

“If there is to be  
a change in my  
life, bring it  
about...”

By Steve Blubaugh

## Introduction

Greetings! In this account I will attempt to give a bit of my experience of departing from the 2x2 system. In order to do that I feel I need to give you some of my history – letting you know where I have come from. I am increasingly amazed at how we have all gotten where we are physically and spiritually.

As my reader, I have some requests I want to ask of you. Firstly, expect me to be totally truthful in what I share with you! Be assured I will do that. If there is a reader who is unable to receive me and what I write on these terms, I urge you to read no further. I cannot be responsible for your reaction. My effort is not to persuade – only to inform by sharing my experience! Secondly, if at any time in the past I have offended any of my readers and or anyone you know, I urge anyone to contact me about my offence. Be sure you will be received and heard. My point of contact is: [blubaughchange@gmail.com](mailto:blubaughchange@gmail.com) . (If you email me and do not hear back from me, it is possibly because Juno is not doing its job. There are ways to contact me through social media.) Thirdly, keep in mind that I am not a professional writer. Therefore there are lots of innocent mistakes of many kinds in this account. Please, overlook them and me!

## **My History**

I am Steve Blubaugh, the youngest of Oscar and Minnie Blubaugh's ten children – two daughters and eight sons. My mother's father, Gottlob Krauss was born in 1864. He immigrated to America as an orphaned teenager from Germany at a time when this country was recovering from a war with itself. I often wonder what it was that my grandfather, a mere youth, saw to be better in America than what he left in Germany during such a time. Papa came all the way into Kansas.

At a Reiff reunion I learned that one day great-grandpa Reinhold Reiff arrived home telling his wife Magdaline, and large family to pack up whatever they can carry. They were leaving Germany. As they moved toward the transportation great-grandpa told them to pray, asking if they should go to Russia or to America! I am where I am because someone prayed to God!

Gottlob and Wilhelmina Reiff married in central Kansas in 1894. Grandma was born in Beinstein, Wurttemberg, German in 1874. The births of their 10 children were from 1895 to 1914. Grandma died in 1952 and Papa in 1954.

Concerning the Blubaugh side: Three Blubaugh brothers came from the Hesson, which is a region in Germany known for being warriors. These brothers were mercenaries for England in the Revolutionary War. George Washington beat us at the battle of Trenton – we stayed in America. I am not current on Blubaugh history. I do know that Blubaughs are so scarce that I figure I am related to each one on the planet! Someone climbed the Blubaugh family tree. Somebody was discovered way out on a limb who I thought was a fictitious character – Johnny Appleseed! His real name was Jonathan Chapman.

## **William Irvine's History**

As a young man, William Irvine was a part of the Faith Mission in Northern Ireland for about five years. Around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he separated and became an independent missionary. He read Matthew 10 and wondered if God had intended for that method to continue. He imagined evangelizing today in the same manner as Jesus instructed His disciples – going on faith lines in pairs, with no salary, taking no collections, being homeless, celibate, and depending on God to provide for their needs. Irvine and some young men experimented with this concept and were successful in winning converts. Many others volunteered to be missionaries / ministers / preachers. In 1903, Irvine organized the volunteers and founded a sect with no name. The movement spread quite rapidly and soon reached several countries. Some of the young men among his early followers became prominent leaders in the sect: Edward Cooney, George Walker, Jack Carroll, Willie Gill and John Hardie. Although the sect still does not officially claim a name, many bynames have been applied to them. Such names: Two by Twos (2x2), Go Preachers, Dippers, Cooneyites, The Truth, The Way, etc. In 1907, the sect adopted an exclusive doctrine that is still observed. They believe that unless one converts through one of their preachers (a living witness), he cannot be saved. They believe their 2x2 method is God's only right way on earth.

The young Gottlob Krauss couple with their ten children attended the Temple Church close to their farm near Gypsum, Kansas. Papa was to have said, "I would rather have my boys trade horses on Sunday than go to that place." In 1916 Bella Forbes (English) and Alma Stuhr (German) came with the 2x2 doctrine to the Krauss' community. During this time, it was not popular to be German in America! Many people (I think about 40) listened, eventually embracing the doctrine those ladies carried. Remarkably none of them "lost out".

The group in their community known as "Temple Church" was actually the Temple Society or "Friends of the Temple". It had been organized in Wurttenburg, Germany in 1857. The movement came to America the next year. The early church had ecclesiastical forms or doctrines which were binding to its members. It held that the New Testament was the teaching of the Kingdom of God. It emphasized the development of the Kingdom. One of the Society's greatest aims was to establish Christian colonies in the Holy Land. According to what I have read, the movement was not successful. All that is left of it in America are a couple cemeteries.

## **My life Collided with William Irvine's History**

My parents married in 1925. The births of their children were from 1926 to 1945. In 1935 Mom's parents sent the workers to my parents. They also accepted that doctrine. Dad was totally new to it. In 1961, when I was 16, I made my profession in that faith. At one stage five of us children were active in the 2x2 fellowship. Mom said she had five wise and five foolish children.

In mid-summer of 1964 I was very inclined to have an active part in that ministry. I expressed my feelings with Loyce Hopkins. She was the younger of the two ladies preaching in our area that year in east central Kansas. After interviews with George Walker and the then overseer in Kansas, Robert Thompson, I was assigned to start with Duane Hopkins. I was 19. Dad's word to me at that time was: "Lay your hands to the plough and don't look back."

Mom was an interesting combination: she was one of the first two women in Kansas to pull off the black stockings! (Eventually, she would go all the way to seamless hose!) All of this made her not a favorite of the overseer! All the while she was a strong supporter of the 2x2 system - it being the only right way. Dad was not so robust with religion. He was a quiet, spiritual man of great integrity.

## **My Life as a Young 2x2 Worker**

After I had been in the 2x2 ministry for a few years, Dad asked me almost weeping, "How do you do what you do?". I never told either of my parents anything about the events I later encountered in the 2x2 ministry.

At 18 years of age, I registered for the draft. It was required by law. I registered as a conscientious objector under the letterhead "Christian Conventions". When I went into the 2x2 ministry I was granted exemption from the draft. My brother, David went to Viet Nam. He sustained major injuries.

In late October 1964 I was at the Marysville, Kansas convention. Joyce Olsen and Ronald Wheeler were also starting that fall. During those days at Marysville, an old lady in the ministry asked the three of us to come to her in the dining room of Grant Griffie's house. With the three of us gathered around her, Jean Weir gave us her blessing in our going forth. She also told us in her heavy Scottish accent: "Overcome what you are while you are young, otherwise it will overcome you when you are old." Jean was a beautiful, positive example of what she impressed on us!

The only points of "doctrine" I knew as I launched my career in the 2x2 ministry were: we met in homes, we went 2x2, we were penniless, we were homeless, we were unmarried, and the women had long hair. We were taught to avoid the subject of grace, because Baptists believed it! Baptists had the false idea they could do anything and still be saved – we were warned! Frequent strong admonition coming from the senior 2x2 ministers to us younger ones was: "Fit in". I was urged to write letters – many of them! Writing and receiving letters became competitive. It certainly was a way to harvest money. I fully intended to die of old age, if I lived that long, with such a commitment.

During my first year, we preached to Sam Warren, the local Methodist pastor and one of his deacons. Duane was quite forceful at times. In one meeting he said, "Any religion that depends on the dollar sign will fall!" This is the only thought that remained with me from all the preaching I listened to that year. During the decades ahead, I realized the dollar sign was of great importance to the 2x2 system! I learned of the many ways they would use that tool, as well as the ways they would use when they possessed it! Not only do they use it to finance their many projects. They use money to prove who is accepted and with hold it to prove who is rejected.

## **Eye-opening Years as a Young 2x2 worker**

My activities were in my home state from October 1964 to October 1972. I was assigned to be with men who I trusted and appreciated. Among them were Roland Craig, Dorne Garner, Lowell Kleebe, and of course Duane Hopkins. There were others that I found a bit difficult: John Lambotte, Uel Boyd, Kenneth Boehning and Robert Thompson, the overseer who was approaching old age. Most of these guys insisted that we study the Bible together. (In retrospect: They had no idea how to approach the scriptures. Therefore, they had no gift at teaching it. The main point was: The younger was learning from the older – exactly like Paul and Timothy, they said! It was worse than a waste of time! Most insisted on praying together. We could not have done worse with, "Hail Mary, Mother of God...!")

John Lambotte was an adamant legalist. He would find things in homes we visited that did not agree with his "standard". If he found the wrong kind of music on a piano he would blast away about it in the next meeting. That was a usual way of dealing with what he thought were "issues of keeping the standard".

After he set the record straight I would often apologize for him! It was almost more than I could keep up with! I learned my lesson: It wasn't my job to apologize for him. That was too much!

I was assigned to Dorne my third year. We were in my home area. Before we left convention for the field, Robert, whose word was final; at times nearly fatal, cornered me. He made clear: "Don't be running home all the time!" My family was never on his "Favorites List". His instruction confirmed that. Robert always made me feel that going home was denying the ministry. Laboring under that impression / fear, huge breaches came between my siblings and me!

When I was with Robert, checking that the hub caps had not been stolen from the car we drove was the most important thing I did twice daily those months I survived with him. The Interstate system in the USA was young then. Robert refused to use it saying, "Highway #24 has always gotten me where I wanted to go!" (Highway #24 and I-70 are parallel.) He was not given to change!

My time with Robert ended suddenly. For some reason I was sent to Northwest Kansas to be with Duane Hopkins and Roland Faber. Those men had been sent to that field the previous fall. Ellsworth Schilling, a Colorado worker, was sent to eastern Colorado. His field bordered west Kansas. Ellsworth was considered a potential "sheep stealer" in Kansas. Robert seemed to think Duane would be the best defense for that threat. (Robert himself was threatened by Duane.) Robert needed to keep the Kansas / Colorado border strong. Conflict between Kansas and Colorado had been ongoing for decades! Time with Duane and Roland was a tremendous break for me. Late that summer the three of us went to Denver, Colorado for the convention.

Georgetta Davis told me that the Kansas / Colorado strife started when Ed Cornock and Robert Chambers came from Colorado to the Elmo, Kansas convention grounds. George Walker was there. They came to confront George face-to-face about his doctrine. Georgetta was on the site at the time and witnessed the event. In an effort to sort out their differences, the men from Colorado, George and Robert Thompson were "locked" in the house for several days prior to the convention! Finally, the men from Colorado bolted out of the house, got into their vehicle, spun their wheels and left! This event would probably have taken place in the 1930s. Georgetta had a lifelong bout with poor health. During the '50s she went from west Kansas to Denver, Colorado to doctor. While in Denver she stayed in a motel instead of being hosted by any of the local friends. The division between those two states was so extreme! Sharp division remained until the deaths of Ed, Robert Chambers and Robert Thompson in the '70s! I seriously question if George ever attended any meetings in Colorado during the Ed Cornock reign. I only knew of Andrew Abernathy going once. It was quite significant that Duane, Roland and I attended a Colorado convention.

Robert Thompson was quite pleased with himself when I saw him at preps that fall. A divorced and remarried couple who had known about the 2x2 system since childhood contacted Robert for help. In a very short time Robert had gotten them to separate so he could accept them into the 2x2 fellowship. Robert had a dry sense of humor. (Jean Weir said of Robert: "He acts like butter could not melt in his mouth. Sometimes he can actually chew cheese!") That same dryness manifested in his ego. In his mind, what he had done was nothing small. He even did it without someone with him! This project seemed to validate him.

At one stage during my years in the 2x2 ministry in Kansas, Robert brought Annie Laura Dixon into that staff. Annie Laura was native of Louisiana. She accepted the 2x2 doctrine there. From there she moved

to the Missouri / Arkansas staff. From there Annie Laura Dixon moved to Kansas. Being very legalistic, Annie Laura quickly gained a strong position with Robert. She easily persuaded him!

One year during the special meetings Annie Laura Dixon spoke of there being too much “i” in her life. She made that meeting a kind of a “renaming herself ceremony”! She announced that she was taking the “i” out of her name. She would no longer be called “Annie Laura Dixon”, but “Anne Dixon”! This was understood to be no small move! It seemed very impressive to Robert. Anne Dixon robed herself with putrefying self-righteousness!

During several of my early years, George Walker, who was quite elderly, came to Marysville a week ahead of the meetings in order to rest. Some of those evenings he would invite the staff into Marshall Griffie’s house. He visited with us, telling of different ones throughout the world. George had an amazing memory. If he ever met somebody, he remembered them as well as all of their family connections. It was during one such session that the event slowed a bit. Not being bashful, I asked George, “Tell us about the beginning of the truth.” He was seated. He gently leaned toward me saying, “Don’t ever let anyone get you out on that limb.” The subject moved to something else.

Another year, Georgetta Davis with Lois Nippert had been preaching in a small, western Kansas town. It appeared as though several from the community were ready to follow with them. A stranger who came to town informed the community that those two ladies are Cooneyites! That ended everything. That fall during another session with George in the house, Georgetta asked him about Edward Cooney. There was a long silence. Finally, George answered, “Edward did a lot that made it much easier on all of the rest of us.” That was his only comment. (After reading Patricia Robert’s book, *THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF EDWARD COONEY 1867-1960*, I find George’s remark quite amazing! Patricia’s book makes it clear that George had been Edward’s adamant, unrelenting opponent! George had a great deal to do with Edward’s excommunication!)

At two separate convention meetings George made two statements I distinctly recall. He said if he was given the choice of only one of the books of the Bible and none other, he would choose Romans. Once in speaking of the different gospels, George said, Matthew presents Christ the King; Mark presents Christ the servant; Luke presents Christ the man while John presents Christ divine. These two statements lodged in my memory. For many years I lacked the significance of what George had said.

Kenneth Williams was one year my senior in the ministry. At one of the three Kansas preps, Duane spoke directly and confidently to the two of us saying, “In this work you can go as high as you set your heart to go.” It was decades later that I understood what Duane meant. Eventually Duane attained great height of stature in the 2x2 fellowship.

Most years Andrew Abernethy came to one or more of our three Kansas conventions. I grew to appreciate him. We seemed to connect a wee bit. During those years of the ‘60s, men tended to wear their hair longer. Andrew ruled that if a man’s hair touched his collar, it was too long! His practice was to scan the Thursday meetings to see if there were any violations. Violators would be spoken to at Andrew’s direction. The messenger was a local man in the ministry. Violators were given two options: get a haircut or leave the grounds. Haircuts were provided on site! The same procedure was followed on Saturday! The standard had to be maintained!

## **A Big Move**

For the most part, those years were quite uneventful as far as “interest” by who we thought of as “outsiders” was concerned. In the fall of 1971 something was bothering me (I don’t recall what it was). I spoke to George Walker about it. I was impressed how he put himself in the shoes of a 27-year-old. He concluded the visit with, “You need a change. You will get it next fall.” I am a creature who does well with change – that’s part of the reason I turn over in bed at night!

Mid-summer of 1972 I learned through the grapevine that I was headed to South Carolina that fall. I was to be an exchange with my brother Raymond. He had gone into the work four years ahead of me. I went to preps in late August. When I saw Robert, the overseer, I told him that I had heard I was going to South Carolina. Without having said anything to me about it previously, he answered in his dry manner, “I have known that for a long time.” He was famous for keeping people in ignorance. Such secrecy was used to give the impression that kingdom matters were so important that commoners were prohibited from being told.

I moved on to South Carolina in October of 1972. Having never been south before, I had no idea what to expect! I even wondered if some of the areas even had electricity!

John Deniker, the overseer, was my first assignment. By early summer of 1973 we learned Sam McCracken from New York / New England was to come to replace John. Sam was coming from Andrew Abernethy’s region! Having such respect for Andrew, my anticipation of Sam’s coming was high and positive. I reasoned: “He is a man who will have been taught how things should be done – done right! What could be better?!”

## **God Begins His Eye Opening Work Within Me**

During that first year in South Carolina, I wrote Duane Hopkins saying: “I don’t believe the way I used to believe!” He never commented. For years I wondered why I offered such a remark. In retrospect, something was subtly moving in my heart and mind!

My Carolina era ended in October 1981. For seven of those years I was assigned to Sam. I started out (having no idea the assignment would be so long), giving him my loyal support. I gladly fit in with his oversight. Andrew frequently came to see Sam. I was made to feel that I was unworthy to be included on such high-level visits. Martyne Weller, a long-time acquaintance of Andrew’s in the work, was without question included in such events. I noticed Andrew came to Sam when he was a bit “down”. Sam was his joker – able to make him laugh!



We were only four men and four women in the 2x2 ministry in those years in South Carolina. This limited number did not make for much variation in the list. One year we lesser ones were all gathered in the living room of the antebellum house of the Cassatt, South Carolina convention farm. We were waiting for Sam to enter to disclose the workers' list for the next year! Sam finally entered with his attaché case, moved to the front of the room, sat down, opened his case, took out the new list, read it as though he was a lawyer, folded the paper, put it back in his case, and closed his case. Then said, "That is the best we can do with what we've got." He then stood up and walked out of the room as though he was the judge having pronounced judgment! I assumed he had gotten the list from Taylor Wood. Many plans during those years came under the label: "Taylor Made", which seemed to add significance! I still supported Sam's oversight and continued ready to fit in! Sam refused to take responsibility for any decisions that were made! He made sure that someone else made workers' lists and so forth.

I constantly felt there was more to the scriptures than what I was getting – surely there was more to share than I had to give! Throughout my career I was exposed to repetitive preaching – reciting stuff over and over. I grew to hate it! Some of my early assignments were champions at this – never sharing anything new or different. (I refer to them as "assignments" instead of "companions". Many of them were not companionable.)

Irwin Douglas, one of the local friends spoke of Kenneth Boehning in this regard saying, "As soon as he reads his scripture I can tell you exactly what he's going to say." Kenneth's mind was beginning to fail the year I was assigned to him. He wrote "sermon starter" verses on a tiny piece of paper. He kept it in his Bible. Before each meeting he checked that list to see what to recite next. That year I saw to it that he mysteriously lost that wee paper!

Robert Thompson could hum-drum night after night on the parable of the sower and seed; actually, saying nothing insightful. He selected the same hymns over and over! It was always time to move on to the next "mission" after these guys had recited their library of sermons! The lack of life and insight and inspiration was mortifying!

We used to visit a home in Charleston, South Carolina, in whose library was a brief commentary on the Gospel of Matthew. I often sneaked a peek! I discovered there is definitely more to be gleaned from the scriptures than what these guys or I were getting from it!

