

In Vain They Do Worship – Chapter 8

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Ch 8: My Sojourn in The Work · By Willis Young

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By Willis G. D. Young

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CHAPTER 8: My Sojourn in "The Work"

It was the end of June, 1962.

And there I was, just one of the "friends," driving up the highway alone in my one-year-old 1961 British-made Zephyr, heading to the Almonte, Ontario convention. My life was about to make a three hundred sixty-degree turn that day, and I was caught between two mind-boggling and extremely diverse sets of emotions.

Before the gong would call us all to the dining shed for lunch after the two-hour-long meeting that first morning, I would be looked at differently, talked about by others, addressed directly or indirectly with a smile or an air that could be interpreted as a form of respect, and I would be treated generally with an attitude somewhat akin to deference. Just the thought of all this already made me feel exceedingly self-conscious, very, very humble, and more than a little apprehensive about the new "career" into which I had volunteered to go.

I would be no longer "that teacher from Ottawa" who, in my mind, had, for almost twenty years—long, even, before I professed—been a *worker in waiting*.

The waiting was over.

I had now, by the grace of God and Carson Cowan, become a "Worker" in the Province of Ontario; and, as far as I knew that morning, my life from that time forward and until the end of my sojourn on the earth would be dedicated completely and selflessly to "gathering in the sheaves" of "sinful straw" as well as ministering to the utmost needs of God's own chosen citizenry.

But perhaps I should go back three or four months and fill in one or two blanks during that period.

The prompt reply that I hoped for from Carson Cowan did not come. You can imagine my nervous stewing, my day-to-day uncertainty, and my general, overall consternation. In teaching, as I'm sure in other professions, there is a deadline for handing in one's resignation and for me that deadline was early in May. Finally, I sat down and wrote another letter to "Mr. C." explaining my predicament and asking him for some sort of direction.

No one could possibly imagine how often I have wished that I had never mailed that second letter.

He replied this time, of course, and, as you correctly assume, I was given the green light to proceed with my resignation and any other plans and arrangements that needed to be made to "free [me] up" by the end of the school year. Since I had no house to sell, and no bank account of any size to bequeath to anyone, there wasn't a lot for me to do but to tell my friends and family, sell my car in order to pay it off, buy a new suit and tie, some drip-dry nylon tricot shirts, and a pair of *black* shoes, as well as a good strong suitcase into which I would pack as many as I could of the bits and pieces of the life that I was leaving behind forever.

Telling my parents proved to be one of the most onerous tasks that I had to perform, and, even to this day, I am filled with a sense of bewilderment and disappointment when I look back and remember their reaction when I gave them the news.

First of all, I had no idea how to go about breaking the news to them, and I think I probably would have left off doing it until they saw my name on the Workers List if it had not been for Stella Beane and Mabel Clayton who were in "our field" that year. They insisted

that I inform my folks first lest they should hear it in a roundabout way from someone else and would be shocked and offended that I had not told them first.

As it turned out, I don't think it mattered either way.

"Do you know if anyone would like to buy my car?" I asked as my mother, father and I sat around the kitchen table one night.

"Why? Are you thinking of selling it?" I was asked. "Why would you want to sell it?"

"Because I'm going into the Work," I blurted out with no preamble.

What followed was one of the longest, deadest and heaviest periods of silence that I would ever experience or could have ever imagined. Neither one of them spoke a single syllable, so, after what seemed to me to be a veritable eternity, I got up and went to bed. And that pregnant moment goes down in history as the only discussion "my folks" and I ever had about my becoming a "fisher of men" in God's "great harvest field"—if you will please pardon the mixed metaphor.

Thus, as I had prepared myself alone as a child to profess, and as I had steeled myself alone for the rite of baptism, I was now on my own and alone again to "go forth to preach the gospel" with no feeling of approval or sense of support from the people in my life who, every book says, should have been in my corner rooting for my team.

It was difficult to explain to my colleagues and co-workers about the "work" I had chosen to "go into," but everyone seemed to accept it for what it was worth or to the extent that they seemed to understand. And so that final day in the classroom rolled around, but I must assure you it was no fun at all for me to fill in my last report card and brush the chalk dust off the back of my jacket before heading home to dismantle the last vestiges of normal life and look toward a very scary and uncertain future.

So there I was at Almonte convention.

"Do you know where you'll be going or whom you'll be with?" I was asked.

"You're going to Dufferin County (north of Toronto) with Willie Bryant," some all-knowing soul informed me.

My heart was pounding, my mouth was dry, and I was experiencing one of the few moments of speechlessness that I have ever known in my lifetime. Willie (or Bill) Bryant I knew, but where in the world was Dufferin County, and who on earth needed to get saved there? I was pretty sure, I think, that because I was a "city person," and because I could speak a lot of French, and because I had shown so much interest in "the French work," that I would be "posted," so to speak, to some urban centre in the province of Quebec. But that was not in the cards, and I was destined to spend my entire sojourn in the work in the shadow of somebody's barn, choking on the dust from somebody's silo, being awakened each new day by somebody's cock crowing at least thrice, and getting lulled to sleep every night by the lowing of somebody's herd of heifers.

(And, which is more, I was supposed to be completely contented with my location, unquestioningly compliant with my companion's every whim, and enthusiastically ecstatic with each new dawn because, after all, I was—was I not?—following the footsteps of Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul, George Walker, and Andrew Abernathy—in that order.)

Selling my car proved to be a comparatively painless ordeal. A young man from Germany, Christian Steppat by name, decided to buy it from me, and he was even considerate enough to allow me to keep it until I was ready to join my companion for my first mission. It is rather an interesting footnote, I think, to mention that exactly one year later when Christian, himself, was going into the work, he sold that same car to a girl named Muriel Molino who, one year after that, went into the work as well. I don't think, however, that there's any moral in that story since both Christian and Muriel are still preaching their hearts out on either side of the Atlantic Ocean while I "flunked out" after only eleven months—as the crow flies!

I had so much hoped that Carson Cowan would have found the time—or, perhaps, even have made some—to sit down with me at some point during the whole convention to have one of those brotherly sort of chats that I had been hearing about from platform upon platform, convention upon convention and year upon year—"here a little, and there a little"! But he didn't, and there I was for four whole days in almost the same position that I had been in for twenty years or more except that now, instead of being a worker in waiting, I was, plainly and simply, a *worker waiting*.

What a blessing it was that I did not hold my breath, for, after almost thirty-five years, I have never yet had the pleasure of having a one-on-one conversation with the man who, the Two-by-Twos will tell you, has been entrusted with the spiritual welfare of "God's little flock" in the second largest province of Canada.

Ah, well!

I have survived the lack of those little niceties of life, and I have long since concluded that the most intimate moments between the Two-by-Two preachers and the Two-by-Two parishioners are reserved for—and lavished upon—"the members of the household" who have the largest homes, the most expensive and longest limousines, and the biggest bank accounts. I saw this phenomenon of patronage before I went into the work, but, due in part to my zeal for the "Kingdom of God," in part to self-induced naiveté, and in a great part to denial, I somehow either learned to live with it or tried to pretend to myself and others that it just did not exist. I saw some of it when I was in the work, but, to give him whatever credit I can, my companion regarded himself pretty much as a just and fair-minded individual, and he saw to it that we "spread ourselves around." (I shall be expanding on this aspect of my experience farther along in this chapter, believe me!) It was after I left the work, and after I began to explore beyond the boundaries of "classified" areas where the workers figured I had no business going, that the smell—no, the stench—of it all rose up to meet me, and I turned away retching in abject disgust.

But I must not create the impression that I was completely ignored.

No, I wasn't. For, you see, I had a total of three—count them—*three* letters from the “big man on campus.” I did not keep any of them, of course, as, in those innocent and Two-by-Two-loving days, it never crossed my mind that I would ever be brought as low as I eventually was in mind and spirit, and that one day I would love to have them for reference purposes— or even for a good laugh.

The first epistle of Carson Cowan, Head Worker of the Province of Ontario, to Willis Young whose life was being offered for sacrifice on the altar of the Two-by-Two Ministry (grace and peace be multiplied!) came, as I told you, after I wrote and practically begged for it. That was the letter that gave me the green light to prepare myself to “[preach] the baptism of repentance and the remission of sins” somewhere, I supposed, within C.C.'s jurisdiction.

In that letter he told me what to do about my financial situation. When I sold my car, he said, I could give the proceeds from it and any other cash I might have on hand or in the bank to my parents or to any one else whom I deemed worthy, or perhaps he said needy. I really do forget the text verbatim. Then he went on to say that I should keep one hundred dollars for myself since that was the amount that each of the workers would be given as he or she left the convention and after all the convention expenses were paid.

That was no problem for me, I assure you, as I had not been in the habit of amassing wealth in any form, and I was just happy that I received enough for the car to pay off the loan. In fact, I can now tell you that I sold the car for what I owed on it because, I felt at the time, I was helping out “one of the young friends” who was just getting his feet on the ground in a brand new country.

Of my own financial situation there is not much more to relate. I left my parents some cash I had, some of which was to pay any gas bills or income tax I might owe the government the following spring, and then off I went.

But off to what? I did not know.

There were two or three weeks between convention and the deadline for me to meet my companion, but that time was rather a hectic period for me as I had such a feeling of finality about my life as I knew it. I look back now at the flurry of things I felt I needed to do. I had calls to make, people to visit, medical and dental appointments to keep, and my very own private moments that I felt I had to have because I was very sure that there wouldn't be many of them any time soon in the future. I'm sure I must have felt very much like a Roman Catholic girl preparing to enter a convent or a similar young man going into the priesthood in one of their religion's stricter and more cloistered orders.

(In fact, I actually find the comparison between Roman Catholicism and Two-by-Two-ism just too compatible for words.)

Christian Steppat drove me in “our” car to Leaskdale, Ontario, a little village north of Toronto, where a tent had been pitched, and where I would join my companion for my first Gospel Mission. Out at the side and slightly behind the tent there was a little travel trailer where Murdo and Dollie MacLeod were staying. It had been arranged for them to join Bill and me in the mission as that was the year that Bill had earned enough “Good Scout Points” to get invited to a series of conventions just south of the border in New York. He was to be away from the mission for two or three weeks, and since it was anathema for me to accompany him due to my spiritual youth and lack of “harvest field” experience, the MacLeods were assigned to the task of breaking me in and helping to show me the ropes.

They proved to be one of the few bright spots that I was to realize that whole year. I did not know them very well before that time, but they had been through the mill many times, themselves, and I really don't think I would have survived those first weeks had I been on my own with my assigned companion.

Christian and I had taken Mabel Clayton, one of the sister workers and her sister Beatrice, an ex-worker, with us to the tent site. After we all had supper, the three of them got into Christian's car and headed up the hill toward Peterborough. I felt instantly lonely, and very, very sad. There went life as I knew it, and here I was no longer independent and no more master of my fate in a life I did not know and would never really understand.

