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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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'To Die Was to Win'
For 16-year-old Youth

By Teresa Shields

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (BP)--Sixteen year old R. Thomas Brown died quietly in his room at the University of Virginia (UVA) Hospital here.

In February, his doctor had found it necessary to amputate his left leg. The Bristol, Tenn., teenager, had osteogenic sarcoma, a kind of bone cancer.

People who had contact with him said he was an "encourager," or "son of encouragement" like the biblical missionary Barnabas. And, they say, his death should be counted as the same--an encouragement.

"Tom had the possibility of being a great athlete," said W. Joseph Owen III, Richmond, Va., lawyer and former president of the UVA Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) that "adopted" Tom.

"He had played center and linebacker on the Bristol high school football team and had also played outfielder on the baseball team. And he was good.

"He told me after his operation that he had been putting athletics first in his life. He said the Lord had taken that away from him. But he wasn't bitter. He saw it as a lesson that he should put the Lord first. He even decided he should take up singing. He said singing praises was the least he could do for his Lord."

A few days before his death, Tom explained, "If I had one thing I could tell a person it would be to trust in the Lord and turn his whole life over to Him. If he does that, well, he will come out on top no matter what happens."

Tom, a member of Euclid Avenue Baptist Church in Bristol, told about his conversion experience.

"I accepted Christ at the age of seven," the teenager related, "but it wasn't until about a year ago that I turned it all over to the Lord. And when I did I had inside me a peace that I had never known. It's marvelous and it's inexplicable. It's a miracle that no man can ever explain.

"Since that time a lot of my friends at school and people I meet say that I'm a square. I just say, 'Let me tell you about this square that the Lord saved.'"

But, not all those Tom met thought he was a square. The story of his faith and courage spread across the nation and the world, according to his mother, Nancy (Mrs. Robert M.) Brown.

"He received letters from people he didn't know and that had never met him," she explained. "They all expressed how just hearing about Tom had encouraged them in their faith. Some told how he had led them to turn it all over to the Lord."

Elizabeth Thompson, member of Euclid Avenue Baptist, wrote, "Tom, we praise God for your witness throughout the past months. Your earthly ministry thus far has been dynamic and far-reaching in effect."

Fellowclassmate Kathy McReynolds sent Tom a letter explaining, "You have meant so much to me. I just really couldn't put it into words. Your courage and faith have been such a great example to all of us. I really wish you knew how many lives have been changed because of what they saw in you.

"Your life has made me realize that the only thing that really matters in life is knowing the Lord," Kathy wrote.

Her letter and many others like it Tom received didn't really surprise him that much.

In his words, "I've learned to live with pain and suffering...I know if I stay strong, it's not hard to just put the Lord Number One in my life. And then, He's just gotta shine through. It's the Lord people see, not Tom Brown."

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Mark Newlen, UVA basketball player and FCA member, was contacted by some people who knew about Tom when the youth was first brought to Charlottesville for treatment.

"When I heard about this young Christian athlete who was going to have his leg removed because of cancer I wanted to go see him," Newlen explained.

"But I was scared because I didn't know what to say. I went anyway to try to cheer him up.

"When I first went in, Tom sat up and said, 'Hi, come on in, sit down and let's talk.' When I went home that night, he had cheered me up instead of me cheering him up.

"Tom taught me more in the eight months I knew him," Newlen shared, "than anyone else I've ever met in my life. He loved Christ with all his heart, mind, soul and strength. His life is a perfect example of 'it's not how long you live but how you live that is of utmost importance.'

"Christ's love which manifested itself in Tom's life will live on in the hearts of those who knew him the rest of their lives."

The encouragement Tom gave to those who knew him well, those who met him for the first time and those who only heard about him, could be summed up in the statement of a fellow classmate and ballplayer:

"To put it bluntly, I have more respect for you than I have ever had for anyone else I have ever known personally, or have even heard of. You are a winner, RTB..."

For about 15 minutes, during an interview at UVA Hospital, the haze and fog of the pain-killing drugs lifted as Tom talked about his faith. Then groginess settled back over him. He died the next evening--Oct. 13.

For the young encourager and those he encouraged, to die was to win.

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Illinois Editor Wins
State Historical Award

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CHESTER, Ill. (BP)--Robert J. Hastings, editor of the Illinois Baptist weekly newspaper, received the only 1976 merit award for a book on the state's history, from the Illinois State Historical Society

Hastings' book, "We Were There," is on Baptist history in Illinois, 1907-76. He is one of few Illinoisans to win two such awards, having won in 1973 for "A Nickel's Worth of Skim Milk," a book on his boyhood memories during the 1930s depression era.

