

Suffering Poverty for The Truth's Sake

**A Story about The Boyhood of
Elder W. D. Frazee**

I want to tell you a little story. I was born in 1906. My father and mother had accepted the message just a few months before and had been baptized in a river out in Arizona. My father grew up in a family where they didn't spend much time on religion; my mother grew up in a Methodist home. When they accepted the truth it was largely through reading books, and the book that finally settled them was, "The Great Second Advent Movement," by J.N. Loughborough. They came into the Seventh-day Adventist Church strongly believing the Spirit of Prophecy. One of the first tests they met was that my father was about to lose his job. Now my father had a job on the water service in Arizona. His father had had the job before him. It was a job with the government. It was a good job, and paid well as wages were in those days. My father could have continued on with that work for, as far as I know, all his life and have had a good income and sent us boys to school with whatever money would buy. But God had another pattern and plan, because by accepting the Sabbath, my father lost his job. I might say that all he really had to do on the Sabbath was just to go down to the river and read a gauge of how deep the water was and record it, then go home. The rest of the Sabbath he could have done as he pleased. But, he had to read and record that gauge, and the law of God says, "In it thou shall not do any work," so naturally, the government wanted the water gauge read every day and that meant that he was out.

So, presently my father and mother were out on a farm and you say that's wonderful...yes, it's wonderful if you know how to farm and have had experience. But, you know, when we talk about our people going to live in the country, we must remember, friends, that farming isn't something you fall into and come out successful. Now everything seemed to go against my parents out there on the farm. Sometimes the neighbors stole the water, and you know out there in that western desert country how important that water is to getting crops. Then the blackbirds came and they would eat the grain. A neighbor had a great grove of trees just next to us and I remember my folks said the blackbirds roosted there and would stop in our fields for breakfast going out and for supper coming in. Well, my father finally borrowed some money from a neighbor to buy shotgun shells to take care of those blackbirds. But he said that for every one that was killed there were two that came to its funeral! That's right, they kept on eating up the crop. We had some chickens. At one time we had eleven hundred chickens. Disease got in among them. I heard my mother tell about how it just made her sick to go out there morning after morning and have to take out the dead chickens and take them away. Well, it seemed there came one calamity after

another. One of my earliest recollections was in living in the old adobe house, out there on the ranch. There was a time there when all we had to eat, was just cornmeal mush and milk from a sick cow. That's all we had.

Well, things went on and you can see we couldn't keep on that way, with the financial reverses and all, and so, finally, my father had a job offer promised him and we moved to Phoenix, Arizona. It was only a little town then and we moved into a little old shack on the poor side of the tracks and the work that my father was promised didn't materialize. I was about five or six years old at that time. My father walked the streets of Phoenix, Arizona looking for work. And a time came when we had not a penny in the house. I've heard my mother tell in after years how she just longed for five cents to go to the store and get a spool of thread so she could do some mending, but she didn't even have five cents. And there was a period of time there when all we had to eat, (my father and mother and I, and my little brother) was just wheat, that's all. I don't know if that was wheat we brought in with us from the farm or where it came from, but anyhow we had wheat. Any meal we had it was wheat, just wheat. Well, it didn't stunt either my brother or me, as you know I am of average size and if you've seen my brother, he's six foot five! But we were getting an introduction into this school of hardship.

Well, as I said, my father kept looking for work and couldn't find any where he could keep the Sabbath; he could have gone back to that other work. So finally my father borrowed thirty-five cents from a Seventh-day Adventist aunt of his, to buy soap, so that he and my mother could take in washing for a living, and for some time that's the way they earned the family living. And presently my brother and I we were initiated into helping them. I learned to iron; I learned to iron handkerchiefs and presently things a little more difficult. Then with what they got from this laundry work they were able to buy one of these old fashioned washers that was in use at that time with a handle on it, all hand power. And my little brother would push it five minutes, and then I would push it five minutes, so we supplied the motor. There was no electricity in our house. I was nearly grown before I lived in a house with electricity. So we were learning to bear some of these family burdens.

