



Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association

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PEOPLE I HAVE KNOWN (PART 1)

Each one of us has a life story. Many can relate to stories about people—sometimes more than a deep theological discourse. We recall that Paul, though well-versed in Scripture, often shared events of his own life, like his Damascus Road experience, even before kings. In this article it will be my objective to honor some people who impacted my life and ministry—people who were truly “Friends” (cf. John 15:15).

I was 21 years old when I met **RUBY BRINKLEY** while holding evangelistic meetings in Porterville, California. She was a widow who had raised two daughters. Both were now grown and married. Life for her had not been without challenges. As a girl she had escaped from a fire which left scars on her body. But she was a woman of God, a prayer warrior, with a strong positive attitude. If I might say the word “worry,” she would respond: “I don’t even use that word!”



Ruby became a good friend over the years that followed. In my mind I can still hear her voice on the phone, with opening words like: “Do you have the victory?” Her faith in God was strong, her dedication deep, but she was also a fun person, pleasant to be with.

The accompanying photo is of Ruby with Floyd Thomas who led the singing in many of my meetings back in 1961-1963—in California, Arizona, and Texas.

When I had ministry decisions to make it was not uncommon for me to share a prayer request with her. As an extension of my preaching in person ministry, I was thinking of going on some radio stations with a 15-

minute program. She thought this was a good idea and said she would pray about it.

A short time later I received a letter from her. She felt the Lord wanted her to give me a small piece of property she owned. It sold for \$2,500—not much compared with prices today—but that launched my radio programs which continued for about five years. Stations like XERB and XEG had transmitters in Mexico which covered several states. Programs were recorded on reel-to-reel tape and mailed to the various stations.

I was never one to beg for money, but it took money to pay for radio time, even though costs were much less then. To encourage listeners to write in, I began to put my messages into print which I offered on the air. This developed into a *writing* ministry which became very far-reaching—including the publication of books and booklets—as well as sharing articles with a mailing list year after year to this present time!

Ruby was not a woman of means. She worked hard as a caregiver and various other jobs. Her favorite was working at Camp Nelson, a lovely summer resort community with huge pine trees and awesome views of mountain peaks. The elevation at nearly 5,000 feet provided relief from the valley heat.

When I think of Ruby, I think of Camp Nelson. The family she worked for owned The Lodge (a coffee shop and restaurant); a lovely motel with quality rooms, as well as more primitive summer rental cabins; a trailer/RV park; pack station; general store, etc. People at Camp Nelson liked to mix the water from a natural soda spring with lemonade, some fished in the Tule River for Rainbow trout, and there were places where wild berries grew in abundance.

Ruby’s brother-in-law, Runie Johnson, built a picturesque chapel at the edge of a meadow there, which has long functioned as a community church. He served as pastor until his untimely death in a car accident, caused by a drunken driver.

On holidays like Thanksgiving, a lot of people from the valley would drive up to spend the day and have dinner at The Lodge. One year in preparation for Thanksgiving many turkeys had been purchased, along with all the food needed to serve many Thanksgiving dinners. But the night before a snow storm closed the road preventing anyone from coming!

Though Camp Nelson is only about 30 miles from Porterville, the road has numerous twists and turns. After passing the

generating station (through which water from the Tule River flows), the road gets steeper. If memory serves correctly, one time I counted 111 curves before getting to Camp Nelson.

It was through Ruby I got to know the people who owned the resort. In exchange for work—like driving the tractor lawn mower, helping unload the truck when it brought supplies for the store, and a few other occasional odd jobs—they provided me a place to stay for the summer of 1969. It was during this time, in this lovely setting, I wrote one of my books.

Quite some time later, Arlene and I had our grandsons Brad and Alex with us on a trip. (They are grown men now in their 30s, but were just little boys at the time.) We went by to see Ruby who was by now up in years. The boys were impressed with her and said, after we left: “That woman *really knows God!*” It brought to mind how some people, upon meeting Mother Teresa, felt a sense of awe.

