking \$5 million in the 1989-90 budget and a \$16 million in the 1990-91 budget for Adults With Severe and Persistent Mental Illness.

Baggett's statewide group is also seeking nearly \$934,000 in the upcoming budget and another \$1.2 million in the 1990-91 budget for the creation of a Cherry Hospital High Management Unit for females and to begin to bring staffing levels up to those of Danforth Dix Hospital.

And, for Cherry Hospital specifically, Baggett is asking for funding for at least 20 new Health Care Technicians.

Baggett said the serious and on-going overcrowding of patients and understaffing of direct care positions at

Violation Of Mentally Ill Rights
—NCTO MEMS, WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 25, 1988
Holtzman, N.C.



retrieving the lost
souls

For every mentally ill person there is a family, and all are victims of the illness. Having fought his own battles with desperation, John Baggett started fighting for others. It's an endless war.

Sun. April 17, 1988

Baggett To Speak At Highland Hospital

■ Baggett To Speak

John F. Baggett, executive director of the N.C. Alliance for the Mentally Ill, will speak at 7 p.m. Wednesday in Homewood School Building at Highland Hospital.

Baggett, whose responsibilities include organization of local affiliates, public education, government relations and consumer referral and advocacy, will discuss services for the mentally ill.

He will also speak during grand rounds at the hospital at 1 p.m. Wednesday.

For information call 254-3201, Ext. 233.

Medical Notes

■ Office Emergencies

A dinner symposium on office emergencies will be at 4:30 p.m. Tuesday at Mountain Area Health Education Center. Registration is required in advance. Call 257-4462.

■ Arthritis Self-Help

CLYDE — An arthritis self-help course will begin April 25 at Haywood County Hospital.

The group-education program is designed to give people with arthritis

the knowledge and skills needed to take a more active part in their arthritis care.

A fee of \$7 will be charged and advance registration is required. Call 452-8292 for information.

■ Wilverding Elected

Darla Wilverding of Fletcher has been elected to represent the Asheville Component of the N.C. Dental Hygienists' Association at the 1988 NCDHA House of Delegates in Lexington.

■ Ostomy Association

The Asheville Area Ostomy Association will meet at 2:30 p.m. Sunday at the Lutheran Church of the Nativity on U.S. 25 and Airport Road.

Greensboro News & Record

Robert D. Benson, *President and Publisher*
John R. Alexander, *Editorial Page Editor*

Ben J. Bowers, *Vice President and Executive Editor*
Ned Cline, *Managing Editor*

Monday, September 12, 1988

A10

'Horrendous' conditions

State legislators who toured the mental health ward of North Carolina's women's prison recently came away shocked. "Horrendous" and "appalling" were the adjectives they used to describe the living conditions they saw. John Baggett, executive director of the N.C. Alliance for the Mentally Ill, says the situation at Raleigh's Correctional Center for Women is "right out of the Middle Ages."

Prison officials concede that facilities are inadequate. Space is short, the 50-year-old building is dilapidated and there are no private rooms for treatment of these severely disturbed women. Although an average of 40 female inmates are usually classified as mentally ill, the prison's mental health ward has only six cells. Two of those are individual seclusion cells, stark 60-square-foot rooms with cinder block walls, peeling paint and concrete floors. To guard against suicide attempts, inmates confined in the cells are given only thin rubber mats, paper sheets and blankets.

The seclusion cells make an ugly picture; it's no wonder they've drawn the most criticism. But Alan Harrop, chief of the mental health services for the state Division of Prisons, says the real problem on the mental health ward is what you don't see. Because

Mentally ill inmates

of the shortage of space, violently ill inmates cannot be separated from those who are less troubled. Office space is so limited that individual therapy sessions can be held only if an officemate leaves the room.

In these cramped conditions, effective psychological and medical treatment is virtually impossible. That's a tragedy for these women, most of whom are chronically mentally ill and have a history of resisting treatment. It is also a tragedy for all North Carolinians. If these inmates are not helped in prison, their problems will become our problems once they are released.

Three years ago, the legislature turned down a request from the Division of Prisons for a 24-bed addition to women's prison for mentally ill inmates. Now the division is preparing to try again. It will ask the General Assembly next year to approve money — an estimated \$1.5 million to \$1.75 million — for a new mental health wing.

The group of legislators who toured the prison saw how desperately that money is needed. Their colleagues should listen, and act.

Overeaters Anonymous

Over the years as a pastor and a counselor, I had worked with a number of youth and adults who were addicted to alcohol or drugs. I had been addicted to cigarettes for about 10 years, but was able to quit as a New Year's resolution on January 1, 1975. Despite my clinical knowledge of addiction and my own nicotine addiction, I did not think of myself as having an addictive personality, at least not until my overeating increased my weight to 400 lbs.

Typical of an addict, I lived in denial for several years, though my food addiction was obvious to those around me. I remember a college student who I was counseling during the 1970s, well before I reached my greatest weight, referring to me as her ``personal Buddha.``

One summer afternoon in 1983, after I finished tutoring a young child at my Oak Park, Raleigh office, the boy's father asked to talk with me privately. I thought he wanted to talk about his son, but as this normal sized man talked to me about his historic struggle with food addiction it dawned on me that I was being ``12 stepped``. He concluded by inviting me to attend a meeting of Overeaters Anonymous on a Friday evening at a church in Raleigh.



I had been trying unsuccessfully to lose some of my 400 + pounds by dieting for the last two years so I was desperate. I felt the invitation to attend was providential but I worried going to the meeting and

participating might compromise my professional reputation in some way. I went home that evening and talked to Millie about it, and asked her to go with me on that coming Friday evening, as that might make me feel less conflicted. Millie, while not as overweight as me, had long struggled with her weight, so I thought it might be helpful to her as well. She agreed.

After attending that first meeting, and hearing others share about their struggle with compulsive overeating, I knew I was not alone and that there were reasons to be hopeful. I decided to take the OA program seriously. Overeaters Anonymous follows the 12 step program of Alcoholics Anonymous, but deals with food addiction rather than alcoholism. I began working the 12 steps, and obtained a sponsor. Millie, on the other hand, hated the meetings. I felt guilty for asking her to go with me and soon felt comfortable enough going alone to let her off the hook. She was clearly relieved.

For the next several years, I spent Friday evenings at my OA meeting and trying to follow the wisdom of the program throughout my week. My first OA sponsor was the same father who had 12 stepped me. With his help, I developed a food plan that was designed to help me deal with my food addiction and also lose weight. Soon the pounds began to melt away. But that was not the only benefit. The 12 step program helped me deal with the ongoing trauma of John Mark's mental illness and to take care of my own mental health while also assisting me in developing a healthy life style. I would, in time, with the help of that program, lose over 100 of my initial 400 lbs.

In January of 1984, Diane Ward, one of our faithful Friday Night OA members, brought her 3 month old baby to a meeting. I did not have a clue at the time how significant that mother and child would later be in my life.

The End of My First Marriage

I had been unhappy in my marriage for many years, at least dating back to my Chicago days as a pastor. That had come to a head

in the early days when Millie, at the time, decided she did not believe in God, a belief that had always been the foundation of our marriage, and of the highest significance for me as a young minister. During the Chicago years it occurred to me many times that I longed to be out of our marriage, but I stayed for both religious and paternal reasons. I took my marriage vows seriously, and I could not consider doing the harm a divorce would cause our children. So I stayed, and tried very hard to make it all work.

After we moved to Raleigh, there were a few months, about the time we bought the house on Blue Ridge Road, when we felt like we could be a family. After all, that was our hope and our goal when we left the Ecumenical Institute. But the kids were by then teens with all the usual challenges of those years, and then John Mark became ill. That totally consumed our energies and put an even greater strain on our marriage.

Then we moved to Chatham County, to Mt. Gilead Woods, and, one by one, our children left the nest. First, Sarah, following graduation from UNC Chapel Hill, and a brief stint of teaching in North Carolina, was recruited for a teaching job in Okeechobee Florida. Then Sam decided one day to drive to Okeechobee to join Sarah. John Mark stayed with us in our Mobile Home, when he was not hospitalized or hitch hiking across the country. His illness made us feel unsafe and on a couple of occasions he was very threatening to Millie. We finally purchased a Mobile Home in a mobile home park in northern Chatham County near Chapel Hill, and moved him to it. That left just the two of us and, at first, I tried to make it work.

I was working on my Ph.D. dissertation at the time and my reflections on my topic, *Self Stories and Coping Styles of Families with Mentally Ill Relatives*, helped me have insight into why I felt so miserably trapped in my marriage. My studies helped me to understand that Millie, who was a daughter of a mother with schizophrenia, and mother of a son with that same illness, viewed her lived reality through the lens of *the sufferer*. In other words, she viewed herself as a martyr, a person whose suffering had become the meaning of her life. While I understood this as a natural and human response to

her life experience, and that she could not at this point deal with life in any other way, I finally understood why she was perpetually unhappy and why my marriage had condemned me to a life of misery.

I began to ask myself if I was forever trapped in an unhappy marriage. I came to the conclusion, since all three children were settled elsewhere, and Millie had a successful teaching career, that I now had the option of leaving my marriage. I did not know if doing so would be a permanent or a temporary thing, but I was determined to find out.

One spring afternoon in 1989, when I was 52 years of age, I sat down with Millie and told her I had decided to leave. She surprised me by indicating she understood and thought it might be a good thing. That agreement did not last long, but it did last long enough for me to take my clothes, books, and computer, load them in my pickup truck, and move out.

At the time, I had been making a daily commute during the work week from my Chatham County home to my NAMI NC office in Raleigh. I found an apartment within walking distance of my office and signed a year's lease.

New Beginnings

Not long after moving into my apartment I got a phone call from a woman who was an executive director of one of the professional associations represented in the Coalition for Persons Disabled by Mental Illness. It was clear from the conversation that the word had spread that Millie and I had separated. She also made it clear she was available if I was interested in seeing someone. I let her know I was not ready to consider a new relationship and needed to focus on NAMI advocacy. And that is exactly what I did.

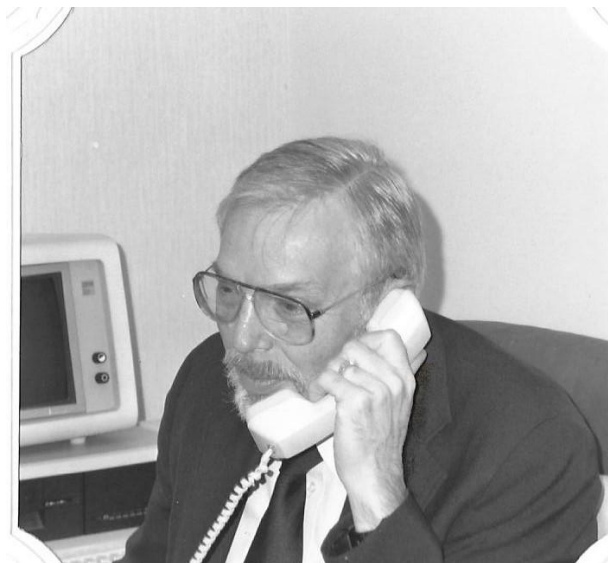
The Coalition for Persons with Mental Illness was very active in the spring of 1989 advocating in the legislature for major funding to expand community based services throughout the state. We asked for 5 million for adults with serious mental illness and additional funds for

mentally ill children. We held a rally in June of that year that received major press coverage. I was chosen to be the keynote speaker at the rally.



At the June rally, NC AMI Executive Director John Baggett exhorted the Legislature to pass the \$5 million appropriations bill for mental illness programs.

I also spent considerable time providing information and guidance to families throughout the state who called our NAMI NC Helpline.



**Answering the
NAMI – NC
Helpline**

I continued to attend meetings of OA, and, after becoming abstinent (refraining from compulsive overeating) for a year I let my home OA group know that I was available to sponsor others. I was asked immediately by two men to sponsor them, which I agreed to do. Then, in 1987, I was asked to become the sponsor of a female. Now Twelve Step programs frown on cross gender sponsorships and I was reluctant at first, but, I had learned some of the woman's life struggles, through her sharing at meetings, and I had counseled females many times over the years, and was confident I could maintain the proper boundaries. The woman was Diane Ward, the same one who had brought her three month old son to a meeting back in January of 1984. After listening to her share about her struggle with food, I soon came to the conclusion that I was probably the right person to help her with her OA program. That would turn out to be a life changing decision for both of us.

