



Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association

P.O. BOX 21, PALM SPRINGS, CA 92263-0021

PEOPLE I HAVE KNOWN (Part 3)

This journey down Memory Lane will have numerous twists and turns, will take us to Malibu, California, with its rich and famous population, will cross oceans and include a climb to the top of the dome of St. Peter's Church in Rome, a walk along the streets of old Jerusalem, a boat ride across the Sea of Galilee, and visits to the biblical cities of Athens, Corinth, Thessalonica, Ephesus and more!

Like many Armenian people who had suffered atrocities in their homeland, the family of **LOUISE PEREIRDA** came to America when she was a young girl. They welcomed the invitation: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free." On the ship, for the first time in her life, Louise saw a black man, possibly a crew member. A different skin color had been unknown to her, so this came as a surprise. She ran to tell her parents.

In Part One of this series, I mentioned a Christian couple, **JACK AND ALICE ERSYIAN** in Fresno, who sold the property across the street from their house to McDonalds for a fast-food restaurant. Though Jack was now up in years, when the new McDonalds was about to open, he went over and applied for a job. I was passing through Fresno and stopped to see them. Alice told me about his new job. I went over there, but only waved to him. He was busy making hamburgers and frying fries for the lunch crowd. He gave me a big smile and waved back. That was my last time to see him. He was by far the oldest employee, but he enjoyed working with the young people and they enjoyed him also.

Louise was a friend of theirs, all of them being of Armenian descent, and grateful to be Americans. It was through them that I met Louise, however briefly, when we were all at a Conference in Phoenix back in the early 1960s. As a result, soon after this she attended meetings I held at a church in Venice, California. As I got to know her, being over 40 years older than me, she liked me to call her "Mom," which I did.

At her invitation, I visited her in Granada Hills (San Fernando Valley), where she lived at that time. She drove me over to Malibu in her Studebaker. Years before, she had lived in the desert where extreme temperatures would cause some cars to overheat. She had good service with Studebakers which became her favorite car.

Today, Malibu, on the California coast, is a very expensive area known for its rich and famous population. But many years before, when property prices were almost nothing (in comparison), Louise purchased 200 feet of oceanfront property. After holding that land for decades, she decided to develop it with a commercial building.

When we arrived at the site, construction was just about completed on a building with units that could be rented as gift shops, beauty shops, etc. At the back, on an upper level overlooking the ocean, she had an apartment built for her use or as a guest house. Unfortunately, the Malibu venture did not work out too well, but that is another story.

As a young woman living in Los Angeles, Louise was a dedicated Christian and attended Bible College. She was among a group of people in 1923 that went with Aimee Semple McPherson up to Mt. Lowe (above Pasadena) for a picnic. The photo (now nearly 100 years old!) shows her with Aimee's 10 year old son, Rolf K. McPherson. In those days Mount Lowe was accessible by cable car on a steep incline railway.



Later in the 1920s, the breakup of what had been an arranged marriage, and other discouragements in her life, caused her to drift away from the Lord. Two marriages followed. By the time I met her she had been widowed for quite a few years and after decades had come back to the Lord. Jack and Alice Eryisian (mentioned earlier) had taken her to hear Tony Fontane sing and give his testimony. The Lord used that meeting to bring her back to Him.

During those intervening years she lived different places, including the Nevada desert where she owned a small motel,

cafe, and gas station near Death Valley. At another time she developed some property in Paradise, California, where there are many pine trees. She hated to remove even one tree. But as the tractor cut the road into the property, some trees had to be taken out. In 2018 Paradise was much in the news, having one of the worst fires in California history. Over 19,000 houses and structures were destroyed.

During World War II, Louise owned a liquor store on Los Feliz Boulevard in Los Angeles. At another period of her life, when she was married to Mr. Pereirda, they were involved in a mining operation in Mexico. She could tell many interesting stories about all of this, but space here only allows highlights.

