



Max Heller: A Story of the
American Dream Come True

By Maryneal Jones

GREENVILLE, S.C. (BP)--Who is this Jewish immigrant, Max Heller, whom students at a Baptist college seek to honor?

Only slight traces of German accent remain in one who came penniless from Vienna to America in 1938 to escape the Nazis. He was 18, barely able to speak English, fleeing with his sister, leaving parents and relatives behind.

He took a job in a Greenville textile mill and within 10 years had established his own shirt manufacturing company. By 1968, he had made a fortune, his company employed 700, and he retired, pledging himself to community service.

The next year he was elected to city council and in 1971 became the first Jewish mayor of Greenville, a Southern community of 65,000.

Largely because of a student generated movement of several years standing, Mayor Heller will receive an honorary doctor of laws degree at Baptist-affiliated Furman University on September 17 in ceremonies inaugurating Furman's sesquicentennial year.

"I am deeply touched," the 56-year-old refugee said of the Furman trustees' decision. "I never thought it would happen to me. It's a great feeling to learn that students had an input into having this honor bestowed upon me."

The trustees' decision came after recommendations from a faculty committee, which had been influenced by student endorsements. Resolutions on his behalf came from two administrations of the Association of Furman Students, two administrations of the students' Collegiate Educational Service Corps, the editor of the student newspaper and from faculty and staff throughout the college.

Heller's relationship to Furman students involved in community service is a remarkable one, especially with the more than 1,000 students in the Service Corps, a student organization doing volunteer work through 60 agencies in a three-county area surrounding the college.

The Service Corps work in the community "would never have been possible without Mayor Heller's encouragement and support" and personal involvement, Dave Coleman, Service Corps chairman, says.

Coleman, endorsing Heller on behalf of the organization whose membership numbers more than half the student body, told of many incidents in which the mayor's actions paved the way for student accomplishments in areas of need.

"One example is a situation that developed at a day care center in which Service Corps volunteers work," Coleman said. "Rats from an adjacent junk yard had so infiltrated the playground that it was inoperative. We told Mayor Heller about it and within a week the health department had exterminated the rats."

The Service Corps has turned to Heller many times for help. "He came through every time, without exception," Coleman said.

Every first Saturday in May, when Service Corps holds its annual campus-wide party for several thousand underprivileged, handicapped and retarded children and elderly people, Mayor Heller and his blonde wife, Trude, are there, up to their elbows in work with student volunteers to make the giant party a safe and happy success.

And Heller's quiet influence has had another kind of impact on the students. Writing last year, in the aftermath of Watergate disillusionments, Coleman said, "I have found Mayor Heller to be an extremely kind and compassionate human being.

"He has truly shown me by his life that it is possible for a man to be in public office without being tainted by the evils often associated with those in such office. He has given me hope in a system which, especially lately, has often seemed hopeless."

Heller's popularity stretches from one end of the city to the other. His office is open to all citizens, and he's deeply involved in civic, religious and political activities. After his 1971 election, The Greenville News called Heller's victory "the enthusiastic choice of Democrats, Republicans and Independents, of whites and blacks, of rich and poor, of every section of Greenville."

The News called Heller's election "a tribute to a man who approximately 33 years ago arrived here as a young, frightened...refugee. What a testimonial to the validity of the American dream. What an example to help dispel feelings of despair rampant in America today."

Heller's escape to America was, in his words, "a miracle." In Vienna in August, 1937, he met a Greenville girl, one of nine young girls touring Europe after high school graduation. With the aid of translators and a dictionary, they communicated and exchanged addresses. The following March, Hitler marched into Austria.

"I wrote her the next day and asked if she could help me come to this country," Heller relates. "She was the only person I knew in America."

The Greenvillian, now Mrs. Mary Mills Robinson, contacted Shepard Saltzman, a Greenville textile executive, and Saltzman arranged papers for Heller and his sister and gave them both jobs in his shirt company. Their mother and father followed. All other members of the family on paternal and maternal sides were killed.

Heller was well prepared for a career in textiles. His father was in the textile business in Vienna. Heller finished a private high school when he was 14 years old and attended business school three years while working. He looks back upon his life as one of "a lot of wonderful opportunities."

Heller married a Viennese girl he met when she was 15. He vowed then to marry her, and did, two years after she and her mother came to America in 1940. (The Heller's now have three children and seven grandchildren.) In 1941, Mrs. Heller's father was found alive in a concentration camp and reunited with his family.

Now, Heller has begun another term as Greenville's mayor. He works for his adopted community because, he said, "I remember Nazi Germany. I want a better life for everybody."

There's more to Max Heller even than the students knew. A Furman administrator said, "It is he who brings honor to us."

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(BP) Photo will be mailed to state Baptist papers by Furman University

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Ohio Board Votes Budget;
L.H. Moore to Retire

Baptist Press
8/5/75

SENECAVILLE, Ohio(BP)--The executive board of the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio voted a \$2 million for 1976 and heard retirement dates of three staff members, including L.H. Moore, editor of the Ohio Baptist Messenger and convention public relations director.

Moore, who will reach mandatory retirement age of 65 on March 8, 1976, will retire on that date. The board voted him a three-month sabbatical following retirement and asked that he use it to write a history of Southern Baptists in Ohio.

Other retirees are W. Leonard Stigler, director of evangelism and stewardship, effective May 24, 1976, and Mrs. A.L. Kirkwood, the convention's Woman's Missionary Union director, effective, June, 1976.

The budget approved by the board, which will be recommended to the state convention this fall, calls for \$2,077,384, with a Cooperative Program unified budget goal for its support of \$1,346,922.

