

ANECDOTES AND EXPERIENCES OF ROY J. HEARN

Michael R. McDaniel

I graduated in 1985 and have always been glad to be part of the last class at the Memphis School of Preaching to have been taught by Roy J. Hearn in 1984. That was the end of an era in the history of the school. I am fortunate to have been taught by two directors of the school (Hearn and Cates) and to be associated with three of them (Hearn, Cates, and Liddell).

Brother Hearn was born in Wilmar, Arkansas on November 15, 1911. Wilmar is located about 107 miles south of Little Rock and 60 miles from Pine Bluff. His father was the superintendent of the local lumber mill. His parents had come from Georgia and had first moved to Helena, Arkansas around 1898. Roy J. Hearn was the fifth of sixth children born to his parents. There was Mary Elizabeth, Robert Talmadge, Cynthia Katherine, Joseph Paul, Roy J., and James Watson. I have been told what the J. stands for, however, brother Hearn would say, "never mind what the J. stands for."

Brother Hearn was the product of a life of rich experiences. He was fond of using Popeye's expression, "I yam what I yam." Ironically, his favorite food in boyhood was spinach as his mother fixed it with plenty of eggs scrambled with it. Perhaps this was one reason he was fond of quoting Popeye. His main diet at that time was said to be biscuits and sorghum molasses. The molasses was well mixed with soft butter and sopped up with big, homemade biscuits. Sometimes a dozen biscuits would be enough for a meal.

Their house had running cold water in the kitchen. Hot water was obtained from a teakettle or from the reservoirs built in the cook stove. In the little back room, there was a homemade lavatory and a washbasin, which was made out of the reflector from the headlight of a locomotive. Brother Hearn said that his father was a very practical man and somewhat of an inventor.

Early on, reading was done in the living room by the light of kerosene lamps. Later, electric lights were installed in the middle of the ceiling of each room.

There was a small creek to the southwest where he used to fish for crawdads with a bent straight pen for a hook and a piece of fat meat as the bait. They would pinch off the tails and fry them and enjoyed eating them.

On the south side of their house was an orchard in which his father raised peaches, peanuts, and watermelons. The peaches were very good, but the limbs served too well as switches for his mother to use on him. He used to tell her that she kept the trees bare of branches, which she used on him and whipped him for things she thought he was going to do.

When brother Hearn was a boy, he liked to play with snakes, especially the little green ones. There was a woman who worked for his family who was afraid of snakes. One day, he killed a four-foot long blue racer and coiled it at the side gate, which the woman used to get to the kitchen. When "Aunt" Lorinda saw it, she took off in the opposite direction like a scalded hound. A whipping then ensued.

Brother Hearn's house was set up on blocks and was pretty high off the ground and wide open beneath. Occasionally, he and others would trap some mice and harness them to small

blocks of wood and then make then pull the blocks around trenches they had dug under the house.

In the springtime when the winds were high, especially in March, they made and flew kites. They were largely made of old newspapers or broken wrapping paper when they could get it. They had no glue, so they made paste out of water and flour to stick the sides around the string that was a part of the frame. Some of the kites were rather large, as tall as a door in the house. String cotton cord was used to fly the kites. Compared to today, toys were scarce back then and mostly homemade.

Farmers would come to town and haul a wagonload of kids out to pick peas or cotton. As they traveled, they joined in singing songs that were popular at that time. Brother Hearn said the most cotton he ever picked in one day was fifty pounds, but that was pretty good for an eight year old. They received one cent a pound for picking cotton.

On Sundays, they would occasionally go to the mill and play on the locomotives, ringing the bell and pulling all the levers. Sometimes, they would put the company push car on the track and take a ride. One Sunday when there was not supposed to be a train, they were out on the railroad taking a ride and as they were going down a little hill and gaining speed, they met "Old Number 5" coming around a bend. Brother Hearn jumped from the push car and into a briar patch which did not help him or his clothes. The older boys got the car off the track. They did not advertise that escapade.

