



100th Anniversary of the University of Redland, 2007
“Reunion of Class of 1951”

Finding Ahmed

...and other discoveries

Ed Irvin

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livescapes

Finding Ahmed

My first job as a minister was in Lincoln, Nebraska. I was born in the west, went to seminary in the east, but had never lived in the Midwest. So I was quite interested in the offer of a position as Assistant Pastor at a medium-sized Baptist Church in Lincoln. The salary was rather modest--\$2,900 annually--but Diane and I thought we could live on it. But then the question of housing came up. I was filling a position that had been occupied by a single woman who lived in a very small apartment. Both of us knew we needed something a little larger and that meant dealing with rental prices. In light of the fact that we as a couple were offered a position at the same rate of pay as a single woman we decided to ask the senior minister for advice.

It was then that he came up with a proposal. The Baptist State Convention operated a Baptist Student House one block from the edge of the University of Nebraska campus and was looking for house parents. (From the second floor one could look north and see the carillon tower by Love library; the students called it “the singing silo.”) That house provided the housing for seven young men recommended by their home churches—mostly from Nebraska such as Grand Island, Nebraska City and Omaha. But one was from Burley, Idaho, and another an international student from Korea.

The senior minister thought that if we were willing, we could live in the first floor quarters, free in exchange for management. We jumped at it. Diane was a good manager (doubtless learned from her father) and, in spite of enrolling in the School of education, could handle the duties involved. Those duties included paying the utility bills, collecting the bedding for laundering, checking for damage, collecting the rent, and in general keeping law and order. Fortunately, there were no meal responsibilities as the men had their own dining facility in the basement with a hired cook.

The house was a large, two-story affair with a full basement and a veranda that ran across the front. The second floor had five bedrooms and a double bath. We had a living room, a “sitting room”, a bedroom and a kitchen. We also had a divided bath—actually two rooms facing each other across a narrow hallway. One room had a toilet and sink, the other had a shower.

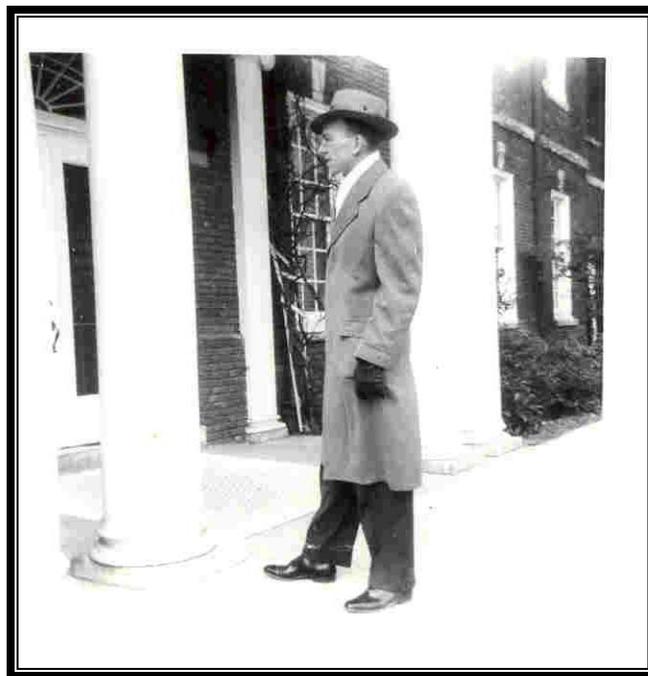
We lived in that house for the better part of two years and made friends with a group of outstanding young men. In fact, we still keep in touch with two of them—one in Colorado and the other in Connecticut. The international student went on to get a PhD at MIT and returned to teach geophysics at Nebraska.

Some humorous events took place at that house! It was located between a similar structure on the south and a fraternity with parking lot on the north. Across the street was a Lutheran Chapel. The setting was conducive to a lot of foot traffic, especially from those seeking shortcuts to the campus. It was not unusual to have students cut right through the house if late for class! Sometimes we would look up from the breakfast table

with wonderment at the strangers passing our stove. I'm sure some of the students figured the house was part of the campus.

