

“THE PREACHER WHO COULDN’T TALK!”

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book first of all to my late parents, Dr. George M. and Shirley B. McGuire, who by both personal example and encouragement, taught all their children to personally love God our Savior, Jesus Christ, His true Church everywhere, and His people everywhere. Their instruction has been a bedrock for me in all the struggles laid down in this book.

Above all, I dedicate this book to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, to Whom I owe everything: every breath and every word. All my adult years have been a coming to terms with the clear fact that He spared my life for one main reason: to proclaim His wonderful grace through the preaching of His Holy Word. To Him alone I give all the praise and glory both now as He gives me breath, and into the eternal age of reigning with Him in heaven.

A WORD OF PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

The origins of this book came out of a biographical sermon I drew up following my retirement. As the years for my retirement were coming on, I came to be burdened with a great desire to tell what the Lord had done in my personal life with what was eventually diagnosed as epilepsy. Prior to that time, both this sickness and the life story resulting from it had been mostly hidden from others who were either not family members or medical people. This desire to offer my story to others became stronger and stronger as I kept on running into people, both adults and very young people, who were dealing with issues in their lives that were not going to change, regardless of what they did; the same sort of

condition I had faced all my life. Many of the issues I heard about were physical. Some were situational. The thought came to me that my own story, and how the Lord has sustained me for over 70 years, might be a real encouragement to people in similar circumstances.

As a result of this almost constant input, I drew up the biographical sermon, preached it a number of times, and God greatly blessed it to both reach and help young and older people alike who were dealing with some of life's difficult issues. I especially wanted to address situations, difficulties and troubles of all kinds that are not going to go away or be cured, or come to an end, as that stormy night on the Sea of Galilee finally did. Troubles come and go in all of our lives, but some of us deal for a lifetime with ever-present conditions which are considered handicaps.

Many times I have thought of the words of a song: "*After the storm the sun is always shining*", which to me says that the dark clouds have parted, only to figuratively look up to see my rather ominous, dark and always-threatening cloud still present! I have found that I am certainly not a lone figure staring daily at dark, scary clouds.

Dear reader, I hope that my story reaches you in a situation where you feel trapped between a rock and a hard place. I like to call it the Moses place, where God seems to say: "*My child, I am not loosing your tongue and I am not taking this away from you, for My grace is greater than your weakness—just trust Me!*" (Ex. 4:10-12; 2 Cor. 12:9) If that is the place this book finds you, you will have to decide just like Moses and Paul in those passages, and I in my life, had to finally decide: ***Do I want my glory, or do I want the glory of God alone to be seen in me at whatever cost the Lord chooses?***

Perhaps a word about the main purpose and goal driving this piece of writing would be in order. I am not really

interested in informing others of the story of my life, for in most ways it has been just the rather ordinary life of pastor. So I am not calling this my autobiography, for I have left a great deal of my personal life story out, focusing instead on those events that reflect on my experience with epilepsy. This is probably best described as simply a narrative of my life from the perspective of struggling with epilepsy. My hope and prayer is that those who read this will be greatly helped as they walk in similar shoes over like paths. But I would be quick to add that this is really not my story at all! It is the story of God working in me, for all you will read and learn about that deals with my physical affliction, I was totally passive in, and had almost no control over. My part was to regularly see my doctors and daily take my medications—the rest was in the hands of the Lord.

Since this is God's story acted out in my life, I think it is only proper to begin by going back into the Book of God and examining a text of Holy Scripture. I have chosen for that purpose a combined reading of the Gospels. The disciples are experiencing a terrifying night on the Sea of Galilee following the feeding of the 5,000. **As we see here, many times great events of blessing are followed by great times of trial!**

Matthew 14:22-23; Mark 6:45-46; John 6:15-17

Immediately Jesus by force actually made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, while he dispersed the crowds. **14:23** And after he sent the crowds away, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone for Jesus had not yet joined His disciples. **14:24** Meanwhile the disciples boat, already

far from land, was taking a beating from the waves because the wind was against it. Jesus was seeing the disciples constantly distressed at rowing...in the fourth watch of the night [**3 to 6 AM**] the disciples had driven the boat with oars only 3 1/2 miles.

New English Translation with annotations

The above account is a fairly familiar one, and pretty much speaks for itself. I like very much the tone and meaning that writer **Frederick Bruner** seems to put on this passage when he points out that *"in practical terms the entire church is in that little fishing boat awash on the roaring Sea."* *"Matthew Vol. 2: The Churchbook"* Eerdmans Pubs. Co. G. Rapids, MI 2004, p. 73 But I must add that in broader terms every believing **congregation**, every **home**, every **family** and every **true believer** is in that vessel tossed back and forth on top those giant waves while **the Sovereign I Am** watches from afar! **AND SO I ASK: How well do you and I handle the troubling things, the storms God puts or allows in our lives that we can do nothing about?**

How do **we** handle the times when we, like the disciples:

- (1) are doing just what our Lord has commanded us to do,
- (2) are right in the middle of obeying Him,
- (3) when **suddenly** we find ourselves in the very teeth of a fierce winds of great opposition,
- (4) **BUT from all outward appearances HE IS NO-WHERE TO BE FOUND!**

¶ Readers, the Lord first placed on my heart a burden to tell others about His workings in my life and the amazing things He had done! The first step was a suitable time to give all praise and glory to God in a public setting like a sermon and before God's gathered Church! In the process of giving praise to God, I want by this writing to encourage those who still find themselves in a boat, all alone, and their boat is quickly filling up with water!