In the spring of 1925, the mill was sold, and brother Hearn's family moved to a new mill in West Eminence, Missouri, for about three months. When the manager had a bad accident, a new manager was assigned, and they had to move. His father found work in a small machine shop in Memphis, Tennessee. This was during the time of the typhoid fever epidemic, and brother Hearn had it for several months. Upon his recovery, he started the eighth grade at Humes High School.

One of his first jobs in Memphis was delivering the old *Press* newspaper which was later combined with the *Scimitar*. He also worked in the machine shop with his father and worked at Piggly Wiggly and later at Kroger.

One of things I remember about brother Hearn was his whistling up the stairs on the way to class. When brother Hearn transferred to Memphis Technical High School in January of 1927, Miss Mary O'Donnell was the tough assistant principal. She heard him whistling in the hallway one day and stopped him and said, "Only crazy people whistle in the house." He said he guessed he had been crazy ever since because he had never quit whistling. He graduated on June 8, 1930.

During the Great Depression, brother Hearn worked for five years with the N.O. Nelson Company which was a wholesale plumbing and heating establishment. It was here that he met Sadie Lela Tisdale who had gone to work a few months before he had in 1930. Around 1932, Tip Cox bet brother Hearn that he could not get a date with her (no money was involved). Finally, he asked her out, and she agreed. After they had dated for three years, they went on a trip to Kentucky. While in a ferryboat on the Ohio River, brother Hearn brought up the subject of marriage. Once again, she agreed. They were married by brother Benton Carman in Mayfield, Kentucky. The marriage license cost five dollars, which was all the money brother Hearn had. He borrowed two dollars from his new wife to pay the preacher. Their wedding date was Sunday, September 1, 1935. The next day was Labor Day, and brother Hearn would say

that he had been laboring ever since to pay for it!

Roy and Sadie Hearn were baptized into Christ on July 14, 1934 by brother H. A. Brown who had come to the Coleman Avenue church the year before. All of the members of Sadie's family had been members of the church except her. Later that year, brother Hearn would begin leading singing. He and brother Albert Holland began the monthly Sunday afternoon singings around 1935.

In 1936, brother Hearn went to work with the Railway Express Company. It was here that his whistling led to a conversion. One rainy night, brother Hearn slipped under a tractor which was pulling freight and injured both shins. He just whistled. The next night, J. D. Ingram, a fellow worker, said to him, "Hearn, when you got hurt last night, why did you not cuss?" He replied, "What good would that do?" After that, they began discussing the Bible and the plan of salvation. It was not long before both J. D. and his wife obeyed the gospel. Brother Hearn wondered if the result would have been different if he had cursed the night he was injured instead of whistling.

In 1936, brother Brown moved back to his hometown of Mayfield, Kentucky. The church then employed brother J.A. McNutt who moved to Coleman Avenue from Winter Haven, Florida. During this time, brother Hearn began to teach the adult auditorium class. He aspired to preach the gospel, and brother McNutt encouraged him to attend Freed-Hardeman College where he had attended. He went for a while in 1940, returned home, and then went back in the fall of 1941. Sister Sadie stayed in Memphis during this time. Brother L.O. Sanderson hired him as a representative of the Gospel Advocate Company in book sales. He preached at the Roan's Creek church near Clarksburg, Tennessee once a month and another Sunday at the Pleasant Valley church near Athens, Alabama. Then he was invited to preach for the church in West Memphis, Arkansas, which was a great situation for them. He preached there from 1942 until 1944. Brother Hearn was among the top four students in his class upon graduation at FHC.

Brother Hearn taught me English grammar. He was fond of correcting us. On one occasion back in 1942, he even corrected brother McNutt. Brother McNutt wrote brother Hearn a letter while he was conducting meetings in Oklahoma and other Western states. The jackrabbits were plentiful and were eating the winter wheat. So the men would drive their cars to the wheat fields and go jackrabbit hunting. While some drove, others would ride the front fenders and shoot the jackrabbits. Brother McNutt wrote brother Hearn at Henderson and said, "Yesterday, I shot a jack rabbit running with a rifle." Brother Hearn wrote him back and said, "That was news to me, for I did not know jack rabbits carried rifles." Brother Hearn then presented it to the college grammar class. I can surely sympathize with brother McNutt, who was one of my beloved teachers. I seem to recall brother Hearn repeating this story to our English class as well.

