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*You may find the following personal experiences interesting, even amusing! More importantly, over the years, I have been able to use them to illustrate biblical truths.—Ralph Woodrow*

**“SAM”**

Some years ago, probably around 1970, on my way to hold meetings at a church in Oregon, I stopped in Reno, Nevada to see some former neighbors who had moved there. They invited me to spend the night. In the bedroom next to where I would sleep, they showed me “Sam,” their pet iguana. An iguana, for any who may not know, is a huge lizard, native to Mexico and South America. Resembling some horrid-looking prehistoric dragon, the iguana has a crest of spines extending along its back. Iguanas range from 3 to 6 feet in length. Sam, I would say, was about 4 feet, including the tail. Heat lamps in his room provided a temperature more like he had been accustomed to in Mexico.

This couple, Sam’s owners, worked for the same company and took two or three months off each winter. Escaping from cold weather, they would spend this time in Mexico—places like Puerto Vallarta. The woman, especially, loved “everything” about Mexico, *even the iguanas*. In the jungles just south of Puerto Vallarta, she told me, a movie had been made a few years before (1964). Richard Burton played the part of a backslidden preacher who, having been fired from his church, got a job taking church groups on bus tours into Mexico. That movie is now considered a classic: “The Night of the Iguana.”

People who worked with her at the company, having heard the glowing reports each year when they returned from Mexico, decided to buy her a surprise present: an iguana! That’s how they came to have Sam. But, realizing that not everyone would be excited about an iguana living close by, they did not tell their neighbors.

Houses in this area were built on the slope of a hill, each stair-steeping upward, requiring a retaining wall between each property. One morning, Sam managed to get out of the house and decided to sun himself on the wall just above the backyard next door. It so happened that the neighbor, along with some visiting friends, had been out gambling and drinking most of the night. When he staggered out into his back yard that next morning, he spotted Sam on the wall. He had never seen a lizard

that big! Supposing his excessive drinking was causing him to hallucinate, he reportedly cried out:

“I will *never* drink Jack Daniel’s again!! NEVER!!”

Proverbs 23:29-32, NIV: “Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine.... Your eyes will see *strange sights* and your mind imagine confusing things.”

**DALLAS**

Back in the early 80s, before speaking at a church near Dallas, Texas, the pastor told me: “Occasionally we have a man come to our service who *thinks* he is Jesus Christ—he may be here *today*.” Sure enough, just as the service was turned to me, toward the back of the building a man stood: “I am the resurrection and the life,” he proclaimed, “he that believeth in me shall not perish, but have everlasting life. I am the Light of the world. Yea, I am Jesus Christ, the Savior.” He said a few more things, pointing out that he had come to the meeting—“not to be ministered to, but to minister”—and, having said this, *left!*

On a different subject, after the service, I was visiting with some men who attended this church. Because they lived in the Dallas area, I asked their opinions about the Kennedy assassination. One man told me his theory: He thought someone could have been hiding beneath the grill of the curb-side drain that is located on Elm Street. As the motorcade approached, he could have fired a rifle from there, and then escaped, without being seen, through the drainage system. Later I heard of others who have considered this. Apparently actual tests have demonstrated that a person, with some effort, could escape in this manner. Please understand that I have no special insight into any of this; I mention it only in passing.

**JFK**

A few years later, in 1991, Arlene and I were driving through Dallas and planned to visit the site of the Kennedy assassination. As we got closer to that area, the streets seemed heavily congested and some were blocked off. At that time we owned a motor home, on the back of which I carried a small Honda 70 motorcycle. It seemed to make sense to drive on out a ways and come back downtown on the motorcycle, which would be easier to park. In the process, we passed some policemen on

old-style, three-wheel motorcycles that looked more like the 60s. We noticed people who were dressed like they were from an earlier era. Some strange things were going on, it seemed to us—as though we were in a time warp.

Then the mystery was solved! Someone explained that scenes for Oliver Stone's controversial movie, "*JFK*," were being filmed that day. Though access was somewhat restricted because of the filming—like walking along Elm Street to check out that storm drain!—we were able to circle around and park the little motorcycle up behind the famous "grassy knoll." We visited the Sixth Floor Museum of the book depository building, and a while later, saw the motorcade as it waited before moving onto Elm Street. It was obvious a lot of effort and expense had gone into realistically re-creating the historic scene—the cars, actors resembling the Kennedys, Lyndon Johnson, Governor Conley, etc. Most of the Dealey Plaza area had remained as it was in 1963, but new street lights had been put up. For the film, even these were modified to look like they did back then. Actors and actresses, dressed as the people were at the time of the assassination, took their places along the route of the motorcade. It was quite interesting to see how all of this was put together.

