

I Remember

Mama



A Tribute to a Praying Mother

by Richard W. LaFountain

Preface

I have many fond memories of growing up in the LaFountain family accompanied by a few deep scars left by the passing of time and events. This is an inevitable result of living in a fallen world. All of us are the product of our environments. We are moldable lumps of clay, having some innate predispositions from our genes and our own unique God-given personalities, but mostly we are impressionable and left with deep imprints by those who touch our lives. No life impression, no deeper indelible imprint can be made on any man than that of his Mother.

The will of Henry Heinz, wealthy distributor of the famous "Heinz 57 Varieties" line of catsup products once testified of the important role his mother played in his life. In his will he wrote:

"Looking forward to the time when my earthly career will end I desire to set forth at the very beginning of this will, as the most important item in it, a confessional of my faith in Jesus Christ as my Savior. I also desire to bear witness to the fact that throughout my life, in which there were unusual joys and sorrows, I have been wonderfully sustained by my faith in God through Jesus Christ. This legacy was left to me by my consecrated mother, a woman of strong faith, and to it I attribute any success I have attained."

The Apostle Paul, writing to Timothy spoke similar words concerning the important role his mother and grandmother played in his faith.

"When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in you also." - 2 Timothy 1:5

My mother, by the grace and sovereign will of God was, is and ever shall be Phyllis June Belyea LaFountain. My mother was raised in an unchristian home. My grandmother and grandfather led a particularly volatile married life that ended in a very painful divorce. My mother was imprinted by the events of those tumultuous days. I was an adult of at least 50 years old before Mother shared with me just a few of those difficult memories. By the wonderful grace of Jesus my grandmother, Nila June Hoobler Belyea, became a believer later in life. My mother also came to know Jesus as her own personal Savior early in her young adult life.

In this little tribute I want to record some of my memories of my Mother and her influence on my life. As with all lives there were good times and bad, highs and lows, happy days and very sad moments, but I choose here to focus on the best of times and to spotlight, not my Mother's shortcomings and weaknesses, but her godly influence on her children. May all who read it take courage that though in your life you may not be the ideal mother or father you longed to be there is great grace for those who are in Christ Jesus, who forgives our trespasses and remembers them no more, and who takes our ragged efforts and turns them into eternal garments made of gold, frankincense and myrrh, a sweet smelling offering that is acceptable to God.

Mama Always Prayed!

I am the third of a family of six children. My siblings have their stories and their own memories of growing up LaFountain. I have my own. These stories are my stories, my memories, my experiences, and my unique "molding" by the influential hands of my mother.

Billy Sunday was once making visits to families when he came to a certain home. He knocked at the door which was answered by a child who said, "You cannot see my mother because she prays from nine to ten o'clock every day." Billy waited some forty minutes to visit with that mother. When she came out of her prayer closet her face glowed with the presence of the Lord. He also knew that two of her sons were in the ministry and her daughter was a missionary. He concluded, "All hell cannot tear a boy or girl away from a praying mother."

Susanna Wesley, mother of Charles and John Wesley, with seventeen children, spent an hour a day shut up with God in prayer. She often had no secluded place to find solitude so she sat in a chair in the middle of the kitchen with her apron over her head. Her children knew that when mother was in her "prayer closet" she was not to be disturbed.

My mother prayed. Long before most of us ever thought of getting out of bed in the morning Mom was already at devotions and often on her knees crying out to God for her children and family. She was not ashamed to be on her knees either at the sofa, or at her favorite chair. I remember well Mom's chair with a lamp and table with her open Bible and usually a notebook with her prayer list next to her all day long.

Mom Prayed About Everything.

She prayed about the missing the car keys, the lost checkbook, even the sick parakeet. Nothing was too small for prayer. I remember well those panic prayer moments. Mom was deathly afraid of tornadoes. We lived in the Midwest and when there was a tornado warning on the radio or when the town sirens went off Mom went to prayer pleading the blood of Jesus for protection from the oncoming storm. There were times when the sky looked so dark and ominous that Mom would huddle us in the southeastern corner of the kitchen (we had no basement) where we would crouch with mother-hen crying out to God and instructing us that when she said run we were to run to the deep ditch across the street and lay flat holding on to one another. Then she would warn, "If someone next to you starts to get sucked up just grab their hair and hold them down."

