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MY LIFE STORY

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Better known as Mrs. H. Robb French

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Many, many years ago a young man in Sinclairville, New York, felt the lure of going West. He had heard that there were great opportunities for young men. So he, in company with another young man, boarded the train. They traveled many miles when they came to what seemed to them the jumping off place, "the wild and woolly West," Eskridge, Kansas. In those days there were no fences; the Texas steers were running wild. This young man was ambitious; he built himself a little store building.

It seemed that everything he touched prospered, and in two years' time he built a little home and went back to New York where he married a very fine young lady by the name of Carrie Lown. She was the bride of the new merchant, William Trusler, and became the Belle of the town. She was religiously inclined and joined herself to the Methodist Church in this little city. She soon became superintendent of the Sunday School.

About seven years had passed by when a little girl came to bless their home, and they named her Golden Lillian. One evening as she was sitting on the porch with the baby, she heard someone preaching. Every once in a while the man would quote his text, "Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." She thought to herself, "What is he saying? That isn't in my Bible."

She got the Bible, ran the references and found it was in her Bible. A great desire came in her heart to hear this preacher preach. He had come to town and pitched his tent below the railroad tracks. Very few were attending the meeting; it was almost a disgrace to go to such a place.

She conceived the plan of wearing a coat with a big collar which she could turn up so that, if any of her society friends passed the tent, they wouldn't know her. It was the fall of the year and evidently the preacher did not have a heavy suit, for he wore three seersucker coats, each one a little shorter than the other. He was an oddity to look at.

This young woman, my mother, sat on the back seat and drank in the truth. The preacher said you can know when you get saved. She commenced seeking at home. No doubt the preacher pulled stakes and left town thinking that the meeting was a great failure.

But one day while she was praying a light shone all around her. She thought this must be what that preacher was talking about and believed she was saved! What a change came in the home! She no longer wanted to curl her hair, and she commenced dressing plain. A few holiness women were holding prayer meetings in the homes, and some way she got into these meetings. They would take turns holding the meetings. My mother took her turn.

In those days they would pray loud and shout louder. Their voices would echo out over the town. The different merchants came into my father's store and said, "Trusler, do you hear that racket going on at your house?"

That night he came home and said, "Carrie, we are not having any more of those prayer meetings in this house. If you do, I will come up and put you all out!" My mother didn't say anything; but when her turn came, she invited them in as usual. The women were having a time. The merchants came in making fun of all that noise saying, "I wouldn't stand for it!"

My father said, "I'm not going to." He grabbed his hat and came stomping up the wooden sidewalk digging his heels into the walk. Mother heard him coming and didn't know what would happen. He opened the side gate, went through the dining room, out into the kitchen, out the back door, around the house -- and never did a thing. That evening he came up for supper as calm as a June morning.

By this time another baby girl was born in the family, and they called her Geraldine Susan. In some way, they got a holiness evangelist to hold a meeting. One night the evangelist said, "You must know you are saved before you seek holiness." My mother knelt at her seat during the altar call. She prayed, "Lord, it has been two years since you saved me; I want to know if I am still saved." And the light shone all around her.

She got up and went to the altar. She did everything they told her to do. As she got up from the altar, a lady asked her if she was sanctified. She said, "No, I'm not." The lady said, "It is a terrible thing to have unbelief in your heart."

As she started home, walking three or four blocks, she got to thinking about the unbelief. She looked up and said, "Lord, I believe You take unbelief out of my heart." With that, a peace came.

A voice seemed to say to her, "You know the next time you can't have your way anger will spring up in your heart."

She looked up and said, "Lord, I believe You take anger out of my heart." A peace came.

The voice said, "You know the next dress you have made, if it isn't the latest style you won't wear it."

She said, "Lord, I believe You take pride out of my heart." And peace came.

The voice said, "You know when you testify nobody will believe you have it."

She answered back, "If nobody believes I have the experience, I will testify anyway."

She had reached home by now. My father had stayed home with us two girls, and we were in bed sound asleep. She opened the door very quietly, crept into bed, but didn't sleep a wink. All night she sang the song, "Oh, How I Love Jesus."

The next day in the afternoon service a lady asked her if she was sanctified. She said, "Yes, I am." And with that, she shouted all over the church.

My mother lived such a wonderful life that I wanted the same kind of religion she had when I grew up. As we were attending the Methodist Church, I admired the roses little girls were wearing on their hats. Sitting on Mother's lap, I asked, "Can't I have some roses on my hat? Can't I have one rose on my hat?"