But the event that took the prize involved an Iranian student who rang the doorbell and asked to see Ahmed. We told him there was no Ahmed living with us. He stepped back to check the house number, and, nodding his head, softly spoke, "Three Feefteen." Then repeated his request. Again we smiled and said there was no Ahmed living with us. He paused and asked if he could look for himself. With a chuckle we laughed and said he could and in he came and climbed the stairs. A moment later we heard him speaking Arabic and laughing. But with whom? Driven by curiosity and a sense of responsibility, we too climbed the stairs and found Ahmed! Incredible! He was living on the roof behind a dormer at the intersection of a roof hip not visible from the street and we didn't know it! Of course the other young men knew it, but weren't about to give the secret away! Ahmed had a sleeping bag, a Sterno stove, flashlights, and an orange crate serving as a bookshelf. There was also a duffel bag for clothing. We had to admire his ingenuity and to laugh at his creativity but told him, as gently as we could, that his arrangement was illegal and not really fair to the other men. We were astonished that we never saw him coming or going and then figured out there was a large elm tree close to the roof, and determined that it was his means of ascent and descent when we were at home. His "living quarters" were fine for autumn weather, but winter was on its way and there was no way he could have handled the snow!

As the school fight song says, "There is no place like Nebraska..."



Seminary

The Balloon

Columbia School was three blocks from our home on east Platte Avenue, Colorado Springs. It was an easy walking distance and four or five of us first-graders in the neighborhood would cluster at the corner of Platte and Institute Avenue and walk together. Platte Avenue was wide with a landscaped center parking lined with blue spruce. We had to watch the traffic carefully but cars always stopped for a group.

One of our group was Donnie Price - a good buddy, if there ever was one. Another chum was Sylvia. She came from a Greek family across the street and I never could pronounce her last name except it ended in "opoulos." She was a pretty thing with olive complexion and dark eyes, her glistening black hair usually tied in a pony tail.

Grant was another fellow walker. He came from a very low income family - we were all victims of the depression (this was in 1936) but his family more than the rest. His clothes were patched and his shoes had cardboard pieces over the holes in the soles to keep mud and gravel out. His mother went door to door trying to make a few cents darning women's silk stockings. She charged five cents.

And then there was Margaret, "Miss Know It All." No matter what the subject Margaret had an answer. If it was yesterday's fire drill, she held court on fire engines. If it was ice cream at Schaeffer's Pharmacy, she pronounced judgment on every flavor.

One morning Donnie blurted out "Look! There's a balloon in the gutter!" Sure enough, there was a balloon, narrow and flat, in a kind of off-white color, and with a very wide neck. I had never seen such a balloon. Donnie picked it up. "Oh," said Miss Know It All, "that's one of those things you use if you want to have a baby!" Now, it didn't matter that Margaret had it exactly one hundred and eighty degrees wrong - she said it, so it was accepted as fiat law.

The following Saturday I went to a birthday party and was peculiarly aware of the balloons, "Aha!" I thought. "So that's why they have balloons at parties! Balloons make babies!" There were eight children at the party, so I counted the balloons. Ten! I wondered where the other two kids were? But, I never gave it anymore thought.

A couple of years later my mother asked me to go into their bedroom and get my father's cuff links off the top of the dresser. So, I went in and saw that the top drawer was partially opened. Peering in I was taken by surprise! There lay one of those balloons, flat and smooth. "Wow!" I thought. "Am I going to get a baby brother?" I already had an older sister, but it would be swell to have a little brother. But, as the days went on, nothing happened. Our family remained: two adults and two children. Margaret must have been wrong.

I don't know when it was that I learned what those balloons really were for. Jackie Franke told me they were designed to keep me from having a baby brother. I remember I laughed out loud at Jackie's description and thought, "No way; not my mother and father." I simply could not imagine them getting together with a balloon.