Mom Prayed Every Day.

And because Mom prayed so did we. Mom instituted what was called "daily devotions" - a half hour or so of Bible reading and prayer every day before we were allowed to go out and play. For us it was agony but for Mom it was obedience to Christ. She would often quote, "*Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.*" So we got the Bible drilled into us day after day. It was

embarrassing. Often our friends would come to the door asking if we could come out and play and were told, "No, we can't come out until we have devotions." "What's that?" they would ask and we'd have to explain it was a time to read the Bible and pray. Some kids would hang around the door with noses pressed up to the screen door watching us as we went through our daily routine.

As we got older Mom found it difficult to keep our attention and I am sure she struggled with keeping us interested in devotions. Then she came across "*The Sugar Creek Gang*" book series by Paul Hutchens. We loved hearing Mom read the stories of those Christian boys and their many adventures. It really helped spice up our devotional time.

Then came the day when a salesman came to the house trying to sell records. He presented a package that was irresistible; though I am sure it was a sacrifice for Mom and Dad to purchase the record player and many volumes of music, Bible readings, and children's stories. Those records stayed around the LaFountain household on into our adult lives. They made a tremendous impact on us. My particular favorites were the Ethel Barrett stories. I can remember every one of them. I think in a big way Ethel Barrett influenced me in how to tell stories and make them interesting and ultimately lead my wife and I to use some of those series in our outdoor children's evangelism in Brazil. Thanks Mom for the faith to believe God for the money to buy that record player and package and to make devotions come alive.

Mom Taught Us to Pray.

I remember my first prayer Mom taught us just to get us started in what to say in our nightly prayers. "Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. And if I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. God bless Mommy, and Daddy, and..." That phrase, "and if I die before I wake", was a scary thing for a child of five to pray. Who wants to think about dying? I suppose it was a good conscience prod to keep us aware that one day we would all die and face our Creator.

Mom Prayed for Us (and with us and over us)

In the LaFountain family you couldn't get away from prayer and a consciousness that God's presence and watchful eye were about the place. If we were going off to school Mom would often want to pray over us before we went out the door. If we were sick Mom would pray, usually with a hand on our fevered heads, and rebuking the fever in Jesus' name would commit us to God. There were times when we were bad and deserved a good spanking that Mom would first stop to lecture us on disobedience and that she was praying for us. Sometimes she would take us aside for a one-on-one conference about our relationship with God and what our disobedience and rebellion would bring later in life. She'd always want us to pray too and ask God's forgiveness before getting that whipping. I don't remember that our prayers ever saved us from a good thrashing but it certainly left an impression. There were occasions as we grew older that she would add that she expected a trip to the altar at church the next Sunday if we really were repentant.

I remember a particular time when I had just had a knock down drag out fight with my brother Mike. He had gotten me down in a headlock, which wasn't easy to do, and he wouldn't let me up and continued to add a Dutch rub. I got madder and madder and said, "Mike, I'm warning you. Don't let me up because when I get up I will kill you!" And I meant it. I was furious! When he did let go I went berserk. I jumped to my feet and with all my strength I clobbered him with a round-house right fist to the eye. I heard and felt a crack as he screamed in pain and dropped like a sack of potatoes. Mom heard the scream, as did everyone else, and Mike was rushed into the emergency room. Once the dust settled and it was determined that Mike would live, howbeit with a huge black eye (which later I was quite proud of having given him), Mom took me aside into her bedroom and had one of those sermonizing and deeply convicting talks. I remember that one because she was right. She said, "Dickie, you have a horrible temper and when you get mad you lose all control and if you don't get it under control some day you will kill someone." Then she suggested a trip to the altar for victory over my temper. I knew she was right. I had a bad temper and once let loose I would go crazy and lose control of myself. On another occasion I was so mad at David, my older brother, that I tore at him from across the ball field and launched my now infamous round-house right. Well, Dave had seen this one coming and side stepped my punch and gave me a judo flip that landed me on my noggin. I don't remember much after that. I only remember coming to and standing in the outfield wondering what happened to me. I'd been knocked out and my memory was jarred for about twenty minutes. Well, that weekend after the Mike fight I did go to the Lord with my temper and in tears asked God to deliver me from myself. He did.

