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November 26, 1986

86-177

Missionary, Daughter  
Murdered In Liberia

By Marty Croll

N-FMB

YEKEPA, Liberia (BP)—A Southern Baptist missionary and her 10-year-old daughter were found murdered in their home in the northeastern Liberian town of Yekepa early Nov. 26.

Libby Tarlton Senter, 47, of Shelby, N.C., and her daughter, Rachel, had been dead several hours when a missionary who lives nearby entered their home and found them.

George Senter, Mrs. Senter's husband, was in Monrovia, the capital city, with their 15-year-old son, Philip, when missionary Earl Williams discovered the bodies and found a knife, the apparent murder weapon, nearby. There was no immediate information on why Senter and their son were in Monrovia, about four hours away.

No motive has been determined for the killings. Initial word of the murders came to John Mills, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's director for work in West Africa, from Bradley Brown, administrator of the organization of Southern Baptist missionaries in Liberia.

Brown heard about the murders after Williams broadcast the news over radio about 8:30 a.m. Liberian time, when missionaries in the country communicate with each other every morning.

Senter of Gibson, Tenn., is assigned as a field evangelist and has been working to start and strengthen churches in about 20 villages around the town. Mrs. Senter, assigned as a church and home worker, was heavily involved in her husband's work, Mills said. The Senters had lived in Yekepa since 1980.

Williams went into the Senters' home when Rachel did not appear to leave for the school she attends with his own child, Mills said. Williams, pastor of Mount Nimba Baptist Church in the city, and his family live adjacent to the Senters in what Mills described as a relatively nice section of town.

Mills talked to Senter about an hour after the first call from Brown. "He's taking it very well, as well as a person could. He's shocked and crushed and all that, but he's a strong Christian," Mills said.

Yekepa is the country's second-largest city, modern by Liberian standards and run by a concern named LAMCO, a Liberian subsidiary of several European and American iron-ore strip-mining firms. Because of LAMCO's influence, the town has a modern supermarket, a water system and a company-run school. A planned city, Yekepa is structured much like an old Southern cotton mill town, Mills said, with districts in which company people live separately from expatriates and non-company people.

LAMCO's own security forces are investigating the murders with Liberian police, Mills said.

Yekepa's economy has been depressed because of the depressed iron-ore market, Mills said. Although unrest has been reported in the country, Mills said it has not been aimed at missionaries. Mills said he knows of no anti-American or anti-missionary sentiment there.

Rachel Senter's death is believed to be the first murder of a dependent foreign missionary child in Southern Baptist history. Mrs. Senter's death is the 11th murder of a Southern Baptist foreign missionary since the board was organized in 1845.

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The last such victim, James Philpot, was shot to death last year after a traffic accident in Mexico City. The first known victim was J. Landrum Holmes, who was killed in China in 1861 as he attempted to persuade invaders not to attack a village.

Southern Baptist missionaries murdered in the past 25 years were Archie Dunaway, killed by communist-backed guerrillas in Zimbabwe in 1978; Gladys Hopewell, murdered in Taiwan in 1973; Mavis Pate, who died in an Arab guerrilla ambush in Gaza in 1972; and Mr. and Mrs. Paul Potter, found murdered in their home in the Dominican Republic in 1971.

Southern Baptists have 67 personnel, including the Senters, assigned to work in Liberia. More than 50 are on the field now, scattered throughout the nation of about 2.2 million people.

Mills described Mrs. Senter as "warm, friendly and exceedingly efficient."

Mrs. Senter was graduated from Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, N.C., with a bachelor of arts degree. She received a master of religious education degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and a master of science degree in social work from the University of Louisville.

Before she and her husband were employed as missionary associates, she taught high school in Chesapeake, Va., and did social work in Evansville, Ind. The Senters were home missionaries in Indiana from 1971 to 1980.

Besides her husband and son, she is survived by her father and stepmother, Mr. and Mrs. W. V. Tarlton of Shelby; a sister, Janet Tarlton of Durham, N.C.; and a brother, Edwin Tarlton of New York City.

