

# **A Life Rooted in Faith: The Journey of a Teacher and Believer**

**Naomi (Williams) Nickerson**

I was born in Ferndale, Michigan to Theodore and Eunice Williams in 1932. At that time, we were a family of five (Theodore Jr., Ruth, Hiram, Arthur Curtis and Naomi.)

## **Living Above the Meeting Room: A Special Dwelling**

My earliest recollection was living in a building my father and grandfather, with the help of many other believers, were able to construct. I was about four or five years old, but I knew something was different about our dwelling. We lived in a four-bedroom apartment above the meeting room where believers were "gathered to His Name." My father had relinquished his position as a pastor in the Baptist Church because he was not permitted to preach the 'Truth' as it was revealed to him in the Scriptures.

## **Order and Generosity Amid the Great Depression**

At this young age, I began to realize that my family was special in many ways. The Bible was read to us after dinner daily. Times were very difficult in our small community because we were going through the Great Depression. Our dinner hour was 5:00 PM. This time was very important and strictly adhered to as our home was one of order and consistency. All my siblings made sure they were on time for the evening meal. I remember strangers coming to our house for food during this time. We knew if you were not present at the dinner table your food would be given to the people in need.

## **A Gift for Music and the Joy of Hymns**

When I was in first grade, a lady came to my elementary school and offered free piano lessons. My maternal grandmother had moved in with us and brought along her prized piano. I developed a real love for music and spent many hours practicing in our cold, unheated living room. The love of singing became the special focus in our family. We love to gather and sing the old hymns. We sang all 1000 songs in the old Red Redemption Hymn Book and then sang every hymn in the Believers Hymn Book. To this day, I cherish those times that brought us great joy as a family.

## **A Personal Encounter with Salvation: November 1941**

In November of 1941, my father was reading the Bible with us after dinner. I had always known that I needed to be saved. However, for the first time in my life, I realized I was a Sinner. I knew where I was going if I rejected the Saviour. The Lord was speaking to me through His Word. I was so overwhelmed I could no longer sit at the table. I knew He was speaking directly to me. I got up and left the table. My family continued the Bible reading without me. No one at the table spoke to me. I went to my bedroom and accepted Christ as my personal Saviour. I told my father I had gotten saved. He gave me his standard response, "I'll see." I knew what he meant — he would be looking for a change in me. At 13 years of age, I was baptized and received into assembly fellowship. It was one of the happiest days of my life. I knew it was unusual to be received into the assembly at such a tender age and I will cherish this memory forever.

## **A Move to Chicago: An Oasis in the Desert**

My family moved from Ferndale, MI, to Chicago in 1946 to help out the small assembly gathered there. We moved to the South side of the city and our home became a little "Oasis in the Desert." My dear mother loved getting ready for the preachers. Every curtain in the house was washed, floors scrubbed and hot meals prepared. It was a glorious time for my mother.

### **Faith Through Hardship: Gospel Meetings and Homework by Candlelight**

In those days, we had many gospel meetings. I was in attendance at all the meetings, and I always helped with the coffee and tea afterwards. My father stayed up with me while I completed my homework assignments. Many times, we were up all night. I paid a heavy price to obtain an education. There were times when I went to school hungry. Sometimes, there was only carfare to school but none to return. But I've seen the hand of God supply my needs just when I needed it. In our family, we learned to trust an unchanging God.

### **Invisible Students: High School on the South Side**

I entered high school in the fall of 1946. It was the first time people of colour were allowed to attend this school. This proved to be the most difficult time of my life. However, we were prepared in advance for what awaited us. My father instilled in us, "*You are not better than anyone, but you are just as good.*" I can hear my father say this as if it were yesterday.

So off to school, I went. Four thousand of them and 25 of us. We became the invisible students. We were ignored, ostracized and dismissed as unworthy. This experience left me with scars that have not healed to this day.

### **Determined to Succeed: Lessons at Teachers' College**

At Chicago's Teachers' College, I spent four years enduring the same treatment. The only difference was that we were scheduled into classes with little or no contact with other students of colour. This arrangement took away much-needed support. This experience taught me to remember why I was there, and that nothing was going to prevent me from reaching my goal. I was sustained by loving and caring parents who always stressed the importance of education. It is something that no one can take away from you.

### **A Calling Fulfilled: A Life in Education**

From an early age, I knew I wanted to become a teacher. What I didn't know was that I would spend 38 years of my life deeply involved with thousands of children, from teaching to being the administrator of a *Head Start Program* for the City of Chicago to becoming a school principal. All of these opportunities came from His loving hands. My parents supported me as I pursued further education, helping me earn my Master's and Doctoral degrees. I learned what it meant to have a godly mother and father

### **A Blessed Partnership: Meeting Melvin**

In June of 1959, a young man by the name of Melvin Nickerson moved to Chicago from Cleveland, OH, seeking better job opportunities. One day, he invited me to go to the Bible bookstore to get Sunday school supplies. That August, he asked me to be his wife. We were married on January the 9th, 1960. Sixty-three years later I can say it was one of the best decisions I ever made in my life. The Lord gave me a life partner who is loving and kind and who loves the Lord with all his heart. He is an ardent student of the Word of God and is beyond

generous and deeply caring. What a blessing! The Lord blessed us with three loving children who love and serve our Lord and Saviour. Our four grandchildren are the added blessing.

### **The Legacy of Theodore F. Williams, Sr.**

I attempted to share some of the events in my life that are important to me. Now comes the hard part. When asked to tell a little about what it was like growing up in our family, I immediately thought: what would Dad want me to say? I had the joy of caring for my father for the last six months before his passing. We spent this time reminiscing as the letters and phone calls to him diminished. As we talked, he expressed disappointment with believers who professed *to know* the Truth yet failed *to live* the Truth as Christ commands us to love one another as Christ loves us. Instead, Caucasian believers in the United States have historically and continued to not respond to the ungodly mistreatment of African Americans from the days of Jim Crow until now.

Thankfully, our God is a God of Justice.

**Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.**

[Psalms 89:14 ESV](#)

**Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.** Psalms 82:3  
ESV

**Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.**

Isaiah 1:17 ESV

**He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?** Micah 6:8 ESV

I am sure that my father would want me to remind his fellow believers that all will be held accountable in that Coming Day. This I leave with you as one who knew and loved Theodore F Williams, SR.