Ed Irvin, Martha, Ruth and Harold

Books

I calculate I was about six years old when my sister put a Big Little Book in my hands. Big Little Books were small and thick – about five inches square and three inches thick. They were wonderful, full of adventure tales, farm life, and sports. Sis and I shared a bedroom on the second floor of our family home and by climbing out the dormer window onto the roof could easily reach the branches of a great old maple tree. I can recall many a happy hour perched in that tree reading about *Dick Tracy*, *Flash Gordon* and *The Katzenjammer Kids* as well as lesser known heroes, taking boys on sailing ships or horseback rides.

My collection exceeded ten copies plus other assorted books and the neighboring kids wanted to read them. My mother proposed I start charging a rental fee. I still have a copy of my favorite, *Little Slam Bang*, with the fly leaf notation, “1 cent for two days, small fine of injury to book,” in my mother’s handwriting. That could have been the start of a rising capitalist career, but it never really took.

My first adult-level book was one of my mother’s favorites, *The Flaming Forest*. It opened my eyes to the power of words. I was ten years old.

As I moved through the elementary years, then high school, I found a growing affection for books. I loved all the Zane grey books. Another favorite was *Chip of the Flying U*. It was the first time I had read about the beauty of a young woman in a white bathing suit. I was thirteen.

In one of my churches we had a Los Angeles County librarian, who proposed we put the church’s library on wheels. And so, we did. A carpenter for Disney studios made a hinged bookcase of four shelves, mounted on universal casters. Instead of hoping folks would walk down a hallway to the library, it was suddenly in the narthex, open and inviting. I placed it close to the main door so parishioners shaking my hand as they left could not help but notice the books.

But the crowning moment with books was in 1984, when I enrolled in summer school at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. When the registrar handed me a library card for New College (it was really old) my breathing quickened. I loved to wander through the stacks of one the world’s great universities and realize it was all open to me. It was especially rewarding, when I would spy a volume that I had in my library at home.

Over the years, I have haunted used book shops, such as Acres of Books in Long Beach, California, as well as ordered from James Thin in England. Books are friends.

Bonding with the Pitcher

Chuck Rose was the most likeable man in church. Mind you, there were plenty of men who were likeable – respected, friendly, devoted and so on. We had a great corps of laymen in that church. After forty-four years in the ministry, I still say the Woodley Avenue Baptist Church, Granada Hills, California was my favorite.

But Chuck stood out. He was a pilot with American Airlines (three stripes) and consequently was not always in town. He was number one pitcher on our fast pitch softball team. I was number two – not bad but just not as good as Chuck. When he pitched I played second base. The team member used to ask, “Is Chuck in town?” If the answer was “yes,” then we would laugh and say, “Then we win!” And win we did! We won the San Fernando Valley Church Softball League title two years in a row, under the aegis of the Los Angeles City Parks and Recreation division.

But Chuck had a vein of deep sorrow in his soul – a trauma barely a year old when I came to be the pastor. He and his beautiful wife, Dolores, had suffered the loss of their 3 year old son, Keller, by drowning in one of the irrigation ditches prevalent in the valley. Now, such ditches must be covered.

His background was staunchly rooted in the Christian faith. He had declared his faith in Christ and was baptized in the First Baptist Church of Bakersfield, California. His parents were kind, generous and loving people – rock solid and a joy to any pastor. All those values came into being when Chuck faced tragedy.

Another phase of Chuck’s participation came in the annual “every member canvass for building the church budget” each fall. When we asked him to chair the campaign in 1964 he agreed readily and made the most of the “Ten Apples” program offered by our American Baptist denomination. It worked!

But the singular most dramatic moment in our relationship came Friday, November 22, 1963, at 10:30 in the morning, when he burst into the church office and blurted out, “Kennedy’s been shot!” “What? The president shot? Oh well,” we thought, “probably a flesh wound and he’ll get the best treatment possible for recovery.” But Chuck poured cold water on that thinking before we could go any further. “Its serious,” he said, “shot in the head.”

Our secretary, Charlotte, had a small radio in her desk. She turned it on promptly and didn’t have to search the dial – every station had the story. Other people had been shot, too, including the governor of Texas.

But the look on Chuck’s face told it all. A mixture of disbelief, anger, desperation, helplessness... There was nothing to do but to put our arms around each other and listen.

