SBC Executive Committee
460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
(615) 244-2355
W. C. Fields, Director
Robert J. O'Brien, News Editor
James Lee Young, Feature Editor
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Minni Pearl, Brooks Hays--Two Friends Who Finally Met

By James Lee Young

NASHVILLE (BP)--Minnie Pearl of Grand Ole Opry fame and Brooks Hays of Southern Baptist and U.S. Congress fame were simply "friends who just never met before," in his words.

They met here for the first time during a star-studded banquet of more than 900 leading persons from Nashville's music industry, business, civic and religious community. The event sponsored by the Nashville Chapter of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, was the Fourth Annual Brotherhood Award Banquet.

Such famous persons as country music king Roy Acuff and country musicians Pee Wee King, Eddy Arnold and Danny Davis of the Nashville Brass attended. They joined former Tenness e overnor Winfield Dunn, the master of ceremonies, in applauding Hays' homespun humor and the many and outstanding contributions to the "brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God" of Mrs. Henry Cannon (Minnie Pearl).

Minnie Pearl was given the Christian-Jewish conference's Annual National Human Relations Award for advancing brotherhood and championing social and economic justic for citizens of all religious beliefs, racial, economic and cultural backgrounds.

This was her night. The guests came to pay tribute to Miss Pearl, a United Methodist.

But Hays, a former U.S. congressman from Arkansas and a former two-term Southern Baptist Convention President, made the event more memorable with his anecdotes and warm manner.

Hays' stories prompted Miss Pearl to say, "You are probably one of the funniest people in the world."

He told about his appointment to the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) directorship by the late President Eisenhower in 1959, prompting a Mississippi editor to write, "Baptists now have access to the world's largest baptismal pool."

Hays' said his father was once asked whether he would prefer his son to be pr sident of the United States or of the Southern Baptist Convention. The former congressman's father siad he preferred his son be President of the United States since "He's not smart enough to be president of the Southern Baptist Convention."

Noting the time alloted for his address, Hays commented, "If I was in charge, I'd give Minne Pearl her award, sing the Doxology and go home."

Seriously, Hays said in today's world, "there is no immunity for any of us. We need a prayerful approach to life that God will protect us all. We must recognize evils and acknowledge our humanity and exalt a common faith."

Citing the nation's bicentennial, Hays said Americans ought to recognize their Judaeo-Christian heritage and admonished, "If we don't raise our voices as religionists, the voic of religion will be ignored," during the nation's birthday celebrations.

Hays, a board of directors member of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, then paid tribute to Mrs. Cannon--Minnie Pearl, saying they "were friends who just never met before."

Minnie Pearl was introduced by former Governor Dunn and opened with her world-famous "Howdee." Holding Minnie's hat aloft, Mrs. Cannon noted that Minnie Pearl has "no prejudices and no bitterness."

Speaking in her cultured, articulate, non-Minnie Pearl style, Mrs. Cannon recalled many of the great stars and friends who had worked with her over the years, citing the late Judge Hay of Grand Ole Opry fame, Acuff, King and Arnold.

"If people can be kind enough," she said, "to accept your mistakes and love you, it's a great world."

She first played the Opry on a cold November night in 1940 and was brought on late, when "most of the people had gone to sleep" in Nashville's old War Memorial Building, where the Opry was then held.

Thirty-five years later, she is still making people laugh and trying to bring them together in God's family.

"Laughter," she said, "is God's hand on the shoulder of a troubled world. Thank God, he turned me around. I wanted to be a dramatic actress. He nudged me and said, 'Uh, uh, don't go this way.'

"And somewhere" she said, "a laugh or two may ease the burden of an aching world."

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(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state papers. # # #

'Young Women Coming Into WMU,' Mrs. Mathis

By James Lee Young

WACO, Tex. (BP) --Young women, ages 18-29, are coming into Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), auxiliary of the Southern Baptist Convention, in growing numbers, a trend that Mrs. R.L. Mathis, national WMU president sees as encouraging.

Mrs. Mathis sees WMU of the future as including even greater numbers of younger women.

"It's not that we have any intention of showing any neglect or letting down in our promotion for all women, but we simply have not had in our organization, young women, 18-29," said Mrs. Mathis, who is completing her second full tenure as WMU president and is therefore leaving office this summer. Six years is a full tenure of office for the WMU presidency.