Dollie, her eyes filled with understanding and compassion, looked at me as I stood there foolishly trying to swallow the lump in my throat and she made a remark, which is indelibly etched in my memory to this day.

“There goes my car,” she said quietly and with an empathy that endeared her to me for as long as she lived.

Yes, indeed! There went my car! And there I was, watching it disappear from view, feeling helplessly bereft of everything familiar, and rather self-conscious, not knowing what workers did in the late afternoons and early evenings, or what was expected of one before it was time to read one's Bible, meditate and pray for an hour or so and then crawl into a strange bed in an even stranger environment and beg for sleep to come quickly.

This was no game now. Every remnant of my land of make believe had been stripped away, and here I was *now*, no longer a worker in waiting or even a worker waiting. My name was on a real workers' list *now* and at long last, *I was a real worker*.

And I didn't have a clue what it really meant to be one.

I don't think anything would bore you quite as much as my giving you a detailed, day-by-day report of my one and only year in the work, so, for that reason, I will try to present that infamous period in my life in a series of what I hope will be more or less meaningful sub-topics.

MISSION WORK

According to Two-by-Two doctrine **mission** work heads the list of reasons for one's call to the ministry, or, as they prefer to label it, the "harvest field." Jesus called it "teaching all nations" in Matthew 28:19, "[preaching] *in all the world* to every creature" in Mark 16: 15, and "[preaching] the kingdom of God" in Luke 9:60. As well, the Apostle Paul referred in all his epistles to his work as "preaching," and, furthermore, he used only the word "preacher" or "Apostle" wherever and whenever he wrote about, or referred to, himself. Nowhere in the entire scripture can we find any mention of **workers** holding **missions** in a rather confined area called a field, or, in fact, being posted to those fields by some **boss** who has crawled his way up the ranks within the man-made hierarchy that was established by that man William Irvine as recently as ninety-nine years ago.

You would automatically think, then, that my entire year in the work would have been spent doing exactly what I felt I had been called to do: preach the gospel. That was not the case, however, for, between the month of August and the month of May, I was involved in only *four* missions.

Let us look at that again.

Discounting the month of July when all the workers I know of go on "vacation" either to visit their families or to spend "a bit" of time edifying some of the more spiritual members of the cult who just happen to have a cottage under the pine or cedar trees in a rather picturesque setting overlooking one of nature's most tranquil bodies of water, we still have eleven months left over. That would seem to provide ample time to engage in **mission work** and to "seek and save" those who are lost— providing they didn't pass on to their reward in their unsaved state during the holiday season. Even if that entire period were spent in only one **mission**, it would not break the record set by our old friend, the Apostle Paul, in Acts 18: 11. "And he continued there [in Corinth] *a year and six months*, teaching the word of God among them."

In fact, that verse almost sounds as if Paul could be described as a *resident pastor* does it not? But that point has already been covered back in my chapter on LOOPHOLES.

My first mission—the one I already mentioned in the tent in Leaskdale, Ontario—happened to be just a couple of doors up the road from the former home of Lucy Maude Montgomery who wrote *Anne of Green Gables*. We "opened" there on Sunday evening, July 29, 1962, and closed without fanfare on September 16 of the same year because, by then, Jack Frost was nipping at our toes. The **mission** ended as it began with Willie and Murdo preaching their hearts out to a tentful of very righteous and very, very saved professing folk who had driven all the way from Orillia through Barrie to Oshawa and, occasionally, Toronto four nights a week for seven weeks "to be an encouragement to us" by swelling the ranks and trying to fool the local heathens in Leaskdale and others in the general vicinity into thinking that "those funny preachers in the tent up there" had quite a following after all.

Apart from the nights when it was my lot to "take part" either by preaching or in prayer, or both, and being scared to death by each and every occasion, my most vivid memories are of my *having* to go over to nearby Sunderland as an ambassador of good will to help a farmer there to hold his great brood of hens—one by one, of course—while he seared their beaks off "with a hot iron," as it were. This farmer and his family were among the very few "outsiders" that we were privileged to preach to the whole summer, but, apart from his getting help with his hens and part of a roof constructed on his son-in-law's house, I don't think he derived much lasting benefit from his faithful attendance.

I had not had a great lot to do with hens from the time I moved with my parents away from my grandfather's farm when I was just a lad of seven, and since I had never developed a very close relationship with a hammer in my entire twenty-six years on the planet, I can tell you that I found all that manual labour to be not a little daunting and more than a little awkward, indeed. I am sure that it does not surprise you, then, that *that* memory is one of the ones that stands out very vividly from my whole year in the service—as I then thought—of the "Most High God and Jesus Christ, his only begotten son."

I have a few more "gems" like that one that you may find rather amusing, but I think you'll enjoy them more if I just fit them in here and there throughout this whole chapter.

Rather early into my first **mission** I received my *second* letter from Carson Cowan.

In this epistle, he troubled himself to "welcome [me] into the work" and to tell me that he "trusted"—*trusted*, mind you—that I had succeeded in "uprooting all ties with [my] former life" before I left home to join my companion.

Of course I had not uprooted all ties with my former life, and, I thought, "Why should I have done so?" And I answered in such a way that I may have, in fact, started to pave the road to my own downfall.

I replied that I was not sure that I had *uprooted* all my ties but that I had succeeded, at least, in *cutting off* most of them.

I never knew whether he liked that answer or not because he never sent me a reply. It was quite a few months before I received his third missive, but I'll tell you more about that one in the next chapter.

On September 30, exactly two weeks after the tent **mission** ended, Willie and I—on our own now—held our first meeting in a rural-type, one-room schoolhouse in Grand Valley near Shelburne. We held forth there for about a month before *all mission work* in Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland stopped dead, and every worker in all that vast area of Canada and a great portion of eastern U.S.A., as well, forgot that he or she was called to preach the gospel, turned their backs on every seeking, unsaved sinner, and went on the prowl or, as the saying goes, the Special Meetings Round.

The “Specials” are timed most appropriately to end just before the Yuletide and now the situation becomes a little ironic and a whole lot hypocritical. All the God-fearing “saints” and all the fear-inspiring “servants” who pretend to believe not one whit in such pagan practices as Christmas and New Year’s put nearly all spiritual activity on hold while “those who are called to preach” go about from house to house partaking of the usual fare of stuffed turkey, cranberry sauce and mincemeat pie.

“What would be the use of trying to have a **mission** at THIS time of the year,” they all complain self-justifiably, “when all the ‘worldly folk’ would be too busy to give a second thought to their souls’ salvation, anyway?”

What a wonderful coincidence it is that all the seeking sinners and all the seeking “saviours” just happen to be “just too busy,” not only at the same time of the year but also every year, as well!

I was very fortunate, indeed, to have suffered intolerable headaches during the summer and fall, and “it was thought best” that I go home with my parents after the last Special Meeting in Breslau so that I could do a little “doctoring” with my old family physician.

Thus it was that my third mission did not get under way until January 27, 1963. This time Willie and I were preaching—albeit in different pews—to much of the same old congregation but, this time, in an Orange Hall in Collingwood, Ontario. We “held on” there until April 10.

Another of my vivid gems—this time an amusing one—comes to mind from an incident that occurred while Willie and I were trying to rent the hall for the meetings.

One of the men who had to be consulted about the rental had a wife who was a member of the Special Education committee. While Willie was proceeding with his transactions, he happened to mention that “[his] companion in this work” had very recently been a teacher of just that type of student. There and then, an invitation was issued to him and “his companion” to attend a meeting of the Special Ed. Committee “on Saturday,” and, there and then, of course, the invitation was accepted, since it seemed like such a wonderful opportunity for us “to meet as many people as we could in the community and to let them see who we were and have a chance of testifying about our purpose in being there in the first place.”

Saturday, therefore, found us milling around in an ante-room looking at displays of students’ work and talking to teachers, parents, school board members, and the like, before it was time to go into the auditorium for the plenary session. I was perfectly at ease in such an environment, and, for a moment in time, I was transported simultaneously to each and every teachers’ meeting I had ever attended. Thus, when the door opened, and the little throng pushed forward, I headed, as was always my wont, to a seat near the front of the room. Willie, who ten years previously had come very close to upsetting his milking stool in his haste to join John Stone on the mission platform, lumbered after me, and we both sat down.

“Man!” hissed Willie into my ear. “Why in the world did you come up this close to the front?”

“Why not?” I hissed back into his.

“Well, for one thing, we’re not members of this thing, and, besides, I feel very uncomfortable.”

“Good!” I retorted. “Now, maybe *you* have some idea how *I* feel in a barn.”

My response was meant to be a jovial quip, and, as far as I could ever tell, it was accepted in that vein, but you all know as well as I do that it’s very hard to teach an old dog new tricks. I never learned to like barns, and I feel pretty confident that Willie did not attend many more Special Education seminars, so it’s a fairly good assumption to make, I think, that neither one of us ever developed a clue about fitting comfortably into one another’s backgrounds or subsequent lifestyles. I do know, though, and I can tell you in all sincerity, that I doubt very much if I would have lasted even the *one* year in the work had it not been for the bulk of the winter months being spent in that town of Collingwood, Ontario.

During the **mission** in Collingwood we almost always had an “outsider” or two to preach to even if occasionally it was an unsaved sister, son, daughter, or—perish the thought—a boy friend or girl friend of one or more of the “saints.” We tramped the streets in sub-zero weather rapping on doors and getting doors slammed in our faces as we invited the local populace to “our meetings” in the hall “over on Hurontano Street.” We attended “worldly” church services when we weren’t having one of our own, but apart from my almost getting thrown out of The Church of Christ after the minister there described me as “a wolf at their door” and, on another occasion, allowing myself to get roped into teaching a new hymn to a Sunday School Kindergarten, the only notable contact we made was through my visits with a lovely eighty-some-year-old lady named Mrs. MacIsaac.

She invited me in when I chanced upon her door during my house to house ramblings, and we had many visits over many cups of tea during many afternoons while her eccentric and equally old husband sat grumpily and wordlessly painting in water colours out at the end of the kitchen table. Not once was I to hear a peep out of him while I tried endlessly and zealously to show her that she was nothing but a sinner headed straight to hell and damnation unless she would come down to the Orange Hall and profess through my companion, Willie.

Some wonderful “friends” who lived in the next town brought her to several meetings, and she listened most intently to our concerted rantings about “the meetings in the home” and the “servants of God having no home,” about Jesus sending his disciples out two and two to save a perishing world, and about what a cardinal sin it was to put your trust in a sect that claimed an earthly founder, and took upon itself an earthly name. Yes, we did our best to show her that, even at her advanced years, and even with her kind and tender

nature, she was now “twofold more the child of Hell than [we were]” because we had so desperately tried to show her the error of her ways.

