

A son's tribute:

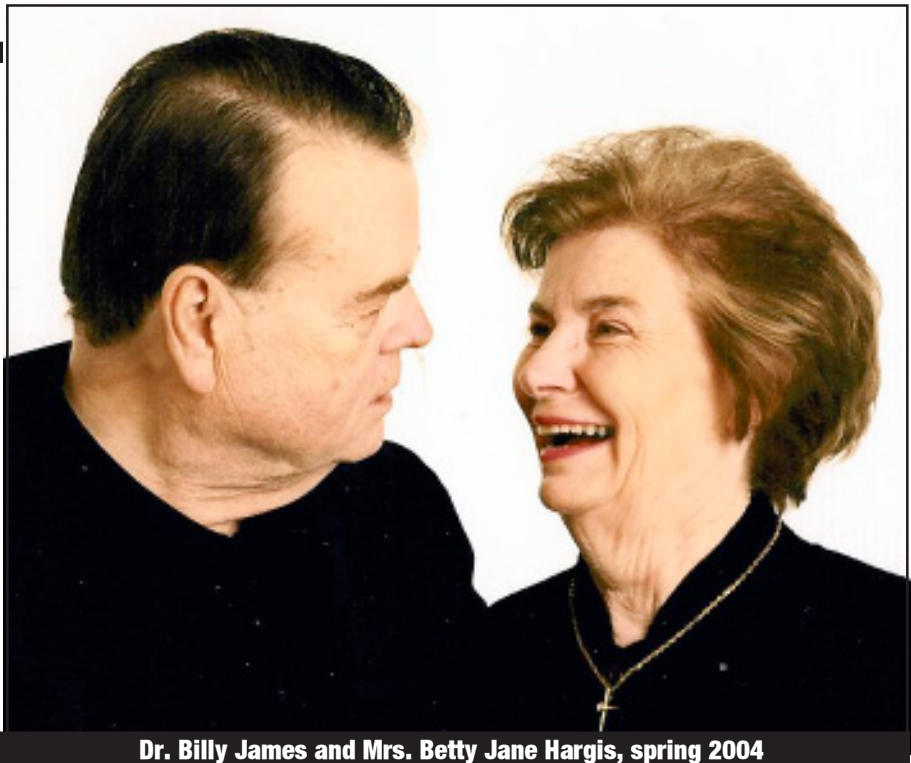
The final days of Dr. Billy James Hargis

by Billy James Hargis II, *Christian Crusade Newspaper* publisher

It was an early Saturday morning when the call finally came. Saturday, November 27, 2004, 6:15 A.M. The sun had not yet risen ... The ground still covered in frost.

Billy James Hargis – preacher, crusader, patriot and anti-Communist – one of the forefathers of the religious right movement that had just re-elected a president. Billy James Hargis, steadfast friend, loving father, devoted husband. Billy James Hargis, my dear, sweet, angel of a father had at long last surrendered

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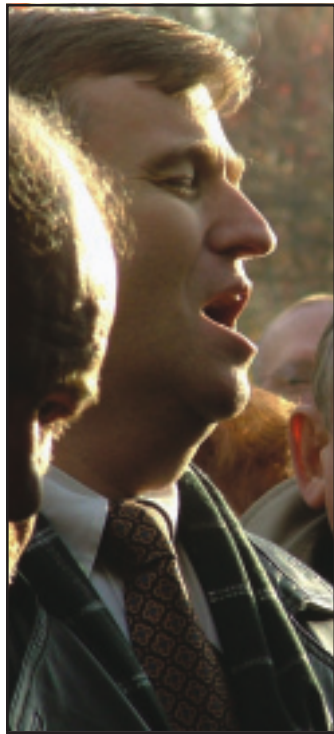


Dr. Billy James and Mrs. Betty Jane Hargis, spring 2004

Joyous, somber memorial service packs Tulsa church

by the *Christian Crusade Newspaper* staff

The sanctuary of Tulsa's Memorial Park Christian Church was packed for the memorial service to Dr. Billy James Hargis.



Billy II sings at graveside

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Headlines worldwide bid farewell to Dr. Hargis

by the *Christian Crusade Newspaper* staff

When a statesman passes from the world scene, it's news – even if a news organization devoted years to destroying the newsmaker – or even if he spent years pointing out their flawed and subversive effect on America.

Thus, it should be no surprise that the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, Radio Free Europe, the *Chicago Sun-Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* were among the news media world-wide headlining the death of Christian Crusade founder Dr. Billy James Hargis.

On the Internet, mentions of Dr. Hargis passed the 9,000 mark within days of his passing, including an offering

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Christian Crusade

Dr. Billy James Hargis: "All I want to do is preach Jesus and save America!"

Volume 53

January-February 2005

Number 1

Founder Dr. Billy James Hargis dead at age 79

by Keith Wilkerson

Christian Crusade founder Dr. Billy James Hargis, 79, died Saturday, November 27, 2004, after a pitched battle with Alzheimer's Disease, which had forced him to retire six months earlier.

He had fought the disease just as he had fought every other opponent during his lifetime – determinedly, prayerfully and unflinchingly.

He was born an orphan and wrote of the pain of never knowing any true blood relative until the birth of his first-born child Bonnie – then experiencing the joy of a new father convinced his newborn daughter had smiled at him from her hospital crib.

He departed this earthly realm at a Tulsa assisted-



Dr. Hargis praying in the Holy Land, 1978

care center where he had resided since July after Alzheimer's had begun to enter its final stages.

Over 54 years, he had founded and led an interdenominational movement that awakened America's Christians and thrust believers into politics – despite the efforts of liberal

politicians to bar faith from the public discourse, shut Christians out of respectability and relegate any talk of Jesus Christ to pulpits behind church

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Friends, family and faithful supporters filled Tulsa's Memorial Park Christian Church sanctuary for the memorial service

Friends, family and faithful supporters bid farewell to Dr. Billy James Hargis

Joyous, somber memorial service packs Tulsa church

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Dr. Charles Secrest, longtime executive of the ministry, stepped to the pulpit—which looked slightly out of place. Indeed, a rough relic of simpler times, it was the pulpit in which a 14-year-old boy preacher once stood as he delivered his first sermon to the congregation of Rose Hill Christian Church in Texarkana, Texas.

Secrest welcomed friends and longtime co-workers, then opened the service with prayer. Hargis granddaughter Betty Grace Choinsard, stepped up to the pulpit and read the 23rd Psalm—a favorite of Dr. Hargis.

His son, Billy James Hargis II, followed with a heart-felt rendition of “How Great Thou Art” that rang from the rafters. Young grand-daughter Annie Paige Kilburn stepped up and read a simple obituary that offered the facts of her grand-father’s life—his date of birth, the day he was ordained as a minister at age 17, the date of his wedding to Betty Jane Secrest.

Then grandson and John Brown University student Robert James Davis stepped up to the pulpit and shared family memories—many humorous, all heart-felt. He told of memorable times with his greater-than-life grandfather—a world famous man who enjoyed taking his grandson to the circus since “where else can you see a man shot out of a cannon?”

As young Davis told his light-hearted reminiscences, he paused, choking back tears as he thanked his grandfather for teaching him lessons of perseverance and faith—not through sermons, but through example.

Granddaughter Lucy Jane Choinsard followed, reading John 14:1-6.

Then former student at American Christian College and longtime friend Carl Teel of Texarkana shared memories as well—such as times when Dr. Hargis quietly encouraged him.

“It is indeed rare,” said Teel, “that a man would give birth to a movement that shaped the destiny of this nation. He was the father of the conservative movement.”

Teel recalled a time when the missionary efforts of Christian Crusade touched all corners of the world—and “the sun did not set on the ministry of Billy James Hargis” because of the clinics, hospitals, orphanages and outreaches across Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Light-heartedly, Teel told of how he had been unsure how to break the news to his parents that he was going to take a job in Israel as part of the Christian Crusade outreach—but how they learned at a Texarkana rally where Dr. Hargis proudly announced that a hometown boy would be representing the ministry in the Holy Land.

Tell then told a humorous story of learning how to baptize in the River Jordan. He recalled how Dr. Hargis had watched in amusement as Teel lowered a believer into the water, then struggled against the water to pull the woman back to the surface, fighting the river’s strong current. She never knew of his difficulty, but Dr. Hargis did—and showed young Teel how to face the other direction and let the current buoy the baptized pilgrim back up.

“He never was so busy that he couldn’t talk with a friend of be there for you,” remembered Teel.

Granddaughter Mary Olivia McGowan then read I Corinthians 15:1-4. Evangelist Cecil Todd, founder of the Revival Fires Ministries, followed. He cited the passage in Hebrews that reminds us that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses—Christians who have gone to heaven before us.

“I believe there is a new face in that great cloud of witnesses,” he said. “Look at the life of the one to whom we pay tribute today. One of the most gifted speakers, he could preach the paint off the wall.”

Todd told of coming to the Lord at a revival meeting led by Dr. Hargis and watching in awe at the Kiamichi Men’s Clinic, an annual gathering in rural Oklahoma, where Dr. Hargis was a favorite speaker and could be depended



Billy James Hargis II



Billy James Hargis III listens to his grandfather’s eulogy

on to raise from the crowd \$50,000 in offerings to support the Kiamichi outreach.

Then Todd somberly told how, “When I was going through my valleys, he was there. Dr. Hargis became more than a dad to me. He would hug me, just as so many of you were hugged by him. This was a man who met with kings and queens and presidents, but always had time for you and me.

“He was hated by some, mocked and ridiculed—and lied about... but so was Jesus Christ.”

Then Todd surveyed the packed auditorium and asked poignantly, “Who is going to fill his shoes? That’s the challenge today as we celebrate this man’s graduation to glory.”

Billy II then sang again—one of his father’s favorites “It Is Well With My Soul.”

Secrest stepped back into the pulpit and offered a short remembrance—recalling the time he was about to introduce a fine young Christian girl to the

then-single young evangelist—only to be told that Secrest’s own sister, Betty Jane, had been seeing Hargis.

Secrest offered a closing prayer, thanking the Lord for the life of Billy James Hargis.

Then Billy II closed the service in song with a powerful delivery of his father’s longtime anthem “God Bless You, Go With

God.”

A graveside service followed. Across the quiet, wintry cemetery, Billy James Hargis II’s voice wafted “Amazing Grace.” The family spent a few more moments, then filed quietly to their cars.

Knowing that now Dr. Billy James Hargis is in a far better place, enjoying his eternal reward—for a job well done.



Cecil Todd, Carl Teel and Charles Secrest share memories

Christian Crusade Newspaper

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Dr. Billy James Hargis, founding editor and publisher

Billy James Hargis II, publisher **Betty Jane Hargis, associate publisher**
Keith Wilkerson, managing editor **Mildred Morris, editorial assistant**
Betty Miles, editorial assistant **Billy James Hargis III, contributing columnist**
David Cavaness, corresponding editor

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Hargis grandson Robert James Davis speaks from his grandfather's original pulpit

Thank you, Grandpa, for the lessons you taught me

Dr. Hargis's grandson, Robert James Davis, is a student at John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Arkansas. This is the eulogy he delivered at Dr. Hargis' funeral in Tulsa.

by Robert James Davis

Jesus Christ still is the hope of the world. It is an honor to be able to speak from the pulpit in which my grandfather preached his first sermon a long time ago. We have come here today to celebrate the life of my grandfather, Billy James Hargis. Each of us is here because he touched our lives in one way or another.

Heavenly Father, I thank you for this day, I thank you for the life of my grandfather and I thank you for the opportunity to celebrate his life. Lord, I thank you that he is in Your presence now, having a grand old time. Lord, I pray that You would be here today and that You would be worshiped, honored and glorified in everything that happens.

Grandpa was a man who was full of love and joy. I think he would want to see that same spirit of joy fill this place today. Today should be about celebrating his life and remembering the great things that he did. One of the things that I always appreciated about my grandpa was his ability to have a good time and to make sure that those with him were having a good time as well.

Each year, Grandpa would take us grandchildren to the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus. It was something that we looked forward to each year. Even as I grew into my adolescent years and might have thought I was too cool to go to the circus, it was still a fun time to spend time with him. Grandpa was always a kid at heart. He loved to see the circus – how often do you get to see a man shot out of a cannon?

Another thing he did for our family was he would

always purchase season tickets to Silver Dollar City in Branson. Now, we would usually only make it to Branson once or twice a year, but he always purchased those passes so that we could go whenever we went to see him.

Christmas was a very special time in our family. Another strong memory that I have was when it

they would be torn open. But that's not the way it worked with our family. We would sit around in a circle and one-by-one we would open one gift at a time and Grandpa never failed to announce before each person's turn "Now, Robbie's opening a gift" or "Becky's opening a gift." He wanted everybody to have their moment for everybody to see what they had gotten and also to see who had got who what.

Those of you who knew Grandpa also know that he was someone who enjoyed eating. Whenever I would come to his house, the first thing he would ask me after he had greeted me was "Would you like some ice cream?" Now, I think he probably did this just so he would have the opportunity to have some ice cream as well.

I also remember a time, and this is a story that I shared at the Christian Crusade luncheon last June how our family went out to a steak restaurant with

Grandpa for dinner. We had gotten our menus and it was about time to order. Just about time for the waitress to take everybody's order, Grandpa announced that everybody was having the steak, everybody was having the baked potato and everybody was having the salad.

Now, Grandma sat there trying to insist that she only wanted the salad, but Grandpa would not have any part of that. He had decided that we were all having steak, baked potato and salad. That was the way that it was going to be and we were going to like it.

But there was also a deeper side to Grandpa. I learned many lessons from him. He taught me what it was to be a man of God – not only in his words, but in his actions as well. He taught me how a man should love his wife – in the way that he loved my grandmother. He taught me that we should all persevere in tough times, and that we can always trust in God no matter what the circumstances might be.

Until the very end of his life, he trusted in God. In his last few months, hearing the word "Jesus" got a bigger response from him than anything else he would hear.

In the last couple of days, as I thought about lessons I learned from him and I put together a few lessons

that I had never really thought about. Grandpa taught me that we should dream big dreams. He believed that the only limitations that a person has



Mosaic portrait of Dr. Hargis

was time to open presents. Now, you would think that with a bunch of small children, as soon as the presents were under the tree, within five minutes,

are those he puts on himself. It is amazing to think how a man with such humble beginnings rose to impact the world in such a dramatic way.

It shows that there are no limitations when we walk in the way of the Lord. We can all learn something from this.

When my mother walked into my room early Saturday morning and told me the news of Grandpa's death, I was blessed with a wonderful vision of what life is now like for Grandpa. I pictured him up in the heavenly realm, singing with a chorus of angels. He was no longer suffering, but was basking in the presence of his precious Savior.

Last August, when things began to grow worse, I was praying for him and a verse was laid on my heart and I would like to share it with you.

The Apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." This verse could not be more true of his life.

He knew that the purpose of life was to live for Christ. He did this not only in his words, but in his actions as well. We can now have the comfort of knowing that to die was in fact gain for Grandpa. It is a hope and promise that we can all hold onto.

And I know that this is a promise that he would want all of us to have for ourselves – that would understand that the purpose of this life is to live for Christ in everything we do.

When we do this, death is not something that we fear, but something that we realize is gain.

I cannot forget one of the last times that I saw him. He had recently fallen and I had come back from college to visit him in the hospital. He had spent most of the afternoon sleeping, but woke up when I was just about to leave. When he woke up,

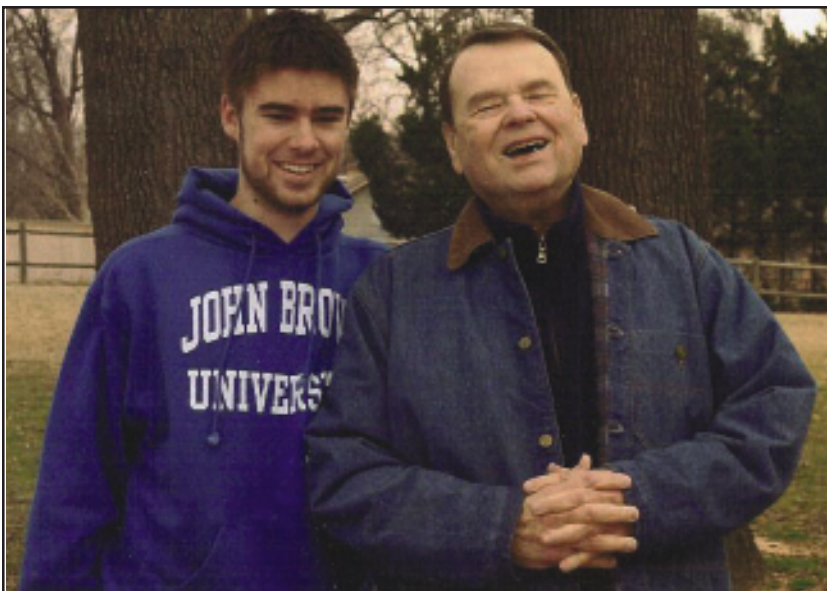
he began to speak – making more sense with his words than he had in a long time. We all had a little worship service right there as he sang and hummed his heart out. I remember saying to him, "Hang in there, Grandpa."

He responded saying to me, "I'm trying to."

is gain."

I love you, Grandpa. Thank you for teaching me that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose.

Amen.



Robbie Davis and his grandfather, 2003



Robbie, in suspenders, at a 1992 Hargis family gathering

Journalist treasures friendship, recalls advice

Billy James Hargis — a true legend

Neosho, Missouri, freelance journalist Kay Hively was a familiar face at the annual Homecoming Reunions at the Rose of Sharon Farm, covering and photographing the events for Christian Crusade Newspaper. What follows is special reminiscence that she published in the Neosho Daily News.

by Kay Hively

Over the years, I have met several people I believe were legendary. But I feel I have really known only two legends on a personal basis. One of them was Billy James Hargis.