Later my father learned from a friend of his about clock and sewing machine repairing and did some years of that. The last year we were in Phoenix, when I was eight years old, my mother accepted an invitation to teach in the church school. That was the first church school teaching she had done, but she had done some teaching in public school before she was married. So she became a church school teacher and that meant mother was away from home day to day. Well, my brother and I were taught to do the dishes, I washed them and he dried them. On Friday it was my job to sweep and mop the whole house, well it was only a three room house, but it looked bigger to me then than it would now. And we had our other duties. Also, from the time I was about eight years old, I learned to sell our magazines, Watchman magazine and Signs of the Times. We went from door to door, my little brother came along a little later as he was able to help me. First I

was out by myself, going from door to door selling these magazines, finally into the business district selling to business men. So, by the time we left there when I was nine years old I had quite a route worked up. Well, they only sold for a nickel or ten cents, but money was worth more in those days and while it wasn't a large amount of money it did help a little.

Well, you know the other day, I was speaking in one of the big Baptist churches in Chattanooga and I was visiting with the pastor in his study before we went on the platform, and there was a picture on his wall of the Grand Canyon which led me to believe he was a native of Phoenix, Arizona, and so I told him that's where I came from, too. We had a good time talking together and he asked me if I remembered Governor Hunt. Well, I did. Governor Hunt was one of the ones I used to visit with my little Watchman magazines; he used to buy a copy of Watchman magazine.

The Lord had impressed by father's heart to teach his boys how to work as well as to learn the Bible and some other things. And my father had us working there in the home and the yard and then doing this work out in the homes of the people, with the colporteur work and he would teach us a little canvas. I have to laugh at old Governor Hunt. He was a rather rough, harsh sounding fellow. I think he was quite friendly at heart, but when I would come in with my little magazine and start my little canvas, he'd say, "Now stop! Stop! Stop! I'll give you a nickel to stop it!" Well, at any rate we had some interesting experiences. The last Christmas that we spent there in Phoenix, just before I was turning nine years old my father got me started selling the little books, what we call the Home Worker Series and also a five dollar subscription book called Easy Steps in the Bible Stories, a book of children's Bible stories. And I went around with these to the business men I had been selling magazines to and I sold a few of those larger books, but mainly the smaller books, and then in the homes of the people.

Well, then in 1915 it became necessary for us to move to California and my mother accepted a position of teaching in the church school in San Diego, California. Well, we got over there in the summer time, before school had started, and we rented a little house. By this time my father's health was not good, so he had to spend more of his time at home. We had a garden there and mother taught the church school. It was in the providence of God, for that put father at home to look after us boys. We kept on doing the dishes, my brother and I, and selling magazines. San Diego was a much larger place, and we worked all through the business district, we used to sell three hundred Watchman magazines each month. And I know what it means folks to work through the day selling magazines and walk home at night to save a nickel for streetcar fare, because nickels were scarce, nickels were important. My mother got, I think twelve dollars a week for teaching church school.

Well, after we had been there a couple of years, and I think I will just be very frank and tell you, since it's all the part of the providence of God. My father and mother, during their first two years in San Diego, while my mother was teaching the church school, had been influenced by the man who was the elder of the local church there, whose name was Dr Henry Tindall, brother of Elder John Tindall. And I can remember as a little fellow nine years old when we first met Dr. Tindall. Elder Owen, and I think Elder Luther Warren, were holding meetings in a tent on Broadway, there in San Diego, on Fifteenth and Broadway, and we came to the meetings right after we moved to San Diego. Dr Tindall met us with that broad smile and held out his hand to us boys and we knew we had a friend. Well, Dr Tindall was very friendly and all that, but he was a strict health reformer and a strict reformer on everything, and he taught the Testimonies strong. Some of the things he did in teaching got him into trouble with some of the people that didn't think he used the best wisdom. I think in after years he was perfectly willing to admit (I know he did), that he hadn't used the wisest methods. But some of the opposition against him was because he was a reformer. Be that as it may, my father and mother were identified with him and the first business meeting that we attended in the church (where I was baptized and became a member when I was eleven), the first business meeting was to consider disciplining Dr Tindall, who had been the elder of the church, because he wouldn't take counsel as to getting out a tract that he had on the Laodicean message. I can remember sitting there hearing the ministers getting up to talk, hearing different church members get up and talk, hearing Dr Tindall and his wife quietly read extracts from the tracts from the Testimonies. And I can remember the final vote when my father and mother and I, and about five other people were the ones who stood up to vote No on the motion to censure Dr Tindall. All the other church members voted to censure him or didn't vote at all. That was my introduction to church business meetings. But, because of that (I had to tell you that to tell you this,) they didn't want my mother to teach church school anymore. So, they offered her schools in other places to move her away from there, but father and mother felt the Lord wanted them to stay right there for some reason and see what the providence of God opened up.