When Willie decided that she had “heard enough” and that I had sufficiently wooed and won her during my regular afternoon teas, he figured it was time for his getting in on the action, and he accompanied me one day in order to test the wind for himself and, of course, for the Kingdom of God. He was very intrigued about my description of “the old husband painting in the kitchen,” and while he didn’t quite say it, I’m sure he felt that I was somehow responsible.

“Could we see what your husband is working on?” Willie inquired in a most charming way.

“Yes, I think that would be all right. Dad, these men would like to see what you’re painting.”

Now it was my turn to become charming. “Oh, my!” I exclaimed, “that is simply a gorgeous piece of work.”

And, after all those weeks, “Dad” finally spoke. “I’m well aware of my capabilities,” he shot back as gruffly as he could, “and I don’t need any flattery, thank you!”

Was I put in my place? You bet your life I was, but what made it doubly sweet for Willie was that it helped to compensate him for my lack of awareness at his discomfiture in the Special Education Meeting.

Neither of us saw much more of either of those old souls, one so sweet and kind and gentle and the other the antithesis of all those traits. Needless to say, Mrs. MacIsaac did not profess, but I have to tell you that, until I saw the light, myself, many years later, I was so sorry that we had had to leave her like that with “her blood on her own head” for she had sat under the sound of **our gospel** and was now on her own before God on the great Judgement Day.

On Good Friday, April 12, just two days after we “closed” in Collingwood, we obtained permission to rent a one-room schoolhouse in a rural area called Epping in the Beaver Valley district. This was a short **mission** with almost no outside attendance, and absolutely no interest in the gospel according to Willie and Willis.

One evening, however, there appeared in our audience a rather unusual number of children. In fact, there were significantly more of them than there were of adults, all of whom, mind you, were “outsiders” and, as such, were automatically sinful and unsaved. The meeting had begun, and it was my turn “at the pulpit” before I decided to try out something, which I had neither asked permission to do, nor had ever discussed with my “boss.” Instead of *preaching*, I simply began to ask the youngsters some questions about Jesus, the disciples, the gospel story, and how all of that was relevant in that time and place.

Always when I “spoke,” I felt riveted to the spot where I was standing. Those were the days before I knew that many workers actually do write out their sermons, or use notes and cheat sheets to get them through their spiels, so, whenever I finished reading the verses that were to be the foundation for my text, I used to keep my fingers in the open Bible, but I was always too scared to look back at the book again lest I lose my memorized train of thought. That night, with the children, was different. I almost forgot I was preaching, and I came perilously close to reverting to the teacher I was born to be. I moved around, I looked different people in the eye, I referred to my Bible for more questions, and I did something very uncharacteristic—I even talked with, and moved, my hands.

I worried until we got “home” after meeting lest I would get reprimanded for such a departure from tradition. But I need not have, for Willie was quite complimentary, and noted, with some pleasure, that it was the first time he had seen me loosen up.

Well!

The school board trustee who had rented the building to us, sent a message through some of the “friends” in the area asking them if “that younger man” would consider filling in for them as the Sunday School teacher since they were without one at that time.

Well. . . no, ah. . . it’s just that, you see. . . we don’t *do* that sort of thing in our church, and. . . well, I couldn’t, anyway, you see, for *we have to leave very soon to make ready for some special feast days that are coming up.*

“Thanks, anyway, but you’ll find someone more suited to your needs.”

So there you have it. I didn’t want to teach Sunday School, you understand, but, in any case, we had to pass up the opportunity of more contact with the people in that community because the “work of the Lord” seemed of no import at all compared to the necessity for us to run around Ontario literally “serving tables” and whitewashing cow barn walls at those fun-filled feast days at **convention** where hierarchies are made and apples get polished, and where egos and, occasionally, a few other things get stroked and inflated.

Yes, in retrospect, I must say that that **mission** was simply a “filler” to pass the time and make it look to the “friends” as if we were busy preaching about what we practised right up to the time that we just *had* to leave for “preps.”

Thus, May the eighth found me helping Willie to dig a hole for a hydro pole on the convention site near Almonte, Ontario.

GOING ABOUT FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE

It isn’t any wonder that, from the inception of the Two-by-Two cult in Scotland and Ireland at the end of the last century, the “workers” and, by association, the “friends”—remember the “Christians in the home life”?—were often referred to as “Go-Preachers.” In fact, a major plank in the cult’s platform, or, perhaps, their most obvious distinction as a religious body is their assumption that, somewhere in the Bible, they have been directed by Jesus Christ to maintain a homeless ministry and prowl around the world from one “professing” home to another commanding and receiving five-star accommodation and partaking of every fatted calf, every fit fowl, and every healthy hog that they can cram into their un-muzzled mouths.

But, hard as I have searched the Scriptures “to see if [such a guideline] be so,” I cannot, for the life of me, find a text that supports, directs, or solely advocates such an itinerant lifestyle or such a dereliction of responsibilities that comes with the ownership and maintenance of one’s *own* place of residence.

“When you come to any town or village,” Jesus is quoted in Matthew 10: 11, “look for some worthy person in it, and make your home there until you leave.”

It would be very interesting, indeed, to go back in time and ask William Irvine and George Walker—to name only two—to explain to our complete satisfaction what their Lord and Master must have meant when, in Luke 10:5-7, he is cited as saying, “When you go into a house, let your words be, ‘Peace to this house.’ . . . Stay in that one house, sharing their food and drink. . . *do not move from house to house.* . . .”

Not only has every Two-by-Two itinerant preacher I have ever known failed miserably at obeying that direction, but all of them have also chosen, it would appear, to ignore Christ’s previous instruction “to travel barefoot.” I feel safe in risking my next year’s pension cheque on the wager that you have never seen a worker walking up to your door with no shoes on. And I say that most confidently to people living in Alaska, northern Minnesota or Wisconsin or perhaps Canada and Scandinavia during the months of November through April.

I recall many, many years ago and many, many times asking many, many questions about why so many, many points of instruction in the Bible were not carried out or followed. And just as many times I got the selfsame answer.

“Well, you see, that is meant to be spiritualized.”

“Oh,” I would reply many, many times, not the least bit wiser than I was before I asked the question.

‘That’s really funny,’ I would think to myself. ‘Everything that seems kind of convenient to do, and everything that fits in with the workers’ interpretation of what’s written is adhered to—albeit, with regional disparities, but everything that seems the least bit vague or inconvenient—or downright impractical—is chalked up to “something that was meant for that time and place only” or else it was written off as “just something that was meant to be spiritualized”’

I finally figured it all out.

Women were *not* supposed to keep silence in the churches, as that would put a lot of sister workers out of business.

Women *were* supposed to let their hair grow long, as that would give “the world” a chance to ask what church they belonged to.

We were *not* expected to wash each other’s feet since we didn’t live in the Negev Desert and the Baptists next door might think we were a bit “queer.”

We were *not* supposed to have radios, and nobody had any right to try to figure it out.

Women *were* supposed to wear black stockings until such time as George Walker got it all figured out.

We were *not* supposed to worship in a building made with hands because God did not dwell in such places. (But I am still trying to figure out if the homes where I went to meeting were made with somebody’s feet.)

We were *not* supposed to practice the “laying on of hands” when someone came into the fellowship because that rite was done only by and between the brother and sister workers at convention preparations and during Special Meeting rounds.

We *were* supposed to go out to preach two-by-two even though there are hardly any examples in the whole of the New Testament of anyone doing it that way except, perhaps, when Jesus sent them “to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.”

Oh, yes, and the workers *were* supposed to go about from house to house since Jesus obviously never did figure it out, and he probably didn’t have a clue about anything anyway when he told his disciples not to do it.

When I was in the work that year, I often wished that we could have spiritualized that last one and just stayed put in one place long enough to have a good yawn. But it wasn’t spiritualized, and we spent the year going from Ivan and Dora’s to Emerson and Margaret’s to Frank and Annie’s to Eric and Elsie’s to Art and Etty’s, to. . . well, you’ve got the picture, I’m sure, and it would do precious little good to keep on naming every God-fearing family in every “professing” home in or near Dufferin County in 1962 and -63.

It may not be scriptural to roam around the way we did or the way all workers do, but, let me assure you, that what we lost in disobeying the words of Jesus Christ, we surely gained in a wide range and variety of experiences from a purely earthly point of view. I was subjected to some of the worst clutters I could have ever dreamed of, and then, by contrast, we stayed in some homes where it would have been quite acceptable to eat off the floor because they were so clean. Most of the people did their best to make us feel “at home,” but, no matter what they did or said, I still felt as if I were a constant visitor, and whether I felt like it or not, I was obliged to get up every morning at the crack of dawn, sneak a visit to the bathroom when I felt I was not putting the family members to some disadvantage, and then be clad in my best bib and tucker when I appeared in the kitchen to partake of whatever happened to be dreamed up for breakfast for “the boys” on any given day.

But it was not all bad, and I do have some very pleasant memories of some of the homes.

I recall coming down to breakfast one morning in a home where we had not stayed previously. I stood gazing out the window at the hills all around me, and, trying to be friendly, I asked where “that road up there” went. The man of the house—a scrawny and diminutive little fellow with an extremely high-pitched voice—squealed at me in response, “It doesn’t go anywhere. We’ve been here for over twenty-five years, and it hasn’t moved an inch!”

That let me tell you, was a pretty hard act to follow.

A week or so later, still in that same home, Willie and I were up in the spare bedroom praying, reading, and meditating as we tried to dredge up (or down) some new words of inspiration for the saints and sinners who would come to listen to us that evening. I looked at my watch and, realizing it would soon be time to leave with the family for the gospel meeting, I laid my Bible down and went to the clothes closet to get my suit. Willie was still seated on the extremely low-slung bed reading, not paying the least bit of attention to me.

When I opened the closet door, I saw hanging there, along with many other items of the family’s wardrobe, a huge woman’s slip that had been tailor-made out of several bleached sugar or flour bags. Perhaps I should tell you that the lady of the home, quite unlike the stature of her husband, was a real Amazon-type woman with a deep, asthmatic voice which shook the rafters when she “paged” us for our meals or when she was trying to locate her man somewhere on the premises. There was no doubt in my mind but that that slip belonged to her, so I squeezed myself into the crowded space, and, with the door closed after me as tightly as possible, I pulled the garment over my head and then stepped out into the bedroom to shock Willie into sharing a much-needed laugh.

What follows next is a scene straight out of a well-rehearsed episode from any good sit-com.

I don’t believe five seconds had elapsed before a knock came to the bedroom door. Willie had just had enough time to get a glimpse of me “in drag” and, with a big grin on his face, he yelled. “Come in!”