Mom Saturated Us with Prayer

Mom so saturated us with prayer that we knew that we could never get away with anything that Mom wouldn't know about later. How did she know? She would always warn us, "God tells me." Sometimes it was God but other times it was Tom or Mike. Once when we lived in Monroe on Wadsworth Street we lived a few blocks from the river where we took up fishing and hunting for crayfish under the bridges. One day we discovered an old waterlogged Playboy Magazine with pictures of naked women on every page. We couldn't believe our eyes! And we couldn't believe any women looked like that underneath those clothes. The only other place we'd seen such a thing was in Grandpa Belyea's basement where he had his nude calendar. Once Mom knew what was down there we were forbidden to go into his basement. This was better than Grandpa's calendar girls. So we hid the magazine so we could refresh our memories from time to time. We swore ourselves to secrecy with an ominous feeling that somehow Mom would find out. She did. One day we made the mistake of having a little brother along when we visited our Playboy Magazine. He ran all the way home to tell Mom the news of what Dave and Dickie were doing down by the riverside. I'm sure that lecture was livid and Dad got dragged into punishing us for that one. But what I remember most was the certainty that Mom knew, or would know, everything. God talks to Mom.

On another occasion after high school Mike and I went on a double date to my girlfriend's town in Delta, Ohio, a trip of about two hours. On the way home while driving my six cylinder, shift on the column, little red Ford Falcon I decided to pass a

slow moving vehicle on a two lane road with curves. When I got about parallel with that car another car suddenly appeared coming around a curve directly at me. It was a panic moment. We were dead meat. There was no way to get around that car in time and my little engine did not have the power to accelerate to pass. So, with a hope and a prayer I slammed the gear into second to get more power and just barely cleared the car in time to escape a certain head on collision. When our hearts settled back into our chests and we realized what had just happened and how close to death we had come Mike turned to me and said, "You watch, Mom will know!" I disagreed but he maintained his conviction that in the morning we'd find out that Mom knew. The next morning at breakfast little brother Steve was laughing and had a silly grin on his face. When we asked what that was about he said, "Oh, Mom was on one of her tangents last night. She got this premonition that you guys were going to die in an accident and she started praying out loud pleading the blood for her boys. We asked Steve what time that happened, and he said it was about 12:30 am - the exact time of our near miss. Mom knows. God tells Mom everything.

Mom Prayed Conviction Into Us.

One of those was *"Be sure your sin will find you out."* Boy, was she right. It always did. I remember on Wadsworth Street that because we had only one bathroom, and that without a window or fan, Mom and Dad would often light a match to dispel the odors in the room. One day I was sitting on the pot and saw the matches sitting there and decided to play with them lighting and dousing them over and over. After that got a bit boring I wondered if toilet paper would burn slowly or rapidly. I got my answer in a blaze of flame. It burns quickly. The whole roll seemed to catch fire. I quickly doused it with my hand but it left burn marks on the wall. I tried everything to clean those marks, but soap, Ajax and bleach wouldn't take it away. So, being clever, I just unrolled a few sheets so it was left dangling enough to cover the marks and left the room. Within the hour Mom called everyone to line up in the kitchen. We were in trouble. Someone had played with matches in the bathroom. She found the marks on the wall (God told her). So now she wanted the guilty party to step forward and confess or all of us would get a whipping. There we stood six little innocents all standing in a row. I was under great conviction and was about to step forward as I secretly prayed, "Lord, deliver us now and in the time of our death," when suddenly my sister Norma burst into tears and confessed that she had played with the matches and had the same experience that I did. She got the spanking—I got the lesson, *"Be sure your sin will find you out."*

Mom Prayed for Our Salvation

She believed that we all had to come to a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Each of us needed a personal experience of being born again. For me that day came when I was very young yet. I remember it clearly because it is the same day my brother Dave gave his heart to Jesus and he was five years old. I was a year younger. We had been sitting at the kitchen table eating lunch in the first house we lived in on Keegan Road. We were eating tomato soup and crackers and peanut butter. I think it must have been a Saturday. Mom was telling us about heaven and hell and the end of the world and that we needed to get saved or we'd go to hell. I

didn't care. I was having fun with my friend and hell was a long way off. I remember clearly the hardness of my little heart. David said, "Mommy, I want Jesus as my Savior. I don't want to go to hell." Mom took David into the bedroom so he could get saved. I think Mike was barely a toddler at the time because he also went into the room with Mom and Dave. I stayed behind.

