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Martha Willie Faces Her 2nd
100 Years With New Hope

By Adon Taft

FORTY MILE BEND, Fla. (BP)--Martha Willie believes a woman is never too old to show concern about how her hair looks or to take the step of faith committing her life to Jesus Christ.

The Miccosukee Indian widow is somewhere around 100 years old, give or take a couple of years. After thinking about it for 12 years--the last seven of them with real seriousness--she made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as her Savior.

Martha finally became convinced that Christianity is not just a white man's religion when a Navajo evangelist, Russell Begay, a Southern Baptist, declared from the pulpit of the Indian Trail Baptist Church that the only way to heaven for an Indian or anyone else is to believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay for your sins and make possible a new, eternal life with God.

That was July 24, the final night of a revival meeting in one of the two churches on the Miccosukee reservation off the Tamiami Trail (an old Indian trail, now state highway 441) at Forty Mile Bend, an unincorporated area at a bend in the road 40 miles west of Miami.

A week later, wearing a white robe over her colorful Seminole dress and stacks of beads, Martha became what is thought to be the oldest Indian--by at least 30 years--ever to be immersed in Christian baptism in the United States.

"I felt happy because I had fulfilled what the Lord wanted me to do," she said through an interpreter. "I would recommend it to anybody, no matter what their age."

Barely five feet tall, counting the knot of still dark hair combed up on top of her head, Martha Willie is looked up to by the other women among the 500 Miccosukees living on the edge of the Everglades west of Miami.

Her proud head is held erect above her sheer purple blouse by strands of white, red, green and dark blue beads covering 10 inches of her bosom and neck. The ankle-length skirt of many colored, horizontal stripes and zig-zag rick-rack is one of the things she still sews herself with her strong, supple hands despite the fact that "my eyes aren't so good any more." Her arms and fingers are covered with Navajo-made silver and turquoise jewelry.

Dignified as she is, Martha, who chews gum incessantly, protested puckerily to a photographer that her hair was not fixed. She giggled when she said her favorite pastime is feeding her 20 pigs.

Martha--mother of 10 (only 2 living), grandmother of 20 and great-grandmother of 10--was born deep in the Everglades and still refuses to live in a modern frame house, preferring her palm-thatched chickee.

She was 23 or 24 years old, married, with two children, before she saw her first white man. She had been brought up to believe that white men were bad, but she was not afraid of that truck driver because Indians were working with him in building the road which now borders the reservation where she lives.

"I was brought up to believe that there is a God, but I didn't know I had to accept Him as Savior and be baptized," said the dark-complected woman whose face is lined, but does not look really old. She never heard of Jesus Christ until 12 years ago.

One of her daughters was in a hospital in Hollywood. And when Martha visited her daughter, another Miccosukee woman was there visiting too. Jane Matlow, whose son Jack is the pastor of the other Baptist church on the reservation, had been sharing her faith in Christ with Martha's daughter.

The daughter made a profession of faith in Christ before she died and urged her mother to do likewise. So when Jane invited Martha to go to church with her in Hollywood, she did.

But Martha did not go to church again for five years. Then her husband died. Meanwhile, another daughter had accepted Christ as Savior and had died.

So for the past seven years Martha Willie has faithfully been in her place in the aisle seat of the fifth pew back on the left side of the nave of the Indian Trail mission of the Miami Springs Baptist Church nearly every Sunday. She loved to hum along when they sang her favorite hymn, "Amazing Grace," in English and join in when they sang "Hallelujah" in Creek. But she still struggled with the idea that Christianity was the white man's religion.

Martha Willie can't read, but she likes to hear the Bible read by Jay Mawhorter, pastor of the 42-member church, when it is interpreted by an Indian. The 61-year-old Southern Baptist preacher who has been here since March, hasn't learned to speak Miccosukee yet.

He does speak the language of the Chealis, Yackinaw, Skokimish and Squamish among whom he lived and preached for 12 years in the state of Washington. But there are 156 different languages and dialects among North American Indians, he said.

As many as 300 of the Miccosukees--one of the four branches of the Seminole tribe in South Florida--at Forty Mile Bend have attended services at Mawhorter's church. And Martha prays that those who haven't already done so will make the kind of decision she did and follow her into the baptismal pool "so I'll see them in Heaven like I will my daughters."

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(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state papers.

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Educators Elect Noel
To SWBREA Presidency

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FORT WORTH (BP)--Russell Noel, minister of education at First Baptist Church, Tulsa, Okla., was elected president at the 57th annual meeting of the Southwestern Baptist Religious Education Association (SWBREA) here.

Other officers elected by some 260 persons attending the meeting at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary here were three vice presidents, Norman Fromm of East Texas Baptist College, Marshall; Truman Kerr, associate pastor, Broadmoor Baptist Church, Shreveport; and Bobbie Sorrill, director of the education division, Woman's Missionary Union, Birmingham. Hazel Rogers, adult Sunday School consultant, Baptist General Convention of Texas, Dallas, was elected membership secretary, and Jeroline Baker, associate professor, Southwestern Seminary, was named secretary-treasurer.

