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-- FEATURES

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Singing Mother
Puts Family First

By Renee Wash

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)—Like so many working mothers, Susan Raye's life is a matter of priorities. But with six children, Raye admits the decision over which comes first, her family or her singing career, is easy.

"In a way, I'm lucky because I can arrange my singing appearances to fit my schedule, but that doesn't make my decision to be first a wife and mother and then a singer any less important," said the brown-haired, blue-eyed country music entertainer. "I gave up a lot to spend more time with my family, and I haven't one single regret."

Raye, appearing in September and October as guest-host on "Country Crossroads," music-interview radio program produced by the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, has recorded such hits as "LA International Airport," "Happy Heart," and "Pitty Pitty Patter."

She's been singing since she was old enough to talk and started her country music career at age 17. She was a regular on the television program "Hee Haw."

Raye first interrupted her career to raise her first son. But after four years, her marriage broke up, and she was left on her own to support herself and her son.

"I hadn't ever worked at anything except singing, but I wasn't sure I could go back to entertaining and still have the time I wanted with my son," she said. "The only way I knew to find out was to try."

She did, and the arrangement worked out much better than she had expected. "Most of my performances were at night while Steve was asleep. If I went on tour, I took him with me. I think I had more time with him than if I'd been working eight to five. And the time I did have I spent with him every minute."

Then, in 1971, Raye married Jerry Wiggins and "went from being the mother of one to the mother of four in one year."

"Jerry had two sons and soon after we were married, I became pregnant," she said. "All of a sudden I didn't have time for my career and my rapidly growing family, too. It was decision time."

So again, Raye's singing career took a backseat, this time for good, she insisted. "I would never go back to singing full-time—I just love being with my family too much."

Raye believes the years she spent on the road have given her a keener awareness of her family.

"Moms who are with their children all the time might not see the importance of little things like going to a soccer game or taking the kids to church," she explained. "Every time I get to do something with my children, no matter what it is, I realize how much my family means to me."

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But putting her family first has resulted in occasional sacrifices, Raye admitted.

The one she most recalls, although not bitterly, occurred during Christmas the first year of her marriage to Wiggins. She was asked to do a Christmas show with Bob Hope overseas but refused because she felt she needed to be with her family their first Christmas together.

"I'd watched every overseas special Bob Hope had done and had always dreamed of being a part of his tour. But I just knew in my heart I couldn't leave Jerry and the children over Christmas."

Raye lets her faith direct her in many career decisions. She has turned down roles in major motion pictures such as "Five Easy Pieces" and has refused to record certain songs because they did not conform to her moral standards.

"I was appalled at some of the words in the script for 'Five Easy Pieces.' I told the director I didn't talk that way at home so why **should** I on a movie screen," she said.

Raye and her family attend church almost every Sunday, "even if I was out late the night before at a performance. There have been times when I didn't get home from a tour until four or five a.m., but I still get up and go to church."

"I don't get a lot of sleep trying to make room for a family and a singing career," she laughed, "but look how much I would miss while I was sleeping."

Raye takes the children with her on short trips such as the numerous fairs she entertains at in the summers. But the children must stay home when she goes to Germany for a tour this fall. "That's when it's really hard--when I have to leave them," she said. "But they understand, and I can put up with it as long as it's a temporary separation."

According to Raye, her children have adjusted well to her life as a performer: "To them it's not any different than my being a secretary or an executive or a nurse. It's a job. Once when I was on TV, my youngest son pointed to the screen and said, 'Look, it's Mommy Susan Raye.'"

"I'm glad they're not affected by my career. But if they were, I know which one would have to go."

Hint—it's not the kids.

Missionary Dudley Phifer
Dies in Houston Hospital

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Dudley A. Phifer, 45, Southern Baptist missionary to the independent South African Homeland of Transkei, died Sept. 7 in a Houston hospital from complications related to leukemia.

Phifer transferred from Malawi to Transkei 11 months ago after a routine furlough physical revealed abnormalities in his blood count. The first diagnosis was leukemia, but doctors giving a second opinion diagnosed his illness as a reaction to malaria medication and suggested he might be able to continue work in a country where no malaria medication was necessary.

He had just completed his first term as a church development advisor in Malawi where he began writing a book on his experiences which he finished in Transkei.

There, the Phifers and one other Southern Baptist couple, Gene and Lavonne Meacham, opened Southern Baptist work in October 1979. Three months before his death, Phifer preached for one of five days of celebration that marked the birth of the independent Baptist Union of Transkei from an association related to the Baptist Union of South Africa.

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board began work in Transkei when Umtata Baptist Church in the capital city asked for a pastor to lead the church to multiracial status. The Baptist churches of Transkei requested a Southern Baptist missionary to replace the retiring South African missionary who had worked with Xhosa-speaking churches for 30 years. Meacham filled the first position and Phifer the second.

Phifer had carried responsibility for training 16 circuit-riding pastors. Because these men served four to 22 congregations which they reached by car, bus, horseback or foot, Phifer also had responsibility for training lay leadership at each of the churches.

