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94-206

OKLAHOMA--Pastor/teacher survives 2 brushes with death.  
TEXAS--Southwestern student behind Barney Home video craze; photo.  
OKLAHOMA CITY--Wilbur Lewis: thanking God for miracles with a small 'm.'  
OREGON--He offers faith to addicts in Portland's inner city.  
WASHINGTON--Pierce named new director of BWA women's department; photo.  
TEXAS--Southwestern graduates told to share missionaries' passion.  
NORTH CAROLINA--SBC president delivers charge at SEBTS December graduation.

Pastor/teacher survives  
2 brushes with death

By Dana Williamson

Baptist Press  
12/21/94

LOCO, Okla. (BP)--"Ladies and gentlemen, we don't mean to alarm you, but we believe there might be a fire in the left engine of the plane."

These words from the pilot of an ATR-72 plane on the runway at Dallas/Fort Worth Airport made passenger Ken Gore a little uneasy -- partly because it was the second time in less than two months his life had been in danger.

Gore, part-time pastor at Loco Baptist Church, southeast of Duncan, Okla., miraculously walked away from an automobile accident Oct. 16 and was safely evacuated from the troubled commuter plane in Dallas on Dec. 12.

Gore, his wife and another couple drove from Loco into Healdton for lunch after the morning worship service on Oct. 16.

"We had had a great service that morning," Gore recounted. "We had a baptismal service, and I remembered I had left the water heater on. So Rob Johnson, a member of our church, and I left our wives at the restaurant while we went back to the church to shut off the heater."

On their way back to Healdton, the car, which Johnson was driving, hit an oil spot while rounding a curve. The car flew off the road, ran into a ravine, bounced from one side of a ditch to another and ended up next to a fence. Both Gore and Johnson were knocked unconscious.

When they woke up about 5 to 10 minutes later, Gore asked, "What happened?" Johnson said he didn't know. Gore asked, "Where are we?" Johnson said he didn't know. Gore asked, "Where are our wives?" Johnson said, "Are we married?"

"Needless to say we were both somewhat delirious," said Gore. "I thought our wives were in the car, and I opened up the door to see where they might be, forgetting that we had left them at the restaurant."

Although the car was totaled, Gore and Johnson walked away from the accident with very minor injuries.

"I had an internal bruise around my rib cage, a nosebleed where I hit the passenger door and the bump on my head which caused the concussion," Gore said.

So when the plane trouble occurred a few weeks later, Gore thought he might be experiencing *deja vu*.

Gore, a Ph.D. student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, flies back and forth from Fort Worth, Texas, to Oklahoma City every Monday to teach seminary extension classes.

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"Before the pilot came back to the passenger area to talk to us, he had announced we would be taxiing back to the gate due to a generator malfunction," Gore said. "But when he shut down all power to the plane and came back to help us evacuate, we knew there was an emergency."

Gore said the pilots stood on either side of the emergency exit and helped passengers down.

"We were on a bridge that crosses a highway, and it was about 15 to 20 minutes before a bus came to take us back to the terminal," said Gore.

Even after all the turmoil, Gore was only about an hour late getting to Oklahoma City, and he made it in time to administer final exams to his students.

"When I walked in the door of the classroom, my first words were, 'OK, which one of you prayed for me not to be here today?'"

Gore said two near tragedies in two months makes one stop and think.

"It makes me think more and more how limited life is. Life can be snuffed out at a moment's notice," he said. "But second, it makes me think how great God is."

Gore has been teaching the book of Job this semester.

"When I was told to teach the book of Job, I never knew I was going to have to live it," Gore laughed.

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Southwestern student behind  
Barney Home video craze

By Mark Reimer

Baptist Press  
12/21/94

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Millions of children throughout the United States stay glued to their televisions for several hours daily as they watch a certain frolicsome dinosaur named Barney on home videos. Their deep adoration of the purple playmate could be credited to the marketing expertise of a student of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Dan Merrell is full-time director of marketing for the home video division of the Lyons Group, producer of Barney. Merrell also works with Lyons' toy division in marketing Barney dolls and other related products from his Dallas office.