Diane was an intelligent woman, a successful nurse with major responsibilities at WakeMed hospital. She had a beautiful smile, and I soon found myself looking forward to spending time with her. As her sponsor I spent time on the phone with her daily, would meet her for dinner at restaurants where we could both successfully stay on our respective food plans, and then afterwards go to an OA meeting. We sometimes did this as often as three times a week.

Diane soon shared with me that she was in a very unhappy marriage. Based on her personal stories I soon concluded that her husband, and the father of her two children, was an alcoholic whose behavior suggested he might be gay. The alcoholism was self-evident. But, at first, even as we talked about this, Diane had difficulty recognizing the implications of his potentially gay behavior. Then she found evidence in the form of porn that clarified his sexual orientation. When she confronted him he admitted to living a ``down low`` life in which he sometimes met male strangers for sexual purposes. Diane at that point became

worried about the possibility of an H.I.V. infection, as well as the future of her marriage. She asked him to leave, and, he seemed relieved to do so.

At this point we were both free to pursue a relationship with each other and soon acknowledged that to one another. Although separated, we were both still technically married, but we found ourselves being drawn to one another in a powerful way. Things evolved rather quickly.

The local chapter of Overeaters Anonymous had a couple of retreats a year at regional retreat centers. While attending a retreat at Camp Agape near Fuquay Varina, North Carolina, we took a walk together and kissed for the first time. I realized that weekend that I was truly in love for the first time in my life. In my younger years I had been attracted to girls and dated them, and I had dated Millie primarily in search of an appropriate preacher's wife, but when Diane and I first kissed, I finally understood what it feels like to be head over heels in love.



Head Over Heels
in Love

We began seeing each other for dates other than OA meetings. We even took a couple of memorable beach trips together. Then, Millie and I, after some contentious negotiations, became legally separated, as did Diane and her husband, Ron. Diane invited me to move into her home on Beechwood Court in Knightdale which I gladly did.

I continued my NAMI Executive Director role throughout this time. Both of our divorces were finalized in 1989 and on Christmas Eve of that year, I asked Diane to marry me. She said yes.



**Engaged on
Christmas Eve
1989**

Sarah Becomes Teacher of the Year

While I was experiencing radical changes in my life, something wonderful and amazing occurred in daughter Sarah's life. In the winter of 1990, Sarah, who was teaching first grade at Everglades Elementary School in Okeechobee, was selected as Okeechobee Teacher of the year.



As exciting as that was, it was only the beginning. As an Okeechobee County Teacher of the Year she became a candidate for the 1991 Florida Teacher of the Year and won. I could not have been more proud of my girl.

1991 Teacher of the Year
OKEECHOBEE
Sarah Baggett Gustafson
 Everglades Elementary School
E-mail: N/A
Subject: N/A
Grade Level: 1st



Marriage to Diane

Diane and I were married on August 11, 1990 at Wendell United Methodist Church in Wendell North Carolina. Diane`s son Jonathan was my best man and her other son, Ryan, at age 6, was the ring bearer. Diane`s maid of honor was her special work friend Kim Warlick.



Our Wedding party.

The nurses Diane supervised threw us the wedding reception in the church basement.



For our honeymoon we hitched our boat to Diane`s van and drove to Fontana Lake where we stayed in a cabin for a week and went fishing every day. We caught a lot of walleye.



On August 20, 1990, while we were still on our honeymoon we received the wonderful news that Sarah had given birth to my grandson, Nathan Gustafson.

About a year after our wedding I decided I wanted to legally adopt Ryan as my son. We filed the necessary paperwork and after we

were investigated and interviewed by social services, Ryan Scott Ward became Ryan Scott Baggett.

While Diane`s oldest son, Jonathan, went to Western Carolina University, Diane, Ryan and I lived together in the house located at 102 Beechwood Court, Knightdale NC, during Ryan`s first years of school.



102 Beechwood Court
Knightdale NC

Deputy Director of Division of MH/DD/SAS

In the Fall of 1991, I was called into the office of David Flaherty, The Secretary of The Department of Human Resources for the state of North Carolina. The position of Director of the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services had recently become vacated and Secretary Flaherty was about to appoint a new director. I was well known to Flaherty as a mental health spokesperson by that time and it was clear he invited me to this meeting in order to seek my support for the person he had selected. That person was Mike Pedneau, a former Director of Dorothea Dix hospital and an employee of the department business office at the time of our meeting. I liked Mike a lot, and was pleased he was being considered for the Division Director position. I gave my whole hearted support for his appointment.

Immediately following that meeting, Mike asked me to go to lunch with him at the nearby Farmer`s Market, which I did. During lunch, as we discussed the future of Mental Health care

under his leadership, Mike asked me if I would be interested in becoming his Deputy at some point after he settled into his new position. I was flattered by the suggestion, indicated I would certainly consider it if and when that became a possibility, but did not take it very seriously at the time. I was still highly engaged with my NAMI executive director responsibilities.

Upon reflection, I realized later that Mike was a brilliant political strategist, and by suggesting I come to work for him he was protecting himself with regards to my future troublemaking as an advocate. Despite this reflection, I was starting to feel like it was time for a change. I desired to travel less and to be able to spend more time with Diane. A job where I reported to an office in downtown Raleigh five days a week, and did little state wide traveling held possibilities.

In March of 1992 Mike let me know that he had persuaded Flaherty to let him hire me as his Deputy Director. I had hoped for a significant increase in my \$60,000 NAMI salary, but Flaherty was only willing to match it. After prayerful consideration, I submitted my resignation to NAMI NC and began my new job. Mike assured me he would get me a larger salary at some point, a promise he made good on three years later when he succeeded in getting it increased to \$100,000.



Albermarle Building
Mental Health Division
was on the 11th Floor

Once hired, Mike assigned me supervision of the three disability sections (mental health, developmental disabilities, and substance abuse). I was also given supervisory responsibility over

Children's Mental Health Services, and Thomas S. Services.

Thomas S. was one of two programs created by lawsuits that the state lost and was subsequently required by the courts to fund. Thomas S. clients carried a dual diagnosis and were both mentally ill and mentally retarded. The other lawsuit had created a service system called Willie M., and was a court ordered service for seriously mentally ill children, many with histories of violent behavior. I would, at a later time, assume responsibility for that program as well. When, about three years later, Mike and I created a Crisis Services Section to promote improved crisis intervention care in communities throughout the state, I was given that responsibility also. (We also soon hired Mary Eldridge, a former President of NAMI-NC to head our new Crisis Services Section. So I became the boss of a good friend and former NAMI-NC supervisor.)

While still with NAMI-NC in early 1992 I had applied for a grant from the National office of NAMI to do a survey/report on Area Program services in our state to persons with Serious Mental Illnesses. I had designed it to follow the model of the national survey created by Dr. E. Fuller Torrey, author of *Surviving Schizophrenia* and other writings. Dr. Torrey was a tireless advocate at the national level. According to Dr. Torrey's most recent 1990 ratings of *State Mental Health Programs Care of the Seriously Mentally Ill* survey, North Carolina was tied with New York and Wisconsin at #7. I was proud of that rating as I believed NAMI Advocacy, and recent funding increases made possible by that advocacy, had moved North Carolina from a low position to a relatively high one. It was my hope that by rating the area programs in the state we could motivate the local programs to do an even better job.

When I became Deputy Director of the state agency, I had to turn that work over to R. Franklin Gose, the new Executive Director of NAMI NC, but I had designed the survey instruments and was confident about the objectivity of the results. Gose, with my help, assured that the survey was completed by all 41 area

mental health agencies supported by the state and published the results in the Fall of 1992. The Area Mental Health Programs that scored high in the survey were understandably pleased, those near the bottom were understandably unhappy. Some of the latter blamed me for their bad publicity from the report.

I served as Deputy Director of the Division of MH/DD/SA for five years. During that time I continued to advocate for persons with serious mental illnesses in legislative meetings, in the Department of Human Resources, and in speaking engagements throughout the state. I also expanded my advocacy to include those suffering from addiction, dually diagnosed children, and persons with mental retardation and other developmental disabilities

During this time it was not unusual for my phone to ring in the middle of the night because of some new crisis in the mental health system somewhere in the state.

One day in late 1996 I received a phone call from Governor Jim Hunt. I had previously met the governor on a couple of occasions and was favorably impressed by him. He was the son of a school teacher and liked to challenge people the way a teacher challenges students. He made it clear he had called me since I was the highest ranked person in state government with responsibility for substance abuse services. He asked me what I knew about addiction. Fortunately I had learned a lot from Dr. Julian Keith, the head of our Substance Abuse Services Section, as well as from my own 12 step program. I shared a few thoughts with him and he seemed satisfied. He then asked me to join him and General Barry McCaffrey, the Drug Czar under the Clinton Administration at the time, for lunch the following day.

So I had lunch and conversation with Governor Jim Hunt and the national Drug Czar in the Governor's mansion. During lunch I described our state services and our focus on assuring effective treatment. McCaffrey was thoughtful, friendly, and gracious. I was pleased to hear him voice his support for drug

courts and diversion of drug offenders to treatment, as an alternative to criminal courts and prison.



**General
Barry
McCaffrey**

The Mountain House

In 1994 my mother and father came to visit Diane and me at our home in Knightdale. I soon realized they were on a mission. Years earlier, while he was managing the Raleigh Diamond Hill Lumber Company, my father, at mother`s encouragement, had purchased a lot and built a retirement home in Wolfe Laurel, a mountaintop residential community early in its development. Dad had become familiar with the development years earlier when he was with a lumber company in Asheville, and had supplied building materials for the Wolfe Laurel development.

After building the mountain house, mom and dad made many weekend trips there. When Dad finally retired, they moved to the mountain home where Dad was active in the local Kiwanis Club, the Wolfe Laurel Homeowner Association, and Bright Hope Laurel United Methodist Church.

When they visited us in 1994 they had lived in Wolfe Laurel for several years of their retirement, but had come to realize that they needed to make a change due to health challenges. They had decided to move to Owensboro, Kentucky to be near my sister so she could help them manage their living and healthcare situation. They planned to move into a senior housing project there. Their

visit with me was prompted by their need to sell the house, but also by the realization that Diane and I were their only hope at the time to keep the mountain house available to them as needed and in the family. They offered to sell the Wolfe Laurel home to us for \$40,000, which was about half of what it was worth at the time. But there was a catch. They wanted to be able to use the house during the summer months and whenever they could make the trip back from Owensboro, for as long as they were living. We, on the other hand, would be able to use the downstairs guest area, Dad had added on to the house, as our own, when they were in the main house, and we could live in the main house when they were in Owensboro. We agreed to the deal and the transfer of ownership followed.



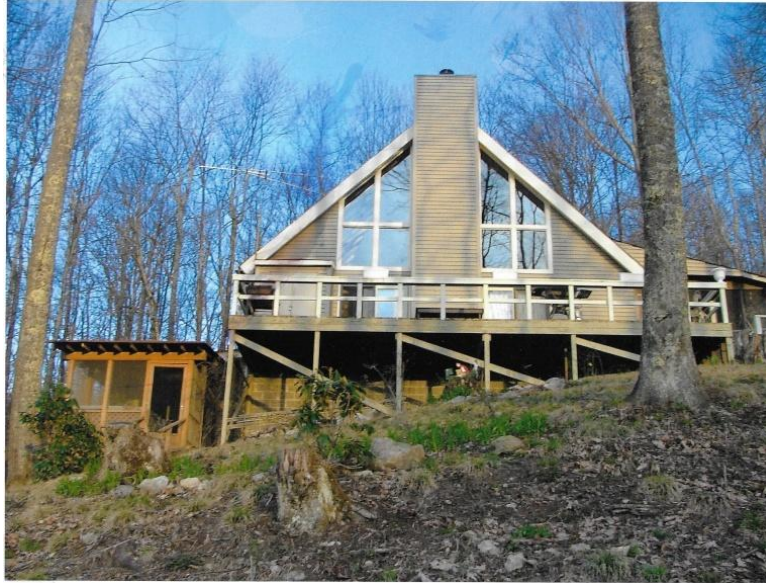
Rear view of
Wolfe Laurel
Home with
downstairs
bedroom under
construction

Once my mom and dad were settled in Owensboro, we found ourselves spending many weekends at our mountain home. Wolfe Laurel was a golf community with a challenging but beautiful mountain golf course. It also had a clubhouse with a dining room and excellent chef. We spent \$10,000 on a club membership. That turned out to be one of the more unfortunate decisions of our lives as the clubhouse went bankrupt some three months later leaving no way for us to recover our money.

