

Meet My Dad, The Author

Memory of my first surprise came when I was five years old. Another child and I devised the idea of hiding behind the front seat of our car when my father was home for lunch. It was time for him to leave, we heard the door close, the engine start, and we were on our way, convinced that our secret was safe. After about five minutes the car stopped and my dad disappeared into a store. We laughed at ourselves, at our hoax, and settled down to hide again. Then he appeared, carrying two ice cream cones. How amazing. There was no reproach, only a smile and a trip home. Somehow we knew not to do it again.

I was fourteen at the time we were told of my father's heavenly experiences. We were staying in Tacoma, Washington that summer because of my father's employment. It was 1931, the year before the depression overcame our family. I was involved in junior high school sports and had lost my heart to the Girl Scouts. My parents always stood firmly behind me, protected me from the overly harsh realities, sacrificed for me and rejoiced when I rejoiced. My parents were in love throughout their long years of marriage. My father called my mother "Dolly". My only sibling on earth, Donald, nine years my senior had moved out of the house by the year Dad told us of his heavenly visits.

I remember that time well. My father said that he had been praying for years to share his heavenly experiences with his family and friends and now he had received a "yes" from Jesus. After telling us he immediately began writing about them every morning. As a youngster on a farm in Iowa, he delivered papers on horseback, getting up at 4:00 a.m. daily. Ever after, he continued this morning wake up routine. His typewriter was busy for many mornings after he received permission. In the end he had typed two books about his experiences and a third which was a series of lectures he attended in Heaven. Later, he also wrote a detailed book which enumerated his earthly life events. He hoped that people reading about his life would see him as an ordinary down-to-earth man and believe what he had written about Heaven.

He was indeed an ordinary down-to-earth person except for his heavenly trips. Visual memories of him flood my mind. I see him repairing his old Model-T Ford, somehow keeping it going. I see him cranking at the front of the car, which always frightened me for fear it would run over him. In contrast, I see him as the professionally dressed man teaching high school. He was a fix-it man. Actually, he twice rebuilt our house, alone, after two fires gutted much of it. And he improved it. I see him helping me with my school work, especially mathematics, and with my school projects. If something was important to me it became important to him. He was always there to back up the family. However, I was never pushed, just trusted and in that trust, found freedom. Much later he was to sew my high school graduation dress and even my wedding dress. It was depression time.

I see him walking with me on woodland trails when I was about five years of age and later too. He introduced me to the loveliness of ferns and mosses, to hidden wildflowers. He would always collect a tiny boutonniere for his lapel. This

was typical. Later, I realized he was searching for reminders of Heaven, even from the time he was a young boy. My visual memories of his hunting agates, for instance, are etched in my mind. The color and translucence of agates reminded him of the radiant hills and crystal gems of Heaven. I still cherish some of his agates, mostly polished beach agates. One of my clearest memories is his searching on bent knee to allow the sun to reveal their sparkle.

My father liked miniatures and saved them. After he retired he began developing an HO railroad layout. When my brother and I left home he had a free room to himself. His railroad layout impressed us and he painted the ceiling blue. Sometimes he wore a genuine railroad cap. He constructed a series of circus wagons. Later he built model boats; first replicas of the Santa Maria, then others. Most impressive was his model of the U.S.S. Roosevelt, famous for Peary's discovery of the South Pole. It was later displayed at a convention in the Seattle Maritime Museum. None of his boats were made from kits, he carved them. He measured the Roosevelt while it was in harbor at a pier in Seattle. The model was amazingly detailed and constructed with great care. Again later he constructed a model sloop for me from a company's construction plans for a full sized boat. As a family we had a simulated launching ceremony and dinner to celebrate its completion.

