

“WITH A MERRY HEART”

A Testimony to a joyful life by the Rev'd David Gregg

Part 1 Origins, Schoolboy, Local Government Officer

Introduction: Having just moved to St. Mary's from Cumbria, after a long lifetime of Christian discipleship and fifty years of ordained ministry in various guises it has been suggested that I might have something of interest to share through “Parish and People”. As I have recently written my testimony (in four volumes!) for my children and grandchildren I thought that some edited extracts might be one way to do it — mostly funny peculiar and funny ha-ha

Origins: I was born in Hollywood (N. Worcestershire!) in December 1937. My father was a Brummie Stockbrokers Clerk and my mother of good yeoman stock from Alvechurch.

Before the war (everyone of *my* generation and older refers to *anything* pre- 1939 as before the war) the village butchers shop in Alvechurch was run by Mr. and Mrs. Bazeley. Auntie Bessie worked for them, and their son, Godfrey, taught her to drive. Godfrey Bazeley was the man who invented “The Archers — an everyday story of country folk”. My grandfather, who was also my godfather, sounded just like Walter Gabriel (or was it Walter Gabriel who sounded just like Grandpa?) And being baptized in St. Lawrence's, I always claim to have been baptized in the prototype of Ambridge Parish church!

Schoolboy: I went to Gosport County Grammar School, mostly at the Bay House department. (In the third form we occupied the former bedroom of the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII Just across the Solent from Osborne House.) The sixth form prefects were once given the responsibility for running the fourth week in succession, we chose to read the lesson from James chapter 3, verse 1, which in our American Standard Version, read: “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, seeing that you will receive the greater condemnation”

Whilst at school, I came to *personal* Christian faith:

I was brought up in a Christian home, with believing parents (and grandmother) who, by their example and teaching and imposition of discipline ensured that I learned from a very early age of the love of God in sending His Son, Jesus, to be the Saviour of the World. We went to Church, and to Sunday School, had Bible stories read to us and were taught to pray every morning and every evening. My parents *also* taught me what to eat: what to wear, where to go to school, where to enjoy holidays, how to choose my friends wisely, and what forms of exercise and relaxation and amusement were good for me, and what were *not!*

One May afternoon, when I was fifteen, our Bible Class leader gave us a very challenging talk, inviting us to yield to God's call, repent of our sins and receive Jesus Christ into our lives:-

From That day onwards my life was completely changed. Just as I eventually came to take *personal* responsibility for my food, clothing, education, holidays, friends, leisure etc., so (I believe) on that day I took over *personal* responsibility for my *spiritual* well-being. I became a personal disciple of Jesus Christ.

Local Government Officer: ‘When the time came to leave school and start to earn a living, I was invited for interview in Winchester. The Hampshire County Council had decided that they needed to widen their catchment area for recruits, and had asked my headmaster if he had any likely candidates! I was offered a post as a junior in the cash section of the Treasurer's Department, at the princely wage of £2/10/0d a week.

The quarterly task of reconciling the County Council's bank statements had all of us, the chef cashier, the assistant cashier and five office juniors, on (unpaid!) overtime, well into the evening, until we had got it to balance to the last penny. With a turnover of literally millions of pounds I did once ask why we were so concerned about a discrepancy of, say, six shillings and threepence! Commander Bellman, the chief cashier, explained that any discrepancy might be concealing compensating errors of great magnitude, and it is true that we might find, say, £1098/13/9d wrong on the Debit side, and £1098/7/6d on the credit side, to explain the six shillings and threepence, but he *never* had an answer to my supplementary question. How did he know that an exact balance wasn't concealing compensating errors of £1098/13/9d on both sides of the accounts?

My friend Graham worked in the County Clerk's office:-

One day he said he had a favour to ask me. His girlfriend, Jackie, was starting work at the Medical Officer's on the following Monday and needed to go to the canteen for lunch. As Graham always went home, he asked me if I would look after her, as she was too shy go to the canteen on her own. Well - the rest, as they say, is history! The day we first met was, would you believe, 14th February 1955 — St. Valentine's day! Do you think the LORD was trying to tell me something?)

(To be continued)