Following this special time, as we rode the little Honda back out to where the motor home was parked, a policeman pulled us over for not wearing helmets. Fortunately, we received only a warning, not a ticket. We were unaware of the Texas helmet law. After all, none of those policemen we passed earlier in the day—those policemen on the three-wheeled motorcycles—had said anything about us not wearing helmets! By now, of course, we knew why: they were not really policemen, they were actors!

### SUMMER HEAT

Biblical prophets, living in areas where the summer temperatures soar, commonly used relief from the sun's burning heat as a type of divine protection and blessing. "The Lord is your *shade*...the sun shall not smite you by day" (Psa. 121:5,6; Isa. 49:10). "A *shadow* in the daytime from the heat" (Isa. 4:6; 25:4). "As the *shadow* of a great rock in a weary land" (Isa. 32:2), etc.

Because of abundant sunshine, the desert around Palm Springs is famous as a winter resort. People from all over the world come here—in winter. *Average* temperatures are: November (78 degrees); December (70 degrees); January (69 degrees); February (72 degrees); March (79 degrees); April (87 degrees); May (94 degrees). And the *summer*? Oh, well... The Chamber of Commerce does not talk too much about that!

One summer day our car was in the shop being serviced. A situation developed in which I needed to go to a certain place a couple miles away. So I rode the little Honda motorcycle (mentioned above). Weather seemed to be exceptionally *hot*. Adding to this, as I rode along, there was heat coming up off the blacktop. About half way to where I was going, I stopped at the Library—not to read a book, but to cool off! That evening on the news, it was reported that the temperature that afternoon was *123 degrees!*

Following a church service some years ago, I was talking to an elderly man about how hot the weather had been here in

the desert. He said, "It was so hot the other day, I saw a coyote chasing a rabbit. They were both *walking!*" ☺

### FUNNY THINGS HAPPEN

As a young preacher, I used to play the piano and sing a song, "I'm feeling mighty Fine, I've got Heaven on my mind!" This was the type of song southern-style quartets would sing and really get into. It was quite popular in California at the time (1957). As it worked out, the first revival meetings I ever held, were in eastern Canada during the autumn of that year. Now I am not saying my playing and singing was as wild as Jerry Lee Lewis, but I did have a youthful enthusiasm! I questioned in my mind whether the Canadians, seeming more reserved, might think this lively song was a bit *too lively!*

At St. Catharines, Ontario, the church had an upright piano, so my back was toward the audience as I played and sang. As I finished this song, there was excitement and laughter! I assumed they really liked the song, had come alive, and were praising the Lord! Later I would find out what really happened: Apparently a door had been left open. A fairly large dog had come into the church, walked down the aisle looking this way and that, and up to the piano behind me. He looked at me, hesitated, then ran across the platform and back out, just as I finished my song!

### THINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS AS THEY SEEM

Long-time minister friends of mine, Chuck and Mary Flynn, told me this story many years ago. As I remember it, back in the 50s, upon graduation from Bible College in Los Angeles, their first church was in Arkansas. While pastoring there, they drove to Lubbock, Texas to attend a Bible Conference. Some who attended the conference stayed in motels, others were provided complimentary rooms with various members of the church. After the long drive the Flynn's arrived in early afternoon, registered, and were directed to the house where they would be staying. Since both the husband and wife worked, the door would be left unlocked; they were to just go in and "make themselves at home." I don't know the exact address, but it was something like 344 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. They went there, stretched out on the bed to rest, at one point turned on the TV, etc. They had no idea they were in the *wrong* house!

Meanwhile, the people with whom they were supposed to stay came home from work and phoned the church, wondering where they were. When someone checked the address, it was clear what had happened: a number had been transposed—Flynn's were supposed to have gone to 344 4<sup>th</sup> Street—same address, but one block over!

Quickly someone went to where they were and explained they were in the wrong house! Of course they left right away. Apparently the owner never knew house guests had been there a good part of the afternoon!

This reminds me of another story. In the summer of 1960, Jim Westbrook (who, incidentally, grew up in Lubbock) and I held three Tent Revival meetings together in the San Joaquin Valley of California: at Tulare, Hanford, and Porterville. While setting up the gospel tent in Hanford, some men who had been in the Tulare meeting came over to help. If memory serves cor-

rectly, the car owned by one of these men was a DeSoto, with a green-and-white two-tone color scheme. I have the feeling he took a lot of pride in this car, which adds to the intrigue of this story. At one point during the busy activities of putting up the tent, I needed to borrow a car to go check on some last-minute detail at the City Hall. Using the term “brother” (which was in common use at the time, seemingly more than now), I asked: “Brother Davis, can I borrow your car?”