So let me take you, the readers of this book, a broader audience, on a tour of sorts thru my life and lay out for you too the special ways God has come alongside me when the fierce winds began to blow against this boy from the hills of West Virginia and the mountains of North Carolina. I do this *especially* because I am nothing special at all, except in the sight of God. I haven't served any big churches or previously written any books. I was not a leader in the Presbyterian Church in America nor the Christian Reformed Church, which I served until my retirement in 2008. I am just a "*buck private*" trying to be faithful to my Lord and Savior. So **the crux of the matter is this:** If our Lord has been faithful "*when the winds & waves were beating against me*" and has done for me what you will read about, He will also be faithful to you as you trust Him and are faithful to Him.

CHAPTER I. THE GREAT CALM **BEFORE THE STORM.**

My family's roots go back to the State of West Virginia. My father was born and raised in Lewisburg and my mother in Kingwood. They met through the state's 4-H program in which they were participants from junior high through young adulthood, and beyond as adult camp leaders. They also shared a common Presbyterian background, with my mother playing the organ in her home church starting around the age of 12, and my father going away to one of the oldest Presbyterian colleges, Hampton-Sydney, to earn his teacher's degree. I recall my father telling me once that Hampton-Sydney, at the time he went there, only gave degrees for Christian ministry and teaching, and his home church was probably hoping he would go into the ministry. The Lord had different plans.

Following graduation from college, and prior to some summer work at a Danforth Foundation 4-H Camp at Stony Lake, Michigan, George Morris McGuire and Shirley Naomi Bucklew were married in the historic Old Stone Presbyterian Church in Lewisburg, West Virginia, on Saturday, June 12, 1937.

The excitement of a graduation, a marriage and a new family having now started, did not completely blot out world concerns, for a world war was brewing and odds were high that the United States would soon

be directly involved. My father, needing teaching experience, received that experience when he was employed in the suddenly greatly-expanding system of private military schools scattered up and down the Valley of Virginia. His first teaching position was at Front Royal Military, then Danville Military, both in Virginia, and then Greenbrier Military Academy back in his hometown of Lewisburg, West Virginia. My two oldest sisters: Ellen Kay (a future missionary with Child Evangelism Fellowship in France) and Shirlee Alcinda (who earned her doctorate and was a professor at Olivet Nazarene College until her retirement) were born during this time frame. I was born on March 17, 1945 and baptized a short time later in the home church of my Father, Old Stone Presbyterian Church in Lewisburg, where my parents had married 8 years previously. In the course of time my younger brother, Christopher Robin was born in Montclair, New Jersey. and later died of a kidney disease while in the 9th grade, and Mary Jennie, born in the early 1950's in Asheville, North Carolina, went on to get her doctorate and teach and retire from the University of South Carolina.

Except for the moving around and our nation entering World War II, these first years of George and Shirley's marriage and starting a family were pretty calm and peaceful. As these years of relative peace came to a close, they were back in W. Va. among people they knew, including my Dad's relatives and church friends growing up. The position of instructor and football coach at Greenbrier Military was an

excellent fit for Daddy at this point, and he was soon elected the youngest elder ever to serve at Old Stone Presbyterian Church. **Note:** The Lord was quietly arranging plenty of help for my parents with their family if it was needed. **It would be needed!**

CHAPTER II. THE GALE FORCE **WINDS OF A DREAD DISEASE!**

Friends, from a strictly human standpoint, I really should **not** be here writing all this down today! At the tender age of **14 months** I came down with a dreaded disease, *Rocky Mt. Spotted Fever*, which went into **encephalitis**. It happened through such a common occurrence. Some dear friends came to visit us whom my parents had not seen in years. The two young families decided to go on a day outing and visit a nearby YMCA camp for a relaxing day. Evidently at some point that day, a tick bit me and went unnoticed for several days. When I became sick, there was at first a lot of confusion as to just what was wrong, and my two older sisters had to be tested to make sure whatever was causing my sickness was not in the entire family. It was not, thankfully. This was in April. Because my Father was associated with the military, he had access to a car, a relative rarity during war time. Mother and Daddy drove me to Roanoke, VA and I spent the next 4 months [May – August] in Louis Gale Hospital, a very curvy and dangerous 92 miles

away. For weeks doctors were fighting what seemed to be a losing battle just trying to keep me alive.

"And the winds were blowing against me!"

The doctor in charge, Dr. Charles Dorsey, finally suggested as a last resort to try a new drug, penicillin, used successfully on W.W.II troops in Europe but never previously on an infant, suspecting it might kill me on the spot. But there was absolutely nothing to lose--everything to gain—I was going to die anyway! [I cannot prove this, but in the research I have been able to do, I may have been the first infant to be given high doses of penicillin in this country.]

The penicillin worked, and the fierce winds stopped by the grace of God and the wisdom He gave to the doctors. As the **Apostle Paul** wrote in **Rom. 8:31** :

"If God is for you, who or what can be against you!"

The only remnants left from the encephalitis as the first few years moved along, seemed to be a rather chronic case of stuttering, but it could have been much worse, for that disease attacks and scars the brain.

My sudden and terrible sickness resulted in a real spiritual crisis and then an awakening for both my parents. Mother had been exposed to genuine and personal Christianity through a lady I only know as Reyna B. Mother had trained this young dynamic Christian witness in business school in Fairmont W. Va. several years before. Reyna B was a graduate of

Moody Bible Institute in Chicago and had a great deal of spiritual influence on Mother. She showed her, for perhaps the first time, the difference between "*churchanity*" and genuine Christianity, between being merely a member of a church and being a real follower of the Person of Christ the Savior.

Daddy had grown up knowing all the facts of the faith, and was schooled in all the minute doctrines of it too, at his Presbyterian college. He knew Presbyterianism frontwards and backwards. But he, prior to this time, did not have a day-by-day living experience and walk with Jesus the Savior.