I stared helplessly knowing full well that there was no chance of my ever getting under the bed, so all that was left for me to do was to head back to the closet while, at the same time frantically trying to remove that great tent-like slip. Somehow I got it off but putting it back on the hanger was an absolute impossibility, so I stuffed it down behind a pile of blankets that was there and hoped beyond hope that it was not the very item of clothing that was being sought. Willie and I were dissolving in gales of laughter as the poor man of the house looked quizzically back and forth from one to the other of us wondering why in the world we should be so amused over his simple errand.

To this day I have no idea what the poor man came for, but, whatever it was, he got it and beat a hasty retreat in case those crazy guys up there would take leave of their senses completely. Willie was remorseless when I tried to scold him for not asking the man to wait a second, and he derived a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction from seeing me in what could have been one of the most embarrassing experiences of my life.

One afternoon in early spring just before our last mission ended, I left the house where we were staying and went for a long, long walk. I hardly knew where I was going or if I would even know when I got there. I just knew that I was almost at the end of my psychological tether, and I really wasn’t sure how much longer I could hang on before something in me snapped.

Before I further elaborate on that painful occasion, however, I should, perhaps, reverse the “tape” and mention two other very difficult moments that I found myself in earlier in the season.

One incident occurred one night while I was asleep in the double bed alongside Willie in a comparatively small and cramped room in a home away up in the hills miles and miles away from civilization as I had grown to know it. It was a dream, I know, but it was such a vivid dream that, even after almost thirty-five years, I still remember it in detail and with a certain degree of emotion. I believe it was William Shakespeare who said, “. . . to sleep, to die; to sleep perchance to dream—ah! There’s the rub; for in that sleep of death what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil?”

To sleep. . . to dream. . .

I dreamt, and as I dreamt, I was being strangled by none other than Willie, himself. I dreamt that I was lying there—yes, in the very room where we actually were—and Willie was up over me with his two hands closed relentlessly around my neck and my breath was slowly but surely being cut off, and my life was just as surely ebbing away. I tried to scream, I thought, but his hands held me securely. I tried to cough; I tried to free myself, to loosen his grip, but the harder I tried to break away, the stronger became his stranglehold. Somehow and from somewhere I seemed to find the strength to free myself from his death-grip, and I bounded into an upright position sitting in the bed with the perspiration pouring down my face and body. When I was sufficiently conscious of my situation and aware of my surroundings, I looked over at the other side of the bed where Willie, sound asleep, was snoring peacefully, completely oblivious to my nocturnal imaginings.

To sleep. . . to dream. . .

At night I dreamed of being bound, and in the daytime I dreamed of being free.

I remember one day while I was pounding the streets of Collingwood trying to give out invitations to our meetings, I suddenly became aware that I was near the train depot, and there was a train right there in front of me, and it was headed for Toronto and all points east. My heart skipped a beat when I realized that all I really had to do was buy a ticket and head for Ottawa. So what if I had to admit defeat. Did I not suffer severe headaches? Would anyone blame me if I took off and called it quits?

But wait!

I didn't have enough money in my wallet to buy even a free ticket, and that was the state of my financial affairs for so much of the year. I knew Willie must have money because he was always going to the post office to buy money orders to enclose in his letters to the workers abroad, but never once during that whole year did he ever ask me if I needed as much as a tooth pick. (I was really lucky in that regard, though, as toothpicks were usually supplied in the homes where we were staying!)

I took it as a sign from God that I was not supposed to leave after all. If it were his will for me to go, I opined, then he would see to it that I had the necessary "scrip for the journey." Thus, my urge to escape had to be put on hold due to lack of funds, and somehow day followed night and Friday followed Monday until I found myself away up in the hills that day when I went for that long and weary walk.

I don't know how far I went, but I know I followed an old logging trail that led me far off that main road "that never went anywhere," and I went deeper and deeper into the woods and down a steep ravine to an isolated little glade on the floor of the valley, and I sat down on a moss-covered log and pondered long and hard about what the future held for me.

I knew that the year was drawing to a close, and I knew, too, that I didn't have much choice at that point about whether or not I would be able to see it through. I do not remember now how long I stayed there before heading "home," but I will never forget what happened when I did get back to the house.

I went up to the bedroom and, without really knowing why, I picked up my Bible, and it opened at a verse which, until that moment, I had never seen before. "Nevertheless," Jesus said, "I must walk today, and tomorrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Israel."

I couldn't believe my eyes. Was that not what was happening to me? If the Son of God whom I was seeking to emulate had no choice but to "keep walking" then surely my situation should be no different. Although I had pretty much made up my mind that day in the valley that I would have to return to my old teaching job in the fall, I felt fairly confident that I would be able to see my "ordeal" through to its bitter end.

For the record, those words of Christ are recorded in Luke 13:33.

There is no doubt that, were I to put my mind to it, I could fill many more pages with anecdotes of personal experiences from my life "on the road" but, apart from providing you with some sort of diary of my activities, it would not be valuable from the point of view of helping you to understand the psyche of the cult in general and the ministry in particular. You can see quite clearly, I'm convinced, that I really meant it when I stated away back in my first chapter that the movement is almost entirely "worker-centric" and that control over the followers is maintained by intimidation and brainwashing. It isn't just over the "friends" that the workers wield such total control, but the same dominant influence exists within the ministry, as well. Obviously there is no such a thing as an "Internal Investigations" body, and that omission permits rampant regionalization of their doctrine as well as boundless possibilities for corruption and misuse of such controlling power.

PROVIDING NO GOLD, SILVER, OR COPPER TO FILL OUR PURSES

That *is* what Jesus told his disciples to do.

That is *not* what Carson Cowan told me to do. He instructed me to take one hundred dollars with me.

Who, do you suppose, had it right?

Already, by obeying that instruction, and if I never wrote another word of comparison or contrast between the Two-by-Twos and their purported example of New Testament ministry, I was breaking a law contained within the doctrine of Jesus Christ as recorded in Matthew 10:9. But I was about to break another one very shortly because, instead of going to "preach to the lost sheep of the House of Israel," I was soon "to go into the way of the Gentiles" whether they were or were not of the good, "professing," Two-by-Two kind, and, as it was soon to be my experience, most of the ones I went to, regardless of their measure of goodness, fell into the latter category.

One hundred dollars in my pocket didn't seem like such a bad deal back in 1962. After all, I didn't have a debt in the world, my room and board were already paid for since I was promised in Matthew 19:9 that I would receive "an hundredfold" more for the house and family that I had chosen to "forsake," and, moreover, every "professing" car in the country was at my disposal. What more could a poor, homeless servant of the Most High God ever wish for?

"Not too much," I can hear some of you thinking.

On the surface, I agree, it surely must look like a pretty soft touch—quite a "cushy" life, really—and maybe, for some, it was and is, but; for me, I would prefer to take away the word "life" and replace it with "existence" for that is barely what I found it to be.

I must hasten to add, though, that it was not the lack of money but, instead, the absence of freedom that caused me so much stress and created the debilitating degree of tension that eventually tore me apart. I'm sure, if you've read between the lines at all during my whole narrative, and, maybe, even if you haven't, you have come to the conclusion that my year in the work was a very unpleasant and, ultimately, unproductive period in my life. At this point, however, I want only to share with you either what I personally experienced or what I know for a certainty about the financial situation regarding the ministry and the men and women who believe absolutely that they have been called by God to exemplify and uphold it.

Not too many nights after my first mission began, it fell my turn to go down to the door of the tent to shake hands with all the departing souls and thank each of them for “coming out” that night. As I have already mentioned, however, if they were “professing” and living within seventy-five kilometres of the place, they weren’t given much choice in the matter of whether to “come out” or not if they wished to retain their status in “the Truth,” but I soon found out that the practice of shaking hands had a completely different and—dare I say it?—much more devious motive, and it gave us, the “workers,” an extra chance to assess just how much real interest each one had in helping the work of God to go forward. For, you see, this ritual gave every faithful follower with an extra shekel to spare a chance to get doubly blest by slipping a last mite or two into the needy and outstretched hand that was extended with such gushing gratitude and, often, such barefaced hypocrisy.

No one had warned me about the process or prepared me for “what I was about to receive,” and I don’t remember if I handled it badly or fumbled it well, but I think I netted a grand total of forty dollars that first time out. I still had my original hundred, and nobody had ever asked me to contribute any of it to help pay for the rental of the tent site, so I dutifully handed over my total “take” to Murdo. No, no, he told me, *that* was given to *me* and, I was to keep it against future needs. But upon my insistence, as I recall, he took it anyway.

So that’s how it was done! Well, not always, perhaps, but from that time on, it certainly gave a whole new meaning to the simple act of shaking hands. And now I also knew better than to fork over my receipts to anyone else lest my future needs should be rather more imminent than I expected or wanted them to be.

The “outsider” of chicken farm fame had tried unsuccessfully on several occasions, I later found out, to give money to each of my senior companions. One night he decided to ply me with some. Now, if there was one thing that was more anathema than another within the cult’s code of ethics, it was accepting cash donations from a non-believer, and I didn’t have to go into the Work to learn that, either. Since I had grown up with that philosophy being part of my spiritual diet, I didn’t have to run to one of my seniors to ask them what I should do when the money was offered. I automatically refused it out of hand, of course, and I think the concept nearly drove the poor, would-be benefactor crazy. We didn’t charge admission, we didn’t pass a collection plate, there was no box for donations at the back of the tent, and, as far as he could tell, we didn’t accept gifts, so, he wondered out loud, what on earth did we do to “pay the bills.” (The poor fellow didn’t know that if he would just profess, we would be more than happy to milk him for all he was worth and then get him to mention Carson Cowan or George Walker in his will, as well!)

But that’s another story.

I thought I’d become accustomed to having the odd bill slipped to me in a handshake, and I had mastered the art of making just enough extra small talk with the donor until I got the money stashed away in my pocket before reaching to greet the next in line, but I was completely taken aback and equally unprepared when I was handed my first cash contribution right out in the open. It was given to me by a wonderful old woman in whose home we often stayed and where we were made extremely welcome. She was my grandmother, your grandmother, and everybody’s grandmother, if you know what I mean.

And there I was, a big, twenty-eight year-old fellow used to working for his pay cheque, being given a five-dollar bill by this kindly old lady who may not have had many of them to spare.

“Oh, no, thank you!” I blurted out, before I realized that that was the worst thing in the world I could have said or done. She pressed it into my hand, and the look on her face told me that she really meant me to have it because “I was one of the Lord’s servants” and that five-dollar bill had an extra blessing attached to it when it was used in the Lord’s work. I took it and thanked her profusely for it, but, I have to tell you, I hated to buy myself even a cone of ice cream after that lest I was using my gifts frivolously.