In her last days, Ruby moved to Oklahoma to be close to her daughter. Twice while holding meetings back that way, I went to see her and once brought her to be with us in Palm Springs for a few days, after which she was able to visit old friends in Porterville for one last time.

The part Ruby played in launching those radio programs had far-reaching effects, as will be seen as we progress.

JACK AND ALICE ERYSIAN heard my radio programs on KBIF in Fresno, California. Because of severe persecution in their homeland, a lot of Armenian people came to the United States. Some settled in Fresno, bought property, owned olive groves and grape vineyards. Many did well and had a great appreciation for America.

If anyone had a problem pronouncing their last name, Alice would say they were the “Erysiens” like the book of “Ephesians” in the Bible! They loved the Lord and it was a joy to be with them. Through them I became aware of certain distinct Armenian foods. At their invitation, several times while traveling through Fresno, I would stop to see them, and even spend the night. They often sent offerings to my ministry.

Jack had long before retired from other employment, but retirement for him was not to sit around and do nothing. Not everyone knew how to repair wicker chairs, but he did. Word got around and before long he had a little wicker repair business going in his garage. I personally witnessed customers bringing wicker chairs, glad they had found someone who could repair them.

The Erysiens owned the property on the corner across the street from their house. McDonald’s wanted to buy it from them for a fast-food restaurant, and they welcomed the opportunity. Jack was now up in years and was not hurting for money (especially after this sale!). But when McDonald’s was about to open, he went over and applied for a job!

Soon he was making hamburgers, frying fries, and waiting on customers. He was by far the oldest employee, but he enjoyed working with the young people and they enjoyed him also. The commute was short—just across the street!

While many people heard the radio broadcasts, only a small percentage, of course, would write and send an offering. But one of those was **A.C. HALL** who lived in Tracy, California, a sweet man with a heart for God.



A. C. HALL

It was my desire, like another young preacher—Timothy—I suppose some listeners figured, “He is young, what does he know?” But for others, my youth (I was in my early 20s) was an advantage. For them, it was good to know that not *all* young people were given over to the world, the flesh, and the Devil.

Because of the contact by radio, A.C. knew of me and attended the meetings I held in Modesto in 1962, about 33 miles from where he lived. Without branching out into the details, I had different ministry projects going and nearly everything was paid up. I only owed \$800 dollars, a small amount in comparison. I mentioned this one night as a praise report; certainly not as an appeal for money.

The next morning I had gone to the church to pray, along with two or three other people. Determined not to be distracted, when a knock came on the side door, I ignored it. (I had reason to believe it did not involve me.) But the knocking persisted, so after quite a while I finally went to the door. It was A.C.—rejoicing and crying at the same time. He told me he had hardly slept all night, that the Lord had laid something on his heart. Having just come from the bank, he handed me \$800 in fifty-dollar bills, paying off our ministry debt! An answer was knocking at the door—and I almost ignored it.

I recall the time Peter had been imprisoned; believers were praying for his release. But when he knocked on the door, they could hardly believe it! “They were astonished” when they saw it was actually him (Acts 12:13-16).

I am reminded of the story about a severe drought that had devastated an area. Rain was desperately needed, so a meeting to pray for rain was called. About 35 people showed up, but *only one brought an umbrella!*



JOE MARAGGIO

It was also through my radio program I became acquainted with **JOE MARAGGIO**—not to be confused with the famous baseball player with a similar name: Joe DiMaggio! Joe, who lived in Long Beach, California, was a regular listener to my programs and faithfully sent \$5 each month.

Way back when, his people had migrated to America from Sicily and settled in the Boston

area. Joe never married, but was especially close to his mother, for whom he provided care for many years, after she became blind. Even in this condition she enjoyed going places, like the amusement park at Coney Island. She managed well, but there was a problem when she needed to use a public restroom. Joe might end up asking several women to help her, before one would agree. He explained she could do everything; but just needed help getting to a stall. She could take it from there. Probably women who refused felt awkward with a blind person.

Joe told me his father was an unfaithful husband, a mean, unreasonable man. One time he tried to burn down the house with the family inside. Joe found it especially hurtful when he would mistreat his mother. Different times he told me how his father would cuss her out using four-letter words. With Joe's Boston accent it sounded like he was saying "far letta woods," but I knew what he meant.

