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**Former Child Star's Radio
Testimony Stops Suicide**

By Bonita Sparrow

FORT WORTH(BP)--Remember child star Jane Withers, the "mean little girl" of 47-plus movies?

Of course you do, unless you're part of the TV generation. Then you'll know her as Josephine, the lady plumber from television commercials.

Miss Withers, who prefers to describe herself as a "missionary of laughter" had an unusual response recently to an interview she gave "MasterControl", a prize-winning radio program produced and syndicated by the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission. The program is heard on 600 radio stations around the country.

Miss Withers related the story in a telephone conversation from her Hollywood, Calif., home.

"I had told the (radio) interviewer how good God is to me, that he's my partner in everything I do, and I believe that if you have the faith, with God's help, all things are possible.

"I had told about my complete paralysis from rheumatoid arthritis some years ago, and how with faith, God's help and some wonderful doctors, I was able to overcome it. I talked about God's help when my husband was killed in an airplane crash several years ago, and I discussed my firm conviction that God always answers prayers.

"Well, I received a letter--I keep seven post office boxes in Hollywood for the mail that still comes to me addressed just 'Jane Withers, Hollywood, Calif.,' from a lady who said she had gone as far as she felt she could...She lived in a small apartment, had no job and felt she had no one to turn to who cared about her. She was literally getting ready to take her own life.

"She said she was in the process of putting down the windows in her small apartment before she turned the gas on. She had her radio on and in the confusion of everything she recognized my voice and said, 'Oh, that's Jane Withers.' She remembered all the good times I had afforded her through my work as a child star.

"She said she listened through the entire interview and said to herself, 'If Jane Withers could go through all she has been through and still have that kind of outlook, then I feel very guilty about what I am about to do.'

"She turned off the gas and went to her church for the first time in years. She asked God's forgiveness, and started all over again. She said she had since gotten a job through her church, working with people, and now she's dedicated to helping people.

"The letter thanked me for her new life and new confidence in living. I tell you, I shook all over when I read that letter. To me, it's another way God answers prayer. I start each day asking God to use me as a tool to help others and that day he used that radio program to allow me to help that woman.

"Everyday is new and wonderful and I look forward to it," Miss Withers said. "Think of what you'll learn today that you didn't know yesterday."

The former child star became a Christian when she was 9-years-old. "I always wanted to be a medical missionary," she said, "So one day I talked to my pastor, Dr. Louis Evans, of Hollywood Presbyterian Church, about it. I told him I loved what I was doing but I wanted to be a nurse, too.

"He said the gift of making people laugh is rare and suggested I pray about it. I did, and the answer seemed to be that I should more or less stay with what I was doing. Dr. Evans called me a missionary of laughter--and I liked that title."

Miss Withers was one of few child stars who continued through her teens, making five pictures a year until she was 21. Some of her better-known films are "Little Miss Nobody," "Holy Terror," "Checkers," and her favorite, "Ginger."

-more-

3/30/76

Page 2

Baptist Press

"I worried about the mean little girl roles," she said, "because I realized, even then, that I had a responsibility to other children. I insisted that the mean little girl be punished for her mischief, because I knew children who saw the movie and tried what she was doing, would be punished for it.

"In fact, twice I refused to do scenes in a movie unless the character was punished for her misdeeds. I was determined to set a good example in the movies."

Miss Withers still sets good examples --a telephone conversation with her is as uplifting as many sermons. God's goodness is a favorite conversational topic.

"My mother taught me that God is my partner. That was the loveliest gift she could have given me. When things happen, I go right into prayer. I don't make any decisions without consulting my senior partner, God. His time isn't always our time but his timing is the right timing."

-30-

(BP)Photo to be mailed to Baptist state papers by Radio and Television Commission

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High Court Says States
May Prohibit Sodomy

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WASHINGTON (BP)--In a one-sentence order, the U. S. Supreme Court upheld the right of states to prohibit acts of sodomy. The court offered no reasons for its action refusing to hear a case challenging Virginia's anti-sodomy statute.