Christianity to him prior to this time was something you were, knew, and practiced, and not so much Someone you knew and communicated with Who was actually a real Person active in your daily living.

Well, the trauma of the long summer when I was in the hospital changed all that for both Mother and Daddy. They were forced to come face to face with the reality that things were completely out of their hands, and if I was going to be spared and they were going to be given their boy back, God was going to have to do it! They also faced the stark reality that God just might take their son home early! That meant turning their lives and wills over to Him, and that must have meant praying to a personal God long and hard, and then surrendering to whatever was His will. That much praying and crying out to God, and the sudden rearranging of personal deep desires and loves for that long with open hearts for His will to be done **regardless**, changes people, and it changed them!

The real evidence of their spiritual awakening did not come into full bloom until later when they moved to New Jersey, but it started during that long, dreadful summer in Roanoke while looking for days at the four walls of a hospital ward with their dying boy.

I vividly remember hearing on a couple occasions growing up, and my sisters recall hearing it too, our parents saying that after that summer, they just both felt that they needed to get themselves and their young family away from the spiritual coldness of the Lewisburg society. All of us children knew that what they meant was that they had found a living Christ and a living faith to replace a prim and proper, rather dead form of faith.

In the late '40's we moved to Essex Fells, New Jersey. where Daddy became headmaster of the Montrose School for Girls. My parents' spiritual growth continued under the exceptional pastoral and preaching ministry of a Dr. Thomas, a Welshman, who was their pastor at the Caldwell Baptist Church, Caldwell, N.J.

My sisters tell me that even then at just a couple of years old I would play my toy harmonica and tell everyone that someday I was going to be a harmonica-playing preacher. That I do not recall, but I do clearly recall what the outside and the sanctuary of the baptist church we went to looked like.

We moved to North Carolina in 1949 and were living in a faculty house at Ben Lippen School, outside of

Asheville. My two older sisters recall the next incident at another time than I do, but this is what I distinctly recall. While still living out at the Ben Lippen School house, I guess I myself sort of threw the first monkey wrench into the situation when I suddenly announced one Sunday afternoon at the ripe old age of 5 that **I was called to preach** and was going to preach starting right then, that afternoon, in family devotions! My text:

Isa. 52:7 "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring the gospel of peace." [MOUNTAINS / FEET / GOSPEL / PEACE: those things pretty much described both that passage and this pre-school mountain boy at that time!

One of my older sisters, Shirlee, who in later years became a professor of English and speech, blurted out: ***"But he can't even say two words together! How is he ever going to be a preacher?"*** That was a **totally accurate** observation at the time.

Because of my speech problem, in my 1st grade Christmas program, a little later on at school, instead of being given a speaking part in the play like all the rest, I sang a solo, ***"O Holy Night."*** You see, stutters don't stutter when they sing! ***"And the wind ceased!" "If God is for you, who or what can be against you!"***

CHAPTER III. THE ANGRY WINDS OF RENEWED SEIZURE ACTIVITY!

Life rocked along fairly uneventfully until my growth spurt in my early teenage years, and it was quite a spurt, as I ended up 6' 5." Seizures, that had been a rarity at night or when I was sick, began to break out constantly during the daytime hours when I was in the 6th grade. That was a long and hard year, with seizure events taking place a couple of times a week. Just imagine one of the tallest boys in the whole school suddenly falling out of his desk, onto the classroom floor, shaking all over for several minutes, at times losing the control of bodily functions, and foaming at the mouth! **In those days, thankfully, there was not the bullying that goes on today.**

I want to send a special shout out to Jon Rowe, one of my fellow classmates that year, whose desk the teacher placed directly behind mine so that he could try and catch me before I hit the floor. It worked a couple of times from what I remember. Jon never mentioned those times to me in the many years later—not one single time.

A situation like that could not be ignored, so a specialist was consulted to find out just what was going on and what could be done. Daddy took me up to Appalachian Hall Hospital there in Asheville which specialized in brain malfunctions. There a Dr. Griffin and his team, after a battery of different kinds of tests, determined that the childhood encephalitis had scarred one side of my brain. That scaring as my brain grew was the cause of my renewed seizures. He recommended putting me on anti-seizure medications for the rest of my life.

Although I was not told at the time, my parents were told that what the doctors were talking about was epilepsy.

"Now once more the winds were blowing against us = now we were facing confirmed life-long epilepsy left over from that childhood illness!"

What would that mean?

Special Notes:

As I look back at those very early childhood years and the spoken expressions I made that I felt, even then, that the Lord was calling me to preach, I recall something very vividly in my mind. Throughout my growing up years as far back as I can recall, I almost automatically and without thinking about it, had a habit of evaluating every preacher I heard in accordance with where I was in my maturity. Was he interesting to listen to or boring? Was he too long winded or too brief? Did he tell too many stories or illustrations and not enough Bible or too much hard Bible content with no illustrative material? Because we lived in Asheville, NC which was surrounded by summer Bible conferences, during my formative years our family heard personally and on radio some of the better known preachers of that day, including Billy Graham, Charles Fuller, Vance Havner, Stephen F. Olford, Alan Redpath, G. Allen Fleece, James Hatch Sr., Robertson McQuiken Sr., Theodore Epp, Bob Jones Sr. and Jr., and several others. Of all those, probably three made the greatest impression on me. Dr. Vance

Havner was the easiest to listen to, for he was a very entertaining speaker. Dr. Stephen Olford was the hardest to follow, for the simple reason he would usually allegorize a passage to such a degree that it no longer sounded like it did in the original Bible text, and sometimes bordered on the absurd. Dr. Bob Jones, Jr. was a master of word pictures, descriptions and illustrations that once heard you would never forget. These three men had more influence on me as a future preacher than all those I have heard since.