"We Were There" is the first major oral history work published by any Southern Baptist group, according to Lynn E. May Jr., executive director of the Nashville-based Southern Baptist Historical Commission.

The book, published by the Illinois Baptist State Association, won a second place award last June in a national Bicentennial history writing contest sponsored by the Historical Commission. It was written from interviews with Illinoisans, 11-90 years of age, Hastings said.

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NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
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(615) 244-2355
W. C. Fields, Director
Robert J. O'Brien, News Editor
James Lee Young, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Walker L. Knight, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30309, Telephone (404) 873-4041

DALLAS Orville Scott, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Tex. 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996

MEMPHIS Roy Jennings, Chief, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, Tenn. 38104, Telephone (901) 272-2461

NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Gomer Lesch, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 254-5461

RICHMOND Richard M. Styles, Acting Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151

WASHINGTON W. Barry Garrett, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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Wrapup

Evangelism, Record Budget,
Charismatics--Texas Issues

SAN ANTONIO (BP)--Texas Baptists, in their 91st annual session here, launched a statewide evangelistic campaign, approved a record \$24.6 million budget, and denied seating to two charismatic churches.

The 2,760 registered "messengers" approved resolutions on gambling and on parental rights and abortion, commended the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board for its efforts in coordinating denominational response to world disasters and hunger, and re-elected James G. Harris, pastor of University Baptist Church, Fort Worth, as president.

The sessions were attended by some 3,410 Texas Baptists and guests, including registered messengers--largest since the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) last met in San Antonio in 1969. Record attendance was in Fort Worth, where 3,777 registered in 1954.

Texas Baptists launched "Good News Texas," a 1977 statewide evangelistic campaign, and named evangelist Billy Graham as the effort's "national chairman." Graham lauded the \$1.5 million campaign as "one of the most important and ambitious evangelical undertakings in the country's history.

"This campaign is for all Texans," Graham said in a taped message. "Because the local church is the heart of this movement, 'Good News Texas' will offer every Texan the opportunity to share the gospel."

Baylor University head coach Grant Teaff and Jeanette Clift George, who portrayed Corrie Ten Boom in "The Hiding Place" movie, will aid Graham as state co-chairpersons for the campaign.

Television, radio, newspaper and billboard advertising will be coordinated to pave the way for followup evangelistic efforts through over 4,000 Texas Baptist churches and missions, a spokesman noted.

Of the record \$24.6 million Cooperative Program unified budget, some \$8.55 million-- or 34.75 percent--will go to worldwide causes through the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) national Cooperative Program. The 1977 budget is \$2.4 million higher than in 1976.

The convention opened on a controversial note as four members of two Dallas area charismatic churches were denied seating.

Despite a recommendation from the convention's credentials committee that four members from the Beverly Hills Baptist Church in Dallas and Shady Grove Baptist Church in Grand Prairie be seated, messengers voted by a two-thirds majority to refuse seating to the four.

In the final business session, one pastor voiced concern about the inherent dangers in the convention breaking fellowship with the two churches.

Richard Hammons, pastor of Shiner Baptist Church, said, "In our history, there have been other doctrinal differences of opinion which have broken fellowship. Many times fellowship is broken over speaking in English as well as in tongues.

"I attended the credentials committee meeting which discussed this issue," Hammons said. "I am not completely convinced that these churches have done anything outside their churches that would cause disharmony. Let us be in prayer that we will be very cautious in breaking fellowship in the future."

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Vernon Lee Treat, pastor of Lawndale Baptist Church, Houston, answered Hammons by saying: "I would commend the credentials committee for the work they did at this convention. But article 3, section 1 of our constitution says messengers should be of like faith in accord with doctrinal issues. I am thankful that our convention acted on this in a 'Christlike' manner."

In a press conference after his re-election, Harris was questioned by reporters about the action on charismatics. "The convention only acted for this year," he replied. "It did not take permanent action. Next year is a whole new ball game."

Harris said he personally would not vote to deny seating on this basis because charismatic gifts are "are in the Bible and I am a biblical person."

But he added: "I am not charismatic."

SBC President James L. Sullivan, a convention speaker, also participated in the press conference with Harris. The question of seating charismatic Baptist churches, Sullivan said, could arise at the SBC annual meeting, which would be more "reluctant to speak on it because the Southern Baptist Convention is a more diverse organization (than the state convention)."