## **Political Power at its Best (or Worst)**

In 1975, Willie Kleffman died. He had been overseer in North Carolina. Then, Sam moved to North Carolina to be overseer. Sam and I had a disagreement before he left. I am unable to recall what it was over. Leonard Hawkes replaced Sam as overseer in South Carolina. John Culver came mid-year. I was assigned to him. I had less than six months with John. His loose behavior concerned to me. At preps I felt I must tell Mr. Leonard of John's effort to come between a husband and wife.

It was during these years in South Carolina that I became acquainted with Evan Jones from Victoria, Australia. He seemed to take a liking to me. In 1976 I followed Sam to North Carolina with a bit of apprehension because of what had gone on between us before he left South Carolina. Fear was a huge factor during all these years!

My first year in North Carolina I was assigned to Milas Crapps. He was dreadfully threatened and insecure. A major point of doctrine that Milas often repeated was: "The reason Adam's fig leaf apron was not acceptable was because it was not fire proof!"

Willie Kleffman's death rearranged the political hierarchy in North Carolina. During Willie's oversight, Ruth Hobbs, Ira and Joe Hobbs' sister, had risen to great power. She supported Willie in much of his often severe opinions. Ruth was a coarse mixture of southern pride compounded with the pride of an elite family in the 2x2 system. Willie seemed to be most powerful as he gave someone the "Kleffman Treatment" with Ruth standing behind him. I have seen her glaring over his shoulder at the victim, with her hands on her hips! After Willie's death, Ruth's situation was very much like, when as a child we plucked the peacock during molt. After his glory had been taken away, he was out of balance, preferring seclusion! I question if Ruth ever regained what she lost by Willie Kleffman's death.

Martyne Weller gained power under Sam – basically controlling him. Her power was brutal. She tried to act refined in it. Having had her basic training in politics under Andrew, Martyne knew how it works. She worked it! Martyne took her power very seriously during preps in such important issues as to decide for us who would drink from plastic, as well as who could use glass. She diligently regulated for us who could sit at the tea table, as well as who stood outside at the serving window! This is a sample of how she flung her weight around! (I was never exposed to her performance in the field.) Martyne was a classic example how a "servant" serves in the 2x2 system!

The events of the following paragraphs are not in chronological order. They are more of a mixed up recall of events. I feel my efforts here are quite like sorting out scrambled eggs! I find it impossible to recall or to put into words the sequence of events or the situations that kept manifesting. At one stage Sam moved on to Virginia. Don Cox came from Virginia to replace him. Don was a live-and-let-live brotherly soul. Don often spoke with appreciation for Taylor Wood. He had previously been on Taylor's staff. Don moved about in the North Carolina connecting with the staff. In about six months Don had a summit with Taylor. Don returned telling me that he had told Taylor "The half has not been told." He said this about issues that were mounting in North Carolina with Sam's oversight. In a short time Sam returned to North Carolina. Don returned to Virginia! Things were very unsettled during these times. Sam often spoke of having "inherited" the problems in North Carolina.

Fairly early in the McCracken era, Andrew Abernethy had a stroke which left his devoted admirers in great panic! Andrew began going many places to doctor. When he went to a new doctor he would deliberately over-dose on the prescribed medication. He seemed to think that would speed up his recovery. When that proved fruitless, he would repeat the process, traveling many miles from place to place to consult with various doctors. He often made his way through North Carolina. His coming always made for stress, confusion including discord – all of this was for what was thought to be a penniless, homeless, humble "servant" of God!

Andrew's health continued to decline. One year he came to Denton, North Carolina, for convention. He arrived a bit early with his entourage, which included Louise Woods and Howard Nussbaum. Sam and Martyne were already there, of course. By this time, Andrew was not much more than a shell of a man with no ability to reason – still bent on traveling! He had been the source of special considerations for the people I have mentioned plus a select few others. These mentioned were in extreme competition to "serve" – providing Andrew's favorite food and drinks. This was the man who had promoted them in

many ways for so long. I saw the situation as “flies on a carcass”! This was the last time I saw Andrew. He continued until 1988. Upon Andrew’s death, Taylor was reported to have said, “Sam has lost his hero!” Sam shifted his allegiance to Taylor.

## **Separation from my Family Members, Instigated by a new Worker Ruling**

At one stage Sam arranged a staff meeting. At that time, he imposed on us all not to call home anymore! I fit in. This was yet a further break in family relations that Robert Thompson had provoked a decade before. I noticed Sam contacted his parents several times a week. After some months of this, Sam asked me, “Aren’t you ever going to call home?”

During those North Carolina winters we had frequent ice storms. I thought I might be helpful to prepare the car for the day by moving it close to the door of the house. Once I failed to get my task done. Sam had things to say about that! I apologized saying, “I’m sorry.” Sam replied, “That don’t mean a thing to me!” With an attitude of extreme disdain, Sam would often say, “I’ll show you who butters your bread!”

The breakdown between Sam and me grew. Finally, he yelled at me using the language of a wild drunken Irishman: “You ain’t with me the way you used to be!” For some unknown reason to me, Sam continued to be my assignment! During all of this time Sam was in great demand on the special meeting and convention circuits. This gave me opportunity to team up with some of the other men.

## **Just Who has my Back?**

Richard McCleery and Lloyd Barriger were also on the North Carolina staff during some of these years. These capable men were a bit younger than I. Richard realized he had been sent to North Carolina for political promotion. He resisted such promotion.

It became more and more evident that Lloyd had been sent there to be destroyed. Lloyd had been involved with the care of George Walker until he died. There was a strong resentment toward Lloyd by Sam and Martyne. Their resentment appeared to be based on their feeling that Lloyd might have a special advantage because of association with George.

I was able to speak openly and confidentially with both Richard and Lloyd. They were a great support to me! I suppose, because I was so “close” to Sam, others of the staff expressed their concerns to me. Most of their concerns, as I recall, were the brutality of the McCracken politics with Martyne’s support in all of it! At one stage I made the dreadful mistake of quoting one complainer to another. My quote got to the politicians! As situations worsened, some of the staff urged me to appeal to some of the “older brothers”. Such a suggestion terrified me in no small way!

In 1980 following the Shelby, North Carolina, convention, Sam was heading to Tennessee as overseer. Don Cox was returning to North Carolina as overseer. Confusion was wide spread, not because Sam was leaving, but because of him leaving behind all issues that he had caused! Peter Hunter, William Lewis and Joe Crane were among the visitors at that convention. (William was one of Sam's greatest fears. When Sam's fear was high he told us to stay away from William. William had been overseer in North Carolina before Willie Kleffman.) These three men had shown themselves to be "brotherly" during the days of the meetings. After the meetings were over I found the three of them all in a room. I began pouring out my concerns to them. Peter, especially assured me I was doing the right thing. He assured me he shared my views. He would certainly report the situation to those who needed to know!

Richard was Sam's driver to Tennessee. After Richard returned to North Carolina from that trip, he called telling me that Sam had been informed of my reporting to Peter, William and Joe at Shelby. He told me that Sam was wild! He advised me to expect things to get even worse!

## Lies Exposed

In every cult, the one who exposes a situation is always the cause! This was no exception. The years to come proved the fault fell squarely on me. To my great fortune, Don was supportive and understanding.

Late summer of 1981, I was assigned to Lonzo Nealon for a few weeks. Lonzo was a mass of nervous energy – part of him was almost always in motion! He saw himself as the last of the real evangelists. Without me having said anything to Lonzo concerning Peter Hunter's response to me the previous fall, Lonzo told of having been in Wisconsin where Peter had also been. Lonzo told of Peter, with a woman in the ministry in Wisconsin, having produced a son. The baby had been adopted by the friends. The following year Peter was sent to Tennessee to be overseer. George Walker would have likely known about the scandal. George would have been one who sanctioned Peter's oversight. This event would have been in the 1940's. That was the first I had ever heard of such foul play of such magnitude in the 2x2 ministry. I certainly was not open to it, even though I had known of John Culver's tendencies!

From the McCracken era there are two unforgettable events. I feel I must share them. Sam and I went to North Carolina from South Carolina during those first days I was with him. While we were in North Carolina we both met Ray Miller for the first time. (Ray had arrived in North Carolina the same time I arrived in South Carolina. Ray is a year older than I. He was converted from Lutheranism while he was in the army in Germany.) Willie Kleffman was overseer in North Carolina at the time. On that occasion Willie took Ray and me aside. He indoctrinated us on the fact that no young person who grew up with electricity, running water or caught a school bus could ever expect to amount to anything in the 2x2 ministry! (Ray was assigned to Willie the year Willie died. Ray stayed by Willie faithfully through his relatively short illness.) After having met that wonderful soul, Ray Miller, Sam said to me: "Ray is too good of a man to be in the work!" The second memorable event follows.

Andrew was himself the hand-picked protégé of George Walker. In praise of Andrew, Sam told me, “I question the salvation of anyone who is not in Andrew’s favor.” (I began to question the salvation of those who were in his favor!) Sam’s attitude gained for him a high seat in the Abernathy court.

An outstanding characteristic of Sam’s was constantly promoting or demoting somebody. Through the years I observed that many people he promoted were eventually destroyed, quite often by Sam himself. The McCracken era taught me: “We often reveal our own true character by the type of people we promote.”

I shall not close the McCracken era without quoting his thought on being our brothers’ keeper. He told of two monkeys in a zoo who were talking to each other. One said to the other, “Am I my keeper’s brother?”

## Another Move

The fall of 1981 I was sent to Louisiana. No one replaced me in North Carolina. (Not being replaced is quite a good indicator of the worth of a 2x2 worker.) A short time later Don Cox was removed to Missouri, which I am quite sure was a greater step in his fall from grace. He was eventually shifted to Iowa, then back to his home state, Illinois. He was the victim of severely high blood pressure which caused his premature death in Illinois.

Enroute to Louisiana I was allowed to go home. This was a very infrequent privilege. Such infrequency contributed to my family ties being severed! My parents had spent a week with me in North Carolina during early summer of 1981. It was a most wonderful time. It was hard concealing the heaviness under which I tried to carry on!

Through the years it was a rare event for Raymond and me to have times together. When we did, he always indicated that his situation was most difficult – always blaming himself.

I had a flight from Tulsa, Oklahoma, to Alexandria, Louisiana. When we tried to land in Dallas, Texas, a tornado was touching down there at the same time! The flight was like what I imagined it would be like riding inside a cement mixer in motion! Landing was averted! The flight continued to Houston, Texas, then back to Dallas where I had to spend the night. I flew to Alexandria the following day. That flight proved to be prophetic for my Louisiana era! I arrived in time for the Effie, Louisiana convention. I was almost a total stranger.

Dennis Falb met my arrival. Much of my Louisiana era was assigned to him. Dennis proved to be very insecure. His frequent topic of discussion with anyone was about him having been held back from the place he deserved - being indeed qualified for it. (At times when he was helplessly high-centered on his extreme qualifications, I told him he was the wisest man I knew...maybe crosswisest...or otherwisest! That seemed to help him get past his self-centeredness, at least in my presence!) He often targeted young women, making them guilty for not going into the 2x2 ministry! Such sessions would often end with his victims being in tears! Of course, I always spoke first in the meetings. He followed by often misquoting

something I had previously said. He would spend the balance of the time correcting what he said I had said! (Dennis was not deaf. He seemed to try to prove his superiority.) This method gave him a way to use the balance of the meeting. Dennis was not a Bible student by any stretch of the imagination!

## **Finally, a Man With no Political Agenda**

John Starkweather was my first assignment in the Louisiana era. I had never even heard of him before. He was overseer, very disciplined, not impulsive, quiet, highly respected, conscientious, slow to communicate. He was a good man who made great effort (at first) to keep me painfully at arm's length! Never before nor since have I been with an overseer of such a good report. This was the pattern for about three months, until he finally broke the silence!

One day John proceeded to tell me that before I had arrived, Taylor Wood had spoken with him telling John to be very cautious of me. Taylor had told him I was clever at making things go the way I thought they should! I was shocked and disappointed, but not surprised that Taylor made such a statement. I asked John if that was the way he had found me to be. He assured me that I was not as Taylor had reported. He no longer kept me at arm's length! We moved into a rewarding relationship with a mutual unspoken awareness that we were faced with a great deal of political corruption. The longer I knew John, the more I realized that he was not political in any way – he was in no one's political camp. This was most wonderful!

## **Louisiana 2x2 “Fellowship”**

A bit of the history of the 2x2 fellowship in Louisiana, as I recall it, might be helpful at this point. Two men came into Louisiana from the eastern USA. Having accomplished very little, if anything, they soon left. Hubert Childers, with co-workers, came sometime later. They were met with a positive response in many areas. The 2x2 fellowship became quite large. (There were many interesting stories about activities during these years.) Of course, Hubert became overseer. He was amazingly popular among the 2x2 fellowship there – to the point of being a god! Throughout the years Hubert kept in close contact with that state, even after he went to other states as well as foreign countries. Somewhere in those early years, Jack Mulkey became a part of the Louisiana scene, eventually becoming overseer. Eventually, Hubert appointed John Starkweather to be overseer. By 1981 the 2x2 fellowship had basically died out in many areas of that state. Louisiana is in the middle of America's Bible Belt. One of the friends in an isolated area told me, “All you would need to this day, to get a big crowd in this town is to announce that Hubert Childers is in town!”

The friends had only good feelings along with good things to say about John. Kirby Franks of the Effie convention farm told me that when Hubert Childers arranged for John to come there, Hubert told the folks in Louisiana, "I am sending you the best I have to offer."

John's messages were very insightful and well expressed. From time to time he shared his understanding on the divinity of Christ: He could not fail to accomplish all that He had been sent by God to do for the souls of men. John said that Christ's coming to earth was not an experiment! When John prayed audibly, he frequently asked God to further His work of grace in our lives.

During later developments, I learned that John along with some others had been excommunicated from the work in, I think, Montana, for teaching these points of doctrine. Somewhere in the past Hubert Childers had favored John giving him a place in the 2x2 ministry in Texas. It was there John gained the respect of many people as well as the resentment of many others in the work there.

Very early into my Louisiana era, I was exposed to the loose living of a young popular man who had been in the ministry there! I could no longer be closed to the reality of such crimes! I quickly concluded that if I had a wife and young daughter and if this man came to visit, I would have put one end of a short chain around his leg with the other to a porch post all the while he was my guest! One man, the father of four, frequently took his wife, the mother of his children, to visit this criminal out-of-state. Rather than addressing the issue, he was moved to a different state shortly before I arrived where he continued in the 2x2 ministry. This is the method cults use in such issues – sweep it under the rug.

Uel Boyd was on the Louisiana staff. He came to our home often when I was a child. Uel was the sort of a guy who if he had drowned in the river, the only thing to do was look for him up stream! He was that unique! Somehow we developed a workable relationship, partly because he had great respect for my parents. He was my brother's first assignment. Uel had left Kansas before I was assigned to him there. I was never assigned to him in Louisiana, but we spent lots of time together.

## **An Unbearable Era**

As I became acquainted with the Louisiana staff, I learned some of them felt they were in Louisiana because the powers that be did not know what to do with them. My feelings were even greater – I felt I had been sent there to be destroyed! Combine that attitude with a climate and culture that was so not me – the Louisiana era was extremely unbearable for me. At one stage I spoke to Jack Mulkey about a possible change. Of course, he would do what he could – but when?

Not being able to recall the course of events, several of the following events are most likely not in chronological order.

## Negativity Breeds Contempt

Totally out of the blue an invitation came from Sam McCracken to the special meetings in Tennessee! “Out of the blue”, because I had purposely not kept in contact with him. With much consternation, I went! It was quite an uneventful time, except for the fact that I felt a heavy cloud of negativity everywhere I went. One day most of the workers were together. Negativity was extreme! Later that day I shared a room with Bobby Sylvia. Under my breath in exasperation, I said to myself, “Whatever am I doing here anyway?!” Bobby heard me, and then replied, “Sam brought you here for a peace offering.” Bobby continued telling me that before I arrived, Sam had gotten the staff together. He warned them against me. There was another turbulent flight back to Louisiana!

## Competition in “High Places”

In 1985 Duane Hopkins invited Raymond and me to Minnesota for special meetings. Duane was overseer there. Raymond had been with Duane the year before I started with him. The outstanding part of the trip was that the climate in that north country was totally compatible with me! Joe Hobbs as well as Gaylen Van Loon were on the staff in Minnesota. Their competition for the high seat was very obvious!

After a few years into my Louisiana era, I called John learning Hubert Childers had called him. With severe forceful language Hubert told John he had learned John was teaching false doctrine! Again, I am unable to recall details in chronological order. Changes happened quickly. John was stripped of the oversight immediately. For a time he was allowed to stay in Louisiana. Erling Omdahl was sent to be with John – actually to spy on him! Leonard Hawkes was sent to be overseer. Eventually plans were being made for next year’s list. Taylor sent Jack Mulkey with the sentence to John that John’s name would be on no list that Taylor was responsible for! This sentence came from a man who was famous for “pouring oil on troubled waters”! John went to New Mexico to live and work.

Later still, I learned it had been John Badertscher who had set off the alarm against John Starkweather. (John Badertscher had been moved from Louisiana shortly before I arrived.) The “false” doctrine that John Starkweather was charged with teaching that Christ is divine and that He would not fail. (The first prophecy concerning Christ is, Genesis 3:15, “I will put enmity thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise its heel.” In my opinion, this prophecy with the entire gospel of John, are proofs John’s two points are valid! Alistair Begg teaches: “There never was a time that Jesus was not God. Jesus was never man and not God at the same time!”) This was their method of destroying a man who was not political, not playing their political games.

Words fail me as to how troubling these times were to me! The entire crisis was hushed in Louisiana. Quite soon things settled into whatever normal would be.



## **My Comfort in Distress**

As a result of these troubling times, "...Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever", Matthew 6:13, took on a new and comforting meaning to me. When any man claims either of these and acts accordingly, he is in major trouble with the only One who rightfully owns the Kingdom and the power and the glory! (At this stage of my history I had not gotten the revelation that the 2x2 fellowship was definitely not the Kingdom!) Presently, I am very intrigued by the question: "What am I actually praying for when I pray, 'Thy Kingdom come'"?

## **Lies upon Lies**

My Louisiana era became even more oppressive. How does one go on from here?! Add the consequences of the Starkweather crisis to the already heavy gut feeling of being sent to Louisiana to be destroyed!

I have previously stated that Mr. Leonard was sent to be overseer. It was wonderful having his brotherly spirit. We were able to resume the relationship we had begun some years before in South Carolina. Never once was the Starkweather crisis discussed between us. Soon after Mr. Leonard arrived, we shared a room during the special meeting rounds. This situation provided a good time to visit.