As for teachers who greatly influenced me, my own father, Miss Betty Bullard (my high school geography teacher), our oldest daughter Kathryn, Dr. Lloyd-Jones of England, Dr. R.C. Sproul, Dr. Robert L. Reymond, and a favorite history professor at B.J.U. Dr. Edward Panosian, made the greatest impact. Reading or sitting under those master teachers brought me quickly to the firm conviction that I was primarily a preacher and not exclusively a teacher.

All the basic preaching background was very beneficial to me as a future preacher. By the time I entered college, my basic preaching philosophy and practice was already fairly well formed. During my high school years I had the opportunity to speak several times, so the college preaching courses served as an opportunity to fine tune what was already formed and being practiced. More important than the classroom work at Bob Jones Uni., were the required every weekend preaching assignments for ministerial students. These weekend preaching

assignments actually proved to be the real strength of the ministerial program and included four years of preaching every weekend of the school year and preaching reports during the summer months. Years later, I took post-graduate work at another seminary and discovered that it was common to have ministerial students come to their Junior sermon preaching the first sermon of their lives!

While I was growing up I did not realize the predicament my epilepsy put my parents in. Now that I have had a family of my own and become acquainted with parents who are over-protective or what is called today "*helicopter parents*," I am very grateful for the way my father and mother raised me, even with epilepsy a daily presence. Doctors made it clear to my parents that daily meds were not perfect in controlling seizures, and that all medications would eventually wear out. They faced the decision of how to raise a child with epilepsy, especially a boy, to be a genuine person who deals with all the things people have to experience in order to grow up to be a normal adult. Consequently they let me ride a bike, play basketball and baseball [especially catcher] through high school, drive and go on out of town trips with friends and school teams. The only sport my Dad forbade me to play on a school team was football, and having been a football coach for many years, he saw the real dangers head injuries could cause in that sport for all who participated.

Looking back I am very grateful that Daddy and Mother allowed me to be just a normal boy even when physically I was not. I think my sister Ellen-Kay said it the best when I asked her about our parents and this matter. She said: "*Well Laddie, when they gave you to the care of the Lord back in that hospital room in Roanoke when you were so awfully sick, they never took it back again to themselves alone!*" I really think she hit it on the head. I belonged to the Lord, and He would take care of me just as He had, in their eyes, brought me back from death's door!

CHAPTER IV. THE FRIGHTFUL **WINDS OF POSSIBLE** **INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY!**

During my upper elementary and early junior high years, both of my parents, but especially my father who was a teacher, noticed my struggles with schoolwork. These intellectual problems were abundantly confirmed when the national 6th grade testing results came back and the head of testing for the city schools, Mrs. Airehart, made a special appointment with my Dad to discuss my scores. They were so low that she recommended he side-track me into trade school immediately. My father decided to delay any decision to change my academic path until the testing results in the 9th grade came back.

By the 9th grade, although the daytime seizures were brought fairly well under control, I was still struggling academically, even though my standardized scores were much higher. After much prayer, Daddy decided to keep me in regular classes. I am sure one reason was my intense feeling that God was calling me into the Christian ministry to preach His Word. That calling would take years of future education and preparation. Both Mother and Daddy just turned all that over to the Lord to figure out.

By the time I finished high school ***"the winds were blowing against me, once again!"*** for no matter how hard I tried, I ended up my senior year sitting very comfortably in the lowest quarter of my class of over almost 400 and ***not*** a college prospect at all. Much later in life, I happened to see a comment my high school basketball coach wrote on the back of a team picture my Mother had. It simply stated: "*George, a very hard worker!*" That means a lot to me, because although my grades did not show it at all, I worked on my studies just as hard as I worked on my basketball.

I still definitely felt God's call to ministry, but that required both college and seminary in my church denomination. My two older sisters had attended a Christian college in Greenville, S.C. only 60 some miles from home. So I applied there. **Side note**: It was very gratifying to be offered an athletic scholarship to play basketball at the local UNC-Asheville, but I had set my sights years before on

Christian ministry, and the opportunity to play major college basketball seemed to me to be, though really neat, only an unneeded detour.

"If God is for you, who or what can be against you!"

Bob Jones Univ. would accept anyone who applied; you just had to make your grades after you got admitted. My college years at **Bob Jones Univ.** were very tough academically, and there were many times I seriously wondered if I would ever finish. I personally knew students who couldn't pass and were either sent home or transferred to the Institute of Christian Service, which did not offer a bachelor's degree program. That possibility was very threatening to me, because that possibility meant no seminary would be in my future. I did **not** think that if a person didn't go to seminary they were of less value than those who did! I just had had seminary in my mind for so long that Christian ministry and seminary for me were welded together into one! As I look back, I think the Lord placed both of those things together early in my mind so that during the very difficult times I had in some of my ancient language courses, I would not seek to option of just throwing in the towel and switching to an easier path.

I had to repeat the first semester of Greek after not pulling a straight C in a 5 hour class. That repeat was really my salvation, an eye opener, and the first step to my academic success, for it led to a rather startling

discovery. My very insightful faculty adviser, Dr. Allen P. Ross, who just retired the last couple of years from Beason Theological Seminary, my parents, and I myself began to see a pattern: Allen was the first to point out that the 5 hour Greek course I had to repeat was a snap the second time around, noting that I hardly had to restudy anything.

What became very obvious to all of us from that repeat, was that although I was certainly slower getting new material than most other people, once I got it, it stayed longer than most other people. Thus even today, I still recall most all of my basic Greek and Hebrew even after some 50 or so years—enough to work in it whenever I need to!

