



News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

**FEATURES**  
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'Today Is the First Day  
Of the Rest of Your Life'

By Michael L. Speer

"This is a gun. Just keep walking or you're dead."

You don't argue with a man who has a gun jammed into your back. Though frozen with fear, I walked...shaking with every step.

"Please God, don't let him kill me," I prayed.

Quickly and silently we walked into a dark parking lot between two buildings on the streets of Los Angeles. My assailant's partner ran out of the shadows. I made no effort to protest while they deftly emptied my pockets and took my wrist watch. Then the partner turned and ran.

The man with the gun stepped back to run, and I heard the crack of a pistol shot. My body spun to the right, and I struggled to keep from falling.

"My God," I cried, "You shot me."

Blood gushed from my mouth and nose, and I began spitting out something which I was sure must be my teeth. I held my handkerchief to my mouth.

"I must find help before I pass out," I thought.

There was no pain, but I could tell from the impact that the bullet had gone into my head directly behind my left ear which was ringing violently. I was equally sure that the bullet had come out my right front cheek, but I was afraid to feel for fear that part of my face was blown away.

Thoughts raced through my mind as I ran for help. I thought of my wife Mary and my two girls and of having to spend a long time in a hospital in Los Angeles, more than 2,000 miles away from home in Nashville, Tenn. I wondered why I had taken a walk before going to bed and who would lead the stewardship and Cooperative Program promotion meetings the next day...

There was no pain, but I was still bleeding badly. My teeth were apparently all in place, but there was a hole in the roof of my mouth.

Even so, I had a strong feeling of assurance that nothing was wrong. I remembered the scripture that had meant so much to me when I was flying in the Navy, Psalm 139:7-10: "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." (KJV)

I knew even then that I was in the right hand of God.

Three men were standing in the middle of the next block. Crossing the street, I ran up to them. "Can you please help me?" I begged, "I've been shot."

One of the men ran across the street to a bar and asked the bartender to call the police and an ambulance. They arrived quickly and rushed me to a hospital.

Hospital personnel stuffed gauze in my mouth to stop the bleeding and gave me glucose. An attendant looked me over briefly and sent me for X-rays. No one said how badly I might be hurt.

-more-

The doctor who was supposed to be on duty could not be found, and I lay for nearly eight hours in a hall of the emergency area, waiting. The night seemed an eternity, and I relived the events of the day.

It was Labor Day, 1971. I had gone to California for a series of associational stewardship and Cooperative Program promotion meetings. It had been a long day, and I decided to take a quick walk before going to bed.

I had walked about two blocks when I heard footsteps behind me and those unforgettable words.

The next morning, a doctor told me that the bullet had entered the left side of my head just behind the ear lobe. It had grazed my ear canal, missed my jugular vein by a fraction of an inch, passed over the roots of my teeth, under my sinus cavities, and ripped through the roof of my mouth.

Apparently the small-caliber bullet had shattered when it passed through the roof of my mouth, and I had spit most of it out. One small fragment came out my right cheek, leaving only a small hole.

The doctors called it a miracle. They only had to give me an antibiotic to keep down infection. I had no pain, no stitches, no bandages; and it left no scars.

After the examination I was placed in a ward for observation with 11 other persons, mostly indigents. No one knew me-- no one seemed to care. I was just another nameless face.

For the first time in my life I tasted the flavor of loneliness. All my life I had been surrounded by people who loved me, who thought I was of some worth.

Now more than 2,000 miles from home, a man had decided that my life was worthless and had tried to end it.

I lay in the ward the rest of the day waiting until I knew my wife would be home from work. I had asked that no one notify her of the accident--I wanted to do that myself.

How do you tell your wife that you've been shot through the head but that you are all right? The fact that I was calling was the only assurance she had that I was being truthful.

The next morning I checked out of the hospital, took a hot shower, shaved, packed my bags, and left for the airport to catch a plane back home.

A crowd of friends were waiting at the airport--my wife, Mary, and two daughters Melinda and Marie, and my best friend, Brooks Faulkner. As my feet touched the ground, arms went around me from every direction; hands and fingers slipped into mine.

The taste of loneliness dissolved. Once again people knew me and loved me, and for the first time throughout the ordeal, I cried.

On the way home I learned that on the morning after my accident, a local frame shop had called Brooks to tell him that a poster he was having framed for me was ready. He picked it up and took it to my office as a surprise, not knowing what had happened to me the night before.

That poster now occupies a prominent place on my office wall, but even if it were not there I could never forget the words. They are etched indelibly on my mind:

"Today is the first day of the rest of your life."