I changed my sermon that morning, just before the secretary printed the Sunday bulletin. I preached on Isaiah 6:1, “In the year of King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord high and lifted up.”

Chuck and I bonded that day in a way no softball game or stewardship campaign could ever produce.

Careless Coins

East Platte Avenue was one of the grand boulevards of Colorado Springs, Colorado. It had a center parking, landscaped with blue spruce and columbines. We lived at 1117 – a rental of \$22.00 per month. That location put us about eleven blocks from downtown. One time my sister and I walked downtown with a nickel in our pocket for an ice cream cone at Barthell's, arguably the finest ice cream parlor in El Paso County. The road dipped under the D&RG railroad tracks and it was fun to stand in that underpass while a train rumbled overhead, imagining what we would do if the timbers suddenly cracked.

But the best part of living on Platte was the circus parade. Once a year, the Barnum and Bailey Circus would come to town by railroad. The animals, tents and circus wagons would be offloaded and a colorful parade formed from the station to the traditional circus grounds east of town. That parade passed in front of our house. What a treat to stand on the curb and see - and smell - the parade led by an elephant with a pretty lady in green and purple spangles seated on the animal's head. And, yes, we got to go to the circus. Admission was ten cents for children. I remember the sideshows with their garish posters and snappy barkers. It didn't cost anything to enter the grounds so we kids would go each of the three days and just walk around. Of course, the first day we would watch with fascination the elephants at work, raising the tent poles.

Then came the acme of activity. When the circus left, we would walk all over the grounds looking for money. We always found some coins. One time Donnie Price found over a dollar's worth of nickels and dimes. How could people be so careless, I wondered? But, lucky for us!

One time Donnie found a bullet. We knew enough about bullets to know how they fired in a gun, but what could we do. We had no gun. Then we figured out that if we could throw it in just the right way against a jagged stone wall, it would go off with a bang. So, we tried it in the Price's backyard. After four or five attempts, Grandpa Bales ran out of the kitchen horrified. "Stop!" he yelled. "Stop, stop!" Then he took it away from us. I thought he was mean, but of course, he just might have saved a life. He took the slug out of the casing, emptied the powder and gave us the casing.

"Better to look for careless coins," we said to each other.

Gunny Sacks

Gunny sacks were an essential part of home maintenance when I grew up. They were so handy! My own children did not have much exposure to them. In fact, when I used that term with our junior high daughter she interrupted with, “Excuse me, but what’s a gunny sack?” It’s like the time recently when Diane and I came home from a trip to Oklahoma. We mentioned that we had visited the Will Rogers Memorial in Claremore, Oklahoma. The kids asked, “Will who?”

I told our children about using sacks to store things, to transport goods, to stop up drafty doorways, and to clean up the yard. Once, when I was a boy in Colorado Springs, we lived on Cache la Poudre St. I loved to say that name – didn’t even know it was French for “hide the powder.” We had moved back to “the Springs” after a two year stint in the mountain town of Buena Vista or “Beunie” as everyone called it.

Our family dog, “Miggie,” had loved the mountain setting. She had the freedom of the neighborhood and could run the two blocks to the edge of town by the softball field and frolic in Cottonwood Creek or run among the pinion pines. We never worried about her. But now, we were back in the city with houses on smaller lots, traffic in the street, and a railroad track a block away. Consequently, we were always admonished by my dad to “keep an eye on Miggie.”

No one had fences. A Mexican family lived two houses away and a couple of times Mr. Martinez or one of the boys would bring Miggie back, knowing she had gotten out of our sight. That family kept a spick-and-span yard and I remember more than once seeing the father in the yard with a willow switch in his hand, monitoring his sons in their clean-up jobs. They all confessed that they liked our dog and said if we ever wanted to give her away they would take her. She was a Spitz-Terrier mix, lively and cute.