I have known Dr. Hargis for about 20 years and he was certainly one of the most interesting people I ever met. In the larger world, he had a definite reputation and was, to put it mildly, controversial. But, what he believed and said in public was absolutely no different from what he said and believed in private.

I always cherished the time I got to spend with Dr. Hargis and now that he is gone, I appreciate it even more. Many were the times Dr. Hargis and I spent discussing world events and things of a Biblical nature. When it came to the Scriptures, he was unsurpassed, and no matter how I quizzed him, he had an answer and he could cite it book, chapter and verse.

From his early day ministry to his last efforts, Dr. Hargis remained true to what he believed and, in spite of all the fame, (both good and bad), he never wavered. Even though I differed with him at times, I always admired his steadfastness. He was not moved by celebrity or money or power. If it was a sin, it was a sin – 'nuff said!

As I mentioned, there were two legendary people I came to know. The other legend was the total opposite of Dr. Hargis, at least in philosophy. But, in many ways, the two were very much alike. Both were impassioned about what they were doing and both stood tall in the face of critics. But there could hardly have been two men with different missions in life.

In fact, on one occasion, I talked to Dr. Hargis about my friend with the multitude of sins. Dr. Hargis was very generous in his comments about the sinner. I asked if he thought there was anything I could do for my "sinful" friend.

Dr. Hargis looked me in the eye and told me to give my friend a gift – "Give him a Bible," Dr. Hargis said. I said I wasn't sure he would appreciate it or would even open it. But Dr. Hargis encouraged me, saying the Bible has great power and it alone could often work a miracle. "Just give it to him and you won't have to say a thing."

All his life, Dr. Hargis believed in the power of The Word. More than just about anything else, he wanted a Bible in the hand of everyone on earth. In his office complex, Dr. Hargis kept dozens of Bibles of all kinds. Often when he would get some new Bibles he would save one out for me. Over the years I had Bibles of every size. Some had beautiful leather covers, some were designed for teenagers, some were large print versions and there seemed to be just about every other version you can imagine. These Bibles rarely stayed on my bookshelf because I usually found someone who was happy to get one when it was offered.

Like many people of note, Dr. Hargis had detractors and critics. Someone was always trying to bring him down. His personal life and his ministry were constantly under attack. But, through it all, he survived. And not even many of his friends know all the good he did in this world.

Now Dr. Hargis is gone and I like to imagine that he is in heaven preaching on some street corner. As it happened, the other legendary figure I knew also died this year – just a few months ago. I don't know if this friend is walking those golden streets in heaven, but if he is, I have a feeling he has finally met Dr. Hargis face to face. And I can imagine that Dr. Hargis has probably given him another Bible.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reporter recalls the “Bible balloon barrage”

He sought to improve the world by spreading the Gospel

by Don Hill of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

It was 1953. The Cold War was young.

Hargis – an eloquent, some said “glib” – evangelist from the United States arrived in occupied West Germany with an extravagant idea. He planned to help save the world from godless Communism by sending excerpts from the Christian Bible across the Iron Curtain in helium-filled balloons.

A big man both in physique and personality, Hargis began preaching as a teenager. Over his lifetime he wrote 100 books and thousands of articles and pamphlets and published a monthly newspaper.

Hargis’ son, Bill Hargis II, says that when his father died on 27 November, his “Christian Crusade” ministry still was



seeking to improve the world by spreading the Biblical message.

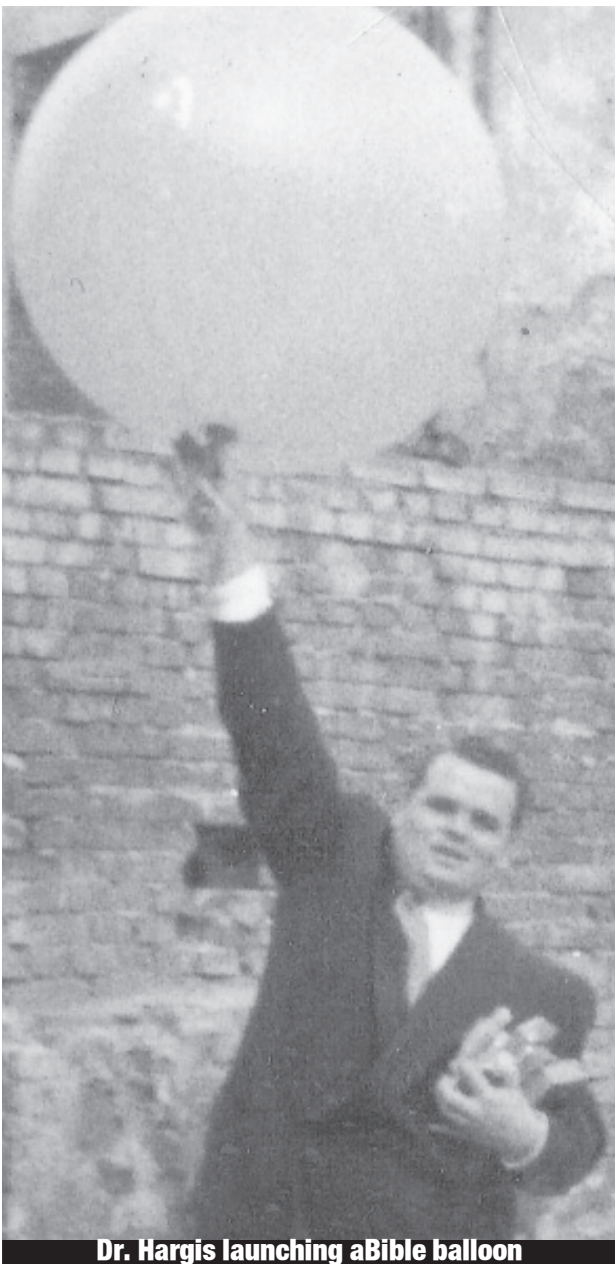
“He still had the *Christian Crusade Newspaper* at the end. It used to be a magazine before that and a newsletter before that. So it’s gone through various permutations. But that’s been the main outreach of the ministry. We’ve also been in recent years sending Bibles to Africa,” Hargis said.

“President [Dwight D.] Eisenhower had personally intervened and given him permission to launch these balloons.” But the singular activity that first focused world attention on Hargis was the balloon ministry in the 1950s.

Radio Free Europe in those days was using balloons to float information into the Eastern bloc about broadcast schedules and radio program content. Hargis says the publicity this received may have prompted the idea of using the same method to spread the Biblical message.

“Well, Reverend Carl McIntire had an organization up in the Northeast that my father became associated with. And McIntire was extremely impressed by my father. And he asked him to take command of this mission to get Bible tracts into the Eastern bloc nations,” Bill Hargis II said.

He said his father eagerly took up the challenge.



Dr. Hargis launching a Bible balloon

built a large evangelical – that is, Bible-oriented – organization in that country. More than 500 radio and 250 television stations carried his broadcast ministry at its peak.

A poster boy for the old American right, Hargis boldly criticized big-name liberals of his day such as President John F. Kennedy, Senator Robert F. Kennedy and the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. He accused the television networks of ignoring the Communist threat and insisted that the assassinations of the Kennedys and King were a Communist plot to smear American conservatives.

The minister was embroiled in a long battle with U.S. tax authorities, who charged that his multi-million dollar organization was not entitled to tax-free status because it combined politics with religious activities.

These setbacks weakened Hargis’ ministries. But he continued to seek to spread the Christian Bible message internationally. He operated hospitals, orphanages, leprosy villages, medical vans and missions in Korea, Hong Kong, India, the Philippines and Africa. He continued to the end to combine patriotic fervor with his religious fervor.

Over the last decade, Alzheimer’s disease progressively weakened and disoriented the evangelist. He spent the last few months of his life in a church hospice near his home in Tulsa, in the midwestern U.S. state of Oklahoma. Hargis says that as his father hovered near death in recent weeks, he still could be aroused by a patriotic call.

“One day he was sitting there – and he would kind of sit with his eyes closed in the wheelchair – and they would bring different groups in to entertain [the hospice patients]. And somebody began to play ‘The Star Spangled Banner.’ And my father lifted himself out of that chair without assistance. He wanted to stand up for the national anthem,” Hargis said.



Dr. Hargis with orphans from behind the Iron Curtain

Headlines worldwide bid farewell to Dr. Hargis

continued from page 1

on eBay, the Internet auction, of his autograph and a number of his early and difficult-to-find books.

The left-leaning *London Guardian* newspaper reported with disapproval “his mix of fundamentalist Christianity and virulent anti-Communism,”

n p r

which was “disseminated at his peak in the early 1960s across a network of some 250 US television and 500 radio stations.”

The *Guardian* went on to say that Dr. Hargis’ “use of churches to organize right-wing candidates served as a template for the strategy of George W. Bush’s Karl Rove.”

The British newspaper added that “Standing 6-foot 6-inches and weighing nearly 20 stone, Hargis resembled the stereotypical southern sheriff more than a preacher. In 1950, with the red-baiting McCarthy era in its ascendancy, he launched the Christian Crusade against Communism.”

Industry journal *Inside Radio* recalled that Dr. Hargis, “syndicated on 500+ radio stations was both a zealous preacher and an ardent anti-Communist during the Cold War. Hargis will always be in the history books — partly because he triggered the famous ‘Red Lion’ decision where the Supreme Court upheld the Federal Communications Commission’s Fairness Doctrine in 1969. That made many radio licensees think twice about controversial programming — and things stayed that way until the FCC quit enforcing the Fairness Doctrine in 1987.”

Inside Radio did not note that the Fairness Doctrine was never enacted by law, but began to be enforced at the request of President John F. Kennedy, who was irritated by Dr. Hargis’ constant opposition to Kennedy’s policies aired on radio stations nationwide and on high-powered night-time broadcasts from stations just across the U.S.-Mexican border, such as XEG, across the Rio Grande from Del Rio, Texas. To stop such criticism, Kennedy instructed the FCC to enforce the Fairness Doctrine, requiring all broadcasters to give away free air time to anyone who disagreed with any political statement they broadcast.

In the Red Lion case, noted the *Washington Post* in its lengthy obituary, Dr. Hargis had blasted journalist “Fred J. Cook, who had been critical of conservative presidential candidate Barry Goldwater. When the broadcast outlet in Red Lion,

Pennsylvania, refused to give the author equal time to reply, the case went to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The high court upheld the equal-time allowance in *Red Lion Broadcasting Co. v. FCC* (1969), codifying what became known as the ‘Fairness Doctrine’ in American broadcasting.”

According to the *New York Times* obituary, Dr. Hargis “was accused by Cook of unfairly maligning him in a radio broadcast. Mr. Cook sought free air time to reply under the Federal Communications Commission’s fairness doctrine.

A radio station in Red Lion, Pennsylvania, sued, saying its First Amendment rights would be violated. But the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Fairness Doctrine, and many stations thereafter were less inclined to broadcast controversial programs.”

The result was that conservative talk radio was silenced until President Ronald Reagan ordered the FCC to stop enforcing the policy, re-opening the door for such conservatives as Rush Limbaugh and Bill O’Reilly. President Bill Clinton attempted to re-impose the Fairness Doctrine to again silence the conservative voices — but was warned that Congress would not go along this time.

Unsuccessfully, Dr. Hargis had challenged Kennedy’s authority, taking his appeal all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

“Overflowing with words and big ideas,” reported the *Los Angeles Times*, “the 270-pound dynamo spewed them forth over 500 radio and 250 television stations, in films, books and gospel records, and from the pulpit and the rostrum in campaigns from the Holy Land to Los Angeles. Preaching ‘for Christ and against Communism,’ Hargis in his heyday in the 1960s and early ’70s seemed to concentrate more on Communism than Jesus Christ, which put him at odds with secular and religious leaders.”

Indeed, President Lyndon Johnson had the Internal Revenue Service revoke the tax-exempt status of Christian Crusade because of Dr. Hargis’ effective mix of conservative politics and religion to oppose Johnson’s liberal “War on Poverty.” Johnson was irked by Dr. Hargis’ influence as well as his unabashed endorsement of Johnson’s presidential opponent Barry Goldwater — and sought to silence Dr. Hargis’ voice by crippling his financial base.

Again, Dr. Hargis challenged the presidential edict, taking his appeal all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court — and losing in arguments before the liberal Earl Warren court of that era, which also legalized abortion on demand and banned prayer

and Bible-reading from America’s public schools. The IRS policy remains although it was never passed into law by Congress and has only been used against conservative Christian organizations — never against any liberal non-profit or ministry.

“A poster boy for the old far right,” continued the *Los Angeles Times*, “Hargis unabashedly tongue-lashed such diverse names as President

John F. Kennedy, Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., the National Council of Churches and network news anchors Chet Huntley, David Brinkley and Walter Cronkite for encouraging, or at least ignoring, the threat of a Communist takeover of the United States.”

In a lengthy obituary by staff writer Robert McFadden, the *New York Times* reported “The Rev. Billy James Hargis, a fiery evangelist and anticommunist preacher who founded the Christian Crusade and reached millions in an international ministry that used radio, television, books, pamphlets and personal appearances, died at St. Simeon’s Episcopal Home in Tulsa, where he had lived since last

July. “At the height of his popularity in the 1960’s and 1970’s, Dr. Hargis traveled almost constantly to deliver his Christian and anticommunist messages, wrote 100 books and thousands of articles and pamphlets, and published a monthly newspaper. “Throughout the 1950’s and 1960’s, he orga-



ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH



BBC

nized and spoke at rallies across America, allying himself with the Rev. Carl McIntire, retired Gen. Edwin A. Walker and other anti-Communist crusaders.”

The *Detroit Free Press* newspaper reported, “Born August 3, 1925, in Texarkana, Texas, the future minister was adopted by Jimmie and Laura Hargis, who brought him up in ‘Christ-conscious’ Depression-era poverty. Recreation consisted of daily Bible reading and weekly gospel singings.

“Among Hargis’ myriad books were *Communist*

1953 with the so-called ‘Bible balloon barrage,’ which he launched from West Germany. In cooperation with Carl McIntire’s International Council of Christian Churches, over the next four years, Hargis floated a million helium balloons carrying scripture into Russia, Czechoslovakia, Poland and East Germany, ‘to succor the spiritually starved captives of communism.’”

The *San Diego Times-Union* newspaper’s obituary noted that “The Tulsa-based Hargis also started

ership School in Tulsa – which charged \$100 admission – to work for conservative candidates and against those he deemed ‘soft’ on communism.

“He argued for the return of prayer and Bible reading to public school,” reported the *Post* obituary. “In his speeches, he was insistent on action. ‘Write your

congressman and your senator,’ he told one assembly in 1962. ‘Don’t ask them to outlaw the Communist Party. Demand that they outlaw the Communist Party in the U.S.A. Don’t ask them to reconsider our affiliation with the United Nations. Demand that they get this country out of the United



Nations to reorganize the United Nations against godless anti-Christ communism. You are not working for them. You have nothing to fear. They represent you, and you should make your wishes known.’

“Hargis told attendees of his leadership school to watch their language – ‘one wild, unfounded, bigoted statement could submarine our whole program,’ he once said.”

“When the IRS revoked his tax-exempt status in the early 1960s, Hargis argued that he was being persecuted for his religious beliefs, adding: ‘This

action doesn’t affect our corporation, only the contributors to our cause. And even so, our average contribution is \$4. Now what would tax-exempt status mean

America – *Must It Be?* in 1960, *The Total Lie* in 1961, *Facts About Communism and the Churches* in 1962, *The Real Extremists – The Far Left* in 1964, *Distortion by Design* in 1965 and *Why I Fight for a Christian America* in 1974. Hargis’ Christian Crusade, which had a \$2 million budget in 1972 financed by the donations he solicited from a mailing list of 250,000 names, was once described by a Wyoming senator as ‘the best-heeled right-wing organization in the United States.’”

The Associated Press obituary run by newspapers worldwide reported that “Hargis had wanted to be a preacher since childhood, and as a teenager, he became committed to fighting the spread of Communism” and that he introduced each radio broadcast with the statement “Jesus Christ is still the hope of the world.”

According to the *Miami Herald*, “Young Hargis, who first stepped into the pulpit at 17, had little formal college education. After attending Ozark Bible College in Bentonville, Arkansas, he was ordained May 30, 1943 and served as pastor of churches in Sallisaw and Granby, Missouri, and Sapulpa and Tulsa” and was famous for a “shouting oratory at the top of his lungs to the point of hoarseness.”

The *Boston Globe* newspaper wrote that “In 1950, Hargis started his own Christian Crusade as an independent, interdenominational ministry. That same year, he became one of the first evangelists to address his flock over television.” Indeed, Dr. Hargis was approached by NBC-TV to fill a Sunday morning slot opposite CBS’ highly popular Bishop Fulton Sheen. Dr. Hargis’ anti-Communist broadcast soon eclipsed Sheen, but was never

popular with the NBC hierarchy. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* newspaper reported “Hargis first earned international fame in

Chicago audience to contribute that year, Hargis described his college as ‘conservative, fundamental, orthodox’ and vowed it would never accept federal funds. What the college

taught, he said, was ‘anti-communism, anti-socialism, anti-welfare state, anti-Russia, anti-China, a literal interpretation of the Bible and states’ rights.”

The *New York Times* quoted Louis Moore, a former religion editor for the *Houston Chronicle*, who said Hargis during his heyday “was a household name” and operated hospitals, orphan-

ages, leprosy villages, medical vans and mission services in Korea, Hong Kong, India, the Philippines and Africa.

The *Washington Post* ran a surprisingly balanced obituary of Dr. Hargis – despite his decades-long criticism of the newspaper’s liberal bias.



when he was 10. By that time, he had been baptized by immersion and found the family’s daily Bible readings his only source of pleasure. The family was too poor to own a radio.