I have come to realize that same kind of recall is true for me in other areas also like road-maps, place descriptions, names of places and people. My only big failing is in working and recalling numbers, and in that I can rely on others. Needless to say, I am not given to the study of *Biblical Numerics*!! "*If God is for you, who or what can be against you!*"

At the close of my senior year in college I did ***not*** have the **GPA** [grade point average] to go on to seminary which I had felt the Lord calling me to do since high school.

Those poor grades may have been the reason the dean of Ministerial Students at the university, Dr. Gilbert Steinholm, called me in to talk with him one day. Unknown to me, he had signed me up to be the assistant pastor of one of BJU's most successful pastors. Dr. Ed Nelson, pastor of the Sheraton Road

Baptist Church in Denver, CO. was an annual speaker at school and on the University board of trustees. Dr. Steinholm had evidently talked with Dr. Nelson and signed, sealed and delivered me to be his new assistant pastor following my graduation from the University in just a few weeks.

I was shocked and rather dumb-founded. First of all, I was not a Baptist and Dr. Steinholm knew that or could have easily found that out. Secondly, he had signed me up for a position without even once consulting me.

I tried to explain to Dr. Steinholm that I was going to seminary or graduate school right there at BJU because that is where I for years felt the Lord was calling me. He was very insistent that I did not need to go on to more schooling, that I was ready to go into ministry right now, that graduate school even at BJU would be a waste of my time and talents, and that this was one of the best positions open to any of the graduates that year (famous alumnus, huge church, great preacher to learn under, large city) !

When I finally convinced Dr. Steinholm that I was staying for Graduate School and not taking the appointment he had arranged for me, he did not dismiss me on very good terms. He was very upset and angry that I had foiled his agreement with Dr. Nelson. In my heart, I knew very clearly that to accept that position was for me as an individual to disregard what the Holy Spirit was saying and doing in my life, and I just could not entertain it, no matter how wonderful the opportunity offered.

Dr. Steinholm was correct. I did not on that day have the grades to go on to seminary or graduate school! But all the students at BJU at that time had to take the rather difficult standardized Graduate Records Exam, since the school did not have secular accreditation. I took those exams just a few days following my tough meeting with Dr. Steinholm, and did extremely well.

After the summer, on August 5, 1967, George Morris McGuire, Jr. and Myra Elizabeth Turner were married at 6:00 PM sharp in Pensacola, Florida in the Gadsden Street Methodist Church. After a short honeymoon in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, off to seminary I went and pulled almost all A's while Myra worked for the Greenville County Welfare Dept. in the division of Aid to Families With Dependent Children. ***"If God is for you, who or what can be against you!"***

As I had one crisis about grades in undergraduate school that I mentioned previously, I had another one my third year in graduate school in the month of October.

My father had been sick with cancer for some months and was not responding to the very few treatments available, so Myra and I decided to ask a Sunday off from weekly preaching to go visit him in Asheville. (We had been preaching in a newly-organized Presbyterian congregation in SW Atlanta for more than a year.) Daddy was in pretty rough shape that Sunday we visited. I recorded on cassettes some Bible scripture passages for him to listen to, and about

mid-afternoon we returned to Greenville. About halfway to Greenville, I started feeling so badly that I asked Myra to drive the rest of the way home.

The next morning I came down with the flu, and by Wednesday I was checked into the University Hospital with double pneumonia in both lungs.

The day I checked into the hospital Daddy passed away. One of my closest friends and his wife, Dick and Carol Hester, took Myra to Daddy's funeral. The scriptures they used in the service were those I had recorded the week prior.

I was in the hospital for several weeks and missed an entire month of classes. It was barely 7 weeks before Christmas break, and 2 class weeks after that until the semester ended.

How was I ever going to make up all that work??? First, I went to see the University Academic administrator, Dr. Phillip Smith to get his permission to make up my Hebrew Studies first before all other classes, since Hebrew class covers so much material in one class, one class builds on the ones before, and I was so far behind. I got absolutely no encouragement at all and was told I should just drop out of school. Financially, that was not a possibility. Dr. Smith finally relented, and gave me permission to make up the Hebrew first and then move on to the other courses.

Then, I went around to all my professors and got all their back work I had missed and told them of the plans. **I finished up my final 1st semester Hebrew test first, and all the rest of the courses except for one or two tests prior to Christmas break!** My

grades did not suffer and I even pulled a C in Hebrew for that semester and an A the following semester. I had to do the work, and Myra helped me all she could, but only the Lord Himself could have caused such a wonderful outcome.

Looking back, I find it interesting that I never heard one word from Dr. Smith, the University Academic administrator. Just a small note of "*Good Work*" would have meant so much both to Myra and me at that time, for I remember as the second semester rolled around we were both just completely exhausted.

Special Note:

For those living with epilepsy or some other malady which might strike at any moment, it always hangs over one like an enemy's sword. I give God praise and thanks that in all my high school and college days I only had two episodes of any note at all. One was in my junior year in high school during an after school scheduled basketball practice, and except for potential embarrassment to me (which never came), it did not amount to much. The other was in college my sophomore year. I was admitted to the college infirmary because of a very bad cold and fever. The first morning I was eating breakfast in my hospital bed when I had a rather long grand mal seizure. Needless to say, it got the attention of the entire infirmary staff. I mention these only to stress that I was not outside somewhere, or driving, or going down

stairs at the university dorm or classroom building, or anywhere harm could come—the Lord had me exactly where help was near at hand, and I give Him the glory and praise.

CHAPTER V. THE PREVAILING

WINDS OF CONTROLLED SEIZURE

ACTIVITY.