Mr. Leonard told of having heard from his brother in Virginia. His brother told of it being so dry there that the water in the well was only 98% moisture! Mr. Leonard brought up the subject of John Culver's activities that were against the married couple in South Carolina. Mr. Leonard told me that he had consulted someone not quite as "high" as Taylor Wood regarding the matter. Mr. Leonard was advised that taking action against John would taint Taylor's reputation! The reason being that John had started in the work with Taylor! John was later moved out of the state. Mr. Leonard continued, telling that the husband in the South Carolina situation told Mr. Leonard that nothing had been solved by merely moving John. Instead, the problem was only spread further!

Our discussion turned to Mr. Leonard's recent visit with Taylor Wood prior to his arrival in Louisiana, and some of the subjects they discussed. I asked Mr. Leonard if Taylor ever has anything to say about me. Mr. Leonard fell quiet, after he cleared his throat, said, "Yes, he told me to be cautious of you because you are clever at making things go the way you think they should!" I followed with the same question I had asked John Starkweather, "Is that the way you find me to be?" "No." Taylor had told John and Mr. Leonard the same thing. Both men responded to my question the same way!

Later in the Louisiana era we were at a convention with the meetings underway. I listened in the meetings, as did everyone else. They could testify to the amazing things they were hearing. They were getting bread for their souls! I felt left out completely, because this was not my experience! Finally, I shared my feelings with Mr. Leonard who was totally sympathetic.

## **The Physical Body Suffers; Results of the Toxic Environment**

During the Louisiana era I felt more a need to try to preserve my health. Walks were unpleasant because of the heat and humidity. I did take up jumping rope. I could step outside to quickly do 1,000 jumps. Then I would flee back to the air conditioning! I did a daily stretching routine. At times I tried to keep busy with odd jobs when I had some reserve sweat! Much to my great alarm, insomnia was affecting me. It was a frightening experience because I had always been a good sleeper, seeming to need at least 8 hours if I could not get 10.

In 1985 and 1986 there was an uneven number of men in Louisiana. I was the odd one. This was good because my aged dad developed health issues. Much of the summer months of 1985 I was free to go home to support him during some major stuff. Then, back to Louisiana for preps and conventions. Almost immediately after conventions things became much more serious for Dad. I was home through his rapid decline and finally death. I cherish those wonderful last days with Dad and of course Mom. Early in 1985 Dad had announced to the family there would be a family gathering celebrating their 60<sup>th</sup> year of marriage on December 28. Dad managed to keep himself alive for that event. He passed 8 days later, a few weeks short of his 86<sup>th</sup> birthday. Raymond and I were allowed to take Mom on a road trip to the west coast to visit her sisters. I returned to Louisiana by March.

I have only one memory of my fraternal grandfather, Charles Upton Blubaugh I. Most of my older siblings knew him well. Nearly every time they mention Dat –as they called him, they make reference to his emotional abuse! Dat had only two favorites. In this respect, our dad was exceptional! The generational abuse stopped with him. There was no such abuse from our wonderful Dad! Dad had only 10 favorites! Hours before Dad died he tried to share in Russell's most severe experience. In an effort to speak, Dad's lips moved, but no sound. Years before, Dad was totally distraught by David's mysteriously delayed return from Viet Nam. During David's delay, Dad could only imagine the worst! His child in need was always his favorite. David got off the Continental Trailways Bus directly in front of the house. Without knowing it he stepped into a house that was distraught and filled with anguish! Dad was hours away from going to Kansas City to heir a Pinkerton Detective to begin his search for his beloved missing son! What blessed memories I have of my wonderful dad!

## **Another Move; Short-lived Hope**

Word came sometime in 1987 that I would be going to North Dakota to join the staff. Gilbert Richter was the overseer there! I had been on the special meeting rounds in Louisiana. I left from the last meetings, which were at DeRitter. Mr. Leonard was among the few who waved me off. In 2004 I learned that, as I drove away that fateful day, Mr. Leonard began to weep, saying, "He's going to North Dakota to be with that politician!"

As I made my way to North Dakota, I stopped a wee bit to have time with Mom. The elder of the meeting with his wife, Clarence and Dortha Turner, took me to North Dakota. The North Dakota era started April 1987. Stanley March, my first assignment there, was waiting for me. Within days after my arrival, Stanley and I went to South Dakota for special meetings.

I found the South Dakota staff totally divided – seniors against juniors and vice versa! Discord with hatred abounded. It was here I first met Jim Chaffee. Leslie Olsen, David Leonhardt and Joe Hobbs were among the seniors.

We returned to North Dakota to do the specials there. Stanley and I spent the summer in the southeast field. Everything seemed to be a “plus”. Stanley was dreadfully insecure, constantly needed attention. (I reminded him occasionally that I could easily tell that he never picked his nose when he was a little boy...he would have picked a different one! Stuff like that seemed to assure him that I knew he was around. He wouldn't need to cough, slam the door nor stub his toe on the furniture so often to be noticed. I gave him more attention with: “You used to be able to spit over your chin...now you can spit all over it!”)

Insecurity abounds among that dysfunctional group. In coming years I tried to help some of my younger assignments to see the need of becoming secure with the Lord, letting His approval be our insecurity.

There was a huge clan in the fellowship in our area - the Berghs. Among them were several teenage boys who had not yet taken an active part in the 2x2 fellowship. Stanley was bent on” bringing them in”! At the close of the last meeting he did the usual thing – “tested” the meeting. None of those young men responded! It was a huge let down for Stanley. He was quite sure he would not return to that field another year to have further influence on them.

At the Hunter convention that same fall, the Berghs were well represented, including the young men. That Saturday night meeting ended with the usual procedure. Several of those young Bergh men responded to the invitation – maybe as many as six! In the quarters that night, Stanley was more than disappointed in those men! He was angry as well! They had refused the opening in his mission, choosing rather to be showy at a big convention. Stanley wanted the total credit for their decision.

Many if not all of these young Bergh men came to NDSU in Fargo, North Dakota the following years. We had frequent contact with them as we had weekly Bible studies with the college students. Travis Bergh was among them. He was the type of young man who was busy with his own thing. He indicated no feeling of being on the “front page”. David Bergh was among them, as well. Instead of slipping into the background, David was more content with a bit of attention. There was an indication the “little man syndrome” with him. During his college years, David went into the 2x2 ministry. Travis and David's fathers are cousins.

Stanley's personal motto was: “Stick and Stay”. In order for him to live his motto, it eventually became difficult for someone else. Ray Miller stuck to his demanding assignment. Stanley's overseer, Robert Eberhardt, finally decided Stanley would no longer “stick” in the work, but would “stay” in a rest home. Robert stripped Stanley of the only tool he had left to clench his salvation! Stanley passed a few days short of 100 in 2018.

The convention season that fall seemed extra-long but quite special. At this stage I had become glad to be a stranger – not knowing people or their trends! The list was published. I was assigned to Gilbert Rictor, the overseer, to be in the Fargo area. It soon was very clear that Gilbert claimed a special advantage because of having been tutored by one of the very early workers from the United Kingdom, James Jardine.

## **Push it Under the Rug for “The Kingdom’s Sake”**

Ira Hobbs was beginning to be exposed during this time. I was quite ignorant concerning Ira’s activities. Several people from Colorado – workers as well as friends – frequently called Gilbert. They seemed to be asking him for whatever he could give – advice, sympathy, etc. He spent lots of hours on the phone with a young male worker who called him nearly daily. In retrospect, the Ira Hobbs’ scandal was extremely complex – complicated with aspects of politics. Because of that, no one could decide anything for fear of it conflicting with someone else. Especially, Garrett Hughes, Colorado’s aged overseer, had to be protected in whatever would be decided! Gilbert never told me what the issues actually were against Ira. I never asked.

Years later, I learned of some of the details of Ira Hobbs’ crimes. The Creator said in the beginning, “It is not good for man to be alone...” Hideous crimes can only be expected when that natural law of God is violated. Such a violation is made by the 2x2 dogma in demanding that those who carry its gospel must be unmarried!

Needless to say, many souls were painfully injured! Because of only hearing some of Gilbert’s end of the conversation, I noticed he would never make a definite stand one way or the other – which I understand is the tactic of a real politician. Gilbert nearly always hung the phone up exclaiming, “Wheee, somebody is really going to get in trouble!” I eventually understood that “somebody” to be the person who was reporting to him! The scandal kind of died down – again swept further under the carpet. Ira Hobbs eventually went on the Texas where he was appointed overseer!

The preps and conventions that fall seemed good, but too long! I felt a positive trend for me, which was encouraging – maybe things are okay? after all! For some reason - without thinking – I frequently called Gilbert “Sam”. These men were much alike in many ways!

In 1988, during preps my second fall in North Dakota I became victim of depression. Depression plagued me until the mid-’90s. My assignment that fall was Gregg Lee, who was starting out! Gregg was newly converted. He had been shown a great deal of attention by some of the friends. The following year, Gregg was sent to South Dakota where he had access to *THE SECRET SECT*. He soon moved away from the ministry and fellowship.

Gilbert Rictor went on a “Come to Jesus” mission to South Dakota at this time. Freddie Bryanton was the overseer. Robert Johnson was on that staff. Gilbert claimed to have confiscated the heretical book! At the same time he claimed to have issued sharp reproofs to the staff for reading it and passing it around!

That year Wilfred Goecke had been sent to North Dakota from Colorado. The Ira Hobbs scandal raged in Colorado. After getting to know Wilfred, I feel he would have found it impossible to have supported Ira Hobbs or those who supported him, which included Garrett Hughes. (Wilfred and I never discussed the Hobbs scandal.) I shall never forget the day we met his flight – he tried to keep his back to the wall. He seemed to find it impossible to trust anyone! Wilfred and I became good friends especially after I was sent with him and his senior assignment during the early days of my depression. Wilfred saw how badly I needed medical help, which he advised. I saw a doctor in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This doctor was one of the friends.

## There Has to be More

From this point the North Dakota era kind of goes into a blur. I was assigned to younger men the remainder of my time there. We began working with smaller group Bible studies, usually also conducting one or two formal public meetings each week. This was pretty much our pattern for the rest of my days in that position. The studies were informal events. We focused on a book in the Bible – one chapter at a time. We met some who showed interest, and who responded each year. In a way, things seemed on a roll despite the depression plague and increased insomnia. Some whom I was with could tell what the moon phase was by the way my depression affected me! We had active days that seemed rewarding to us, I thought. Still I was not content with what I shared from the scriptures! *There had to be more!*

We were to go to Aylesbury, Saskatchewan for convention. (SK is where Robert Thompson had been the first white child born in some of that frontier.) I had never been there before. Eldon Tenniswood was to be there! I had never met him. I had heard lots about him. He frequently published what I shall call “propaganda pages”. Those publications must have been delivered worldwide! I was none the wiser after I had read some of them! Taylor Wood told Eldon to stop his publications – He stopped! Eldon’s sister Lillian was on the staff in South Carolina while I was there. Lillian was a very pleasant person with a beaming beautiful smile. Beneath all that was visible about Ms Lillian, there was an explosive unpredictable temper! I was anxious to finally meet Eldon.

The Tenniswood clan were among the first in Michigan to accept the 2x2 dogma. Andrew Abernathy was one of three sons of one of the first women to accept the 2x2 dogma in North America. The very small Abernathy house in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania became the point of entry into North America for workers coming from the UK. (Jean Weir told very interesting stories of those days. Willie Jamison told of his entry to America through that same house.)

Andrew and Eldon went into the 2x2 ministry and became competitive contenders for power. To keep the conflict from worsening, Eldon was sent to the west coast of North America. He became globally popular. Eventually he arose to the oversight of a large area on the west coast. Andrew stayed on the eastern front. His popularity grew as well. These powers maintained their differences – mainly marriage, divorce and remarriage. If one camp decided a certain course action, it was quite certain the other would be critical. With this knowledge of history I looked forward to meeting Eldon Tenniswood!

Dale Shultz was overseer in Saskatchewan. He had ongoing depression. We had helpful discussions about our mutual concern. There were more than 75 workers present. The hour finally came when the Eldon Tenniswood entourage arrived! I forget details of the group with its cars plus all that was required for this man who professed to be a servant of the Lord Jesus! There were at least four women from Eldon's California staff to maintain him – his own cook, secretary with others doing certain functions. There appeared to be a "geisha"! Dale announced that there would be workers' meetings Wednesday morning and Wednesday afternoon!

We gathered for the morning meeting. Dale was master of ceremony. He announced that the first meeting would be open for everyone to have part. The second meeting would be exclusively for our "esteemed brother" Eldon Tenniswood! That second meeting came with the esteemed brother center stage! Everyone appeared to be in absolute awe! For more than an hour I listened to and watched that old man yo-yo between laughing and crying! All the while I thought: "If this is an 'esteemed brother', I'd hate to watch an 'unesteemed brother' perform!" Eldon's "message" amounted to dreadfully nothing! I had met the Eldon Tenniswood!

Feeling I lacked insight of the scriptures caused me to continually reach out for method in our Bible studies. I asked Don Shenton a 2x2 worker from Manitoba about his method. He worked a great deal through studies. He advised, "Let your visitors tell you all they will. That way they will likely come back which will also give you opportunity to eventually tell them more."

Our activity required lots of endless planning. I tired of making plans! I wanted the young men to have part in it. I did not want them to be a "non-person" in the efforts. I wanted them to work "with" me, not "under" me. I wanted them to see the project then give their input. It was easy to abandon the habit of the older person always speaking last. I tried to promote the idea that our place in an event really didn't matter. As I took on the prep leader task, I tried to promote the same idea among the staff. Most days we'd gather after breakfast. I urged everyone to share what they saw that needed to be the project for the day, as well as who wanted to do it.

Without being able to give the exact year, I well recall the day David Bergh arrived at the Cando, North Dakota convention. It was easy to enter into his feelings of being overwhelmed. At times he became quite despondent and withdrew to cry. He required lots of rest, it seemed. This was his unique behavior for several years during preps and conventions. When he began to have a bit of input in matters of preps he seemed to require less and less rest! During some of those years I described in the above paragraph I enjoyed working as equals. The time finally came when the friends noticed and mentioned to me that David wanted something above being equals!

We often planned a week away from the field usually at some campground – Teddy Roosevelt National Park, Boundary Waters, Lake Itasca, Yellowstone National Park, etc. We went to Yellowstone in January. We used snowmobiles to move about on. The necessary gear made us look as though we were headed for outer space! Being there in winter we spent no time reading bumper stickers – we were among the very few in that amazing landscape! It was easy to spot wildlife against that endless white backdrop. Old infirm bison huddled and died near the hot springs. They became an easy meal for their predators.

## **Workers' Meeting**

The workers' meetings at Hector, Minnesota were held in early summer 1994. (It was the last of its kind where Taylor Wood had authority.) My expectations of that event were positive as well as high. The meetings finally came! There were upwards of 200 of us 2x2 workers there. Many states were represented. It was a two and a half day event.

I was glad to be able to speak to Taylor and Sam. I made eye contact while shaking their hands and telling each of them separately that I was glad to see them. I noticed Sam shadowed Taylor quite closely all those days. (It may have been because William Lewis and Weldon Burgess were there. Both men were great threats to Sam.)

Taylor was the master of ceremony. He opened the event telling us the event was intended to be a time of fellowship – no plans or problems would be dealt with while we were together! The event was conducted much like the usual convention meeting format. There are no “gems” from those meetings that remain with me. Of course there was a picture taken professionally. This was no small event, proving to be a major “up” for the Minnesota team of whom Gaylen Van Loon was the team leader!

All the overseers could not speak. I noticed those who did not speak sat on the back row during the meetings! At the yearly conventions the men and women sit close to the platform on separate sides. Sam was not allotted time for his “keepers' brother” message!

The few remaining Kansans still in the work, except Raymond Reece, were present. The Kansans decided to sit together at the dinner table – “Fine!” I thought. During that meal it was mentioned that we all had a special start in the work because of having been under Robert Thompson. I found it impossible to share that sentiment. I would have found it easier to compliment the fine wild rice soup we were served. It had been purchased from a gourmet café. None of the food served us was servants' rations! The elite friends were selected to serve.

Then also, there were the sleeping arrangements. Only a very select few could be in the house. The others bunked with the peons. This arrangement was especially degrading to Gilbert. The convention sleeping arrangements were always a status symbol with Gilbert – certain bedrooms seemed to indicate higher status than another! On one occasion during the meetings I needed to speak with Gilbert. I found him on his bed. He appeared to be sulking.

We soon scattered. It was especially noticeable to me of the workers who had been there who soon left the ministry or passed away. I was not aware of there being as many replacements. One man left immediately to marry the mother of his unborn child! He was from Mexico and was thought to make efforts among the Latinos in Nebraska.

## **Christian Books; A Spiritual Universe Opened!**

During one of those years Raymond Reid contacted me. (Raymond later became the author of *THE GATE SELDOM FOUND*.) Raymond sent me a book of the teachings of Watchman Nee. I read it with increasing interest. I bought and read more books of his teachings. It was through these writings that the doctrine of grace began opening – what a blessing! A totally new spiritual universe opened – which continues to open! There are many definitions of “grace”. My own definition is: “God doing for me what I could never do for myself.”

I tried to find where that definition is evident throughout the scriptures. From the New Testament I followed it all the way to “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” (Grace is actually evident from cover to cover.) There God did something for me that I could never have done for myself: He created me a place to live! As long as God has been, so grace has been! To reject the doctrine of grace is to reject the existence of God Himself. The seeds of grace can only grow in the soil of humility. If grace is truly affecting me, I will not be proud! If a doctrine is not the doctrine of grace, it cannot be good news! Nee was my beginning of seriously learning from others outside the indoctrination of the 2x2s. The scripture began to make sense!

I was amazed when I understood that often any form of the word “give” throughout the Bible is reference to an act of grace! These scriptures are samplings of what I discovered: Isaiah 9:6; John 3:16; Matthew 10:8. (As 2x2s we had promoted Matthew 10 forever, giving the idea it was in reference to money.) Now, I see Jesus sent out a ministry of grace! Too often we have so little to freely give because we have not freely received! Suddenly, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” made sense. In giving, regardless of what it is, we are like the God of all grace - actually being children of the Highest!

I have come to value the teachings of Derek Prince, Chuck Swindol, Alistair Begg, J. Vernon McGee, David Jeremiah, Dan Mohler – to name a few. I’m glad these people are on radio: I can shut them off whenever I choose! I could never do this during the hours of preaching I had been forced to endure!

