

A LIVING NATIVITY PAGEANT NIGHT TO REMEMBER

In 1963, Mountain Brook Baptist Church began the annual presentation in the church parking lot of a Living Nativity pageant with live animals. It was performed for four nights before Christmas and ended Christmas Eve. Dr. Dotson M. Nelson Jr, our minister, provided a taped vocal narration through a loudspeaker mounted on the church roof and the Junior Deacons (later called Associate Deacons) were assigned to various committees involved in presenting the pageant. Another Junior Deacon, Dr. Joel Goldsby, and I were on the Live Animal Committee with the pastoral intern, the Rev. Bryant Strain. Our job was to go to three different locations in Shelby County to pick up a cow, a donkey, and three sheep.

After loading the cow into Joel's horse trailer we then went to pick up the donkey. As we drove down a narrow two-lane country road, another car coming toward us around a curve was partially in our lane. Joel had to steer sharply to the right and slam on the brakes to avoid a collision. The other car barely avoided hitting us and kept going, but the rear of the trailer had swung so far right that a wheel went in the ditch and we couldn't move. The cow was no doubt a little shook up, but remained upright throughout the event and was not injured. With help from another motorist, we got the trailer out of the ditch and proceeded onward to pick up the donkey with no problem.

We arrived next at the farm to load the three sheep and found that the owner had not kept them penned up as

planned, so the three of us began chasing the sheep around a fairly large meadow. At times it seemed pretty hopeless, but we finally got them loaded into the trailer and to the church.

When the pageant concluded on Christmas Eve, the animals were loaded in the trailer to be taken back to their owners that night, thus permitting the three of us to be at home with family all Christmas day. Joel couldn't get the trailer tail-lights to come on and we couldn't risk somebody running into us, so I volunteered to stand in the rear of the trailer holding a flashlight. It was a very cold 40 or 50 mile ride that Christmas Eve, and overall a Living Nativity experience I will never forget.

Jack Pfrimmer



Amy Hirsch and Mary and Eleanor Grace Splawn dressed up as angels in the 2017 Living Nativity.



Mary Lee Allen as Mary, the mother of the Jesus, in the 2014 Living Nativity.



DECEMBER 23, 2018

WE'VE A STORY TO TELL
75th Anniversary Memories of Mountain Brook Baptist Church

A HISTORIC BABY

A charter member's great-grandbaby was presented to Mountain Brook Baptist Church on November 11, 2018. In this historic family dedication ceremony, we met Abigail Emily Cribbs and her parents Joy Gowens Cribbs and Michael Cribbs II. Abigail wore the same dress her mother wore for her own Mountain Brook Baptist Church family dedication in 1984.

This is how Abigail came to be a fourth-generation, historic part of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. Perna and Sidney Armstrong had built a home and were raising their children on Cherry Street. They were attending the Mountain Brook Methodist Church, which met in the building now occupied by Steeple Arts Dance Studio. (The congregation later merged to help form Canterbury Methodist.) The Armstrongs' youngest child was born on February 23, 1943 and was named Billie Jo. Today, she is the longest-standing member of the Mountain Brook Baptist Church Sunday School.

When Baptists started to organize a church in 1944, Mrs. Perna Armstrong was very enthusiastic. She was among two dozen earliest charter members who agreed that Mountain Brook needed a Baptist church in addition to two Methodist churches already at work. For several weeks, the Baptists met for worship and planning in homes and at Crestline School. On April 25, 1944, Baptist ministers of Birmingham formally chartered the new church. Perna and her husband Sidney were listed on the roll of chartering members of Mountain

Brook Baptist Church. Sidney was serving as the initial treasurer for the preliminary group.

By the time of the final listing of charter members in September 1944, an "x" mark was placed beside Sidney's name. He declined to undergo baptism by immersion, which was necessary for membership and office-holding. Although not an official member, he remained a supporter of the new church. Perna Armstrong stayed on the charter list. She was the only charter member who came over from the Methodist church. She had apparently been immersed at an earlier time. She was thoroughly active in every way—especially with involvement of her young girls.

Billie Jo, and her older sisters Joyce, Joan, and Catherine were regulars in the Baptist Sunday School from the beginning. Billie Jo remembers the earliest church nursery and crowded little classrooms in the Jackson Avenue Chapel.



Mrs. Perna Armstrong, charter member.

In the 75 years of Mountain Brook Baptist Church, Billie Jo has never attended another church except when she was away at school. She was baptized in the Mountain Brook Baptist Church Chapel baptistry in 1955. Billie Jo fondly remembers her baptism. In those days, each person had to provide his or her own baptismal clothing. Perna Armstrong took care to make Billie Jo a beautiful white dress. She sewed four silver dollars into the hem, so that the dress would not float up in the water. Perna made another white dress, very pretty, for Billie Jo to change into after the baptism.

Billie Jo had problems with her vision. After she had exhausted the provisions local schools made for low-sighted children, her parents sent her to the Alabama School for the Blind in Talladega. After finishing there, she came back to Mountain Brook Baptist Church, where she would eventually teach music to our younger children in the Half Day Program.

When construction began for the Sanctuary in 1965, Perna Armstrong was one of five charter members remaining to participate in the groundbreaking.

In 1981, Billie Jo married Wayne Gowens. He was a Methodist but wanted to be a Baptist, and Billie Jo rededicated her life to Christ. She wanted to be re-baptized when her husband was immersed. Wayne became a Deacon. Their baby Waynett Joy was born in 1984—and soon won a regional contest for prettiest baby! Joy was baptized in 1991 and married Michael Cribbs on May 22, 2016.

In 1976, Sidney Armstrong was very sick with cancer. Billie Jo was trained as a nurse, and she took constant care of her father in his long suffering. Sidney expressed regret that he had never been immersed, so Billie and her mother called for the Baptist pastor, Dr. Dotson M. Nelson Jr. There on his sickbed, Mr. Armstrong received spiritual comfort as a Baptist. Mrs. Armstrong died in 1981, soon after Billie Jo and Wayne were married. The house on Cherry Street was sold, and now the Gowenses live in Trussville, along with the Cribbses and baby Abigail.



Baby Abigail Cribbs with Joy Gowens Cribbs, Michael Cribbs, Wayne Gowens, and Billie Jo Armstrong Gowens, a charter member of the Sunday School.