What I am about to say, I want to say discretely, not desiring to offend anyone. To show how the father of this family was despised, after the funeral when he was lowered into the grave, one of Joe's brothers stepped forward and urinated on his father's casket!

After both parents were deceased, Joe decided to move to California. His background had been Catholic, but this was pretty much in name only. Then one day while driving along a street in Long Beach, California, he noticed a church and felt impressed to attend a service. I believe the name at that time was Gospel Lighthouse. There the preaching of the gospel impacted his life.

Later I had the opportunity to preach at this church which was pastored by Herschel Phillips who seemed to appreciate my friendship. He was instrumental in helping me obtain the tax exemption for the Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association. Ironically, a few years later, in front of about 400 people on an Easter Sunday morning, Herschel suddenly fell over and died while preaching. This was quite a shock for Joe and, I am sure, for others in that congregation, including children!

Because Joe had come to know the Lord in a positive way, he liked me to call him "Brother Joe," which I did. While still living in Riverside at the time, he came to see us. We invited him to spend the night. He had faithfully sent \$5 a month (as mentioned), but when he left he handed me \$1,000 dollars in cash! For us, and at that time especially, this was a huge amount and met a pressing need Joe knew nothing about!

Joe had a lady friend, Dorothy, who lived in Norwalk in a nice double-wide mobile home. In comparison, he lived in a long trailer in a trailer park in North Long Beach. His trailer was old, but he kept it up by replacing appliances like the hot water heater, as needed. When Dorothy died, she willed her mobile home to Joe. He moved there and gave *me* his trailer!

About that time a flood had devastated a poor town in Mexico, east of Tijuana, sweeping away a pastor's house, leaving his family in dire straits. It took some doing, but with the help of a couple American pastors, friends of mine, Joe's trailer was relocated to Mexico, providing a home for this pastor.

A little bit later I took Joe down to Mexico so he could see his old home, now serving as a home for a pastor and his family. He felt good about this. We could not speak Spanish, the pastor and his wife did not speak English, but it was obvious they were very grateful to God, and to us, that they now had a home!

Joe had made arrangements at Westminster Memorial Park for his burial when the time came and wanted me to conduct his funeral. When that time came, while driving there, I suddenly had a tire blowout. For any who may be familiar with the area, I was headed southbound on the 57 Freeway (not too far from The Crystal Cathedral). My son, Ralph K., who was a teenager at the time, was with me. But due to a recent injury, his arm was in a sling, making him unable to help.

Though wearing a suit, I had no choice but to change the tire, knowing time was limited because of the funeral. There was only a narrow shoulder on which to pull over, *and* the tire to be changed was on the side where traffic was zooming by! It was dangerous; I was vulnerable. I was about half way through the procedure when some young smart alecks came by in a car. Just as they got to me they screamed while making a loud noise by hitting the side of their car. That was scary!

Finally, having changed the tire, I stopped at a fast-food restaurant to wash up, and made it to the cemetery just in time to do the service for "Brother Joe."

One of my radio programs aired each Thursday night at 10 PM on XEG. This was a superpower station that could be heard in many states and time zones. One of the people who heard me on that station was **ARNOLD GWATHNEY** in Forrest City, Arkansas. This was in the early 60s.

He made contact, read messages I wrote, and a few years later (around 1967), he and his wife Bobby Jo, with their little son Randy, came to see us as part of a trip to California. His parents were living in California at the time.

I would describe Arnold as a pleasant, upbeat, honorable man who had a heart for God and ministry. Over the years he served as a pastor within some churches that were part of a fellowship of churches in Arkansas. He was also the editor of their magazine for a number of years. Until his retirement, his employment was with the local newspaper at Forrest City, less than an hour's drive west of the much larger city: Memphis, Tennessee.

I once shared with Arnold that before my birth, the two names my mother had in mind were Ralph and Arnold. Had Ralph not won out, I would have been Arnold Woodrow!