I drove into town, attended to the business at hand, came out and got into his car—well, I *thought* it was his car. It was a DeSoto, same two-tone color scheme; but as I drove back to the tent, it did not seem to be running right. The motor was cutting out. This was a concern—I didn’t want Brother Davis to think I had misused his car in some way. I then noticed something I had not seen earlier: over to my right on the seat was a pack of cigarettes. I was certain Brother Davis did not smoke, so it was a mystery why a pack of cigarettes would be in his car. *It still did not dawn on me I was in the wrong car!*

Back at the tent the work of setting up was continuing. After I had been there a half-hour or so, Brother Davis saw me and asked, “Where is my car?” When we went over to what I thought was his car, I noticed something else: the whole side of this car, opposite to the driver’s side, had scraped against something, was dented in, and the chrome was missing. Obviously this was the *wrong* car! Figuring we might need to do some “explaining,” I told him we better go back to the City Hall *together!* Arriving there, the parking space where this car had been was vacant. I pulled in, leaving the keys as I had found them: in the ignition. Two or three spaces away was the right car, the keys to which were in my pocket! I guess no one ever knew the difference.

### JUDGE NOT

What could have been taken as car theft, a crime, was really only an honest mistake. There is a lesson to be learned here, about things much more serious. It is important that we do not judge or be too critical of others—we may not know the whole story (Rom. 14:4). Sometimes we look on outward things, but God looks on the *heart* (1 Kings 8:39). While in one sense sin is sin—and “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”—*not all sins are the same* (Rom. 3:23; 1 John 5:16,17; 1 Tim. 5:24). “To him who knows to do good, and does it not, *to him* it is sin” (James 4:17). It will be “more tolerable” for some on the day of judgment than for others; to whom much is given, much will be required; some will be punished with many stripes, others with only a *few* (Mk. 6:11; Lk. 12:47,48).

### YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

After the meetings in Hanford, Jim Westbrook and I took a couple days off to go to Yosemite—to enjoy its scenic beauty, to seek the Lord with prayer and fasting, also to escape from the valley heat which was extreme that summer of 1960.

Yosemite is known for its spectacular waterfalls, but back then thousands would gather to watch a different kind of fall: The Firefall. For many years, until discontinued in 1968, each night when the appointed time came for this fiery display, a forest ranger would cry out: “LET THE FIRE FALL!” Then, from Glacier Point, 3,000 feet above, coals of fire would be pushed

over the cliff forming a magnificent, glowing firefall.

I am sure this reminded many who were Bible believers of the time someone else called for fire to fall: Elijah. He boldly challenged the prophets of Baal on that occasion: “The God who answers by *fire*, let him be God” (1 Kings 18:24). There was no answer from Baal, but the true God answered as fire fell from heaven!

### AMARILLO

Many years had passed since that special time at Yosemite. Jim went on to pastor churches in California, Kansas, and Texas. We kept in touch. In 1989 he was pastoring in Amarillo, Texas, and invited me to speak in his church. This brought back some memories for me; I had preached there thirty years before as a young evangelist. Back then, we were going into the third week of the meetings when a Texas “norther” blew in—it was December—and people could not get to church because of the snow, fallen trees, downed power lines, ice on the roads, etc. It was time to head home.

Now, thirty years later I was going to preach at this church again. Pastors had come and gone over the years. The *location* of the church had also changed. A new church had been built on a large piece of property several miles east of the former location. The parsonage, though facing the side street, was also on this property. After sleeping there overnight, the next morning Jim said, “That room where you slept last night is the *same* room you slept in *30 years ago!*” How could this be?—we were now several miles from where I stayed before. Then he explained that the *property* where the parsonage had been located, had been sold—it was in the path of the freeway that was built through Amarillo. But the *house* had been moved to the new property and again served for the parsonage. I would have never realized I was sleeping in the same house!

### MY FIRST HOUSE

The first house I ever owned was moved even a longer distance—about *50 miles!* This was back in the mid-60s. At that time the way was being cleared for a freeway through Pasadena, California (now known as the #210). Many houses, to be moved, were auctioned off at low prices. I bid on a house, and won the bid, for a total sale price of \$400. Doesn’t that sound unreal compared with prices today! And though it cost \$1600 to move the house—four times the price of the house itself—for a total of \$2,000 I had a house that had been moved to my lot in Bloomington (near Riverside, California). *But then the hard work began!* A foundation had to be built, plumbing and electrical systems had to be brought up to code—things like that.