For years I had tried to read the book of Acts. When I came to Acts 2:42 “...And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine...”, my heart screamed: “Why does it not itemize the points of that doctrine!” Finally, during those awakening years I read Acts again. For the first time I found the apostles’ doctrine in black and white! Every time the apostle opened his mouth it was the apostles’ doctrine – what an amazing revelation! With pad and pen I listed each of those points – there are many of them! This study proved to be a revolutionary study. Never once did the apostle promote a certain method of ministry. Because of that study a great deal of dogma that I had trusted in went directly to the garbage bin! God was leading me in the process of giving up what I had owned, having treasured most of my life! These times were overwhelming for me!

## **More Awakening**

More awakening came as I gave thought to: “Abraham believed God and it was imputed to him for righteousness.” (This statement is mentioned at least three times in the New Testament, Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23.) I made a list of what I always thought I needed in order to be righteous: 2x2



fellowship meetings, 2x2 ministry, the Bible, 2x2 conventions, etc., all of what made me legalistic! To my amazement, Abraham didn't have any of what I thought was vital! Abraham's experience was marvelously simple! More of my belief system landed in the garbage bin! This was becoming traumatic! What if somebody found out I no longer believed nor taught that standard doctrine?!

My experience became a process I understand as "being born again again"! (Paul spoke of it as "being changed from glory to glory".) The transition became strong and powerful and amazing!

At last George Walker's comments concerning his appreciation for the book of Romans, along with the themes of each of the gospels, was becoming meaningful!

I also questioned why it was that I did not have the gift of healing, which was part of the original sending of the apostles. This gift was displayed throughout Acts. I finally reasoned myself out of that possibility: "If anyone could do it, it should be us! We go 2x2!"

One day LeRoy Sandford and I headed west on I-94 out of Mandan, North Dakota. I blurted out, "If we do it, it's not wrong!" (I had begun to realize why we did what we do - some man tells us to do it - even if it is the right form! I questioned the office of an overseer who decided who goes where, etc.!) LeRoy almost pushed me out the passenger's door as we sped down the interstate at 75 MPH!

I began questioning my own definition of what the "word of God" actually is! I had grown up trusting in and all the while believing the King James Bible is the word of God. I tried to apply my definition to Abraham, Genesis 15:1 & 4, "After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision...And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying..." - as well as to John the Baptist, Luke 3:2, "Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of the Lord came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness." I am citing only a few such instances. "For the word of God to come to these men, does that mean a King James Bible dropped out of heaven to them", I questioned.

Now, I am only comfortable understanding the "word of God" being God's personal message to me concerning my own life. That understanding applies to both Abraham and to John the Baptist. I realized one can have the Bible, yet be without the word of God!

I am discovering the many ways the word of God comes to each of us. King Saul was distressed because God did not communicate with him - not even by dreams, 1 Samuel 28:6, "I applied my definition of the word of God to the parable of the sower and the seed.

During these revolutionary times Malachi 3:16 came into my focus. This is how it reads in the SBV (Steve Blubaugh Version): "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another [and they did not need a workers' list nor a friends' address book to do it]..." More and more I saw the possibility of fellowship outside the 2x2 system!

## **"My Brothers"**

Because many events and impressions are not chronological – the following paragraphs are hodge-podge from about 1992 through 1998.

In 1992 brother Ralph passed at age 61 after a long struggle with a disease that caused his body to completely quit making its own blood – Myelodysplastic anemia Syndrome. He lived for some years only by getting frequent transfusions; one transfusion was six units! Finally, his frail body said it had had enough! His widow, Elda Faye passed during this time frame, as well. My oldest sibling, Robert basically dropped dead at age 68!

My brother Reuben's wife, Joan was ending her 18 year battle with cancer. She had been my high school English teacher. She was a devout member of the Church of Christ. We never had a spiritual discussion during all the years of our relationship. Her death was eminent. I felt concerned to know how things were with her spiritually. When I called I found her at home in her hospital bed under hospice care. We spent very little time talking about incidentals! Abruptly I went to the heart of the reason for my call, "Joan, what is your hope in all this?" At that moment, with a spirit of complete confidence in quiet trust, Joan told me that her only hope was totally in all that Christ had done for her! She never mentioned having heard a certain ministry or minister, nor of her commitment to a religious system, nor that she received her education through a college sponsored by the Church of Christ! Grace had prepared me for this moment. I was able to rejoice with her. I hung the phone up, having moved through another phase of my own process of accepting more truth! I attended her funeral only mourning her death, not that she had died outside the 2x2 system!

Traveling by car to some of these funerals, I went through central Nebraska. This was the area where both Uel Boyd and Lowell Kleeb were in separate rest homes.

I found Uel in bed. His eyes were closed, but he was not asleep. I tried to initiate some kind of interaction with him – using a bit of humor. He informed me that his stage of life was so serious that he could not be appealed to by anything funny! Some years before in Colorado, Lowell had had a brain tumor removed. A large portion of his skull had been removed because of an infection. He was unable to walk and his speech was limited. After sharing some pleasant time with him, I had to move on. Being in his wheel chair, Lowell said, "I want to go with you as far as I can." He accompanied me to the elevator to say good bye. I never saw either of those men again.

By this time my brother Raymond had left the work from the state of Texas. He had moved in with our widowed mother. Within five years he married Joy Price.

## **What is Being Hidden?**

Shelly Vigessa was home from a foreign country where she was active in the 2x2 ministry. She was at preps and conventions at all three conventions. During the last convention she told me, "You have a very unstable overseer because of what impresses him – cooking, singing and preaching."

Evan Jones and Sam McCracken both came during these years for conventions. Sam managed to bring his “keeper’s brother” message.

Joyce Lawrence was coming to North Dakota from Colorado. Joyce Naber was leaving North Dakota going to Colorado. Gilbert said we were “re-JOYCE-ing”. Joyce Lawrence brought a competitive spirit, which made for confusion and distrust. Joyce Lawrence’s conduct became extremely questionable to me the longer she was in North Dakota. Some on the staff asked me, “Why are you so afraid of Joyce?” I replied, “You are not a 52 year old male!” I became fully convinced that Joyce was ready to use her body any way necessary for her own benefit!

In Gilbert’s opinion Joyce Lawrence could cook, sing and preach. He promoted her for this reason! One of those “re-JOYCE-ing” years at Mandan. The visitors had all arrived! There was a noon meal that Gilbert wanted the best impression to be made! Gwen Aarestad was the cook for that significant event – not Joyce Lawrence. In Gwen’s delightful humor, her claim to fame was that she had difficulty boiling water at times. Late on that eventful / fateful morning Gwen reported to Gilbert that the oven had been mysteriously turned off at the vital time in the meal’s preparation! The significant meal would not only be second rate, but late as well! (Having stated all I have about the woman in discussion, I leave it to the reader’s own conjecture as to how the oven might have been mysteriously off!) Gwen had been caught off guard!

I observed that Gilbert waltzed around Joyce Lawrence very gingerly, not crossing her. He tended to favor her when her associates went to him for help with their difficulties with Joyce! Gilbert had been her overseer in New Mexico. My observations convinced me that if Joyce Lawrence would talk, Gilbert knew a huge skeleton would walk out of the closet in broad daylight! (Joyce Lawrence was moved back to Texas, her home state around 2000. Joyce Naber had been in North Dakota some 20 years.)

As I continued in North Dakota we were doing a great deal of convention upgrading. Gilbert claimed to be completely not involved in what was being done. He would frequently visit the site saying, “I’m picking up...! I’m picking up...!” By saying this he claimed to be hearing from the friends things that were not good about what we were doing. Gilbert would never say what it was he claimed to be hearing. This was his tactic promote fear. Finally, I told Gilbert to tell those people to talk to me. I would be happy to hear them. He did not “pick up” anything anymore! I grew to hate projects!

## **Discord Among Men in Power**

One of the friends, Herb Smith was a department head at North Dakota State University. He spoke to me about the United Nations. In Herb’s opinion the UN is a world power without a territory with all power over all nations. He said the UN was capable of manipulating even the most powerful nations to act in ways that are questionable. At times they act quite inhumane – whatever served the UN’s interests! Herb’s most interesting observation has stayed with me!

Gilbert went yearly to overseers’ meetings in Nashville, Tennessee. He returned once telling of Earle Newmiller and Sam McCracken managing to abandon their disagreement short of a fist fight! Gilbert

would be perplexed at times, wishing there could be more unanimity among the leaders. (Chuck Swindol said that “unanimity” is a matter of everyone involved agreeing on all issues. “Unity” is a matter of accepting others’ differences, yet remaining one.) Gilbert seemed to think that someone could create unity. He failed to understand in Christ there is a unity to be maintained.

From one of those famous meetings of overseers Gilbert brought back a profound declaration from Taylor Wood. Taylor declared, “Our job now is to keep what we have.” From that time forward the 2x2 system abandoned what little gift of evangelism it ever had. With that attitude, preps, conventions, and special meetings became the major focus! Implosion in that system has escalated dramatically!

During this era Ken Paginton was dying of cancer in England. He was the first of the 2x2s to go to Madagascar. Eventually he was called back to the United Kingdom to be overseer. During Ken’s death process he was burdened by the lack of unity. Ken recognized a dreadful discord among the men in power in the 2x2 system. Ken wrote an epistle. I understand he sent it to each of the overseers worldwide. Gilbert received one such letter. Ken’s letter was soon followed with a letter from someone else who insisted that Ken’s letter be destroyed! Before he destroyed his letter, Gilbert read to me a couple of paragraphs from it. I do not recall any statements from that epistle - only Ken’s heartfelt plea for each overseer to lay aside legalistic differences and earnestly seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit that they might attain the unity that is in Christ. Ken wrote of the pain and confusion they were causing. The epistle was very moving. It was to be destroyed!

## Further Questioning

Gilbert seemed supportive of me, at least it appeared that way for a while. He usually sent me out-of-state for specials and conventions – surely I could claim that as a sign of some kind of progress! At one stage during the North Dakota era, Gilbert insisted in the presence of several of my assignments that I denounce John Starkweather as well as his doctrine. I reluctantly complied. I could not do that now! (I learned later that John had previously refused to play politics with Gilbert, which did not set well Gilbert.) In the presence of these younger men and me, Gilbert would frequently say, “Fit in or be an outfit!” I was often appointed to be the baptizer. I began to question: “Am I baptizing these people into Christ or into a religious system?”

There were more signs of decay in my relationship (if I dare call it “relationship”) with Gilbert. There also grew to be a major rift between Gilbert and Galen Van Loon, overseer in Minnesota. (Decades before, Gilbert had worked in Minnesota. I can only speculate what the rift was about!) At times Gilbert went to Minnesota without invitation or announcement. That did not go well with Gaylen or his “hit man”, Jon Knochenmus! Eventually, those two Minnesota men frequently called me asking for Gilbert’s whereabouts, also what he was doing! They were intent on counteracting Gilbert! In one phone call, Gaylen told me he had told Gilbert, “What don’t you understand about me telling you to not cross the North Dakota / Minnesota border?”

Two of the younger women, Grace Henderson and Melinda Yule, were in a field next to ours. They were having many sings. They were recording them, which Gilbert claimed to disapprove of. Gilbert called telling me to tell those women to stop their sings. If they had any question, they should call him! (This seemed really strange because Gilbert was very fond of singing. Melinda and Grace could sing very well!) I complied. Shortly I received a call from Grace, who told me she had called Gilbert. She said he didn't know a thing about what I claimed he had said! What could I say! She never trusted me again! This was a Gilbert Richter trait that I became all too acquainted with in the coming years!

## Love of Money Wreaks Havoc

When I arrived in North Dakota under the oversight of Gilbert Richter I felt sure that I had moved into a situation where I could be free to do what I was comfortable and happy doing! Let me emphasize that good expectations had at last occurred, I thought! Allen Riley was a former companion of the McCracken era. Allen shared my feelings of hopes that seemed to come with my change to North Dakota. Allen was well aware of the trauma of the Louisiana era. Allen was a refreshing support during it all. I must add this about Allen: He was converted to the system and went into the work. (He may have lasted three years.) His last months in the 2x2 ministry he was assigned to John Culver in South Carolina. My observation was that Taylor and Sam were against Allen from his very beginning in the work. They were intent in destroying him and finalized their efforts by assigning him to John Culver.

Walter Jardine had been overseer in North Dakota for many years. Most of his staff were born, reared, and had gone in the 2x2 ministry there. (Worker worship was promoted in this environment. Many boys had been named after Walter.) Gilbert pointed out that several of that group had collected estates from the friends stashing them away in bank accounts. It appeared to be competitive! Some of these accounts showed up out-of-state. As these estates became estates again, Gilbert gave the impression that he had to legally deal with some of this. He claimed he was quite uncomfortable doing it. He implied he was correcting someone else's violation of the penniless 2x2 ministry!

Quite soon after my arrival to North Dakota, "the work" was awarded a large sum of money. Gilbert was the administrator. It was kept secret at the time. In a few years Gilbert commenced "upgrading" convention grounds. Wilfred Goecke needed medical treatment. He asked Gilbert for funds to do it. Wilfred told me Gilbert told him he didn't have it. He would need to get it from a difference source!

During this same period the report of the Willis Propp scandal in Alberta slowly leaked through to us in North Dakota. That scandal was concerning money as well as multiple excommunications! During all that exposure about Willis, Gilbert became quite paranoid. He assigned "trustees", Bob Zimmerman and Roger Myers, to "manage" the money. I knew both of them quite well. Roger said Gilbert kept absolute control of the money. Gilbert's name was in no way connected to it!

During this era, I learned when a worker went to a foreign field to work, the state of origin was expected to support them with funds. There were a couple of such people in Scandinavia from North Dakota. I understand Gilbert was tight with the funds. Those Scandinavian overseers urged him to pay up! Roger

Myers told me that Gilbert relented. He sent an amount that would not buy a tank of gas! Roger told me that every time Gilbert approached the subject of this money he displayed signs of mental illness! Roger told me the only other worker in North Dakota who was granted free uncensored access to this money was Joyce Lawrence!

During this time Gaylen Van Loon's brother's business was going defunct in yet a different state. Gaylen solicited funds from anyone for his brother. Roger Meyers reported that his mother-in-law had been generous. She with many others lost everything!

## **North Dakota Trivia**

I must add a bit of North Dakota trivia that amazes me. The growing season there – if everything goes well – is only 90 days! I tried to learn what those early settlers did first after they arrived. I envisioned them having come by train from the east to Minneapolis, Minnesota. From there they used an animal drawn vehicle heading toward what became North Dakota. I asked many people, did those settlers dig a well first, or build a house first, or plant a crop first. No one was ever able to answer me. (I asked that question of someone in Minnesota. “They build the church first”, was the reply.) Those early people did the right thing, because their descendants are there!

Being that far north I experienced the short winter days then the long summer days. I learned that every square inch of the earth's surface has equal amount of sunshine in a 365 day period! This amazes me about my Creator!

The Northern Lights were always an amazing experience – no two times were alike! When I was a child in Kansas we saw the north sky glowing red once. That was nothing compared to what we could experience in the north. One winter night north of Jamestown the Northern Lights experience was like being under a canopy! Overhead as well as far to the south were brilliant shades of yellow, red and green! Other times the lights were like huge draperies in shades of pale green gently waving in the far above.

There are countless pioneer stories! The early settlers could build some sort of a dwelling on the land. If they lived there a certain length of time they were given a nice piece of real estate. Two spinsters from the east coast had hired a man to build their tar paper shack. In the early fall these ladies had arrived by train to live in the shack in order to claim up their property. A man with team and wagon met their train. He discerned the sky as he took them to their shack. He saw that a blizzard was coming. He quickly unloaded the two women with their stuff. He hurried home order to avoid the approaching blizzard. The temperature kept dropping as the women unpacked. As conditions worsened the women wanted to start a fire. They discovered they had brought everything they needed but matches! They journaled the final hours of their lives. They froze to death!

## Convention Rounds 1996

In 1996 I was asked to have a part on the convention circuit. My first convention was Pulaski, Virginia, Sam McCracken's region. John Guy on that staff, whom I was well acquainted with from North Carolina, became a victim of Sam's promotion. John fell victim of Sam's politics. He later landed in the bone pile! Nathan McCarthy from New Zealand was a visitor at Pulaski. Nathan and I had both had our first go on the platform. We were scheduled to share the Sunday morning meeting – as the only speakers. Saturday morning Nathan came to my room. Without wasting time, in his stoic composure moved into the subject of the two of us being united for that Sunday morning meeting! He quickly pointed out that this desirable unity could never be unless I wore a more subdued tie! I must not use modern American English when I prayed – King James' English was important to him! Somehow we were on the same platform!

Darla DenHerder was a visitor as well. We had met at Manhattan, Montana convention in 1988. At that time it was evident there was real discord between us. I figured it was mainly due to the fact that I was a "wise man from the East"! (Maybe there's a reader whom isn't aware of the major split between the East and the West in North America. I don't really know what that split is all about. I do know that both fronts were united during the Starkweather crisis! John Starkweather did something that likely no other person has ever done! John united the two fronts against him!) At Pulaski I sensed a refreshing connection with Darla. She may have sensed something with me as well. My tie nor my modern American English in prayer had anything to do with it! Awakenings were in process!

Denton, North Carolina was my second stop – Taylor Wood's territory! That very familiar convention site held an unrelenting tsunami of memories for me! I moved through the cookhouse during one afternoon tea when I recalled the "flies on the carcass" ordeal, a few years before! Peggy Jansen, whom I had never met of that staff, was in the cookhouse. During a brief visit she told me Taylor loved being deceived. She said that was evident because of the men he kept around him! Peggy suggested I turn to see who was flanking Taylor while we spoke! Kenion Coleman and Leslie Pulley were vying for Taylor's attention!

Anne Dixon had been on the North Carolina staff for a while. By this time she was old and quite frail. Her rank was so low among the women on that staff that I don't think she even had a rating! This was a difficult position for Anne. Martyne remained well established in power – she never ever learned to share! Annie Stone appeared to be in on most of Taylor's moves. (I learned years later that Taylor kept Annie with him much of the time. She was anything but a personality. Second handed reports have come to me, telling of much questionable behavior between Taylor and Annie. I have no personal exposure to such behavior. It could easily be true.) Anne was without a position of recognition. She approached me several times as though she hoped somehow I could bring up something from the past that would revive some kind of status for her. Anne was pathetic!