The question has been presented previously to the SBC (which meets each June) but it has "declined to take action," Sullivan said.

Reporters questioned Harris and Sullivan on an endorsement of one of the two major candidates for the United States presidency--Jimmy Carter, a Southern Baptist, or Gerald Ford, an Episcopalian. Both said they did not consider it appropriate openly to endorse either candidate.

"I would hope that any endorsement from any Baptist pastor would be considered an individual expression only," Harris said.

Sullivan said he had not made up his mind and would not comment because of "our traditional Baptist position of separation of church and state." He said the country is "fortunate to have two good men of high moral character running for office. The basic selection should be the country's as to whom it prefers, based on the candidates' method of operation and platform."

Before adjourning, the convention approved eight resolutions, including expressions of concern over parental rights, world hunger and legalized gambling.

The resolution on parental rights expressed deep concern over the U. S. Supreme Court decision in July 1976, limiting the authority of parents over their minor aged children in decisions to secure abortion.

In his presidential address, Harris expressed his "dismay at the ruling that a minor child may secure an abortion without the consent or even the knowledge of her parents.

"I am appalled at this evidence of growing permissiveness and increasing disrespect for the family on the part of our highest court," Harris said.

Another resolution commended the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board for its growing efforts to meet needs resulting from disaster situations, but it urged the board to "continue intensifying efforts to develop a more effective reporting system with the churches and denomination concerning how world hunger funds are being used."

The Foreign Mission Board has assumed the main responsibility of distributing Southern Baptist funds for world hunger among needy nations and in disaster areas.

The resolution on gambling warned that "Legalized gambling, including bingo, inevitably results in growth of crime, the destruction of legitimate business and the exploitation of the poor."

The resolution urged strict enforcement of present laws and opposed "any further legalization of gambling activity."

The 1977 convention will meet Nov. 1-3 in Fort Worth.

Bluefield Surveys College
Students on Election

BLUEFIELD, Va. (BP)--While many Americans are questioning the need for the televised debates between the two major presidential candidates, a survey of Bluefield College students indicates that those who watched both of the first two debates are better informed about the platforms and issues of the 1976 presidential race than those who didn't watch.

While each of the students at the Southern Baptist-related school who took part in the survey knows who the two presidential candidates are, half do not know who Ford's running mate is and one-third did not correctly identify the Democratic vice presidential candidate.

All who participated in the survey know of Carter's famous Playboy interview, while 45 percent don't know of former Agriculture Secretary Earl Butz.

Other results indicate 55 percent don't know what the SALT talks are and most thought unemployment in the U. S. is more than 25 percent.

"The students surveyed represent a cross-section of the campus student body and, in all likelihood, form a representative composite of the general public," a college spokesman said. "If that conclusion is accurate, the vast majority of the American public neither knows nor cares about the issues and candidates in the November election."

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5,000 Decisions Recorded
During Crusade in Paraguay

Baptist Press
10/22/76

ASUNCION, Paraguay (BP)--About 5,000 people made decisions for Jesus Christ during a recent Louis Palau crusade here, according to Southern Baptist missionary Judi (Mrs. Tom) Kent.

On the final Sunday afternoon of the 10-day crusade more than 17,000 people gathered in the stadium to hear Palau, a well-known Latin American evangelist.

Baptist churches are among those following up on the response of the new believers. Followup procedures include nightly age-level Bible studies. Pastors and other members of Baptist churches have pledged their support to help the new believers grow in their faith and become affiliated with church fellowships, according to Mrs. Kent.

"In many churches, families are being united in Christ for the first time after years of praying," Mrs. Kent said. "One young wife said that her husband had forbidden her to attend church for three years, but she kept praying. During the Palau campaign, she finally convinced him to attend with her and a friend. At the close of the service, she accompanied her friend who wanted to make a decision for Christ. She turned around to find her husband there for counseling, too."

A young married man told his church when he accepted Christ recently that he was deeply concerned that his mother accept Christ also. The young man went with the family to the crusade. The first night his sister accepted Christ and the second night, another relative made the same decision.

The third night his mother made her decision for Christ.

At a luncheon given for professionals, Palau spoke to over 300 persons. He invited the doctors, dentists, lawyers, military personnel and others present who would give their lives to Christ to write "si" (yes) on the back of the card beside each place setting. Fifty persons responded.

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