“As his mother lay in a hospital bed, he promised to devote himself to God if she recovered. She did.

“He was ordained at 17 and later received a theology degree from Burton College and Seminary in Colorado.

“Increasingly, he policed his pulpit and in 1962 urged attendees of the Anti-Communist Lead-

to these 250,000 people? They are not big-money.”

“The rise of the counterculture brought him more followers,” wrote the *Post*, “who found in his national television appearances a fighting voice against liberal forces they saw working nefariously around them. Dr. Hargis made speaking tours that he called ‘midnight rides.’

Columnist David Hinkley of the *New York Daily News* wrote: “The death of evangelist Billy James Hargis late last month was a good reminder that once upon a time, the good stuff on the radio didn’t happen in the morning. It happened late at night.

“In the ’50s and ’60s, morning radio played nice. So did most radio. But then late at night, the preachers came out. Some, like Wolfman Jack, were selling rock ‘n’ roll. Others, like Billy James

Hargis, were selling salvation. Hargis was a righteous anti-Communist and old-style moralist. His basic message – that this is a wicked world full of poor wicked sinners – was tough to refute.

“You can find that message in any church. You just don’t hear it packaged like the radio preachers do it. They holler. They plead. They cry. They thunder.

“Imagine cutting your dinner steak with a chainsaw and you start to understand how these guys approach the Gospel.

“Billy James Hargis was 79 when he died. But over the years he served up a heap of salvation. Say hallelujah. Say amen.”



popular with the NBC hierarchy.

The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* newspaper reported “Hargis first earned international fame in





Earliest known image (circled) of Billy James Hargis, a babe in his mother's arms

Founder Dr. Billy James Hargis dead at age 79

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Believing that true Christianity is lived and reflected in daily life as well as government, Dr. Hargis built up a huge broadcasting empire with outspoken attacks on Communism as well as liberalism and big government as well as denunciations of sexual permissiveness, drug abuse, biased journalists, Hollywood's corrupting influences, liberal extremism, worldwide persecution of Christians and profiteers exploiting youthful rebellion.

He was born on August 3, 1925, at Texarkana, Texas. After Texarkana High School, he attended the Ozark Bible College at Bentonville, Arkansas, received baccalaureate and master's degrees from Burton College and Seminary in Colorado, then was honored with a number of other degrees from such prominent institutions as Bob Jones University.

He was ordained as a minister at age 17 at the Rose Hill Christian Church in Texarkana and served as the preacher at Sallisaw, Oklahoma, and Granby, Missouri, before accepting the call to a large congregation at First Christian Church, Sapulpa, Oklahoma. It was there that he would write that he "became aware of the threat of Communism internally" faced by America, largely through his friendship with Kiamichi Mountains evangelist A.B. "Brother Mac" McReynolds, who mentored the young Hargis and convinced him of Satan's use of atheistic Communism to subvert America as the world's defender of freedom, to severely persecute the Church worldwide, and to force Christianity underground around the globe – including in America.

A longtime listener to Charles E. Fuller's Old-Fashioned Revival Hour, Dr. Hargis saw the poten-

tial for taking this anti-Communism message to millions by using the broadcast waves. In 1950 he founded Christian Crusade, an interdenominational movement designed as a "Christian weapon against Communism and its godless allies," utilizing radio broadcasts at first, then expanding quickly to television. With the backing of such supporters as pioneer oilman William Skelly and faithful financial backer Walter Foster, he gave up his church at Sapulpa and became a full-time evangelist on radio and TV, then traveling to personal appearances nationwide and around the world.

On one such speaking trip in Scioto, Ohio, he met a church organizer, Betty Jane Secrest, who won his heart – and who on December 21, 1951 became his bride. They would have five children.

Dr. Hargis had the ability to provoke debate and to force controversy to the surface – such as in 1960 when a little-known U.S. Air Force training manual revealed sweeping charges about Communist infiltration of American religious institutions. Its author, Homer H. Hyde of San Antonio, Texas, had heard Dr. Hargis speak and asked him for the

documentation, which Hyde included in the publication.

After the National Council of Churches and presidential hopeful John F. Kennedy denounced the work, Dr. Hargis heartily endorsed it, declaring "the NCC has done more to nurture Communism than any single organization in the United States.... I thank God that at last some responsible government agency has had the fortitude to question the dubious activities of the NCC."

He called on the chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee to conduct a thorough investigation of Communist infiltration into American Protestant churches and the NCC, and boasted that the controversy was a "God-send." It made Dr. Hargis and Christian Crusade the center of what Dr. Hargis would later describe as "a raging controversy between enlightened Christians on one side and pro-Reds, useful idiots and the totally unenlightened on the other."

The most important result of the affair was the emergence of Christian Crusade as the leading force on the Christian right. Dr. Hargis began to regularly draw 3,000 people to Tulsa for conferences. His radio program listings soared and evangelical firms like Word Records and De Moss Associates Insurance began placing ads in *Christian Crusade Newspaper*.

In 1960, he published his first book, *Communist America – Must It Be?* Between 1957 and 1961 *Christian Crusade Newspaper's* circulation rose from 20,000 to nearly 100,000, and it outgrew its Tulsa facilities.

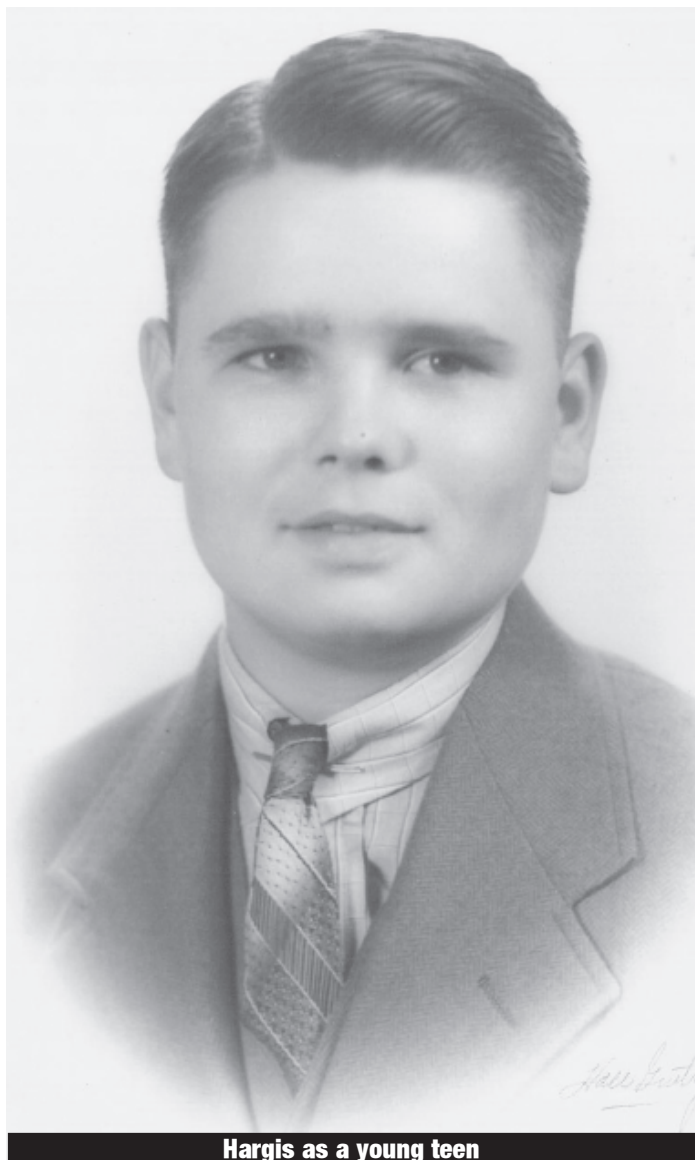
As he gained subscribers, Dr. Hargis turned over the editorship to L. E. "Pete" White, who filled the newspaper with articles on prayer and prophecy, interspersed with exposes of Communism and the liberal ecumenical movement. In July 1957, Julian E. Williams began contributing regular "intelligence reports" about Communist influence in American churches. J. B. Matthews, the freelance congressional researcher who had amassed a large body of data on Communist activity in the United States, authored his first column in November 1957.

In September 1958, the "Foreign Intelligence Digest" by Major General Charles A. Willoughby, who had served as General Douglas MacArthur's intelligence chief, became a regular feature of *Christian Crusade Newspaper*. Prominent fundamentalists also contributed columns and articles. Soon, Dr. Hargis was writing a nationally syndicated newspaper column.

In 1961, summer conferences and winter Anti-Communist Leadership Schools were reported in detail in the newspaper. Speakers from year to year constituted a who's who of the American right. Among these were Governor Orval Faubus of Arkansas in 1960, Catholic right-winger Dean Clarence Manion, Liberty Lobby pioneer Willis Carto, John Birch Society founder Robert Welch, and Harry T. Everingham, founder

of the organization "We, the People."

In 1962, notables at the conferences included



Hargis as a young teen



Billy James as a toddler

General Edwin A. Walker, Congressmen Martin Dies and John H. Rousselot, newspaper columnist Westbrook Pegler, undercover Communist for the FBI Matt Cvetic, air ace Eddie Rickenbacker, Methodist anti-Communist Myers Lowman, university founder Bob Jones, Sr., Governor J. Bracken Lee of Utah, National Association of Evangelicals luminaries Frederick C. Fowler and Dave Breese, and W.O.H. Garman of the American Council of Christian Churches.

1963 saw appearances by such national figures as Congressman John Ashbrook, former Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson, Dr. Carl McIntire, General A. C. Wedemeyer, and anti-Communist writers W. Cleon Skousen, Dan Smoot, and E. Merrill Root.

At the annual conferences, Dr. Hargis began a tradition of giving a “State of the Union Address” enumerating Communist achievements of the past year and urging more forceful action to counter the threat. In 1962, for example, he unleashed a stinging attack on the Supreme Court’s school prayer decision, called for reaffirming that the United States is a Christian nation, supported the embattled House Committee on Un-American Activities and underscored the need to become involved in electing conservative, anti-Communist candidates regardless of their party affiliation.

He reinforced his backing for the House Committee by showing the controversial film *Operation Abolition* (1960) at his rallies and insisted that the National Council of Churches’ opposition to it proved how the NCC had taken the side of “the Communist conspirators within our country.”

In 1962 Hargis purchased a hotel in Manitou Springs, Colorado, which he renamed the Summit. It was intended to serve as a summer conference center and “anti-Communist youth university” to train high school and college students.

A particular target for this audience was rock music – which musician Little Richard would declare is only successful if it is disliked by teens’ parents. As a result, year-by-year, rock music became worse and worse – embracing Satanism, promiscuous sex, drug use and rebellion – in its drive to extract millions of dollars from teen concert-goers and recording purchasers. During the 1960s, even the Beatles were not spared Dr. Hargis’ wrath. “When the Beatles thrust their hips forwards while holding their guitars and shout, ‘Oh Yeah!’ who cannot help but know what they really mean!” he thundered. The parents shouted “Amen.” Rebellious teens scowled.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Dr. Hargis had achieved top billing on hundreds of television and radio stations throughout America. In 1953, he had received international news coverage when he visited West Germany and launched his “Bible balloon barrage” in which thousands of helium balloons bearing biblical excerpts were sent into Russia, Czechoslovakia, Poland and East Germany, “to succor the spiritually starved captives of Communism.”

Seeking the Lord as he sought to “preach Jesus and save America,” he took on big government, as well as anti-Christian abuses affecting American believers in business, unions, entertainment, cultural and charitable institutions and even other religious organizations. He did not hesitate to point out when mainline Protestant churches served as Communist sympathizers, or one time when he was concerned that the nation was in the hands of a group of radicals hooked on “the insidious dope of socialism.”

In 1964, Dr. Hargis privately supported Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater’s bid for the presidency, saying that if Goldwater won, “we will have the privilege and duty” of assisting him in improving the country. Dr. Hargis said that Goldwater’s victory would “be the greatest miracle of the 20th

Century.

Personally I am praying to God for that miracle.”

The need for a school-prayer amendment and a petition that Hargis circulated around the country was the topic of a *Christian Crusade Newspaper* article in May 1964. Pornography and obscenity were targeted as well. Although Hargis was disappointed by the Goldwater defeat, he saw a silver lining in it since 25 million Americans “did vote for conservatism.”

He urged readers to redouble their efforts. Christian Crusade headquarters in those days buzzed



Betty James and Billy James Hargis on their wedding day, 1951

with activity. Dr. Hargis and other authors generated books and pamphlets at a rapid rate. Cuban refugees Fernando Penabaz and Pedro Diaz Lanz were brought on staff to develop a Latin American ministry. A sparkling new headquarters building and the Cathedral of the Christian Crusade were constructed.

Dr. Hargis’ love for the Holy Land turned into 94 separate pilgrimages with large numbers of supporters – which included opportunities to be immersed in the Jordan River and to take communion at such sites as the traditional Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem.

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH
REVIVAL
 COME TO

Begins Sunday,
July 27, 1947

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Services Each Night
 Monday Through
 Saturday
8:00 P. M.

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH
 Lee and Elm — Sapulpa, Oklahoma

The Building Is
 Air - Cooled For
 Your Comfort

•

MESSAGES THAT WILL
 THRILL YOUR SOUL —
 SONGS THAT WILL GLAD-
 DEN YOUR HEART —
 TRUTHS THAT WILL
 CHANGE YOUR LIFE!

HEAR —
BILLY JAMES HARGIS
 Bring Powerful Messages On Such Subjects As:
 “Most Horrible Sin in Sapulpa” — “Dynamic Living” — “Mirages Of
 Hell” — “Saddest Words Ever Spoken By Jesus” — “Why Your Prayers
 Are Not Answered” — “God’s Global ‘Go’” — “Precious Promises Of
 Jesus” — “The Signs of the Times” — “Cries From The Cross” — “Judas
 Iscariot—Better Than Average” — Padlocks Of The Soul” — “Hen-
 Pecked Husbands And Foolish Wives” — Etc.

HEAR — C. O. LOWREY, Singing Evangelist
 Stirring Congregational Singing — Superb Organ - Piano Duets
 Special Music That Gladdens The Heart
 “Everyone Is Invited To Attend—Come Early For A Good Seat”

Billy James Hargis
 PASTOR

Dr. Hargis also led a number of missionary tours throughout Africa and Asia, taking the opportunity to meet with national figures such as Taiwan’s Chiang Kai-shek, Korea’s Syngman Rhee, Spain’s Francisco Franco, Rhodesia’s Ian Douglas Smith and Kenya’s Daniel Arap Moi.

American Christian College opened its doors in 1970 and a large missionary society was created to channel funds to charitable and evangelistic outreaches overseas.

However, Dr. Hargis’ unofficial but tacit support for Richard Nixon in the 1960 election and Barry Goldwater in the 1964 election had not gone unnoticed by the winners of those presidential contests. Irked by Dr. Hargis’ nationwide conservative commentary on radio and TV, President John F. Kennedy had ordered enforcement of the Federal Communications Commission’s informal “Fairness Doctrine.” The eventual result was a landmark lawsuit that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court – and the silencing of dissent. Any station selling Dr. Hargis air time was required to give an identical amount of time away free for rebuttal.

The result was predictable – as radio stations turned to music instead of talk. They couldn’t afford to let everyone with an opposing view to fill their airwaves with political debate – particularly without paying.

After Kennedy’s assassination, President Lyndon Johnson enlisted the Internal Revenue Service, which on November 13, 1964, announced that Christian Crusade had violated a little-known clause in its rules that prohibited non-profit organizations from participating in politics.

Although churches had long been platforms for political and policy debate throughout American history, the IRS announced that Christian Crusade’s



Dr. Hargis is welcomed to Taiwan by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek

Founder Dr. Billy James Hargis dead at age 79

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tax-exempt status was being scrutinized because it had intervened in political campaigns on behalf of candidates for public office and a substantial portion of Christian Crusade activity was aimed at influencing legislation.

The specific charge was that Christian Crusade both "directly and indirectly" supported candidates for public office—Nixon and Goldwater in particular.

Furthermore, Christian Crusade had encouraged its audience to influence their congressmen on "legislation affecting agriculture, education, hospitalization, medical care for the aged, mental health, urban renewal, the federal income tax, U.S. participation in the United Nations, foreign aid, the Connally Amendment, McCarran Immigration Act, Becker Amendment to the Constitution, the Supreme Court, and the operation of government corporations," said the IRS.

Dr. Hargis replied that the IRS action was obviously politically

motivated, that he was a victim of the liberal establishment, and that he would fight the matter in the courts.

Critics of the IRS action, some of whom were liberal churchmen, pointed out that serious constitutional issues involving the separation of church and state were being ignored. Dr. Hargis secured endorsements from scores of Congressmen and traveled to Washington on May 20, 1966, to defend his IRS status, but to no avail.

The ministry was notified on September 22 that year that the tax exemption had been revoked, though the ruling did not apply to the Church of the Christian Crusade, which was incorporated differently. Subsequent efforts to overturn the decision in the courts failed.

Dr. Hargis denounced the ruling and declared it reflected the growing erosion of religious freedom and an increasing persecution of Christians that was to be expected as liberal influences continued to change America.

He announced that the loss of the tax-exempt status would not affect his work since it "takes the muzzle off *Christian Crusade*" and "we can fight harder than ever."

Furthermore, he declared, Christian Crusade would not "have been singled out for persecution by the enemy if we had not been considered so effective."

Indeed, the battle intensified as Christian Crusade denounced the ongoing liberal decisions of the Earl Warren Supreme Court, including bans on all prayer or Bible reading in the public schools and the legalization of unrestricted abortion on demand.

In 1969, Christian Crusade produced a host of articles and booklets denouncing liberal inroads into the schools, such as sex education, sensitivity training and subverted teacher organizations. Attracting considerable attention was the publication *Is the Schoolhouse the Proper*

Place to Teach Raw Sex?