They had been paying fifteen dollars a month rent, but couldn't afford that now, so they found a place just a few blocks from where we had been living, with about half an acre of ground and a little house on it and we rented it for I think five or six dollars a month, just a little two room house with a lean-to and a chicken house in the back that we converted into a bedroom. But, that ground made a garden. It had guava trees and some other fruit trees on it, and the ground was good ground, but just full of Bermuda grass and of course we didn't have any tractor. We didn't have any mule. All that we had was our hands and a spading fork and tools like that. My father and mother got out there and grubbed out that grass, and we boys were getting on in age to help some with that, and so the garden began coming along and people would come to the garden and buy vegetables. My brother and I would take the vegetables out. Well you say, did you have a truck? Oh, no. In those days we were so poor that I don't suppose that we ever dreamed we would ever have an automobile, in all our lives, No.

I can remember how I used to wish for a bicycle, you can imagine how a boy would wish for a bicycle especially when you see other boys with bicycles spinning around the neighborhood. A bicycle? The nearest I ever got to a bicycle was an old bicycle frame off of a junk heap with some little old wagon wheels stuck in it, and we could roll down a hill in that thing. But, we discovered a way that we could transport our vegetables. We made what the children in those days called a "Gohycle." We would take a one by four, or two by four, about so long, take a roller skate, take it apart and nail one part of it on one end and one on the other end, and nail an apple box on top and put a little handle across it, put one foot on it and push with the other and away we would go! Well, we would fill up that apple box with bunches of radishes and carrots and things like that, and as we'd get other things from the garden we'd put a lug box, (that's about a thirty pound box) on top, and we would pile that with vegetables. And I have seen the day when we would go out of there (and I don't know how it could have worked) we would add two or three lug boxes piled on top of one another and somehow keep that on the sidewalk and go from house to house with those radishes and carrots and beets, turnips, tomatoes and string beans. We kind of enjoyed it. It was interesting selling the different things and seeing the money come in. Of course sometimes it was tiresome, but we were expected to do it.

We had precious little time in play, but, we had some play, and from time to time my mother and dad would take us on an excursion, but the only way we had to take an excursion was to get on a street car and go as far as the streetcar would go, then walk out to the back country from there. I can remember a little old stream, way out beyond the end of the streetcar track, and, oh, what a world of fun we boys would have out there in that stream at times. But, most of our time was spent in work, because we went out and sold vegetables before school, we had our school at home, even though my mother was teaching church school, my dad would teach us at home. In the afternoon, we would go out and sell magazines all afternoon. On Sundays, we would sell magazines in the morning and then we were home in the afternoon. But, you can see with selling vegetable five mornings a week before school and then getting our lessons and then selling magazines in the afternoon, we didn't have a lot of idle time.

Well, I'm telling you this little story friends, and I trust you will understand and not misunderstand. And that you can imagine some of the emotions that fill my heart as I look back at it, but I want you to know that I love the things we've been studying this afternoon from the Lord's instruction. They are not guesswork for me, nor fears. I've been on the receiving end of this. I know what it's like to grow up in a poor home and I know what it's like to grow up in a home where the children are required by stern necessity as well as parental precept and example, to share in the burdens of the home, both in the household duties and to help to earn the family living. Do I need to tell you that as I look back on it, that I wouldn't have missed it for anything? Do I need to tell you that in it I see the

providence of God preparing us for this line of work that the providence of God has put us in?

Ah, friends, even today I hate to see a nickel wasted. I thank the Lord with all my heart that he put me in that environment and gave me parents that loved His instructions enough to carry these things out. And so today, out of these stories I've told you, I just want to thank God for his goodness in giving me this experience.