Since coming to Lyons in April 1993, Merrell has designed covers and arranged advertising promotions for six Barney videos, 8 million copies of which have sold nationwide. Merrell also has taken a lead role in the development and marketing of Barney toys. One of the best-sellers has been the soft, cuddly Barney doll that plays the fun-loving character's trademark song, "I love you. You love me. We're a happy family ..." when its palm is squeezed.

"I'm totally at peace with myself spiritually about my work. I have no problem standing behind the products as a Christian," said Merrell, a master of divinity student who attends only night classes at Southwestern Seminary. He maintains a 3.9 grade point average.

"I know that some Christians have attacked Barney, but if anyone takes the time to watch the show they'll realize that there's no evil or New Age intent," he said. What Barney's popularity sadly says about American society is "something like this has to bring home the value of love to families when the Christians should be doing that," he added.

"The thing that Barney stands for is to let kids just be kids. Don't introduce them to violence, don't introduce them to sexual education. Don't make them older than they're supposed to be," he said.

Admitting his heart is sometimes warmed as he views Barney videos and clutches the latest Barney doll, Merrell noted his work as the soft-spoken dinosaur's most avid promoter has heightened his sensitivity to reaching the secular world with the gospel. "There seems to be a new sense in Christendom that we are going to have to go out and get these people. For every 12 or 15 members in my singles class at church, there are thousands of people who aren't coming."

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After graduating from Baylor University in Waco, Texas, with a communications degree, Merrell moved to Dallas and began part-time work in a video store. The job allowed him to gain some skills in marketing and purchasing of videos, and eventually he was promoted to marketing director for the 17-store Dallas chain.

Later, he moved into video distribution for the fifth largest distribution company in the country. He was promoted to vice president of marketing and purchasing and was responsible for an \$8 million inventory and the purchase of \$100 million to \$200 million worth of films from Hollywood per month. But something was changing in his life. He felt a call to attend seminary and began evaluating his job situation.

"As I began to get more sensitive spiritually, I began to realize that about 80 percent of what Hollywood was sending out was something that I couldn't live with as a Christian," Merrell said. "I had to market these movies and then leave work, sit down in a chair in class and listen to prayer requests. I started to feel a whole lot like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde."

A friend working for the Lyons Group approached him about a marketing job. Merrell took the opportunity, although it meant a pay cut. At the time, Lyons was excited about Barney as its newest children's entertainer. Several years later, the Dallas-based company is the third largest supplier of children's video tapes and the fifth largest supplier overall in the country.

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(BP) photo available upon request from the Southwestern Seminary public relations office.

**Wilbur Lewis: thanking God  
for miracles with a small 'm'**

**By Dave Parker**

**Baptist Press  
12/21/94**

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--December 27, 1993. That date will live forever in the mind of Oklahoma City doctor Wilbur Lewis and his family.

On that day, Lewis' life was forever changed.

Lewis had been a general surgeon in Midwest City and Oklahoma City since 1970. He and his wife, Gladys, missionaries to Paraguay from 1960-70, were at Copper Mountain, Colo., with their family for an annual ski trip with other doctors.

Lewis and his daughter Leann were stopping at their condominium for lunch. He did not see an unmarked culvert and fell into it being thrown headfirst into the ground and severing his spinal cord.

Instantly paralyzed from the neck down, Lewis could not even speak. He mouthed the words, "Get help," to his daughter.

Another doctor was nearby, and he started giving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to Lewis, while emergency crews were called.

He was transported to a Denver hospital; at that time, doctors did not expect him to live through the night. He kept improving, though, and eventually was transported to Craig Institute for Rehabilitation, a world-famous center in nearby Englewood.

Lewis is a quadriplegic, expected to be confined to a wheelchair and dependent upon a respirator the rest of his life. He cannot speak without the help of a device attached to the respirator. That is not stopping him from giving his testimony in churches, though, about how God has helped him through one of the most difficult times anyone can imagine.

At first, Lewis thought God would heal him and remove his paralysis, but that has not happened. Still, he thanks God for the blessings he has provided.

"When this first happened, we were praying for a miracle with a capital 'M,'" Lewis said. "We were disappointed that we had not received that miracle. One night, though, I was praying with my wife and we realized that even though we had not received a miracle with a capital 'M,' we had received several miracles with a small 'm.'"