But by the 1980s, the liberal assault on Dr. Hargis personally and on the ministry of Christian Crusade had taken a deadly toll. The college had closed its doors. Dr. Hargis had been diagnosed with an inoperable heart condition and had to cease traveling. He retreated to his Rose of Sharon Farm near Neosho, Missouri.

The newspaper continued in monthly production, but Dr. Hargis' health was in decline. Even worse, he was deeply affected by scandalous smears and disinformation campaigns launched on every side—determined to silence his voice. One day, praying under the shade of a large tree at the Rose of Sharon Farm, Dr. Hargis recalled the gentle advice of longtime friend and advisor Dr. Richard Wurmbrand—who had withstood years of persecution at the hand of his native Romania's Communist regime.

Dr. Hargis decided he would not go on the defensive and answer the smear charges endlessly but rather would turn his accusers over to God, pray for them, and dedicate himself "to the cause that has ever been on my heart." Friends from all



Dr. and Mrs. Hargis with longtime friends Rev. and Mrs. Richard Wurmbrand

over the country wired, wrote and called urging him to “hold fast” against the attacks by the left-wing news media and the liberals entrenched in power in Washington, D.C.

Homecoming conferences continued to be held at the Rose of Sharon Farm. Like the legendary phoenix, the resilient Dr. Hargis rose from the ashes of ruin to hold high the banner of Christian anti-Communism once again, but he was growing older.

He was content to circulate the newspaper worldwide – continuing to proclaim the truth and challenge his followers to serve as Watchmen on the Wall, assisting him in getting the newspaper into as many hands as possible – and spreading the message to decision-makers.

If ever a national leader had dramatic ups and downs, it would be Dr. Billy James Hargis. He was reviled and ridiculed by his enemies. He was praised and loved by those who knew his heart.

In the book *The World’s Troublemakers* by Bruce Brown, Dr. Hargis was vehemently denounced and compared to the pale rider of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

Yet in the 1987 book *American Orators of the Twentieth Century: Critical Studies and Sources*, he was named by editors Bernard K. Duffy and Halford R. Ryan as one of the top 50 public speakers of the last 100 years.

That list included William Jennings Bryan, Shirley Chisholm, Clarence Darrow, Eugene V. Debs, Everett Dirksen, Betty Friedan, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, John L. Lewis, Huey Long, Malcolm X, Ronald Reagan and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Dr. Hargis took enormous encouragement in the success of President Ronald Reagan and praised the turnaround of conservatism – particularly due to the emergence of a new generation of Christian conservatives willing to take their convictions to the public arena and the polling place.

Dr. Hargis continued to serve as director of the Christian Crusade Ministries – highly critical of Presidents Carter and Clinton, but enormously supportive of President George W. Bush.

Health intervened again, however, and the toll of Alzheimer’s disease forced Dr. Hargis to take a lesser roll – that of prayer warrior. Daily he toiled in the Christian Crusade office, but took decreasing active part in the production of the newspaper – while overseeing that it maintained its strong message.

Then in the summer of 2004, he saw a longtime dream come to pass as his son, Billy James Hargis II, took over as Publisher. Perhaps it was knowing that Bill II had matters well in hand that allowed Dr. Hargis to relax and let go.

He had nurtured young Billy to be his successor – a role that his son declined until it was apparent Dr. Hargis would have to retire. Alzheimer’s had affected him differently than some.

Gifted with a brilliant and complex mind, Dr.



The Hargis family, 1957



Broadcasting on the radio



Hargis remained focused on the ministry until the very last – although his capacity diminished steadily in the final six months of his life.

Even so, he lived up to a longstanding promise to supporters – that he would pray for them and with

His funeral was attended by hundreds, packing Tulsa’s Memorial Park Christian Church. He was eulogized by a grandson, Robert Davis, by two “Timothies” who had entered the ministry under his mentorship – Texarkana minister Carl Teel and Revival Fires founder and evangelist Cecil Todd – and by Dr. Hargis’ longtime friend and brother-in-law, Charles Secrest.

At the graveside, the final farewell was delivered by Billy James Hargis II – in song, exactly how as a little boy he had first assisted his father at the pulpit.



Dr. Hargis interviews Art Linkletter on TV

them for America.

That he did until the very end – although at the last, his voice had been silenced and his fervent petitions were known only to the Almighty God he had served for so many decades.

former Betty Jane Secrest; three daughters, Bonnie Jane Chois-nard, Becky Jean Frank and Brenda Jo Epperley; 11 grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren. Dr. Hargis was preceded in death by one son, Brian Joseph, who died in infancy.

This time, Billy II, sang solo – his emotion-filled voice wafting out over Tulsa’s Memorial Park Cemetery with the words of A m a z i n g Grace.

In addition to Billy II, Hargis is survived by his wife of 52 years, the

A son's tribute:

The final days of Dr. Billy James Hargis

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all earthly care and gone home to be with God.

It had begun ten years before, at least as far as we knew. My dad was a preacher. Spreading the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ was far and away the single most important thing in his life. It defined him. And that meant spreading the gospel anywhere and everywhere. Big crowd – small crowd – two or three gathered together in some small room – it made no difference to him. Preaching salvation and the love of Jesus – that was the only thing that mattered.

So, just as my father had begun his pastoring days in a little Missouri town called Granby – my father was to end his pastoring days in the little Missouri hamlet of Notch.

Just outside of Branson, Notch was not the sort of place you would have expected to find a man of my father's skills and reputation to be working behind a pulpit, but my parents had bought a little weekend getaway there. Dad loved Country Gospel music and there was plenty of that to be heard in the region, plus it was a nice gathering place for all the kids and the grandkids, right around the corner from Silver Dollar City, an amusement park to which he liked to treat us.

Anyway, a stone's throw from the house, nestled in the trees and just off the two lane highway, lay the Notch Community Church. Nice little congregation – nothing too large – just a great little group of Christians who needed a pastor. Dad was going to be in town on the weekends anyway. He was only too happy to do the job – no charge. Dad was a giver.

Things went along fine for quite a little while there. Dad preached and a little lady named Jessie would sing. She was an Ozark mountain original. Lots of heart and conviction. She'd strum on her guitar and sing out loud and strong. "I

wanna stroll over heaven with you some glad day." My dad loved it. He brought her to Neosho to sing at homecomings and Bible conferences on the Rose of Sharon Farm.

It seemed like a comfortable fit until something went awry. Suddenly dad seemed uncertain of himself. Preaching had always come easy for him. The Word of God just seemed to pour out of him. He had been declared one of the great American orators of the twentieth century. Some ministers spend weeks, months even, trying to work a sermon up – not my dad. He'd go in 30 minutes early on a Sunday morning, find himself a scriptural text, prepare himself an outline and be off and running within the hour effortlessly holding his congregation in rapt attention. My father was a natural. Better still, a super-natural.

But now, for the first time in his life, his rhetorical skills seemed to be alluding him. He began to worry and fret over the preparation of a sermon. My mother would call me and ask me to reassure him that all was well, that everything would work out fine and that he could do this, like rolling off a log.

However, for my father, it must have felt as if the log was rolling over him. Many a Saturday night he sat there in his office, trying to collect his thoughts, but the thoughts did not seem to want to fall into place. He paced the floor. He cried in utter frustration. My mother would soothe him, stroke his hair and pray with him.

Finally, his greatest fear came to pass. While in mid-sermon, he lost his train of thought – panic set in. He had no idea where he was in that sermon or where

he was headed. I must have moments like that four or five times a day. Be talking about something ... digress into something else ... all of a sudden – what was I saying? What was my point? I'd say that's pretty common for most people, but not Dad. He was never like the rest of us. Those who knew him well called him a genius and I think they were pretty close to right. I never saw anybody who could do so many things at once. Two or three phones going, a dictation machine and half a dozen different sets of instructions going out to the employees coming in and out of his office at any given time. I assure you, you never saw his likes. I doubt very much I shall ever see his likes again.

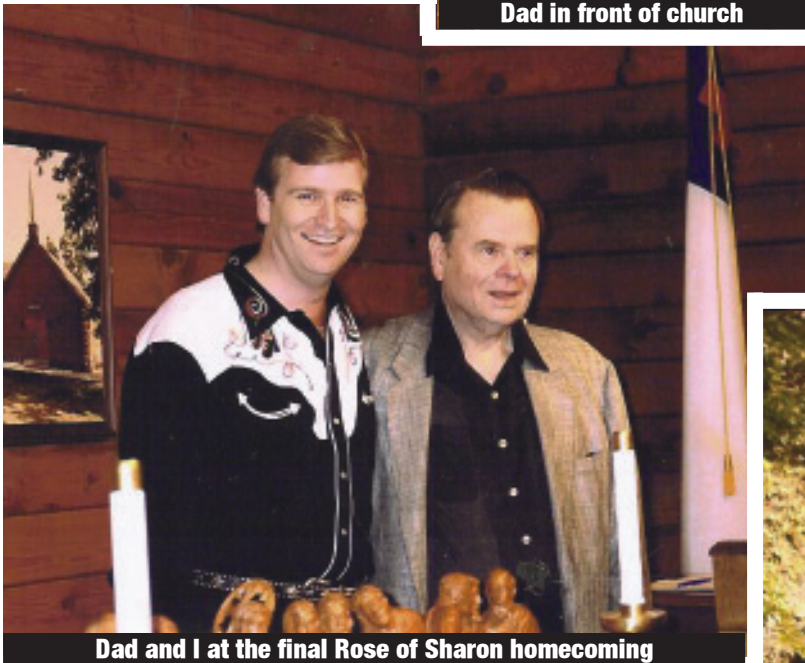
Not on this earth anyway.

Dad called it being "detail minded." When I was a boy he would preach to me about it again and again and again and again. But now, in front of this lovely little congregation, the details had escaped him and Billy James Hargis stood before them at a loss for words. The effect was crushing and his self-confidence took a terrible hit. The fear was too taxing, the worry far too consuming. He resigned from the little church.

Not too long after, he was contacted by PBS. They were producing a series of documentaries to be broadcast nationally on the religious right. They wanted to fly a film crew to Tulsa, film him in his home, explore the great history of this man and the organization he led. The man who was to conduct the interview, Calvin Skaggs, sounded fair, genuinely interested and respectful of my father. It felt different from the many smears and hatchet jobs that had been so mercilessly unleashed on my



Dad in front of church



Dad and I at the final Rose of Sharon homecoming



Christian Crusade homecoming group photograph my Dad kept on his desk



Granddaughter Annie fishing with Dad at the farm

father over the years. Dad wanted to cooperate, to tell his side of the story. But what if his mind failed him? What if the memories didn't come?

He asked me to fly to Tulsa to be there with him, to support him, to help jog his memory if things got rough.

I was so proud of him. They started asking him questions about his beliefs, core convictions, landmark court rulings, battles with the government and triumphs in the court of public opinion. He was magnificent – charming – disarming. My father could be big – the biggest – when the occasion called for it, but

my father also knew the light touch. He had a wonderful sense of humor, a gracious and hospitable manner and a self-deprecating sincerity that endeared him to both friends and many a foe.

That Billy James Hargis was fully on display in the early going that day. Dad had expressed honestly his concerns to Mr. Skaggs prior to the interview, but as the first film cartridge came to an end, Skaggs was nothing but elated by what was unfolding before his camera. Unfortunately, it was not to last. Dad had been on a roll up to that point and the momentum was strong, but the lapse in time while the cartridges were being changed had a dread consequence.

The blood wasn’t flowing as before, the synapse not firing and my father seemed to lose his concentration slowly but surely. Again, he grew frustrated with himself and that only exacerbated his condition. I knew how badly he hurt – he so wanted this to be done correctly.

Questions came up concerning the Supreme Court ruling outlawing prayer and Bible reading in the public schools. They wanted to know how he had immediately reacted to that horrible news. He could not recall, but thankfully I could, for it was on that day, and as a direct result of that decision, that I asked Jesus into my heart and my father led his nine-year-old son to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

I shared this story with the crew while film cartridges were being changed out yet again and they subsequently asked me to share that story before the cameras.

My father was so pleased. I don’t know when he was ever any happier with me. He wanted my help, he wanted me picking up where he left off. He wanted the story to continue – the message to reverberate, long after he had lost his ability to sound it across the land.

When the documentaries finally aired on PBS, entitled “With God On Our Side” and narrated by Cliff Robertson, the results were wonderfully fair. Along with the interview done by Tom Snyder on the “Tomorrow Show,” I think it is the most objectively unbiased hearing my father ever received in the national media. For once, he was not lied about, not called names, not disrespected or ridiculed. For once, somebody told the straight story and did not render false promises and betrayal. After having appeared on “The Today Show,” “Meet The Press,” “Larry King” and with Mike Wallace and in the pages of *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Life*, *Look*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*. This was my father’s last great opportunity to present his beliefs and accomplishments before a national audience.

The episodes in which he appeared and the clips which were utilized were aired without creative editing, so as to quote him out of context, and without the use of out-takes which might have been used to embarrass him. It may sound silly to some, but I most solemnly assure you that there were no ends to which most members of the “elite media” would stoop in order to destroy my dad. Lies, distortion, the use of grotesque photographs or bad editing or damning descriptions. I have seen it all over my 50 years and believe you me, a fair shake was an absolute rarity; truth, a lost commodity.

Dad was thrilled and most especially pleased because he felt that my portion of the program had shared the story of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

It was with great pleasure that only a few days after my father’s death, we heard Mr. Skaggs being interviewed on National Public Radio (NPR) concerning the life of Billy James Hargis. His documentary, having been re-edited to include the re-election of President George W. Bush, was being aired during the months of November and December on the Sundance channel.

I shall forever recall the genuine affection Mr. Skaggs seemed to have for my father. Skaggs was a Christian, though not, I think, a conservative. I drove him around Tulsa following the interview, showing him the sights. It was during that drive that he told me of the various Christian conservative leaders he had interviewed during the course of his project. He said you could tell the ones who were “real” from those that were not. He said he could tell in an instant that my father was genuinely and sincerely “real.” I didn’t need him to tell me that – I knew it already – but it was good to hear it all the same.

By the way, while I am on the subject of “the media elite,” let me say that although they most certainly put my father through Hell throughout his ministry, I do believe that he was almost universally “liked” by those who reported on him.

I remember especially *The Saturday Evening Post* doing a huge feature

story on him. The reporter and photographer assigned to cover him came and spent two weeks on the job. They came to our farm with us – photographed us doing chores – gathering eggs from the hen house. They rode with us on the customized Silver Eagle bus that my father traveled in as he toured the country speaking in a different city every night. They went with us to my grandparent’s home in Texarkana, Texas; shared our meals and got to know my father as he really was – affable, friendly, optimistic and caring. All the while, notes being scribbled on a pad, conversations recorded, camera shutters and flash bulbs taking it all in.

The gentlemen returned to New York City, I suppose. Next thing you know, they are back in contact. Must come back and take more pictures. Photographs are not what the editors wanted – the story is not what they had in mind. Must do it over. The photographer was terribly embarrassed. He liked Dad. So did the reporter. To know Dad was to like him. But that’s not what the big boys had in mind. New story, new pictures.

“Doomsday Merchant On The Far, Far Right... Billy James Hargis Leads His Million-Dollar Witch-Hunt in Hot Pursuit Of The Communists He Sees Lurking Everywhere.”

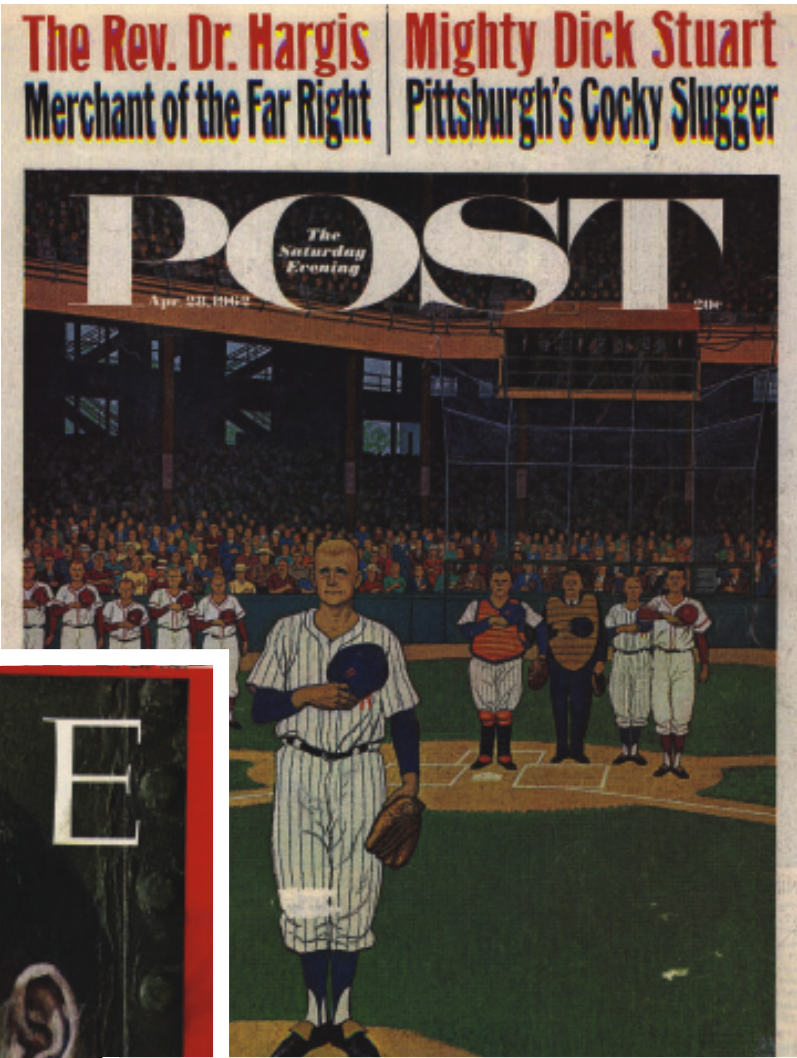
Nice big full-page picture of Dad’s face, ultra-close, black and white. Fists up next to his jowls – heavy on the 5 o’clock shadow – scary stuff. Hitleresque one might even say.