Diane and I spent much of our time making ``improvements`` to our mountain house. We built a deck on the front of the downstairs bedroom, screened it in and installed a hot tub there. We also built a large screen porch on the northern end of the house near the kitchen. That turned out to be a major project. Diane`s Dad helped me erect and secure the supporting posts during a weekend visit, and Diane assisted me with the perilous job of constructing the roof.



**A Happy Building
Weekend at Raven`s
Haven Mountain
Home**



**Wolfe Laurel Raven's
Haven Home Front
View showing
downstairs hot tub
screened porch on left
side.**

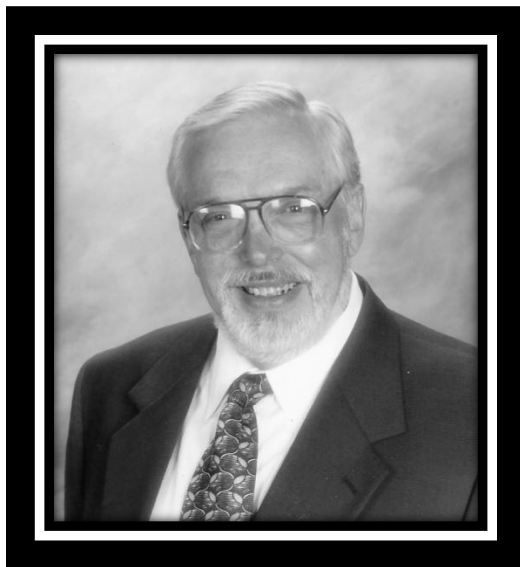
State Mental Health Director

In March of 1997, Mike Pedneau decided it was time for a change. He worked out a set of changes with the Dr. David Bruton, Secretary of the Department of Human Resources under Governor Hunt at the time, with Pedneau stepping down to become the Director of Dorothea Dix Hospital. Pedneau was able to persuade Britt to appoint me as the Division Director, and I then appointed Dr. Terry Stelle as my Deputy Director.

Terry was my personal friend during my NAMI days and had served under me for the past five years in his role as Chief of the Mental Health Section. He was the husband of Lynn Stelle, who was also a personal friend, and the head of our quality programming efforts. Lynn oversaw our Area Program surveys and reviews. Terry and Lynn had warmly befriended Diane and me during our dating phase, had attended our wedding, and were trusted members of my staff. Terry often called me ``boss``, a title I would later (in 2001) call him after he became the Director of Dorothea Dix Hospital and I was his Special Assistant.

At the time of appointment I was quoted in the department press release with these words:

``We are facing new challenges in mental health. I look forward to guiding the division in these efforts. I know firsthand the challenge of having family members with mental and addictive disorders. I`m dedicated to making our system of care consumer and family centered.``



**Division of MH/DD/SA
Director Portrait**

I served as Division Director (State Mental Health Director) until Y2K, the beginning of the year 2000. As I approached four years in that position, Diane and I both were seriously stressed. Not only were our jobs hard, but we lost three of our four parents in 1999 (Mom and Dad Call, and my mother, Madge). Only my father survived to ring in the new century. In addition, much of my stress came from my relationships with the 41 area mental health directors in the state.

Early in my term as Director of the Division, Terry Stelle, my Deputy Director came to me with a concern. He had been reading the mental health statutes and realized our agency was legally responsible for holding Area Mental Health Programs accountable for the quality of their services. Moreover, Terry viewed us as vulnerable to censure from members of the General Assembly for past failures to do so. I asked Terry to take the lead on addressing this problem. Lynn, his wife, who I am convinced was the one who actually identified the legal vulnerability, soon turned her program section into an accreditation

review team. The team developed review criteria and methodology and began a series of local program reviews. I had long believed the Area Programs had a tendency to use their resources to serve what we, in those days, sometimes referred to as *the worried well*. I saw these reviews as an opportunity to pressure the local programs to refocus their resources and services on the needs of the most seriously disabled clients. The Area program directors were not happy about this to say the least. They were accustomed to complete autonomy in their local program policies and services and did not think they should be subject to the new accreditation standards we created. They soon began writing letters to my boss, Dr. Bruton, The Secretary of Human Resources, in which they complained about my leadership of the Division.

After being called to Dr. Bruton's office to account for the large stack of complaints he had received I realized I was at risk of being fired. It was not a pleasant place to be and the first time in my life I had ever felt so vulnerable.

In addition to losing parents, one other stressor occurred that year. My son, John Mark, had been living in a group home in Western North Carolina, and, while doing some work on a Christmas tree farm, he almost lost his hand to a wood splitter. Fortunately, he was transported to Winston Salem to the hospital where they were able to reattach and save his hand.

A few days before Christmas in 1999, I offered Dr. Bruton my resignation with the understanding he would find another job for me somewhere else in the department, at a comparable salary to my current one. After some consultation with his budget director and the Governor's Office, he offered to create a position of Special Assistant to the Dorothea Dix Hospital Director with responsibilities to provide planning leadership for other department initiatives as they arose. Under pressure from the Area Programs, the Secretary of Human Resources was delighted to have a way to make almost everyone happy, including me.

I wrote a letter on December 22, 1999, explaining that a combination of personal and professional stresses had led me to step

down from the director position. Always the advocate, even in a goodbye letter, I closed my letter with these words.

There are many fine services in North Carolina. There is a safety net that must be preserved. There are also holes in that net in the form of service gaps. There are inefficiencies, questionable priorities, and conflicts of interest that must be addressed if the funding agencies are to have confidence in the North Carolina system. We need an honest system that does not promise more than it can deliver with the resources available.

Among the positive things that helped me to negotiate this time of transition were letters from advocates, legislators and other state employees expressing appreciation for my leadership of the Division.

Dorothea Dix Hospital Assistant Director



**Dorothea
Dix Hospital**

When I transitioned to the role of Special Assistant in 2000 Steve Johnson was the Director of Dorothea Dix Hospital. It was a turbulent time for the hospital. The hospital had recently been the subject of investigations by The North Carolina Division of Facility Services on behalf of The Health Care Financing Agency (HCFA), and by reviews from representative staff of the Department of Justice in Washington

that found serious shortages in nurses, deficiencies in nursing care and patient safety problems. These conditions placed the state in danger of losing more than \$40 million in federal Medicare and Medicaid funds. Moreover these surveys identified dangerous life threatening conditions on some wards. Plans of correction were prepared but not implemented. Instances of patient neglect and deaths were reported in the local press.

Within three months of my appointment to Dix, Director Steve Johnson was suspended by Secretary Bruton, due to the hospital's failure to address these problems. Johnson subsequently resigned and retired. Dr. Terry Stelle, my former deputy in the Division of MH/DD/SAS was appointed to replace Steve.

As if there was not already enough to worry about, the General Assembly was in session, and, as usual, looking for ways to cut agency budgets in order to fund their pet projects. My \$100,000 salary as a Special Assistant to a hospital director was easy picking for them. At first, when I learned they had eliminated my salary, I worried that I was out of a job. But my friend, and now boss, Terry Stelle, went to the Secretary of the Department of Human Resources, who was, by then, Carmen Hooker Odom, and persuaded her to allow him to find the money in his hospital budget to pay me to be his Assistant Hospital Director at \$73,000, the standard salary for such a position.

Terry, almost immediately, put me in charge of a plan of correction to restore our accreditation and ensure continued funding from HCFA. I appointed a task force representative of various relevant employee groups with an emphasis on nursing care and rehabilitation therapy. We soon identified reduction in seclusion and restraint usage as major outcome measures necessary to demonstrate improvement. The HCFA review had been especially critical of our excessive usage of those restrictive measures. In leading this group I relied heavily on guidance from Diane who had been previously involved in CQI efforts at WakeMed to reduce the use of restraints.

We also familiarized ourselves with what national reviewers considered best practice models. The one that seemed to be the best model and the best fit for our hospital was the ``mall`` model. Our

vision soon became to change the culture of the hospital from one of behavioral management to one of restoration and rehabilitation. I had long been a critic of what I termed ``cigarette and TV therapy`` on the hospital wards, an image derived from observing mentally ill patients spending their days smoking cigarettes in front of a hospital tv during their hospital stays. The mall model was based on the notion that our job was not just to provide a safe space for medication management, but to prepare patients to be successful in community living upon release.

The mall metaphor envisioned a hospital where patients could engage with a variety of learning opportunities designed to prepare them for successful community living. We already had staff devoted to vocational training, and recreational therapy, but both had been historically underutilized. We also recognized that we had failed to provide opportunities for our patients to learn social relationship skills. Our first task was to retrain our staff in order for everyone to understand the new model of care. It was not long until staff became excited about the changes. Everyone seemed to know our former way of doing things was not working.

We also implemented new guidelines for the use of seclusion and restraint, and made it clear that staff were going to be held accountable for any deviation. Between January and October of 2000, seclusion episodes were reduced by 60%, restraint usage was down 67%, falls down 11%, injuries down 45%, even though our census was up by 2%. Based on the results of this CQI project, the hospitals accreditation was restored.

I spent the remainder of my 3 years at Dix making sure we did not backslide from the progress we had made. I truly believe Dix had become, at that point, a model of what a 21st century psychiatric hospital could be. That is why I grieved profoundly when, later, in 2012, during my retirement years, I learned the General Assembly in North Carolina, in cooperation with the City of Raleigh, had closed the hospital in order to cut the state budget and to turn the Dix campus into a city park.

Our Sebring Village Home

In 2001, while still working, Diane and I began to dream of a retirement in which we would be able to spend summers at our mountain home and winters in Florida. Florida was not just a good place to go to escape the treacherous snow and ice of the North Carolina mountains, it was the home of daughter Sarah and her family, and son Sam and his family. Spending time with children and grandchildren in a tropical climate seemed like a perfect plan.

By this time both Sarah, Sam, and children had moved away from Okeechobee - Sarah to Melbourne, and Sam to Lake Placid. I had long fantasized about spending time fishing in Florida with Sam during my retirement years. Over the years, while on visits to Okeechobee, Sam, a local fishing guide by then, had given me some great fishing trip memories. One of those times, while fishing on Lake Okeechobee, Sam guided us to a great spot and we had the best fishing day ever.



**Best
Fishing
Day Ever**

Since Sam had by that time moved to Lake Placid Florida, where he had purchased the local Domino's Pizza business, Diane and I first looked for a possible house in that town. But we soon realized that Lake Placid was simply too rural for our needs. Then we discovered Sebring

Florida, a small town some 20 miles north of Lake Placid. Sebring had enough commercial development to make it a desirable place to settle. While exploring the area, we found Sebring Village, a mobile home park near U.S. 27, the main highway. We also found a mobile home for sale in Sebring Village, with a pond in back of it. We decided it would fit our needs and dreams. We bought the home but rented it to another couple for the first two years of ownership while we continued in our respective vocations in Raleigh.



Sebring
Village
Entrance



View of the
Pond behind
our Sebring
home

I did not realize it until later, but Sebring had an important family connection. Several years before my birth, my grandfather, Rev. John Baggett, for whom I was named, served as the Methodist appointed pastor of the Avon Park/Sebring Circuit. I would at a later date have the honor of leading worship and preaching a sermon at the Avon Park United Methodist Church my grandfather had served many years before.

Retirement

During 2003, as I contemplated my approaching retirement years I became clear that I did not want to simply look at my future as an extended vacation. To be sure, I hoped to enjoy my senior years, but I also wanted them to be productive and to have meaning and purpose. I had loved oil painting as a youth, but had been able to do little of it during my working years. I decided I wanted to paint again in retirement. I had also always loved writing, and decided my retirement would be a great time to write a book or two that I had long dreamed of writing.

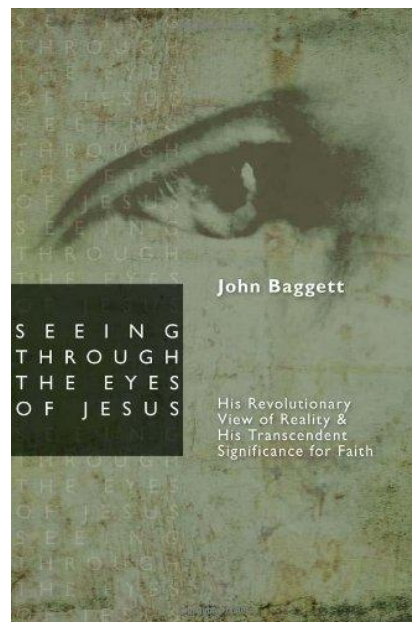
In September of 2003, both Diane and I retired from our respective hospital jobs and moved to our Wolf Laurel home. Ryan enrolled in nearby Mars Hill College where he continued to pursue an interest in theater arts.