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press

P.J. Flammig Named  
To Peace Committee

By Dan Martin

N-60  
Baptist Press  
11/26/86

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Peter James Flammig, pastor of First Baptist Church of Richmond, Va., has been elected to the Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee, replacing Cecil E. Sherman of Fort Worth, Texas.

Flammig's election was announced Nov. 25 by Harold C. Bennett, president and treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee, following a mail ballot of the 70-member Executive Committee.

"It was necessary for the Executive Committee to name a new member to the Peace Committee," Bennett told Baptist Press. Bennett explained the action which created the 22-member Peace Committee contained the provision that any vacancies would be filled by the Executive Committee "at its next meeting. ..."

He explained Charles Fuller, chairman of the Peace Committee, "requested a successor be elected as quickly as possible in order to be able to participate in the next meeting. He felt if the election was delayed until the February meeting of the Executive Committee, by that time the Peace Committee would have almost completed its work."

Bennett also said the provision requires that the filling of any such vacancy maintain the (political-theological) balance on the Peace Committee.

Flammig, who says he is a "moderate" in the denominational controversy, replaces Sherman, one of the leaders of the moderate-conservative faction, who resigned Oct. 22, saying he could no longer serve on the group charged with the responsibility for determining the sources of the controversy, making findings and then recommending solutions.

The Richmond pastor told Baptist that while he shares "some of the same perspectives" with Sherman, "we are very different personalities."

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He added he had accepted the election "because I was asked. I think the situation is so important that anyone who really cares about the convention would be inclined to do whatever they could. I would have been pleased had they named someone else, but out of stewardship of my love for the convention, I did not feel I could turn it down."

Flamming added: "I would guess probably my main concern as a spectator or bystander during this process has been primarily mission-oriented; that this conflict not disturb our global mission and educational ministries. I think neither side is apt to support over the long term endeavors which they have no voice in. I would hope that some solution could be worked out so that both sides could continue to enthusiastically support our mission and educational and healing endeavors."

James Slatton, a leader of moderate-conservatives and pastor of River Road Baptist Church in Richmond, said Flamming is "a satisfactory choice to me personally. I like and trust Jim Flamming, and his commitments are all on the moderate side.

"Our original request," Slatton said, "was an identified leader among the moderates, and that, of course, Jim Flamming is not. He has not had a leadership role among moderates in the convention effort in the last seven years. He has been a moderate and at times an outspoken one, but he has not been a leader."

Flamming said he is "not a politician. I am at my best as a pastor. Denominational politics is not one of my gifts, so I haven't been there on the forefront as some have."

Paige Patterson, president of Criswell Center for Biblical Studies in Dallas, and a fundamental-conservative leader, told Baptist Press: "I have always thought very highly of Jim Flamming while realizing we probably disagree on most issues. I have always considered him a tremendous intellect and very statesmanlike. I would suppose he would make a very fine contribution to the Peace Committee."

Fuller, pastor of First Baptist Church of Roanoke, Va., said of Flamming: "I believe Jim Flamming certainly can make a distinct contribution. I think he has a hand on the situation in our denomination, and he has a spirit through which he expresses himself. Both the knowledge and the spirit can contribute to our deliberations in these last weeks."

Fuller added he has offered to meet with Flamming before the upcoming Peace Committee meeting--Dec. 1-2 in Atlanta--to help prepare the Richmond pastor for the task.

Flamming comes onto the Peace Committee at a time when the group has already met 10 times and is moving toward completion of its task. The group has announced it will make a preliminary report to the February meeting of the Executive Committee and have the final draft of its report ready for release in early April.

Flamming, 52, is a native of Burlington, Colo. He is a graduate of Hardin-Simmons University, Abilene, Texas, and received the master of divinity and doctor of theology degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

He became pastor of the 3,900-member Richmond congregation in 1983. From 1966 to 1983 he was pastor of First Baptist Church of Abilene, Texas. Previously, he served three other Texas congregations. He has been a trustee of the SBC Foreign Mission Board and in Texas was vice president of the convention, chairman of the executive board and trustee at Hendricks Hospital and Hardin-Simmons University, both in Abilene.