My big sister Norma, alias, Jeannie, came back into the kitchen and continued to preach Mom's sermon to the only heathen left at the table, me. She preached a hellfire and brimstone sermon. I remember it. I remember her saying "All of us are going to heaven except you, Dickie. Don't you want to go to heaven when you die?" I clearly remember my answer was "No!" Then Jeannie really laid into me with the fires of hell. Finally, seeing she was getting nowhere, she added, "Besides I'm going to tell Mom what you said." That did it. I must have figured I would get a whipping to get heaven knocked into me and another place knocked out of me. So I got down and went into the bedroom. It is weird how some things stick in your memory. I went into the bedroom and Davy and Mommy were crying and praying, so being a good imitator, even at that age, I started to imitate crying.

At the end of all that, Mom turned to David and said something like, "David, what just happened? Did you ask Jesus into your heart?" Goody two-shoes David says, "Yes, Mommy, I asked Jesus in to my heart and he came in and I am going to heaven." Then she turns to me. "Dickie, did you ask Jesus into your heart?" It was like time stood still for a moment. I suddenly realized that I had not. I cried. I am sure I must have prayed something, but could not remember what. I panicked. If I say 'no' I will get a spanking. If I say 'yes' I will be a liar and really go to hell. So I did what any sensitive kid would do, I lied. "Yes, Mommy I asked Jesus into my heart too." Mom hugged and kissed everybody as though the whole world just got saved, and we all traipsed back into the kitchen to finish lunch - all, except for me. I remember that so clearly. It is like there was a film rolling.

I stopped in the hallway really under a heavy sense of conviction that I had lied to my Mom and was now really a sinner and headed to hell. I paused, leaned against the wall with my right shoulder and said, with eyes half open half closed, "Jesus, I am a sinner. Forgive me and come into my heart and be my Savior. Amen." You see, I did not know I was supposed to ask Jesus to come into my heart. I thought I was just to go through the motions like my big brother and copy him. So I did. The revelation that I was a sinner and bound for hell came to a little four year old like a bolt of lightning. Don't tell me kids don't understand enough to get saved at an early age!

Mom Prayed and Dedicated Us to God

Each of Mom's children were taken to church and dedicated to God in a formal baby dedication. I wasn't aware of my dedication since I was still a very tiny baby. But I grew up with the constant reminder that Mom had dedicated me to the Lord. She told me that the Sunday after I was born on September 14, 1947 I was in the back pew of the church being nursed by Mom and by the Word of God. In my instance she had prayed that God would make me a missionary. Thirty years later Mom's prayer was

answered. Mom always made sure we all knew exactly what she prayed for us. I grew up with that awareness from my earliest memories.

We had a big family and we were often poor. Dad had a factory job and it seemed that every year they would be on strike or laid-off so that we could never get ahead financially. Our houses were really small and our furniture was used and well abused. Yet Mom considered it part of her important destiny to expose her children to missionaries whenever possible. Mom was a missionary prayer warrior. So, when the week-long missionary convention came around every year Mom made it her business to invite the missionary over for dinner. What better way to expose her children to the exciting life of a missionary. With so many other families better off and with fewer children it must have seemed strange to the pastor to send a missionary to one of the poorest families in the church. Those missionary conventions and missionary visits had a profound impact on my life.

When I was nine years old I remember going to the altar at the end of a missionary service and dedicating my life to the Lord to be a missionary. I believe it was a missionary from West Africa. I was stirred by the adventure of living in the jungle. I am sure in my innocence I thought it was more like being Tarzan than evangelizing, but God used that to mark me for life. By the time I was in high school we were still going to those boring week long missionary conventions even on school nights when we had homework and better things to do. In many ways we hated being dragged off to church every night.