**Ryan in Costume for
Mars Hill College
Production of The
Pirates of Penzance**



I began work on a book titled, *Seeing through the Eyes of Jesus*, a book I had long planned to write. The idea for the book had been birthed back in my seminary days with my study of the new quest for the historical Jesus literature under the tutorship of my New Testament professor, Dr. Leander Keck. My exposure to the Ecumenical Institute Biblical classes, both as a student and a teacher, deepened that interest. But it was probably my doctoral work in Anthropology that was most influential. I became fascinated with the ways in which Jesus both reflected and challenged the culture into which he was born.

I wanted to write a book that could be used in college and seminary New Testament classes that would reveal who Jesus truly was in his relationships to God the Father and to his contemporaries. And I wanted to use the wisdom of cultural anthropology to achieve that task. It was an ambitious undertaking and the beginning of a journey of five years of study, reflection and composing.



In 2005, since Diane had returned to Wake Med as the VP of nursing at Cary Hospital, we decided to purchase a home on Namath Court in the Clayton area of Johnston County, NC. It was a beautiful home in a friendly neighborhood in a community called Riverwood.

While Diane commuted to Cary weekdays, I continued writing my book about Jesus.



Waiting with neighbors for Trick or Treaters on Halloween on Namath Court

In 2008, I was fortunate to have my book published by William B. Eerdmans, a well-known and highly respected publisher of scholarly theological works. That would not have happened if it had not been for my old Wesleyan friend Charles Sensel who pitched my book to Bill Eerdmans at a conference Charles attended in 2007.

It was also my good fortune to have renewed my relationship with Charles and other members of our Wesleyan 2nd Floor Ministerial Association at a series of reunions, begun in 2003, at the Abbey of Gethsemane, a Roman Catholic monastery and retreat center near Bardstown Kentucky.



Members of the 2nd Floor Ministerial Association attending our 2007 retreat. Charles Sensel was in the middle position and David Hilton was on the far right. Mickey Miller who edited my early books was third from left.



**Diane and me
at a
Bardstown
Retreat**

The retreats were attended by about a dozen of my friends from my student days at Kentucky Wesleyan, most of whom had been ministerial students. I was especially glad to renew my relationships with Charles Sensel and my old college roommate and spiritual advisor, David Hilton. Our annual retreats continued to be held for the next 5 years. Diane and I also enjoyed visiting the Old Kentucky Home museum and gardens in Bardstown while we were there.

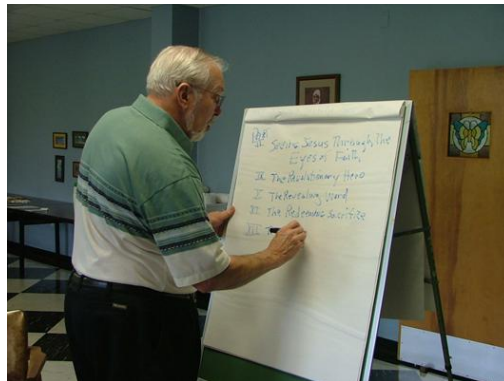


**Old Kentucky
Home Gardens**

**Old
Kentucky
Home**



Our 2007 gathering was held at a Kentucky Lake retreat center instead of at Gethsemane near Bardstown. At that gathering, I presented highlights from my book and received comments from members of our group.



Not long afterwards, at the instigation of some of my retreat colleagues, I was selected by a Kentucky Wesleyan committee to give The Beavin Lecture during homecoming weekend in September 2008. The annual lecture was named after Dr. Ed Beavin, a now deceased, but once charismatic teacher of Old Testament at Wesleyan, a professor who had inspired me to take the Old Testament seriously in my preaching and studies. When Bill Eerdman, my publisher, learned of my scheduled lecture, he decided it would be the perfect occasion for the

release of my book. So the lecture turned out to be both an introduction to the themes of my book and a prelude to my first book signing.

Aunt Dorothy Visits

Shortly after our wedding in 1990, Diane and I travelled to her childhood town of Elmira New York, and, in addition to visiting the local sites she had enjoyed in childhood, we visited her Aunt Dorothy Call Lovell, sister of Diane's father, Raymond Briggs Call.

Aunt Dorothy was quite an accomplished woman. During WWII she had been an outstanding player for a girl's softball league. She was later inducted into the Elmira Woman's Sports Hall of Fame. Following graduation she was employed by Hogg-Nichols Inc., a plumbing and heating contracting firm in Elmira. In 1954 she became owner and CEO of the corporation. She was the first woman in New York State to hold such a position in that type of business. Prior to retirement in 1979, Aunt Dorothy was named Chemung County Business Woman of the Year, served as a Director of the Chemung Co. Chamber of Commerce, served on the Board of Directors of the YWCA and the Board of Tanglewood Nature Center, and was a speaker for various business foundations. After retirement Dorothy organized NEWS, the National Executive Women's Society. It was a women's business organization that continued for twenty years until men's business clubs began accepting women members.

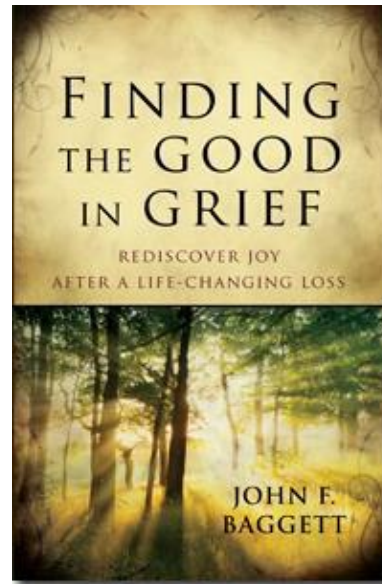
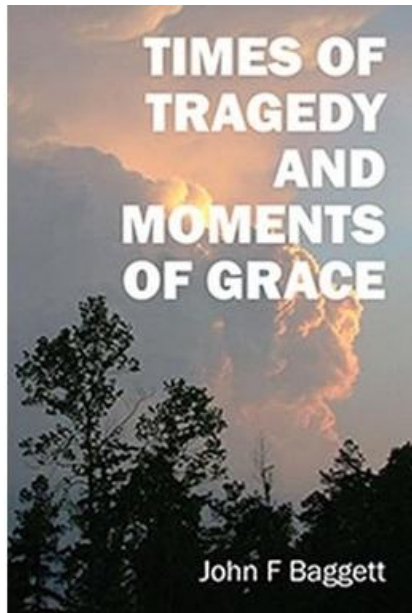
In addition to visiting Diane's Aunt Dorothy and her husband, Uncle Lou, early in our marriage, we also made trips to their home in 2003 and 2006. Following her retirement, Aunt Dorothy's purpose in life had been to be active in the Chemung County Humane Society and to rescue as many dogs as she could afford to humanely save. She owned a large estate in Chemung County with a spacious home in which she and her husband, Lou Lovell lived together until his death in 2001. On a hill behind the house she had a large kennel which contained as many as 20 rescued dogs. She would also keep several of her favorite canine companions in her home.



**Diane, Aunt
Dorothy, and
a rescued
Golden
Retriever**

Our 2006 trip was a sad one. Aunt Dorothy was bedridden and in the process of dying of terminal cancer. At the end of our visit we all had a tearful goodbye in which Aunt Dorothy hugged Diane and said, ``Have a wonderful life.`` On our return trip through Pennsylvania we got a call from a friend of Aunt Dorothy telling us that she had passed away. We returned to Elmira where we made funeral arrangements. As she had requested I served as the minister in charge and presided over her funeral.

On our return trip Diane and I had time to talk and process what had happened. As we talked, the idea for a book on grief and grief recovery began to take shape in my mind. Once back in North Carolina, I began putting my ideas into a document. Within a few months those thoughts took the form of a book I titled *Times of Tragedy and Moments of Grace*. I self-published this book through Outskirts Press in 2009. This book was subsequently made available through Amazon Kindle, and was later picked up in 2013 by Kregel Press who published a revised version of the book under the title, *Finding the Good in Grief*, which is also available on Kindle.



Our return trip from Elmira in 2006, turned out to be a life changing trip in more ways than one. We would later use what had been conceived during our journey to launch a grief ministry that would continue, in one form or another, for the next 20 years.

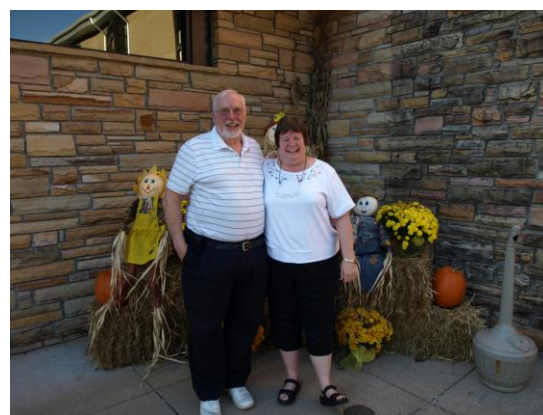
Scott Family Reunions

Retirement made it possible for us to finally begin attending the Scott Family Reunions. My mother`s generation had gathered for several years during the 1990s but Diane and I had not been able to get the time off from work in order to attend. Finally in October of 2003, not long after moving to Wolf Laurel, we attended our first of several Scott reunions. These annual events were held at Montgomery Bell State Park near Dickson Tennessee. Dickson had been the home of my great grandfather, Albert Leslie Scott, whom we all called Papa Scott.

Montgomery Bell was a beautiful natural environment populated by deer and other wildlife as well as the location of a fine conference center.



**Montgomery Bell
Park Deer**



Scott Family Reunion 2012 At Montgomery Bell



**During one
Reunion I Visited
Scott Street in
Dickson TN,
which was Named
After my Great
Grandfather**

The Baggett Reunion

At the 2007 Scott reunion, my 86 year-old Aunt Eva, was able to attend. She was my father`s sister and the widow of my mother`s brother. Both Aunt Eva and I had received invitations to the 2007 Baggett reunion to be held in Cunningham, Montgomery County

Tennessee near my Great Grandfather Baggett's former home. It was our good fortune that the reunion was being held the same week as the Scott reunion. Diane, Aunt Eva and I, made the trip to Cunningham and attended a reunion potluck meal. We then visited the Baggett family graveyard where Henry W. Baggett, my great grandfather and his wife, my great grandmother, Florence Virginia Stack Baggett was also buried.



The 2007 Baggett Reunion

In January of 2008, a couple of months after the 2007 reunions, Diane and I travelled by car, from our home in Sebring Florida, to Pensacola Florida where we picked up Aunt Eva and drove, with her as our passenger, to Selma Alabama. It was our second trip to Pensacola. We had attended my Aunt Eva's 90th Birthday gathering there in 2006.

It had long been my hope to return some day to Selma, the location of the Civil Rights march in which I had participated back in 1965. Once in Selma, we visited the Civil Rights museum, the Edmund Pettus Bridge, Brown's Chapel Church, and the housing project, where I had been a guest those many years before. This was deeply moving for me. It brought back some powerful memories of a time when I, along with many other brave souls, risked my life to help end voting discrimination in our country.



**Visiting Browns Chapel Church
in Selma**

Boston Trips

In 1993 Diane and I made a trip to Boston where she received a Leadership Award, by The National League for Nurses, as one of the 100 top nurses in the country. It was a memorable journey since, in addition to seeing Cheers, the site of the television comedy series, we were able to take a walk on the Boston Freedom Trail that included 16 memorable historic landmarks related to the beginnings of The American Revolution, including the site of the Boston Tea Party.





Ten years later, in 2013, we returned to Boston during our retirement years, to visit Ryan, who had moved there for a period at the invitation of a girlfriend he had met on a plane while traveling to visit with us in Florida. On that Boston trip we visited Hartford Connecticut where there was a statue of Thomas Hooker, a founder of Hartford, and ancestor of Diane, and the Bell Rock Cemetery in Malden Massachusetts, where, Thomas Call, the American founding ancestor of the Calls in America, was buried in 1676. We also visited the reconstructed Plymouth Massachusetts village where we met an actress playing the part of the step-mother of Resolved White, one of Diane`s ancestors who came on the Mayflower.