Ohio convention receipts for the first seven months of 1975 totaled \$629,000, the board was told, showing a \$40,000 gain over the first seven months of 1974.

Among other action, the board voted to upgrade retirement programs of employees with the Southern Baptist Convention Annuity Board and named Bill Reid, minister of youth at Blue Ash Baptist Church, Cincinnati, as Baptist Student Union director in Central Ohio.

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**Fled Communists; Road Led
To New Life for BWA Prexy**

By Jim Newton

HONG KONG (BP)--Twenty-six years ago, David Y.K. Wong left his home in Canton, China and trudged down the dusty roads leading to a new life in Hong Kong.

Little did he know that the road he traveled to escape the Communists who took over his homeland would lead eventually to world wide recognition as president of the 28-million member Baptist World Alliance (BWA).

Wong, 65, became the first layman and the first Asian to be elected BWA president, during the 13th Baptist World Congress in Stockholm this summer.

Wong sees himself as a symbol of the feeling that Baptist laymen and pastors should "work together as ministers."

Indeed, he considers himself a "minister" even though he is not ordained and does not feel called to the pastorate.

For several years, he has devoted most of his time and energy to Baptist work, not only in Hong Kong but internationally through the Baptist World Alliance.

He was the guiding light and chief organizer of the First World Conference of Baptist Men which met in Hong Kong last November and was previously chairman of the Men's Department for the Baptist World Alliance. His service to Baptists has included the chairmanship of the board of governors, Hong Kong Baptist College and of the Asian Baptist Fellowship.

An engineer and architect by profession, Wong has sought to be thoroughly Christian in his daily work, and has prospered, he feels, as a result.

"The Lord has really blessed me," he says. "Although I spend most of my time doing church work, my business continues to grow."

He admits that he has delegated more and more responsibilities to his partners, S.T. Chui, K.C. Kan, and K.C. Lee, and their staff of 20 office workers.

The story of Wong's business success is intertwined inseparably with his Christian pilgrimage.

A fourth generation Baptist, Wong is the son of a Chinese medical doctor and the grandson of a Chinese Baptist preacher.

When he was only a baby, Wong's father contracted an unknown disease and everyone in the family thought he was dying.

A Chinese neighbor in their small village told Wong's great-grandmother, "I heard in Canton that Jesus Christ will give us eternal life if we pray and believe in Him." The family prayed and Wong's father recovered.

"My great-grandmother felt it was a miracle," Wong says, "and she wanted to know more about this Christ."

Eventually the family moved to Canton, and there they heard Baptist missionaries explain more about Jesus. Almost the entire family trusted in Christ, Wong says. His grandfather became a Baptist preacher.

Wong's father, whose name, Dai-Po, means "Heavenly Father heals," became a medical doctor because he felt God had saved his life, and he thus wanted to help save other lives, Wong says.

Wong's father helped to found the Stout Memorial Hospital in Kwongsi Province, where the late Southern Baptist Missionary Bill Wallace served and later died in a communist prison. Wong himself was born in that hospital.

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As a young man, he worked as an engineer on the Burma Road before the Japanese invaded China, and later was employed by the Chinese government building highways, railroads, and air fields during the war.

When the Communist takeover became imminent in China, Wong went to Hong Kong to start life anew, hoping to find work as a building consultant.

One major job was the key to Wong's success, he recalls. A wealthy and influential British Jew named Kadoorie asked Wong to design his new home and was so pleased with the design that he asked him also to supervise the construction. After the job was finished, Kadoorie offered Wong a job on his staff.

Wong, however, had a counter-proposal. He wanted to start his own architectural and engineering office and offered to devote first priority to Kadoorie's projects, including much of the work for the China Light and Power Co.

Since then, Wong has won high acclaim for his construction work in the Hong Kong area. He has built six electrical generating plants, including an \$85 million project on Tsing Yi Island, plus the 25-story St. George's Building in Hong Kong and the 12-story Peninsula Hotel in Kowloon, Hong Kong.

His firm also built one of the biggest tourist attractions in Hong Kong--the Peak Tram Terminal Building, which carries passengers to the top of a mountain peak with a magnificent view of beautiful Hong Kong harbor.

In addition, Wong has designed or built the Kowloon City Baptist Church in Hong Kong, where he is a deacon and member, and 10 other Baptist churches in Hong Kong.

He also designed and built many of the buildings at the Pui Ching Middle School operated by Hong Kong Baptists, and many schools of Christian churches in Hong Kong.

In his business, Wong has sought to live by Christian principles that are in direct contradiction with culturally-accepted practices in Hong Kong.

"When I first set up my office, I made up my mind I wouldn't be involved in any crooked business deals," Wong recalls.

"In Hong Kong, most architects would get kickbacks and commissions from construction companies. But I decided I was not going to do this.

"I told my workers, 'This office is different. You'd better not ever receive any money from a contractor or inspector.' They knew I meant it, and they respected me for what I believed."

Wong not only seeks to be honest in his business, but to share his faith in Christ with those with whom he works.

Many years ago he led to Christ his "right hand man," and now he is vice-president of the Brotherhood at Kowloon City Baptist Church and a Sunday School teacher.

Both his employes and his clients know not to call Wong about business on Saturdays and Sundays, because "I'm busy with church work then," Wong says.

In recent years, however, Wong has devoted almost full time to his church work and only about two days a week to his business.

"The Lord willing, I am going to devote my whole time to serve him in whatever capacity He wants me in," Wong notes. "My wife (Lillian) has the same desire. We pray that God will use us to work for his glory."