It was in the middle of my 11th grade year that the Lord again got a hold of my heart and affirmed that call to be a missionary. I went forward that night with deep conviction about what God had said to me when I was nine years old. I wept at the altar telling the Lord I was too shy and too stupid and too allergic to be a missionary, but if that is what he wanted I wanted to hear it directly from him with no doubts. My grades were D's and C's and I wasn't a foreigner to an F on my report card either. I did not have the grades to go to college. In fact, I was never sure I would pass to the next grade at the end of each year. I was the shiest child in our family. I couldn't speak in public. I didn't even raise my hand in class for fear someone would look at me. I used to hide under the bed when company came to the house and would not leave my hiding place until they left. Every year I came down with the dreaded "weed poisoning," not poison ivy, but a hyper allergic reaction to weeds in general.

So, I was not your prime candidate for missionary service. That night God got hold of my heart and again called me to be a missionary. I told Him I couldn't and that I thought he had the wrong man, but God's Spirit persisted. That week, in the quiet of my upstairs room, when my brother Dave, my inevitable sleeping partner, wasn't in the room, I got down on my knees again and argued with God about my potential to do what he asked of me. In desperation I asked for a sign from His Word. I opened the Scriptures and immediately my eyes fell on the page like a spotlight was shining on it. *"Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature."* I rejoiced in sobbing tears, "OK, God, then You have to do what I can't do. You have to give me intelligence to get good grades so I can get into college. You have to take away my shyness and you have to heal me of this weed poisoning. He did. From that time to

graduation my grades went from D average to the honor roll until I graduated. I remember my brother Dave having a fit when I came home with an honor roll report card. He said, "How'd you do that? You must be cheating. You're just as dumb as I am." Yeah Dave, you're right. I'm as dumb as a brick, but I have a praying Mother and a God who can do anything.

Mom Prayed Us Through Sicknesses and Injuries

Looking back it is amazing that none of us died in childhood when we remember all the accidents and "near misses" we had.

I remember playing with my brother David on our big bed one day. I can't remember too much of what was going on but we were playing and during our play I got my hands on a rat-tailed comb which I somehow managed to shove into David's ear. Mom prayed us through and I don't believe Dave has any hearing problem from it.

I remember at a very early age playing on the old coal bin. It was great fun. We were playing cowboys. We had a tricycle that was our horse and of course the Lone Ranger, the Cisco Kid, Roy Rogers and all the cowboys we watched didn't just get on the their horses, they leaped onto them from two story windows. So we climbed on to the roof of the coal bin in the back yard and jumped onto our faithful steed below. Mom saw what we were doing and demanded that we stop that immediately before we broke an arm or leg. The warning was repeated several times. I remember hearing it for the last time just before Dave jumped just one more time and came down awkwardly nearly biting his tongue off. He still has the scar on his tongue to this day. But Mom prayed. God answered and Dave had no speech impediment whatsoever.

I remember David having terrible recurring bloody noses. We slept together in the same bed for much our lives. Dave used to get nose bleeds that wouldn't stop. I remember Dad having to come into the room over and over again to repack Dave's nose with gauze and cotton. It was quite traumatic. Even now remembering how Dad had to fish that slimy packing out of his nose with blood dripping all over the bed gives me the creeps. Mom prayed, "Lord, stop the blood and heal him for Jesus sake." He did.

I remember David being very cross-eyed as a child and having to have glasses at an early age. I remember Dad taking David to an Oral Roberts meeting in Detroit to have his eyes prayed over. It seems that the eye doctor had told mom that he would go blind if he didn't have eye surgery. Well, he didn't have the surgery and he didn't go blind. God heard. God answered.

I remember Mom and Dad taking us to Winona Lake, Indiana to a church family camp where I think the Jones family had a rented cottage. As we were running on the steep sidewalks down interminable steps, I would run ahead of Dave taking a couple of steps at a time and picking up speed as we went, then Dave missed his footing, came down on his head knocking himself out and scraping his face badly. He looked terrible and it gave us all a good scare but there was no permanent damage that we know of.