Thomas Hooker Statue



Thomas Call Grave

VI. THE MELBOURNE YEARS

THE MOVE TO MELBOURNE

By 2010 we began to realize that it was getting too challenging to maintain two homes in North Carolina and a Florida place. We also decided, after much discussion, that a future of living in a mobile home in Sebring Florida, where tornados and hurricanes were a risk, and healthcare services were limited, was not wise, especially considering the aging process and my emerging health challenges.

We soon decided to explore the possibility of moving to Brevard County, Florida, to be close to our daughter, Sarah. As Diane`s parents had found it comforting to live close to their daughter in the nineties, we thought living close to Sarah and her family would be good for us. On a trip to Sarah`s in the Spring of 2010, we explored the Viera West community in the Melbourne metro area. It was a new development, with quality amenities, of multiple neighborhoods being built on former land owned by the Duda Ranch.

After selling all three of our homes, we purchased a new house in the Daintree community and moved there in the Summer of 2010.

THE STROKE

Diane and I attended Scott reunions yearly for some 10 years. As we returned to our home in Melbourne Florida, following the 2013 reunion we stopped for the night at a motel in Tallahassee. That was when I experienced a life changing stroke.

I woke up around 3 a.m. that night with the need to relieve my bladder. When I opened my eyes, I realized something was wrong. I had double vision. When my eyes adjusted to the dim light of the bathroom, I was seeing two of everything. I returned to bed and woke up Diane to tell her what was happening. Fortunately, Diane had the nursing knowledge to recognize I was having a stroke. She called 911

and EMS took me by ambulance to Tallahassee Memorial, the hospital affiliated with Florida State University.

The medical staff at the hospital ran a series of tests, including a cardiac catheterization and imaging, and determined I had a brain stem clot that caused my double vision. I stayed in the hospital for a few days, and, while I was there, Sam drove to Tallahassee to visit me. His visit meant a lot to me as I was not sure I was going to survive the stroke. Sarah also drove there not only to give me comfort, but to help with the journey back to Melbourne. The doctors gave me medications. They also had me wear an eyepatch over one eye that alleviated the double vision. I soon found I needed a walker for balance, as the stroke had caused me to become unsteady on my feet, and to be at risk of falling.

Once back home in Brevard County I was admitted to a rehab hospital that worked on eye exercises to treat the double vision. I am not sure if my therapy worked or if my body corrected itself after the medications alleviated the blood clot in my brain stem, but my single vision suddenly, and thankfully, returned. But the unsteadiness persisted and I would be using a walker for the rest of my life.

PAINTINGS

During our winter stays in Sebring Florida I had enjoyed taking lessons in oil painting at the Highlands Art League and had produced several oil paintings. Most began as photographs that I had taken of memorable scenes Diane and I had enjoyed while sharing a trip or outing.

Some of these were representations of places Diane and I had enjoyed in North Carolina, such as a sunset boat scene in Beaufort, NC, and a seascape at The Whaler Inn where we owned a timeshare for several years. One of these works was a painting of a garden scene at a Sebring tea room we loved to visit. That painting and some of my other works were, one Saturday, featured in an art showing at the tea room. Once we settled in Melbourne I continued to enjoy painting, especially

Florida related subjects and scenes. (See paintings section at the end of this memoir).

SMALL GROUPS

By 2012 Diane and I had become active members of the Faith and Fellowship Sunday School Class at Suntree United Methodist Church in Melbourne Fl. When class leadership found out I was a retired Methodist minister, I was added to a teaching rotation which had me leading a Sunday School study every month or so.

The church was also encouraging the development of small groups for discipleship growth. Diane and I had been in a small group when we lived in Clayton N.C, and agreed to begin a group in our home on Tieda Drive. We invited several couples we had come to know in the Faith and Fellowship class to attend a Thursday evening meeting twice a month where we would study together and grow in discipleship. This Logos group has turned out to consist of our best friends and companions over the years since.



**Logos
Group
Enjoying a
Meal**

After moving to Heritage Isle in 2017, we realized that there were quite a few residents of that senior community that attended Suntree UMC. We decided to explore starting a second small group with these neighbors. We obtained addresses of neighborhood members from the church office and invited about 30 people to our home for a social get

acquainted event. Several attending the social expressed interest and we began another small group on two Monday afternoons a month, which we called Heritage Isle Spiritual Life Group. We also have grown close to those who have made up this group.

Both groups have continued to meet, to study, to pray, and to support one another through difficult times.



Heritage Isle
Spiritual Life
Group

FAMILY PROMISE

One Spring day, in 2012, I received an invitation to have lunch with two of our Faith and Fellowship class members, Russ Buchanan and Hindman Wall. I knew that Hindman was a well-respected former Athletic Director at Auburn University and Russ a retired businessman from Birmingham Alabama, but I was unaware of their agenda until we met.

Russ and Hindman were members of the Board of Directors of Family Promise of Brevard, an affiliate organization of a national program serving homeless families. Unfortunately, the Brevard County affiliate had been in existence for several years, had raised some money, but had spent much of it on travel and conferencing expenses of the board members. At the time of our meeting, the organization had not yet served a single homeless family member.

Russ and Hindman described the Family Promise model to me and let me know they believed in it as a *hand up rather than a hand out* approach to homelessness. I learned that there were 10 local congregations of various denominations ready to open their facilities and host families by providing a place to sleep and meals. But, families would also need help finding affordable housing and removing barriers to self-sufficiency.

It became clear in our discussions, that the organization needed an executive director and a staff in order to be able to provide the services required by the Family Promise model. I knew how to raise money and how to get a non-profit up and running. I had experience with fund raising at the Ecumenical Institute, at Louisburg College, and with NAMI of North Carolina. I was also at the point in my retirement where I needed a challenging mission to provide greater meaning and purpose. I agreed to become the volunteer development officer and to raise the money needed to hire an Executive Director, who would then have the responsibility to raise funds for additional staff, and for providing the co-ordination necessary for the congregational model to work.

So I agreed to become the Volunteer Director of Development for the organization. Diane and I each were appointed to the Family Promise Board of Directors. Diane took on the role of Congregation Relations.

One of the first things I did was to request our Logos small group raise funds via a spaghetti dinner at our church. We were fortunate that Dick Fernandez, a member of our group, was a veteran who had served his country as a navy cook. Dick knew how to feed a large group of people and agreed to take charge of the food preparation. The group did an amazing job of selling tickets and produced a full house for the event held in the Suntime UMC Worship Center. The Logos Group served and accomplished a successful meal that raised over \$3,000.

The spaghetti dinner was the first of several fund raising events which included a Golf Scramble that raised \$21,456, a Bowlathon that raised \$5,100, and a Tent City overnight event that, which, including funds from the Spaghetti Dinner, helped to bring in a grand total of

\$35,000. We also raised around \$20,000 from our participating congregations, and another \$20,000 from local corporations and foundations. In addition, we had donations of \$47,685 from individual donors, mostly members of the Family Promise Board and participating churches. By the end of 2013 we had raised a total of \$101,327.

In the meantime, some of our Family Promise board members had sought and obtained the use of an office building owned by Grace Fellowship Church in Rockledge, Florida. The church initially charged Family Promise rent of \$1 per year, but Family Promise of Brevard had responsibility for utilities and upkeep.



**A Family Housed
with the Help of
Family Promise
of Brevard**

These efforts made it possible for the Board of Directors to finally begin the process of hiring an Executive Director. I served on the Personnel Committee that interviewed candidates. Our first hire was a young woman who turned out, within a couple of weeks, to not be the right choice. Both she and our leadership realized quickly that she was not a good fit. Then we interviewed Tara Pagliarini, who turned out to be our dream candidate. Tara was a social worker by training who had worked in mental health in South Carolina before moving to Florida. Under her leadership, Family Promise has grown over the years and assisted over four thousand homeless family members, 97% of which have transitioned to stable housing. Tara also turned out to be an effective fund raiser allowing me to step down from my development role and to pursue other paths of service to our community.

GRIEF MINISTRY

In the Spring of 2015, in cooperation with the staff of the Congregational Care Office of the church, Diane and I began a grief support ministry at Suntree UMC. We had previously taught a class at the church in the Fall of 2014, based on my newly published book, *Finding the Good in Grief* (Kregel 2014). (Rev. Terry Hill, one of our senior pastors, read the book on her own at that time and told us it was the best book on grief she had ever read. She later pitched the book from her pulpit in Key West Florida.)

When launching the Suntree Grief Journey Support Group, we were fortunate to have two other group leaders join us, Jan Janicke, and Pam Nelson. Janet Janicki was a Stephen Minister, Stephen Ministry Leader, and certified life coach. She was also the author of *When Fear and Faith Collide* (Brentwood Christian Press 2008), which detailed her journey through her first year of vision loss. Pamela L. Nelson had a Master's Degree in Social Work Counseling from the University of Central Florida. She was an experienced facilitator for hospice, Alzheimer's, and grief support groups.



Grief
Support
Brochure

In late May of 2015 we began with a group of around 20 individuals with meetings twice a month, on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday

mornings. We established a group covenant to insure confidentiality and compassionate acceptance, then gave presentations on weekly topics, and broke into two groups for sharing, one for those who had lost spouses, and the other for any other kind of loss.

The group changed over time as new members joined, and early members decided it was time for them to move forward without the support of the group. We continued this ministry until we transitioned it in August of 2022 to a national Christian grief support ministry known as GriefShare. After leading a group through the 13 video and discussion sessions of GriefShare that year, Diane and I withdrew from the Suntree grief ministry and turned it over to the capable hands of Congregational Care staff and graduates of the program. GriefShare has continued in the subsequent years.



Grief Share Poster

As part of our grief ministry Diane and I also provided resources to the church for persons struggling with getting through holidays and personal difficult anniversaries. In addition many of Diane's professional counseling clients over the years have been persons struggling with grief who were affiliated in some way with Suntree United Methodist Church.

SHARING SOME WISDOM

Anthropologists have long recognized the importance to the human race of *elders* in various cultures, whose primary role was to preserve and share wisdom for the benefit of emerging and future generations. I believed my training and experience over my lifetime

placed on me an obligation in my senior years to share some of the wisdom that I had received from my elders and drawn from my own personal journey.

LOCAL SCHOOL CIVIL RIGHTS PRESENTATIONS



**Civil Rights
History
Presentation to
several classes at
Indialantic
Elementary**

From 2015 to 2021, I was a frequent lecturer at local Elementary Schools, Middle Schools, and High Schools, during which I presented a PowerPoint history of civil rights in America, intertwined with personal stories of my involvement. This was initiated by Virginia Hamilton a nearby teacher of gifted students and a member of SUMC. My daughter, Sarah, and grandson, Nathan, also hosted me for the presentation. Sarah, in introducing me to students at Satellite Beach High School, referred to me as a ``Primary Source``. (Grandson Nate also scheduled me for a Christmas season Santa Clause visit to his third grade class in Melbourne Beach Florida, to do a reading of *The Grinch that Stole Christmas*).

There were several other local school presentations of my civil rights presentation during those years at various locations throughout the county. These were given at a time when exposure to black history was still required in public education. All of that sadly ended in 2022 after the Florida legislature effectively passed legislation, called the Stop

Woke Act, preventing the teaching of African American history in the public schools.

JOURNEY CLASSES

Our home church in Melbourne Florida, Suntree United Methodist, was pastored in our early years with the congregation, by a husband and wife team, Rev. John and Rev. Terry Hill. John Hill was a brilliant student and teacher of Christian Theology. One of his innovations was a *Theology at the Tavern* weekly evening event where a group of congregants would gather at a local restaurant and discuss theology over glasses of wine and bottles of beer. John and Terry also initiated Wednesday evening congregational dinners in the dining hall of the church, followed by what they called Journey classes, in various classrooms. The class Diane and I taught on *Finding the Good in Grief* in 2014, mentioned above, was a Wednesday night Journey class.

In the Fall of 2015, following the arrival of our new pastor, Annette Stiles Pendergrass, I taught a Journey class of around 40 persons based on my book *Seeing Through the Eyes of Jesus*. In 2016, I taught another class titled *Inasmuch*, based on Matthew 25:40 “*And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*” That class spoke to contemporary manifestations of the challenges listed by Jesus in Matthew 25.