Did everything but draw a little Hitler mustache on him. But that was, of course, the point. The story tries again and again to paint him as some sort of anti-Semite. This, despite the fact that he repeatedly denounces anti-Semitism during the course of the article both to them in interviews and before a convention here in Tulsa of his followers. Makes no difference though. The powers-that-be knew what that story was going to be before they bought the reporters plane tickets. If they had to send them back a dozen times, they would have done so until they got the fanatical right-wing portrayal that they were

looking for. Sincere, good hearted people who supported my father were pictured as shadowy, fanatical, slightly off kilter. Even a great American hero like Captain Eddie Rickenbacker was photographed looking surly and contorted. Throw out those sunny pictures of Hargis on the farm – too nice, too friendly. Show me your creepiest stuff. This was most definitely not to be a Norman Rockwell portrait of American values. This was to be a smear piece, pure and simple.

While I’m at it, allow me to share one other media anecdote you may find interesting. A lot has been made recently of Dan Rather’s attacks on George W. Bush and subsequent resignation. I’ve heard even conservative pundits make comments about how things under Rather are not in the great tradition of CBS under the reign of Edward R. Murrow or Walter Cronkite. What a lot of hooey that is. Things were never unbiased or objective at CBS news or any other major television network newsroom and anybody who says otherwise either doesn’t know what they’re talking about or is intellectually lazy.

Speaking of Dan Rather, while we are on the subject, allow me to share a little story about him and my dad. Say what you will about Rather, and there



A son's tribute:

The final days of Dr. Billy James Hargis

continued from page 1

is much that could be said, I believe the man loves his country. I have seen him get choked up too many times in speaking about America, to believe him

not to love her. A partisan? You betcha. Left wing – liberal – hard-core yellow dog Texas Democrat? (A yellow dog Democrat being one who will vote for an old yellow dog before he would vote for a Republican.) I have no doubt about it. Able to separate his politics from his coverage? I hardly think so. Have I ever taken issue with his reporting? There were times when if I'd had a gun on me, I might have shot out the set. But the man strikes me as someone who, after all is said and done, has more values than one might think – and I will tell you why.

Several years ago I had occasion to meet Rather in Houston. Upon hearing my name he looked at me with great astonishment on his face and inquired as to whether I was the son of the Billy

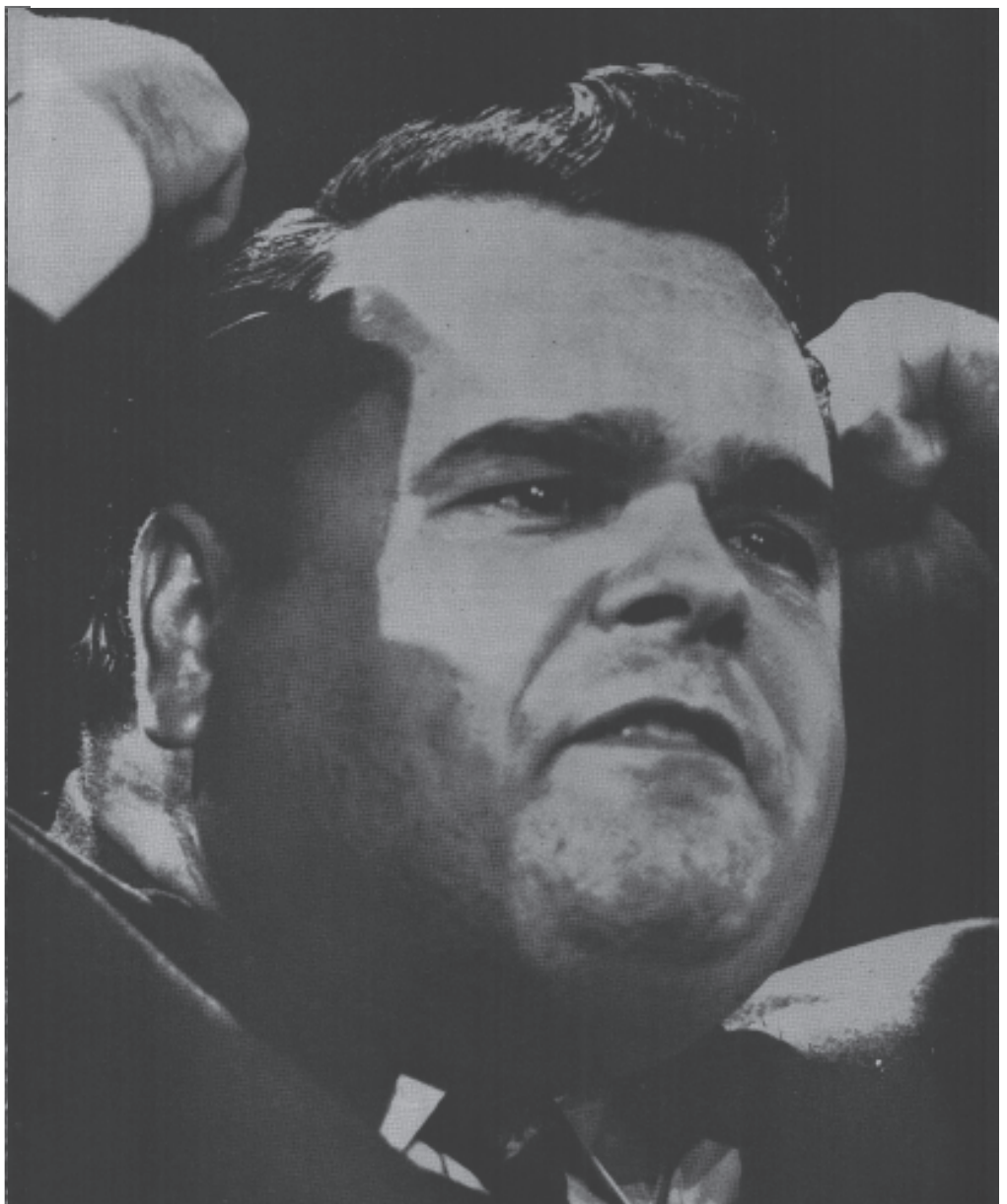
James Hargis. I, of course, responded in the affirmative and he began to tell me how many years previously he and a friend had driven to Shreveport, Louisiana, in order to hear my father deliver a message there. It must have

made something of a good impression on him as he autographed a book for me to give to my father and these are the words he inscribed: "To Billy James Hargis – for all that he has done in IHN (in His name), Dan Rather."

I must say I was rather stunned by his magnanimity. After all, my father had never gone lightly on Dan Rather or his ilk. But I later learned that Rather is a professed believer and from all reports, keeps a Bible on his desk that he reads every day. I can't say for sure whether this is the truth or not, but I can tell you that since my father penned the book *Distortion By Design* back in about 1965, Christian Crusade has stood strong against the kind of slanted, dishonest, propaganda that passes for news in the national press – the same kind of slanted poison that has made Rather the victim of his own un-doing. But that being said, what-



Above and below left, are photographs taken of my father on the "Betty Jane Ranch" in Skiatook, Oklahoma, by the *Saturday Evening Post* photographer. Refused by the editors of the publication, the photo below right is what actually ran along with the caption "In his hellfire-and-brimstone harangue, Hargis attacks the 'liberals, welfare-staters, do-gooders, and one-worlders who serve the Communist cause. He believes that Red agents are everywhere.'"



ever our differences on the battlefield of ideals, I respect Dan Rather for the respect he showed my father, my Lord and my country. Even my father's most ardent enemies in the press were drawn to admire him.

When I gave Dad the Rather book, *The Camera Never Blinks Twice*, I remember his getting a huge kick out of it and the inscription. But I also remember something else. We were discussing a national radio interview I had done with Rev. Marlin Maddox. At some point my father turned to me and said he had not realized that Dan Rather and Marlin Maddox were brothers.

It was the first time I had ever really heard my father miscomprehend something in such a manner and even more disturbingly, it was hard to get the notion dispelled from his head. The men had two different last names – nothing had been said about them being brothers – but it still required some explanation before he quite got it. Something was most definitely amiss.

I had a good friend, a fellow student from American Christian College, who is now an outstanding Christian counselor, specializing in children with learning disabilities. I spoke to her regarding my concerns for my father. She gave me a little test to administer to him – about ten simple memory questions.

One Saturday afternoon, I sat down with him in the living room while mother was cleaning the kitchen. He was grateful to be taking the test – anxious to find out its results. I asked him the questions and he did his best to answer them. He did okay, too. But, only okay. Maybe sixty percent right. But not an extraordinary mind. The dad. A genius – the

Even still, it was one night in particular stayed up long into the night – so perceptively telling him, “The game he was playing was sharp as you ever saw. He was playing for attention, as if he was being assessed and was returned.

“You know the

He still did telev

He still conducted

mas Eve program

to primarily read

commentary. The

operation or tests after his death – tests which in the end seemed totally unneeded. For the time being, my father seemed sad and bewildered – besieged (prematurely, the doctor said) by a disease he could not fight nor understand. In truth, even the name evaded him, often referring to it as “all-heimers,” and later still inquiring from anyone within earshot, usually my mother, “What is it that I have?”

He had to quit driving. God looked out after him as long as he could, but eventually dad knew it was time to surrender the keys. Mom became his chauffeur, as well as cook and constant companion. The strain was taking its toll.

Mother's back sent her into severe pain. For a period there, she could hardly rise up out of her bed. Dad wanted to keep moving, but Mom could not. I was living in Houston and even with regular visits could only do so much. My three sisters, Bonnie, Becky and Brenda, were all in Tulsa with their own jobs and families to look after, but at least they were a support system. We worried that if anything went wrong out on the farm, how long would it take to get help? My father was a big man, an unwieldy man for a little woman with a back problem, should an emergency arise. My father had been diagnosed with major arterial blockage. 100 percent in one artery, 95 percent in the second and 63 percent in the third. He had already had a heart attack as a young man and now the doctors

told him the only thing keeping him alive were a network of auxiliary veins that had miraculously webbed themselves around his heart – keeping blood flowing, but making his great big heart impossible to operate on. It was too much for my mother to look af-

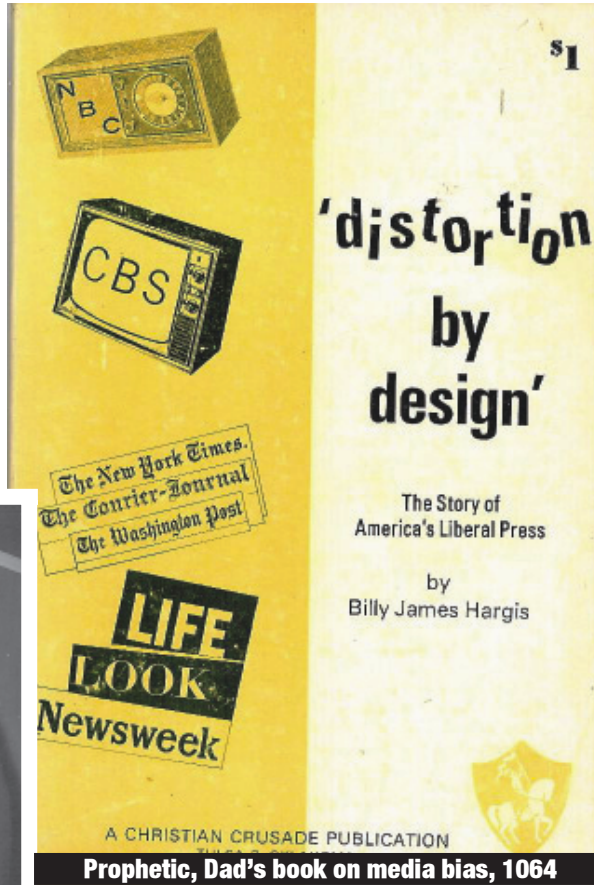
ter in her then weakened state. Branson – Neosho – Tulsa. Uncertain of her own health and driving skills, the hard choice was made to consolidate things to Tulsa – less travel – more time to heal. He still had an office and staff there and most

importantly, family. Still, it broke my father's heart to leave the Rose of Sharon Farm. What had once been his home-away-from-home had now simply become his home.

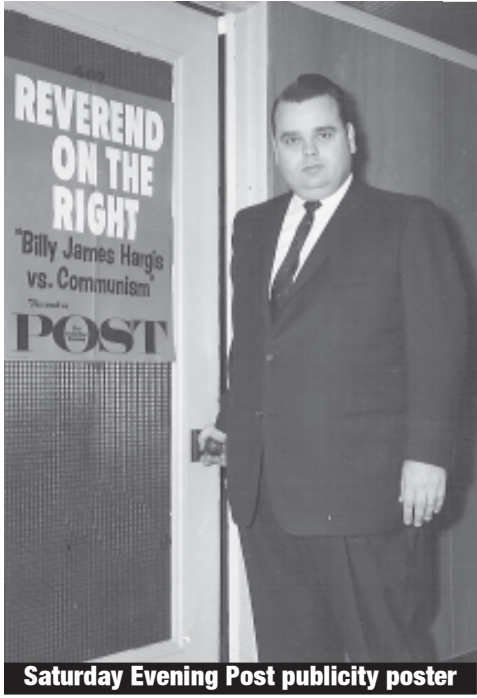
He loved his big stone fireplace with the rough hewn mantle, where he would spend cold winter nights throwing yet another log on the fire. Sitting on his chair ottoman, legs spread far apart, he would stoke that fire over and over again, sending sparks a'flying and flames a'blazing till it was almost too unbear-

able a heat to sit in.

He loved his dogs. Loved 'em all. Had a whole pack of them – all strays or hand-me-downs that somebody else couldn't deal with. Not dad. They had a home with him and my, didn't he love to look after them. Enormous bowls of steaming leftovers – throw them all in – the dogs would like them just fine, thank you very much. He was like some Henry VIII figure, walking in the



Prophetic, Dad's book on media bias, 1964



Saturday Evening Post publicity poster



Christmas Eve was always time for a special service – Dad at the pulpit while I provided carols



Family picture at the Rose of Sharon Farm log house, Christmas Day 1998



Our family, including two of Dad's best dogs

morning from his log house to his log school office, his loving canine entourage in tow. And there they would sit, waiting patiently till they could stroll back with him to the house come noon. Then, after one of mom's warm lunches, off they'd go again back to the office! Yet again they would mill lazily about, lying in the cool dirt next to the concrete stairs. And there they would abide in the afternoon shade until the great man would once again descend the stairs and dutifully they would follow him home even as night began to fall.

And how he loved that log school chapel. How precious was that place to him. Walls covered with religious paintings and patriotic art. Museum cases filled with memorabilia from his ministry and historic artifacts. Up the stairs and down the halls where his faithful employees and volunteers would be working hard to spread the gospel even unto the uttermost parts of the earth. The ministry fed my father's soul.

And to see him in his office. Just to see him in that office – God knows what I would give to see him there again, reclining so far back in his high-backed leather desk chair that one felt it was nothing short of an act of God keeping him from falling back on his head. But God held him up – in more ways than one.

The office was altogether over-crowded. I hardly see how he got all the furniture to fit in there, let alone himself. But somehow he wedged it all in – great, oversized, magnificent office furniture from his travels in South Korea. Great black lacquered desk, shelves and cabinets inlaid with rainbowed mother of pearl. I don't know that it was expensive furniture, but it was different from what you normally see in America and had a certain grandeur to it that would have stood out in any office environment – but did so particularly in this not overly large office in this most rural and American of settings. And there he would sit, dictating literally hundreds of letters at a sitting, swinging his wheeled chair around on occasion to change out a cassette tape on his dictation machine, put on a new gospel record or just to survey the Ozark hills which rested assuringly outside his upstairs window.

Then there was the chapel. How dear it was to his heart. The wood having been donated by Pastor Garland Faw of North Carolina, who owned his own business of manufacturing and distributing pre-cut Lincoln log homes. The log chapel was my father's *sanctum sanctorum*. It was there, in what he had named, the Laura Lucille Hargis Memorial Chapel, that my father found a renewed sense of purpose in life. For after the world had beaten him down – when cruel, jealous and deceitful men had done all they could to destroy him – it was in this quiet place that my father, battered and torn, waited on the Lord, reaching out yet again to a loving and forgiving Christ, crying, "Here am I, send me."

It was no easy thing, I know, for my father to even take another step down what were the darkest roads of his life, but the Rose of Sharon Farm provided him with a place where he could find healing and redemption. Without pride, without vanity, my father carried on his work for the Lord in this lovely remote corner of the American heartland.

Every Sunday morning he and my mother would open the doors to that little chapel and hold services for whoever might be in the neighborhood, whoever might be wandering by. Sometimes there might be fifteen, sometimes only a few. Ozark mountain winters can get pretty bleak at points and there were times when the snows were too high for anyone to make it. None-the-less, the doors were opened. Mom was at the organ, hymns were sung, a message delivered and the Lord's table remembered. This was my father's heart. Loving. Tender. Faithful to God, both in season and out of season. Nobody knows but his family how he struggled and how he grieved, but thank God he soldiered on. He fought the good fight. He ran the race without flinching and for that I am so grateful.

Even to the end though, the farm remained a special place. After one particularly bad episode, in the middle of the night, I sat next to my father as he lay helpless in a hospital bed. On two different occasions that night, separated by hours, a noise was heard from out in the hospital corridor – a nurse dropping a container, someone speaking too loudly. Twice I heard my

father call out for Mildred Johnson Morris, his secretary from the Rose of Sharon. Twice he hollered, "Mildred?" Somewhere in his mind he was ready – dying really – to rush off another letter to the friends of Christian Crusade.