My second of two turns on the platform was the last meeting. As I stepped up to the mic being the last speaker, from my right Taylor spoke up, "Cut it short, Steve!" Such a remark from such a man usually made for a very difficult meeting! Instead, there was a comfortable flow with a positive response from the friends.

When the meeting had ended I stepped to the left off the platform, then outside from beneath the tent. This made it convenient for Martyne - one of the flies – to begin giving me a royal tongue lashing! I have no clue what she was on about! She was old and petite. For an onlooker, it must have looked a bit like a bantam rooster flogging a giraffe! I found a chair then sat down. I hoped by sitting I could make the entire procedure a bit more convenient for the pitiful old soul! It seemed to be something she felt compelled to do. Pride and everything related to it is extremely ugly in its old victim. Martyne had been a long time subscriber to a dogma that confuses vice for virtue. I moved on to Cassatt, South Carolina - never sing Martyne or Anne again.

South Carolina was Clinton Goff's territory. I had never met Clinton. Nathan McCarthy was there. Tom Young from Manitoba, spent an entire meeting telling us that age 28 was the best age for godly people to marry. ( I had missed out!) My last stop was Marysville, Kansas. Evan Jones was there. We made what I felt was a good connection at that convention. I hurried back to Mandan, North Dakota for preps, where I was prep leader!

Evan was a visitor at Mandan! One morning after breakfast prior to the meetings, Evan came looking for me. He told me a light bulb needed changing in his room. He asked me to do something about it. (Changing a bulb just about maxes out my handyman abilities – that ain't no exaggeration!) I hastened to satisfy his needs! With the job finished Evan in his gruff manner ordered me to sit down on the bed! He motioned with his finger! He then began railing on me about my praying in modern English! Finally, when he seemed to think he had made his point sufficiently Evan said, "I'm telling you this because I am going to invite you to Australia for conventions in 1998. Next week I'm to see Taylor Wood. I will tell him I want you to come. You can't pray down there like you do here!" Evan said when he came to Hunter convention the week following his summit with Taylor that he could give me the sealed deal!

I kept everything under my hat. I assumed Evan had also had communication with Gilbert about his plan! Two weeks later Evan was at Hunter. Again Evan asked me to come to his room. This time he reported that he had told Taylor he wanted me to come to Australia for conventions. Evan continued saying that Taylor told him that he was glad when specific requests were made! My trip to Australia was settled!

I went away from Evan thinking Taylor's opinion about me may have changed a wee bit. All the while the rift between Gilbert and me grew worse. I assumed – merely assumed – Evan had mentioned all of this to Gilbert!

## **New Plans had been Made**

The convention had ended and was cleared up. Gilbert talked about long range plans, some of which would involve me which would conflict with the trip to Australia / New Zealand. I interrupted him by asking if Evan talked to him about me going to Australia! Gilbert stopped short...cleared his throat...gasped...with a frantic stutter blurted, "I won't block that!" This proved to be the encounter that made the rift irreversible! Evans' decision without consulting Gilbert seemed to be a direct political slam in Gilbert's face!



All of 1997 and most of 1998 went by quickly. My first assignment, Duane Hopkins was on the continent back from South America. Somehow the word either came from him that he wanted to see me or I had mentioned that I wanted to see him, which I would be glad to do.

Willis Propp was to be at both North Dakota conventions with the convention at Blackwater, Missouri between. Duane was to be at Blackwater as well. Gilbert planned for me to drive Willis to Blackwater, then back to Mandan, North Dakota. I actually looked forward to the break away from North Dakota. I had first met Willis at Marysville, Kansas probably in '69 or '70. I saw him a few times after that. This time we could get acquainted!

Arriving at Blackwater I learned that Duane's sister, Loyce was in his entourage. This was especially nice. I had not seen Loyce in years!

John Culver was on that staff. I was told by some of the peons that three peons had rotated year after year with John. They had become disgustingly tired of the repetition. That fall they went together to the overseer, Ken Lerwick. They made it clear to Ken they would do that no more! John was moved to Texas.

## **Listening With Ears Tuned by Grace**

I listened in those meetings through ears that had been tuned by grace. Nothing spoken seemed to make the trip there and back worth the effort or expense. I had grown up appreciating Duane's message. There was no substance to it now.

Willis was still clever at his unique tactic. I remembered from that time at Marysville so long ago, after Willis had spoken he exhibited great feelings with verbal expressions of having failed to perform on the platform. I discovered through the years that this was his clever way of sucking out flattery and sympathy from his sympathizers – he was so threatened and insecure! This pattern held true everywhere. He was a champion at it!

The car we were driving was parked a fair distance from the house where Willis slept. One day he came to me asking for the keys to the car. Willis told me that he wanted to visit with Ron Johnson. He was afraid the walls of his room might have ears! (Jack Price had previously excommunicated Ron from being overseer as well as from the 2x2 ministry. I knew none of the charges.)

My personal time with Duane was quite limited. He seemed to put his blessing on my trip to Australia / New Zeland. He seemed to indicate that I would likely be accepted down there. Loyce and I managed frequent visits. Finally, she took me quite far into the yard under a tree quite a distance from everyone. There she told me that her brother had entirely too much power. (This was evidence of what Duane had told Ken and me years prior!) Loyce was fearful for him – she seemed a bit fearful of him. Loyce continued telling me she did not enjoy being in Duane's entourage. She would prefer being in the company of someone like myself! She quizzed me extensively about Gilbert. She had always found his manners questionable.

On the long return trip back to Mandan, Willis explained that his reason for visiting with Ron was to reinstate him into the 2x2 ministry. I figured Willis's effort was a direct hit at Jack Price who was his long time rival, an arch enemy too. In a few months Ron was given a place in the 2x2 ministry in the east. For Jack Price's hymns to get into the new hymn book was a real thorn in Willis's side. None of Willis's writings made it that far! Willis was indeed a master politician. During this trip I failed to catch on to what he actually was! Being a captive audience in the car, I was indeed taken in by him for a time! We spent that night in a hotel. His paranoia may have influenced his decision. (Willis was in the hospital when I returned from my forthcoming trip. I called him to wish him well. My calls were screened by women on his staff. I called only once. He was extremely paranoid!) In 2005 I visited people who were well acquainted with Willis. They reported that when Willis was with people in public (for instance at a restaurant) he insisted on keeping his back to the wall.

The rift became more obvious! Gilbert was not inclined at all to finance my trip to Australia / New Zealand. I managed to get money from the Roger Meyers. All of this plus the fear that I might get dumped somewhere in the middle of the Pacific if it should be discovered that I was outside the box concerning dogma, was a huge overwhelm! Insomnia gave me no reprieve!

After clean up at Hunter, there were a few days before I departed for Australia / New Zealand from Kansas City, Missouri. This gave me some time with Mom. She had given up her home. She was settling into assisted living in Iola, Kansas, which is east central Kansas. Raymond and his wife, Joy lived in Iola as well.

## **Australia / New Zealand**

As I headed to Australia / New Zealand, in Los Angeles I met with some others who were invited on the same tour as me. We traveled together. We arrived at Sydney, Australia. Very soon I flew on to South Australia.

My first weekend was in Adelaide, South Australia where I met with people who knelt to pray, sat to testify and stood to pray for the bread and cup! My tour included all the Australian states except West Australia and Northern Territory. Communion was served at each Aussie convention, but not in New Zealand.

During the second day of that first convention, Stan Cornthwaite, the crude overseer used his time by blasting out convention etiquette as well as other nonsense. I had never heard such stuff before. The local staff collapsed in their laps as the overseer laid down the law!

It was obvious that each state was quite isolated from the others, as far as the fellowship was concerned. Each state seemed to have their own and only right version of "truth" with the proper application thereof. Legalism was rampant which appeared to provide the grounds for an obvious division between the ministry and the fellowship. I was amused by the assault of a young man in the ministry in Queensland for wearing deodorant! His criticism had a strange smell to it - he was quite strong, as well!

In that same state, the overseer, Albert Barnes was a beautiful compassionate soul. Albert sat beside me at the table. I am the world's worst / best to mix food. When Albert saw the mixture on my plate he almost had to leave the table!

In New South Wales I was uplifted by the message from a young worker, Cameron Ford who spoke insightfully on "God so loved the world..." I learned shortly thereafter that Cameron along with several of his family was excommunicated. Ian Taylor was on this staff. He is a bit younger than me. He urged me to ask Evan Jones, when I saw him, if Ian and I could make an exchange of fields! He was urgent! Another young man in the ministry, Nigel Lock asked for a walk one night. Nigel seriously wanted to know when I thought the 2x2 ministry and fellowship would somehow change / improve! Nigel saw no possibility in the foreseeable future. I had wondered the same thing for some years!

Before I had gone to Australia I heard of an American couple who had toured the Berlin Wall! After the guided tour they asked the tour guide when he thought the wall would come down. His wildest guess was not before 50 years! The couple had hardly gotten out of Berlin when the wall went down! I told this story to my friend in the dark that Australian night. I tried to remind us both that when God decides to do something: It will be done – nothing can stop Him! It seems I have heard that Nigel may be completely out of the 2x2 system now.

In New South Wales one of the most poisonous snakes in the world found his way into the meeting. That King Brown was right under where I sat! That snake created no small stir! All the while in heavy Aussie accent someone called out, "Don't move! Just don't move!" An old gent gave the snake a deadly blow with his cane. The meeting carried on! There was an animal rights person in the crowd to whom apologies were later made. She replied, "No worries, I would have done the same thing."

There seemed to be an issue that was to be publically settled by an announcement from the platform. Gordon McNab had been overseer. They brought him from the rest home. With help Gordon managed to ascend and stand on the platform. He announced the law as to how this issue would be handled! Issue closed! The new overseer, Clyde Mackay seemed to feel he didn't have the necessary clout to make the declaration that needed to be made.

In New South Wales I got the slightest view of a platypus in the wild! It took some adjusting to see kangaroos as road kill. Most freight liners have roo bars protecting the front. As summer progressed the harvest flies became more and more aggressive. They only harassed in direct sunlight. It was here that I caught the wog, felt crook during which time the locals urged me to keep rugged up! "Wog", "crook" and "rugged up" is the Aussie's way of saying "flu", "felt badly", "kept covered up in bed".

My two weeks in New Zealand were closely monitored by Nathan McCarthy. I tried to abide by his rules, as I understood them – yet he was still suspicious! I met with Jim Chaffee in New Zealand. Jim invited me to come to Hong Kong for convention. That extension to my trip would include time in China. Jim and I called Gilbert for permission to which he replied, "Whatever you men decide!" Gilbert gave no indication that he was in any way in favor of such a trip. Nathan agreed to pay for that additional ticket!

A meeting in which I had spoken had ended. I was still on the stage, when a lady bolted out of the crowd, "Thanks for smiling on the stage," she exclaimed!

Nathan appeared to give a huge sigh of relief when he saw me finally on a flight out of New Zealand from Auckland! I carried on with King James and his English! The remainder of my time Downunder was in Evan's territory – Victoria and Tasmania. Evan kept me in "tow" most of that time - he was kind as well as rudely harsh! It became very obvious that the older men on that staff were radically discordant! (Evan had two consecutive very long convention tours in the eastern U.S.A. In my opinion Taylor Wood was giving Evan asylum from the strong feelings against him in his own territory!) John Robinson was getting a strong toe hold on the high seat there. Because of Evan's preaching style, there seemed to be an unspoken idea that preaching should be extraordinary in subject matter as well as in presentation! I noticed when Evan began to present his discourse, the local staff either looked out the window or began reading their mail or went to sleep – maybe eventually all three!

We were ready to move back to the mainland from Tasmania, when a woman came forward to say good bye as well as express her appreciation. Evan was out of hearing. Her concluding expressions were, "Tell Mr. Jones 'good bye' ...he's a good man... ..on the stage!" I did not venture to mention to Evan about the possibility of me having a change with Ian Taylor.

Having shared my observations, I must add that I met wonderful souls everywhere I went. Their appetite for something more inspired me. Their appreciation enabled me to lay aside my fear of being found out, then ultimately dumped far out into the Pacific – a location where I could neither claim Australia / New Zealand nor America as a safe haven. Many of these souls seemed to be looking for someone who could "save" the 2x2 system. I have never seen the possibility of the system being salvaged. Rather, I have the feeling it will go down with all the rest of Babylon, Revelation 18:2. During those years in North Dakota I felt encouraged because of the decrease of numbers in the 2x2 ministry. I felt being fewer they would have less control. I failed to see how their use of the cel phone and email would play a great part in maintaining control!

There was a day or two wait in Sydney, New South Wales during the second week of January 1999. On January 13 there was an 8 hour flight to Hong Kong. This boring flight became most interesting because I visited that 747 cockpit three times. The cockpit was ahead of engine noise – perfect silence! I was in the cockpit during landing. The landing was as eventful as driving up a driveway! The arrival was precisely during Hong Kong rush hour! The population there is so dense that everyone cannot be on the ground at the same time! During nights when I couldn't sleep, I noticed that the Hong Kong sounds during the night were the same as during the day – except for a mournful bird call during the day!

## **Hong Kong**

Jan Demmon, a lady in the 2x2 ministry met my flight. Jan led me to the train from which we detrained in the heart of the heart of Hong Kong at rush hour. People were everywhere! I have never walked through the bristles of a brush. That is the best way I can think describes the situation! I was in quite a panic as we walked along! At times Jan would get ahead of me, nearly out of sight! I asked Jan if I could take hold of her hand! "No!" People were so dense. I was fearful of getting separated from her!

Jan was from Oregon. On the train into Hong Kong, she approached the subject of marriage and divorce and remarriage. She must have detected that I was not happy to get into such a discussion right then. She said, "This is not an appropriate discussion, is it?" I agreed! The subject she approached was the decades old conflict between the east and west factions of the 2x2 system.

Jan was in Hong Kong as a sort of hostess to all of the comings and goings in that part of Asia. I think it was no more than a two-year arrangement for her. She seemed to enjoy all the activity.

## China

I had a couple of days in Hong Kong waiting for Peter Jackson, an Englishman. I had shared times with him in Australia / New Zealand. I would be traveling in China with him. Peter was noted for being obnoxiously bluntly outspoken, topped with a strong complex of being God's gift to every woman. His face matched that of a bull dog with a ruddy complexion! Before we moved into China we were advised to always expect the unexpected! This was good advice for the Chinese culture as well as for the culture of the 2x2 ministry in that huge and amazing and beautiful land!

I continue to be intrigued by China's culture, history, and natural history. Such DVD documentaries as *WILD CHINA* and *THE STORY OF CHINA* are beautiful and very informative. Having been informed regarding China: Always expect the unexpected! The Shen Yun performing group in North America has certainly been the unexpected! For any reader who wishes to expose themselves to almost two hours of unexpected elegance and precision and beauty and grace, and 5,000 year old culture, I suggest you Google to see what / when the possibilities are near you. Check them out on YouTube. This group comes to Kansas City each year with a different performance each year. The same company has teams performing throughout the year on nearly every continent.

I admit that I had a subtle apprehension about putting myself in a known communist environment. Because of that I saw to it that I was first to board the flight! I sat as far back in the cabin as possible – I wanted to see for sure what communists actually looked like! My apprehension subsided when I saw they were actually quite ordinary folks! Soon the flight ended at Shanghai, China. There I wanted to be the last off the flight – I wanted all the gun battles to be ended by the time I touched ground. It didn't take more than 30 minutes to forever be rid of any apprehensions! I grew to be amazed at how such a severe culture with its severe life style could produce such a gentle people! I asked many people how this could be so. No one could answer my question.

On this, my first trip into China, we went as far north as Harbin. Its sister city is Minneapolis, Minnesota USA where it can be very cold in January! We made our way south toward Hong Kong – stopping in major cities visiting who I came to know as "teachers". They were the 2x2 ministers. At one stop I was given the opportunity to have a "student" show me around. He was fluent in English. I discovered this young man had about three years of English lessons. He had no hint as to why the "teachers" were in the country! Fearing I might create an issue, I didn't clue him in.

This tour included a walk on the Great Wall of China, after staying in the American Embassy compound in Beijing! One of the American friends had a position with the embassy at the time. We connected with a male “teacher”, Richard Den Herder who conducted us back to Hong Kong exiting China at Shenzhen.

The Chinese New Year was approaching. During that national holiday all of China is on the move. This national activity made it possible for a few Chinese to be undetected as they came to Hong Kong for the convention. A facility owned by a group similar to Boy Scouts in America had been rented for housing, dining plus the meetings of the coming convention in Ping Shan, a Hong Kong suburb. About 75 gathered for the convention. The few “teachers” had gathered about a week prior to the convention.

One of those days there was a “teachers’ meeting”. The “teachers” had come from several parts of the world. Of course each one had been indoctrinated according to those various regions.

The “teachers” had batches in mainland China. Some of them were opposed to the idea of themselves breaking bread and drinking the cup together in a batch that had not been “sanctioned”! Others from different indoctrinations wanted to take the bread and drink the cup in that non-sanctioned batch - regardless. After a lengthy discussion, seemingly not accomplishing anything, Jim Chaffee, the overseer turned to me asking what I would do if I was in a situation as it was in the discussion. It was easy for me to say I could take it even in a pasture under a tree! (Since then I have looked further into Acts where I saw what the early church actually did “daily”, Acts 2:46.) I don’t think anything was resolved that day in Hong Kong.

Nothing about their conversation in their meeting pertained to how they could more effectively do their “work”. Their conversation was totally about how they could try to get along with each other with their various unique forms of legalism – groping for a unity that wasn’t to be found! There was nothing offered for edification! Most likely they continued to sing something about “God’s true way abides the same in every age and clime...”! This incident showed me how difficult it is to actually put a staff together with people from various parts of the world with many differing indoctrinations – all under the same heading!

Jim Chaffee was very perplexed by his position. He readily admitted this to me saying, he would happily meet the flight of anyone who would be sent to take over his job. He was overseer of China, Viet Nam and Mongolia.

The convention seemed a positive event. The rented public facility certainly was attractive to me after we had experienced a long plague of building and repairing two convention grounds to be used only 4 days a year – add to that, insurance and taxes! Most of those who attended were from Australia, New Zealand, England and the USA. There were a few from China and Hong Kong.

Soon after the convention a 2x2 worker, Dellas Linaman came from Taiwan. This older guy had the reputation of doing nothing under cover. None of the “teachers” wanted to accompany him on a little more than a 7-day trip deep into mainland China toward the west. They were fearful of what the authorities might do because of the way Dellas would conduct himself! I was appointed to go along with him! Other options were trips to Viet Nam or Mongolia.