In the summer of 1944, the Hearn family moved to Nashville. Brother Hearn worked with the Gospel Advocate and attended George Peabody College for Teachers. He preached at the Pennsylvania Avenue church and later at the Charlotte Avenue church. Their first child, Dolly, was born on October 2, 1945.

In 1948, they moved to Crossville, Tennessee on the first Lord's Day in November to work with the church there. Around this time, he and brother McNutt were in a meeting and the lady of the house where they were staying was making biscuits. She was a snuff dipper. They used to make a dipping brush of a black gum branch. It was frayed on one end and dipped into

the snuff and then placed in the mouth. This woman had one in her mouth and a drop of amber on the end of it. Brother Hearn said to brother McNutt: "Are you going to eat any biscuits today?" He replied, "That depends on which way the drop falls."

On one occasion, he went to Maryland to hold a meeting. Easton Johnson was to lead the singing. Brother Hearn told Easton that he would give him half of what he would get for the meeting. It went for three weeks and at the conclusion, sister Raines brought him a large sweet potato, about the size of a man's head. He split it in two and gave brother Johnson half.

On December 29, 1951, their second daughter, Janet, was born. She came early because Dr. Paul Irvin, Sadie's doctor, wanted to go to New Orleans for a football game on New Year's Day, and the Hearn family needed a tax deduction. So, Dr. Irvin prescribed that she take two ounces of castor oil. She did, and Janet was born the next morning.

During this time, brother Hearn did some great work in Crossville through a radio program on station WAEW and a gospel paper entitled, "the Gospel Herald" which was distributed free to every household in the county. He also held two major debates. The first occurred July 6,7,13,14 1950 with B. M. Cole who was a district representative of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Brother Hearn made an argument on First Peter 3:1-4 about the hidden man of the heart of the woman being incorruptible and placed the Greek word *aphthartos* on the chalkboard. He also showed that the same word was used to refer to Christ as immortal (1 Tim. 6:16). Since the same word was used to describe Christ in Heaven and the soul of the woman on earth, therefore, the soul of the woman (and of man) was not subject to annihilation. Mr. Cole erased that from the chalkboard and refused to discuss it. The next night, brother Hearn had it painted on a sheet in permanent paint and said, "Now, let us see you rub that out." He still did not touch it. The fruit of his work in this debate was *Handbook on Materialism* which was published in hardback form in 1950 by Firm Foundation. In 2006, this book was reprinted by the Guardian of Truth Foundation as a paperback.

After nearly seven years of fruitful labor at Crossville, the Hearn family moved to the Lehman Avenue church in Bowling Green, Kentucky, in April of 1955. Not long after moving there, brother Hearn learned that the Catholic Church had taken over the school system in Marian County. Brother Hearn prepared two articles for the Louisville Courier-Journal, each of which covered one-half page, at a cost of over three hundred dollars. Individuals contributed to the costs. After the articles appeared, he also had a lengthy exchange with Catholic priests in the letters to the Editor column of the paper. The Kentucky Court of Appeals eventually handed down a decision on behalf of the Bradfordsville citizens and school.

Early in 1957, brother Hearn was at the forefront of the fight to keep alcoholic beverages out of Bowling Green and Warren County, Kentucky. Quite a number of people feared for his life. They won the fight, but it was voted back in within a couple of years.

The Hearn family would leave Bowling Green and return to Nashville. At age forty-six, brother Hearn accepted the job of superintendent of Elam Hall, the men's dormitory, at David Lipscomb College. During the time, he preached for the Corinth church near Portland, Tennessee and continued to work on his degrees at Lipscomb and George Peabody College.

In the summer of 1960, brother Hearn was invited to work as Dean of Students at Freed-Hardeman College for his former schoolmate, H. A. Dixon, who was then President. Sadie Hearn served as his personal secretary while there. He taught fourteen hours of class work in addition to his administrative duties. He left two years later to return to Lipscomb in the fall of

1962. He was involved in student personnel work and teaching Bible and geography. He began preaching for the Division street church in Smyrna. Sister Hearn began work for brother B.C. Goodpasture as his personal secretary at the Gospel Advocate.