Bennett said he conferred with Executive Committee Chairman David Maddox, a real estate developer from Fullerton, Calif., and with officers of the Administrative and Convention Arrangements Subcommittee: James Jones, pastor of Campbellsville (Ky) Baptist Church, chairman; Francis Wilson, pastor of First Baptist Church of Alamogordo, N.M., vice chairman; and Frank Lady, an attorney from Jonesboro, Ark., secretary.

The four officers conducted a conference telephone call, during which they "considered a total of 17 persons. ... After discussion and evaluation, it was unanimously agreed that the name of P. James Flamming ... be suggested," Bennett said.

The Administrative and Convention Arrangements Subcommittee was polled. That group recommended Flaming to the entire Executive Committee, which was then polled, starting Nov. 14, Bennett said, adding he announced the results of the election as soon as possible.

In other business regarding the Peace Committee, Fuller told Baptist Press he has appointed Winfred Moore, pastor of First Baptist Church of Amarillo, Texas, and former first vice president of the SBC, to replace Sherman on the political activities subcommittee of the Peace Committee.

Fuller said that during the December meeting the Peace Committee "will turn its attention to political matters. We have received the (seminary) presidents' proposal and have asked Southern Baptists to give that a chance. Now we can turn our attention to political matters."

During a joint prayer retreat between the Peace Committee and executives of the national agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention in mid-October in Glorieta, N.M., the presidents of the six SBC-related seminaries issued a statement of intentions on ways to solve the theological aspect to the convention's problems.

In his comments on the December meeting, Fuller said he has received a copy of an eight-point proposal by Slatton, Moore and Norman Cavender, a layman from Claxton, Ga., on ways to solve the political controversy.

"It will be given a prominent place on the agenda of the political activities subcommittee," Fuller said, adding he "cannot speak for the committee, but feel the matter will be referred to the full Peace Committee for discussion."

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Appeal Process Resumes  
In Suit Against SBC

By Marv Knox

N-CD

Baptist Press  
11/26/86

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Legal proceedings have resumed in the appeal of a defeated suit against the Southern Baptist Convention and its Executive Committee.

Judge Robert Hall of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia ruled May 5 that the federal courts have no jurisdiction over action at the center of a suit brought by four laypeople against the SBC and the Executive Committee.

Robert S. and Julia Crowder of Birmingham, Ala.; Henry C. Cooper of Windsor, Mo.; and H. Allan McCartney of Vero Beach, Fla., had asked the federal court to interpret SBC bylaws, to direct the SBC to comply with that interpretation and to vacate the 1986 SBC Committee on Boards, Commissions and Standing Committees.

Their suit revolves around the report of the 1985 SBC Committee on Committees, which made nominations to the Committee on Boards. Specifically, it focuses on a judgment by Charles F. Stanley, then president of the convention, who ruled out of order the proposal of a new slate of nominees for the Committee on Boards, which would have replaced the Committee on Committees' nominees. The plaintiffs claim their rights were violated and the bylaws broken by the procedures.

When Hall ruled the court did not have jurisdiction, the four plaintiffs filed notice of appeal with the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. Later, they asked attorneys for the SBC to sign an order that would dismiss the appeal and also strike from record the decision of the lower court. The SBC's attorneys refused, later explaining, "We were not about to agree that the lower court's opinion be wiped out."

Now both sides have filed briefs with the appeals court; the plaintiffs' was filed Oct. 27, and the SBC's was filed Nov. 26. Attorneys for the plaintiffs, the lawfirm of Bondurant, Mixson and Elmore of Atlanta, have 10 days from the latter date to file a response. Then the court will decide if oral arguments will be presented and how the case will proceed.

"The issue on appeal is whether or not the district court could hear the Crowders' suit without violation of the First Amendment," said John E. Floyd of Bondurant, Mixson and Elmore.

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"The question in this case is whether the free exercise of religion would be impaired if a secular court told the Southern Baptist Convention how it must elect its committees," said James P. Guenther of the Nashville, Tenn., lawfirm of Guenther and Jordan, attorneys for the Executive Committee.