While I held summer camp at Deception Pass, Washington, in the summers of 1940 and 1941, my parents visited. It was an interracial camp for disadvantaged girls. He would sit with fascinated children on the beach and carve small sailboats from bark, toothpicks for masts and triangles of paper for sails. Then he would set them out on the water, much to the children's delight. Children adored him, later including my own two. They well remember the sailboats and also a waterwheel for Jeanice and Larry. He carved other miniatures too. I particularly prize a perfect little axe about 2 inches long. Sometimes the carving would be baskets out of nut shells. I was told that when I was an infant and we were traveling across sun drenched Eastern Washington, my mother had forgotten my nipple so he carved one. He always carried a pocket knife. He even carved his ice cream into apples or bananas occasionally.

Animals liked him. First there was our dog Max when we lived in Bellingham, Washington, and later, Pal, a fox terrier. Flowers seemed to respond also. He had a knack with them wherever we lived. Doubtless they reminded him of Heaven. There was a time when my parents owned a small acreage in Auburn, south of Seattle, which he gardened while we continued to live in Seattle. I was in college at the time and remember it as a veritable truck garden. My mother prepared many cans of vegetables from it.

I have attempted to describe what he was like, a totally honest and caring man who did not spare himself, a family man, elder in our church, a loving man. What was he not? He was not athletic. He was not artistic, even though he sometimes attempted to be but he was a great help to my mother in her efforts. Neither was he musical, although again, he tried to be. He did play the Jew's harp. However, if we were singing around the piano and he joined us it was a disaster. He was tone deaf.

Again, I see him with magic squares, a math exercise on a grid, the columns of which add the same in all directions. Yet not content with inventing varied shapes and sizes, he used logarithms. He kept his mind busy. He liked puzzles. At work, at Boeing Airplane Company where he inspected transits, he would often arrive at a math solution in his head before engineers worked it out on paper. Still he could never induce me to like thought problems.

My father's sense of humor was limited and practical jokes an anathema. Only once in all the years I saw him lose his temper. A cousin was staying with us at the time. To understand the incident one needs to visualize Dad as a boy with his friends in the family watermelon patch. They had free reign with parental permission. They would break open ripe melons with their hands and eat the centers. Ever after watermelon was a great favorite of his. On this particular day he sat at the kitchen table, a beautiful slice of watermelon before him. The cousin crept up behind him, reached across his shoulder and salted it. Furious, my father picked up the watermelon and slammed it on the floor; he said nothing.

I never heard any arguments between my parents. Each gave in to the other as needed, although there must have been minor disagreements we did not know of. Outstanding in my memory was my father's sensitivity to my mother. An illustration of this was in regard to church attendance. A very large issue with him was the growing liberal position of the church we attended. He wished to transfer to a smaller and more conservative congregation but he never did. The reason was my mother's shyness. It was not easy for her to make new friends. He stayed for her sake.

Sunday mornings my father polished the family shoes in our basement. He really made them shine. We went to church in the old Ford. I was in my teens, self conscious and embarrassed. He was sympathetic and would park several blocks away. It was not until after the depression that he could replace the Ford with a used Studebaker which to us was as exciting as a new car.

Dad was always frugal, yet we never missed a meal, even during the height of the depression. During those years food was issued as commodities from the government. He volunteered at the commissary as an accountant and occasionally was paid a little, but only in street car tokens. With no job he was unable to make payments on the house and lost it to foreclosure. However, we didn't move. No one wanted it; nothing sold in those days. Eventually he was able to begin payments again, then lost the house a second time for the same reason. We stayed. Eventually it was paid off. The Lord's protection was strong but there were no frills. Christmases were meager but joyous. Trees were available for cutting, free at the edge of town. Bringing a Christmas tree from the woods seemed quite romantic.

He had learned from his own parents to take advantage of opportunities and to work hard. Together, with his three brothers, he learned the building and mason trades from his father. These occupations were always there as a backup. He liked being a brick mason and was fast and precise. However, he was disgusted

with the cursing, immoral stories, crude behavior and the depreciation of women among fellow laborers, consequently, he often ate lunch alone.