Three of the nine justices indicated they would have preferred to hear the case instead of affirming the decision of a three-judge U. S. district court. That court held last October that Virginia's law does not violate the constitutional rights of consenting adults who choose to practice sodomy.

The Virginia law makes sodomy a felony, punishable by imprisonment of up to three years in the state penitentiary.

The case was brought by two practicing homosexuals in Richmond, Va., who contended that the law violated their constitutional right to privacy. Although they had not been arrested under the statute, they claimed police harassment against them.

In a statement submitted to the Supreme Court asking for its review of their case, the men said the "the state neither has a rational basis nor a compelling interest in proscribing sodomy in situations involving consenting male adults in private."

The statement argued further that the court has previously held that sexual decisions are essentially private ones protected by the Constitution.

They cited decisions in recent years upholding the right of married couples to use contraceptives, of unmarried couples to engage in sexual activity, of adults to possess and read obscene materials in the privacy of their homes, and of women to obtain legal abortions.

A U. S. district court in Richmond rejected their arguments in a 2-1 decision last fall. The dissenting judge said, however, that in his view "the issue centers not around morality or decency, but the constitutional right of privacy."

The state of Virginia argued, on the other hand, that to reverse the lower court would undermine the validity of other state laws, such as those prohibiting adultery and fornication.

In addition, the state expressed the view that homosexual acts are not protected by the Constitution's implied guarantee of the right to privacy.

-30-

European Baptists Differ On
Role of Women in the Church

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RUSCHLIKON, Switzerland (BP)--Baptists believe that women can, but should not be pastors, according to a recent survey on the role of women in the church among Baptist churches in Northern Europe.

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Replies to an informal questionnaire have demonstrated traditional Baptist variety as well as the belief that attitudes are changing. The questionnaire was sent to 120 union (convention) leaders, laypersons and pastors in Baptist churches in Switzerland, France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, the German Federal Republic, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden and Finland.

Although a significant number of women are serving in pastoral functions in Europe, an exact figure is hard to determine, since differences of opinion exist as to what constitutes "pastoral duties." If both the traditional shepherding tasks of leading a local congregation (including serving the ordinances) and preaching/evangelizing are included, then the number is about 114. If, on the other hand, the large number of women preacher/evangelists is not counted, the "femine fellowship" of pastors is reduced to about three dozen.

The longest practice of women in the pastoral ministry dates from 1892, in Sweden. Other unions started at different dates such as 1920, 1955, even 1973. Unions now having active women pastors include those of Great Britain, Sweden, Finland (Swedish-speaking), and West Germany, which has one woman serving as an associate pastor. The Oerobro Mission of Sweden also is included.

At present 250 women are studying in European Bible schools, seminaries or with theological faculties. Many come from unions that currently do not have women in pastoral service. The past 25 years have seen more than 200 women studying who are now in varied teaching, preaching and missionary functions. Numerous women are serving in pastoral and preaching functions on mission fields but are not permitted to do so in their home country.

A section of the survey asked that the respondent compare his own attitudes with those he felt were held by the average Baptist, and by denominational leaders, within his union. Significantly, among the respondents, more than 84 percent felt that women can fulfill pastoral roles, 80 percent felt that they should, and 85 percent felt that the Bible does allow such a possibility.

However, 42 percent of the respondents felt that it is "not natural" for women to take such leadership roles, and 49 percent said that it is not expedient for them to do so at this time. To both these questions, more than 70 percent replied that the "average Baptist" would oppose such.

It was clear that they were certain that the "average Baptist" would change toward more acceptance of women in the field of church work. Further, they indicated that Baptist leaders were well on their way toward greater acceptance of women in church work. Since many of the respondents said that they were open to such acceptance themselves they concluded that their own attitude would not undergo significant change.