My parents returned to Tulsa, bought a nice red brick house, white shutters, quiet little neighborhood just down the hill from the great house we had once lived in as a family. They didn't need so much room now – Walter Brennan wouldn't be coming over for dinner anymore – Senator Joseph McCarthy wouldn't be stopping by as he once had. No more grand banquets or parties as there had been when luminaries, statesmen and celebrities dropped in and out of town to interview, consult or speak for my father. These days were quieter, more modest, better days in their own way. No need for a new car

every year. The accoutrements of power and prestige, now mere vanities. To my father, the sleepily little red brick home with the two concrete plow horses I had given them, on either side of the front door, was the most beautiful home in the city. The big oak tree that so dominated the corner on which they lived was the most glorious tree in the world – what shape – what color!

The Buick they leased for several years, they finally bought outright. No need of a new car every year to transport the VIP's from all over the world. No Cadillac would be required to pick up Governor Wallace. No Lincoln for Senator Thurmond. These were simpler times, a Buick did the job just fine – better than a limousine – it was completely paid for and with plenty of leg room to boot.

Mornings were spent in bed. Mom got up early – sat at the kitchen table paying bills, writing notes, a cup of tea, some "alone time" before the requirements of being a primary caregiver began.

Dad would wake up – come wandering into the kitchen – that was Mother's cue. Back into bed Dad would go – Fox news channel – always wanted to see his paper even if he wasn't quite clear on all the

facts. Enjoyed the circulars – especially the tape and CD players that they advertised. Dad would circle those with his ink pen. Dad always liked anything to do with recording equipment. It came from his making all those radio and broadcast tapes – he wanted to keep recording – spreading the gospel.

Then came breakfast in bed – courtesy of mom. Bowl of cereal. Sliced banana – maybe some strawberries. Toast. Jelly. A little ham. Always a glass of orange juice – often fresh squeezed.

Dad loved it and I loved it, too. During my monthly extended-stay visits with them, I would often drive in from Houston late in the evening, so he wouldn't have seen me the night before. So when I peeked in on him in the morning, it was always with great surprise and delight that he would greet me, "Hey, buddy! Well, bless your heart! I didn't know you were here!" Then he'd give me a great big hug and I'd kiss him all over his face. I cannot begin to describe to you how much those moments meant to me. To be able to kiss my father. To be able to shower him in love and affection and to see the light that shone in his eyes for me. Such moments are beyond my ability to describe.

Alzheimer's is a terrible disease, make no mistake about it, but as with many bad things that may beset us in this life, it is not without its lessons and its silver linings.

To be there with him in those mornings was a blessing and a treat. To read him his paper. To see the smile in his eyes. To laugh with him. To behold his wonder. He was gentle. He was funny, and he loved George W. Bush. We'd sit back there watching the President serve a surprise turkey dinner in Iraq or holding a press conference with Ariel Sharon and my dad would just marvel, "Now that's a man of God" he would exclaim – and I never had cause to doubt him.

Perhaps the thing I will miss the most is holding his hand. He used to tell stories about his own adoptive father and he would describe him as a man with "ham-like hands." I liked the ring of that phrase and think it captures most accurately his own enveloping grasp. It felt as if it took the two of my hands to get around the one of his. To be seated, cross-legged, next to my dad in



Disembarking his plane, Senator Joseph McCarthy is welcomed to Tulsa by my father in 1954.

the morning time ... to be allowed to gaze upon his still boyish face...tussle his hair...lovingly caress his hand...this was a bit of heaven here on earth for me. It was a benevolent God that provided me with such an opportunity to lavish affection on my hero and friend.

To have been able to help him into the shower – put shampoo into his hair – dry off his back for him – coax his, now skinny, little arms up so that we could put on his deodorant or bring his tee-shirt down over his head – and most precious of all, to have been able to stand before the mirror with him while I shaved his face. “Put some water on your face, Dad, no, over here...over here. That’s right. That’s good. Now let’s put on some shaving cream. Doesn’t that feel good?”

Now that was a gift. Mom was afraid of nicking him with a real razor, especially with him taking Coumadin and all. His blood was too thin now – difficult to stop the bleeding. But I was used to the feel of a good news razor against my own face. I felt comfortable and relaxed shaving him – and he made it such fun. The way he sealed tight his lips as I spread the lather across his upper lip and chin. The way he mimicked my movements to jut out his jaw or move his pursed lips from side to side. His pleasure and his patience, as with each individual stroke of the razor, I would shave clean another portion of his baby soft face.

Rinsing the lather off the blade under the tap and then returning again until his whole countenance beamed back fresh and whole. I can’t tell you what it did

for this son’s heart to be able to perform such a simple task for his father and to feel the warmth and joy that radiated from him for it. He knew the difference between the feel of an electric shaver and that of a real razor and it meant all the world to him to slap the after shave on his face and know that it both looked and felt just right. That is a memory I will carry with me as long as I live. To have been able to return even a small portion of the love and care he gave to me as a child was a blessing from above.

I know that perhaps some reading this will find such personal recollections ill considered or inappropriate to the nature of this newspaper, but I would like to think that most of you will understand my wanting to include them here.

First, I want to pay tribute to my father’s lives, both public and private, because I think they had a wonderful consistency about them.

Secondly, I think part of what made my father so compelling to people was his openness...his honesty. As Kay Hively so beautifully expresses in her essay from the *Neosho Daily News*, with dad there was no disguise. What you saw is what you got!

Thirdly, my father brought me up to be a student of history. To Dad a work Learn the truth about a man – what really made him tick – that’s what fascinated my father and what fascinates me still today. I want to reveal my father’s humanity to you... I have faith you will appreciate him all the more.

Finally, I want you, the reader and supporter of this newspaper and ministry to have access to the kind of man you have helped sustain for these many years. I want to review with you his weaknesses and his strengths for he walked through this life fully human but even in his frailty and fragility – God continued to work a miracle in the life of Billy James Hargis. Along every step of the way, God was working His purpose out.

As with a refiner’s fire, all dross was being consumed...the gold refined.

I once heard an old minister being described by a younger one as an “old workhorse just waiting to be harnessed up to the plow again.” That was my dad all over. Every afternoon he was ready to go to work and no matter how much he was enjoying the conversation ... no matter how pleasant the diversion...come one o’clock p.m., at the latest, it was time to go to work. No matter what, he was heading out that door.

Let me tell you, friend, he loved this ministry. He poured his life’s blood into its continuance right up until the very end. Most of all, he yearned to be behind the pulpit again – but, of course, that was impossible – so the next best thing was to be behind his desk.

Rolling around in his over-sized desk chair was harness enough and kept

him in full charge. Here he had life-giving purpose. There was, after all, work to be done – papers to be moved – letters to be read – a newspaper to be proofed – articles to be reviewed – visitors to be greeted – pictures to be sorted – arrangements to be made and calls to be taken, and all to a gospel music soundtrack. Record albums, CD’s, audio and video cassettes – he was surrounded by them, constantly changing from one format to another.

Part of my job was making sure that all these records and tapes got put back where they came from. That would keep you busy ‘cause Dad, as had always been his custom, liked to keep moving ahead. It was part of his strength, but could prove challenging for those who surrounded him. Where were we headed next? One could never tell, but it kept you on your toes and life was never dull. He was excited too? Glad I was there. “You and me, brother.” he would say. “You and me.”



In August 1979, Alabama Gov. George Wallace came to Tulsa to speak for us following his first run for the Presidency

It reminded me of when we were recording the “Billy and Me” album back in 1974, and he wanted us to include a song he had heard on TV one night. The man my father heard singing was Paul Williams, the song’s composer, and it seemed odd, so completely out of character that my Dad would want to record that particular song with me.

It was, after all, a pop song. It went on, in fact, to become a hit for singer Helen Reddy. I was amazed he was willing to make that stretch and, quite frankly, talked him out of it. But not without regret. “You and

Me Against The World” the song was titled and said, “Sometimes it feels like you and me against the world. And for all the times we’ve cried, I’ve always felt that God was on our side. And when one of us is gone and one is left alone to carry on... Then remembering will have to do. Our memories alone will get us through. I’ll think about the days of me and you... of you and me against the world.”

It breaks my heart to think about those lyrics now, but they also give me comfort. So, likewise, do the lyrics of another song I did, in fact, record on that “Billy And Me” album.

“Precious Father, loving Mother
fly across the lonely years;
and old home scenes of my childhood
in fond memory appears.

Precious memories, how they linger,
how they ever flood my soul,
in the stillness of the midnight,
precious, sacred scenes unfold.”

I was indeed blest with a father who provided me with so many “precious memories.” Among the many, however, none is more important than that of my father at prayer.

The highlight of the day, indeed, the very heart and soul of it, was the visit to the prayer room. That was where the work day would always end – time spent before the altar with my mother, myself, with God and with you, the supporters of Christian Crusade.

It was there that Dad would sit patiently and lovingly while we read him aloud the prayer requests that came in each month from Christian Crusaders all over the country. Together we would pray for you by name, remember your sacrifice, your needs, your hurts, your heartaches and agree as touching anything you required that it might be done by our Father, Who is in heaven.

That was Dad at his best. He never quit caring about you. He never forgot why he was here or who had helped him accomplish such wonderful things. It was you. It was God, and it was my mother, his “Betty Jane.”

In the end, the story of Billy James Hargis is, in no small measure, a love story.

Time brought many heartaches my father’s way. Many were the slings and arrows he suffered along his crusader’s trail. He was, as was our Lord, “despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.”

Dad had risen too high, accomplished too much, not to have made some powerful enemies. From the Whitehouse to the national media, there were plenty of people on the left who just couldn't wait to bring my father down.

Sadly, there were also traitors in our own camp who, out of greed and jealousy, had their own reasons for wanting to see my father out of the way. Though differing in motive, these cold, ignoble men shared a common goal and, therefore, without one thought as to the good of the Kingdom, a deal was struck to destroy Billy James Hargis.

The result might have killed a lesser man. (In truth, there was a time when I did fear for my father's life, so great was his despair.) But in his darkest hour, when many a friend turned away, my father had two overwhelming assets: Faith in a merciful God and the constancy and steadfastness of a loving wife.

As horrific as those days were ... as bleak, dismal and depressive as that period was for every member of my family ... I know there is not a one of us who is not grateful for the bond that it helped forge between us and between our parents.

"And we know that all things work together for the good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" — my father's favorite verse. I heard him preach it. I saw him live it.

This trial by fire made my father a better man — a wiser man — a richer man. Life had taught him a hard lesson, but I'm grateful to say, he was a willing student.

His work had taken over his life. Yes, he needed to be about his Father's business, but this was too much. Regular Sunday services, 90 city cross-country tours, a nationally syndicated weekly television program, a daily radio broadcast, leadership schools, preacher conventions, a liberal arts college to run, Christian youth camp, books to author, a weekly newspaper to write and publish, albums to be recorded, overseas tours leaving practically every other week and a missionary organization with hospitals and orphanages in every corner of the globe. You do the math. How much time does that leave you for family or reflection? Every day is accounted for, seven days a week, 365 days of the year. Everywhere you go there are people requiring your attention, needing answers to questions.

A woman in Kentucky wrote my mother recently recalling how one night at the youth camp a group of about five young people wanted to accept Christ as their Savior. The woman went and knocked on the door of the man who later became my father's chief accuser. He could not be bothered. He told her he would deal with it the next day. She then went and knocked on my father's door. Without hesitation, Dad came out and helped lead them to the Lord right then and there. The woman said the experience spoke volumes to her about both men.

Dad always had time for anybody and everybody.

He taught me to be no respecter of persons. He said, "You spend as much time with the fellow in overalls as you do with the man in the suit." He spent time with both. Everyone got greeted. Everyone was important. A free Saturday afternoon when I was a boy and he was in town was an opportunity to go out and call on widows, church members and people in nursing homes. "Pure religion undefiled" the Bible calls it, and my father made it a practice.

Home between a Holy Land trip and a chicken supper tour, he would often be off to the office to catch up on correspondence or to write an appeal letter at five o'clock in the morning — this after having not gotten in from the office till 10 the previous night.

Three weeks out of four, he was on the road or circling the globe. Somebody had to raise the money to finance it all. Hundreds of people were on the payroll in this country alone. Around the world, there were countless more dependent on his financial assistance. At the college there were scholarships to be underwritten, loans to be repaid, television time to be purchased and costly production expenses. New printing presses. New computers. (Mr. Honeywell himself came to check out the installation, so

great was that expenditure!)

And what of the land for future expansion? What of the rows of houses? There were whole apartment buildings to provide dormitory space. Buildings for classrooms, a library, a radio station, a gymnasium, a dining hall, a bookstore, a museum of fine religious art, a direct mail plant, corporate headquarters, two sanctuaries, three theatre pipe

organs, parking lots and a new \$200,000 bridge (1973 dollars) to tie it all together so that the students and personnel wouldn't get hit by cars crossing busy Sheridan Road. Worse still was raising the money to keep it all running. People were quicker to respond financially toward a new building than they were toward paying high electrical bills, gas or groceries.

As Carl Teel said at my father's funeral service, "The sun never set on the

ministry of Billy James Hargis." But a ministry such as that came at a great cost. Paying that cost ultimately was the responsibility of one man... my dad. Yes, he had help. Good people... great people... dedicated people. But at the end of the day, it was Dad's engine that pulled the train.

Many were those who ridiculed my dad for his ability to take up an offering. After his funeral,

I even joked that with that big crowd in attendance, Dad would have been disappointed we didn't pass out some chicken buckets for a collection.

Let me tell you the truth, though, right here and now. If my dad had never had to take up another offering, he would have been only too glad. On those All-American Kids tours he would much rather have let the big production sell itself and taken up a nice, easy-going, freewill offering. I know this to be true because he tried it on a number of occasions, but to no avail. Without his passion, drive and full commitment... without his putting himself on the line unequivocally on a daily basis, there would be no tour, no movement and no world outreach.



Dad with orphans at a David Livingston Missionary Foundation party in Seoul, Korea, 1977



The Hargis family poses with the American Christian College student body and faculty in front of the Cathedral, 1973



I hold the candle as Dad burns the mortgage on the Cathedral of the Christian Crusade

So night after night, my sweet, 285-pound dad, with a history of heart problems, and high blood pressure, would go out there and hammer and sweat and plead, and do everything he could to pay for that tour, keep the ministry running and the message going out “for Christ and against Communism.” Night after night he would go out there and address the crowds till his voice was almost gone with hoarseness, his shirt and undershirt soaked through with sweat.

I tell you, with the utmost sincerity, I never expected my father to make it through his sixties, let alone to seventy-nine. The mental and physical toll of what life demanded of him was too great a burden for even a healthy man, let alone a man with his medical history and girth.

The psychological pressures alone were beyond all imaginings. The pickets. The threats. The animosity and cruelty of a left-wing press constantly berating and slandering you. I have the utmost sympathy for Rush Limbaugh (who has written and spoken kindly of my father on many occasions). I think Limbaugh is now where my father was in many ways. A point-man and leading voice of conservatism, but that makes you a hated man, and don’t think that doesn’t begin to wear on you after a time.

Yes, my father was willing to fight for what was right, but that did not make him impervious to pain. Words do sting and “the lies that some may hurl” have the power to cut and leave one bleeding in their soul.

Deep down inside my dad was a big-hearted, over-weight orphan boy from Texarkana, Texas, who was just trying to do something big for God. He was not a hateful man, a bigot or a racist, as he was often accused of being, let alone some sort of Nazi or KKKer as some books have tried to imply. What manner of malevolence spews such lies?

My father loved people—all people! He battled against the tyranny of godless anti-Christ Communism and for the freedom of oppressed people in every land. He fed, clothed and found work for scores of people of every race and color. For these efforts, he was scourged, reviled and betrayed. Those who were so quick to scorn and malign while contributing so little themselves should have carried that burden around on their back, any part of it, and see if their knees didn’t start to buckle a bit. This was, after all, a man. A man like Adam—a man like Noah—a man like Moses—a man like Abraham—a man like Sampson—a man like David—a man like Peter—a man like Paul.

“Don’t worship Billy James Hargis,” my dad used to say. “Billy James Hargis will let you down. Billy James Hargis has feet of clay.” I heard him preach that a hundred times...maybe a thousand. The point was that we are all just human after all, save one...Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God. It is in He alone that we may find perfection and it is in He alone that we may find the forgiveness that each and every one of us so desperately need.

I view my father as I would some great character from the Bible. Go down the list of them, it’s the same story over and over again. Men who had faith. Men who had flaws. Men who found forgiveness. There’s not an exception

to the rule. That’s why they’re in there...one reason only...to point the way to the Savior, our Lord Jesus, crucified, buried and risen again.

My father did that with his life. He did it in big ways, but ultimately and more importantly, he did it in the little things, too. As my father’s world grew smaller, the light of his love shone even brighter.

God gave my father a break. He saw the load was too much for him and so he lightened it some—made it more bearable. God was good and gave him time to enjoy his family. Gave his family a chance to hold him near. Gave him a chance to spend time with a loving, godly wife who “reverenced him” through the blackest of days of his life and loved him till the very end.

“She is so beautiful!” Dad would say to anyone who would listen, countless times a day. “I love her so much. She is just the best. She is the most wonderful woman in the world. Listen, brother, this woman is a saint!” My mother grew embarrassed by his incessant praise and ardent adulation. But her protests could not silence his heart.

My father loved my mother with an intensity that could not help but touch those who witnessed it firsthand. As time and the disease whittled away at his thoughts and memories, this is the glory that I observed and took heart from. His love of people. His love of this ministry. His love for God, and his love for my mother. Boiled down to his essence, these were the immutable truths my father had to

impart. This was the legacy of his life and for his children and grandchildren; they are a bright and shining star by which we may navigate life’s stormy seas.