"We think the answer to that is clearly yes. The lower court agreed," Guenther continued. "The plaintiffs asked a U.S. district court judge to issue an injunction requiring the Southern Baptist Convention to conduct its elections according to the judge's notion of how that ought to be done. The judge correctly declined to do that. He recognized that he represented the secular sovereign, and he had no jurisdiction over a dispute in the Southern Baptist Convention, which is a religious sovereign.

"It is as if a Tennessee court were asked to enforce the laws of Alabama."

Guenther said Judge Hall's ruling "follows the decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court which hold that the First Amendment forbids a court from taking jurisdiction over an ecclesiastical controversy. A decision to the contrary envisions federal marshalls acting as microphone monitors and a federal judge serving as parliamentarian of the Southern Baptist Convention."

"Although we respect the district court, we feel the ruling was erroneous," Floyd contended. "The district court's ruling was very broad. On its face, it appears to give a very broad prohibition to actions of the sort the Crowders have brought and leaves them with no remedy," since responses that were satisfactory to them could not be secured through SBC channels.

"It comes down to a question of whether rights of this type (which the plaintiffs claim were denied by Stanley's ruling) are enforceable at all," Floyd added. "It's clear the rules that govern the SBC were voluntarily adopted; what we will find out is if the rules mean anything. A rule that is not enforceable is not much of a rule.

"If you think about it, it is a little worrisome for an institution as large as the Southern Baptist Convention that rules cannot be enforced. It is disturbing when you think of the money, assets and number of people involved."

Floyd said the plaintiffs' brief "deals with Supreme Court cases—about a half-dozen cases that aren't crystal clear. That makes it a fairly important case. The 11th Circuit presumably will decide what the Supreme Court cases mean and what they mean in this context.

"Most cases have arisen in local congregations. Now you're dealing with 14.5 million people who have an interest in what happens. It does put a little bit of a new light on it in that context. It's an important case."

Of the arguments to be presented before the appeals court, Guenther said: "All these arguments are a rehash of what has been said in the lower court. Nothing is new. We're still saying the same thing we've always said, and they're saying the same thing they have said."

Newberrys To Return  
To Brazil In January

By Eric Miller

F - FmB

GORDON, Texas (BP)—A dream to be back on the mission field by Christmas will come true a few weeks late for a Southern Baptist missionary family.

Randy and Jan Newberry, both 36, and their children, Amy, 15; Joey, 13; and Philip, 2, plan to return to Brazil in mid-January after the two older children finish their school semester. For them, it is a culmination of many miracles and countless prayers.

Their emotional roller coaster ride began March 27 when Philip was diagnosed as having meningitis. Doctors doubted he would live, but a miracle occurred and he did. The Newberrys told doctors people around the world were praying for Philip.

Meningitis caused poor circulation in his extremities, and that resulted in gangrene. A distinct line marked the boundary between living tissue and dead, dark, plastic-like tissue. Doctors amputated his hands and feet at that line.

Five weeks after the amputations, doctors at Children's Medical Center in Dallas became concerned about an infection developing in Philip's arm. They decided to give him an antibiotic they knew he was allergic to. An earlier dose had caused a rash, but this time he had a severe reaction. Seventy percent of his skin sloughed off, and he developed pneumonia.

Doctors attached pigskin to Philip's body and his skin started growing back. Within two weeks he was recovering, marking another miracle.

Eventually Philip was fitted with artificial legs, and one more miracle occurred when he walked without crutches. Doctors told the Newberrys they had never seen a bilateral amputee—missing both legs—walk without crutches, and Philip is a quadrilateral amputee. Again, they told doctors people around the world were praying.

Seeing their son walk across the stage at Glorieta (N.M.) Conference Center during Foreign Missions Week in August fulfilled their first dream.

After Philip walked across that stage, the Newberrys said, "Our next dream is that we'll be back in Brazil by Christmas." But school schedules intervened, and it will be early January before they leave Texas for Brazil.

Their first term was in Natal, Brazil, where Randy was a religious education consultant. Now he will coordinate small-church development in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Randy firmly believes it is God's will for them to return to Brazil, even though staying in the United States would appear to be easier.