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Her successor will be elected in the Monday morning session of the WMU meeting in Miami Beach. The new president will be nominated by a committee composed of the presidents of the state WMU organizations and then elected by the general assembly of WMU.

"In the last three or four years, we have had a real growth in enlisting young women of that age. And so, because of that, we are featuring a young woman in each of the WMU sessions in Miami Beach (June 8-9)," Mrs. Mathis said.

The growth over the last few years is attributed by Mrs. Mathis to, "their realization that here is an organization that is really worthwhile.

"I think they also realize," Mrs. Mathis continued, "as the older women have realized all along, that here is an organization through which they (young women) have an opportunity to grow and find places of leadership."

WMU is the only organization in Southern Baptist life, Mrs. Mathis noted, "that has a state and a national organization."

However active they may be in Sunday School classes or Church Training, it is generally just a local church opportunity--But WMU offers far more in terms of involvement and leader-ship opportunities for young women, Mrs. Mathis said.

Involving women of all ages in WMU has been a foremost task for Mrs. Mathis, who, herself, became a Christian at age 13 in First Baptist Church, Wichita Falls, Tex., and involved herself in WMU as a young woman.

She became involved in WMU in Henderson, Tex., where she was first elected president of the local congregation's women's organization.

From there, the sky was the limit, as she evenually became one of Southern Baptists' most recognized and respected women. Her list of credentials reads like a "Who's Who of American Women." In fact, she is listed in that volume.

Her more recent accomplishments include serving as WMU president (national) seven terms from 1956-63. Then she joined the WMU staff in Birmingham, 1963-69, as promotion division director.

She did such a good job as WMU they again elected her president in 1969, where she has served to date.

A widow, several years, Mrs. Mathis has a daughter living in Dalhart, Tex. and has two grandsons and a grandaughter. She was born in Bellevue, Tex. Her first name is Marie.

The daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. T.D. Wiley, has done her parent's proud. She is currently president of the Women's Department of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA)a position she has held five years.

Mrs. Mathis is the only woman to ever serve as program chairman for the BWA, holding that position when the Alliance met in Tokyo in 1970.

A few years ago, she was nominated for the SBC presidency but was defeated. Her attitude toward Southern Baptists and the women role is positive.

She doubts that a woman will be elected president of the SBC in coming years. "This is because of our Southern culture," she said.

She does not feel this is wrong, but feels instead that women in the SBC have plenty of opportunities for leadership.

Whatever the feelings of other women in the SBC, Mrs. Mathis has been given more honors and vital tasks in the convention than almost any women in recent years.

She served as second vice-presidnt of the SBC in 1963 and vice-president of the BWA, 1965-70. Among her many credentials are terms served on the Executive Committee, SBC, the executive board of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the SBC Foreign Mission Board, Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and others.

Mrs. Mathis is a life member of the executive board of Texas WMU. And she received the highest knighthood degree in Liberian Humane Order of African Redemption in 1968.

She has two honorary doctorates and was the first woman to receive such from Hardin-Simmons University (doctor of laws) in Abilène, Tex., Mary Hardin Baylor College (doctor of literature) in Belton, Tex.

As president these many years, Mrs. Mathis said she feels the greatest achievements of WMU have bean in mission support, through the Cooperative Program unified budget of Southern Baptists.

"We have supported missions by teaching the meaning of the Cooperative Program in our church's because of this.

"Then, I feel our other great accomplishment is the growth of the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering (for Foreign Missions) and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering (for Home Missions).

"I was present in Birmingham, in a meeting of the executive board (of WMU) when the first \$1 million goal was set for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering...Next year, the goal will be \$24 million."

Mrs. Mathis in the last five years has traveled on five continents in her various roles. She has "no regrets", sees no "great changes" in WMU work for the future, with the exception of the increasing role of the younger women, and expects to continue work "backstage" with the BWA and WMU, as she is needed.

"I have plenty to do right here at Baylor University (Waco)," where she \$ full time director of the Student Union, Mrs. Mathis noted.

She will preside over the WMU annual meeting in Miami Beach, June 8-9.

Though leaving office for the time, it may not be the last time. W M Uand Southern Baptists have long recognized the able leadership of Mrs. R.L. Mathis.