It is well known that on a visit to see brother N. B. Hardeman in Memphis, he remarked to him, "If I could start over, I would have a school in which only the Bible would be taught." That thought remained in brother Hearn's mind for quite some time. He mentioned it to several in Nashville, and brother Goodpasture liked the idea since he was a graduate of Nashville Bible School, the predecessor of Lipscomb. For this new school, brother Goodpasture would serve as chairman of the board, J. Roy Vaughn was made vice-chairman; E. Ray Jerkins was named secretary; H. Clyde Hale was appointed treasurer; and Roy J. Hearn was to be director. Charles E. Chumley was also added to the permanent faculty. The Waverly-Belmont church building was made available. The Nashville School of Preaching was scheduled to open in the early part of 1966. However, brother Hearn desired a full time, daytime school with classes meeting thirty hours a week each for first and second year. Others such as brother Vaughn, desired a school on Monday, Thursday and Friday nights from seven to ten. As a result, brother Hearn left Nashville and sought to start a school of preaching in Memphis. The Nashville School of Preaching opened on February 6, 1966. Charles R. Brewer, who had been added to the faculty, was made the Director.

The Hearn family moved back to Memphis in the middle of January, 1966. The church at Getwell agreed to host the new Getwell Road School of Preaching. Brother Hearn began to travel in several states telling churches and individuals about the school. It opened September 1, 1966 with fifteen students enrolled from seven states. Those who taught were Roy J. Hearn, Alan Highers (Getwell), Richard Bagget (Coleman Avenue), E. L. Whitaker (Knight Arnold), Richard Curry (Oak Acres), Wayne Emmons (Macon Road), Charles Pledge (West Memphis), and Ralph Carnahan (Getwell). The next year, only seven new students enrolled which made a total of twenty-two.

On March 14, 1969, the school moved to Knight Arnold, and the name was changed to Memphis School of Preaching. The Knight Arnold church did much for the school including the building of a new facility to house the school and its faculty in 1974. They supported the school in a wonderful way.

In July of 1967, brother Hearn joined Franklin Camp in starting a new journal called *First Century Christian*. It continued for ten years and ceased publication in 1977.

For a few years, brother Hearn drove to the Pine Bluff church near Toccopola, Mississippi to preach. Later, he traveled to Hughes, Arkansas and continued there for three years. In 1979, he was invited to come back to West Memphis to preach for what is now known as the Highway 77 congregation. He remained there until December of 1989.

Brother Hearn retired as director in March of 1983 and was replaced by brother Curtis A. Cates who had come in the fall of 1982. He retired from teaching in the school in the fall of 1984.

For several years he was bothered by throat trouble making it difficult to preach. Finally, he had to quit. After having three surgeries on his vocal cords, his voice came back around the first of June of 1990. To my knowledge, he only preached a few times after that.

First Century Christian was revived in 1989 with brother Hearn serving as editor until his stepping down at the end of 1994. The January, 1995 issue acknowledged him as the paper's

“Founding Editor.” He also worked with **Truth for the World** in assisting with Bible questions.

Sermon Outlines of Roy J. Hearn was published by friends in 1989. In 2001, this sermon outline book was reprinted by the MSOP Alumni Association with the outlines converted from the modified exponential system, made popular by brother A.G. Freed, to a more standard outline form. The new book included several tributes to him written by members of his family and others following his death. On March 1, 2000, brother Hearn had granted permission by letter to the MSOP Alumni Association "to reproduce and reprint any of my works, of any kind."

Roy J. Hearn passed away on November 25, 2000 at the age of 89. Truly, we have warmed ourselves by the fires that other men have built. Without the vision and dedication of Roy J. Hearn, the Memphis School of Preaching would not exist and many of us might not be preachers. For this, we pay him tribute today. *[This article was completed on January 12, 2009 by Mike McDaniel, the President of the Memphis School of Preaching Alumni Association. It is based largely on unpublished and incomplete handwritten notes written by brother Hearn in 1990 when he was 78.]*