Classmates are begging Amy and Joey to stay in Gordon, Texas, and Philip could get more convenient medical treatment in the United States. Once a year Philip must be brought back to the Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Crippled Children in Dallas for doctors to check his arms and legs. He also will have to go to a Sao Paulo clinic about every six months to be fitted with new prostheses as he grows.

The Newberrys have deep roots in Gordon. Randy moved there at 13 when his father became pastor of First Baptist Church. Jan was born there. They met at Gordon High School and got married at 18. Jan's family lives in Gordon, and Randy's family lives 30 miles away.

All of Gordon knows about Philip's brush with death, said the Newberrys' pastor, Bill Wright of First Church. Students prayed in school for Philip, as did civic clubs and churches.

The Newberrys are popular at school. Classmates this year selected Amy as the "cutest girl" in the school and Joey as "class favorite" for the eighth grade. Amy is on the drill team, and Joey plays football for Gordon Junior High. Randy has been teaching a Wednesday night Bible study for youth, many of whom are his children's classmates.

In the months since Philip became ill, Randy and Jan have lived through the stress of not knowing whether their child would live, whether his high fever had impaired his hearing, sight or mental abilities, or exactly how they would cope with his needs. But cope they have, and as a part of that, they have developed new parenting skills.

Each day Jan helps Philip strap on his artificial legs and feet. Some mothers put the shoe on the wrong foot, but Jan sometimes puts the foot on the wrong leg, Randy jokes. She helps Philip eat by attaching a clip-on spoon to his arm.

The Newberrys have to see that he has someone nearby when he's climbing steps because he must crawl up them. They also watch him near uneven terrain because he has no feeling for ground surfaces and can trip easily.

He falls harder than other children because he can't break his fall with hands. The family must see that he doesn't walk in gravel because a fall on gravel would cause punctures in the ends of his arms.

Speaking at many churches in Texas and one in Florida, Randy and Jan have explained how it felt to watch a son slowly dying and then to see him recover as people around the world prayed for him.

The Newberrys cried recently as they recalled waiting through days and nights in the hospital. "We thought about if Philip died, what it would be like without him," Jan said. "I'd think about going to the beach and how much he liked the sand and the water. He liked to run. I thought about his birthday party and maybe it would be the only one that he'd ever have."

Pictures flashed through their minds of Philip splashing in a toddler-size swimming pool and playing with his dog. There was the afternoon when Philip started walking at nine months and the times he played hide-and-seek with Joey. Amy and Joey asked God to spare Philip's life and to take theirs instead.

The weekend before he got meningitis, the Newberrys laughed at him playing in a motel pool. He would jump in and Randy would catch him and set him back on the pool edge. Each time, Philip would say, "Back, daddy, back," waving Randy to move farther from the edge.

"I remember telling Jan," Randy said, "If we lose him—Oh, we'd never lose him, because you can't lose something if you know where it is. But if the Lord takes him, we know where Philip is. He's not lost.

"If the Lord takes him," Randy said, "that will be a tremendous hurt. But that would be two of the most joyful years that we'd ever want—the two years that we had him."

During the crisis time, Randy, Jan and William Gaventa, the physician who directs medical services for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, sat together Easter morning as Philip lay injected with nine intravenous tubes, catheters in his stomach and chest, and respirator and feeding tubes. Doctors doubted Philip would live another day.

The three cried together. Gaventa regained his composure and told Randy and Jan, "Whatever happens, God is going to take care of you. His grace will be sufficient for whatever the day holds no matter what that day holds."

Months later the Newberrys met a doctor in Dallas who asked them about Philip and if they planned to return to Brazil. "We told him about everything, what Philip lost and how well he has recovered," Randy recalls.

"The doctor just looked at me and said, 'I had an 18-month-old daughter who had the same type of meningitis, but she didn't survive. For a doctor that's real hard. ... You keep asking yourself the medical questions. What if we had tried this antibiotic or what if we had done that?'"

In Philip's case, prayer brought about a miracle that goes beyond medicine.

Philip Newberry  
Learns To Adapt

By Eric Miller

F-FMB

GORDON, Texas (BP)—People in the department store stared at Philip Newberry.

