

INTERVIEW WITH GWEN JONES

Almeda: Gwen, I've known you for many years. When did you come to Springfield?

Gwen: In 1940, I remember arriving from Kansas City on a hot summer day aboard the old electric train which backed into Springfield. I wondered where I was coming to! But through the years I have really learned to love the Ozarks. This has been my home for most of my life.

Almeda: We came home from India in February of 1963. You were at Central Assembly at that time, weren't you?

Gwen: Yes, I was.

Almeda: You and our nephew Max Eleiott worked together. Max was there eight years at that time, and four years when he came back later, but I can't remember which years.

Gwen: I can't either, but I'll always remember Max and Dolly as wonderful people and great musicians. Isn't he still involved in music, at least to some extent?

Almeda: Yes, in Fort Wayne, Indiana. I was thinking that you must have worked with several pastors at Central.

Gwen: Actually there were nine, including our present pastor, David Watson. It has been a pleasure to serve with each one, adjusting to the varied music preferences and styles. They all became good friends.

Almeda: I don't know anything about your early life. Where were you born?

Gwen: I was born in Battleford, Saskatchewan, in 1911. My family had immigrated from England and settled in this small town. I was the youngest of three girls. In 1918, my father enlisted in World War I and left for England. While he was gone, very dear friends of the family moved to Victoria on the west coast of British Columbia and were charmed with its climate and beauty. So while Daddy was overseas, decision was made by correspondence, and the family moved to Victoria.

Almeda: Were they serving the Lord at this time?

Gwen: They had a strong Christian background and were attending a Methodist church. But our home was revolutionized when Dr. Charles Price came to Victoria and held a healing crusade that shook the city—and impacted our family.

Almeda: Did they remain in the Methodist church?

Gwen: For a time; but not long after that, a Pentecostal church was opened in an upstairs hall in downtown Victoria. The young pastor called to the mission was none other than twenty-two-year-old C.M. Ward who proved to be a great pastor. .

After graduating from high school, I went into legal stenography and worked for the attorney of a large company. I was considering studying law as a career. About this time I had a complete breakdown and became so ill that it was necessary to take a leave of absence from my job and move to Seattle where my father was pastor of Fremont Tabernacle. Not long after this Dr. Price was holding a tent meeting crusade near Seattle. My father took me to one of the meetings, Dr. Price prayed, and I received a wonderful healing.

Almeda: Did you return to your job in Victoria?

Gwen: No, I remained in Seattle with my parents. In 1937, I enrolled in Northwest Bible Institute, hoping perhaps to prepare for gospel ministry as so many of our family had. But I seemed to be pushed (almost reluctantly) into two areas—journalism and music. My schedule at NBI included serving as class secretary, editor of the school paper, three years on the yearbook staff, finally as editor. In music, I was pianist for the choir, part of a clarinet trio, accompanist for ensembles, chapel pianist, etc. I graduated in 1939.

Almeda: By this time had you made a decision about your future?

Gwen: Not really. For a few months I worked as legal secretary for a firm in downtown Seattle. There was also opportunity for music and other ministry in my father's church. At this time Noel Perkin, whom you knew well, came to speak at a missions convention in Fremont Tabernacle and was a guest in our home. I recall that he talked to me several times about his department in Springfield and mentioned that the girls who worked with him considered it a rewarding ministry. At the time this had no particular significance to me, but I later learned there was a purpose behind his comments.

It goes back a few years to when I was a legal secretary in Victoria and was spending my vacation in Auburn, Washington, where my father was then pastor. That year, the district council was being held in Auburn, and because several states were incorporating as the Northwest District of the Assemblies of God, E.S. Williams had come to chair the sessions. At the last minute it was discovered that no arrangement had been made for a recording secretary. So my father volunteered my services. A legal background stood me in good stead, and Brother Williams seemed to have been impressed. When Noel Perkin needed help years later, evidently my name came into the picture. So he used this visit to our church to look me over. A few weeks later I received a formal letter of invitation to join the Missions Department staff.

Almeda: And you accepted the invitation. You mentioned earlier that you arrived on a hot summer day in 1940.

Gwen: Yes, and the only two people I knew in Springfield, Noel Perkin and E.S. Williams, were at the train to meet me. Brother Perkin had also brought along two workers.

Almeda: Do you remember who they were?

Gwen: Marge Beade and Edith Whipple. You didn't know them, did you?

Almeda: Yes, very well. We met them back when we came home from India on furlough. Of course Marge later married Brother Kamerer, Gospel Publishing House manager and for years was secretary to the general superintendent.

Gwen: Actually at first I worked with Edith, doing some editorial and promotional work.

Almeda: Then you didn't serve as Brother Perkin's secretary.

Gwen: No, that was Ruth Judd's position. In those early days Home Missions headed by Fred Vogler was a part of the Foreign Missions Department. Brother Vogler needed help and asked for me. At first I was a little disappointed because the vision of our family had always been the foreign field. But I can see that it all worked out in God's will.