I finished seminary but found my search for a conservative Presbyterian congregation that could extend to me an approved call to be difficult. I served an Independent Presbyterian congregation in Atlanta for 5 years. I was ordained by a commission composed of ministers and elders from the area and a few of the ordained members of the faculty of Bob Jones Uni. and Graduate School of Religion.

Sometimes it takes a good and fine-tuned looking backward to accurately see what has taken place – what God has done. From my first pastorate in Atlanta in 1967 to my last in Austinville, IA starting in 1996 I can think of only one seizure attack I experienced, and that was because of some very unusual circumstances. Let me give you a brief rundown.

During the late 1960's and early '70's there was talk of a new conservative group coming out of the old liberal Presbyterian church in the South, but no definite action was taking place. The Viet Nam War was at its height and I was receiving mail constantly from Christian and church organizations begging young ministers to volunteer for the military chaplaincy program. The situation was extremely critical, because most of the seminaries were both anti-war and anti-military. So after talking with Myra and doing a lot of praying, I felt that I needed to volunteer and try to help fill the void, since I was neither anti-war nor anti-military. I signed up to enter the Army chaplaincy program at the 5th Army Headquarters at Ft. McPherson in Atlanta where I was located. In time, they accepted all my papers and sent me to Ft. Gordon in Augusta to take my physicals. I passed my physicals and a team of neurologists talked to me and examined records and data about what they referred to as my "*so called*" encephalitis experience. They did not think I had any long term effects that would keep me from entering the chaplaincy program. They instructed me to wean myself off the meds I was on for the next two weeks and report back to them. On the seventh day of getting off the medications I had a grand-mal seizure. Myra and I had gone to vote or do something like that at the local Seventh-Day Adventist Church. I believe I was getting back into the car to come home when I suddenly had a fairly bad seizure. When I reported this back to the doctors in Augusta, they sent my case

to the Surgeon General's Office in Washington, D.C., asking for a review and an exception. Several weeks later, I received notice that both the review and request for an exception had been rejected. I would not be allowed to serve my country as a chaplain or in any other capacity in the services. That was disappointing news, but also a reaffirming of my original calling as a pastor/preacher.

As the new conservative Presbyterian movement became more and more active, in early 1972 I received a call from the First Presbyterian Church (PCUS) of Clarendon, Arkansas. I served as a student pastor there for two years prior to that congregation voting to join the newly formed Continuing Presbyterian Church movement in 1973, which later changed its name to the National Presbyterian Church and then a year later the Presbyterian Church in America.

Our first two daughters, Kathryn Anne & Rebecca Joy, were born while we were serving in Clarendon. We later served PCA churches in Cynthiana, Kentucky where our third daughter Deborah Ruth was born. Later came pastorates in Quincy and Pensacola, Florida; Orange Beach and Pinson, Alabama until 1996.

Special Note:

As epilepsy sometimes brings on difficult situations and responses that have to be dealt with having nothing to do with seizures, let me relate to you readers one incident that happened to me. I had been in ministry for over 20 years, served faithfully in the new PCA since its founding, been stated clerk of two presbyteries and served on several General Assembly committees. I had received a call from the Mt. Calvary PCA congregation in Pinson, Alabama. Prior to accepting a call, the called minister has to meet with the minister's committee and get their approval, which is usually a formality for previously ordained men. Prior to the meeting of presbytery where I was to be interviewed, the minister's committee was meeting at Knollwood PCA in Gadsden, Alabama and I was called in to meet with them. I was sitting directly across from the pastor of the largest PCA congregation in the presbytery and a founding leader in the PCA. I knew of this particular man, but had never actually met him personally, so he did not personally know me. When it came time to approve or disapprove my call to the Mt Calvary Church, everyone was for it except this one rather influential man across from me, and the elder representatives from his congregation. I was not aware of it at the time, but the elders from this one man's congregation were numerically capable of either passing or blocking any item that came before Presbytery. When the chairman asked him to give his reasons, he stated that he felt that a pastor needed to be able to talk, and he understood I had trouble talking. When

pressed further by some of the members of the committee, he said I stuttered and Mt Calvary needed someone who could talk plainly to them. Sitting diagonally across from me and next to him was Pastor Paul McHenry, with whom I had served in Gulf Coast Presbytery some years prior. He spoke up and said that he had heard me speak several times and never heard any problem. The committee voted with one negative vote to let me accept the call. The vote on the floor of Presbytery that day also passed. As a follow-up on this experience, I have figured out just in recent years that my so-called handicap was actually being used in this incident as an excuse to try and keep me out of that section of the denomination because of my more strict confessional views. At the very next meeting, the same person tried to do the same thing to a seminary friend of mine, trying to casting a bad light on this man's supposed bad temper. He passed too! My stuttering and my seminary classmate's temper were just "*smokescreens*" for this man's personal underlying reasons to oppose us.

Now as you have read, stuttering has been an everyday occurrence with me as a result of the encephalitis, but it has seldom been a problem in the pulpit. But stuttering and other handicaps that encephalitis can bring on can, even in our advanced day, bring on discrimination. In the very next section you will read of my ministering in a congregation in Iowa in the Christian Reformed denomination. I have been told on good authority that applicants who

stutter are not passed through the seminary that feeds that denomination to which I now belong. I managed to be received by way of receiving a call from a particular congregation, being approved by local groups, and transferring in from a sister denomination.