The 2-year-old son of Southern Baptist missionaries Randy and Jan Newberry underwent amputation of his hands and feet after meningitis caused gangrene last April.

Randy noticed people moving around to see Philip, whose artificial legs were visible. "That poor little boy—he has no hands," someone said.

Then Philip spotted a cricket hopping across the floor. He ran over and stomped it, then stepped back, bent over and looked at the bug. People nearby watched his actions and their look of pity changed to one of amazement.

Philip also attracted attention in an Orlando, Fla., airport waiting area when he pretended to play football. He'd bend down to hike the ball. Then he'd throw it, catch it and run a minute before lying down on the floor and saying he'd been tackled. Many of the people watching were amazed at all he could do.

Back home in Texas, Philip comes closer to the real thing. There he proudly wears his Dallas Cowboys helmet as his mother holds a small football upright on the floor 10 feet away. He concentrates, then runs on his knees, kicks the ball and giggles. Inside the house he is as comfortable without his prostheses as he is with them.

What lies ahead for a boy who lost his left arm at the elbow, his right one at the wrist and both legs just below the knee? Snow skiing, swimming, bicycle riding, driving cars, tying shoes, dressing himself and opening doors—Philip's parents believe he'll do all those things.

They see a "strong determination in a lot of things he does," Randy says. The biggest accomplishment Philip has made since his amputations is learning to walk on the prostheses. Doctors had predicted he would have to use crutches to learn to walk. But he learned to walk in about a week without crutches.

"The accomplishments we have seen in just the last month have been exciting," Randy adds. "After several more years, I think we will be amazed at what he will be able to do."

An electronic arm may be in Philip's future, but they're expensive. A doctor in Minnesota is doing transplants of hands and feet, but transplant candidates must take risky anti-rejection drugs, and the Newberrys are leery of those.

Spending time with amputees gives the Newberrys encouragement. They met a 16-year-old boy who lost more of each limb than Philip did and the boy "talked about helping his dad work on the car," Jan says. "He didn't tell us anything that he has not learned how to do." They learned of a 7-year-old boy without hands or feet who can tie his shoes and dress himself.

The Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Crippled Children in Dallas sponsors an organization of parents of amputees. "They get together once a month and encourage one another and just watch what the kids can do," Randy says, adding he may start a similar group in Brazil.

The Newberrys plan to return to Brazil in mid-January and live in Sao Paulo, where Randy will help start new churches.

Philip "will have a tremendous testimony, and I believe Brazilians with their tremendous love for children will just absolutely love Philip to death," Randy says.

"The thing that has amazed us is how God has allowed Philip's story to spread and to touch lives all around," he adds. "It indicates that God really does have a tremendous plan for Philip's life. It is a little bit scary to think about the responsibility that he has given us."

Philip's doctors say they had never known a bilateral amputee to learn to walk without using crutches. But Philip, a quadrilateral amputee, was able to accomplish the task, Randy says. "We said, 'But you've never had one who had the amount of prayer that Philip has had.'"



Church Youth Ministry Is  
The Brightest Spot In Town

By Bill Bangham

F-Br.C.

BLOCKTON, Iowa (BP)—In Blockton, Iowa, Friday nights on Main Street are quiet. They're as quiet as the placid Platte River that snakes along the edge of town.

The movie theater is gone. So is the drug store, the bank, the Laundromat, two restaurants and three garages. Where there were two gas stations, now there is one.

The grade school too is quiet. The last classes were held here in the early '70s. Children now ride one and a half hours each way to another community for class.

Two thousand people once lived here. Now there are 275.

"If you've got to be parked in the middle of nowhere, this is a good place to be," says Richard Melvin. He should know. He's lived all of his 30-odd years here.

"I hate to see it, but Blockton is dying," says Melvin. "Too many people think it's dying. It would be different if people believed in it."

Melvin is one of those who believes.

Every Friday night, and many Saturdays, finds him in the brightest spot in town. It's also the noisiest.

Climb the rickety, wooden stairs to a room above Melvin's father's hardware store and ears are assailed with the clatter of football games, the sharp crack of cue and billiards skittering across green felt, the electronic dittling of an Atari and the tinny hum of a record player.