I’ll not attempt to recall the names of the cities we visited. One “village” we visited had more than a million population! We found the native Dellas had hoped to locate. As a young man, this man had been

charged with a crime. He was sent to hard labor camps where he despaired of his life for many years. Suddenly, for no reason at all he was freed. As he had been severely treated so he became favorably treated. He was granted special benefits with many privileges. We had several days with him. As we were leaving he said in perfect English, "Steve come back to teach English. I will get you a job teaching English. You will be able to use the Bible as your text book." We made our way out of the mainland to Hong Kong. Dellas soon left for Taiwan.

## Return to America

I waited a few days for my return flight to North America. My birthday occurred during those few days. My hosts wanted to celebrate the event. They asked me what I wanted. I said, "Cherry pie." My hosts looked all over Hong Kong with no success at finding a cherry pie! We had to settle for a gourmet something that had only a few cherries in it. It was priced at nearly \$50.

By the time I left Hong Kong, I traveled the city a bit by myself using the public transit systems. At first it was most frightening, to say the least! My accomplishment was so amazing that it would have been a worthy entry into my baby book! On one trip by myself I bought a huge jack fruit. It was cut in half and wrapped in news paper at the market. I boarded the first bus. I had a seat by myself. The bus never moved for what seemed a very long time. Finally, the driver yelled out something in Mandarin! I had no idea what his message was. Still the bus never moved! Everyone looked at me! I was totally in the dark about what was going on! The driver kept watching me in his mirror! Suddenly we were on our way! I arrived home with my prized fruit. My hosts informed me it was illegal to have jack fruit on public transportation!

Years later I read *THE HEAVENLY MAN*. I found it to be a wonderful story of a spiritual man in China. It gave details of what he experienced because of his faith. His experience was totally different to that of the "teachers".

My return ticket took me to Kansas City. I had time with Mom. Gilbert told me to wait there until time to start specials in North Dakota. After that we went back to the field in Northwest North Dakota. All the while I was harboring the hope of returning to China, as my friend there had urged! Having the hope of any possibility felt quite good and inspiring. Folks everywhere wanted to hear about my trip!

I quickly started the process of getting the official "green light" from the right officials to return to China! Gilbert would not make a definite affirmative statement – saying I needed Taylor's answer! Taylor seemed powerless, as well – suggesting I really needed to get Paul Sharp's approval. While I was in China, I had learned Paul, who was in British Columbia, had the final voice in everything concerning Asia.

Clinging to a fictitious hope of going back to China, we went to Dagmar, Montana for that convention. There I witnessed Darla DenHerder's first steps out of the work, then out of the fellowship! But surely there's someplace on the planet where I could quietly do the work I had begun to love greatly! I could work with the doctrine of grace being the theme - even if it was a remote place far off in China! Shortly

before we went to Hunter for the preps, Paul Sharp wrote to me – he wrote several lines, actually saying nothing! I managed to interpret that there was no “green light” concerning me going to China!

Very soon we were into the convention season. Gilbert soon came to me saying, “Ron Thomke doesn’t have anybody to send to that southeast Kansas field. That’s where your mother is. I’m thinking of sending you down there!”

Prior to my foreign convention tour, through the remainder of my days under Gilbert there was almost daily evidence of him working others against me. Such treatment became more and more open. Gilbert used David Bergh against me. (David seemed to see this as a chance for promotion – he played into it well!) All the while Gilbert cleverly maintained innocence and ignorance of what he was promoting! Several times I caught Gilbert spying on me. This was nothing new! I left North Dakota from Mandan in October 1999. Gilbert was among the group waving me off. In that situation he tried to appear – at least friendly. I was unable to genuinely respond. I never saw Gilbert Richter again!

From the distant past echoes the kindly entreating counsel: “Overcome what you are while you are young, otherwise it will overcome you when you are old.”

## **Time with Mom and lifelong friends**

Going to that area in Kansas put me among many people whom I had known most of my life. It was great getting to visit often with Clarence and Dortha Turner. He had been our elder most of my home life – no great personality. He was a genuinely wonderful man.

Clarence told me of the time Robert Thompson came to him with some radical charges against him. Robert’s efforts were thwarted. (I recall the day when Robert with his posse, Anne Dixon and John Lambotte left from the Independence preps. It appeared very questionable.) Anne and John were strong supporters of Robert’s intentions to act against Clarence. Anne was the woman who had taken the “i” out of her life! Apparently, Anne had missed the “i” in “Dixon”!

Turners and I often had open discussions. Clarence told of the previous year having three older women of the 2x2 ministry in that area. Lois McKnight and Virgie Patten, the two oldest women formed a clique – excluding the third, Marybelle Armstrong who was younger, but not young. Clarence said the three of them had spent several days in their home. Finally, Clarence sat down with the three of them together. He told them they were to love one another!

There was an entire group in this area, which had come into the fellowship in the late ‘60s. About 20 years later they were told by William Peterson, the overseer, that they were the “ideal church”. That compliment fostered a dreadful spirit of self-righteousness and certainly exclusiveness!

Dale Leive had moved from central Kansas to Burlington, Kansas, which is east central Kansas. He had moved there in order to be near his oldest daughter. Dale had a long history in the 2x2 fellowship. He had spent a few years in the ministry until he married Hilda in the early ‘50s. She had passed away a few



years prior to my return to Kansas. We visited Dale often. Dale would often approach the subject of what he suffered under the cruel oversight of Robert Thompson. He implied that he knew of Robert's misbehaving with women. He never would give names. The pain of his dealings with Robert was something he took with him to his grave. Dale finished his life in an assisted living facility.

My first year back in Kansas I was assigned Charles Middlesworth. He was quite a dull older person. His diabetes may have caused his dullness. He never actually took care of his health. We started two meetings a week, with several informal Bible studies. At the start I could tell that many of the friends were actually tired of meetings! There was "outside" interest. Those of the fellowship responded to the efforts. Our efforts seemed to revive them a bit.

My insomnia indicated no let up – it actually worsened! My niece, Amy Olson and her family lived in Indiana. It was arranged for me to go there for specials. During the spring of 2000 I was with Ron Thomke on road trip together. He brought up the idea of me looking after preps at Marysville! I flatly refused every suggestion! Finally, I said, "Give that job to someone who needs / wants it!" All of my efforts failed. Ron was unrelenting. I was awarded that job!

During this year Mom moved into skilled long-term nursing care. I went with Charles to Effie, Louisiana for convention. I spoke in the first meeting. I mentioned some thoughts from the messages to the seven churches. Leslie White was there. After I had spoken Leslie moved among the crowd, telling them, "Steve Blubaugh doesn't know what he's talking about." He continued with his politics moving more among the affluent people. He told them, "If you were on my side, things would be better for you." His listeners reported these things to me!

My next assignment was Scott Pace. He was in his second year in the 2x2 ministry. We seemed to be growing in the same way. We invented the word "systemites". It was a good time with much the same activities. Having upwards 15 visitors at one Bible study weekly was a common occurrence. Clarence Turner later told me that the "ideal church" told others in the fellowship that we were going about it wrongly. People needed to come in the way they had, which was the usual protocol: attending gospel meetings, finally standing when the invitation was given.

## **Out-of-State Special Meetings**

I accompanied three other workers to Manitoba, Canada for specials. I had been there several times before while I was in North Dakota. Later I went with Scott to Missouri for specials. Kenneth Lerwick was overseer. We had frequently seen each other when we were young. His friendship meant a great deal to me. This was the first time we had connected since he had arisen to overseer. (I had seen him at Blackwater in 1998. He was busy those days and we hardly spoke.) He was fully controlled by Glenda Pickering who was on his staff. I found Ken to be a total blank! Most likely Gilbert Richter had influenced him against me. I was relieved to finally get away from Ken!

Turner's daughter-in-law, Lois Turner was in our area. Lois' cousin Allen Anderson is overseer in Mexico. Ron Thomke had come for a brief visit. We took him to meet Lois. She quickly told Ron that

she would like to have Allen come for special meetings. Ron seemed to panic a bit, saying, "A man of Allen's caliber, you would have to get Taylor Wood or Sam McCracken to make those plans!" (In retrospect: Ron, who proved to be very threatened, probably did not want the likes of this Allen around!) Ron proved himself to be famous for going to the field of someone else while that worker was absent, then speaking against that worker.

I had known a couple in our field that decades previously had "lost out". They warmly welcomed us when we visited them. He had been raised in a very conservative legalistic 2x2 situation. Long story short: We started a weekly study in their home. In that first study I said, "Let's forget all we think we know about serving God!" Those words were repeated often through months to come. I feel they were more for my benefit than anyone else!

This quote from Dan Mohler was recently shared with me: "I will not let my natural knowledge change truth that is eternal."

I took a typing class during my sophomore year in high school. That first lesson was memorable! All 18 of us students were seated at a typewriter. Charles Holloran, the teacher bolted into the room! He yelled, "Forget everything you think you know about typing!" He slammed the door as he left the room! Ray Petit and Shirley Dieker failed the course! They never learned the first lesson. I often used this experience to illustrate what Jesus said, "...whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple", Luke 14:33. For many years I applied that to others! There is so much from my past "learning" that I have to forsake!

## **Texas Convention**

That fall I was asked to go to a Texas convention. Some "Gilbert Richter Disciples" were present. I noticed they frantically took notes while I spoke! (In retrospect: They were reporting what I was saying to Ron and or Gilbert!) One such disciple was Jim Price. He is my sister-in-law, Joy's brother. Jim and I were the only two sleeping in a large "ward". We had known each other for many years. Jim found it very hard to acknowledge my presence.

Joyce Lawrence had been sent to Texas from North Dakota. Ira Hobbs was her overseer. They managed to sit across the table from each during every meal. They obviously passionately enjoyed each occasion to the fullest! Their actions further confirmed why I was thought to be "afraid" in North Dakota!

## **My last Year in Kansas**

I was unaware that the fall of 2001 was the beginning of my last year in Kansas! I was assigned Leslie Pountney. He was at least 13 years my senior. I had the lead position. My previous contact with Leslie

left me with the impression he had a passion for Christ plus a gift of reaching out to people. I found out I could not have been more radically wrong! Instead of a “passion” for Christ I discovered he merely had an “obsession”! In his fragile mental / emotional state he would completely draining me of my energy - never replacing it! I tried to plan three day weekends in order to escape him!

That fall at Marysville David Grainger and Wes Brown came to me. Both of these men are from prominent families. Wes was from Leslie’s previous field. Wes told me if Leslie returned to their field again, he would protest violently to Ron! Both men offered their support if I needed help with Leslie! (In retrospect: Leslie was the perfect fit for what I later learned he was used to do. It became obvious he spied on me!)

Even though the studies were well attended, Leslie persistently resisted the idea of Bible studies. He felt these people needed an opportunity to “profess”. He was very strong on the idea of this being the only ministry through which souls can have hope of knowing God and being saved! This notion impelled his obsession! After listening to this for too long, I replied, “That being the case you do a total injustice to every soul if you should ever sleep!” Leslie also used the method of cycling through his library of sermons. He recited his stuff about Revelation 13 most frequently!

## **My Brother Raymond’s Tragic Death**

Early in 2002 my brother Raymond ended his own life! The shock and grief were absolutely indescribable! His act was totally unexpected. We knew he was ill. That afternoon my siblings, most of whom had never been active in the 2x2 fellowship, were together. I was absent. Leslie invaded their mourning / consoling gathering. He proceeded telling them with great emotions of the many times he himself had thought of committing suicide!

George Peterson, Jim Price, Ron Thomke and LaRon Branson had gathered for the viewing followed by the funeral. At the viewing I asked those men to gather with me. I told them I needed help with Leslie. I told them what he had done with my siblings! Ron sprung into action! A short time later it became clear that in their minds I was the problem! David Grainger and Wes Brown who had seemed to offer support at Marysville convention were anxious to avoid me, negative and eventually unavailable! (In retrospect: It appears that the powers that were influenced them to renege.)

A short time after Raymond’s funeral I went to Mississippi / Alabama for a long weary trudge of special meetings. During those rounds Don Barber was with me nearly every day at the same places! In some of the homes, I posed questions such as why do we do certain things, etc. I was given a bit of time alone at the convention place. The Phillips were new on those grounds. They had taken on that project feeling it would offer wonderful opportunities. They told me in detail that they very soon saw otherwise. They eventually sold the property. Soon thereafter they left the fellowship.

During these months the insomnia became extreme – two hours of sleep per night was a good night!

It was time for 2002 preps at Marysville. (I found it difficult to “really be into it” because, in my opinion, the previous conventions had yielded nothing that justified the effort and expense to the host the event!) I had arrived a bit early with Leslie. For some odd reason I was in the shop when Ron Thomke arrived. The shop is in the middle of the yard! Ron parked his car. He quickly got out of the car. He made his way directly to me in no slow stride! Without any proper greeting Ron began railing on me in a full blown rage! I sat down on the anvil, letting him hammer me!

One of Ron’s acquisitions was something like, “Every time I hear you preach, it’s always grace....!” (During the special meetings that year I had spoken about the four women in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew. They were women who would have been shut out by law. They were included because of grace. Some of the friends who had listened to me called Ron. They expressed their appreciation for what I shared. Ron called me. He told me what the friends had said! Ron seemed supportive during that phone call!) All the while he yelled, “You can’t stay in Kansas! You have to leave!” He railed on me about my time in Mississippi / Alabama specials. He said something to the effect, “You spoke good things in the meeting, but out of the meetings...!” Somewhere during the “visit” I quietly asked Ron, “Is my ministry a threat to you?” He was unable to reply! For a moment it seemed as though I had hit him with a hammer! (In retrospect: All of his charges were founded on reports from Leslie, then Don from Mississippi / Alabama.)

Still in his rage, Ron brought up the subject of a phone call with Gilbert. He implied Gilbert was very angry! His anger was about me! He handed me a note with a number where Gilbert could be reached along with the time I was to call. I was to make the call early the next morning. Ron finally stopped. I was left alone trying to recover from the treatment on the anvil.

This was the start to the convention season that year! What do I do? How do I fortify myself to encounter Gilbert in murder mode?!

## **A Plea for Help**

In a frantic call for help, I reached out to Gaylen Van Loon. He was on a road trip returning from a summit with Taylor Wood. I made my plea for help. Gaylen assured me he would do all he could. (I assume he did, which was nothing.)

After supper that same day I phoned Barry Barkley. Barry had begun taking over Taylor’s seat. Barry took my call. I poured out my plea for help to him. All the while I spoke, it seemed all Barry did was breathe, finally saying, “I think it’s time for this conversation to be over.” There was no one on the convention grounds that I could share my load with!

Morning finally came! I made the dreaded call to Gilbert. He answered and spoke in his usual jovial voice making his usual abstract statements. Gilbert gave no indication that he had had time with Ron on the phone! In the process of that call he said, “When Steve Blubaugh went to southeast Kansas he felt sure his mother would die within three years. That has not happened. Now I feel we need to bring Steve Blubaugh back to North Dakota. We’ll drop him off in South Dakota. We need somebody there to bring

the word.” I asked him if this was agreed with by Taylor. He seemed taken back a bit. Finally, we hung up. After the Kansas conventions were finished I’d be headed to South Dakota!

As I went to breakfast that morning I met Ron, who blurted out, “No your ministry is not a threat to me!” Then, he asked about the call to Gilbert. He seemed shocked that I had nothing to report of Gilbert’s wrath! He asked specifically about that. This was the end of anything that even resembled a relationship between the two of us.

I had spoken with some of the friends who expressed their views of the “workers’ table”. Our thoughts were not for such an arrangement. During a meal I tried to sit elsewhere. When Ron saw me, he came to me telling me to get back to the workers’ table! Being seen with his staff seemed to boost his ego! One objection to setting at the workers’ table was the way the servers, Mr. and Mrs. David Grainger, obsessively flaunted themselves in their esteemed position.

Lowell Stidolph was a visitor at that convention. We had never met. I looked forward to getting a bit acquainted with him. I had heard positive things about him. He was a bit younger than me. One evening during the convention we met up in the yard. During our visit, I told him I had discovered the doctrine of grace. I told Lowell that it left me feeling that I had never been saved. That seemed too much for him! He fell silent then walked away!

George Gittins from Manitoba was at the next Kansas convention, Bird City. George asked a bit about my latest rounds in Manitoba. After he listened, he told me Alton Mose, the overseer there was telling that I was the cause for a young ex-Hutterite man leaving the 2x2 ministry in Manitoba!

Jacobus DeVilliers from Holland was at that same convention. He was originally from a little known country in Africa. He worked in Holland. On a morning walk I met up with Jacobus. We chatted a wee bit. Soon he exposed the burden of his heart! He spoke in detail of the confusion in the fellowship in Holland. He broke down weeping. On the platform he had a unique way of vividly speaking about the problems developing in the fellowship!

Independence, our last convention had ended. Gaylen Van Loon came from Minnesota, replacing me in the southeast Kansas field. (I knew nothing of this when I called him from Marysville.) Gaylen arrived before I left for the Perry, Oklahoma convention the following week. I felt it would be a good gesture showing Gaylen around. I introduced him to some of the people we had been working with. Scott Pace was assigned to Gaylen that year. I soon saw Gaylen had no evangelistic aspirations! With the passing of time, I learned he spend most of his time in the Yates Center area riding the Cummins' farm equipment. Scott left the work that year.

My new assignment, Dennis Hause from South Dakota met up with me. We went to Perry together. I was a very small boy the last time I had been at Perry. Jacobus DeVilliers was there, who had been at Bird City. Dale Spencer from North Dakota was a visitor also.

## **Self-Glorification**

Dale had worked some years in Texas. Apparently, before Dale arrived at Perry he had communicated with many of the people in Texas who had entered the fellowship through his efforts. Craig Winquist was there too. Craig had been with Dale during much of those “successful” times in Texas. During at least one of the convention meetings, Dale asked everyone in the crowd who professed through him to stand (He may have done this twice.) This was a glaring act of self-glorification. Dale labored under the excessive self-imposed burden of an abscessed ego. It never ever seemed worth his effort to crawl out from under it! Jacobus’ message had totally changed. I had the impression that somebody had instructed him to “stick with the program”, or go home!