I remember well an incident when he was laying brick on a hospital. He stepped inside from the scaffolding. When he was about to return he saw an angel standing on it so he waited. The next instant it collapsed and his life was saved. I know that he frequently was aware of his angels and their activities. Other incidents I know of directly, come to mind. My brother had just been married and we were visiting him and his wife. As we walked down the hall to their apartment my father warned us, "Something has been going on here, all of their angels are present." When questioned, we were told that a spiritualist had just visited. The new couple was being protected. Another incident was during a funeral service. I noticed his looking around and in a whisper, asked him why. He said that he was watching angels comforting the family.

Another memorable incident came after I had completed my education and was working as a family counselor. Needing a bit of extra money to increase my income, I took in some typing on the side. A society woman was writing a book on the fountains of Rome and had given me the hand written manuscript. I lost it. I was desperate. Finally, my father volunteered to help look for it. We were searching in the basement of my home, an unlikely place. There was a closed box at the center of the basement with nothing on it. Dad and I had been hunting for some time when he turned to see a hand place the manuscript on that box. Just a partial glimpse of an Angel. How often any of us are helped, we cannot say.

My father usually did not speak about his spiritual experiences. I believe this was because he had been silent for so many years. However, if I questioned him he was never hesitant in answering. He enjoyed being alone but he really was never alone. The angels were his friends.

For entertainment we were likely to play games some evenings. I remember among them was Flinch and the progenitor of pick-up-sticks, a game with tiny wooden tools. Then, there was table croquet on our dining room table. Later, black and white television arrived. Mother and Dad thoroughly enjoyed I Love Lucy. He liked Charlie Chaplin as well, probably for my sake. Most exciting for us were picnics and camping. An early memory, when I was five years old, was his building a row boat. We were camping at a beach near Bellingham, Washington. He actually tied a rope to the boat and to a log on the shore, pushed it out, and let me paddle alone. I have much to be grateful for that my parents encouraged independence. I always enjoyed their trust. It was freeing. I remember giving my mother my university diploma when I graduated. I knew they had earned it with their faith in me and their diligent support. Another source of entertainment was visiting with relatives and close friends, especially during our Bellingham years. Later, they would stay over with us in Seattle.

Always a student but never able to go to college because of finances, he took correspondence courses. I have a number of his diplomas which include accounting, architecture and shorthand. Eager to learn, he would reach out for knowledge. For instance, he discovered the Numeric New Testament which

unquestionably proves the mathematical foundation of scripture. He even attempted to learn Esperanto which he saw as an international language that could help to unify different ethnic groups. Sometimes I would see him reading the dictionary or an encyclopedia, eager to learn, ready to explore. He did not read novels. I believe this was his respect for truth over fantasy.

My father was a preacher but not a pastor. In his preaching, as in his Bible classes, he never mentioned his spiritual knowledge gained in Heaven. He would say that all that anyone needed is in the Bible. I especially remember the lively men's Bible class he taught in the Bellingham church, and his creativity. He actually made film strips long before they were commercially available.

I often think of the many disappointments he faced. The struggle with his old Model T is something of a symbol for me. I remember no complaints. He had a try again attitude. A major loss was my mother's first baby who died at birth and his most savage fear was that he would lose his wife too. The rural doctor turned out to be drunk. Fortunately, thinking ahead in case of an emergency, my father had his own bottle of ether sequestered away, and he needed to use it. He saved her life, or was it the angels, doubtless both. His disappointments were many. Even when he began trying to restore a trashed boat he found on the beach, someone burned it. This may appear a small thing but it stays in my mind because, growing up, I knew he could not afford much. He would set about trying to make what he wanted or needed himself. I learned from him to persist, to recognize and claim opportunities, but most of all to trust and to seek God's will.

It surprises me, as I look back, that he never attempted to influence me with his special knowledge, but allowed me to find my own way through anxieties, trials and mistakes. He is in Heaven now, no longer a visitor. He is now surrounded with the Heavenly things he so loved and is together with my mother and two sons. The older I become, the more I recognize the absolute compatibility of his heavenly experiences with my increasing understanding of scripture. This, together with the consistence of his life, has influenced me deeply.

Eleanor B. Whipple Ph.D., D.H.L.