I looked up and saw the tears streaming down my mother's face. She said, "Geraldine, the Lord won't let me wear roses on my hat. And if I let you put roses on yours, I feel like we would both be lost." When I saw the earnest look on her face, I commenced to wipe the tears off and said, "I don't want no roses, I don't want no roses."

About four years after my mother's conversion a revival came to our little city. It seemed everyone was turning to the Lord, including most of the merchants. But my father wouldn't attend until the last night when his bookkeeper persuaded him. The congregation sang, "Calvary's stream is flowing, flowing so free for you and for me. Calvary's stream is flowing ..." when he made his way to the altar. As he went, his sins all loomed up before him, all the wicked things he had ever done.

When he got up, they said, "Trusler, did you get through?"

And he said, "No, Carrie and I will settle it when we get home." They went home, had another prayer; and the victory came to his heart. The next morning there were four kneeling at the family altar.

In a short time the churches became cold and formal. My father and mother in company of some others left the Methodist Church. They didn't have an adequate place to conduct services. So my mother said, "Papa, you have a lot on Main Street with a building on either side. It wouldn't take much to put a floor and a roof, a front and a back up, so that we could have a place to worship."

A Wesleyan Methodist preacher came along about that time and organized our church.

The preachers in those days preached against lodges, and it stirred the town. One night we were coming out of the mission. The rocks and rotten eggs were flying, and one rock hit my mother on the arm. It swelled and became black and blue. She was glad to suffer something for Jesus' sake. I remember holding on to my mother's dress and hiding behind her.

My father became janitor. One Sunday morning he went down to ring the bell, and the clapper was gone. He got a piece of iron and hit the bell. The people came out to see what was going on.

Mother had great faith for divine healing. She was healed many times, especially once when she had erysipelas [a streptococcal infection producing inflammation and a deep red color on the skin. -- Oxford Dict.] in her limb from knee down. Her limb and foot were swollen twice their size; the skin had cracked and it was a terrible looking sight. They were pitching a tent down on the school campus. She was talking to the Lord, telling Him how she would like to attend the meeting when He said to her, "Put on your shoe." She reached into the closet close by, got her shoe and put her foot into it. With that, she got up and commenced to walk around in the room praising the Lord. Then she walked out the door and down the street three good blocks to where they were putting up the tent.

When my sister was a little past two years old, she was marvelously healed of enlarged adenoids. Before this, her breathing could be heard all over the house. When I was about two years old I became very sick with inflammation of the bowels. I lay in a stupor for about a week. Mother called the folks in to pray; and while they prayed I opened my eyes and said, "Bread and milk, Mama."

I had taken a few bites when I slipped off her lap and said, "It's dong, it's dong!" [It's gone, it's gone!] and went walking about the room.

Many years later, while we were pastoring in Birmingham, Alabama, we started a little school for children. One night I was coming up from the dormitory with my arms loaded, hurrying to escape a storm. It was very dark and I fell over a stump onto my chest. The folks helped me into the house. I was pretty badly hurt. I went to the hospital and was taped but didn't seem to get any better.

It had been a month and we were in Winder, Georgia, holding a meeting. I felt discouraged and thought, "I'll never be any better." I went to bed. The next morning I didn't hurt and could breathe deeply. It occurred to me that I was healed. I had an idea who had prayed for me; when we got back to Birmingham, I said to Sister Tomlin, "Did you pray for me while we were gone?"

She said, "Yes, on Thursday night I was so burdened for you that I couldn't sleep. I got up at three o'clock and prayed."

I often have said, "While I slept, Sister Tomlin prayed and the Lord healed me."

At one time we were without a pastor. One rainy day Mother looked out the window and a man in a two-wheeled cart, driven by a horse, came down the road. The Lord said to her, "There is your pastor, the one you have been praying for." The man tied his horse. He rapped at the door. She invited him in -- her new pastor.

My father had a two-story stone building across town which he had taken in on a debt. We didn't have a room where we lived for our pastor, so Mama fixed up a nice place for him in that large building. He would come up to our house for his meals. He came late in the morning for his breakfast; and it was quite a trial to stop work to cook for him. One morning he said, "Sister Trusler, I have been praying and the Lord has shown me that this is going to be a great work some day." Then my mother was sorry she ever got tried.