A series of speakers urged the educators to be effective, to not be afraid of seeking feedback from the people they serve and to learn how "to love, live and use the Bible."

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Hall Joins Seminary
Development Staff

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LOUISVILLE (BP)--George M. Hall of Palm Beach Garden, Fla., has been named director of deferred giving at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary here, effective September 1.

He will have responsibilities in estate planning as an associate in the work of Southern Seminary Foundation.

A native of Elberton, Ga., Hall is a graduate of University of Georgia and Southern Seminary where he is currently completing the Doctor of Ministry degree.

The new development official comes to the seminary from the pastorate of Lighthouse Baptist Church, North Palm Beach, Fla. He is former associate pastor at Walnut Street Baptist Church here, and his pastorates include Valwood Park Baptist Church, Dallas, Tex., and First Baptist Churches of Homer, La., Alexander City, Ala., and Middletown, Ky.

Hall's wife is the former Donna Bonnett of Denver, Colo., and they have four children.

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Sunday School Board
Settles Choir Robe Suit

ROANOKE, Va. (BP)--The Southern Baptist Sunday School settled an \$800,000 suit by a choir robe manufacturer for \$20,000 and will cease to use the name of Bentley & Simon in its advertisements, according to an agreement in U. S. District Court here.

"The Sunday School Board in no way admitted to being guilty of the allegations of the suit in its agreement to settle this case," said James W. Clark, the board's executive vice president. "The board agreed to pay Bentley & Simon \$20,000 rather than to pursue the case through the courts."

The suit, filed last February by Bentley & Simon, a manufacturer of choir and pulpit robes, alleged that the board, although it ceased buying Bentley & Simon robes in 1976, still advertised them as such. It further alleged the board, by using the phrase "quality tailored by Bentley & Simon," is "defrauding and misleading the public by palming off unauthorized robes not tailored by the plaintiff."

At the time the suit was filed, board president, Grady C. Cothen, who was out of town when word came of settlement, called the mislabeling charge "ridiculous" and the fraud allegation "preposterous."

Cothen did note an error on the part of the Sunday School Board in inadvertently using the Bentley & Simon name in an advertisement in which it should not have used.

"In editing copy of the catalog of one distributor, the editor failed to delete two mentions of the Bentley & Simon name," Cothen said. "Insofar as we are able to ascertain, this represents an error of the Sunday School Board... (but) the charge of fraud is preposterous."

The agreement filed in the Roanoke court stipulates that the board will cease using the name or trademark of Bentley & Simon and offering any of its choir robes for sale, cease selling robes tailored by any other manufacturer under the Bentley & Simon label or incorrectly designating the origin of any such robes, and cease from advertising any products manufactured by Bentley & Simon. The board will withdraw all references to the company in future catalogs, brochures or price lists.

"Under the terms of the settlement, the Sunday School Board can sell its existing inventory of Bentley & Simon robes until Dec. 31, 1978," Clark said. "By that time no inventory of these robes will exist."

Earlier Cothen had explained: "By agreement with Oak Hall (which acquired Bentley & Simon), we were to sell our remaining stock with the Bentley & Simon label in the robes. No robes of any kind have been sold by the Sunday School Board except with the label intact."

"We are glad the matter is settled," Clark said, "so we can get down to the business of selling high quality robes, manufactured exclusively for (the board's) Broadman (division), as well as disposing of our remaining stock of choir robes which were purchased from Bentley & Simon, labeled as "tailored by Bentley & Simon," and referred to (in the original suit) as "inferior robes."

"If the Bentley & Simon robes are inferior," Cothen said earlier, "it is the responsibility of the manufacturer. It is ridiculous to imply the Sunday School Board would mislabel choir robes."

Clark said the board owed Bentley & Simon "slightly more than \$3,000 in royalties since December, 1976 (when it ceased buying them) and had offered to pay that amount when it became due if Mr. (Malcolm) Rosenberg, (president) of Oak Hall, would tell us to whom it should be paid--an individual, Oak Hall or Bentley & Simon. Mr. Rosenberg failed to respond to that request for payee information, except through his suit filed in February, 1977."

11 Missionaries Take Part
In Korean 'Invitational'

TAEJON, Korea (BP)--Eleven Southern Baptist missionaries were here recently for an "invitational meet"--not golf or tennis, but evangelism.

The crusade was called an Invitational Crusade because it was held at the special invitation of a local church.

The pastor had been training laypersons for three months prior to the crusade and had a list of 200 prospects, according to Southern Baptist missionary Rolla M. Bradley. The prospect had already been contacted and agreed to allow a missionary and a Korean layperson to explain Christianity to them.

During the three-day crusade, the missionaries and laypersons made the visits, resulting in 11 persons accepting Christ. The new additions increased the church's membership by 20 percent.

The approach of inviting several missionaries to one Korean Baptist church for several days of concerted evangelistic visitation is in its third year. So far this year, six to eight churches have participated.