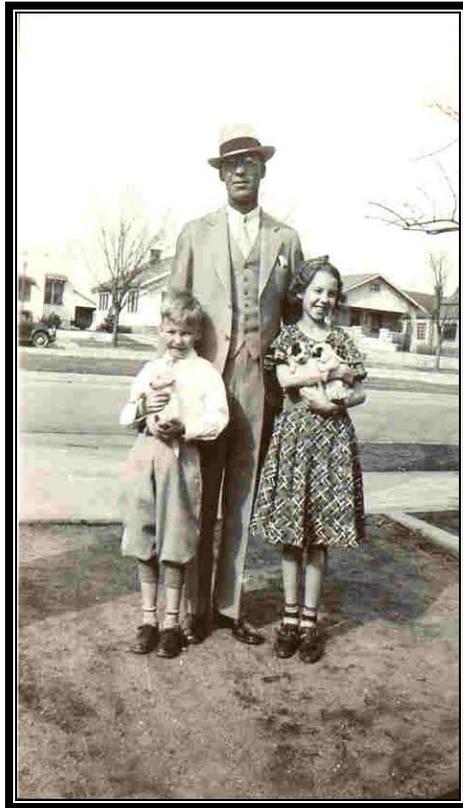
Also, my sister was crazy about that dog. On her 12th birthday, my parents bought her a new bicycle at Montgomery Ward. Yes, a new one, not a secondhand as dad had done with the push lawnmower and the Maytag washer. She hung a basket over the handlebars and took Miggie for rides. For my part, I taught Miggie how to jump about three feet in the air, twist and come down on all fours. When I picked her up she would lick my ear.

And, so it was, that one afternoon, when I came home from school I spotted a gunny sack by the back steps. Odd, I thought, since we had not done any yard work recently. I kicked at it as a boy will do and felt something solid. Not bothering to look, I hopped up the steps and into the kitchen, whistling a tune as I always did to let mom know I was home.

There was a tender smile on her face as she embraced me and she sat me down at the kitchen table. “Son,” she began, “I have something sad to tell you.” All at once, everything tumbled in on me. She didn’t need to say more. Miggie’s love of romping, the traffic on Cache la Poudre, the gunny sack out of place – all told me in a trice that Miggie

was dead. I burst into tears as did my mother. She then told me our pet had been run over by a delivery truck and the driver came to the door to tell what happened. Mom said he had a rim of tears on his eyes.

Dad said he would dig a hole in the ground by the chicken pen and Sissie and I could bury our pet. And so we did, even making a little wooden headstone out of a slat from an orange crate. We printed her name and the words “run” and “jump” on it. And left her in the gunny sack.



1936

Languages

My first foray into a foreign language was Pig Latin. It was fun. “Let’s go to the park.” Became “ets-lay o-gay oo-tay e-they ark-pay.” My sister and I used it a lot, mistakenly thinking that we could communicate without our parents knowing what we were talking about.

There were some people in our church in Colorado Springs from a foreign land called “Lithuania.” I never heard them speak in their native tongue, but every English word they spoke had a definite accent which I found fascinating. So, while still in elementary school I took a bit of an interest in languages.

When our family moved to Los Angeles in 1941, we all became aware of Spanish. The movie house near us was the Granada. Another one down the street was the El Rey, which, I learned, meant “the King.” One of my school chums lived on El Molino, Spanish for “the Mill.” As far as the goes, the very name of the town we settled in was Alhambra and we learned in school that it was taken from a castle in Spain. Of course, Los Angeles itself meant “the angels.”

Anyway, I liked picking up Spanish words and phrases and scored well in High School. Some words didn’t make sense like the city of La Jolla. People pronounce it “La Hoya.” At home was had a bag of Jolly Time popcorn so I started calling it “Hoy-ee Time.”

Spanish carried me well on into college where I scored an “A.” It was then that I realized that all the romance languages came from Latin and even though I had not taken Latin I could figure out pretty well what the words meant. The same was true for French. Later I audited a class in German. The professor, a certain Dr. Prodaniuk, greeted the class on the first day with the startling pronouncement that the class would be conducted in German starting the next day. It was sink or swim. Fortunately, my penchant for languages saw me through.