I remember it was on Keagan Road that Norma slammed the back door on my right hand pinky. I've still got the scars to show it. I had been daydreaming as always. I was on a pirate ship sailing the high seas. The wind was strong that day, blowing from the northwest as I remember. I stood on the door sill holding on to the door jam. The door must have been partially open and Norma (Jeannie) came running out the door. I remember Mom calling, "Norma, close the door." Slam! What a shock. My finger was in the door, stuck in the door with blood squirting out. It was smashed. I mean really smashed. Fortunately, God made us with our own anesthesia for times like that and it was also numb. They put my finger under cold water to rinse it off only to see that the tip was dangling off below the fingernail. I still remember sitting in the car on the way to the hospital with a big wad of sheet or pillowcase, or maybe a towel around my finger. They had to sew it back on. I have those scars all these years. I have no bitterness or animosity toward Norma for slamming the door. The door slammed and God chose my finger to be in it to show His great power and grace in the time of need, and to show us that God answers the panicked prayers of a worried Mother.

We all remember little brother Steve on Wadsworth Street walking in front of Dave as he was playing baseball and Dave swung the bat full force landing the bat into Steve's eye. That horrible event makes me shake even as I write about it. The scream, the horror, the terror in Mom and Dad as Mom held Steve's head in her lap and held his eyeball in the palm of her hand to keep it from dangling out. Dad laid on the horn racing through traffic lights all the way to the hospital. Then some weeks later Steve walked behind someone on the swing set while his eye was healing and re-opened the wound! More excitement! But that resulted in a praise session around the dinner table as the doctor had told Mom that there had been a pocket of blood formed behind the eye and the collision with the swing had probably saved his eyesight!! (A lesson in *"all things working together for the good of those who love God."*)

Mom Prayed for Miraculous Provisions

As I have said we were often poor and had to learn to do without. I remember the embarrassment of going to school with the soles of my shoes unglued. Dad would try his best to glue them with some of that tough glue from the factory then press it down with a leg of the kitchen table all night only to have it come loose on the way to school. It was especially embarrassing when it was time for recess.

There was the time when Dad was on strike and Steve wanted some strawberries. Mom told him we couldn't afford to buy any but that we could ask God for some. That week at Wednesday prayer meeting, Mrs. McBee, not knowing of Mom's prayer, gave us two quarts of strawberries from her garden!

The most remarkable experience was the day God provided bread from an empty cupboard. Dad must have been on strike or laid off again because food was in short supply. I remember in the same time period Mom would give us dry milk and pretend that it was real stuff. We always knew the difference and to this day I hate 1% or 2% milk. It reminds me of that dry milk. I remember Mom not having milk one morning so we had to have our oatmeal with water! Yuk!!! On this particular day we didn't have

any bread in the house. There was nothing. Mom sat us down and told us again the story of George Mueller and how he prayed for food for his orphanage and God always provided. So, that morning she prayed. Then we waited fully expecting that someone would knock on our door with food for the day. No one came. She prayed again and we waited. We had already watched Mom look through all the cupboards as we did in search of something to eat. There was nothing. Old Mother Hubbard went to the cupboard, but this time it wasn't the dog without a bone, it was the kids who were going to go hungry. Again we prayed and waited. Finally Mom got up one more time to search again for something to feed her children. This time to all of our amazement there was a loaf of bread tucked in a corner that had not been there before. I wish I could go back for a video replay of that scene because I wonder if it was "*Wonder Bread*." It certainly was manna from heaven.

I remember that Mom and Dad didn't have money to send us to camp but often at the last moment someone from church would paid our way to children's camp at Beulah Beach, Ohio. Norma remembers being so excited to go, but then she discovered that all the girls in her "group" somehow knew that her way had been paid and was embarrassed. Camp was great anyway.

Norma remembers having clothes given to me from a lady at church. She had much nicer things than we could have afforded and I always felt well dressed. We all hated wearing hand-me downs especially when from other children at church who would always tell us that used to be their shirt.