Having come back to the Lord, she had a desire to make up for wasted years. Like certain women who supported Jesus' ministry (Luke 8:3), she backed different worthwhile ministries, including mine from time to time. I never tried to pressure her (or anyone else) to give to my ministry, knowing that true giving comes from the heart and not of necessity (2 Cor. 9:7).

By the early 1970s I had preached in quite a few states: California, Arizona, Texas, Oregon, Washington, Colorado, Arkansas, Nevada, Missouri, and also Canada. I had been in Mexico on trips taking beans, rice, and clothing into poor areas around Tijuana and Mexicali several times. But I had never had any ministry beyond these border cities. Louise felt it would be worthwhile (a learning experience for me and a blessing for those to whom I would minister) for me to pursue a missionary trip far down into Mexico. She offered financial support toward the expenses of the trip.

Not knowing Spanish, I would need an interpreter. About that same time I met **FRANK MALDONADO** who was born in Puerto Rico, but had long lived in the states. He was fluent in Spanish, as well as English. By this time he had given up a good job at a tire factory in Los Angeles to go to Mexico, to start and pastor a church there.

The way this came about is interesting. He had a vivid dream that included the words VICTORIA, BC. He thought "as most of us would" about Victoria, British Columbia, in Canada. Was God calling him there? He felt he was called to Mexico. Then he learned there was a town in Mexico with this name: Victoria, BC (Baja California)! The church he built there is shown in the accompanying photo. Living conditions for him and his wife were far inferior to what they had been used to, things like taking a bath in a canal and feeling fish nibble at them, unpaved streets, widespread poverty, etc.



From Victoria, we traveled far down into Mexico to cities and towns, as well as some remote villages. The year was 1974. I remember the year because it was when President Nixon resigned. I think we were in Mazatlán when we saw it on television. It was broadcast there in Spanish, of course, but Frank told me what was being said.

Not long after my return from Mexico, Louise began to talk about her desire to visit Jerusalem and the land of Israel. She wanted me to accompany her on this trip, was able and willing to pay my way. I suggested she invite, instead, a lady friend of hers who lived in Los Angeles. But she insisted on me going and, later, I was glad she did.

At first I was somewhat hesitant. For one thing, it was obvious that some of the brochures advertising Holy Land tours made false claims. One said, "You will see the tree near Jericho that Zacchaeus climbed!" Another said, "You can pray in the Upper Room," implying that it is the same one mentioned in the Bible. But when Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70, one stone was not left upon another that was not thrown down (Luke 21:6). The "upper room" that is shown today dates from the 11th century and was built by the Crusaders. The other reason for my hesitation was flying. I had flown, but never a long trip like this. I always felt better when the plane *landed*, rather than when it *took off*!

Before any plans for the trip could be finalized, there was another obstacle: the need for a *passport*. American citizenship for Louise was based on her first marriage to an Armenian American, but he had died years before and some old records about *his* citizenship had been destroyed in a fire. Finally after quite a delay, with the help of a lawyer, she obtained what appeared to be a "passport." More about this is coming up....

There were numerous Christian tours to choose from, but she liked an 18-day tour that included going to Ephesus, which is now a part of Turkey. Though not the exact location, she wanted to visit this part of the world where Armenia is located, the country from which she came as a little girl. This tour included a cross section of believers from several different denominations. None disputed over doctrinal differences, but simply desired to enjoy and learn from a tour of Bible lands.

Though some claims about Holy Land tours have been exaggerated or unfounded, much information is accurate and worthwhile. One can learn about people and places in a classroom or by reading the Bible, but there is nothing quite like *actually being there*.

Finally, in 1978, everything was set for the trip. I don't believe Louise had ever flown on an airplane before, so she was taking on a new venture.

Our flight left Los Angeles at 7 PM and flew north to Seattle (picking up part of the tour group there) and on over the polar route to Copenhagen, Denmark. It seemed strange to go north to go east "but the world is *round*!" Flying against the sun, morning came early. As it began to get light, the world down below appeared as a winter wonderland. There were huge icebergs floating in the water and mountain peaks casting their shadows from the rising sun.