***INASMUCH* COURSE OUTLINE**

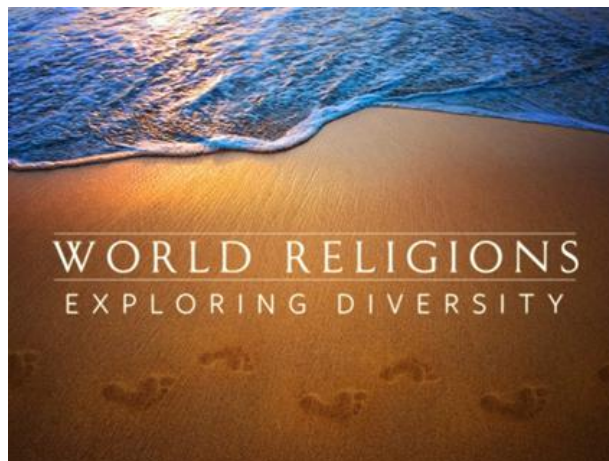
September 14 Alleviating Hunger, Malnutrition, and Homelessness
September 21 Thirst and the Need for Clean Water
September 28 Practicing Hospitality to Strangers Part I : God’s
People and Cultural Diversity
October 5 Practicing Hospitality to Strangers Part II:
Compassion for ‘The Strange Ones’

October 12 *Clothing the Naked – Protecting the Vulnerable*
October 19 *Kindness That Matters For Hurting, Sick, and Disabled Persons*
October 26 *Ministering to Persons Before, During and After Prison*
November 2 *Strategic Loving that Makes a Difference*

In 2018, Pastor Annette and I taught an *African American History Class* that was well attended by Suntree members. In 2019, we taught a course titled *World Religions, Exploring Diversity*.

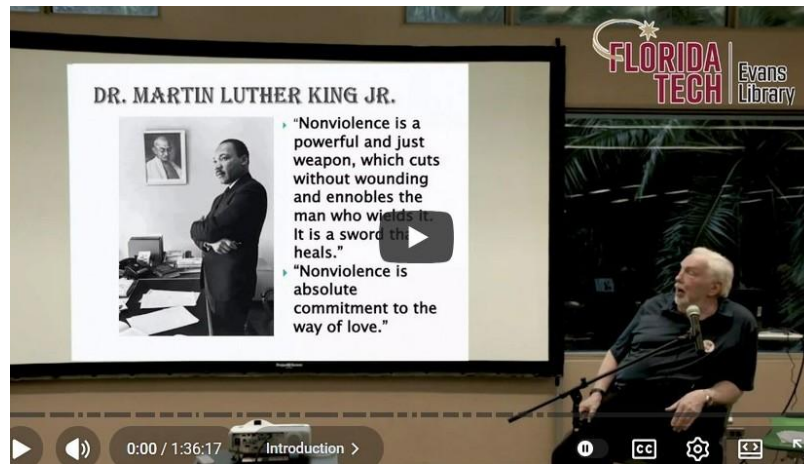


**I Enjoyed Teaching Classes with
Pastor Annette Stiles Pendegrass**



Also, about the same time, I led a Memoir Writing Group, made up of interested Heritage Isle residents. We met on Fridays from 10 to 11:30 a.m. beginning in 2017 and continuing through January of 2020.

On October 4, 2019, I gave a presentation at Florida Tech University titled, *Changing History by Non-Violent Means*. It was recorded by the librarian and is still available to the public via YouTube.



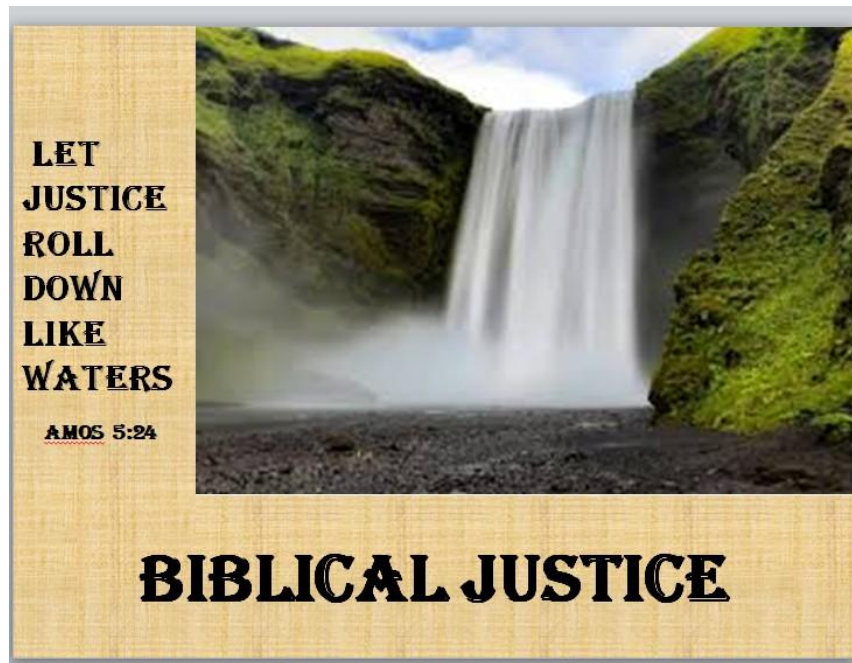
YouTube video picture of *Changing History by Non-Violent Means*

In 2020, during the first year of the COVID epidemic, Annette and I taught an online class titled *White Fragility*, based on the book by that title written by Robin DiAngelo. Also in 2020 we put together an online panel of interfaith leaders to discuss the relationship between spirituality and mental health.

Under Annette's leadership, Suntree United Methodist Church initiated a Beloved Community Committee in 2022. The intent of the committee was to assist the congregation in embodying the beloved community vision of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Diane and I were both invited to be on the committee. I soon developed a course titled Beloved Community 101 which, with the assistance of friends Kathy Turner and Sharon Garrett, was first held in the winter of 2023.

In late 2024 I developed another Beloved Community Course titled *Biblical Justice*. This was a 7 week course that traced the theme of justice throughout the entire Bible. Our Associate Pastor, Bailey

Schreiner and I taught this class on Wednesday evenings in the winter of 2025. During Lent in 2026, I taught a 10 week version of this class, with the capable assistance of Mirhonda Silva, to an online class of Florida Conference clergy and laity. We also taught a 3 hour virtual Train the Trainers version of Biblical Justice on June 27, 2026.



Biblical Justice
Class PowerPoint
Image

MENTAL HEALTH TASK FORCE

In January of 2017, Suntree UMC created a vision plan that called for an initiative to raise awareness about mental health and to partner with community agencies around mental health needs. Because of my history in mental health advocacy and administration in North Carolina, I was chosen to head up this initiative.

Diane and I organized a Mental Health Task Force which began in April of 2017. Our initial thinking was to put together information about mental health and services in Brevard County, a Mental Health First Aid Kit, that could be used by church pastors and staff to refer

persons to mental health services in Brevard County. With this in mind I requested a grant from the Space Coast Health Foundation only to be turned down because of the 211 Brevard helpline that was already available to the county for that purpose. Because of this we began to turn our thoughts in a somewhat different direction.

At first the task force consisted of Suntree members but it soon drew professionals and NAMI family members from the community who wanted to participate in our mission. Not long afterward, we identified our primary mission as an educational one, to help fight stigma and to provide awareness and information about mental health conditions and services to both our congregation and our community.

Our first educational event was in the form of a sermon I preached at SUMC on October 21, 2018 on the topic – *Understanding and Loving Persons with Mental Illness*. This was followed, a week later on October 28, 2018 by a Mental Health Town Hall consisting of a panel of mental health experts in the church Worship Center. Panelists included Dr. Barry Hensel, Vice President of Circles of Care; and Patti Smith and Ellen Audelo, representatives of NAMI Space Coast chapter. This was featured in a January 4, edition of Hometown News.

In September 2019, the Task Force also arranged for NAMI of Brevard County to begin to offer, at SUMC its Family to Family Class, and to provide space for a NAMI Family Support meeting.

MENTAL HEALTH EVENTS

On October 16, 2018, I preached a sermon at Suntree UMC titled: *Understanding and Loving Persons with Mental Illness*. Using slides with photos of my journey with John Mark and other family and friends who struggled with mental health conditions, I shared my journey as a family member and as an advocate.

On October 28, 2018 we held a Mental Illness Awareness Town Hall. The Town Hall was held on a Sunday afternoon in the Worship Center. It featured a panel discussion and Q&A session. Neil Jackson, a member of Suntree UMC, and board member of Circles of Care, the public mental health provider in Brevard County served as panel

moderator. Panelists included Dr. Barry Hensel, Vice President of Circles of Care; and Patti Smith and Ellen Audello, representatives of NAMI Space Coast chapter.

In September of 2019, our church hosted our first NAMI Family-to Family education program, a free 12 session class structured to help family caregivers understand and provide support for individuals with serious mental illnesses.

Our Mental Health Task Force soon grew to over 40 members, with about half being SUMC related and the rest professionals and family members. In 2019 our task force decided to hold a mental health fair, free to the public, which would address the problem of stigma and misunderstanding of mental health conditions.

On October 27, 2019, we held the first of what would become an annual event. The Mental Health Fair theme, *Help and Hope for Mental Health Challenges*, encompassed mental health resource tables in the dining room, and an ``Ask the Mental Health Expert`` session with distinguished mental health professionals and NAMI family speakers.

In 2020, the first major COVID year, our Task Force decided to hold a virtual Mental Health Fair using Zoom technology. Clinical evidence had made it clear that COVID carried with it mental health challenges and the event was designed to address them. On Sunday Afternoon, November 15, 2020, we used Zoom technology from 1 till 5 pm. Our speakers included local mental health clinical professionals, an addiction specialist, and Judge Steven Leifman, of Miami Dade County, who was the founder of a highly successful model program diverting thousands of mentally ill clients from incarceration.



Judge Stephen
Leifman

In 2021, the nation was still dealing with the COVID epidemic and our Mental Health Task Force once again held a Virtual Mental health Fair. This took place on October 2, 2021 with the theme: *The Ripple Effect*. The presentations were focused on the ripple effects of suicide and the criminalization of mental health conditions. Experts for the session on the ripple effect of suicide included Lynn Cline, a parent, survivor of a son`s suicide, and founder of *Hannah`s Heroes*, Janean Knight, of Brevard County Schools Student Services, and Dr. Caroline Griffin and Tanya Dix, clinicians with Circles of Care. Experts on the criminalization of mental health conditions included Judge Morgan Reinman of Brevard Courts, and Lt. Joanna Seigel, and Agent Cory Jackson, Brevard Sherrif Office.



In addition to our COVID era virtual fair on October 2, 2021, our Mental Health Task Force also held a virtual panel on November 14, devoted to sharing spiritual wisdom on mental health wellness from the major faith traditions. It consisted of a keynote by Dr. David Rosmarin, Director of Spirituality and Mental Health at McLean Hospital and an Associate Professor of Psychology at Harvard Medical School, and panel presentations from local leaders representing Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Protestant, Catholic and Islamic religions: Rabbi Cantor Patricia Hickman of Temple Israel, Sensei Genjo Gallagher of the Brevard Zen Center, Mrs. Nina Gadodia of the Brevard Hindu community, Rev. Dr. Gary Spencer, United Methodist District Superintendent and former pastor of Suntree UMC, Muhammad

Samarah a leader of the Islamic Society of Brevard, and Deacon Mike McElwee, of St. John the Evangelist Catholic Community.

Local news coverage of the event included the following quote printed in the Nov. 4, 2021 edition of hometown news:

“A day devoted to mental health wellness could not come at a better time. Isolation, loneliness, and anxiety have touched all of our lives during the past two years,” said Dr. Baggett. “The good news is, we don’t have to cope with our mental health challenges all by ourselves. There is ancient wisdom, thousands of years old, in the various faith traditions, which is available to help us through tough times.”

The following year, on November 12, 2022, we held our first fair to use the *Dare to Care* theme. Our keynote address was a virtual presentation by Dawn Brown, an African American staff member with NAMI nationally, who was dedicated to addressing mental health care in minority communities.



**Dawn
Brown**

Her keynote was, at my request, on *Untreated Mental Illness – An American Tragedy*. Six of our breakout workshop sessions were led by local professionals and NAMI members. Pastor Annette Stiles Pendergrass and I led a seventh session on *Biblical Wisdom for Mental Health Wellness*. The C.A.R.E. theme stood for *Community Awareness & Response for Everyone*.