Then came seminary and the required Greek and Hebrew. Some schools were dropping language requirements with all Bible work done in English. But not Eastern Baptist Seminary! However, I relished it! Our professor of Greek was a bright guy only about eight years older than most of us. He had learned Greek well and actually studied Hebrew at Dropsie Institute, a Jewish men’s school, where he did as well or better than any of the future rabbis. He was the only Christian in the class.

Many Greek words are found in our speech. Arche means ancient (as in archaeology). Logo means word. Technia means child, i.e., something small. Hence, it shows up in our word “technical” – getting down to fine points.

Some of my classmates had no proclivity for languages and had a hard time with Greek. My buddy, Dwayne, and I often coached one or two, trying to think up clever ways to

remember the Greek vocabulary. One fellow had graduated with honors in agriculture from Penn State. He had a desire to be an agricultural missionary which he did, receiving high commendation from the Thai government. But he who knew botany, animal husbandry, and water pumps simply could not get the Greek declensions and depended on sheer memory to see him through.

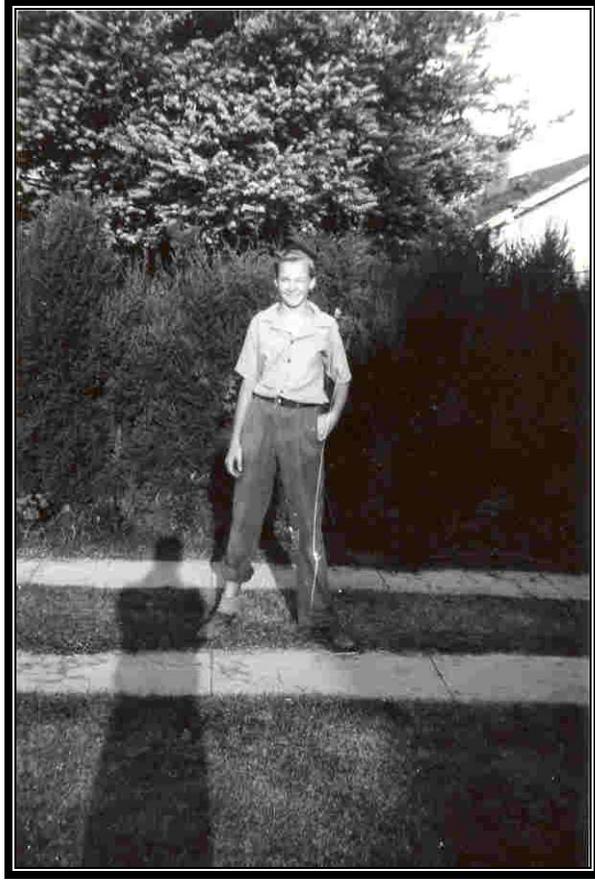
One gratifying experience I had in seminary was teaching a Sunday School class in Spanish at Philadelphia's old 5th Baptist Church. The students were Puerto Ricans. Classes were held in the afternoon as the dominant white membership did not want "those people" sitting with them in the morning hour. It did not faze them to realize that the cavernous old church with seating for three hundred had a morning attendance averaging 35. The Puerto Ricans were told they could meet in the chapel and they filled it with almost one hundred every Sunday.

But if Greek was tough, Hebrew was a killer. Except for me! For some strange reason I took to it and did well. At the end of the first semester I earned a B plus grade. The professor, Dr. Edward Dalgliesh, asked me to join him in his class the next semester expositing the Book of Amos. One day he was called to an emergency faculty meeting and he asked me to take over. Wow! He was quite a man and invited me to play golf with him. He had married into wealth and had the best car, the best camera, and the best golf clubs available.

Dr. Dalgliesh tried to steer me into teaching, but I was enamored with prospect of preaching and pastoring a congregation, thanks to very positive experiences with ministers as I grew up.

But, I still like languages. Diane and I have traveled in thirty-eight countries and she always marvels at how I can figure out enough signs to get around.

But, sometimes I flunk language at home with plain English used to assign "vacuuming" or "mowing." I just don't get it.