And sure enough, when I was about eight years old the French family moved to town. As soon as they arrived they said, "We must start a Bible school for our children." My father gave the two-story stone building. They took us out of the public school in the spring of the year. We started with nine children, sitting around tables.

There wasn't much to work with at first; but from then on God sent us good teachers, desks, and everything we needed. We would go part way with the public school children, and then turn to go to our school. They would call out, "Sanctihites! Wesleyites!"

The school had very strict rules which were never suspended. Consequently, I never went with a young man until I was nineteen years old. We went to church together, came back and sat on the porch a few minutes. Then he went home. I didn't go again until I was twenty-one.

Father French was my pastor fourteen years and president of the school a good many years. He would tell us that we were not living just for now, that some day we would all be working for Jesus, and that we should get our schooling and leave the weightier things in life until afterward.

The school became very spiritual; you could hear the students praying all over town. It grew until we had over ninety students. During this time the Baptist Church came on the market for sale. The church was bought and we had rather a nice place to worship. The crowds came and stayed late watching the altar services. Maybe someone would fall under the power, having a vision of hell and then of heaven. We were all afraid we might miss something if we weren't there or if we were late.

Our little town was quite a clean city. There came a carnival, and my mother and Mother French knew it would never do for it to operate. So they joined hands and commenced to pray. It started raining; it rained and rained. The merry-go-round tent was set up, and that's about all. On Sunday afternoon we had a service with them. They said, "If we had known you were coming, we could have had a pulpit and chairs for you." We said, "No, we don't need anything. We just wanted to have a service." We understood later that they lost so much money while there they broke up the carnival after leaving town.

There was a colored man who moved to town. His name was Billy Page. He built a nice home on the outskirts of town, a house with a basement. We noticed on Sunday afternoon that there would be horses and buggies around his house. We found out he was selling liquor. The mayor would not do anything about it, so our church people decided to hold a street meeting in front of Billy's home.

The first two meetings everything went off pretty well. On the third Sunday, Billy was prepared to break up the meeting. He had a spirited horse. He took it back away and started the horse running; but when the horse got to the ring he stopped. Then Billy conceived the plan to get another horse on a long rope and swing him into the ring. But as the Lord would have it, no one was hurt too badly.

Billy grabbed my mother's hand and said, "Mrs. Trusler, you shouldn't be here," and started the horse galloping down the road. This was a great show. The whole town turned out to see. They put the poor man in jail, and this ended the selling of liquor in our little town.

Father French wrote to different Bible schools for a teacher for our school. I remember the night my folks went down to the French home to pray and decide which would be the one. A young man who had just finished college at Peniel, Texas, by the name of Raymond Young was chosen. He came and proved to be a great blessing to the church, school and community. After a few years he became my brother-in-law.

Mother French was praying one night, and the Lord said to her, "I want you in Alabama." It was around Thanksgiving time. The family chartered a railroad car and moved to Alabama. School at Eskridge was carried on a few years by Raymond.

One summer evening nearly all the young people were away. As I knelt by my bed praying, I said, "Lord, would you let me know something of what my life's work will be?" No doubt you can guess of whom I dreamed. That was a secret between the Lord and me.

The next spring I received a card; in two or three weeks I answered with a card. That correspondence was kept up for five years. Robb was going to Trevecca College in Nashville, Tennessee; and I went to Washburn College in Topeka, Kansas, specializing in music.

I had my own private class. I taught six seasons, and during the last season the class numbered forty-eight pupils.

My sister, her husband and I went to Kingswood, Kentucky, to teach in the school there. The dean of music in the school said, "You must go to Dr. Beeson's school in Meridian, Mississippi, and take some music under Miss Reigel."

She secured a position as assistant superintendent of the practice hall. I wrote the Frenches that I would be coming through Birmingham. The whole family met me at the train. The Lord had given them some wonderful meetings, but now they had settled down to pastoring churches where they had had such wonderful revivals.

Robb had taken Tuscaloosa, and we spent Sunday there. I had the time of my life singing with my guitar, "Get a Transfer" and "Telephone to Glory." In those days the crowds came, sitting in the windows and in every available spot.

I went on to Meridian and came back and spent Christmas vacation with the Frenches. In two years' time Robb and his sister, Frances, came to Eskridge where the marriage ceremony was performed, June 23, 1919.

We boarded the train to spend our honeymoon at the Wesleyan Methodist General Conference in Fairmount, Indiana. Then we went on to Alabama to take up our work in evangelism. Robb had an uncle, with three sons and a sister, who kept writing for us to come to Birmingham, telling of the great need. The second year we went with no financial backing.