But his special concern in the past year had been the Msobomvu Baptist Church in Butterworth, the industrial center of Transkei, said his wife, Rebecca Reagan Phifer of Houston. When the rural people left familiar surroundings and moved to the Msobomvu township to make money, they discovered a void in their lives. Phifer had spent much of his time with that group, seeking to meet their spiritual needs.

Born in Houston, Texas, Phifer lived in a number of Texas towns where his father was a pastor. He was a graduate of Decatur (Texas) College (now Dallas Baptist College), the University of Corpus Christi, Texas, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas

Prior to his appointment, he was pastor of First Baptist Church, Tilden, Texas.

Besides his wife, Phifer is survived by his parents, C.H. and Willy Mae Phifer of Moscow, Texas; four children, Melanie, Charles, Rachel and Kirk; and a sister, Wilda Thomas of George West, Texas.

Services were held Sept. 9 at Baptist Temple Church, Houston.

SBC Holding On
In Denomination Switching

By Marv Knox

ATLANTA (BP)--Nearly half of American Protestants are members of denominations other than those in which they grew up, according to a study by C. Kirk Hadaway, researcher for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

Hadaway's study, contained in the 1980 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches, shows Southern Baptists are far down the scale in "church switching." However, about 12 percent of persons who are Southern Baptists eventually will change denominations.

"No denomination is able to retain all those who are reared members," Hadaway writes. "But some are more stable than others."

Southern Baptists show increases, Hadaway adds, because of two factors: First, churches enlist children of members and retain them as members throughout their lives. Second, the denomination attracts "religious" converts who are likely to join churches, not merely list the denomination as a preference on opinion polls without making actual commitments to the churches and denomination.

The study notes the most stable denominations are Baptists and Lutherans.

"Their health in terms of growth comes from holding onto their members and effectively incorporating the children of members into the denomination," Hadaway says, further noting: "Conservatives gain the most committed converts, retain the most committed members and lose those who are least likely to attend."

While the study does not examine specific reasons why the Southern Baptist Convention remains stable, Hadaway says some "inferences" can be made.

Because churches within the denomination are diversified--representing many levels of economic strata and shades of theological perspectives--members can attend an "alternative" Baptist church if they don't feel they "fit in" to the Baptist church nearest them, Hadaway says.

Conversely, Southern Baptists are so dominant in parts of the South that members are faced with a lack of alternate denominations, should they decide they might like to switch, he adds. Also, Southern Baptists benefit from rich and long-standing traditions in many families, so younger members inherit a high degree of loyalty to the denomination, he says.

And, finally, the convention remains stable because it has a basic "core of beliefs," he explains. "If you're a member of some other denomination, you might not know if that denomination is too conservative or too liberal for you," he says. "But most Baptists know what they believe and what the denomination stands for in its beliefs."

Hadaway's report shows religious groups at opposite ends of the liberal/conservative scale enjoy the greatest gains from switching. These bodies, however, suffer problems with membership because of other factors.

For example, the Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ, the most liberal Protestant denominations, report net switching gains because they are "attractive" to adults who decide to change groups. Yet these denominations are not growing because large

numbers of their members drop out of organized religion altogether and because those they gain tend to be uncommitted to their churches, Hadaway says.

At the other end of the spectrum, right-wing sects enjoy large switching gains brought about by aggressive enlistment tactics. But they suffer from instability. Members jump to other denominational groups or move from sect to sect, and churches must depend on aggressive evangelism, just to hold their own.

Presbyterians, Disciples of Christ and Methodists, located in the middle of the liberal/conservative scale, all suffer membership losses, the report says. Because of instability, they are "at a disadvantage in all aspects of switching."

"All denominations attract former members of other religious bodies, but some are more aggressive in their 'sheep stealing,' and others are simply more 'attractive' to would-be switchers," he adds. "As a result, switching is not a process of equal shuffling of members. Some denominations gain and others lose in the process."

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Rural Church Grows Corn
For Chicago's Inner City

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RAMSEY, Ill. (BP)--City streets met country fields when a Baptist congregation in rural Illinois planted two acres of sweet corn for people who live around Chicago's Uptown Baptist Church.

Several families from the Bayle City Baptist Church near Ramsey, Ill., visited Uptown in the spring. They came home and planted two acres of corn on donated ground with donated seed.

In August, Uptown pastor Jim Queen brought 15 men and boys from Chicago's inner city to pick the corn. The men came from a halfway house which the Uptown church ministers to, and the boys came from the neighborhood around the church.

The men and boys picked a trailer load of corn which they took back to Chicago for distribution to people in need. Church members volunteered their vehicles to haul the corn and women of the Bayle City church provided home-cooked meals for the Chicago group while they were there.

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Father Follows Son
Into Church's Pulpit

Baptist Press
9/8/80

COALTON, Ohio (BP)--Sons occasionally follow their fathers into the pastorate of the same congregation, but Friendship Chapel in Coalton, Ohio reversed the situation.

When Randy Wood resigned Friendship's pulpit to enter Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the chapel called his father, John, as pastor. It is John Wood's first pastorate.

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