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'Fish Bait' Made Queen  
of England Feel at Home

By Bonita Sparrow  
for Baptist Press

She was Princess Elizabeth then, heiress to the throne of England and its Commonwealth, but William Moseley (Fish Bait) Miller called her "Ma'am" in his Mississippi drawl and made her feel right at home in the nation's capitol.

Miller, doorkeeper for the nation's House of Representatives since 1947, handed Prince Philip such a compliment that His Royal Highness demanded a repeat of "that charming speech" before he'd consent to wave to the visitors in the House Gallery.

"I hadn't made that speech up, or memorized it," Miller, a Southern Baptist, said recently in Nashville. "I told him we in America thought he was the handsomest brute we'd ever seen, and it tickled him to death. I just treated them like folks."

"Princess Elizabeth told President and Mrs. Harry Truman later that I had done more to make them feel at home in Washington than anybody except them," Miller recalled. "I know she said it because President Truman told me she did."

Miller was in Nashville to appear on an upcoming segment of "Spring Street, USA," the family television series hosted by Ken Chafin and produced by the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission for the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"Fish Bait" came by his unusual nickname as a child. "Down in Pascagoula, Miss., they used all kinds of bait to catch shrimp, lobster, fish and what have you. I was so sickly as a child that they didn't think I was good for much but bait and folks called me 'Shrimp Bait,' 'Lobster Bait,' and 'Fish Bait' and as I grew older the name stuck.

"It's stood me in good stead. The two times I ran against opponents for the House doorkeeper position I defeated men who had been in Washington lots longer than me but they had no nickname."

His musical "Mis-tuh Speak-uh, the Pres-i-dent of the United States" has introduced Presidents to all joint gatherings of Congress for nearly 30 years.

Demonstrating his famous style on the Spring Street show, Miller said, "I took music lessons as a child and my teacher used a metronome to help me keep time. When I get ready to introduce somebody I pull my tummy in, stick my chest out and get ready to imitate that old metronome."

In addition to presidents, Miller has introduced vice presidents, justices of the Supreme Court, visiting dignitaries and more members of the Washington diplomatic corps than he can count.

He recalls such historic greats as the late Sir Winston Churchill and others.

"I don't smoke and never used alcohol in any form, but back before we knew smoking was bad for health I carried a lighter and was considered the fastest draw on Capitol Hill. Churchill came from a visit to the House and one of his aides handed him a big, black cigar. I whipped out my lighter.

"He growled at me, 'Fish Bait, what are you doing using up petrol during wartime? Let me show you how to light a cigar.' And he pulled out a box of those little society matches, used the bottom to poke a hole in his cigar, and lit it with the other end."

In a later era, Miller was present for President Nixon's report to Congress just after the President's return from Russia in June, 1972.

"I told Mr. Nixon I was glad to see him back, especially in one piece, and that he looked good. I knew I had overstepped my bounds but he didn't seem to mind.

"He turned to one of my friends, Zeake Johnston Jr. of Jackson, Tenn., and said, 'You all still let old Fish Bait work around here?'

"And Gerald Ford, who was standing nearby, turned around and said, "Mr. President, he was here when we got here and he'll probably be here after we are gone."

And Miller would certainly spend his life in Washington all over again "if God led me to do it and if He would stay with me like He has this time."

Miller's Christian life is no secret although he calls himself "just your average layman." He's a member of Memorial Baptist Church in Arlington, Va., where he and Mrs. Miller have lived since 1959.

The second Sunday after they joined the church there was a call for a teacher for an intermediate boy's Sunday School class. The class had "run off" two previous teachers. Miller volunteered.

"I told them I knew how to make a Sunday School class tick and they were welcome to stay but if they didn't want to be in a Sunday School class to get right out. They stayed, and 10 of the 13 class members became Christians, he said.

He has since given up that class to become superintendent of the Sunday School. "My greatest thrill is to have people come up to me and remind me, "I was in you Sunday School class.'

"I think the main reason for my exciting life and what success I've had is that my secret of getting along with people is, first, being a Christian and, second, being human.

"But being a Christian is the most important thing."

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BP Photo mailed to state Baptist paper editors; others on request.

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Renew Ministry to Cities,  
Urges Texas Baptists' Landes

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DALLAS (BP)--A renewed ministry to cities "quivering with emphysema of their own creation" has been called for by James H. Landes, new executive secretary of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Landes, who headed up the Texas convention's urban strategy council, challenged Baptists to a united effort in meeting the plight of both urban and rural areas. He noted especially needs in Texas and urged Texas Baptists to greater cooperation in these areas. Landes noted Jesus wept over Jerusalem.

"The Lord continues to weep over Houston, over San Antonio, Tyler, Amarillo, Lubbock, Dallas and all our cities."

He spoke of the plight of the downtown church, the mid-city church, the inner-city church, the transitional church and the rural church.

"We know the problems of the suburban velvet ghetto," he said, adding that seemingly affluent churches often are beset by near-debilitating problems.

"At a time when our cities are quivering with emphysema of their own creation, we must pray that the Holy Spirit will fall fresh upon our people, that we may be used as His instruments for the redemption of people," Landes continued.

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"Timidity in the city will not do. We must be bold in our faith," he declared.

Coupling his call for urban ministry with a challenge for unity, Landes said:

"We dare not try to meet the powerful challenge of hell's chief seat in the city when we are at odds and split asunder.

"United, cooperative, prayerful, there is little we cannot do with God's help. Divided there is nothing we can do."

Landes, himself, has been pastor of urban and suburban churches in Wichita Falls, Tex., Birmingham, Ala., and Richardson, an affluent suburb of Dallas.

He noted that prior to 1900, more than 50 per cent of the people in the United States lived in rural areas.

"Today, however, 75 per cent live in urban areas and by 1980, 80 per cent will live in metropolitan areas. Today's cities generate and control much of the wealth. They create standards and styles. They are surfeited with crime, violence, misery and sin.

"To the people of the city, we Baptists are commissioned to preach and to minister. To the fermenting, frightening, heckling, bankrupt, unsafe, dirty cities, Jesus would have us bear witness.

"It is our mission to proclaim the uniqueness, the permanence and the availability of Jesus Christ in a world of weird sounds and sights," Landes said.

He continued, "Urban life is a severe threat to our Christian influence as Baptist people. The city's atmosphere, competition and depersonalization contribute to indifference, to arrogance and to anonymity and lack of understanding."

Landes also said too many people are "suave, polite and adroit at playing games but not consistent at boldly proclaiming the faith and maintaining our Christian integrity.

"In an environment tense with bitterness, we proclaim His joy. In a day of arrogance, doubt, despair, we declare the blessed hope."

Landes noted Baptists seek opportunities to work with other Christian groups in civic and moral matters but said:

"We are not interested in becoming a part of organized ecumenicity, but we rejoice in many forms of cooperative Christian endeavor.

"I have pledged anew to God, to myself and to you, that such energies and strengths that I am given will be dedicated to sounding the trumpet, lighting the lights and heightening the faith in our Lord, Jesus Christ."