The original house was mostly rectangular, but one room extended out from the rest, making it somewhat like the shape of an “L.” Before the house could be moved, this room had to be cut off, to be attached back on later. As preparation for moving began, I was somewhat surprised when one of the workers, starting at the peak of the roof, began sawing off this part of the house *with a handsaw.* That is a lot of sawing!—through shingles, wooden frame, stucco, wires, and pipes—all the way down to the foundation! When I asked the mover about this, he said it was cheaper to pay a man to use a handsaw—even if

it took all day—than to pay the expensive insurance premiums required if power tools were used. That explained that!

Speaking of houses, let me tell you about a house I have mentioned numerous times as a sermon illustration—possibly the most *unusual* house in the world!

### THE WINCHESTER HOUSE

When I was 14 years old, while visiting my Aunt Thelma in San Jose (California), she took me to see The Winchester House. It is a bizarre story how this mansion—renowned for its size and utter lack of any master plan—came to be built.

Mrs. Sarah Winchester had inherited a fortune that included royalties of \$1,000 *a day* (equivalent to \$21,000 a day now) from her late husband's firearms company. Beginning in 1884, and continuing for 38 years (until her death in 1922), she kept crews working day and night, continuously adding on to her house—more rooms, secret passages, and trap doors! There are many oddities: One cupboard door opens to a storage space of one-half inch, while a nearby closet door opens to the back 30 rooms of this sprawling house! Several stairways lead nowhere. There are about 160 rooms, hundreds of doors, 47 fireplaces, 52 skylights, and over 10,000 windows!

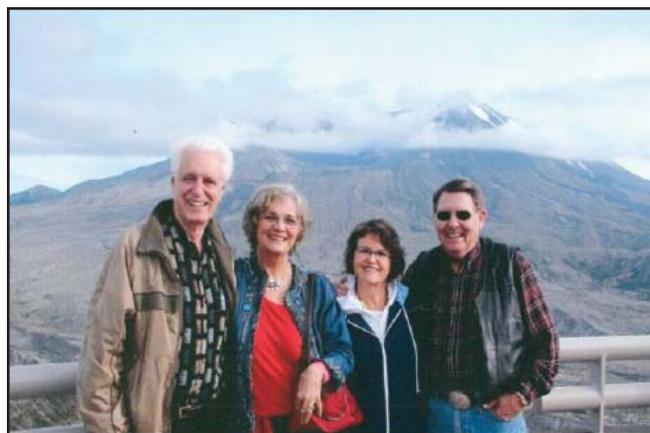
Why did Mrs. Winchester keep building? Because of *fear*. Fearful that the spirits of Indians and others who were killed by Winchester rifles, would kill her in revenge, she sought the advice of a spiritualist medium. She was told that as long as there was the sound of hammers and construction continued on her house, she would not die! But she finally did die and her body was carried out the front door, a door (it is said) she had never used in her entire lifetime.

The story of Mrs. Winchester well illustrates Hebrews 2:15, how some, having a "FEAR of death," spend their entire lifetime in *bondage*. It is an extreme example indeed!

### ATTITUDE

Several years ago, I was in line at the check-out counter of a local grocery store. As the man in front of me completed his purchase, and was leaving, the lady checker said to him: "Thank you; have a good day!" With this he swung around and in belligerent tones replied: "Don't tell me what to do! I'll do as I please. *I don't like people telling me what kind of day to have.*" He was so sarcastic, I wondered at first if he meant this as some kind of joke. But he was not joking!

This incident caused me to recall the words of Psalms 51:10: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and *renew a right spirit within me.*" A "right spirit"—a good attitude—is of great importance. We can have differences without being *difficult*; diversity without *division*; and opinions without being *opinionated*. If we must disagree with someone, we need not be *disagreeable*. Amen and amen!



This is a photo of Ralph and Arlene Woodrow with Paul and Joane Tillman, who took us to Mount St. Helens on August 26, 2008. They are good friends, have supported our ministry, and loaned us a car to use while we were in Washington. It had rained earlier in the day and when this photo was taken a cloud obscured the summit. However, before we left, the sky had cleared and the top of the mountain (what is left of it!) was clearly visible.

Most have heard about the catastrophic eruption that occurred on May 18, 1980—the most significant volcanic event in United States history—when an enormous portion of this mountain suddenly blew up. Fifty-seven people died; 250 homes, 47 bridges, and 185 miles of highway were destroyed. A 230 square-mile area of forest was blown down or buried beneath debris. The mushroom-shaped column that rose thousands of feet skyward, turned day into night, as gray ash covered a vast portion of the state of Washington and beyond. For us to visit Mount St. Helens was an awesome experience!

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