Dale returned to North Dakota. Wilfred Goecke later told me that Gilbert Richter called a staff meeting. He asked Dale to inform the staff of my messages that were radically questionable - upsetting the crowd at Perry! (I was given positive viewpoints from several of the friends about my “questionable” messages.) I had spoken three times at Perry. Once I spoke about the “ouches” mentioned in Exodus 28 and Exodus 39. My thought was basically about: “My grip on the Savior is important, but His grip on me is all important.” I had gone through John with that thought. In another meeting I spoke about the “ignorant and out of the way” (Hebrews 5:2) disciples. I focused on a section of Matthew somewhere about chapter 20 and following. I don’t recall what my subject was the third time.

As Dennis and I headed toward South Dakota. We stopped to see Mom who was quite demented at that time. I was alone with her. In that visit I thanked her for everything she had done for me. I continued, “If it is too hard to stay, you can feel free to leave.” With that we moved north to South Dakota. My first memory of Mom had been when I was not quite four years old. I was sitting on a little wooden stool looking across at her in her sick bed. She was languishing with depression. I wondered what was going on!

At this point I was making major history! I was the only person in the known world who had worked as a 2x2 working in both Carolinas, then both Dakotas!

## **No Welcoming Feeling**

We made my historical move with an entry visit with Joe Hobbs, the overseer. From the very start into this historical process, there was an uncomfortable feeling about it all – there was no real “welcome” feeling, nothing reciprocated! Dennis and I began our activities in northeast South Dakota – suddenly we were busy again! Insomnia was quite dominant with me. With the wonderful support of Dennis, we carried on.

At one stage we were back with Joe. I took the opportunity to express my appreciation for Dennis. Joe went cold and brittle then said, “I don’t care! He has to be treated as a young worker!” For the benefit of my readers: Dennis Hause at that time was in his mid-50s, had served in the military, was converted to the fellowship, had married, had a son, was an educator, and was divorced. His son moved in with him when the son became of age. The well beloved son died in a car crash while driving in a blizzard in Montana. After all this, Dennis wanted a place in the 2x2 ministry! This was his third year in the 2x2

ministry. Dennis was the second of two men I was ever with who had experienced real life! He had to be treated as a “young worker” - whatever that kind of treatment is!

Very early in 2003 an artist friend from our NE South Dakota area was going to Kansas City for an art show. He invited me to go along. It was a 4-day trip. It would put me within an hour and half from Mom. I called Joe to let him know my plan. His question was: “What would this work be like if everyone did like you do?” This question came from a man who with his siblings, Ruth and Ira Hobbs took three month shifts being with their parents in Memphis, Tennessee. Their schedule which kept their parents out of the rest home continued several years. I accepted the invitation. This was the last time I saw Mom.

Joe was alone. His Parkinson’s Disease was becoming more evident. His efforts were about 100 miles south of where we were. Joe was about 100 miles from any support of the friends. Dennis and I thought we would be “brotherly” by going to support Joe.

Upon our arrival, the reception we met made me feel we were not wanted! The meeting was in a fair sized brightly lighted room with about 40 seats down. Maybe 8 seats were occupied by friends only. We young workers had our little parts first. Then, Joe began expounding. He had a dreadfully awkward way of speaking with an excessive use of words to make a simple statement. It was difficult for him to say something as simple as, “Go to the corner. Turn right. Go to the first house on the left.” Through his manner of speaking, it might be totally impossible to get that simple instruction out of what he would likely express. That day he managed to be quite clear and simple. He told us the empty seats were proof we are right. Referring to the community, he said nobody wants to listen to us! I didn’t either! I quickly abandoned my “brotherly” tendencies. I never again suggested we do such a ridiculous thing!

I went with Dennis to Minnesota for specials. This was my third time for these rounds; on the same route each time. The weariness of it all was most memorable!

We were with the group of their workers’ meeting in Minneapolis. Robert Eberhardt was present. It was very evident that he was being groomed for a high seat. He enjoyed every stroke of the grooming. After the meeting I connected with Julie Lynn Eckel and Pam Erickson. Both had had time in North Carolina. They were well aware of the goings on under Taylor Wood and Annie Stone. Julie assured me that never again would she sweep anything under the rug – there was no more room under the rug!

I called my relatives often. Mom was declining. I wanted to be in that loop.

Lyle Schober, the overseer and Craig Winqvist were part of the staff at Duluth. I noticed Craig nearly clung to Lyle, avoiding me. Lyle who seemed to be a kindly sort of man, took me for a walk. During that walk Lyle told me he had a new revelation about grace! He continued by telling me, “Grace only affects us after we die.” His statement left me speechless. I found no common denominator! (In retrospect: I feel Gilbert had told him to tell me that. He complied!)

There was a couple in the Duluth area that had several children still at home. I was alone in their home overnight. Ben Tenniswood had been in their area. They had become quite taken in by Ben. They were supportive of him. (Ben seemed clever at focusing on a few people, who became his personal fans.) Ben was in California after he left the work. This couple bought tickets to spend a week with Ben. They

hoped to encourage him. It becoming very clear very soon that Ben's main problem was he claimed his salvation on being a Tenniswood! My hosts regretted that their return ticket was a week later!

## **Mom Passes Away**

On Monday after the Duluth meetings I learned Mom had passed away at age 97. I began the drive to east central Kansas. It took a day and half of steady driving. Some of my siblings didn't want a funeral; others needed some kind of closure. We compromised with a family event including the few local friends. I was asked to say something. My thoughts were: The "mother figure" in the scriptures is very like grace – she conceived us, she bore us, she gave us birth, she nurtured us, she cared for us, she taught us – all of this when we could not have done it for ourselves – all 10 of us! Without her we could not be! Very quickly I returned to South Dakota where Dennis was.

## **Final Plea for Help**

I felt I must do something because of my health – but what!? where!? when!? I had not mentioned my thoughts to anyone. I recalled the offer of my life-long friend, Alan Churchill. We had grown up near each other, seeing each other frequently at meetings and of course conventions. Alan had moved his young family to Guelph, Ontario; I think in the '80s. At one stage, Alan told me if I ever needed a place to "go", I could come to their house. I certainly had no idea that such a time would come for me, but it had! I spoke to Alan regarding his offer. We made no definite plans.

Very soon after joining Dennis there was a project at the Utica, South Dakota convention grounds – enlarging the meeting shed. A new convert who was a young contractor, was asked to come to direct the project. The project was close to completion when he said to me, "Where do we put the stained glass windows!"

Insomnia plagued me despite all my efforts. I had done hypnotherapy which didn't seem to help much, at least at the time. One morning I connected alone with Joe, asking him if there could be some money for further doctoring for my sleeping problems. Without hesitation or excessive words, speaking very clearly, Joe told me, "Before a farmer makes an investment he figures to see if he will get any return from his investment. I don't think I will be getting any return for my investment – so, 'no'"! (In retrospect: His reply indicated that he knew – one way or another – the axe was coming for me!)

Within a few days, Dennis and I went to Cody, Wyoming for convention. That is close to Yellowstone. I lucked out by being given a room all to myself – sleep hardly came day or night. Ian Taylor, whom I had met in New South Wales was there. When I met Ian, he was urgent to have a change with me. Now, Ian found it hard to speak to me. He seemed to have gotten an advancement that suited him better than an exchange with me!



After the Cody convention I made one last effort to get some money for my health care. I called Roger Meyers. I reported my situation and my needs! He assured me that if the decision was completely his, there would be no problem. Without Gilbert's permission, would I be ready for the Richter wrath! (He implied it would be high on the Richter Scale!) "No."

I called Alan Churchill again. Plans were made for me to go to Guelph, Ontario! Before I left the field I wrote a form letter to each of the elders – except one - that I had worked among in the Dakotas and Kansas telling them what I was doing including my reason. I said nothing about being denied financial help for my health. There was one response to my letter. (In 2007 I visited one of those men, Eric Butcher who asked me why I sent out that letter. I told him, "To get ahead of the fabricator!" I wanted to present my own details without Gilbert doing it. I felt sure he would slant details in favor of his own agenda! Eric understood my reason for writing the letter. He continued telling me he had seen the rift that came when I was invited to Australia / New Zealand before Gilbert had gotten the same invitation!)

## **A Far-reaching Warning Against me**

In May 2018 I learned Gilbert had issued a far reaching warning against me! Travis Bergh told me about having heard this warning. Travis reached out to me personally in 2017. I asked Travis to give me the details of the meeting in which the group were warned against me. Please, read Travis' details – it follows verbatim:

"I would like to begin with a little back story. Around Hunter, North Dakota time, late September 2017, one of the Elders in the fellowship asked some questions about why Steve Blubaugh was not allowed to come back to meeting. I had already realized in my heart that I could not stay in the fellowship much longer myself, so it sparked a curiosity in me and decided to see if I could get in touch with Steve.

"I was not on Facebook at that time, and did not want to try something that could be observed by others, I just Googled his name. What I found was a blog post by Darla DenHerder, that Steve had commented on. Darla's blog is "Opening My Heart". Well, I got distracted by the freshness and openness of Darla's blog, so I got sidetracked and spent the next several months reading and commenting on Darla's blog. Every thought she shared fell perfectly in line with what God had been laying on my own heart about how much we needed to grow in His Grace and Love. We developed a friendship and started emailing back and forth, and at some point early this spring [2018], Steve commented on one of her blog posts again. I discussed it with her, she mentioned that she would be willing to share Steve's e-mail with me.

"I want to make very clear, that I did not contact Steve until after I had left the fellowship in mid-February of 2018. It was more like May that I first called him and sparked up a friendship that has been deeply rewarding to the both of us. In our first conversation, Steve shared the details of his long and somewhat painful journey in the work. As he shared the details of how he was dealt with during his most difficult moments, I could not help but recall this one event that I was quite certain he had never heard about.

“To those who would say, I am just dredging up the past to sow more strife, I would ask, why has the past never been dealt with? The Truth is supposed to set you free. Why are prominent members of the fellowship still in complete and utter darkness, despite asking on several occasions, what the problem was? What are you hiding?”

“I wish to recall these events as best I can remember them. I did not realize the significance of what I observed at the time and never expected to revisit this event, so I did not take any special effort to remember exactly what was said, the exact date, and who was in attendance. Forgive me if I don’t have every detail down, but I will say that I can with certainty say that David Bergh was the workers who delivered the message.

“In a Sunday morning meeting in the Parshall / Garrison area of North Dakota, around about 2003 to 2005. I wish I could be more accurate on the date, but I made countless trips and attended countless meetings in that area over the years from 2003 to 2009.

“David took part last in the meeting and I will say that it was a very awkward moment for me. He began by referencing a scripture where someone was tasked with the delivering a difficult message. I have resisted the urge to Google the subject, because I don’t remember the text at all and I don’t believe it to be that relevant anyway. He then reflected on how this disciple must have felt, because he felt the same heaviness in having to deliver a message of warning to the church. The message, which he specifically said was sent from Gilbert (the last name was implied, we all knew Gilbert Rictor was the overseer), was that a former worker who had spent time in this area in the past, had departed the fellowship and was seeking to influence those still in the fellowship. They just wanted to warn everyone that this was a concern.

“The humility with which the message was delivered could not be refused. I very much felt David’s sincerity in delivering the message. I would like to hear now what his thoughts were, then and now, on the subject. I don’t feel it would be a welcomed question, so I have avoided asking about it. Perhaps he can respond to this letter if he ever reads it.

“Just to be clear, he never named a name, but I have no doubt that the timing (we had all heard rumblings about Steve, in hushed tones) can only point to one man being targeted by this warning: Steve Blubaugh.

“I am certain that I have the main point of the case 100% correct. I wish to defame no one in sharing this message, and share it only to bring these facts into the light. The truth shall set us free, and need never be protected or hidden, especially with a life.”

The following is a bit more from Travis Bergh as he recalled / thought more on the task I had given him. Please, continue to read remarks from Travis:

“As I reread what I wrote, I am struck by this thought. ‘David has carried this burden with him for almost 15 years.’ I think about secrets that I have been tasked with keeping. It is a burden every time someone asks a question that that they know the answer to, but cannot share. You are always on your guard when certain subjects come up, because the smallest of slips can be damaging.

“Why do they not commit to dealing only in the truth and unburden all who are involved with any deception? When has hiding something that everyone knows about ever helped to contain a situation?”

This deception in which they so willingly deal, should be all the proof that any would need that they need to change the name of their fellowship. Not necessarily to 'The Lie', although I think it is close, 'What We are Willing to Share', would be more accurate."

## What does the Future Hold?

The date set for my departure from the field was in June 2003. Dennis took me to Minneapolis, Minnesota. From there I made my way into whatever the future was to be! I had no clue as to what was ahead! En route to Ontario and for months thereafter, I was very aware of the Lord Jesus embracing me – drawing me near to His heart. This was profound to me, unchanging too! I had never known of this experience so profoundly at any time in my history! I became aware that it was His embrace that was protecting me from bitter and self-pity and revenge! In His continued faithfulness He has blocked from my mind many things that, if I had entertained them, would have destroyed me.

Some decades previously, I had started in the 2x2 ministry with Exodus 33:15 as my own prayer and expectation! "And he [Moses] said unto Him, if Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence." It had been realized! Now, in a totally new direction He has been nothing but faithful - still!

Going to Alan and Eileen Churchill's put me within a nice bike's ride from Raymond and Gretchen Reid's home. I spent the summer of 2003 between those two homes. There was plenty of physical work. Even that did not induce sleep! Somehow, through the decades with insomnia, my mind did not race when I was unable to sleep at night! Very quickly after my arrival I realized how numb and shut down my entire being had become due to sleep privation. I realized my physical life was very near its closure! The summer climate in Ontario was a perfect fit.

It was wonderful renewing acquaintance with Alan and Eileen, and making acquaintance with Raymond and Gretchen Reid. During these months *THE GATE SELDOM FOUND* was under construction.

One morning I sat on the edge of my bed. I was trying to read my Bible when a definite message came, "Close the Book and put on your work clothes." I did that. I am waiting for the full meaning of the message to become clear. On infrequent occasions I looked up single verses or short passages, nothing more. It wasn't until mid-2016 that I studied in depth again. It was then, for the first time, that the Gospel of John became meaningful to me.

Being as far north as southern Ontario, the summer days grew noticeably shorter noticeably quickly. I did not intend spending the winter that far north. Where do I go from here? I began thinking of a couple, Clarence and Carol Foos. I had only been to their ranch once in southwest South Dakota – I really did not know them. I had the idea, "Maybe there is something that I could keep myself busy with on their ranch. How do I approach them with my idea?" Carol had been born and reared in North Dakota. I knew her sister and husband very well, Dean and Lois Bergh. I called Lois trying to explain my thoughts to her. She quickly urged to me call Fooses. I did. I told Carol a bit about myself. Without hesitation she replied, "If there is anything we can do, we want to do it!" That phone call made me feel accepted and welcomed. That was major at that point in my journey!

## **A New Normal**

I went state side to Minneapolis. I spent a few days there. The day after Thanksgiving 2003 I was heartily received at Battle Creek Ranch in South Dakota – no questions asked! There had been a Thanksgiving celebration at the ranch. Berghs were still there. I become emotional now as I think of what that welcome meant to me! I have tried to imagine what everyone there thought when I appeared looking much like a cadaver! The holiday guests soon left. Life settled into a new normal for me on Battle Creek Ranch.

The ranch house, which is near Hermosa, is nicely nestled in a valley having out buildings surrounding it. From one of the ridges above the house at night the glow of lights illuminating Mount Rushmore is visible to the west. From the same point looking east during the day it is possible to get a glimpse of the Badlands.

For months, for anyone to ask me questions had to be out of the picture! I was totally unable to understand myself nor could I explain myself to anyone. It was too much to be asked what I would like for the next meal! Fooses were very considerate! (In retrospect: With a different understanding now of “Where there is no vision, the people perish...”, Proverbs 29:18.)

## **The Lord’s Embrace**

For a dreadful time, I had no vision, no dream! I had no horizon – not even distant China! Looking back, I see that without vision I was about to perish - physically! (All through this experience I was aware of the Lord’s wonderful embrace!) The Lord began changing that – I continue to retain those visions to this day!

The privilege of caring for a pen quite full of feeder calves became great therapy for me. When they discovered I was their care giver, those critters were quite vocal about my arrival morning and evening – never any questions! They had poor manners and began devouring what I brought without saying “Thank you” – their responses told me that! There were three big dogs who added a great deal to life on the ranch. They were Barney and Bailey (named after the famous circus) and Ben! The four of us became close friends as I brainlessly wandered those hills for hours day after day. I didn’t need to ask these guys to come along. They asked no questions. They were clever at occasionally locating me, needing some kind of attention. These four-legged friends plus Clarence and Carol provided what eventually helped bring life back into me. Sleep was still nearly nil! There was a fellowship meeting in the ranch house each Sunday except the first Sunday of the month.

During those many days and many miles of wandering those unique hills, I kept questioning myself, “What is going on? What is God doing in all this?” I was in a strange place in life. Things were going

on within my innermost being that I had never experienced before. The entire process was and still is unexplainable! Finally, I was able to explain it to myself in these words – “God is changing my spiritual DNA!” I was afraid to share that thought except with very few people. In 2015 I listened to a man teach concerning God giving us His DNA! I had figured that expression was my very own personal definition; my own copyright! At last, I realized there are others on this planet that are in some way similar to me – what relief!

In addition to the DNA change, something else was occurring! Without being able to explain it, I think of it as a great deal of toxicity being cleared from my being – possibly at the cell level! As I continue with this writing there is more toxicity being broken loose then dredged up!

Lyle Schober was in South Dakota for special meetings. He visited Battle Creek Ranch at meal time. I offered to give Lyle a haircut that afternoon. For months I had thought of those early disciples in John 1. I noticed that Jesus dealt with each of them right where they were – He did not try to unsave any of them. While I had Lyle as a captive audience, I asked Him how we would have dealt with those same men. Would we need to unsave them before we could actually help them. Lyle offered no answer.

## **Do Angels Really Exist?**

After many weeks at Battle Creek I went with Clarence and Carol to Rapid City. I was a total stranger in Rapid. I drifted the streets downtown going from shop to shop. I did a massive amount of window shopping!

In one shop I leaned on a display case, looking down into it. Suddenly a scruffy man who might have been in his mid-40s stepped beside me in the same position – shoulder to shoulder! Without introduction, this guy began telling me we are exiting the Piscean Age. He continued to explain, the Piscean Age was a 2,000 year period also known as the Church Age. It had been a time when people were content to be preached at - told what to believe and what to do. He continued to explain that we are now moving into the Aquarian Age. In his words the Aquarian Age was the “Golden Age of the Holy Spirit”. It would be a time when people would more and more pursue a personal relationship with God. They would desire instructions for themselves only personally directly from God Himself.