Unlike some people we meet along life's journey who simply come and go, Arnold kept in touch. Each year on my birthday, August 25, he would phone me. He remembered this date because it was also the day his mother was born (not the same year, of course). He and I were within 10 days of being the same age.

If I was preaching back that way, Arnold would come to the meetings at places like Little Rock and Hot Springs, Arkansas.

On one occasion we both spoke at a Conference near Muscogee, Oklahoma. Different times when I was traveling through Forrest City, I would visit them and spend the night at their little house on Hickey Street. Arnold had a mild Arkansas accent, but in fun he would emphasize it: "*Y'all come back now, ya' hear!*"

In September 2006, Arlene and I spent three days with Arnold and Bobby Jo in Branson, Missouri. See photo. We took in a number of shows (all very clean, family entertainment, some including gospel music). At one, for those arriving early, in a large room above the lobby, a fine piano player performed classic gospel songs for a half hour.



ARLENE WITH BOBBY JO AND ARNOLD GWATHNEY

At one time Arnold developed a tumor on the brain. Bobby Jo phoned for prayer. Fortunately the tumor was successfully removed by surgery. By the time we met in Branson he had fully recovered. But more challenges and tragedies would be in his future.

Arnold's sister in Oklahoma, Wanda, phoned me. She told me something horrible had happened something that was difficult for Arnold to even talk about. Knowing of his friendship with me, she asked if I would phone him (without mentioning her call). She felt it could be helpful if he opened up to me. What had happened was indeed tragic.

The son of Arnold and Bobby Jo, Randy, was separated from his wife who was living with her mother in a small town not too far away. Apparently she had used his credit card to make a sizeable purchase. Taking a gun with him, he went to where she was living and confronted her. At one point, her mother, a Christian woman, said, "Randy, don't let the Devil take advantage."

Randy had not been a violent person, but something snapped. He aimed his gun at her, pulled the trigger, shot and killed her. When her parents (the grandparents of his wife), who were living in the same house, came into the room, he shot and killed both of them!

A lot happened quickly. Evidently Randy's estranged wife's brother (who lived next door), who ran to phone the police, was also shot, but only in the arm. When an officer arrived, Randy shot at him through the windshield of the police car, as he hurriedly made an attempt to flee to Mexico. Just before crossing the border, he tried to use his credit card and was apprehended by the police.

Randy's murder trial received a lot of publicity on television and in the newspapers, including that his father was a pastor. As I recall, some of the people who were killed had been in a church Arnold had once pastored. The hurt for all concerned was overwhelming. Of course we stood with them in prayer through this trial that went on and on. When the verdict was finally handed down, it was life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Bobby Jo was already dealing with a health issue which was only made worse by all the stress and heartbreak, no doubt shortening her life. Just before she died, Arnold phoned me and said she was in the hospital, not expected to live. Her death was a great loss for him, another tragedy.

If all that had happened was not bizarre enough, there was more to come. About two years after Bobby Jo's death, Arnold was *murdered!* On October 15, 2017 an intruder broke into his house. His motive for murder was no more than to take what money was in Arnold's wallet and the keys to his car, a 2009 Toyota. He then used the car while robbing a local Family Dollar Store. The police were called, and as he fled was in a car wreck, was quickly arrested, and taken into custody.

Though we sorrow at the loss of those we love, we sorrow not as those who have no hope. We have a blessed hope in Christ of the life to come eternal life when there will be no more sin, suffering, sorrow or *death!* What a glad Reunion Day that will be!
—to be continued.

In the foregoing article I had occasion to mention people who contributed to my ministry back over the years. I want to thank those of you who, *today*, provide financial support some every month, and others from time to time. Much appreciated. Because of your faithful giving, I have not had to beg or send out appeals for money. True giving should always come from the heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7).

Much of the cost in printing is the initial set up, etc. When printing articles, once the press is running, the expense to print additional copies is minimal. Because of this, some of our articles are in good supply and may be sent a second time. This can be done for no additional postage, mailing at the non-profit bulk rate. If you already have one of these additional articles, perhaps you can share it with someone else. Blessings!

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