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The first miracle was the fact a physician was near enough to him when the accident happened to immediately begin administering mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

A second miracle was Leann was with him at the time. "She asked, 'Daddy, are you all right?' I could only mouth the words, 'Get help.' She assured me someone had already called 911, and the ski patrol headquarters was only 50 yards away."

He became aware of the third miracle while listening to a lecture at the rehabilitation center. There, he learned only 1 percent of patients with cervical fractures ever live long enough to make it to the hospital for treatment.

"Getting me into Denver was another miracle," Lewis said. "They wanted to take me in by helicopter, but the weather was bad and the sky overcast, so I had to be taken in by ambulance."

The fifth miracle was the doctor on duty at the hospital.

"There was one person at the hospital that specializes in cervical spine fracture injuries," Lewis said. "He was on duty that night. He did the operation right away because it was thought I wouldn't survive overnight."

"His skill and expertise made him able to perform a miracle."

Miracle six was when he was transferred to the rehabilitation center, which was only a few miles away. Miracle seven was the fact he was able to wear a "halo" brace until the spine injury healed.

Miracle eight was being able to return to Oklahoma City, because Lewis noted "most of the people who do survive are in an institution the rest of their lives and not able to get out."

More than 100 friends and relatives and fellow members of First Baptist Church of Oklahoma City greeted Lewis at Will Rogers World Airport when he returned. Afterward, he said miracle nine was finding nurses here who are experienced in cervical spine fractures.

Miracle 10 is his wife, he said. An English professor at the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond, an Oklahoma City suburb, she is also a registered nurse.

"I have a wife who is loving and supportive," he said. "She is able to continue with her job. She helped to close down my practice."

"It is a miracle to have someone who loves me so much to help provide my care."

Lewis said his time in medical school and in Paraguay helped him deal with difficult times.

"I shared with many people their own personal tragedies, never thinking this would be my lot in life," he said. "I am now able to understand a new meaning of suffering."

The amount of suffering he has experienced has provided him with the answer to the question, "Why is there suffering?"

"If there were not suffering in this world, we would not be able to look forward in the afterlife to the freedom from suffering we will experience," he said.

The accident has also given him a rare insight into the feelings of the patients of Jack Kavorkian, the "suicide doctor." He said he doesn't "believe for a minute" doctors should help patients commit suicide. On the other side, he said he has a disdain for "faith healers" who take advantage of sick or injured people.

"Although I have gotten depressed and dealt with a lot of denial, my faith in God has grown because of this experience," Lewis said. "I hope you, too, can have the experience of a closer walk with God because of your experiences."

"All of us have challenges, whether they be physical, emotional or spiritual," he said. "These are the kinds of things we can look forward to as Christians, a testing of our faith."

"My prayer for you is when these trials come to you, that your faith will grow and your love for him will be manifested in your new relationship with him."

He offers faith to addicts  
in Portland's inner city

By Rachel G. Gill

PORTLAND, Ore. (BP)--Troy Smith talks with the measured cadences and gentle intonations of his south Mississippi beginnings. With a quiet, almost dispassionate voice, he tells the story of a young man's journey into alcohol addiction and violent behavior. The tale is his own.

But Smith's story doesn't end in despair. Now many years removed from those back alleys of addiction and hopelessness, Smith has experienced a miracle of God's grace. His testimony today is one of repentance, cleansing, healing and hope.

The oldest of seven children, Smith grew up the son of a Southern Baptist pastor but decided being a pastor was not the life he wanted. During the Vietnam War, he interrupted his college career to join the U.S. Marine Corps.

It was there he learned to hate. "They teach you to hate," he says. "It makes you a better killer."

In Vietnam, Smith fought in the Tet Offensive -- one of the deadliest campaigns of the war -- where many of his friends were killed or maimed. He escaped physical harm but left Vietnam, he says, "with a lot of anger and a serious drinking problem."

After leaving the Corps, Smith moved to Pascagoula, Miss., to work as an electronics supervisor on off-shore oil rigs where drinking and fighting were a way of life. Money was good, but it was a rough way to make a living.

