

## BILLY GRAHAM REACHED INTO MOUNTAIN BROOK BAPTIST CHURCH

Our church history has told about the leadership given by our pastor, Dotson Nelson, in bringing the Billy Graham Crusade to Birmingham in 1972. The story reminded me of how the Crusade impacted me personally, a member of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. I became one of 50 follow-up counselors.

Prior to the Crusade, I joined a community Bible study hosted in a private home and led by fellow Mountain Brook Baptist Church member Deveaux J. Robinson. We followed lessons written by the Billy Graham Association, using them in this study to prepare for the forthcoming Crusade.

My entire family attended the Crusade meetings at Legion Field. During one service, I felt the need to respond to the invitational call. In my heart, I rededicated my life to the Lord, handing Him the reins for guidance and leadership.

Following the Crusade, I was surprised to receive a letter inviting me to serve as a counselor for some of those who had walked forward in response to the invitation to decide for Christ. There was to be a Bible study in several weekly meetings for a small group. I received names and addresses of about 10 women. Surveying the addresses, I determined that all of them lived in another part of town and they might be African American.

I had no specific instructions about organizing this group, so I chose to make some telephone calls among those listed. The first woman seemed pleased that I called and was quite congenial. When I shared the information that we were just getting organized for the Bible study and had not yet determined a good place to meet, she suggested that she would be glad for the group to come to her home! I told her that was very kind and we certainly would like to consider her invitation as we sought to find a convenient place. This was where we later gathered with the assigned group for several weeks.

That experience was a favorable memory. I was the only white woman in the group. I thoroughly enjoyed getting to know the women and interacting with them. The bond of Christian love was present as we studied the Bible together, following lessons provided by the Graham Team.

One of the purposes of inviting Billy Graham to preach in Birmingham was to promote racial harmony. In my case and in the case of our church, that goal was certainly achieved.

*Elouise Williams*



*Elouise Williams with her husband, the late Harold Williams, and children Anna and Richard. Harold Williams was church moderator from 1980 to 2002 and was a Life Deacon. The family photo was made soon after the Graham Crusade.*



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## IN THIS VERY ROOM

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*“So I give you a new command: Love each other deeply and fully. Remember the ways that I have loved you, and demonstrate your love for others in those same ways. Everyone will know you as my followers if you demonstrate your love to others.” John 13:34-35*

One of the most heaven-sent days of my life came when my parents first brought me to this church. I was just an infant. They were faithful on my behalf and trusted that God would use those in my midst to nudge me closer to a relationship with Christ. And they held onto the blessed assurance that the fullness of God’s love would be poured out “in this very room.”

Every Sunday before Sunday School we would go to Britling’s for breakfast. My grandparents were there and all the rest of my cousins, but what I loved most was seeing my grandfather, John H. Holcomb Sr. (He was a key figure in establishing Mountain Brook Baptist Church.) I remember being carried in his arms. We called him Pa-Pa. He was joyful. He was very loving and told me Jesus loved me. Then he talked about Jesus, as if he were his friend. He could be my friend, too.

I saw hunger and joy for God when Pa-Pa made sure we picked out a Psalm to read before every meal.

I saw the generosity of God when Pa-Pa gave each of his 17 grandchildren a quarter to put in the offering plate while we sat with him and my grandmother.

I heard the tenderness of God’s love when he told my grandmother, “Good morning, Beautiful.”

I saw the unselfish love of God when he tied the sash on my dress.

I heard the love and redemption of God when I was hiding under the bed at the farm in fear, after hurting my cousin, and I heard Pa-Pa say, “Jesus loves you, Mary Hudson.”

I understood that God also lived at our church—an enormous place where my parents took me a lot. And He had a son named Jesus, who had forgiven me. As I was growing up, this church was growing up too. And I felt the love of God in the little brick church.

I felt the love and comfort of God there when I saw my mother get baptized and I laid my head on Ann Lee’s lap and she rubbed my back.

I felt the love of God when I got to count six pennies while my Sunday School friends and my teacher Betty Acton sang “Mary Has a Birthday” and I wore my red cowboy boots.

I felt the love and joy of God when, led by the Shaffers and the Crawfords, we sang together for our Children’s Christmas Program.

I felt the love of Jesus when I made my profession of faith. My cousin Nancy Holley Capacik and I accepted Christ at the same time. We cried because we were happy. And our friends embraced us and rejoiced with us. And God began to fill us up.

I realized the love of God when I learned it is more blessed to give than to receive.

I felt the love and acceptance of God when I forgot my lines in the youth play at church and my church family still clapped.

I experienced the love of God and the vibrancy of God’s story from Sally Lamar, Nan Adams, Tom Merrill, and Joyce Ratliff as they taught me more fully about Jesus during Sunday School.

I saw the heart and compassion of God’s love when we went with the Browns and the Brabstons to feed the homeless.

I felt the joy of God’s love when Mary Grace Nelson, my new friend, and I sat together and harmonized hymns at every Sunday night worship service. And our favorite was “There’s Within My Heart a Melody.” I saw the communion of God when we went on youth choir trips and shared the gospel and love of God. Lester Barker taught us how to praise God with song.

I saw the love and fellowship of God as 50 or 60 families gathered on Wednesday nights for prayer meeting with Dr. Nelson and we prayed for each other. And the Holy Spirit came.

I saw the unshakable tenacity of God’s love, when many times after getting discouraged, our church prayed for unity. And God held up our community—and helped us build a new Sanctuary.

I realized the power of God when we had our revivals and shared God’s love and mercy with others in our community. And we shared in our brokenness.

I felt the love of God when we visited the sick. And then, we were blessed when some of the sick we visited became part of our own family.

I saw the blessings of God when Harold and Elouise Williams and others welcomed my husband into our church family.

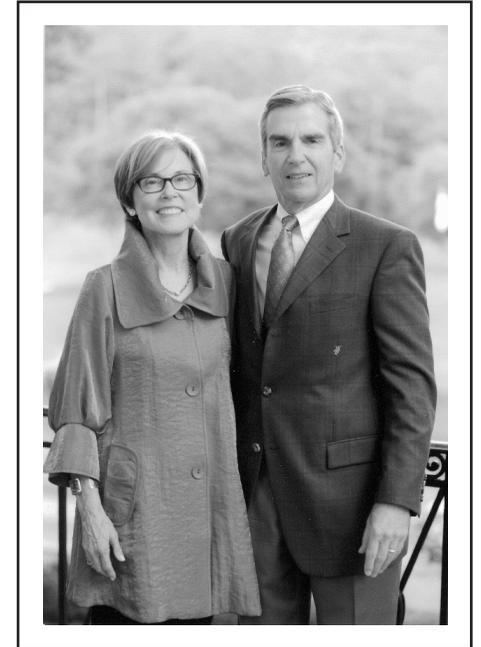
I felt the gratitude and love of God as church friends rejoiced with John and me when Dr. Nelson baptized our children.

I experienced the love and kindness of Christ when a church member lifted me up after I had been wounded by another.

I encountered the inexpressible love and hope of Christ, when after my mother died, Lloyd Berry, Margaret Brown, Martha Manly, and many others from my Sunday School class hugged my neck and brought food to our home. They wept with me and comforted me.

God is love. He wants to live in our hearts. And He is “in this very room.”

*Mary Holcomb Scott*



*Mary and John Scott Jr.*