1944

The Twitch in her Eye

“For by the grace given to me I bid everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment.” -The Apostle Paul

Junior College! What a put-down! What an embarrassment! For those who couldn't cut it into a regular university there was, I thought, a rescue basket where one could play like a college student and take classes in pottery, metal working, or fencing. Thankfully, I would tell myself, that's not for me. I would sail straight into a 4-yr institution, live in a dormitory, and study Plato and sociology.

But that didn't happen! I was rejected by the school of my choice, the University of Redlands! Impossible! Didn't they know who I was? I had filled out all the proper forms, had my grades sent to the college admissions officer, and forwarded letters of recommendation from my pastor and the neighbor next door. I waited for instructions. Then I got a letter saying that the admissions officer, a certain Louise Jennings, would like an appointment with me.

I drove the sixty miles out to Redlands and walked into her office. She was rather pretty prim, silver hair done up in a bun, dressed in a gray business suit, and was friendly yet formal. No one told me she had a twitch in her right eye, a tic that had not interfered with her professional goals.

She greeted me cordially, pointed to a chair and opened a manila folder. “Well, Mr. Irvin,” she said, “you have had quite a high school experience! I'm impressed.” I smiled broadly and thanked her. “But,” she went on, “academically, you've fallen a bit short of our standards, particularly in history,” and her right eye twitched. I winked back and said. “Well, you know history...” I thought to myself, “I'm going to like this lady.” She continued, “And that C in Geometry certainly didn't help you any.” Again the twitch. Again I winked back. I told her I went to summer school one year and made a B. But an uneasiness began to creep in when she twitched while looking at the papers. Slowly, it came to me that she was not winking in a lighthearted manner, but everything she said was serious. “And so,” she concluded, “we're going to suggest that you put a year at a Junior College and bring your grades up.”

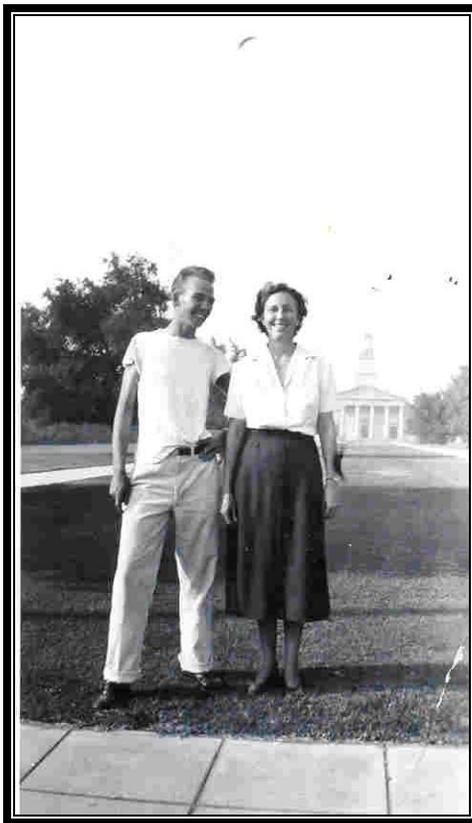
I was devastated. At Alhambra High I had graduated as a member of the Senior Honor Society with an asterisk by my name in the program. The drama coach had called me the best actor in the senior play. I had been the field announcer at all the home football games. I was president of the Key Club. Everyone knew me. My annual was full of compliments and silly sayings. Clearly, the University of Redlands did not appreciate what they had in me. I was better than Junior College material.

Miss Jennings won. I enrolled at John Muir Junior College in Pasadena and went to work with determination. In the long overview of my education I must say I had some of the

best professors I ever had. Algebra, English, the Sciences - all were tops. I even took boxing for the physical education requirement; the football coach was the teacher.

My grades came up. I re-applied to Redlands and was accepted. So I transferred in as a sophomore and made the most of it. I graduated with an “A” in religion and a “B” in Philosophy and felt good. But I still felt humbled by the experience with Miss Jennings. Maybe the old Apostle was right – “not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think...” (Romans 12:3)

I graduated SUMMA CUM LUCKY !



*Redlands Chapel
Ed and his mother*