

GOD'S CHILD AND CHRIST'S AMBASSADOR

You grew up Buddhist and were even ordained a monk. When did you become a Christian? After meeting Martha in 1977, I've spent more time with her in a Presbyterian church than in a Buddhist temple. In New York, I attended the Episcopal Church noon eucharist one day when Archbishop Runcie of Canterbury officiated. I knelt and opened my hands; he paused a moment trying to read the writings (my to-do list) on my palms, probably thinking it was a message for him, but couldn't do it upside down. Martha and I worshipped at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian. In Washington we attended National Presbyterian where Martha became a member. Since moving to San Antonio in 2006, it has been First Presbyterian, a beautiful 175 years old church downtown. I was baptized there by Ron Scates and Scott Simpson on 4 December 2016, ten days before Martha lifted off to be in Heaven with the Lord. Scott helped me navigate through my deep grief. I thought I had seen enough tragedies (my mother, sister, brother, their spouses and children--15 altogether--were killed by the Khmer Rouge), and Martha's loss was the worst. I read the Bible in three weeks, listened to it in French and Spanish, joined Men's Prayer Breakfast, attended church every Sunday. In 2017 I went to the Holy Land with Ron. In 2018 I built a school in Yucatán and addressed *San Pablo* Seminary in Mérida, and *Puerta del Cielo* and *Emanuel* Presbyterian churches in Cozumel. An elder asked what sustained me during my three-day run through the jungle. I said that my mother told me, "Never give up hope;" there must be some divine intervention that kept me alive. He said God probably wanted me to be a Buddhist first before becoming a Christian: God knew me since time began. The presentation was aptly entitled "*De la Tierra al Cielo*" (From Earth to Heaven). So, I may be a new kid in town, but I have been around the block for a long time.

After Martha's departure, you have served the Lord in Mexico, Lebanon, Iraq, Guatemala, Turkey, Jordan, Indonesia, Germany, France, Paraguay, Argentina, Costa Rica, mostly developing countries; you came to Europe. What did you do in Germany? I went to visit my dear friends Christa and Dieter Wilke who found me an excellent teacher to help me refresh my German in a wonderful intensive program. We spent weekends visiting churches, castles, cathedrals, museums. Trier: Constantine; Aachen: Charlemagne; Mainz: Gutenberg, where I was invited to print a page of the Gutenberg Bible; Frankfurt: Goethe; Cologne: *Sankt Petrus* Cathedral, *Maria im Kapitol* Church. The high point was Wittenberg. We stayed at a special place, earlier guests included Carl XII (1707) and Peter the Great (1711), across from *Schlosskirche* (All Saints' Church) where Luther displayed his 95 Theses on the main door (31 October 1517); his tomb is there. About 3 AM, from my window I saw an incredible full moon descending on the Church making the famous Door clearly visible. To think it was the same moon Jesus, Shakespeare, von Steuben, Washington, Lincoln saw was so surreal. On Reformation Day 2019 I presented the Gutenberg Bible Page and a copy of Luther's 95 Theses in Latin from All Saints to our Senior Pastor Bob Fuller.

In Golden Bones Chapter 11, your first day in America 4 June 1976, you described your fascination with 18 wheelers, fancied becoming a driver. What did you do on 4 June? I woke up at 3:30 AM at a truck stop in Natalia, Texas. Clint and I had come from Laredo at the border of Mexico. After saying our prayers, I took the wheel again and we left for Sulphur Springs, Texas. The light traffic before sunrise let me reflect briefly on the previous evening when a Mustang cut in front of me. I don't know why he couldn't wait for a few seconds for me to pass the exit ramp so he could properly leave the freeway. Maybe he rushed to the restroom or just wanted to show off his fast and furious machine. Accident, he would not make it anywhere. Hasta la vista baby!

Never cut in front of an 18-wheeler truck. Weighing 80,000 pounds (36,300 kilos) going at 65 mph (105 kph), it takes at least 525 feet (160 meters) to stop. I'd rather be in *Amarillo by Morning* than not there at all. Clint built his company from zero to some 80 trucks. He has driven two million miles. Most importantly, he is well versed in the Bible. That day we listened to Ravi Zacharias whose hometown of Madras (now Chennai) I visited in 1992 while in the Bush 41 Administration; I paid my respects to Saint Thomas at his tomb at the striking Saint Thomas Basilica, a Catholic church in a Hindu state. We picked up a load of some 300,000 eggs in Brashear, Texas, turned around for San Antonio and Flatonia, Texas. You have to be egg-xtra careful with eggs! A Mustang driver gave me a thumb up before passing me. She could be one of those who recognized that everything in our livelihood from cradle to coffin, including food, clothing, shelter, has been delivered by a trucker: an important 24-7-365 profession. In one day, I saw both Satan and Angel driving the same car.

15 June 2020, midpoint between your two 4s: 4 June your freedom day and 4 July which you described your emotions at America's Bicentennial in a 1996 opinion piece in the International Herald Tribune. Today, what's one thing you are thankful for, and one thing you are hopeful for? What's a good day for you? I'm thankful for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you. I'm hopeful that my message of service to others is well received. A good day is when I can bring smile to five people or more, and learn something new.

What are you reading? Some of your favorite verses? Ron Scates and I are reading *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Our Bible study group, led by Bob Fuller, we read "Acts." For 2020, my *Texas Literary Society* book club recommended: *Golden Bones, Inside the Hot Zone, The Train to Crystal City, Big Wonderful Thing*. I wrote the first one as you know, spoke at our Society dinner about the Memoir and American Dream. Separately, I read Zacharias' *Jesus Among Secular Gods*; Eric Metaxas' *Martin Luther*; David Rubenstein's *The American Story*, and *Fouquet*. The last one is a French book about Louis XIV's finance minister who built the exquisite *Vaux-le-Vicomte*, precursor to *Versailles*. He was quickly arrested after his chateau completion in 1661; exiled, he died two decades later: Don't get ahead of the king! Favorite verses? Difficult to answer: Matthew 25:35 "I was a stranger and you took me in;" 1 Corinthians 8:2 "Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know;" 1 Co 13:8 "Love never ends;" Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Him who gives me strength;" Matthew 25:21 "Well done, good and faithful servant."

What are your favorite three words? Who would be three persons in history, if you could invite them to dinner? Only In America, God Bless You, I Love You, Duty Honor Country, Faith Family Friends. Dinner guests: Jesus, Luther, Washington.

What's one word that best described you? "Adaptable" until 2014 when a fourth grader in Virginia asked me that question; she answered it for me, "Hopeful."

How are you going to celebrate your next birthday? I am hesitant to speak about the future. Martha and I agreed that *a trip does not take place until you get home safely*. Billy Graham once recalled: "A full moon night I'll never forget! It seems to me that the Spirit of God just came into my heart in a tremendous surge of power that I knelt down right there and I said: Lord, I'll be what you want me to be and I'll do what you want me to do." So, I'll be there where the Lord sends me. Meanwhile, I am grateful to be **God's Child and Christ's Ambassador**.

Amen!