In Angola, Africa, where he was transferred with his family, Smith's problems with alcohol and anger caught up with him.

"I was walking down the street one day when I saw this Portuguese guy in front of me," he says. "I thought, 'I could kill him without feeling anything.' That's when I realized I didn't care about my life or anybody else's. God used that experience to get my attention."

The change in Smith's life was dramatic. Instead of drinking and fighting, he now spent free time reading the Bible. "I just stayed in the Word," he says. "By the time I left Angola I had read the Bible through several times."

Smith was reading the Bible at home one day when he heard God's voice. "It was very clear," he says. "God told me I was to preach. I couldn't believe it. I was shocked!"

Hesitantly, he went upstairs to find his wife. "What would you say if I told you God called me to preach."

"I guess you'd have to preach, wouldn't you?" she answered.

Back in the States, Smith completed a degree in religion and philosophy at William Carey College in Mississippi in 18 months, while starting a church that became the fastest-growing in the association.

On a much needed vacation, he heard God speak to him again, this time calling him "to an unchurched city surrounded by mountains."

When he related God's instructions to a close adviser, the friend said, "You're talking about Portland, Ore."

"When I told my wife," remembers Smith, "she turned green." Going to Portland meant facing the unknown again. No job. No money. No place to serve.

"But when we got there," says Smith of his and Jamae's experience, "we felt like we were home."

That was 16 years ago. Early years in Portland were spent in church starting and evangelism. Now a missionary of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, Smith is founder and director of Baptist Revival Center, a SAFE house for drug and alcohol addicts in Portland's inner city.

SAFE -- Setting Addicts Free Eternally -- is a program Smith conceived for people who are at the bottom of the addiction ladder, hopeless individuals the system has given up on. Its 90 percent success rate for those who graduate is astounding. Most graduates stay on as encouragers, helping SAFE newcomers on their journey to freedom from addiction.

Through personal counseling, Bible study and personal support, SAFE's staff members are models of God's deliverance from guilt, addiction and mental illness.

"When we explain to drug addicts what Christ can do for them," says Smith, "hardly anyone refuses him. We don't have to force anyone. They're desperate to receive the Lord. That changes them and gives them hope."

No one knows better than Smith what that means.

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Gill is assistant editor of MissionsUSA. Reprinted by permission from Missions USA, Volume 65, Number 5, HMB, all rights reserved.

Pierce named new director  
of BWA women's department

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WASHINGTON (BP)--Willene Pierce, director of the Maryland-Delaware Woman's Missionary Union the past 13 years, has been selected director of the women's department of the Baptist World Alliance.

She will begin her duties Feb. 22, according to Catherine B. Allen of Birmingham, Ala., women's department president.

"For more than a year, we have been asking God to lead us to the right person to serve as our new director," Allen said, noting many candidates had been considered. "Our interview committee of five leaders concurred enthusiastically with the world officers in choosing Willene Pierce."

The officers feel "Willene Pierce is already a world-class leader among Baptist women, with wide international knowledge," Allen said. "She loves Baptist women around the world. She has visited and served them as a speaker and teacher at her own expense in Taiwan, Rwanda, Latvia and Paraguay."

Pierce, in accepting the call to direct the Baptist world women's organization, said, "During the past few years, I have been confronted over and over again by two facets regarding the lives of the women of the world: One is that of great need -- spiritual, emotional, physical, moral and economical. The other is that of immeasurable worth in sharing the gospel and in Christian ministry.

"I welcome the opportunity to help women around the world who are seeking to touch the lives of others in the name of Jesus Christ."

Born in Belle Plaine, Kan., Pierce is a graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

Pierce comes into the director's position with knowledge of women's department operations, having served on the finance committee the last three years. In addition to handling the department's finances, other responsibilities include promoting the annual Day of Prayer, editing the department's publications, maintaining correspondence and relationships with officers in the six continental unions of the women's department and planning women's leadership development conferences.

Pierce succeeds Beth Hayworth MacClaren, the department's director since November 1987, who is retiring. Allen noted until Pierce officially takes office Feb. 22, MacClaren has agreed to remain in office, and will continue to be associated with the department in a volunteer capacity.

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(BP) photo available upon request from the Baptist World Alliance.