This untidy gent disappeared as quickly as he appeared. I had no idea where he came from or where he went. I had not seen him before nor have I since! All of what he told me was a totally new concept. It was a bit off the wall – should I accept it or not? Keeping in mind what he told me, through the years I have observed as well as listened with his ideas in mind. I discovered more and more that people’s experience is as he had told me – including my own! I have shared this encounter with only a few people. Several of my listeners have remarked that this scruffy guy was indeed an angel! I cannot agree nor disagree with their thought!

## **My Prayer Without Ceasing**

During these times I began praying to God, “If there is to be a change in my life, bring it about with ease and with grace!” This was my prayer during the following months – in my heart continuously day and night. This was the only way I could even come close to expressing myself to God! (In a recent broadcast, Alistair Begg told us sometimes we are so far down that all we can do is faintly cry, “Father!”)

The Hermosa, South Dakota convention farm is 10 miles across the hills as a magpie would fly from the ranch – by road it might be more than twice that. During preps in 2004 I went and stayed at preps now and again. During a work day I was able to spend time with Jeff and Lori Slatar. They both have a generational 2x2 history, Jeff in Minnesota. He had some years in the work, then became Lori’s second husband.

One day Lois Bergh called telling me that Gilbert was headed to Hermosa preps. He would be unannounced (at least to me)! I managed to arrange being back at Battle Creek Ranch when he arrived. The next time I was at preps no one mentioned anything about Gilbert having been there. He quickly moved on to a Colorado convention. I attended two days of the Hermosa, South Dakota convention. Charles Thain was among the visitors. He spent one entire meeting carrying on about the Tribe of Ephraim. He gave lots of details. I have no idea if they were correct. The impressive part of his speech was that he mentioned God or Jesus less than 10 times total – I actually counted!

During those two days at convention I connected with David and Elaine Musgrove. They lived about 100 miles north. I had known Elaine in Kansas since her childhood. Musgroves were planning to build a new house. They asked if I would like to help – offering a place to live with food. I left the ranch and moved into their lower level bedroom! I actually felt strange doing it. I had been there for several weeks. One day Musgroves were in Rapid City getting supplies. The phone rang several times before I picked it up. The call was actually for me. It was a contact whom I had never met. The subject went to “angels”. It very interesting.

Unknown to me, the answer machine was on! It recorded the entire conversation. When my “hosts” came home I was already in my bedroom for the night. They listened to my phone call then catapulted into eviction mode! First thing in the morning they told me that because of the phone visit they insisted that I be out of their house by the time they came home that night! As they departed they told me they had no idea why they ever even asked me to come – it was so not like them to invite anyone into their home! They managed to thank me for my work on their project.

## **Grateful for Dear Friends**

That same day Battle Creek Ranch was a welcomed sight as always. There was no conflict there. I told Fooses details of what had happened. It became evident that my phone visit had spread among the people who “needed to know”. Suddenly such chatter hushed! I supposed someone managed to reason correctly enough, figuring that my rights as an American citizen had been violated!

Time moved on. It must have been mid-July 2004. Battle Creek Ranch had been enlarged by the acquisition of adjacent land. I helped Clarence take down miles of old fences. Taking away old boundaries proved to be even more therapy for me. More of God's spiritual DNA change was in process in me!

From Battle Creek Ranch I visited Joyce Naber about 10 years after she had left North Dakota. Leslie White was her overseer in Colorado. We had always respected each other, maintaining a positive relationship. All the while during our visit, Joyce acted as though there was something she wanted to tell me. She was simply unable to express it! We had said our good-byes. Joyce made her way to the car. I stayed on the door step seeing her off. Suddenly, Joyce turned. Coming back to me she said, "As bad as we are, we are the best the Lord has!" That seemed to be what she had difficulty putting into words! I felt for her feeling she was in such a hopeless despairing situation with no apparent way out.

Sometime in August the South Dakota workers would have gathered at Utica, South Dakota for preps. During a week in early September Joe Hobbs had mailed the 2004-2005 South Dakota workers' list to Fooses. I assume he did this statewide. Carol had opened it. She had seen what the contents were without reading it closely. The next Sunday morning, before the fellowship meeting started, Carol handed each of us a list.

## **The Answer to My Prayer**

As all workers do in a situation like that – I looked for my name first! I found it nowhere on that list! Then, I reread it! My name was not listed! I went momentarily into panic overdrive! Then, the message clearly came, "Steve, this the answer to your prayer!" – "If there is to be a change in my life, bring it about with ease and grace." A quietness overwhelmed me! God had done for me what I could never have done for myself! We carried on with the meeting. After everyone had gone I pointed out to Fooses what was not included on that list! They knew too that I had never been consulted in any way prior to the printing of that list!

## **I Am Free! My Departure from 2x2's**

I had been given an invitation abroad. Suddenly, I was free to make my own decision. I began planning to that end. Before 2004 ended I went abroad.

My purpose in this writing is to make known what lead up to my departure from the 2x2 ministry and fellowship. My departure actually came to pass prior to my going abroad. I do not find it necessary to include any of those details. Nothing in my months away had any influence on that move.

I was about to return to the USA. I received an email from Joe Hobbs. Joe ordered me to have no contact with any of the friends in South Dakota without his permission. (I figured that his ruling applied throughout. Previously, I was aware that such a decision one state was honored in others! I figure my assumption is fairly accurate based on the fact that I am aware of workers attempting to visit me only twice. Their visit was aborted because our schedules conflicted. October 2017 LeRoy Sandford, my former assignment, now overseer, was asked by the Berghs to visit me. He replied something to the effect that he'd need to get permission from someone who would need to give him the go-ahead! My sister, Norma who will soon be 90, asked LeRoy for the conference call number of the Kansas convention in September 2018. LeRoy reluctantly provided her with the numbers only with her promise to not give that information to me! Norma continues in the 2x2 fellowship pretty much in her own way. She told me she would given them to me anyway!) Joe's act finalized my departure from the 2x2 fellowship. (Since that day I have attended only a few meetings.)

## **Karma**

I returned to Battle Creek Ranch. Fooses were not a little upset by what Joe had imposed on me. "What authority does he have to say who we can have in our home," they reasoned!

Several years later, Joe was at Foos' table. Clarence asked Joe straightforwardly, "What are the charges against Steve?" Joe answered, "Steve preached grace but not truth!" Fooses told me later they were taken back and dumbfounded – they were speechless! After Joe had gone, Fooses thought of what Joe had answered. They felt they should have ordered him off their property!

I had been abroad for more than six months. I had been out of touch with the few people who remained in contact with me. I was quite "out of the loop". I had heard of Gilbert Richter's death while I was away. I knew none of those details!

I called Dean and Lois Bergh for details. December of 2004 they had been to a funeral that Gilbert conducted. After the service Gilbert told Berghs that he would like to come to their house that evening. He was to interview John Simons at their house regarding John's offer to go into the 2x2 ministry. It was Saturday evening. He told them not to worry about anything for him to eat.

Gilbert showed up in time for the evening meal despite what he had told them – as was his frequent pattern. Gilbert started his usual pacing. (Lois did not describe this scene to me. I was very familiar with Gilbert's pacing mode including jerking his buttocks and clearing his throat!) Then he said, "What do you hear about Steve?" He knew I was at Battle Creek Ranch where Lois' sister Carol Foos lives.

Berghs began explaining that people were falsely accusing me. They told of the Musgroves listening to my recorded call, then misinterpreting what they had heard. Gilbert told Berghs that I was the reason Jeff and Lori Slatar had left the fellowship. (Jeff told me later that he left the work partly because he could get no one to answer his questions sensibly. Lori's was reared in North Dakota in the fellowship and is Lois Bergh and Carol Foos' cousin.) Lois had ask Clarence Foos about this. He assured her that I was not the cause of them leaving the fellowship. Clarence had asked Jeff that question personally.



Berghs told Gilbert about the workers' list being handed out that Sunday on the ranch. They told him my name was not listed. Gilbert said, "I had something to do with that." John Simons had not arrived at Berghs yet. Dean plead with Gilbert, "I implore you to do whatever is necessary to make this right with Steve!" Gilbert gave him assurance that he was doing that! John arrived and nothing more was mentioned about the issue of discussion.

Both Gilbert and John spent the night with Berghs. Union meeting was at Berghs the next morning. Early the next morning Gilbert came asking for something for his stomach. He wasn't well. He went into the meeting, but left the room immediately when it was over. After the group had left, Gilbert told Berghs he would eat nothing for lunch. John stayed for the meal.

Gilbert asked for vinegar, hoping to settle his stomach. Berghs tried to provide him with what he thought would help – yet he vomited violently. Gilbert managed to take a nap. He appeared again about 2:30 P.M. Gilbert was very ill. Lois called their daughter, Mary Kadry who is a physician's assistant. Mary said the only thing to do was for Gilbert to go to the Emergency Room. John took Gilbert to the ER. (John's interview never did take place.) The ER doctor wanted to enter Gilbert into the hospital because he felt Gilbert needed to be followed with more examination. Gilbert refused. Berghs took him to their house for another night.

As Gilbert left the next day, Dean plead, "I implore you to make things right with Steve." Again, he assured them everything was being done that could be done. That was their last conversation with Gilbert.

The next week he went to a doctor in Grand Forks, North Dakota. March 4, 2005 he was diagnosed with Burkitt's Syndrome. That is a rapid growing form of cancer that usually only attacks children. Gilbert's body refused treatment. He died May 29, 2005 and was buried June 4 at Lakota, North Dakota.

During the months of Gilbert's decline and eventually death, David Bergh was appointed the interim overseer. Barry Barkley needed someone to communicate with concerning North Dakota matters during these times. At last, Barry sent word that Jim Price would move into the overseer position in North Dakota. This entire process would have been quite an advancement for David with future potentials. This would look good in his political resume!

## **The Liberating Power of God**

This brings me to an incredible, but humbling part of my testimony – another part for which I claim no credit! I had prayed to God, "If there is to be a change in my life, bring it about with ease and with grace!" God used a man to bring about that change. A mere man, Gilbert Richter took credit for what God Himself alone had done! God never shares His glory with another, "I am the Lord: this is My name: and My glory will I not give to another, neither My praise to graven images," Isaiah 42:8! God alone removed that glory seeking man. Vengeance belongs only to God. I have known the liberating power of God!

I read some "gems" from the sermons at Gilbert's funeral. Richard Harbour's parents came into the 2x2 fellowship through Gilbert's efforts in New Mexico. Richard spoke of Elijah's mantle. Of course he was

ready to take up the mantle that was sure to fall! Dale Spencer spoke of burying his best friend. Berghs said Dale became quite emotional. Jim Price spoke. Ron Thomke spoke that Gilbert had a unique way of communicating!

## In Conclusion

Previously I mentioned the Lord's embrace and the comfort of such an experience. In conclusion I will give a few other sources of strength. Included are some observations, as well.

Because of the words of Jesus, it became very clear to me: if the kingdom I am a part of was only of this world, I would be forced to fight. "Jesus answered, My Kingdom is not of this world: If My Kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should be delivered from the Jews: but now is My Kingdom not from hence," John 18:36. If I would fight, my only weapon would be my own "fist of wickedness", Isaiah 58:4. Having prayed as I did, I have been restrained from questioning what the Lord has brought about in my life.

God permitting, I welcome the day when I can face-to-face thank those who violently opposed, questioned and misunderstood what God was doing in my life. God used them to assure me that He is so much more / greater than the god of the 2x2s! My heart's desire and prayer to God for the 2x2s is that they might be saved! My hope is that nothing that you have read here has caused you in any way to have negative feelings toward anyone I have mentioned.

Genesis 41:50-52, "And unto Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came...Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, hath made me to forget all my toil, and all my father's house. And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction." I understand that Manasseh (whose name means "God hath made me to forget") must be before Ephraim (whose name means "God hath caused me to be fruitful") can be embraced! These names are evidences of the amazing grace of God! Joseph's experience has been most meaningful to me.

Herb Smith's description of the United Nations continues with me: That organization having power over all nations, manipulating even the most powerful nations to act in questionable or inhumane ways! I have transferred this description / definition to the 2x2 system with its dogma: It too is a world power obviously without a territory. It has the ability to control and manipulate the lives of any who will subscribe to it! What that world power promotes is in stark violation of Him who would not break a bruised reed nor quench a smoking flax. That deceptive world power opposes Him who is meek and gentle, inviting us to learn of Him – all the while feeling its deception is indeed the only truth!

Outstanding evidence of this dogma's manipulation is that the 2x2 ministry and fellowship can only love its own! Michael Singleton is a classic example of this. Michael, one of the friends, is a professional. I am convinced he treats each of his clients with the highest level of professionalism, cheerfulness, friendliness along with every other attribute that draws his clients to trust him, seeking his services. After God brought about His change for me, Michael had no way to relate to me – nothing more than a painfully cold meaningless greeting without eye contact! Such is a world power dogma that will not free its victims to go beyond it, all the while the victim feels right in doing so! It is dreadful deception when darkness masquerades itself as light – bondage as liberty – death as life! Being able to understand such an issue is a major step in being liberated from it!

I found something both quite alarming as well as assuring in John's gospel. Going throughout that gospel record I noticed the phrase "cast out", John 6:37, "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out."; John 9:34-35, "They answered and said unto him [the blind man], thou wast all together born in sin, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said unto him, Dost thou believe in the Son of God." To "cast out" is another way of saying "to excommunicate".

Jesus said to His disciples, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if you have love one for another," John 13:35. Regarding excommunication, it could have been said, "By this shall all men know you are Pharisees!" This was practiced only by Pharisees then, now by only modern day Pharisees. This is yet another way that world power manipulates its subscribers.

3 John 1:10, "Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his [Diotrephes'] deeds which he doeth prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church." That dreadful deceptive power had gotten among the first century church! Any system having such practices proves exactly what it is – always known by its fruits! Pharisees in every age have always been unable to tolerate the unbridled liberty of the recipient of the amazing grace of God! To all of these Pharisees, the doctrine of grace is false doctrine!

Another glaring identification of the Pharisee is Mark 12:13, "And they sent unto Him certain of the Pharisees and Herodians, to catch Him in His words" – catching Jesus in His word! He proclaimed grace while they were hung up on legalism! The two cannot mix! The Pharisee has to judge then condemn everything by what is legal. A modern day Pharisee identifies himself with such activity! "Catching someone in their word" is quite closely associated with "not being able to endure sound doctrine", 2 Timothy 4:3. Any group that rejects the grace of God does not know God. The group that rejects the grace of God has only false doctrine to proclaim!

John 9 gives another characteristic of Pharisees: They cannot accept or admit to supernatural activity. "If we can't perform it, it can't be done!" It was the changing of water to wine that helped those early disciples not Pharisees to believe.

## **Why Did I Stay so Long? God's Perfect Timing**

Most likely many of my readers are wondering why I stayed where I did for so long. That is a legitimate question. I have wondered it myself!

This is my answer to myself – accept it if you can! A part of my existence required that I be in my mother's womb. There I was provided what I needed, for a time. The time came when I needed to be birthed or consequences would have been tragic! So, it is with where I was all of those years. Never once have I wanted to go back to my mother's womb. I have never cursed that womb. So it is concerning where I was in the 2x2 system - all the while being assured the Lord had placed me there! Paul spoke of being separated from his mother's womb. God's timing was significant in his future spiritual development.

## Jesus' Own Peace

I am indeed grateful to be able to report that currently a six hour sleep is not uncommon – insomnia can be overcome! In my most recent study of John, I discovered John 14:27 for the first time, “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you...” At time I have felt a bit guilty for not being plagued with worry over my situation or my future. God has given me the full reason in this verse. In my own history I have been given lots of stuff. As a child I had been given hand-me-downs – stuff somebody else had out grown! I have had people, lots of them, try to impose on me their fears, pride, ideas – you name it! Never before have I been so aware of Jesus giving me His very own peace! This gift more than amazes me! I am ready to testify His peace is the wonderful promoter of my sleep!

I must tell of two men in the 2x2 ministry. They were (still are) in two different states during my time in North Dakota. (I question if these two men knew each other.) We had frequent separate phone visits – sometimes weekly! That communication was valuable to me. Both men had rough patches in their experiences that perplexed them. They knew about mine! God brought about my change. These two men pulled away from me, as did many others.

It may have been about five later that these two men approached me again. Each one cautiously contacted me by phone separately. About six months later they both called again. Finally, these wonderful men were able to tell me that if “their big boys” knew they were in touch with Steve Blubaugh their careers would be in jeopardy! I am pleased to have frequent contact with these two men again!

I spoke to one of these men recently. I told him I hope to get to see him again. I also mentioned that he was surely aware that things get a bit difficult if I come around. He responded, “Yes. Maybe things will be different by the time you can come.” One of these men told me that Craig Winquist told him, and others, that I had started a new religion. Craig said that I had quite a large following. I wish I knew where those “followers” are. I’d tell them to quit it!

I have hesitated to reach out to many people. I have concerns as to how the 2x2 system might react to them. All efforts to contact me are most welcome. Fooses have wonderfully continued with me with an unrelenting moral support. I am sure there is much about my journey they are unable to understand. They have apologized to me for not having acted with more wisdom. At the time I did not need someone’s wisdom. I needed their graciousness. The Fooses excel in that virtue. Clarence passed away August 2018.

Again, I urge anyone to contact me if in any way at any time I have offended you or anyone you know! I am ready to receive you, ready to hear you and ready to ask for your forgiveness! I admit that world power with its dogma has had a strong influence in my actions, as it also influenced the many souls I have mentioned in this writing. Those actions of mine against you no doubt caused you much pain! I make no claims of perfection.

If any reader has reached this point of this writing and is offended by something you have read. I am sorry you have read beyond the second paragraph! I urge you to continue where you are in your personal journey as you are – if you are comfortable being there. Continue there until God by His grace enables you to move to a different reality. (I make no suggestion what that might be, except that God wants to lead all of us into a closer relationship with Himself through His Son Jesus.) Each of us must be where we are, otherwise we are not truly genuine. Based on my personal experience, my advice to everyone is: Avoid resisting change that God inspires, all the while avoiding the change any person would attempt to persuade you to make!

If any reader knows that anything I have written here is incorrect or incomplete – please contact me. We can discuss it in an effort to set the record straight!

“The less we understand about our deception, the easier it is to deceive us.” As I recall asking George Walker, “Tell us about the beginning of the truth.” His gentle reply was, “Don’t ever let anyone get you out on that limb.” When the control of information is lost the control of people will be lost as well. Liberty can follow correct information! Knowing truth sets us free.

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