In the year 1996 a big change took place in my

life: A congregation in Iowa in a different denomination I had never been in issued me a call, and it came about in this way. Our two oldest daughters had graduated from the college of the Christian Reformed Church in North America in Grand Rapids, Michigan (Calvin University). I had preached a couple of times in the church they attended during school. I was told that the denomination was desperately in need of ministers, especially those who would be willing to pastor a rural or semi-rural congregation, and those with experience. On one of our visits to Grand Rapids to visit our daughters, where the headquarters of this denomination was located, I dropped by to see the Chairman of the Pastor Placement Dept. He handed me a long list of all the vacant churches he was trying to fill. It was single spaced and many pages long. I was shocked!

For my wife Myra and me moving to Iowa was at first somewhat like moving to China or some far off place on the other side of the earth! But with our youngest daughter, Deborah, in her second year at Mississippi College, we really did not have any reason not to go, and we both had sensed for some time

rather strongly that the Lord was preparing us to move on to a different field of service to minister in. We communicated a lot, talked a lot, borrowed a lot of advice, prayed a lot, and we finally decided that when the Lord keeps telling you to go, you'd better listen and go.

Even though the Iowa congregation chose what may have been the coldest and most dreadful weekend in February 1996 for us to visit, we had a wonderful weekend in spite of all that, and the congregation extended to us a call the following September. Several of the people told us after we got there that they did not think they would ever see those people from the South again after that horrifically cold and windy weekend when we were candidates there!

We ended up having the best 12 years of our entire ministry out there in Iowa!!! If we had chosen a place to close our regular pastoral ministry, we could not have chosen a better place in every way. The congregation was a joy to work with and prepare for and preach to. My years of ministry experience were greatly needed in the local and immediate area denominational governing body, the classis. Myra had at last a large garden with top soil 6 feet deep, one of those elegant, old Iowa farm houses she made to look like a show place, and all the snow she could ever desire!

I will remember the Iowa ministry for many things, but a few of the unusual one are: **(1)** I had never lived in a place before where people actually would

show up early for services; **(2)** I never had a congregation where at the beginning I had never heard of any of the last names of my members; **(3)** Both the education level and the medical care was the best of any place we had ever lived [the medical care would prove, during the end of our time, to be vital and crucial]. Lastly, **(4)** I never had a congregation that could sing like that Austinville crowd. Iowa students all have music in elementary school, so everyone can read music and sing parts! Their singing was as close to heaven as it will get down here!

NOTE: All during my major ministry years my seizure activity had been kept at bay! That was about to change.

CHAPTER VI. THE UNEXPECTED WINDS OF RENEWED SEIZURE ACTIVITY LATE IN LIFE!

Going back to our life in Iowa, everything had been going along for many years in the sunshine without the winds of either church or physical troubles blowing at all. Yes, I had early on developed asthma for the first time in my life, but with some constant work and medication most of the time it was well under control. The week I moved from Iowa the asthma stopped and

never returned. We figured out that I was very sensitive to whatever was in the air from the giant grain elevators in little Austinville where we lived. In the Austinville Church congregation it seemed that blessing followed blessing-- "*God was in His heaven and all was right in my world*" (the Lord was indeed blessing our work, He really was-- **it wasn't the feeding of the 5000 weekly, but rather the feeding of a full sanctuary weekly!**) From time to time my asthma flared up, but I had really good medical care for which I was very grateful.

Unknown to me or anyone else, even my doctors with whom I kept in very close contact, I was living on the edge as far as my health was concerned. Looking back, I suspect that over the years two things were going on that none of us realized and could not have known. **[1]** My asthmatic condition, that seemed under control most of the time, may have been actually working against me and my epileptic condition. **[2]** After many years taking the same drug to control my epilepsy and regulating it from time to time, it was losing its effectiveness. A couple of times in succession I dreamed or thought I had had a partial seizure in my sleep, but I could not separate fact from fiction, for there were none of the tell-tale signs the following morning such as a splitting headache or extreme drowsiness. What made these episodes so difficult to determine was that in both episodes Myra had gone for the night for her brother's funeral.

A few weeks passed, and then one Sunday night, while leading our prayer time, there was a long and strange period of silence and confusion on my part that I still can't fully explain or describe. After church I asked one of the men there, and he said that at that time they almost started to close the service, but I seemed to recover.

Finally, one day in **2003** my physical house fell in, so to speak.

"This time the winds started very suddenly blowing against me in a really strong gale like one of those terrible storms that so suddenly can descend upon the Sea of Galilee as it did in the Bible text!"

I had just picked up my car the previous day at a paint shop after getting the rocker panels repainted, driven 10 or so miles that morning to the nearest town, and was attending a meeting with the ministers of 3 or 4 small towns of the area in the elementary school principal's office. Those are the kinds of things rural pastors do, and I loved it! As I sat in that meeting, I began to feel worse and worse. I finally decided that I was going to have to excuse myself. I went out in the school's hallway and started leaning against the wall for a few seconds. I recall just sort of sliding from a standing position slowly down to the floor. Evidently some time passed, for the next thing I remember little kids were staring down at me sitting on the floor.

Since I did not want to scare them (as if I hadn't already) I said something to try and let them know I was fine. At some point, I noticed that the door to the school nurse's office was to my immediate left (**PTL**) so I decided in my confusion, it might be a wise to go in there if I could. I walked in, told the nurse who I was, that I was not feeling too well and thought I might just sit there for a while. I recall that she asked me some things and if I wanted to lie down. I said that was not necessary. I guess I had been there 5 minutes or so when I told the nurse that I thought I would lie down after all. I think that at that point I handed her my wallet card and told her I was an epileptic. It was not more than a couple of minutes after lying down that the first full body seizure hit and then another and another. They stopped long enough for the nurse to get help from next door, (one of my pastor friends), then the seizures started up again. I tried to make them understand where Myra was (she had taken the ladies of our church to a ladies church meeting some 50 miles away) but they could not understand what I was trying to say. They finally were able to reach a minister friend who reached Myra. Then the nurse must have called the nearby ambulance and doctor's office just 3 blocks away. The EMT's arrived and carried me down 3 flights of stairs (an interesting experience) and took me to the local clinic.