Louise was a sweet little lady in many ways, but there was also a crass side about her. The next morning after arriving at Copenhagen, about eight of us were seated around a table having breakfast in the hotel. One of the ladies in the group asked how she was doing. "My feet hurt like HELL, Honey!" I noticed some raised eyebrows. A man who had been her pastor (now deceased), who also called her "Mom," used to say: "The Holy Spirit is still working on Mom!"

From Copenhagen we flew south and cities in Germany such as Munich were clearly visible. Then we flew over the snow-capped Alps. What a sight! Several times the pilot tilted the plane so people on each side could get a good view. I was content with flying *level!* Soon we could see the coast of Italy and landed at the Rome airport. Up until now there had been no problem with Louise's passport. But upon our arrival in Italy, it was rejected as invalid. We were detained at the airport for six hours, while the rest of our group went on into Rome to continue the tour.

Both of Louise's sons had served in World War Two. She was disgusted that anyone would question her citizenship. When we were finally released, we went to the American Embassy for help with the passport problem, knowing several more countries were part of our itinerary: Greece, Israel, Jordan, Turkey, and Switzerland.

It seemed to me the cab we took into Rome was going *very fast* and the speedometer seemed to indicate even faster! Then I realized it was registering kilometers, not miles per hour! After going to the Embassy, we headed to the Vatican, thinking we could rejoin our tour group there. Not finding them, we did some touring on our own.



In the accompanying photo of St. Peter's Church, at the top of the front portion there are 12 statues representing the 12 apostles. On this level, behind the statues, is a large open porch-like area in front of the dome. At one end is a room with food and soda pop machines. We noticed a couple men

dressed in black, probably priests. Louise tried to talk to them. But they did not know English and we did not know Italian. They appeared friendly and we tried to communicate with gestures. One pulled out a writing pad and wrote: "1933." He then handed it to the other man, who was younger, who wrote: "1945." They were interested in Louise's age. When they handed her the writing pad, pointing at the numbers, she caught on right away. Proudly (I use the word in a good sense) she wrote: "1897"! Her birth had been in the previous century. Our languages were different, but we used the same numbers.

Not far away was a line of people going through a doorway. "Look Woodrow," Louise said to me "she almost always called me Woodrow" "let's see what this is." We started in.

Going was easy at first, but became more difficult as we went along. There was no turning back. We were climbing over 300 steps, between the inner and outer casing of the dome, all the way to the top. The passage became narrow, and finally a spiral staircase with only a rope to hold on to! From the top



of the 500 year old dome, largely the work of Michael Angelo, there is a grand view of Rome, the Tiber River, and surrounding area. If Louise appears a bit exhausted in this picture, there were good reasons!

After joining again with our tour group, we flew from Rome to Athens, the capital of Greece. The city landmark is the Parthenon atop a rocky outcrop clearly visible from all over the city. Nearby is the Areopagus (Mars Hill) where Paul preached (Acts 17:16-34). While in Greece we also visited Corinth. From Athens we took a flight to Salonica (also located in Greece), known in the Bible as Thessalonica (Acts 17:1). From here we drove to the ruins of Philippi, where Paul and Silas were jailed (Acts.16:12-31).

Finally it was on to Israel, landing at Tel Aviv. As is common on tours to Israel, we visited the Wailing Wall, the Mount of Olives, Calvary, the Garden Tomb, Sea of Galilee, Bethlehem, etc. Millions all over the world know about *Bethlehem* because of the birth of Jesus. What surprised me was *how close* it is to Jerusalem. Our bus, having left Jerusalem, arrived in a few minutes. It is only five miles!