Willie and I never discussed either finances or each other’s financial status at any time during the whole year. I realize that our worldly wants were minimal, but, be that as it may, I never did have very much cash on me at any time. I would have given almost any amount to go to have my hair cut by a real barber in a real barbershop, but that was not considered a proper thing for brother workers to do.

No, sir! Not on your life, sir! But bear with me, if you will, and I’ll tell you more about that aspect of my year under my next sub-heading in this very chapter.

At least twice already I have mentioned that I was suffering from unbelievably severe headaches, and that I had been given permission to go home with my parents after the last Special Meeting in order to see if I could get help from my old family physician. Just before leaving the meeting site, Horace Culwick came over to me and shoved forty dollars into my pocket explaining, as he did so, that I “might need a little extra [money] if I was going to be doing any doctoring.” As far as I can remember, that money did come in handy, if not for the “doctoring” at least for the train ticket to take me back to Toronto to meet Willie upon his return from eastern Canada.

The only other time in the year when the memory of money has any significance for me is during convention preparations at Strathroy, Ontario. The headaches had not cleared up, and Willie felt that I should go to see one of his family’s favourite chiropractors in town.

I couldn’t go because I didn’t have a single dollar in my pocket.

I used every excuse I could think of to get out of visiting the man because I didn’t think it was correct policy to ask anyone—including my companion—for money. I had gone out to preach in faith, and I figured that’s the way things were supposed to be. “If it was God’s will that I should go for medical help,” I thought, “then He would provide me with the funds to follow it through.”

And, miraculously, that’s what happened.

One day I received a letter—from whom I do not remember—and, in that envelope, there was enough cash to allow me to make several visits to the chiro. Apart from being able to get into a car by myself, drive into the town for a medical appointment, and then prolong my stay by walking around the streets and looking into store windows for old time's sake, I experienced absolutely no benefit from getting stretched, twisted, snapped, crackled, and popped. The headaches hung on and were with me five or six months after I “went back to working with my hands” as so many in the cult like to express it.

As I look back on that experience of being flat broke—too broke to go to a doctor, even—I have no choice but to think, what an utter fool I was!

How could I possibly have known what “skulduggery”—if you'll pardon my Irish—and fraud were being carried on right under my nose as well as numerous other noses, concerning the acquisition, the hoarding, and the distribution of all those five-, ten-, twenty-, one-, two-, and five-hundred-dollar bills? How could I have known from all that brainwashing I'd had from the cradle on, that the Great Overseers—the workers who had elevated themselves to pinnacles of absolute power—had literally scads and scads of money saved in legitimate bank accounts under either an assumed name, in the name of one of those “most trustworthy” bishops, or, in some cases, even their own name? How could I possibly have known what they meant when they preached about going out in faith “[providing] neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in [their] purses, nor scrip for [their] journey. . . for the workman is worthy of his meat”? How could I have ever guessed the plethora of lies that was being perpetrated upon the citizens of the world?

The sad, and, oh, so hurtful truth is that, in my naiveté, I could not have known, for so devious was the extent of the deception!

I was thirty-six years old and had been out of the work for about ten years before I was given a glimpse of only one element of the dishonest arrangements that were going on behind the scenes.

That glimpse was given to me by an ex-worker from the province of British Columbia. I had known him for many years before he went into the work, and it was not at all unusual for us to discuss all sorts of little inconsistencies that were to be found in “the Way,” and, even though I went into the work, bombed, and left it, he never breathed a word to me about his intentions to do the very same thing in the very same order a few years later. (I do believe, however, that his name stayed on the “Workers List” one year longer than did mine.) To my knowledge it was during his months “in ultimate service and sacrifice to the Lord” that he picked up the intelligence about what I will call, for want of a better term, **inter-worker financing**.

The head “honcho” in British Columbia—one of the most devastatingly boring speakers I have ever had to listen to—was a man named Ernest Nelson, but he is not to be confused with another worker of almost the same name who spent many years “saving souls” in Japan. It seems that *our* Ernest Nelson chose a bishop in or near Vancouver who, like Job of Old Testament fame was “perfect and upright [in all his ways], and one that feared God, and eschewed evil” and got him to open up a bank account “In Trust” so that all the extra cash that the workers had, and didn't know what to do with, could be deposited there and sent off to workers in “foreign fields” and other areas just in case they didn't remember that they were supposed to be preaching by faith and relying on God to supply their every need without the interference of any man-made organization. The practice was justified in one case, at least, by saying that when some political unrest reared its ugly head somewhere in the Orient, money had been sent from this account—and I'm really tempted to say *these accounts*—to help the workers there to get out while the going was good.

It would have been fun to just sit back and let God in on the action. I'm sure that if those workers really were preaching the pure, unadulterated Truth, and if it was God's will that they were in that country on his bidding, he would have provided them with “a ram caught in the thicket,” so to speak, and would have assured them of the words we all can read in I Corinthians 10:13: “So far you have faced no trial beyond which man can bear. God keeps faith, and he will not allow you to be tested above your powers, but when the test comes he will at the same time provide a way out, *by enabling you to sustain it.*”

Somehow I cannot reconcile those words—regardless of either interpretation or translation—with those workers in the Orient being able to wire Ernest Nelson for a “quick fix” of cash so that they could clear out and leave all their trusting converts behind amidst the exploding bombs, flying shrapnel, and clouds of nerve gas.

Can you?

Now I could look back and reflect. Now I could recall the numerous trips to the post office that were made by Willie, my companion, my elder brother, the man to whom I was apprenticed, and the one whose wallet was obviously filled to overflowing. No wonder, now I could muse, that he had to buy so many money orders, for, after all, that money had to be sent to at least one overseer so that sufficient funds would always be available to fly Carson Cowan to Australia, George Walker to wherever George Walker wanted to go, to buy new flush toilets for some convention site or other, and, perhaps help Paul Sharp or Willis Propp acquire a new lap-top computer and up-date their fax machines.

Had I been really apprenticed, or had I been treated as an apprentice, would one not suppose that I should be taught the tricks of the trade? If there were extra cash at any one time, and if that cash were going to some “worthy cause,” wouldn't it have been the proper and appropriate thing for my “trainer” to teach me what to do with it? The fact that he neither let on to me what he was doing, nor took the trouble to teach me to do it also, indicates to me that someone somewhere knew that something secretive was going on, and that it would be better that someone with my lack of experience, big mouth, and wagging tongue be kept in the dark as much as possible for as long as possible.

I once told George Poole that I knew all about Ernest Nelson's "nest egg" account out in British Columbia. He realized very quickly that his best reaction would be no reaction at all, so I pressed my luck and asked him if Carson Cowan had a similar "stash" here in Ontario. His answer was quite typically "Poole-ite."

"I don't think there's anything like that," he responded wryly, "and, if there is, I've never seen it or used it."

'Sure!' I thought, smiling inwardly, 'I just bet you don't.'

I was never satisfied with any answer I ever got about how it was always possible for workers—especially the older ones or even some younger ones with considerable gift of the gab and high marks in following the party line—to have money to go wherever they wanted to go and whenever they wanted to get there. I always received some vague explanation about God providing for them since it was his will that this one or that one was needed in certain areas to edify, comfort, and feed "[his] lambs and [his] sheep."

When I consider that answer now and allow myself to dispassionately reflect on the impact it had on me during my formative years, I really have to wonder if it had any influence at all on my desire to go to Chile or Afghanistan or unheard-of places like Dufferin County, Ontario, to spread "glad tidings of great joy" to all who would listen and to a few who wouldn't.

Local or trans-continental travel always used to be by train, bus, or borrowed buggy, and workers going abroad for any reason always went by ship. But little by little, over the years, borrowed buggies became big Cadillacs, Mercurys, or Chrysler New Yorkers as long as they were air-conditioned and did not have a *radio aerial* in view of the naked eye. Buses and trains soon gave way to airplanes for movement between almost any two locations and to almost any place on the planet since, as the workers justified it, "We have found it to be so much cheaper in the long run, and we save so much time."

Time for what?

Time for getting back to a companion to start another mission? Hardly ever!

Time for hurrying to some needy soul who is crying out for salvation? Very unlikely!

Time for dashing off to preach to the unsaved relatives and friends at the funeral of some deceased member of the sect, whom they did not know, had rarely seen, and never visited? Quite possible, indeed!

Time for rushing to Australia or Great Britain for a convention or special meeting? More often than not!

So there they were—all those important imparters of eternal peace and salvation—spending other people's hard-earned dollars to literally escape every possible opportunity they might have to "preach the word [and to be] instant in season [and] out of season" by touring the world and becoming very powerful, very removed from the gospel scene, and very, very filled with pomposity and a sense of their own importance.

I could allow myself to seethe with indignation when I think of that and remember that I hated to buy an ice cream cone or a hot dog and couldn't even spend two dollars for a professional hair cut. But I'm not seething because, at this point in my life, I really don't care—now that I see the whole set-up for what it is and what it always was. As far as I am concerned now, the workers are almost every bit as dishonest as was that pathetic TV evangelist, Jim Bakker, who finally did 'fess up and spent several years in a penitentiary washing toilet bowls and urinals and mopping and waxing the institution's floors. (One could almost think that he was at convention preparations!)

And besides, had I been able and willing and had not so quickly run screaming back to my blackboard, chalk dust on my jacket, and an infinite pile of report cards to fill out, I probably would, by now, be crisscrossing the globe, too, and imagining myself as some emissary for the God of Heaven and shamelessly taking advantage of the perks that such a position offers the shameless—even as I write.

I have now told you the ways that I was personally financed while I was preaching, as well as some means of hoarding and redistribution of excess funds used by some—if not all—of the upper echelons of the cult's internal structure. Many tales have been circulated about great amounts of wealth that have been amassed by those same self-proclaimed demagogues, but, because I have no absolute documentation to support what I say, I must leave any such scuttlebutt to be written by others who both know first hand and can validate the veracity of such intelligence.

According to some personally unsubstantiated rumours many individuals have bequeathed complete estates to the workers and "the Work." Some individuals, I have heard, were asked to donate their life savings to the "Overseer" at the time they were accepted into the ministry. (This, as you now know, did not happen in my case.) There are those who believe that some "outstanding and revered" men such as George Walker or Jack Carrol—archenemies in lifetime—left behind sums as great as three million dollars when they shuffled off this mortal coil. If that should be the case, then, does it not give one pause for thought as to what happened—or, indeed, happens—to the accrued interest on such wealth, or who is responsible for remitting to the government all the legal taxes that are owed "year by year continually"?

Putting aside all proven or unproven references to filthy lucre, however, we are still left staring head-on at all the bits and pieces of real estate that sit idly for at least eleven months of every year on somebody's farm, hobby farm, or ranch while the workers are

running all over the continent trying to convince everyone they come across that “. . . the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands. . .”