There's always a round-robin elimination ping-pong game with six or eight players rotating rapidly around the table, each wildly swatting in turn at the careening ball.

If you're there on the right night, a rented movie flickers on the video player at one end of the room.

But the noise only serves to punctuate the happy chatter of 15 to 20 young people.

It's not just the brightest spot in Blockton, these nights it's the only light on Main Street. This is the Upper Room, a youth ministry of Blockton Baptist Church, where Melvin is a member.

"The kids just need something to do," says Melvin. It's as simple as that.

The Upper Room started three and a half years ago with Melvin and Carol Elg, wife of the former pastor, Mike Elg. Carol Elg was determined to have a ministry to the young people of Blockton. And so was Dode Lawrence, former church member.

"Carol and I did the talking," recalls Melvin, "but Dode did the actual work."

The church didn't have much money to put into it at the time. Lawrence went around town asking for donations. Somehow he raised between \$400 and \$500. He listened every morning to radio swap shows and eventually bought a pool table and a used television set.

Melvin's father, Orville, donated the room above his store.

When Lawrence died several months after the Upper Room opened, the young people dedicated it to his memory. The sign above the door on the street leading to the stairs attests to that.

"They knew who got the money to get it started," says Melvin. "He was quite a guy. He spent a lot of time with them."

The Upper Room is open to everyone, not just members of Blockton Baptist. Some of the young people who attend are members of other churches. Others don't attend any church at all.

"You don't have to go to any church to come up here," says church member Charles King. "But after so long, we hope they will see the need for it."

A few families have joined the Blockton church through their children attending.

"Everyone in Blockton has been witnessed to through the Upper Room," says Melvin. "It's helped dispel the idea that you can't be a Christian and have fun.

"Down the road is where we'll see the results from this."

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F-SWBTS

Blind Man Helps  
Thousands Read

By Elizabeth Watson

Baptist Press  
11/26/86

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)—Edwin Wilson couldn't read a single book in Fleming Library when he came to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1945.

But it was no fault of his own. Wilson was blind, and the Fort Worth, Texas, seminary had no books in Braille.

Today Southwestern's visually impaired students can "read" textbooks, library books and other Christian literature because of the work of Christian Education for the Blind, a service founded by Wilson in 1946.

For 40 years, the Fort Worth-based non-profit organization has published Christian reading materials in Braille and recorded them on cassette tape.

Currently, three Southwestern students use Wilson's service. Five others help him as volunteers. Two Southwestern graduates serve in full-time administrative positions.

While in seminary, Wilson felt a divine leadership to begin a special ministry for the blind. "As a seminary student I often had difficulty finding readers to help me with materials for classwork and other activities," Wilson explains. "Braille books were not available, and the cassette tape hadn't been invented yet."

Wilson realized his personal knowledge of blindness, his years of advanced education and his evangelical background prepared him for a publishing ministry. He founded Christian Education for the Blind to help students and Christian laypeople.

"When I lost my sight in early youth, there was no Christian literature in Braille beyond the Bible suitable for a lad who was baptized into the fellowship of a Baptist church," Wilson notes.

His first publication was the Braille Evangel Magazine, a 1946 periodical of Christian literature and sacred music in Braille. In 1952 Wilson organized the Texas Church Conference of the Blind and in 1953 the National Church Conference of the Blind.

With the advent of the tape recorder, Wilson extended his ministry to include Southern Baptist Sunday school lessons on audio tape. Six curricula currently are recorded for teachers and pupils. He recently published The Evangel Hymnal, which features both lyrics and music.

More than 4,000 people use Christian Education for the Blind services. All books and magazines are free. The service is funded by private donations.

"I have a deep sense of satisfaction knowing that much of the ministry is engrained in the lives of blind people around the world and that it will continue to live on long after I'm gone," Wilson says. "This is matched with a deep sense of appreciation for the help of many people, especially Southwestern Seminary students, who have shouldered the responsibilities here at Christian Education for the Blind."

"This ministry is God's answer to a great religious need."

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(Watson is a student newswriter at Southwestern Seminary.)  
(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Southwestern Seminary