Father French gave us a tent in which to hold services. We felt we should start in the heart of the city, but it was against the city ordinance to pitch a tent within the district for fire-protection reasons. We prayed and waited on the Lord for two weeks. The Lord marvelously answered prayer. We worshipped in the tent three years, winter and summer while we were buying a building which we later remodeled for our church.

The blessing of the Lord seemed to be on the work, but our hearts were hungry to have a mighty revival. It was about the fifth year when an evangelist from New York state came to hold a meeting. He put the gospel plow in deep.

One night we were kneeling around the altar, and the atmosphere was so heavy no one could pray. The evangelist spoke up and said, "You don't want a revival. I'm going to pack my suitcases and leave."

I told the Lord that I wanted a revival more than anything else in the world. He then began to show me that I had had criticism in my heart against an official in the Conference and that we should write him a letter asking forgiveness. I also asked the church to forgive me. With that a few drops of blessing fell.

Then He showed me that we must visit some homes where people felt we had mistreated them and ask forgiveness. After we had gone to the last home, my burden was lifting. We went back to the church and I went into a Sunday School room to pray.

I looked up and said, "Lord, take carnality out of my heart." I felt like the old stump puller was pulling the roots out! Then it was time for the service to begin.

I led the singing. We sang, "He abides; hallelujah, He abides with me!" The Spirit said, "Come over this way." There was nothing on that end of the platform; on the other end were the piano and chairs.

I said, "I'm leading the singing, I must stay here."

The third time the voice spoke I started for the corner. When I got my back to the crowd, the blessed Holy Ghost fell from my head to my feet. What a wonderful experience!

It seemed that that was the beginning of the revival. It wasn't long until the church was swarming like bees, asking forgiveness and clearing the channel.

After a two and a half weeks' meeting, the evangelist came back for another two and a half weeks' meeting. The last Sunday morning the chairman of the Board of Stewards stepped out and said, "I have been a hypocrite, I have lived in sin, I want everyone to forgive me."

With that confession, the atmosphere cleared and the revival came. It ran for eight months the most wonderful months of our lives.

Birmingham was a hard, scattered city and it had been hard to get the crowds; but from then on we were putting chairs in the aisles to accommodate the crowds. The finances came up and many seekers were at the altar.

Robb and a local preacher pitched a tent in another section of town; and many outsiders were saved and sanctified who had lived in deep sin. The first ten years we were pastors were wonderful years.

The conference bought a camp ground out about five miles from the center of town. It was quite an expensive piece of property; so we all bought lots to help pay for it and built small houses.

I thought I would beautify ours by planting flowers and shrubbery around it. We were busy with our pastorate, so the only time I had to work was early in the morning around five o'clock. I would be out digging in the dirt, but the Spirit would be telling me that I should be in the house praying. I battled over it quite a while.

We went to Colfax, North Carolina, to help in a camp meeting. I went into the tabernacle early one evening and was praying, still battling over my flowers. It was about time to start the service when I said, "Yes, Lord, I'll give them up."

I got off my knees weeping when a lady handed me the most beautiful lily I had ever seen; and the Lord said, "I'll give you all the flowers you need when you want to take them to the hospital." He has done just that.

After ten years of pastoring, we decided to go into evangelistic work. Eight years passed by and the church in Birmingham was without a pastor. So we came back for three years to help save the church. After that, we went into evangelism again.

We made a few trips to Florida and saw the great need of a spiritual work. Tourists would come on their vacations and go back home worse off spiritually. In 1948 Sea Breeze Camp was started.

After some of the land had been cleared and a few buildings had been moved onto the property from an army camp, we lived in the building which is today the "Camp Food Market." It did not look then like it does now. There were boards missing in the floor and cracks all around. It was a small beginning, but God has marvelously blessed.

One Sunday afternoon, I was sitting on my army cot, playing my guitar and humming a tune to the top of my voice. There was no one close around. I was quite thrilled with it. After I had gone over it several times my husband said, "Let's put words to it!"

So the song, "There's More With Us Than Be With Them," was the result. It has been our battle cry down through the years. In all our conflicts we give God all the glory, honor, and praise.

In 1960, Rev. S. D. Herron started the Hobe Sound Bible College. We give the Lord all the praise for the buildings He has built and the students and people He has sent in, and for His divine presence we have felt in this place from time to time.

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THE END