Who, then, is responsible for paying the property tax on all those permanent structures? It seems very unfair to ask God to do it, I would think, since, according to Acts 7:48, he doesn't dwell there, and one can't help but feel sorry for the farmers if *they* have to pay it since they could hardly get a herd of cattle into any structure if that is already filled to overflowing with rolled up canvas tents and piles of convention benches.

Do you know what I think?

I bet you a dollar that the workers pay it, and I'll go one better. I bet they get the money for it out of one of those cutesy little accounts that George Poole hasn't got a clue or an inkling about! And the sad fact is that that account got built up by the five-dollar bills that “my grandmother and your grandmother and everyone's grandmother” pressed tearfully into the grasping paws of every able-bodied man and woman who should have been out earning an honest living the way the Apostle Paul did in Acts 18: 3.

PERIODS OF PERSONAL ANGUISH

I feel that I have told you just about all you care to hear on this personal “anguish” bit, and, really, the word “anguish” is perhaps somewhat overstated and slightly exaggerated. There are, however, two or three things that are so outstanding in my mind that, even after more than thirty years, I feel they warrant a sub-topic of their own.

The first one is that old hair-cutting ordeal.

Isn't it strange? I had quit my life's work. I had left everything comfortable and familiar behind me. I had sold my car and, with it, my symbol of freedom. I was surrounded by hayseed and hogs in an environment that was as alien to me as living in outer space, and I was terrified beyond all reason every night of the year that I had to stand up to preach to the assembled audiences in front of me, yet, while nearly all thoughts of those little “burdens” have dimmed with time and circumstance, one memory sears through with laser-like poignancy to haunt me still after more than three decades out of the work and almost two of them out of the cult itself.

And that memory is of the old hair-cutting ordeal.

Why did it bother me so much and give me so much stress? I don't really know why, but it actually seemed to take on a life of its own, and, in a strange way, it became the personification of, or the scapegoat for, my lack of independence and freedom and everything that was unpleasant for me that whole year long.

It had never once crossed my mind that the brother workers were not just expected but actually *required* to cut each other's hair. Oh, sure, I had often seen such activity going on in my parents' home as I grew up, but I had no idea that being a barber “on the side” was one of the necessary qualifications for male members of the cult to enter the ministry. It seemed to rank right up there with being able to milk cows, de-beak hens, pitch hay, dry dishes, split wood, and read your Bible and pray for at least an hour two or three times a day every day of the week!

Apart from the added nervous tension that trying to master the art of hair-cutting inflicted on me, I can hardly tell you just how much I dreaded having my own locks lopped off in some slice-happy fashion by someone who was eminently better at nailing a new roof on somebody's house than he was at wielding scissors and a comb near anyone's pate after the building was erected. And, let me assure you, that “slice-happy” was not an adjective that applied to me when I began the job of shearing the tresses off my voluntary victim!

I hadn't the faintest inkling of how I was supposed to approach this dreadful ordeal.

I have no intention of boring you with details of how or where or how frequently these stupid operations occurred, but I can tell you with some mild embarrassment that they became so problematic for me that I often found myself lying awake at night worrying about them and wondering what I could do to get out of them altogether. Doesn't that sound crazy? There seems to be no logical explanation for the way our minds work at times, or why it is that one thing more than another will often send us into either depths of despair or paroxysms of pleasure.

I will leave it to you to figure out just what category I fell into when Willie would announce, “Well, I guess tomorrow's the day!”

Three other outstanding stress-inducing predicaments come to mind, and they all came about as a result of my glib tongue and a sense of humour which, most of my life, has worked overtime without, I might add, getting paid time-and-a-half.

The *second* of those incidents happened one night after one of our gospel meetings during our **mission** in Collingwood. Willie and I were spending that week with a wonderful couple in a town not too far away, and, as was our custom, we rode to and from meeting with our family of the week. On the night in question our hosts had invited two of the friends from Barrie to drop in “for tea” on their way home. The woman of the Barrie couple loved to laugh and carry on, as some would say, and she and I had a great time entertaining the others around the kitchen table as each of us tried to outdo the other with just the right quip. I found the tension from preaching, praying, and playing the piano for the hymn singing ebbing away, and, for the first time in a long time, I forgot I was a worker and became a human being.

Oh, fie for shame!

In the hilarity of the moment I had not noticed that my companion had slipped away and was no longer with us at the table. Common sense and a comparatively short memory should have prevailed to warn me that something was amiss, but the spirit of pleasure and

light-heartedness had clouded my perception, and I stayed on “at the party” until the visitors left before I retired to bed for the night. Still feeling excited and buoyed up, I entered the bedroom to find Willie already tucked in and looking as pleased with the world as seven days of wet weather. How could I not have surmised that I had committed some terrible infraction of some unwritten regulation from the book on the “Behavioural Ethics of the World’s Exclusive Band of Heaven-sent, Homeless Stranger-Preachers”? I pressed my luck just a bit too far.

“Anna certainly has a great sense of humour,” I ventured.

“Harumph!” growled Sir William. “It’s a bit too much for *my* liking, and none of that sort of thing befits a servant of the Lord.”

From somewhere I found the strength to keep my mouth shut and not fire back any number of responses which came flooding into my mind, but, later as I *crawled* into my side of the bed, I found myself sizzling with indignation at the very idea that a servant of the Lord had to stop being a member of the human race in order to glean and gather souls in God’s great harvest field.

And, like an arrow piercing my very being, I suddenly recalled my *first* great faux pas just a week or so after our first **mission** had started in the tent at Leaskdale.

Beatrice Clayton, an ex-worker whom I’ve already mentioned earlier in this chapter, came to the tent and took Willie and me to visit a Toronto family who were vacationing at their summer cottage near Pefferlaw. While we were there some other family members arrived, and a barbecue became the order of the day. I must tell you that Beatrice was filled to the brim with lots of life and love of laughter, and it was not only fun to be around her, but it was also a great pleasure as well. Having been in the work herself, and, for health reason, having to leave it after a few years, she had genuine first-hand knowledge of the stress and tension that pervade the souls of all young inductees into God’s army of “Christian soldiers marching as to war.”

But that day at the Pefferlaw barbecue her antics got me into a bit more hot water than either of us ever bargained for.

She was seated on my right at one of those picnic bench-table combinations, and, as you well know, one does not have a lot of room for maneuvering when one’s legs are tucked neatly under the table area. Everyone was talking, laughing, and generally enjoying the sunshine, food, and fellowship—in that order—when Beatrice removed her spoon from her very hot tea cup and, unbeknownst to me, she placed it on the back of my arm just above my elbow. In my mind there was not a shadow of a doubt: I had been stung by some sort of insect as large, surely, as the spider that sat alongside Miss Muffet!

“Ow-w-w-w!” I exclaimed, as I threw my right arm up and to the right, catching Beatrice just across her chest (no one would have dared think of *breast* in 1962!), and both of us toppled on our backs out onto the grass behind us with our legs still caught between the bench and table. And there we lay, laughing like two kindergarten kids on a water slide, until we could regain some sort of composure and join the rest of the happy throng for the rest of the meal.

It was pure, unadulterated fun and frolic, and everyone around the table got a great “charge” out of Beatrice’s naughtiness and my resulting discomfiture.

But wait!

Not *everyone* got the same “charge” out of our “crude behaviour.” And already you are anticipating my next sentence. Back at the tent that evening one young, fun-loving, and too frivolous ex-school teacher got reprimanded by one not-so-young and comparatively-lacking-in-frivolity ex-farmhand for such nonsensical “carrying on” and for “most unbecoming behaviour” for someone who was “supposed to set an example for the Lord’s people” and someone whom those same people were supposed to be able to emulate.

Wouldn’t you think that I’d learned my lesson then and would have known better than to allow myself to get so happy and carefree a few months later around that table in Stayner, Ontario? Unfortunately, I just kept forgetting over and over again that Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10: 22 that “[he was made] all things to all men that [he] might by all means save some.” It’s just awfully hard for me to believe that Paul, Silas, Titus, Timothy, and Jesus Christ, himself, never had a laugh, never played a trick on anyone, or never—at least once or twice in their lifetimes—behaved in the manner of a plain and simple human being.

My leash was feeling shorter and shorter, don’t you see? And, as the noose around my neck became tighter and tighter, and I began to find it harder and harder to “kick against the pricks,” my vision became clearer and clearer that no amount of composition corrections, or chalk dust on the back of my jacket, and no number of tri-annual report cards to fill out in triplicate could ever come near the burden I was labouring under in order to spread the word of God to a lost and perishing world.

During our last little **mission** where I got asked to take on the job of Sunday School teaching, and where I almost got caught prancing around a bedroom draped in a slip belonging to the lady of the house, but which was large enough to sail the Titanic across the Atlantic Ocean, my tongue got me into more trouble.

This time there was no fun involved.

I absolutely adored the couple with whom we often stayed in Stayner, and Willie—bless his heart—often “allowed” me to stay there in that home while he went down country with some of the farmers so he could brush up on his knack of slopping the hogs and practice the fine art of spreading manure wherever and whenever it needed spreading. (Actually, I thought he was quite good at it—even when he was not down in the country!)

However, while up in the hills for those last few weeks, we were pretty much obligated to stay around and visit among the few families of friends in the area. Thus it was that one Sunday morning, which happened to be one of those Union Meetings I described earlier on, my wonderful Stayner couple who, not having the Union Meeting in their home that day, decided to “drive over to the valley for a change” and “see the boys.” No one on earth could have been happier than I to see them, so, with no malice aforethought, I vociferated, “What are you people doing away over here?”

It was my way of letting them know how completely overjoyed I was to see them, but, apparently, either my tone or my timbre gave them to believe that they had committed some unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost himself and that they should have stayed home and met with their own little “flock” of fair and familiar faces. And the next thing I knew, I was being sharply rebuked by my companion for “my lack of wisdom” in speaking to those people the way I did and “offending them by implying that they were not welcome in that gathering.”

Oh, my!

How I wished that they had spoken to me first so that I could have assured them just *how* welcome they were and *how* delighted I was to see them! But I guess they thought “it would be wiser” of them to go right to the “top” and let *him* know how awful the young sprout had made them feel.

Of course I apologized, but we all know what that’s like. After a nail is driven into a board, it can be pulled out, but it’s just about impossible to ever really remove the evidence of the hole that the nail made in the first place.

Would that tongue of mine ever stop getting me into trouble?

It hasn’t yet!

There are yet two more anxiety-filled incidents which I would like to tell you about— neither of which, as far as I know, had anything to do with my tongue, my tone, *or* my timbre. Since one of them occurred during the Special Meeting Rounds, I will keep it for later and will conclude this sub-topic by elaborating a little more extensively on the other.