Everywhere he went he spread love and goodwill. No one was a stranger. Everyone a friend. His witness, his testimony became purer and finer than anyone could have ever dreamed. His ministry became one on one. One person at a time, he brightened whatever corner he was in.

The tears stream down my face as I write these words to you, dear reader, because I know how true this is. My father was not the hate-monger he was portrayed as being. He was not some god-forsaken Elmer Gantry figure trying to fleece his unsuspecting followers. He was good and kind and gentle, genuine and sincere. He loved his God and loved his fellow man and served them both with a faithful and loving heart. But even his big heart couldn’t go on forever.

I will not burden you with the details of my father’s physical decline. I will only say that there were a series of falls as Dad began to lose not only his mental balance, but his physical balance as well. Finally, he experienced one horrendous fall where he gashed the side of his face and blood began seeping into his brain and the pressure in his skull built dangerously. The doctors prepared us for his death.

A few hours after we had gone into what can only be referred to as “premature mourning,”

there he was, happily taking the stitches and holding court with the family. He would never be going home again, but how good it was to be able to surround him in a cocoon of familial love.

It was only a temporary reprieve from what would lie ahead, a sort of Indian summer, but for now he had come back from death’s door and was with us once again, energized by the experience. He seemed more lucid than he had for a long time and he had us laughing long and hard as we all squeezed into the hospital room and encompassed his bed.

Then he would lead us in prayer. Over and over again, sweet, understanding, luminous prayers that defied all explanation. Together we would hold



Audiences everywhere enjoyed Billy James Hargis' All-American Kids, circa 1970



Dad posing with ministers from all across America at his annual Preachers Convention



One of Dad's countless overseas tours prepares to depart from New York City

hands, as a family, and our patriarch, our miracle of a father, would show us the stuff that faith is made of. How sweet a memory is that? How much more cause does one need to believe? Faith of our Fathers. Faith of our Fathers, indeed!

He looked like he had been through a car wreck, the entire left side of his face swollen to enormous proportions. The bruising, deep black, blues and purples, overwhelmed that side of his face and carried well down into his neck. He had no clue as to his appearance. He just knew he was glad to see us all there together.

The next five days he was never alone. Someone was always at his side, as we took shifts watching over him. I wish you could have seen him, how dear he was.

The nurses would come in to take blood what seemed like every hour. Sometimes it was with great difficulty that they were able to find a vein, meaning they would have to poke him with the needle again and again. Awakened from his much needed sleep, Dad would just thank them profusely. “God bless you. Thank you. Well, God bless your heart. You are so wonderful.” Over and over again they would stick him with the needle and over and over he would offer them his blessing. I never saw anything like it. In those five days the nurses fell in love with him, with his little boy charm and they cried when the time came to wheel him out of the ward and off to the Alzheimer’s care facility we had been forced to find for him.

It was no different there. It was a church-run home that we had chosen for him, the best the city had to offer, and there were many wonderful Christian people there, both patients and attendants. Yet my father developed a special bond with many of the nurses. They came and told me that out of all the patients they had ever come in contact with, Dad was the sweetest, the most special. It reminded me of his birth.

Dad was adopted. Before his adopted parents came to acquire him, he had to spend some period of time in a hospital. There, too, the nurses took a special liking to him and it was they who gave him his name...”Billy James.” In fact, there is reason to believe that his real mother, his birth mother, was herself a nurse who had conceived him out of wedlock with a married doctor, and was forced to give him up for adoption.

Did she, herself, give him that name as she reluctantly let him go? We’ll probably never know, but one could easily believe having seen the love he inspired among the nurses, that perhaps her love and prayers for him had reached God’s ears and been honored in the form of a special bond between him and the angels of mercy. On his bluest of days or even in the throws of his most agonizing pain, he would always buck up for them ... greet them with a smile, a “hello there!” And kiss them on the hand just to make their day a little brighter. They adored him.

One fine young attendant named Stewart Graham, after having once met Dad, went out of his way to come read to my father from the Bible. He worked in the nursing home wing of the facility and had no obligation to spend time in the Alzheimer’s wing. Nevertheless, he would come seek my dad out during his lunch break, or any other free time, wheel him out into the courtyard for some fresh air, and just share the Word with the preacher. I know that young man will be blest for his efforts.

Dad liked to hear those Scriptures. When I would read aloud to him, it just seemed to calm him. Even if he didn’t understand every last thought, he still knew he was hearing the Word of God and sometimes he would “ooh” and “ahh” over the beauty and grandeur of the King James English. “My goodness, isn’t that something!” he would say.

Another thing he enjoyed hearing were the letters and prayer requests of Christian Crusaders from across America. I’d come see him with a bag full of them and he’d be so happy to know that people still remembered him and his work continued. Together I would read to him each individual card and letter. I would give him the writer’s name and share with him the city and state from which they hailed and then, one by one, we would pray for their respective needs. I wouldn’t doubt that as his body grew weaker, his prayers grew stronger. Like the widow’s mite, my dad was giving all he had to give.

Likewise, the newspaper you are reading was always a treat to share with

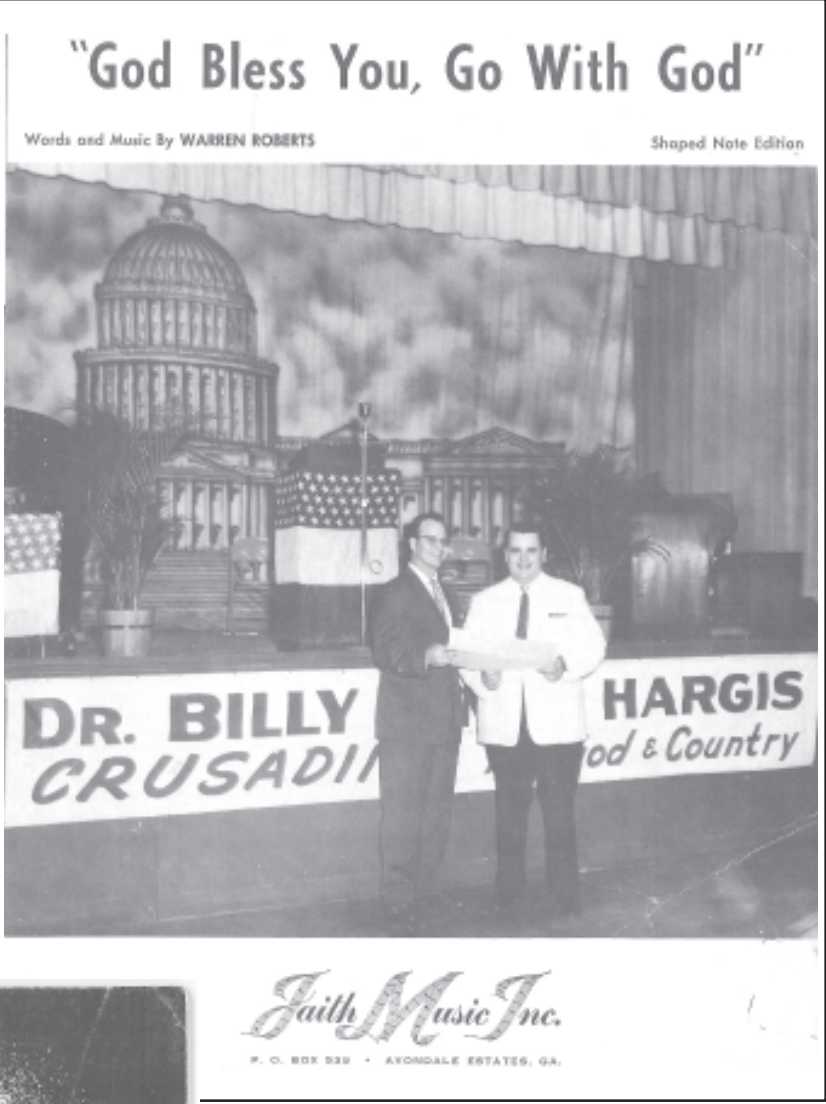
him. What satisfaction it gave me to be able to show him the latest issue. There was real excitement in his face and voice, real joy, when he saw the paper and realized afresh that Christian Crusade was still alive and well.

The thing that perked him up the most though was singing ... singing hymns! He liked it so much that I kept a copy of his *Billy James Hargis’ Favorite Hymns* song book there on the shelf. I’d get it down and we’d just start singing. “This world is not my home, I’m just a passing through,” was a favorite. The hymnal had been put together for him by Albert E. Brumley who had written “I’ll Fly Away.” That one got sung a lot, too.

Dad couldn’t remember the lyrics anymore but he never forgot how to sing

a good harmony line. So, off we’d go just tearing them up, one song after another. Songs that make you feel glad to be alive, and better still, not half bad about dying.

I’d stick him in the wheelchair and roll him down this long empty hallway that separated the two wings of the facility. There were great acoustics in that hall, just tailor-made for a Hargis boys duet. Many a nurse got a smile or a chuckle as we came wailing down the hall singing “The Battle Hymn Of The Republic” or “I Saw The Light” at the top of our lungs.



There were still happy times.

One day, Mom and I were back in his room with him. He was lying in bed. His eyes were shut tight and there seemed to be no awareness about him at all. But often when he was in that condition, you could start singing and suddenly he’d join right in, singing a perfect harmony. At the very least he’d lift up his arms and start shaking his hands near his sides in a crisp rhythmic motion like he was playing some invisible maracas. On this day, he seemed particularly lifeless, so I started singing his theme song, “God Bless You, Go With God.” It had been written for him by an Atlanta, Georgia, disc jockey and dear friend, Warren Roberts, many years ago having been inspired by the opening and close to my father’s radio broadcasts: “Jesus Christ is still the hope of the world!” and “God bless you. Go with God.”

Hovie Lister and the Statesmen Quartet had recorded it for RCA Records and I had sung it, along with “God Bless America” all across America when I was a little boy. In fact, I once got to sing it with the Statesmen when I was about five at one of my father’s great rallies in Atlanta. Imagine me, being back-up by Hovie Lister, Jake Hess, Doy Ott, Rosie Rozell and Big Chief! Talk about a memory!

Anyway, my dad loved that song and I knew that if there was anything that would revive him, this would be it. Sure enough, no sooner had I started singing than the hands started shaking that rhythm and in came the high baritone harmony singing a steady, “ahhh.” All was right with the world, his eyes still closed, until we got to the end of the song. I always do the first and second ending on it. The first ending stays down, then you double back to the middle of the song until you come to the end for a second time, which is high and strong, and that’s what you refer to as the second ending.

Well, we got to the first ending, Dad singing harmony and I started to go down on the melody line. Without ever opening his eyes, Dad starts saying, “No! No!” and points up, jabbing at the sky with his right hand. He knew how he wanted that song sung, and he was ready for that high second ending. And it was, after all, his song! He was well within his rights to choose whichever ending he pleased. Mother and I just roared with laughter. Two minutes before, one would have thought he was totally checked out. But even when the lights looked as if they were out, there was still somebody home.

One of the most poignant examples of this was when the rehabilitation nurse came to visit him one day. He sat there in his wheelchair, silent, not moving, not really responding to her at all.

“He’s not doing very well today, is he?” she said.

“Oh no? Listen to this,” I said. “Pray for her Dad. She needs you to pray

for her.” And off he went, praying to beat the band. It was just who he was and what he was all about.

There was the day some musicians came to the home and started playing “The Star Spangled Banner.” Dad, since the fall, had gotten to the point where he couldn’t hold his head up straight and could only stand with someone assisting him.

But sitting there in the wheelchair that day, looking like he was a million miles away, one woman was moved to tears when she looked over and saw my dad, my sweet Papa, rising to his feet, unassisted, that he might pay proper respect to our national anthem. That was my dad! That was my dad.

If I had to pick a favorite story about Dad in his final days, I think it would have to be this one: One Sunday my father’s great friend, Evangelist Cecil Todd, came to Tulsa to visit Dad, along with his wonderful wife Linda. They were kind to attend church with my mother and me that morning and then went to Sunday dinner with us at the cafeteria. Afterward we went to see Dad.

As always, he lit up when he saw my mother. Mother was everything to him and as we gathered round a table for conversation, my father could barely take his eyes off of her. He kept saying over and over again, “Isn’t she wonderful? Isn’t she beautiful? I just love her! I just love her so much!” He would lean over to kiss her repeatedly, making my mother nervous about the public display of affection.

But one could not help but be touched by the adoration on his terribly bruised and battered face. This being not too long after the biggest fall, the swelling was still pronounced, the cut still very visible. He looked like he had gone 20 rounds with Sonny Liston, but it was not pain that you saw on his face that day. It was love.

We decided to take a stroll down the aforementioned hallway, pushing dad in his wheelchair, and again we sang as we made our way past the peacocks, chickens and rabbits they had running loose in their windowed courtyards.

As I told you, it was a Christian facility and had its own little church with a stained-glass area for conversation and a chapel with an altar and a large wooden cross hanging over it. Dad liked to go there and just sit with Mom. Sometimes she would play hymns for him on the piano.

But this day was extraordinary. As we parked his wheelchair in the center aisle by the last row of seats, suddenly like out of some wonderful old movie or, better still, like something out of the Bible, my father, weak, unsteady and broken as he was, pulled himself out of that chair and began to walk down the aisle toward the altar. He knew he was in the house of the Lord and this was where he belonged. I was behind him with the wheelchair I’d been pushing, but Cecil and Mom rushed to his side to make certain he didn’t fall.

Slowly, deliberately, each step an eternity, on feet so swollen he could no longer wear shoes, my father struggled valiantly to make his way to that altar. When he finally arrived there, in the shadow of that great wooden cross above him, my father spread out his hands and arms upon that altar, placing them flat upon the white stone surface and there he laid his head down upon the altar.

There he stood, frozen in time, with all his heart and all his faith and all his conviction fully on display. One could not have been witness to such a thing and not known that God was in the tabernacle.

Linda Todd stepped back toward me, her eyes brimming over with tears, as I, too, began to cry. This was a man of God! As Cecil Todd led us in a closing prayer, we all knew that my father had assumed the pulpit that Sunday for one last time, and preached us a sermon that went far beyond words and reached the supernal. He showed us the things that matter...he showed us the things that remain.

On Thanksgiving Day, I went to see my dad with my three sisters. All four

of us had never had the opportunity to go at the same time and it was terrific to see how pleased he was that we were there.

He was sitting out in the common area in the big recliner he had sat in at the house to watch Fox News Channel, Trinity Broadcast Network, Gaither tapes and Christmas Eve broadcasts from the Log Chapel.

You could tell he was in some discomfort and was obviously tired and would slip in and out of sleep, but every time he woke up he would express his joy in seeing us there gathered around him.

He was shaking badly now, but as soon as he would doze off it would stop. It was hard to see him this way, but we did our best to put on happy faces. We shared our Thanksgiving prayers.

Eventually the girls had to leave to go prepare Thanksgiving meals, but having come in a separate car, and not being much of a cook, I remained behind with Dad for an extra hour.

I hated to see him fighting to stay awake and knew the shaking would stop if he could just sleep, so I said, “Hey, Dad! Why don’t we just take a nap?”

“Okay! Let’s do!” he said and fell into a nice deep peaceful sleep. After an hour, he was still resting soundly, so I kissed him on his forehead and went on my way.

The next afternoon I returned with my mother and my wife. He was not doing well now and was shaking severely, lying in bed. The attendants tried to get him up and put him in a wheelchair for a visit, but it was just too painful to see him trying to sit up straight, so we put him back in his bed.

He seemed extremely warm to me and so while Mother sought to soothe him, I got a cold washcloth and placed it on his forehead.

I had brought the December Christmas issue of *Christian Crusade Newspaper*. He had not yet seen it and we had filled it with full-color reproductions of the religious master paintings my father adored and once had collected. I held the paper before his face and said, “Look Dad! Look Dad!” – hoping against hope that it might offer him some diversion from his pain. For just an

instant, I think he tried to take it in, but then just couldn’t. It was the first and only time in over 60 years of publishing that my father was unable to experience the satisfaction of a new issue, hot off the press. I feel so badly now. If only I had thought to bring it the day before, but now it was too late.

My father was engaged in the sort of struggle an unborn child must experience as it travels down the birth canal toward the light of a new life. Though we did not know it at the time, he was, in fact, saying his final farewells as he surrendered all earthly care.

We had, all three of us, stepped out into the common area as several of those on duty attended to him. One nurse, the kindest of them, a sweet young Christian of Vietnamese heritage named Goldria, had experienced a renewal of faith, inspired by what she had seen in my father’s loving spirit. She came out and beckoned me in. Dad had asked for

me and for his children. I went back to him and saw his hurt. What could I do? I could think of only one thing. I sang for him.

I had sung for him all my life. From the age of two, he had put me on the radio and I had sung for him. At age five, I began to spend my summers with him out on the road traveling from city to city, dressed in my little suit and put in front of thousands to sing for my father. On record albums, in church services, on choir tours and on national television, this is how I had lived my life – singing for my father. And now, as I saw my hero of heroes lying there writhing in pain, what else could I do but sing to him softly...slowly...

“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,



Singing for my father at the Christian Crusade national convention in Los Angeles, California, August 1965

Was blind, but now I see.”

Verse by verse I sang it to him by memory. I sang it to him from my heart. I sang it to him with all the love that I had learned from observing him... studying him... revering him. Prayerfully I sang until, finally, I reached the last verse of the last song my father would ever hear me, or any other human voice express...

“When we’ve been there ten thousand years
Bright shining as the sun.
We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise
Than when we first begun.”

Already, I feel my father was hearing less and less of me and more and more of a far sweeter, finer descant than he or I could ever dream. But before he surrendered to it, he wanted to see my mother. His wife. His love. His treasure. She whose price had proven itself “far above rubies.”