I remember my first bike. David and I with our close friends would scavenge other people's garbage from the allies on Wadsworth Street to get enough parts to get one bike from many. They were Frankenstein bikes, but they worked. We learned to put them together, replace ball bearings, inflate and patch tires, tune the spokes, etc. That was great fun. But I longed to have my own bike, a real bike. My first real bike came from Mrs McBee. I remember her son went off to college and she had a red Schwinn racer. It was a three speed with hand brakes instead of the pedal breaks we were all used to, and best of all it was in great shape. What a beauty! I don't remember why I got it but I think Dave already had a cannibalized bike that ran pretty good and it was my birthday. That bike was my favorite. I could ride it all over town and often with no hands.

Mom Prayed God's Word into Our Hearts

We spent most of our young lives in church. We would go to church on Sunday morning for Sunday School, then stay for church, then we'd be back for Sunday evening service. Then on Wednesday night we had to go to prayer meeting. Of all those occasions prayer meeting was the most difficult because so few other children had to go and we had homework to get done. Most of the other times we went to church I didn't mind because usually there would be a cute girl I was interested in even if the service was boring.

Getting ready for church was a riot. Can you imagine getting six children in various stages of getting dressed and ready for church on Sunday morning and with only one

bathroom in the house? It was chaos. There were constant arguments and so much fighting going on you'd think fire would come from heaven to consume us. But a miracle happened every Sunday morning, as soon as the car doors opened to get out at church we were little angels and Mom and Dad were all smiles like nothing ever happened.

Vacation Bible School was always a special treat though it sometimes went on for two weeks. We didn't mind. There wasn't anything else to do with our summers. When we lived on Keegan Road we were encouraged to invite our friends and neighbors to bring them to Jesus. Mom couldn't drive and Dad was always at work so we arranged with a farmer to pick us up with his pick up truck and we'd all sit in the back for the 20 minute ride to church. I don't ever remember getting rained on either. Many of our friends came to Jesus because Mom and Dad were faithful to encourage us to get our friends to church.

I remember Mom's constant emphasis on heaven and hell and that Jesus was the only way and everyone needed to come to Jesus to get saved or they would end in hell. We were still on Keegan Road in the first house we owned, when I had the occasion to lead my friend to Christ. I would play in our sand box behind the house with my friend Floyd Davis from three houses down. Every day I would tell him about heaven, hell and Jesus and tell him that he needed to ask Jesus to come into his heart to be saved. Day after day he would promise to do that before he went to bed. Each day I would ask him, "Did you do it?" His response was usually that he forgot. But I will never forget the day he came smiling to the sand box and told me, "Dickie, I remembered to do it. I asked Jesus to come into my heart." Much later in life, long after we moved from there and I was already out of college I heard that Floyd became a preacher and was the pastor of a Lutheran church. Mom, my friend will be in heaven as one of your treasures because you were faithful to pass your faith on to your children.

I remember from childhood the time period when Rev. Swaney was our pastor. There was a church service in Monroe in which the Holy Spirit came down in awesome power on the congregation. They called it revival. I remember hearing Mom and Dad talking about it in the car on the way home. They mentioned the shimmering fog-like presence that appeared on the platform. When they said that, I thought back on the service and remembered seeing that fog above the preacher. In my childlike heart I said to myself, "Huh, so that's what that was!" But I never forgot it. I have preached about the Shekinah glory and used that illustration. I later found out that Jack Hayford has seen the same thing in his church. Mom may not even remember that experience, but it impacted my life greatly with a hunger to see and experience that Presence of God!"

We went to church even when it wasn't convenient. We only had a Volkswagen Beetle when we lived in Carlton and made the long trip back to Monroe to go to church. We remember going to church (all 8 of us) in that Volkswagen beetle and the window would not thaw out even though we had to drive twenty miles to Monroe to church. No wonder we were so cranky on the way to church—we hated the boney butts of brothers sitting on our laps.

Mom Prayed and Practiced Hospitality.