For the next Dare to Care Mental Health Fair, held on November 11, 2023, our keynote address was by the nationally famous syndicated

columnist, Chaplain Norris Burkes. His presentation was titled *Resiliency, Surviving Loss, Love and Life*. During our Resource Table time following his keynote, he signed and sold copies of his new book. Because the chaplain lived on the West Coast, it was expensive to fly him in, but we were fortunate to receive a very generous donation from the Renfro Family to make that possible.



Chaplain
Norris Burkes

At this 2023 event, in addition to our mental illness related themes, we also addressed the problem of addiction with a breakout session on *The Neuroscience of Addiction: Understanding the Disease Model*, led by a local member of Alcoholics Anonymous. Diane and I led a session on *Finding the Good in Grief*, based on themes from my book of that title.

Our theme for the 2024 Mental Health Fair, held on September 14, was *A Time for Hope*. In place of a keynote we decided to have a series of personal stories of hope in the face of mental health challenges, moderated by our Associate Pastor, Bailey Schreiner. The featured speakers were Zayne Devoe, a youth member of our Mental Health Task Force and a mental health consumer, and his mother Niki Devoe, a member of NAMI. Zayne and his mother shared their personal moving stories of their struggles with Zayne's symptoms and treatment and their courage, strength and hope during their journeys. Joe G., a local

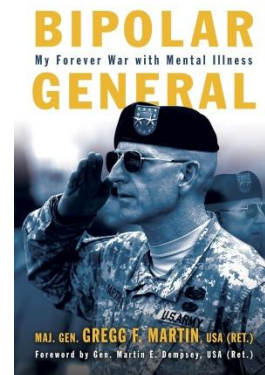
member of Alcoholics Anonymous, who regularly attended AA meetings held at our church, shared his inspiring story of addiction recovery. Deborah Kofkin, the mother of a son who died by suicide, shared the painful and inspiring story of her journey to being a dedicated advocate for suicide prevention. Dr. Ethyl Andrews, a local child psychiatrist talked about the problem of recidivism in Brevard County, and Natalie Hussein, then president of NAMI Brevard, talked about the services needed in the form of a better continuum of care.

The focus of the breakout sessions was on mental health challenges during various life phases. Diane and I led a breakout session on Tools for Emotional and Spiritual Self Care.

Our 2025 Mental Health Fair, held of October 4 of that year, had as its theme *A Time for Compassion*. Our keynote address was delivered by Major General Greg Martin, author of *Bipolar General: My Forever War with Mental Illness*.



General
Gregg
Martin



We were fortunate that General Martin had retired to Cocoa Beach and was available at no cost to us. His personal story of his struggle with bipolar disorder personally and being the father of a son with that same diagnosis, was not only deeply moving, but also highly informative.

Our breakout sessions in 2025 included sessions on Social Media, Technology and Mental Health,, Tools & Resources for Mental Health

Wellness, Child and Family Mental Health, Veterans Mental Health, Caring for Mentally Ill Loved Ones, and Aging and Mental Health.

Each of our Mental Health Fairs in the 2020s included more than 20 resource tables provided by local professionals who shared information about mental health resources and services in our community. Diane and I also had a table where she let people know about her virtual counseling services and I signed and sold copies of my books.

In early 2026 I decided, at 89 years of age, that I needed to step down as chair of the Suntree Mental Health Task Force and to pass the responsibility of our mental health education to someone else. The problem quickly arose, that there was no clear and easy choice for handing off this responsibility. I informed the Task Force that meetings were suspended until the church could identify a new chair.

I also, at the same time, indicated to our pastors that I was willing to continue as a member of the Sunree UMC Beloved Community Committee and that Diane and I would be willing to help that group take responsibility for future Mental Health Fairs. In the Spring of 2026, we began planning the 2026 Fair and using our planning process as a way of training the Beloved Community in the steps needed to continue having Mental Health Fairs. We chose as our 2026 Mental Health Fair theme, *Out of the Shadows, Into the Light* and decided that I would give the keynote address by telling my own personal story, as the father of a mentally ill son, from the shadows into the light.

HEALTH CHALLENGES IN MY SENIOR YEARS

In the Winter of 2008, at age 71, I began to have episodes of atrial fibrillation. A cardiologist in Sebring Florida recommended a pacemaker. We did not realize at the time that the cardiologist was not a skilled pacemaker surgeon. After he implanted a pacemaker, while I

was resting in a hospital bed, my entire abdomen began to pace. It was a scary experience. The Sebring hospital staff rushed me back into surgery where I believe the doctor disconnected the leads. When he talked to Diane afterwards, he admitted he was over his head. We soon travelled to Raleigh and arranged for Dr. Cooper, a Wake Med physician Diane knew from her time there, to put in a new pacemaker. This surgery was a success and has served me well through the years since. When that pacemaker began to lose its power in 2023, Dr. Stephen Watts, an electrophysiologist in Rockledge Florida, replaced it.

Despite having the onset of atrial fibrillation and pacemaker surgery, and a stroke on October 10, 2014 that gave me double vision for a few weeks and left me permanently unable to safely ambulate without the assistance of a cane, walker, or disability scooter, I had the good fortune of remaining cognitively healthy and able to write and teach throughout my eighties. Eventually my teeth became so bad that they had to be replaced by dentures, my vision so bad that I had cataract surgery, and my hearing so poor that I needed hearing aids. ``Old age``, as my father used to say, ``ain`t for sissies``



Recovering
from stroke
At Rehab
Hospital



Walking with
my walker for
Family Promise

In January of 2023 I had an attack of appendicitis, and when the emergency physicians at Viera hospital began surgery they discovered my appendix had already burst. If Diane had not rushed me to the hospital when I complained of abdominal pain that evening, I probably would not have survived.

In February of 2026, after being referred by urgent care, I was admitted to Holmes Hospital for three days with a serious case of the flu.

Despite these health challenges, I remained active and productive through my eighties, especially as I devoted my energies to Diane's and my family histories and memoirs.

FAMILY HISTORIES AND MEMOIRS

Between 2015 and 2023 I devoted much of my time, with the assistance of Diane, to writing a family history titled *Raymond and Dorothy Call/Smith Family History*. It was an adventure filled with surprising discoveries. When we first began to research the project we had no expectation that we would find so very many of Diane's ancestors who played significant roles in history. We were in awe when we learned the Call/Smith ancestry included nineteen of the 132 persons who ventured across the ocean on the Mayflower in 1621, and that more than 400 of her ancestors made that same journey during the Great Puritan Migration. Nor were we prepared to learn of all the ancestors who played significant parts in American history: those who settled the wilderness, established towns and cities, survived Native American attacks, were tried as witches, served in the militia, and fought in the American Revolution and Civil War.

The book moved from those early days to the family that Diane grew up with, and her personal memories, children and grandchildren. Once completed, we had copies of this family history printed at Staples and presented them to family members the following Christmas.

In 2018, I completed a book titled *Primary Source, A White Pastor's Journey through the Civil Rights Era*. It was generated by the invitations from local teachers I had received beginning in 2015 to speak to children in the local school system about my experiences during the civil rights era. One of those teachers was my daughter, Sarah Baggett Aloise. It was Sarah who inspired the title to the book when she introduced me as a "primary source". Much of the content of this book

appears earlier in this memoir. While the book was printed privately at Staples for a limited audience, it is currently available for free online reading at https://wedgeblade.net/files/archives_assets/26082.pdf .

While working on this memoir, *Guarded by Grace*, I have also worked on a yet unpublished Baggett Scott Family History titled *American Odyssey*. While researching the latter, I have been surprised to learn that I have ancestors who fought with William the Conqueror in 1066, and have ancestors who were among the first Europeans to settle at Jamestown, and that there is even a line that leads back to the father and sister of Pocahontas. More than a dozen of my ancestors served in the Revolutionary War, and ancestors also fought in the Indian Wars and on both sides of the Civil War.

I also worked closely with Diane as she wrote a memoir titled *CALLED TO CARE: My Fifty Year Career in Nursing, 1971-2021*. In that work she covered her journey from her early decision to be a nurse following her mother's accidental fall, injury, and need for care when Diane was only 8, through her nursing school and early career at a psychiatric hospital in Elmira New York. It recorded her extensive career at Wake Medical Center in Raleigh North Carolina, her awards and publications, and culminated in her role as Vice President of Nursing at WakeMed Cary. Finally, it told of her post retirement career as a grief counselor in the Suntree/Viera community of Brevard County Florida.

90TH BIRTHDAY PARTY

As I approached my 90th year on this planet, Diane and my daughter Sarah began to plan for a birthday celebration to be held on Sunday, August 16, 2026 at the Hilton Hotel in Indialantic Beach, Florida. She scheduled Pearl Joy to entertain us with music as Pearl had done on my 80th and my 85th Birthdays. Friends and Family were sent invitations, but those who lived a significant distance away were encouraged to send cards and letters.



SELECTED POEMS

DEVOTION

*OUR HEARTS TO GOD
SHOULD BE SO TRUE,
THAT IN A SINGLE DAY,
EACH LITTLE THING WE THINK OR DO,
EACH WORD WE CHANCE TO SAY,
BECOME A WAY OF SERVING HIM,
A WAY OF GIVING PRAISE.*

By John F. Baggett III (*Composed 1950 at Age 14*)



MY HAPPY PLACE

**THERE IS A PLACE, THOUGH SOME MAY SAY
IT DOES NOT STILL EXIST;
A PLACE WHERE TREES AND FLOWERS PLAY
SPRINKLED BY MORNING MISTS;
WHERE BIRDS THEIR HAPPY SONGS DO CHANT,
AS IF WITHOUT A CARE
WHILE BABBLING BROOKS THE MEADOWS HAUNT,
WITH HAPPINESS TO SHARE.**

By John F. Baggett III (*Composed 1953 at age 16*)

THE GOD SONG

(Sung to the Tune of *Blowing in the Wind*)

**IT IS GOD THAT IS ALWAYS DRIVING MAN
TO CARE ABOUT THE COMING DAY,
AND YET GOD IS THE MYSTERY WHO TAKES
EACH MAN`S SECURITY AWAY.
IT IS GOD THAT MAKES MAN SEEK HAPPINESS,
BUT DOES NOT ALLOW HIS JOY TO STAY.
IT IS GOD WHO GIVES – EVERY MAN HIS LIFE.
AND GOD WHO TAKES HIS LIFE AWAY.**

IT IS GOD THAT DRIVES MAN TO SEARCH FOR LOVE,
AND YET MAN IS CONSTANTLY PURSUED
BY THAT FORCE WHICH FINALLY CASTS EACH ONE OUT
INTO LONELINESS AND SOLITUDE.
IT IS GOD THAT DRIVES MAN TO KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH,
BUT ALWAYS DENIES HIM CERTITUDE.
IT IS GOD WHO GIVES – EVERY MAN HIS LIFE,
AND GOD WHO TAKES HIS LIFE AWAY.

IT IS GOD THAT GIVES THE DESIRE TO ACHIEVE,
AND YET DEATH LEAVES MAN`S WORK UNDONE.
IT IS GOD THAT SUMMONS MAN TO DO GOOD,
AND NEGLECT HIS DUTY TO NONE.
AND YET GOD IS THE VOICE THAT PRONOUNCES GUILT,
FOR MAN`S WAR WITH SELF IS NEVER WON;
IT IS GOD WHO GIVES – EVERY MAN HIS LIFE
AND GOD WHO TAKES HIS LIFE AWAY.

By John F. Baggett III (*Composed 1968*)

POEMS WRITTEN FOR DIANE

THE LOVE OF MY LIFE

GUIDANCE FROM ABOVE
TO DIANE – WITH MUCH LOVE ON OUR 28TH ANNIVERSARY

WHEN I WALKED INTO A MEETING ONE NIGHT,
I DIDN`T MEAN TO FALL FOR YOU.
BEFORE MY EYES – A WONDROUS DELIGHT.
WHAT TO THINK? WHAT TO DO?
I COULD NOT HELP BUT STARE AT YOU
FOR A VERY LONG WHILE,
UNABLE TO RESIST YOUR CHARMING SMILE.