The famous Jordan River flows from the Sea of Galilee and ends in the Dead Sea (which has no outlet). It is generally known that the Dead Sea is below sea level, but not as well-known is that the Sea of Galilee is also *below* sea level at -695 feet. Following a boat trip across the Sea of Galilee, a lot of tours go to a fish restaurant where they are served "Peter Fish," so named because as a person begins to eat, he will find a small coin in the mouth of the fish (see Matt. 17:26,27).

As we visited the site where Solomon's Temple once stood (now occupied by the Islamic shrine, the Dome of the Rock),



our guide told about Solomon having a thousand women in his life (700 wives and 300 concubines 1 Kings 11:3). He said (jokingly) he could probably put up with a thousand wives, but the thought of having one thousand *mothers-in-law* is what bothered him!

I passed on riding a camel, but Louise, being an adventurous person, went for it!

Jesus spoke of a man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho (Luke 10:30). The road we followed most definitely goes down dropping in 21 miles from 2,557 feet above sea level at Jerusalem, to -825 feet below sea level at Jericho!



From Jericho we went down even more, to the Dead Sea the lowest spot on earth where some of us waded out into the very salty waters. Not far away we visited Masada. This is an area on a high plateau with cliffs on all sides, where Jewish Zealots made their last stand against Roman forces that destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70. According to Josephus, 960 people there chose to commit suicide rather than surrender to the Roman armies. At Masada a tram takes tourists from the parking lot to the top. We rode the tram up, but I hiked down the winding, so-called Snake Path coming back.

In order to visit the ancient ruins of Ephesus, we flew to Istanbul, Turkey, and then another flight to Izmir (called Smyrna in Revelation 2:8). From there it was a forty mile drive to the site of Ephesus. Among the ruins is the old amphitheater built of large stones into the side of a hill which is probably the one mentioned in Acts 19:29.

At times Louise could be unpredictable. I recall one time going with her to Karla's restaurant here in Palm Springs for lunch. Being the winter season, there was a line of about 30 people waiting to get in. She told me: "I've learned how to do this; I don't wait in lines! I didn't know what she was up to. I was not about to cheat by cutting in line. A couple minutes after she went in, she came out the door and hollered back to me at the end of the line: "Woodrow! Come on!"

Two ladies were having lunch at a table with four chairs, so she had asked if she and her friend could join them. To be

polite though probably with some reluctance they agreed. Louise told them I was an Evangelist (only the way she would say it was more like "Vangelist"). Apparently they knew what she meant and said they were members of the Christian Science Church. Surprisingly, what seemed awkward at first, worked out well. I think they were intrigued with Louise and we all had a friendly and enjoyable conversation!

At times Louise could be blunt. Her son, when he was about 60, lived a couple hours away. When he came to visit, she gave him a Bible with orders that he read it! Months later when he visited again, she asked if he had read that Bible she gave him. He told her he started to he read Genesis and Exodus, but when he got into Leviticus he gave up said he could not understand it. She said, "You FOOL, you don't start with the Old Testament, you start with the New Testament, the Gospel of John!" He told her he didn't know that. Apparently he did follow up on this at least as far as the Second Chapter of John about Jesus turning water into wine. He later told her he did not know this before. That sounded good to him!

Back in the 1930s, Louise and her husband sold gift boxes of dried fruits and dates at their "Black Tent." This was located at what is now a major intersection in Palm Springs. Many of their customers were tourists and others from cold climates that flock here during the winter months.



When "Mom" moved from the Los Angeles area in the late 1970s, she purchased a house in Palm Springs, only blocks from where they had the Black Tent so many years before. She would go on to spend the final years of her life here. I went to see her at a care facility for one last time, shortly before her passing in 1985. Ironically, it would be in this same facility 34 years later that my wife Arlene (having slipped into a coma) would also pass from this life on October 10, 2019. The place of burial for each of them is here at Desert Memorial Park.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?....In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. —Rom. 8:35,37.

<p>RALPH WOODROW PO Box 21 Palm Springs, CA 92263 Phone: (760) 327-6049 ralphwoodrow@earthlink.net www.ralphwoodrow.org</p>	
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