**Southwestern graduates told  
to share missionaries' passion      By Mark Reimer**

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The 359 graduates at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's fall commencement Dec. 16 were exhorted by the president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board to be end-time apostles.

Rankin, a 1969 graduate of the Fort Worth, Texas, seminary, cited the Apostle Paul as the ultimate example of an end-time apostle, "called and serving prematurely." He outlined three characteristics of Paul's life that Christians need to imitate for effective ministry: Paul had a vision to evangelize the nations; "he discovered his weakness that ignited God's power and grace;" and he focused entirely on Jesus.

Rankin asserted he never has been "one to get caught up in eschatology," instead devoting his attention to the task at hand. He acknowledged a great emphasis on eschatology among many Christians, and a general excitement is prevalent among the missions community about reaching the end of the millennium. Proof of this excitement, he said, is the FMB's 534 new missionary appointments for 1994, bringing a total of over 4,000 appointed missionaries currently serving with the FMB.

Although new believers are being won daily, "we should never presume that it's our strategy" alone that's accomplishing the work, Rankin said. God is the force behind missions efforts, he reminded the graduates. Every Christian therefore should work with a sense of urgency, knowing "Jesus has assured you that his power and authority goes with you."

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**SBC president delivers charge  
at SEBTS December graduation      By Dwayne Hastings**

Baptist Press  
12/21/94

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--A light drizzle fell outside and umbrellas were almost as numerous as mortarboards, yet every face inside Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary's Binkley Chapel was beaming as the school held its fall commencement Saturday, Dec. 17 on its Wake Forest, N.C., campus.

Southeastern president Paige Patterson conferred degrees upon 37 students whose homes were as distant as Seoul, Korea, and as nearby as Raleigh, N.C. Patterson said wherever the graduates go and to whatever specific ministry, their task will be none other than shepherding with Jesus Christ as their model.

Southern Baptist Convention president Jim Henry delivered the charge to the graduates, reminding them God had placed a call deep down in their heart -- a call to exemplify the love and compassion of Jesus so the lost might see Christ in them.

"He has put his hand on you and called you. Stand on your call," Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla., told the graduates. "Your call may well be your anchor in the rock when everything is going down around you. When the devil whispers in your ear, 'What are you doing serving Jesus?' Say, 'I was called.'"

Henry reminded them not to forget their position in the kingdom of God. Noting John the Baptist's life, Henry said John knew he was not the light and that Jesus was and is the light of the world; likewise, those in the ministry are called to serve, not be served.

"You probably will not lose your head like John the Baptist, but there are folks out there who will not like what you are doing. You must remember your commission. Do not compromise the integrity of what you believe."

Former SBC president and evangelist Bailey Smith gave the prayer of dedication, exhorting the graduates to dig into the word of God so when those around them fall they will hold tight.

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"It is not a secular call that is upon your life," Smith said. "You are going out to represent God. You must preach a hell that is hot, a heaven that is precious, and a savior who is coming again."

Among the graduating class was Paul Wallschlaeger, candidate for doctor of ministry who earned a master of divinity degree from Southeastern in 1984. Wallschlaeger, who studied under three administrations at the seminary, said he had felt the "winds of change" sweep across the school.

He said, "I have thoroughly enjoyed my relationship with all the presidents. I feel like the changes have been positive and that the student body is now more than ever charged to do God's work."

The former pastor of New Covenant Baptist Church, Richmond, Va., Wallschlaeger has been assigned by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board as pastor of the International Baptist Church, Copenhagen, Denmark.

The graduation ceremony was a family affair for Ron and Sherian Aldridge. Husband and wife each received the associate of divinity degree. Aldridge admitted the experience presented some unique challenges: "Our work at Southeastern has really drawn us closer together -- while we both had to work and spend many hours studying, I wouldn't trade our time here for anything."

Mrs. Aldridge added: "It has been hard financially and the class work has been difficult, yet in all of it God has grown us in our faith. He gave us the measure of strength and ability to face the challenge of a seminary education."

Aldridge, pastor of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Pittsboro, N.C., continued, "We're leaving with mixed emotions. Its exciting getting out there in the field, but saying goodbye to all of our friends here makes it bittersweet."

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