At this time World War II had created a great need, and Home Missions had been assigned ministry to servicemen. Myer Pearlman, burdened for this ministry, had initiated the magazine *Reveille*. The need became so overwhelming that the executives established it as a separate department. I was asked to join this ministry as office manager and assistant in editing *Reveille*.

After the war, the Servicemen's Department became a part of youth ministry and I moved to that department as office manager. In 1946, the *CA Herald* editor left and R.C. Cunningham, then assistant editor of the *Pentecostal Evangel*, took over the *Herald* on an interim basis. The board offered me the editorship. I declined saying editorial work just wasn't my area. But after Bob's urging, I prayed about it and finally said yes. So editorial work did become "my area" from that time until retirement—and even after!

Almeda: How long were you *Herald* editor?

Gwen: From 1946 to 1954. The next assignment was editor of the *Sunday School Counselor*, then I moved to the Foreign Missions Department as missions education editor. In 1965, *Advance* was introduced as a magazine for ministers and church leaders, and I served as editor from that date until my retirement in 1990, after 50 years of employment at Headquarters.

Almeda: I'm sure not many employees served that long.

Gwen: No, I guess it set a record for years of employment. At the retirement banquet, Brother Carlson announced that the executive presbytery had voted to award me the

General Superintendent's Medal of Honor. Formal presentation would be made at the following General Council to be held in Portland. This award was instituted in 1989 to honor outstanding lay persons within the Fellowship. At the previous council one of the honorees was Senator (then Governor) John Ashcroft. The second recipient to be honored in Portland to be Vernon Clark who as you know was recently named Chief of U.S. Naval Operations. No doubt you saw the headline article about him in *Springfield News and Leader* a few days ago.

Almeda: I did, indeed. It was a wonderful testimony.

Gwen: You can see why I was overwhelmed when Brother Carlson made the announcement. My first thought was, *why me?* I was not a famous person. Most of my work had been behind the scenes. I wasn't a preacher or public speaker. I had no credentials to be considered an outstanding lay person like John Ashcroft or Vern Clark. Why me?

In the months before Council, I thought a lot about this and decided it was in a way a tribute to *faithfulness*. If we can't be counted on to be faithful in our responsibility, the greatest talents and abilities are not enough. God had blessed me with good health and enabled me to fill each assignment to the best of my ability—mostly behind the scenes. So when the medal was presented, I accepted it on behalf of all those lay persons who have pursued important responsibilities year after year—often behind the scenes and unsung—with faithfulness and dedication.

Almeda: Thank you for sharing that with us. Going back a few years, how old were you when you gave your heart to the Lord?

Gwen: I was about six when I knelt at the altar during Dr. Price's revival in Victoria.

Almeda: Can you remember when you first started to play the piano?

Gwen: My oldest sister Lorna was considered the musician of the family and studied piano extensively. I concentrated on clarinet first but later took up piano and organ which have become opportunities of ministry for many years.

Almeda: Were there any special people who have inspired you through the years?

Gwen: So many great people have touched my life that it is hard to name a few. Dr. Price was one. And Noel Perkin. It was an inspiration to work with such a humble and godlike leader. Someone referred to him as "one of God's gentlemen." He was a fellow Canadian—did you know that?

Almeda: No, I did not. He was indeed a wonderful person.

Gwen: And of course I must mention Pastor Wannemacher.

Almeda: Gwen, you have spent many years in ministry at Central Assembly—playing the organ for services, specials, choirs, weddings, funerals, radio and TV programs. You are still involved in some of that ministry, aren't you?

Gwen: Yes, I play organ for both Sunday morning services at Central once a month, also weekly for the midweek services, and for special events such as funerals and receptions. Then I am pianist for the Pioneer Praise Choir which has a meaningful ministry both in Springfield and on weekend tours.

Almeda: You have had illnesses but pressed on courageously.

Gwen: God has been good. Since retirement I have had two major cancer surgeries. Each was completely contained, so no treatment was necessary. The doctors have been amazed by the measure of health I have at age 88.

Almeda: Through the years you have been a tremendous blessing to thousands of people—including me. I'm sure you wouldn't have chosen any other life. You have had two careers, and the Lord has used you and made you successful in both.

Gwen: I can look back with appreciation on the years you and I worked practically next door to one another. We had good times and good fellowship. Besides, there was the India connection through Derrick and Dorrie Hillary.

Almeda: What relation were they to you?

Gwen: Derrick was my first cousin, but really was more like a brother. When he was just a boy his father was killed in an automobile accident. His widowed mother and her two children came to live with us, so we were brought up together. Their daughter Gwen was named for me, and of course you know she married the son of Maynard and Gladys Ketcham. We have remained close—in fact, Gwen came a few weeks ago to help me move.

Almeda: I am happy you moved to Maranatha. You have a cozy apartment. Next to you and across the street are old friends. All of us, and many new friends, are looking forward to good fellowship in the days to come. God has brought you here, and we know He will use you and make you a blessing at Maranatha Village.