I have never failed to marvel at the immediacy with which one can leave behind a milking stool, a pitch fork, a grindstone, a pick axe, or a kitchen sink full of dirty dishes and, in one fell swoop, become a fully qualified marriage counsellor, a born-again psychiatrist, or a full-fledged family planning instructor. And, apart from my list of rather male-dominated trades, this same phenomenon exists—nay, thrives!—among both genders of the cult’s clergy.

If so many lives had not been misdirected and screwed up by these self-styled experts in all things conjugal, marital, and post-natal, it really would be quite a funny scene indeed. But the reality is that there is so much unhappiness, so many “wrong” marriages, and such rigidly unsympathetic and antiquated attitudes toward everything that does not fall within the limited experience and impractical views of the “overseeing brothers” that there is nothing amusing or excusable to be found anywhere.

Who better, I ask you, could, after all, understand the needs of a young woman going out into the world of business and commerce or, perhaps, one planning a wedding than some prissy old maid who was supposed to be fitted out with a chastity belt the day she offered for the work and go back every year at convention time to have one of the brother workers re-fit it and, most likely, tighten it a little at the same time? I’m sure you’re thinking, as I am, that the only more-qualified person to do all this counselling would, surely, be one of those holier-than-thou bachelors who, *according to their own testimony*, have not only pledged a life of celibacy, but *claim* to have lived one as well.

And, on this very theme, about seven weeks into my “calling,” my companion was summoned to Toronto—quite outside our “field,” to be sure—to counsel and put in order some domestic dispute which had, yet again, reared its ugly head.

In making his request to one of the friends for the use of his vehicle to make the jaunt to the big city, Willie informed him that the reason for having to go was because it concerned someone “that we had a little to do with a few years ago.”

‘WE?’ I wondered, being careful not to look too puzzled. I didn’t recall where Willie had been “a few years ago,” but I knew of a certainty that I was back in Ottawa brushing chalk dust off the back of my jacket.

And then it hit me.

The Royal “WE”, of course !

And I was to hear that same pronoun used many more times that year, and every time I heard it, I felt like gagging, for it always seemed to imply some sort of modesty on the part of the speaker and make him sound so humble and self-effacing. If modesty existed at all in any form, it was only ever of the false variety as far as I could judge the situation.

So we went to Toronto, and we took me along with us!

I wouldn’t have passed up the opportunity to go for all the tea in China as I got to catch a glimpse of civilization as I loved and remembered it. Who among you can comprehend the thrill I derived from simply seeing streetcars and buses, apartment buildings and stores, and those funny lights that turned red and orange and green to keep the traffic moving in such a controlled and “worldly” way! What a contrast it was to bull barns and backhouses, to silos and sump pumps, and to the pungent perfume of fields being fertilized for their following fallow period!

The day passed uneventfully enough, and whether the family ever stopped quarrelling or whatever they were doing that was serious enough to make *us* take the day off from *our* second **mission**, I do not recall. Perhaps, I never really was told about the outcome since we probably thought it was of no concern to me in the first place. I rather suspect, however, that everything turned out just right because, as I told you, Willie was terribly adept at flinging the fertilizer whether he was down in the country or not—or even when he was a lot farther down in the city.

What I do recall, however, is a day that held me in so much pain and personal mental agony that I can still re-live the sordid memory of it and conjure up the feelings of imprisonment that pervaded my whole body, soul, and spirit.

It was the day that Willie took it upon **ourselves** to try to iron out a problem concerning a long-standing feud among a family of aging brothers and their wives—wonderfully faithful, professing Two-by-Two's, all, and all of them “breaking bread” together every Sunday of the year but not, as the Bible says, doing it “from house to house.”

I stayed up in the bedroom, of course, listening to the banter and barrage of “he-said-she-plied-and-I-could-never-dream-of-thinking-or-saying-what-they-all-have-accused-me-of” filtering up through the heating grate directly over the stove below.

I felt that I would go absolutely mad before the sun would set that day.

My nerves got the best of me, and I literally became reduced to a sweating, writhing mass of sub-humanity rolling and tossing on the bed, unable to read, to pray, to write letters or even eat, drink and try to be merry. In retrospect, I can tell you that it was one of the worst stress attacks that I have ever experienced in my life before or since.

I came to hate the sound of the voices coming up at me. I suppose I was transported mentally back to my days at home when my parents were fighting and screaming at each other and at me, but this time I was stuck with having to wait it out and hope that sleep, death or a car would come for me either altogether or one at a time. I did not intend to be fussy!

That night when Willie came to bed, it was I who looked like seven days of wet weather, and for the first time that year, he noticed that something was amiss with my demeanor, and he actually encouraged me to talk about it and to pour my heart out about the stress and strain under which I had been existing for the previous nine or ten months. He was very sincere about his concern, but, needless to say, he really didn't have a clue about what I was telling him.

Being able to verbalize my feelings and explain my struggles, however, did bring about a strange sort of uneasy peace of mind which, when added to the odd laugh we enjoyed together and the long, solitary walk I had, was enough to get me through two convention preparations and three conventions and back home to Ottawa where I began my old life anew.

THE SPECIAL MEETING CIRCUIT

As I have previously stated, this was a season of the year quite apart from the other four and, as far as I could fathom, the only thing special about it was that it gave all the workers a chance to feast on several fatted calves during their visits to all the friends—fatted or otherwise—and allowed their mission work to grind to a screeching halt while many a poor soul seeking salvation got tired waiting and went on ahead to his eternal reward.

Because Willie had been “invited” to eastern Canada that year, and, because (due to my “newness” and inexperience in the work) I could not be considered of any spiritual value to the needy souls in that area, I had to be left behind to team up with no other than Carson Cowan and his entourage of “Merry Men and Women” whom God wanted to keep in Ontario that year. From the seventeenth of November, therefore, until December the twenty-third, I could have been found almost anywhere in the Province from Toronto to Barrie to North Bay to Timmins to Chesley to Chatham and Breslau and many, many more places in between until I finally found myself in my parents' car heading home for Christmas—and, of course, to get that “doctoring” done!

One of the “girls”—sometimes known as “sister workers”—in our often-less-than-happy-but-always-smiling little troupe was a woman named Margaret Brisbin whom I had known since I was about six years old. Had I been smart enough, though, to “cotton on” to the fact that she was engaged in a rather long and on-going fling with Vernon Haddlesey, one of the “boys”—sometimes known as “brother workers”—who was also traveling with us and preaching his lungs out at every whistle stop, I might have reacted a lot less diffidently than I actually did when I was subjected to one or two incidents of outright derision at her not-so-tender whim.

Although I had known her for such a long time, I could never have imagined, or previously testified to, the extent of her crankiness or her downright mean-spiritedness. But on that, my one and only, Special Meetings Round, I was to “suffer the slings and arrows of [her not-so-outrageous and, just perhaps, her very good] fortune.” Perhaps I should be uncharacteristically charitable here and chalk her behaviour up to the fact that the poor woman was in love!

It takes so little, doesn't it, to offend and belittle someone who is trying to get his sea legs in a new “calling” in life?

And it takes just as little to be kind.

But there I was—thin-skinned, as always—surrounded by my elders, my superiors, my theretofore heroes in the work, not knowing where to sit, how to behave, or when to move, being laughed at and derided at every turn, and never quite knowing what I did to deserve it or what I could do to avoid a recurrence of it any time in our then foreseeable future together.

“Sister Margaret” had her big go at me while we were trying to get the sound system in order in the auditorium where the meetings were to take place in North Bay. Never being an intellectual giant in the field of electricity, electronics, or sound systems, I thought I was simply doing what I was told to do by Carson and the other “big” guys when, “what to my wondering [ears] should [I hear]”—none other than Miss Brisbin, herself, openly and bare-facedly laughing at me and ridiculing me to her co-sister, Eva Strickland, about the way that I was trying to show off when I didn’t know anything about what I was doing.

I must admit that the part about my not knowing anything about what I was doing was treacherously close to the truth, but long before that day in November, 1962, I had learned well my lesson not to show off by a mother who had, among her many and varied virtues, the ability to keep me humbly in my place by simply—and not very succinctly—saying, “Go sit down and get out of the road, and let someone do it who knows how.”

Ah, yes! That lesson was indelibly imprinted, I am sure, on both hemispheres of my brain, and I think I always figured that when I became a man—and a *man worker into* the bargain—I could stop fearing that I would ever be belittled again—especially by a senior sister in service to her heavenly Lord and Master.

But, sadly, I was very wrong.

I didn’t hang around long enough to hear if her derision was validated by anyone in the group, but I remember how totally humiliated I was, how I pretended that I had heard nothing amiss, and how I tried to hold my head up in an attempt to be as cheerful and as impervious to her sniggerings as Mother Nature would allow me to be. It was not an easy role for me to play, and I received no Oscar for my performance, but, after all, she was, I believed at the time, my “elder sister” in the “business,” and the only choice I was given by none other than Jesus Christ, himself, was to forgive her “seventy times seven”—even though the scars from that burning wound still sting a little after thirty-five years and counting.

She, of course, has been dead for several years, and her erstwhile suitor found a wonderful widow with whom he could settle down and finish his days “in [her] own hired house.”

There were one or two other minor incidents of similar nature that occurred as we rolled merrily along from day to day, but, rather than subjecting you to my frequent fits of full-blown paranoia by providing you with any further details, I will leave you to assume that the whole Special Meeting circuit was, for me, at least, a most unpleasant and completely unrewarding experience.

One of the sister workers, a girl named Chrissie Fowler, who had been “labouring” for several years in the Canadian Maritimes and Newfoundland, joined our number for the North Bay event before leaving and going on to one of the other circuits that were in progress. While in North Bay, she happened to be staying in the same home as I was.

I should say here that I was still receiving my monthly copies of the *Reader’s Digest* as my subscription had not yet expired, and my parents dutifully forwarded it on to me wherever I was to be found. On the Saturday afternoon after I had walked my heart out in the cold of a November day in North Bay, I came in, went to the room I was sharing with Glenn Richards, and, throwing myself across the bed, grabbed my copy of the *Reader’s Digest* and began reading.

The room door was open, and Chrissie passed by and glanced in on her way to the kitchen downstairs. She took about two steps past my door and stopped. Back she came, and, gazing intently at my reading material, she clucked, “I quit reading all *that* type of stuff the day I professed.”

And then she was gone, leaving me no opportunity to defend myself or to discuss the sin I was committing. Having grown up, as I said, with workers coming and going to and from my parents’ home, and having seen several of them reading either their very own *Reader’s Digest* or one which they picked up off one of our tables, I certainly felt no great burden of guilt to be found reading the same sort of thing now that I had joined the forces, as it were.

