

May 8, 1974

**Blind Baptist Layman Views  
Life With Spiritual Eyes**

By Roy McDonald Exum

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (BP)--Forrest Cate is a Ford dealer here. A Baptist layman who shows horses, he is also a cattle farmer and owns "The Church Goingest Dog in the County."

Cate is blind.

Chattanooga's "Little Profit Dealer" has been blind for about five years yet continues to run his Ford dealership. In addition, he has made over 150 talks during the last two years and has been booked solid since the beginning of 1974.

Every month, he tells more than half a dozen churches, schools and civic groups about how he has depended on God for strength and how God has taught him to use his affliction to benefit others. Although his church is not SBC-affiliated, he often speaks in Southern Baptist churches.

Brought up in what he describes as a "fine Baptist home" Cate's childhood was fairly normal except for the nuisance of sugar diabetes, he says.

A big step in faith for Cate was when he fell in love with a former Miss Chattanooga, Marcia Stolpmann, a Catholic, while attending the University of Chattanooga.

"We broke up about five times and just figured there was no solution for our differences in religion. But we asked the Lord to work things out since we really were in love. Before we knew it, we were getting married in the Catholic Church.

"Today we are both members of the Daytona Heights Baptist Church in Chattanooga," he adds without further detail.

When the Ford Motor Company decided that the Chattanooga area could use another dealership in 1965, Forrest Cate and his father decided to try for it.

Ford awarded them the dealership, but the next year Cate's father died. Forrest decided to go ahead with the plans. In 1968 Forrest Cate Ford moved into its new plant.

Cate was selling cars; he had a beautiful wife, three children, and a lovely home; and he was involved in showing horses. Then tragedy struck.

"The kids and I were at a horse show and I bent over to paint a pony's hooves. When I straightened up, my eyesight was blurred," he explained. A year and a half later he was completely blind.

Cate had been afflicted with diabetic retinopathy, a condition caused by ruptured blood vessels in his eyes.

"You can imagine what I tried to do to keep my sight," he said. "A doctor in town had read an article about argon laser beam treatment, and I was in New York taking treatments immediately." In one year he made ten trips to New York and had two operations.

The blurring continued and worsened until he was totally blind. The doctors told him there was nothing they could do. Cate kept coming to his office and trying to work, "but it seemed almost fruitless," he admitted.

Then a friend suggested that Cate get a seeing-eye dog.

He traveled to Columbus, Ohio, to get the dog, and says "I don't mind telling you I was scared. It was really spooky going anywhere by myself since I had become completely blind. But in Columbus I met Romulus and it was worth it."

Romulus, a 75-pound Labrador Retriever, is Cate's "left-hand dog," also known as "The Church-Goingest Dog in the County."

Cate began to ask God to help him, "Just like anybody who lost his sight would," he says. "But I asked Him to use me for something. Don't make me go through this for nothing," he prayed. Shortly after, he heard a Chattanooga Presbyterian minister give a sermon on afflictions, and it changed Cate's life.

Cate began giving his talks. "You see me now--I am nothing. Without that dog I can't even get outside," he tells his audiences. "One has no assurance of tomorrow, but the Lord has promised He'll take care of us. I am what I am by the grace of God and the people around me."

Since his total blindness, Cate has learned to ride horses again and in 1972 became the first totally blind person to show a Walking Horse.

He continues to operate his business as well as a 400-acre cattle farm. "I have 141 employees at Forrest Cate Ford, and I know that having a blind boss makes things a little tougher on every one of them."

A friend of the family, who was eligible to retire the year Cate lost his sight, brings him to work every morning. Cate's secretary reads the mail to him, and his horse trainer takes him home every afternoon.

"I appreciate the fact that the Ford Motor Company has enough faith in me to let me continue to operate in a dealer's capacity, a guy who could be the only blind dealer in the world," Cate says.

For the past three years, his dealership has won the Ford Motor Company's Distinguished Award for recognition of highest performance in sales and service of Ford products.

Sometimes people come in to see him, not realizing he is blind, and say, "Mr. Cate, look at this..."

"I just get excited and imagine I am looking. I think it is funny when people make a mistake like that and wish they wouldn't feel self-conscious about it. It doesn't bother me," he says.

Cate's faith has helped him, and he wants to use it to help others. Lots of people have it a lot tougher than he does, he feels, and says, "if I can give one person some encouragement or motivation--point one person to the Lord--then it makes all I have done worthwhile.

"I believe that life doesn't stop when we die here. I ain't always gonna' be this way. Someday I will see again."

(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state papers

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