The local doctor and his team had a very difficult and long time getting the waves of seizures to stop. I

ended up in the hospital in Waterloo, and that was followed by extensive testing and about 2 years of changing seizure medications by a team of specialists in Ames, IA. The problem was trying to find one that would work that I had not taken previously.

There is one thing that just jumps out at me when I think back on this episode. I want to share it with all of you, so you can share it with anyone connected with this disease of epilepsy. **No one thought to tell me that all seizure medications wear out sooner or later, and for me to be on guard for that!**

Doctors told my parents, but I never got the news or read it when I grew up. I had been on one medication for perhaps 50 years and everything seemed fine. But the specialized physicians in Ames, who helped me so much, told me that the increasing of that medication twice in 4 or 5 years, when there was not a growth spurt going on or a major life change, was a sure sign that the medication was losing its effectiveness. **How I wish I had been told that at some point before I was 62 years old!!**

Epilogue

That last traumatic season was 17 or so years ago, and since that time the Lord has allowed me to close out a great pastorate in Austinville, IA. and partially retire, prepare the PCA congregation in Florence, AL for a new pastor, help restore and rebuilt the Russellville, AL congregation from 2009 to April of 2019, and fill an emergency supply need

becoming senior pastor of the Cleveland United Methodist Church in July 2019. ***"If God is for you, who or what can be against you!"***

In the text we began with, the Lord knew the wild winds were coming, and even sent the disciples into those winds. But He also sent the calm and came to them in their need. For both the winds and and calm we give Him praise.

One final true story just for you young people reading this who struggle because you have some things about you that you do not like but cannot change!

In the late 1990's, I was assigned by our denomination to go one Sunday about 70 miles north of Austinville, IA and preach for a Christian Reformed Congregation who at the time did not have a minister. Rather early that beautiful Sunday morning I left, and headed for this church feeling perfectly fine. About half way there, just south of Hampton, IA., I suddenly began to feel very sick, so I turned down a side road to find a private and quiet place. After a while I drove on, feeling none the better. When I got to the church, I told the elders as we met for prayer prior to the service that I was not feeling very well, for I thought they ought to know. I got through the service, but I had the hardest time I had ever had with my stuttering, which had rarely been any problem in all my years preaching. On the way home, as I thought over the morning and prayed about it, I just could not understand anything about the entire morning and what had happened. For that service I had been **prayed up**, **studied up**, **paid up**, **hyped up** so there was not any

natural or spiritual cause for the utter failure! I just blamed it on feeling badly, for when I have been tired or sick I sometimes have had some stuttering problems. Pondering the whole situation over quickly, I just forgot about it and put it forever in the rear-view mirror. That in itself was not like me, for I have a tendency to brood over things that are disappointing for a long time. By the time I arrived home, I felt wonderful, and preached that evening in my home church with no problems at all.

A couple of years later, a man named Herb Schreur came up to me and said: *“ Pastor McGuire, do you remember preaching in Britt on a Sunday when you could hardly talk?”* I said, *“Herb, I certainly do, why do you ask?”* He said: *“Our 10 year old daughter was there that Sunday morning. She had completely gone into a shell because people at school had made fun of her and bullied her because she stuttered, and we really did not know what we were going to do next! She was just withdrawing from everything and everybody. Well, that morning when you stuttered so much, that changed her. When we went home for lunch, she said: ‘If that man can stand up there and preach and stutter, I can talk too!’”*

That same little girl is now all grown up, and the last I heard she was a major in the Air Force, a psychiatrist stationed at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, AL!

I would be willing to have 1,000 stammering, stuttering services like that one, if it would change the lives of 1,000 young people finding it hard to accept how God made them **or what He has permitted to happen to them!!!**

My Final Word to You Readers:

Brothers and sisters, the fierce winds of opposition blow in all of our lives and we expect them, for we live in a fallen world that will always oppose the genuine Christian believer. But **Moses**, **Paul** and **some of us** have found that the greatest and hardest opposing winds to accept come from inside ourselves. These **Winds**, **weaknesses**, and **threatening possibilities** we can do nothing about, for God has made clear He is **not** going to remove them. **Moses** was slow of speech and **Paul** had his thorn in the flesh, about which he wrote in **2 Corinthians 12:9** (which really ought to be **my own life's verse**):

"Most gladly therefore will I boast about my infirmities, weaknesses in order that the power of Christ may rest upon me!"

Let me be totally honest with you: ***When I pray the prayer before I preach: "Lord open my mouth and give me the words to say" that prayer is indeed very real and literal to me!***

Returning to our Bible text:

"the disciples' boat was taking a beating from the waves because the wind was against it. **They were constantly distressed at rowing**... having driven the boat with oars **only** 3 1/2 miles."

Are YOU constantly distressed at your rowing and the lack of progress YOU are making against the God controlled winds you're facing?

Instead of straining against that blowing wind, dear fellow Christian believers, don't worry about your lack of progress -- just ***face that wind*** in the strength of God's wonderful and enduring promise: ***"If God is for you, who or what can be against you!"***

I close with these old but wonderful and reassuring lines that I learned as a boy and have repeated to myself for almost **70 yrs.** now:

*"Got any **rivers** you think are uncross-able?
Got any **mountains** you can't tunnel through?
God **specializes** in things thought impossible,
And He can do for you what no one else can do!" -*

Oscar C. Eliason

[THE END - "soli deo gloria"]