When I look back on that silly little non-incident after all these decades, I can’t help but think of how foolish and unpleasant she really was that day. Her hair was long and styled most appropriately to pass muster with the cult’s authorities in such matters. Her skirt was just the right length from the floor, and her stockings were neither too light nor too dark. No trace of make-up could be found on her person, and, as far as anyone could detect, she must have given away any jewelry she may have owned on the same day she read her last *Reader’s Digest*. But she was lacking common sense, compassion, and the good grace to mind her own business and let the God of Heaven direct me through the avenue of my own active conscience what to give up or discard when he felt that what I was doing was going to create a bad spirit within me or cause harm to his kingdom on this earth.

Before I move on to my next and last sub-topic in this chapter, I would like to leave you with a rather amusing little anecdote which occurred in a Sunday morning meeting just prior to Willie’s departure for Atlantic Canada.

The meeting proceeded and ended pretty much as they all have done since William Irvine discovered the “golden bricks” back at the turn of the century. One of the older friends who was part of the little congregation had, apparently, just received in the mail a day or so previously the very famous and highly revered “SPECIAL MEETING LIST FOR ONTARIO AND QUEBEC.” It must have been that he had not brushed up on the rules concerning deference to any workers—especially brothers—who might be present in the meeting at least in body if not in spirit, and, therefore, took it upon himself—*himself*, mind you—to read to all assembled the dates and locations of each and every one of the up-coming **holy days**.

The poor man was slow of movement, slow of thought, and just ever so slightly slower of speech!

All went well with the “reading of the scroll” until he came to that sizable north-western Ontario town that straddles the international boundary with Michigan.

“November [20 ?],” he droned on, “*Salt Ste Mar-eye-a*.”

“What?” I queried silently. ‘Is that some new location this year—some place I’ve never heard of before?’

Would I be going there?

And suddenly it hit me! *Sault Ste. Marie*, of course!

To this day, I’m not sure what kept me from exploding into a “guffaw” that could have been heard from Dundalk to Dresden, but it helped that I did not dare to look even sideways at Willie who, regardless of his many straight-laced discretions concerning the behaviour and conduct of a servant of the Lord, knew when something was genuinely funny and could be relied upon to enjoy the levity of the moment.

We shared a few laughs about it afterwards, and it really was that sort of lightheartedness that helped me counteract some of the stresses and strains that dogged me the whole year long.

CONVENTION PREPARATIONS

I struggled through two of these terrible “Prep Times” and have lived to tell the tale, but I found them laborious, unproductive to a fault, and completely outside the realm of all things spiritual and scriptural. Where, in your Bible, can you find even one verse that quotes Jesus Christ, “the author and finisher of our faith,” telling any of his disciples that they would be expected to waste months and months of every year along with thousands and thousands of someone else’s precious and hard-earned dollar bills in preparing for a series of “feast days” and free-for-alls that were scheduled to occur all over Palestine from Gog to Magog and from Dan to Beersheba wherever they could find someone who had a large enough farm to accommodate the crowd, and who just happened, at the same time, to be terribly “worthy” of the privilege of hosting such a civilized and “ruly” throng?

That’s such a funny coincidence!

I can’t find that verse either!

My first real experience of that other separate and special season of the year—or **Preps** as members of the cult like to refer to it with such reverence and affection—was at Strathroy, Ontario, at the Bryant farm where Willie grew up “as a lad,” and which was now owned and operated by his younger brother, James, who, with his lovely and “faithful” wife, was a staunch pillar in the “church.” That seems right off the top, to cover the requirement for “worthy”—professing, husband of one wife, having a brother and sister in the work, and joint heir to the family’s fame and good fortune.

To add “icing on the cake,” the farm was not only large enough for the workers’ purposes, but it had also been sanctified and dedicated many years earlier to the use of the Lord and ALL his people who should perchance drop by on their annual pilgrimage—some may prefer “vacation”—to enjoy a bit of fellowship and hospitality or simply to remove their shoes and worship at the shrine of such a holy and spiritual site as one of God’s very own **Convention Grounds**.

They could then re-don their clogs, record in their diaries what a special privilege they’d just had, and toddle off home screaming at one another, ignoring the needy and indigent along the way, and making sure to engage in as much gossip as was necessary from time to time to destroy both the guilty and innocent alike. After all, *they, first*, did not have to cast that stone, because they could write to one of any number of their contemporary “fishers of men” and get him or her to throw it on their behalf. And, I assure you, from personal, secondary, and even tertiary experience, that every possible measure of punishment could—and would—be meted out with great alacrity by those same holy reapers, and that “no stone would be left [either] unturned [or unhurled],” as the case might require.

But, surely, I digress. . .

Ah, yes. I was at Strathroy preps.

It really is awfully difficult, with mere words, to imply or signify to you what an oppressive ordeal such an experience proved to be for me. Apart from the lack of biblical support for either conventions or preparations for them, I cannot believe that, even from a purely practical standpoint, someone somewhere over the years has not decided to legislate this useless waste of time and energy out of existence. Time has helped a little to block out some of the personal horror of those days, but I remember writing in a little, old, homemade diary day after awful day, “Preps, Preps, Preps. . .”

As I explained earlier in the chapter, my relationship with hammers was, at the worst, very limited, and, at the best, extremely short-lived, and I soon discovered—as if I had not already known!—that my association with saws planes, anvils, and even the most common variety of screwdrivers was equally as moderate. You can see right off the top, then, that I was not going to prove to be of much value around a bunch of “real men” who were not only very ably qualified in every one of the manual arts, but who were also more than a just a little seasoned in the rigorous routine of all things “Preparation.”

Not a lot was left for me to do, therefore, but to help the “real women” with some of the domestic chores like sweeping out those little cottages—the word “shacks” was out of the question, of course—which had been sitting idly under the maples and elms waiting for the eventual occupancy of such austere and worthy personages as George Walker, Arnold Brown, Lloyd Wilson, Orin Taylor, and Rasmus Pripp, to name only a few. I trust that you took note that I made no special effort to present my list in the order of the internal and worker-imposed declension that exists within the cult’s rigidly adhered to status system and its century-old hierarchical structure.

Of course, there were outdoor “privies” to scrub down and splash with some inexpensive paint. A hen house or two had to be mucked out regardless of one’s allergies or aversions to such tasks. Mattresses and accommodating bed frames had to be lugged to those wee “guest houses” under the shade trees for the big guns, and, of course, prayer mats—I believe the Moslems call them “rugs”—had to be beaten within an inch of their lives and then placed in exactly the right spot where all the holy knees would be bent for hours in meditation, supplication to God the Father, and, who knows, perhaps even a little nod or two.

Once or twice I had the dubious honour of driving one of the old, beaten-up farm trucks to the local dump to dispose of some of the useless excesses of accumulation that had no practical or foreseen spiritual value to the great feast days that were almost upon us. These “outings,” while not exactly part of my job description as a labourer in God’s harvest field, did, at least, give me a fleeting feeling of freedom, and I’m almost too embarrassed to tell you that the thought occasionally crossed my mind that I would like to keep on heading west or south or anywhere but back after I had disposed of my conglomeration of clutter.

But I was a brute for punishment, and I always returned for more!

On June the third things began to taper off, and it fell my lot to join a few other servants and handmaidens who were scheduled to attend another convention held at Dunnville in the Niagara Falls area. This was supposed to be a “break” of some sort, but after I got to spend one full day working in the cookhouse alongside my old friend, Murdo MacLeod, and then preparing to deliver a gospel message to the assembled throng on the Saturday evening, I was not one bit sure that that was the sort of respite that I had really anticipated. I did, however, get to meet some relatives and old friends while I was there, and, since the car rides to and fro were of some geographical interest to me, I suppose I would have to admit, in retrospect, that it was far more rewarding, after all, and a great deal more appealing than staying back in Strathroy and helping Willie to re-pitch a tent that had come crashing to earth during one of Mother Nature’s temper tantrums.

Eventually all was in order.

God’s people began to arrive, and a festive atmosphere replaced the drudgery of the previous month. How exciting it was to finally see the culmination of all our labour as the meeting tent filled with all the hungry saints who had come to feast at “the feet of them [that were supposed to] preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of great joy”!

Before the four-day frolic would end, everyone would be given the opportunity of testifying to how sinful and needy he or she really was when he or she had arrived and of heaping mounds of unworthy praise and adoration on the heads and shoulders of all the members of the ministry there present as well as those in the past who had delivered them from the wiles of Satan and the ones who, in the future, would be called by God to seek and save members of their posterity perhaps unto the tenth generation.

And a good time was had by all!

Thus my first Preps and ensuing clean-up ended, and, before I knew it, I was travelling to Almonte, Ontario with Willie and an old Irishman named Andrew Blair who was as deaf as a post unless, and until, you said something that was in complete agreement with his opinions on almost any topic under the sun. You had only to cross him in the smallest syllable to discover just how badly damaged those tympanic membranes really were! There, in Almonte, at the farm of Alex Hazelwood—fourth generation owner of the same sanctified site—the whole procedure would begin again, only, this time, things would be on a much grander scale, because *this convention was the BIG one*.

One full day and four flat tires later we finally arrived at our blessed destination.

I will spare you all the details and any further descriptions of the rigors and turmoils of “Bee Days” and more “Bee Days,” of tent pitching and bench placing, and of hundreds of dishes to wash, sewers to clean and electrical wires to be strewn.

Suddenly, it suddenly seemed, things were over, and I was no longer in the work! Having one hundred dollars in my pocket—albeit not the same hundred as I had started out with one year earlier—I bid farewell to a few souls who seemed to care, and, hitching a ride with some professing folk from Prince Edward Island, I made my way back to Ottawa where life for me would be forever different and yet very much the same for the next twenty years or so.

Late in the winter or very early in the spring during our last mission, I had quietly written to the Ottawa School Board to see if could get my old job back.

At the same time I wrote almost as quietly to Carson Cowan to ask him if he thought I could have a few months off from the work and, perhaps, go on the “Resting List” while I tried to get help for my terrible headaches.

A marvellous coincidence ensued.

On the very day I received an answer from the school board offering me a job, I received my third and final letter from my “pastor-in-chief.” As you may recall, he was not nearly as prompt at replying to me when I had offered for the work in the first place.

“No,” he wrote very much to the point, it would not be a good idea for me to go onto the Resting List.

He continued to explain that, since my health had been of great concern to my companion—and to him!—during the whole year, he felt I probably had not made the proper adjustments to my new way of life, and he felt it would be a very wise decision for me to return to my “teaching career.”

What a final and sweeping dismissal that was!

And, what a relief!

So there I was with a letter in one hand firing me from the job I thought God had called me to do, and, in the other, an offer to return to the work for which I felt I had been born in the first place.

I had a reasonably good summer, and in September, as in the following twenty-five Septembers, I was found in front of a class as I tried to mould and modify, or educate and edify, the lives of literally hundreds of Canada’s youth and to keep wiping the chalk dust off the back of my jacket as I weighed, time after time, into the endless task of filling out all those report cards.

Go to **Chapter 9**