We were so poor we couldn't even buy a pizza after church. We remember coming out of church on Sunday and Wednesday nights and smelling the pizza from the pizza parlor next door. I remember one time dad bought one so we could taste it. We've been hooked on pizza ever since. Then there were those rare occasions when Dad would take us all to the Root Beer stand with the orange lights and service at your car. Dad would order a "baby beer" for each of us and Mom and Dad got the 5 cent size. The hot dogs sure smelled good but we couldn't afford that.

We didn't often get invited out to dinner or over to someone's house for a meal. We were just too big of a family and who would want to have all those kids over for dinner? But that didn't stop Mom from having other people over for dinner. I already mentioned the missionaries she would often entertain so we would get a good exposure to what it was to be a missionary. Sunday dinner was always a fond memory. It was the big meal of the week. I can still remember the yummy smell of pot roast cooking. We'd come home from church to that delightful smell filling the house. We felt rich on those Sundays. I remember only once being invited to someone's home for dinner. It was the Steiner family. They too had six kids and no one ever invited them for dinner either. But one day we got invited. Mom warned us that they lived in a converted chicken coop but she didn't want us to mention that or embarrass them. We were to be polite and eat everything they set before us. We were all to be on our best behavior. When we got there to our shock it was a chicken coop and they had, of all things, LIVER for dinner and no catsup to drown the taste. So, we gagged it down and then went out to play on the farm and had a great time. Mom and Dad were just delighted to be invited into someone else's home.

A Tribute to Mom

These are just a few of my memories of growing up with a godly mother. Someone has wisely said,

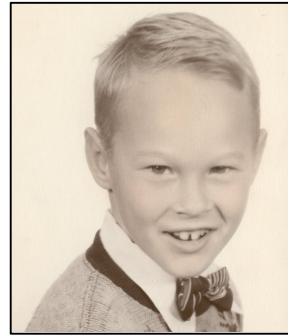
*If you have a smile for Mother, Give it now.
If you have a kindly word, Speak it now.
She'll not need it when the angels
Greet her at the golden gate;
Give the smiles while she is living,
If you wait 'twill bet too late.*

*If you have a flower for Mother, Pluck it now.
Place it gently on her bosom,
Print a kiss upon her brow.
What cares she when life is over,
For the flowers that bloom below.
She will have her share up yonder,
Scattered at her feet galore.*

So Mom here is my tribute to you while you can still enjoy it. Happy Mother's Day!
Thanks so much for being my Mother. I wouldn't trade you for any other in all the world.

Your son,

"Dickie Bill" LaFountain



* Dickie Bill was mom's endearing name for me when she was playing and smiling. But woe to me when it turned to Richard William LaFountain. I knew I was in big trouble.

Postscript for Mothers

It's never too late to start praying for your children. God hears and answers the heart-cry and prayer of mothers who cry out to him for their children. If you are a mother and you have never put your personal faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior you can do that today and start a new life. God promises us that anyone who is in Christ is a new creation, old things are passed away and everything is becoming new.

Here is what to do:

Jesus is standing at your heart's door and knocking, asking to come in and fill your life with his presence and blessing. The Apostle John said, "But as many as RECEIVED him, to them he gives the right to be called children of God, even to them who BELIEVE on his name." (John 1:12)

Right now, bow your head and confess to God that you are a sinner and need a Savior. Then personally open your heart's door by inviting Jesus to come into your heart and life to be your Savior. He will come in and forgive all your sins and wash your heart whiter than snow. At that moment he will also write your name in a book in heaven called The Lamb's Book of Life. You will be his child and his ear will always be attentive to your prayers.

Mom used to teach us a wonderful chorus about receiving Jesus into our hearts. It goes like this:

*Into my heart,
Into my heart,
Come into my heart, Lord Jesus,
Come in today,
Come in to stay,
Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.*

If you have prayed that prayer today I'd love to hear from you and send you a most wonderful booklet titled "*My Heart, Christ's Home*" by Robert Munger. This little booklet describes our lives like a home with many rooms and how Jesus desires to come into each room and clean it up and make it a place for his presence. It is my gift to you. Visit us online at www.PrayerToday.org and click on "*My Heart, Christ's Home*." Then fill out the information or just send us an e-mail telling of your decision to invite Jesus Christ into your life.