The survey was designed to encourage comments, and most respondents freely indicated reasons behind their attitudes. Perhaps the most-repeated phrase from several countries was a simple, "Why not?"

Although some confessed that the subject was not even discussed in their union, others underlined that it was an extremely lively, controversial issue that would have to be resolved in the very near future.

A few of the reasons for being open to women in church work were, however, pragmatic: "We should use them because we do not have enough men," or "We could use women for smaller, poorer churches, since women can live on less."

Others were directly negative in their comments: "The church often follows the ideas of the world. I pray God it will not happen in Baptist churches" . . . "According to the Scriptures, the man is the authoritative head. Thus, woman should only hold such positions of leadership as come under the pastor, such as work with women, youth work, children's work or some special responsibility."

Some concern was exhibited over the situation of the woman in the home and her responsibilities as a mother. Several saw this more in terms of gifts and calling: "I do not believe that the question has so much to do with sexes--man or woman-- but it has to do with the person and personalities. After having served as pastor . . . I have been convinced that the calling of a pastor to a congregation . . . would depend upon how they would experience God's guidance. This is not to escape the problem but to become more God-oriented than man-oriented."

Others were quite enthusiastic about the topic, but called for more study: "We have no Leitbild (model) for women pastors. We need more serious Bible study of the topic." Or again: "It is remarkable that there has been no theological debate on this topic: women have just been appointed to different tasks without strong theological motivation or reservations."

And one even replied: "There is no obstacle incapable of being surmounted in a Baptist church, and if God calls us he also enables us . . . So much depends upon personality--warmth, clarity of expression, special gifts for the church situation--all these will have to be weighed . . . I would never choose a man or a woman as pastor because of sex, only because of ability."

In conclusion, still another interesting response was given by a pastor from a union from which rather consistent negative responses had come (and where there are no women serving).

His contribution: "Why not women? Simply because it is not done? Why not complimentary work? Women are less pretentious, more humble and more submitted than men. Therefore they could be more submitted to the Lord . . . marvellous!"

Survey on Role of Women in
Baptist Churches in Northern Europe

QUESTION	Personal Attitude		What Average Baptist in Union* Might Say		What the Collective Attitude of Union* Leaders Might Be	
	<u>can</u>	<u>cannot</u>	<u>can</u>	<u>cannot</u>	<u>can</u>	<u>cannot</u>
Can women fulfill pastoral roles effectively	84%	16%	46%	54%	69%	31%
Should women do such work?	<u>should</u> 80%	<u>should not</u> 20%	<u>should</u> 31%	<u>should not</u> 69%	<u>should</u> 49%	<u>should not</u> 51%
According to your understanding of the Bible, does such a possibility exist for women?	<u>does</u> 85%	<u>does not</u> 15%	<u>does</u> 53%	<u>does not</u> 47%	<u>does</u> 72%	<u>does not</u> 28%
Is it "natural" for women to take such leadership roles?	<u>Is</u> 58%	<u>Is Not</u> 42%	<u>Is</u> 27%	<u>Is Not</u> 73%	<u>Is</u> 38%	<u>Is Not</u> 62%
Is it expedient for women to assume such roles?	<u>Is</u> 51%	<u>Is Not</u> 49%	<u>Is</u> 23%	<u>Is Not</u> 77%	<u>Is</u> 38%	<u>Is Not</u> 62%
If an equally qualified man and woman were available for the pastorate of a given Baptist church, which would you honestly choose?	<u>man</u> 56%	<u>woman</u> 15%	<u>uncert.</u> 29%	<u>man</u> 84%	<u>woman</u> 2%	<u>uncert.</u> 14%
Do you think the attitude will change significantly within the next 25 years?	<u>yes</u> 54%	<u>no</u> 46%	<u>yes</u> 75%	<u>no</u> 25%	<u>yes</u> 70%	<u>no</u> 30%

*Convention