**BAPTIST PRESS**

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February 28, 1974

Radio-TV Commission Answers  
Committee of Fifteen Report

FORT WORTH (BP)--The Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) Radio and Television Commission has responded to what were described as three "areas of concern" involving the agency's work, included in a "Committee of Fifteen" report, which was presented to the SBC Executive Committee in Nashville February 20.

While recognizing "the merit of the report in many respects," James L. Pleitz, outgoing commission chairman, took strong issue with the report's observation that the Radio-TV Commission sometimes creates tension with other agencies, that it tends to oversecularize its television programming in a way as to "almost obscure the gospel," and that a disproportionate amount of commission income is spent on peripheral services such as public and station relations.

Pleitz quoted from a statement prepared by a committee of the Radio-TV Commission's board of trustees and presented during its February trustees meeting.

"It is regrettable that a 15-year-old report (committee to study total program) concerning the Radio-TV Commission relationship with other agencies was quoted and the conclusion expressed that 'in our opinion the conditions that prompted this report still exist.'

"This is denied as strongly as we know how to deny it. Far reaching and constructive changes have taken place since 1958. Therefore, we request that this reference be deleted from the report."

In describing present Radio-TV relationships with other agencies Pleitz said such relationships are "the finest ever and the role of the Radio-TV Commission as an 'enabling agency' is evidenced in many ways.

"Representatives of the SBC's Sunday School Board, Home Mission Board, Foreign Mission Board, Brotherhood Commission and six seminaries attend commission meetings in liaison roles," he said.

"The commission has Dr. Fred Laughon, a former chairman of the board of trustees now based in Richmond, as a liaison with the Foreign Mission Board to explore new methods of cooperation. There have been numerous meetings and several media workshops which the Foreign Mission Board cosponsors with the Radio-TV Commission.

"The technical production and marketing of Spring Street, U.S.A., demonstrates how the Radio-TV Commission and a board--the Home Mission Board--work together," he said.

Spring Street is a syndicated television series produced by the Radio-TV Commission for the Home Mission Board.

Pleitz deplored "such strong language 'as to almost obscure the gospel' in commenting on the ways that some programs are presented.

"On the contrary," he continued, "the Radio-TV Commission believes it is penetrating the streets and the marketplaces with the gospel in a most effective way. Some programs are stronger than others just as some pastors' sermons are stronger than others."

"On balance, the power of penetration is evidenced 52 weeks a year by the tremendous mail response from prisons, high rise apartments, lonely homes and disturbed people."

"Radio-TV Commission figures indicate that in 1973 there were 189,480 responses to commission programs. Each of these represented a very material decision in itself, Pleitz said.

"Of these responses, 2,676 registered specific Christian decisions," Pleitz said. "Hundreds of other decisions, not tabulated, are indicated in the commission's mail each week," he said.

"In addition, many decisions made as a result of the Radio-TV Commission programs are frequently registered in the church of that individual's choice and never reported to us at all.

"Letters from listeners and viewers refer often to the evangelistic appeal of commission programming," he said. "This convinces us that our approach is evangelistic although it is not always made in the traditional pattern. The commission's follow-up program is evangelistic and offers additional evangelistic opportunities."

Pleitz reminded, "it should be remembered that religious groups given free broadcast time are not to use that free time to add members to their faith groups. This would be in violation of broadcasting regulations and codes under which all stations operate.

Responding to the third concern, that a disproportionate amount of commission income is spent on peripheral services such as public and station relations to broadcasters, Pleitz observed:

"The Radio-TV Commission's dependency on the networks and the local stations for public service time, rather than purchase time, was a basic decision made in 1954 by the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee.

"At that time the Radio-TV Commission was instructed to pursue a policy of offering its programs on a public service (free) basis. Under this instruction we must operate according to the rules and accept the limitations involved.

"The modest amount of money spent on cultivating the industry is one of the wisest investments the commission makes. The amount of free time given Radio-TV Commission programs in the fiscal year 1972-73 was \$8.5 million. This was obtained on an investment of \$1,507,335, made by the Southern Baptist Convention in operating funds during this same period."

Pleitz said the Committee of Fifteen report which indicated Radio-TV Commission gift increases for operating purposes from the Cooperative Program was incorrect.

"Gifts from the Cooperative Program for operating purposes increased from \$400,000 in 1958 to \$1,400,000 in 1971.

"That was a gain of \$1,000,000 in 13 years, or 250 per cent, instead of the incorrect \$1,969,724 figure which showed an incorrect gain of 329 per cent."

Pleitz said the Radio-TV Commission board of trustees response to the Committee of Fifteen report is made "in the good spirit in which the report was given to us. The commission has already taken positive steps related to many of the listed concerns."

In its report, the Committee of Fifteen noted that the commission's program gains had been significant, recognized the agency's improved image. The report further noted the commission has received numerous awards for outstanding programming and service, and that the agency's "financial gains have been reassuring."