**WE SAT IN THE ROOM MANY TIMES MORE.
SOMETIMES LISTENING, SOMETIMES SHARING
NEVER BORED, ALWAYS CARING.
DRAWN TO YOUR BEING.
A WHIRLWIND OF FEELING.
AND THEN, ONE NIGHT, I KNEW
YOU FELT IT TOO.
COULD THIS BE RIGHT?
WHEN I WALKED INTO A MEETING ONE NIGHT,
I DIDN`T MEAN TO FALL IN LOVE.
GUIDANCE FROM ABOVE. JOHN**



TREASURES

MOMENTS WITH MY AMAZING WIFE

**I LOVE EVERY MOMENT I SPEND WITH YOU.
AND TREASURE THE TIMES I HOLD YOUR HAND,
WHENEVER WE SHARE A BEAUTIFUL VIEW,**

**OR TRAVEL TOGETHER THROUGHOUT THE LAND.
WE SHARE WITH EACH OTHER ALL THAT WE DO,
AND DO THE THINGS WE`VE PLANNED.
YOU ARE THE CENTER OF MY BEING
MY FRIEND, MY LOVER, MY LIFE.
I DON`T WANT TO MISS A MOMENT OF LIVING
WITH YOU, MY AMAZING WIFE.**

**TO DIANE
WITH ALL MY LOVE
JOHN**

A MOMENT OF GRACE

**A time of crisis
A time of fear;
And then,
From the darkness
Did appear,
A deer. A deer?**



**Not *just* a deer,
But a sign- to ease our fear;
Something different,
Something rare;
A gift of God`s amazing care;
A moment of grace,
For the crises we face.**

John Baggett



*Diane
A Companion in Christ Forever*

*With stunning smile
And upbeat style,
You enter the lives of others,
And they are drawn to your friendship.*

*As hummingbirds to
Crimson flowers in the Spring.
With sympathy and empathy
Your intuitions discern that others are in pain,
While your training affirms
The physical, the mental, and the spiritual
Dimensions of their maladies.*

*You feel, and then you heal
For you have been blessed
With the healing word and touch.
Always the Servant, always the Nurse,
Focusing on the needs of others,
And bringing the gift of caring
With peanut butter and jelly efficiency.
To every task of Administration
And every human encounter.*

*And you have brought God's healing power
To your marriage and family.
And the scared Child within you
Has reached out to the sad Child within me,
And together we have found a playground of immeasurable happiness.
Your life and mine
Were once crushed by the terrible forces*

*Of loneliness and hopelessness.
But now we celebrate even the tough times
In the victory of Faith together,
Knowing and believing that
Nothing can separate us from the Love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord
Your companion in Christ Forever —
John*

NEXT TO YOU

TO DIANE FROM JOHN ON OUR 36TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY



NEXT TO YOU

**Since long before we said ``I Do.``
My favorite place was next to you.
When sneaking a kiss while on retreat,
Or going out for a bite to eat,**

**Or visiting a park in the afternoon,
Or watching a rocket leave for the moon,
Or taking a trip to a far off space,
Like Boston, Plymouth, or some other place,
Or walking the boardwalk at the beach
Or going to a class to teach,
My favorite place in all the world
No Matter what we ever do
Will always be - next to you.**



**When walking to a mountain top,
Or deciding on a place to stop,
Or lying in the bed each night
While holding one another tight
Like the night I suddenly awoke,
To find that I'd just had a stroke.
My favorite place in all the world
No Matter what we ever do**

Will Always be next to you.

**Back when we worked on projects
Building a porch or deck,
You always worked with me,
Despite my sweaty neck.
At Banner Elk we swung on the swing,
And listened to the birdies sing.
Whether retreating with the boys
Or buying grandkids toys,
My favorite place in all the world
No matter what we`d ever do,
Has always been next to you.**

**And should I die and go to see
All those who`ve gone before
You need to know I`ll always be
Beside YOU evermore.
My favorite place in all the world
No matter what we do
Will always be – me
NEXT TO YOU**

**With unending LOVE,
John**

SELECTED PAINTINGS

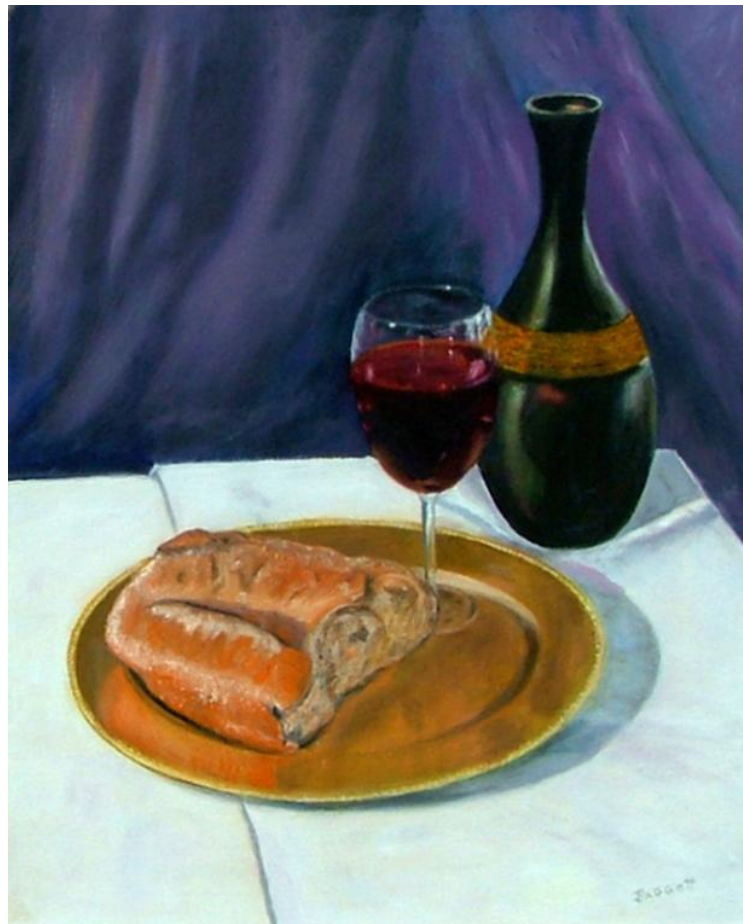






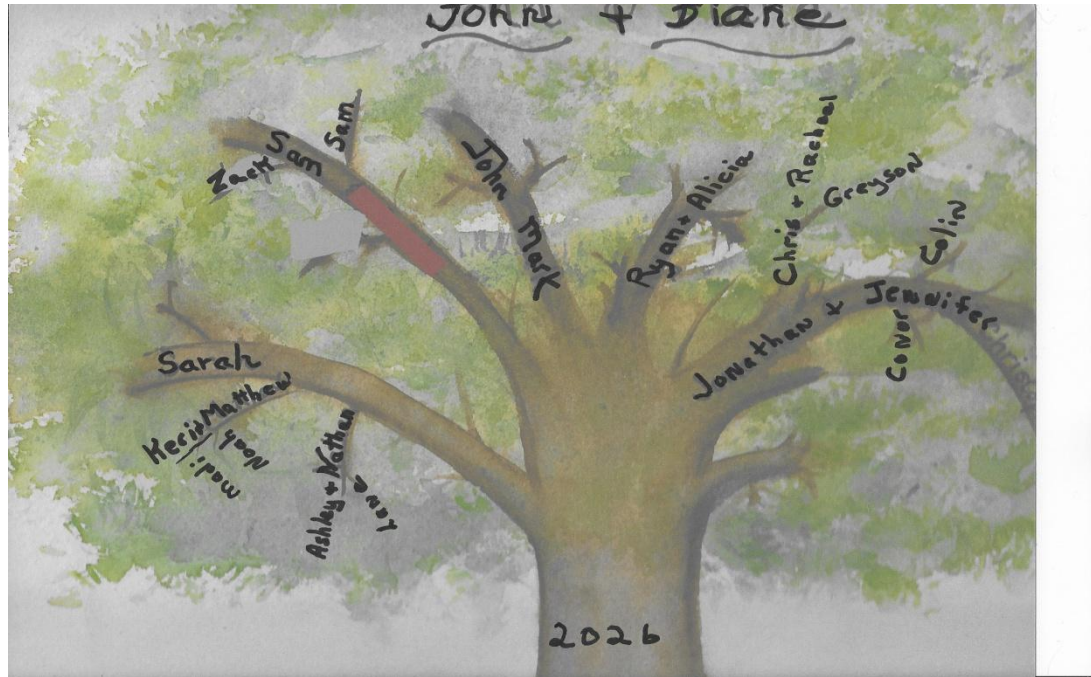








OUR GROWING FAMILY TREE



DAUGHTER SARAH AND HER FAMILY



SARAH



Keri and Matt



Ashley, Rev. John, and Nate



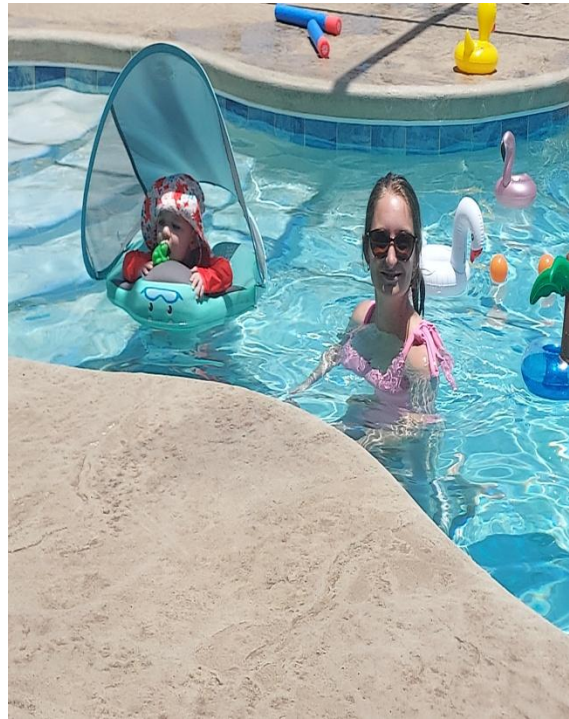
**Front Row: Keri with Madi, Diane with
Lane, John with Noah
Back Row: Matt, Ashley, Nate, Sarah**



**Great Grands
Madi and Noah**



Great Grandson Lane



**Lane and Ashley
in Great Grandfather's
Pool**

SON SAM'S MELBOURNE VISIT



**Back Row:
Diane, Sarah,
Nate, Ashley,
and Lane**

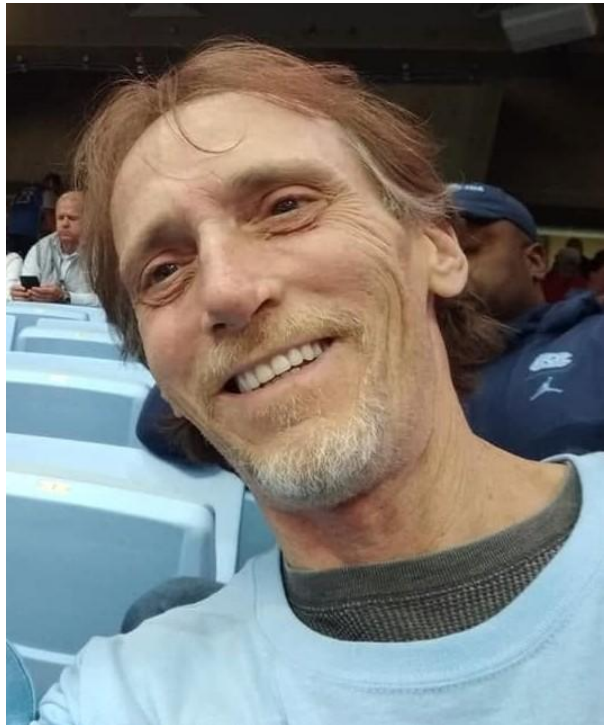
**Front Row: Son
Sam and John**



THE BAGGETT BOYS

Left to Right: John Mark, John, Sam, Sammy and Zach

SON SAM AND HIS FAMILY



Son Sam



**Grandson Sammy
With Carla Rossi**



**Grandson Zack
Talented Photographer**



**Grandson
Sammy With
Baby Sammy**



**Son John Mark
And His Dad**



SON JOHN MARK



SON RYAN AND ALICIA



SON JON



SON JON AND FAMILY

FRONT ROW: CHRISTOPHER, JOHN, DIANE AND COLIN
SECOND ROW: JENNIFER, JON, CONOR, RYAN



***RACHEL AND GRANDSON
CHRIS***



***CHRISTOPHER
AND GREAT
GRANDSON
GREYSON***



**AS THE TREE CONTINUES TO GROW
IT WILL ALWAYS BE
GUARDED BY GRACE**