It was at the Sciotoville Church of Christ in Sciotoville, Ohio, that a young Christian Church evangelist from Sapulpa, Oklahoma, had met the young Miss Secrest who played the organ for the revival he was conducting there. It was in that same church where he took her hand in marriage, to have and to hold, till death they did part.

And now, at the St. Simeon’s care facility, some 52 years later, that same preacher reached out one last time for the hand that for so long had provided him with the comfort and assurance he now so desperately needed. He reached out and she was there, just as she always had been.

My father must have done something right or why else would God have given him such a prize?

I left my parents alone. She was the medicine he needed. Shaking violently, he clung to her hand tightly... tightly! He needed her strength. He needed her calm. I left them there for an hour and fifteen minutes. When I returned, my

mother was still sitting there on the edge of the bed, still holding fast to his now resting hand. His shaking had stopped and a deep, tranquilizing sleep had overtaken him. Still she sat there, no mind for her own comfort. She sat there with a hand cramped with arthritis and having been too long in one position, but which she would not move for fear of disturbing his slumber.

With great care and difficulty she gained her release from his grasp and then grimaced with pain as she attempted to rise. Meanwhile, I once more tip-toed over to kiss him on his forehead, never once thinking that this might be the last time I would see him alive.

It had not been a good night, for sure, but there had been other episodes and no one was suggesting to us that he might be near the end. Had they suspected that, I’m sure they would have told us, called a doctor or moved him to an area of more extensive care. There was no hint of that though, and little wonder.

Even as he had struggled that night, every time a nurse came into the room, he would raise himself up just a little bit and offer up a painfully cheerful “Hey, there” and then fall back exhausted by the effort. But make the effort he did, unfailingly. Even as he carried on his darkest and grimmest battle, his final defense, my father’s instincts to be kind and spread God’s love, never abandoned him. His witness, unassailable!

That night, I could not sleep. At 3:40 a.m., I walked down the hall of my parents’ home thinking that I should not leave the following Wednesday, as had been my plan. I knew Dad could not carry on this way. His heart was too weak and this was far beyond anything I had witnessed from him in the past.

I talked to God. I said, “Lord, should I go to him and whisper to him to let go and not to fight it anymore?” I had never had cause to think such a thought before. I had

heard of it being done though, and if there was a time when such a thing was appropriate, I felt this was certainly it. As much as I wanted to continue being



To have and to hold, in sickness and in health, December 21, 1951

HEAR BILLY JAMES HARGIS!

*In A Great
CHRIST-CENTERED REVIVAL!*

**Challenging Messages by One of America’s
Leading Young Evangelists!**

**Inspiring Music That Leads Beside Still
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Each Night at 7:30 Beginning OCTOBER 3, 1950

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Portsmouth, Ohio

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Nationally Famous Preacher; Editor of National Magazine, “Christian Echoes”; Speaker on Network Broadcast, “Christian Echoes Hour”; Pastor, First Christian Church, Sapulpa, Oklahoma



with him... as much as I relied on him, needed him, depended on him ... the time had come to let him go. I loved him too much to do otherwise.

I finally went to sleep.
“Bill. Bill.”
“Yes?”

It was my mother. I could see her silhouette in the dark as she opened the door to the room.

“He’s gone, Bill.”
“What?”

“Your father’s gone.”
She came over and sat down next to me on the side of the bed and I stroked her back and held her close as she softly cried in the dark, though I myself could scarcely take it in.

He had died in his sleep at 5:45 that morning, just 30 minutes before and the nurse had called and awakened my mother with the news.

Sitting there, as broken-hearted as we were, I must tell you there was peace of mind as well, and the tears of joy far surpassed those of sorrow.

No more pain. No more pain. He had hurt enough. God in His infinite wisdom had taken my father Home at just the right time.

The Alzheimer’s had allowed us the opportunity to say a long goodbye to our husband and father. We had been afforded the chance to appreciate him, to savor him and to love on him. It also gave us time to prepare for this very hour. To be separated from this titan, our patriarch, would be a challenge even under these circumstances, but I would hate to think of the battle it would have been without them.

In the end, it was mercy. God was good, as always, and Dad was proven right, yet again, that all things really do work together for the best.

One by one, my mother called my sisters and they began to arrive at the house, hugging, crying.

A call from St. Simeon’s told us that he was still there, if we felt the need to come and see him before the funeral home arrived. Though somewhat apprehensive, I felt it important I go.

The best friend I ever had was an older woman of Irish descent, that worked for me at the Christian radio station I managed. If a close friend died, she would sit with the body the entire night before the funeral out of respect for the deceased and in keeping with the spirit of the traditional Irish “wake.”

This was my father. I did not want him lying alone in that room. I wanted to be with him. Nervous as I was over how I might find him, my brother-in-law, Jack Frank, drove me over to the home.

I need not have been so anxious. As I went into the room, I saw him lying there in the bed, under the covers, with his red plaid flannel pajamas on, his hands resting on his chest.

He looked so calm, so untroubled. I kissed him and then I took a seat beside him and as I stroked his hands, had 45 or 50 minutes alone with him to tell him how I felt.

I know he wasn’t there anymore, but what if he was? What if God allows their spirit to linger long enough to see how we love them and grieve for them? Even the off chance of it was cause enough for me to speak my words aloud and know, that if truly he were present in some way, that he would be able to comprehend fully, for the first time in a long time, how much this boy loved him.

For his part, he looked as if he was sleeping. In fact, I looked several times at his chest just to make certain he wasn’t breathing. It made it easy to sit there with him, sharing my heart and a lifetime of memories.

I sang to him, too. “Will The Circle Be Unbroken.” Only this time, there would be no harmony and no keeping of the rhythm. Only quiet. Only peace. My father was otherwise engaged. He had an appointment to keep with a heavenly choir, and he was being counted on for a high baritone with all the words.

I returned home and shared with my family how beautiful he was to behold, and not to be afraid. After a while, I went back to the bedroom and sat down on the bed. I looked over at the chair and on it was sitting upright *Christian Crusade Newspaper* I had held up for him to see the night before. I read the words on the cover and my heart leaped in recognition.

“And lo, an angel of the Lord!” Yes, yes, oh yes! That was it, exactly!

The next few days were consumed with telephone calls and condolences. There were friends to be notified and arrangements to be made.

And there was the press. They may have gotten the story wrong as usual, but at least they remembered to spell his name right. And at least they did remember.

Recently a book came out by Richard Viguerie, purporting to give a history of the religious right in America. Viguerie, considered the king of conservative fund-raising and direct mail, had done very well for himself during the 1970’s in a close association with my father.

Now, however, at least judging by his book, he cannot seem to recall who my father was, as there is no mention of him or Christian Crusade anywhere in his book. Many less well-known figures are recalled, but the contributions of my father have been expunged from his record. This from a man who called himself my father’s friend and whose empire profited greatly from his work with Billy James Hargis.

It brings to mind my father’s comment to Tom Snyder during his interview on “The Tomorrow Show.” “Christians are the only army that shoot their wounded,” he said, and Viguerie’s omission only confirms it.

Meanwhile, the world media had no trouble recalling who Billy James Hargis was, or what he had accomplished, as substantial pieces appeared in nearly every great city newspaper in the country, many with photographs.

National magazines covered my father’s death. Television covered it, both locally and nationally. National Public Radio. The Associated Press. The British Broadcasting Company. Radio Free Europe. A name search on the Internet produced thousands upon thousands of media references to my father’s death, more than could possibly be explored. Someone told me they had seen where it was covered in as obscure a place as the Middle Eastern country of Oman.

Fair weather friends aside, my father was still remembered.

The *New York Times* called first. Nice sized article, section one. Not bad for a kid that had started off with so little prospects. Called him an “arm-waving, 270-pound elemental force whom Oklahomans called a ‘bawl and jump preacher.” “Bawl and jump preacher?” What the heck was that all about? I’ve spent the better part of my life in Oklahoma and all of it in the church. I have never, in all my 50 years, ever heard someone in Oklahoma, or anywhere, use such an expression. What’s more, and believe me, I’ve asked around since seeing this – I

don’t know anybody who has heard this description. *Nobody!*

Furthermore, even if I had, it doesn’t even suit my dad. He may have “bawled” as in “yell,” but I’ll be hanged if I ever saw him “jump.” Not once! It just wasn’t his style and yet they just about opened up the story with this claptrap. What utter nonsense. The “newspaper of record,” indeed!

Yet newspapers everywhere followed their lead. A lot of well-written stories, and some not so well written. Over and over again most all of them talked about him being what “Oklahomans call a ‘bawl and jump preacher”

When *Time* magazine came out with their obituary on him, a week later, there it was again, only now he was a “bawl and jump televangelist.”

Poor dad. He died not knowing what he was ... but then the press never really took the time to know *who* he was or what he meant to this world, either. It came out at the funeral though.



Mom and Dad with her parents Jesse and Jacintha Secrest



It was only fitting that, with understated charm, my uncle, my father's associate-evangelist and former president of Christian Crusade, Dr. Charles Secrest, presided over the service. With wit and warmth and tears, Uncle Charles recollected beautifully life with his friend and confidant, both on the road and overseas.

My nephew, Brenda's son, Robbie Davis, brought unbelievable passion and spirit to his recollection of his grandfather. We have included the text of it here in the paper, but to read it pales in comparison to actually having been there to hear it. His blazing delivery and evident heart brought great credit to his parents and, of course, to his grandfather, who would have been so proud.

We were blessed beyond all measure by the presence of Carl Teel as one of our guest speakers. Carl, like my father, hails from Texarkana, from the Christian Church, and was one of my father's ministerial students at American Christian College. His personal remembrances and reflections fleshed out even further the man who was Billy James Hargis and sent our spirits soaring toward the heavens.

Rounding out the quartet of speakers was a man who had never failed to remember my father over the years, constantly calling him to offer up some words of encouragement, Rev. Cecil Todd. How deeply honored we were to have him behind the pulpit (the very pulpit that Dad had preached his very first sermon on well over 60 years ago at the Rosehill Christian Church of Texarkana, Texas). Cecil shared with us Dad's influence on his having entered the ministry, the bond they shared as fellow "preacher boys" under the influence of Brother A.B. McReynolds, and the loving support my father had shown for him over the years. He thrilled and transported us with oratory on a grand scale, describing my father's life, influence and achievements. With intensity and fire, he did my father proud!

Working in tandem and complimented by the reading of scriptures by each of my father's granddaughters, these four fine men were able to paint a magnificent portrait of the man my father was. From the bold, broad strokes of monumental accomplishment to the subtle nuance of the smallest gesture of kindness, my father was well represented on this day of remembrance.

Likewise did I attempt to represent him on this most important of days, with tribute in song.

The night before I had tried to rehearse the songs, but to no avail. I could not sing a line, could not even look at the words to be sung without dissolving into tears. I've sung for hundreds of funerals but none of it had prepared me for this experience. I honestly did not see how I could sing a note without falling to pieces. The emotion was too great ... the sentiment too strong ... the music too achingly rich ... the lyrics cutting too close to my breaking heart.

I prayed for God to get me through it. I wanted it to be right for Dad. God

answered my prayers. I surrendered not to tears but to celebration as I sang out with joyful abandon, "How Great Thou Art." "It Is Well With My Soul" and, of course, "God Bless You, Go With God."

As we left the church, we were surrounded by so many loved ones from the past. Former employees, former friends, former church members, and former students from the college. We were blest to see them all, though the time spent with each was too painfully short as the press of the crowd was too strong.

It was a celebration though, for a life well lived. I only wish he could have seen it. I know how pleased he would have been.

The hour was getting late, however, and the service had run long. Now it was time to go to the graveside for the committal.

All my father's grandsons served as pallbearers, from the smallest to the tallest. They were joined by a young man who is about to marry the first of my father's many grandchildren.

A nephew (the son of Charles Secrest), the son of Dr. Philip Joseph (a Lebanese doctor who had been my father's friend, personal physician and had delivered into the world all my father's children, myself included) and a Palestinian Arab, who my father had brought from Jerusalem many years ago, to attend American Christian College and whose loyalty and friendship has been an inspiration to this family.

So here we were, at long last, at Memorial Park Cemetery. The plots had been purchased decades ago. My father was pleased that they had asked him to be buried there among the city's fathers.

A few years ago, he and my mother had pre-chosen the monument they

wanted. A year or so later, driving through the cemetery to visit the grave of my baby brother, they were astonished to discover the monument already in place.

They got out of the car and all they could do was laugh, it seemed so strange to see the big "Hargis" name already inscribed into the large marble slab. They were very pleased, though. In addition to the main monument, they had benches placed on either side of it.

The one on the left engraved with his salutation and guiding principle that "Jesus Christ is still the hope of the world"! The one on the right quoting his favorite Bible verse, Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." Their shared headstone (now in place as of this writing) would read "God and Country."

With the stately monument resting confidently

under a shade tree, my father loved to drive by and look at it. I think it gave him great comfort to know where his body would one day lie, though greater still was the comfort that came from knowing he would spend eternity in heaven. And I know he will, too.



Dad on the front porch of his parents' home in Texarkana, 1974



Longing for home: Dr. Hargis at his parents' graves Thanksgiving 2003

That's why I had sung "It Is Well With My Soul." Not just for those of us who mourned and grieved, but for him, also. It was well with his soul!

I had seen it in him, when all his defenses were down. While others suffering from his same disease turned mean and surly, my father was the living embodiment of the old hymn that says, "Everyday With Jesus Is Sweeter Than The Day Before."

As I stood there by the grave that day, my son, Billy James Hargis III, came up and stood next to me. We found ourselves between two men.

The first told the story of how my father had called him back in 1973, when the man was out of a job, and asked him to come to work for him finding homes for orphans from overseas. The result of that call? Fifty thousand orphans adopted by American families and another 10,000 overseas. Sixty thousand orphaned children, just like my dad had been, given loving homes, families and a new life.

The fellow on the other side was from Malaysia and had studied for the ministry under my father at American Christian College.

He had proven himself a loving and faithful friend toward Dad over the years, never failing to show my father respect or to express his gratitude.

He now pastors a thriving and influential church in the Tulsa suburb of Broken Arrow. I asked him how things were going.

He shared with me and my son, how he had baptized 11 new Christians that preceding Sunday. Imagine that! Eleven new souls for Christ in *one* day from *one* man whose life my father touched!

The grandkids never saw Dad in his "heyday." They just loved him for the

kindly old grandfather he was to them. Sometimes, it was easy for even his own kids to forget the colossus he had been as he strode across the world stage. Of course, most sadly of all, the day came when he himself could no longer recall what God had done through him.

But this day was a day of reminder and of remembering.

As that service had ended and these two men spoke to us of the continuing reverberations of the ministry of Billy James Hargis, I turned to my son, who like me is his namesake, and said, "Now you know who your grandfather really was! And you bear his name! You can be so proud!"

The day had been cold, overcast. There had even been snow flurries and rain was forecast, but what could we do?

The service was scheduled and announced – rain or no rain – we had to go through with the Tuesday afternoon service. But though the day had been gray and dreary, as we gathered around the grave and under the canopy that had been erected, thankfully there had been no rain.

It was nearing five o'clock. What little light there was, was fading away. I began to sing that song again – the song I had sung to him that last night as he lay there dying. "Amazing Grace, How Sweet The Sound..." Those in attendance, one by one, began to sing with me. People began to weep. The realization of why we were there and what we were doing was setting in.

Suddenly – miraculously – a beam of light pierced through the darkened sky. From the vantage point of those seated, luminous, radiant, incandescent



Dad on the front porch of his parents' home in Texarkana, 1974



Mom and Dad with Sapulpa friends, the late Harold Anguish and his wife, Dimple



Dad with longtime friend, singer and former evangelist, the great G.P. Comer



The loving grandfather in his big chair with precious grandson B.J.



Billy James Hargis I, II and III celebrate Pa-Paw's birthday, summer 2004

light began to pour into the area just above where my father lay.

The skies opened up. The clouds rolled back and a spectacular, brilliant and blazing sun majestically appeared upon the horizon, enveloping every one of them in the dazzling, golden, iridescent light of God's love. And we sang. My, how we sang!

"When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun.
We've no less days to sing
God's praise
Than when we first begun."

That's the promise, my friend,
that's the reality.

My father has gone home to be
with God. He arrives there free
... forgiven ... and unforgotten.

My poor, sweet, tired, innocent father went to sleep that night, still the little lost orphan boy from Texarkana.

But while he was sleeping, his Father came and lifted him from his bed and, accompanied by angels, carried him to his brand new home.

All the brothers and sisters he never had in life ... well, he had them now. For everyone there was a child of the King. They were all there waiting on him – real excited, too.

There, big as life, was Charlie Pile and Harvey Ward ... Dr. Joseph and J.L. Brown. Dr.



Longing for home: Dr. Hargis at his parents' graves Thanksgiving 2003

McIntire was there. Pete White. Bill Sampson. General Walker and General Moran were there to salute him. Harold Anguish came down, too. So did Les Dunnivant and ol' Cliff Kyser. Brother Mac was there in his cowboy hat and G.P. Comer? Man, you could hear him singin' "How Great Thou Art" from clear across the pearly gates. But best of all, sittin' there on the front porch swing were his proud parents. Jimmie Earsel and Laura Lucille, crippling arthritis gone and with the smell of fried chicken and tater's wafting generously in the air.

It was a big night with lots of joy and laughter. Jesus Himself was there, no longer the unseen guest at every table. He was right there at the head of it, and was overheard to say as He placed a crown upon my father's head with enough stars to light the heavens, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!"

Maybe Dad's critics were right – maybe he wasn't a saint. But he is now, dear friend. He most certainly is now!

God bless you, my sweet father.

God bless you and go with God!



Billy James Hargis before his graveside monument, summer of 2004.