

DORIS L. MENZIES' LIFE SUMMARY

By her sons Glen W. Menzies and Robert P. Menzies

Doris L. Menzies (Dec. 16, 1932–May 28, 2011) will likely be best remembered as the loving and supportive wife of her husband, William W. "Bill" Menzies. They were happily married for nearly fifty-six years. Mom was more than simply an extension of our dad. She was an educator, missionary, author, evangelist, and a nurturing mother.

She was a survivor, a sweet lady, but who was also tough. We first expected to lose Mom in 1980, thirty-one years before she actually died. In that year, out of the blue, Mom had a massive heart attack, which the doctors did not expect her to survive. She not only survived one but two more heart attacks, two triple bypass surgeries, a heart transplant, cancer and a traumatic head injury. If someone had asked us in 1980 what we thought the chances were of her living another thirty years, we would have replied, "nearly zero." We regard the last thirty-one years of her life as a special gift from above, and from a kingdom perspective these were probably the most fruitful years of her life.

Mom was born at home on her parents' farm, four miles outside the city limits of Decorah, Iowa, just a few miles south of the Minnesota border. Her parents were Willard and Beatrice ("Betty," née Nordheim) Dresselhaus. She was born on a cold winter day, December 16, 1932. She was the youngest of four siblings; she had two brothers and a sister.

Decorah, where Mom grew up, may have been the most Norwegian town in all of America. It was home to a Norwegian language newspaper, the Vesterheim Museum, which celebrated Norwegian immigration to America, and the Norwegian Singers. They let Mom's dad sing in the Norwegian Singers even though his background was German.

Mom's family lived on a dairy farm. She attended a one-room school near their home, complete with an outhouse, which, for a time, was taught by her older sister, Arlys.

Mom spoke with great fondness of her early days on the farm. She was proud of the fact that her father considered her the *best* tractor driver in the family! She drove the tractor while her dad and brothers ran the baler and stacked the bales of hay behind her.

Mom writes of these early days:

We were a close-knit family, with many uncles, aunts, and cousins living on farms nearby. On the adjoining farm lived Uncle Elmer and Aunt Gladys. My father and Elmer were brothers; my mother and Gladys were sisters. So, I grew up with three double-cousins nearby. I do not remember an unkind word spoken between our families, even though the families worked together much of the time. I had a happy childhood.

Mom attributed this remarkable harmony to the love of Christ, which permeated her home. This same love flowed into and shaped our home life as well. When we think back on our own early years, we too cannot remember one unkind word spoken between our mom and our dad.

Mom committed her life to Christ at the Decorah Assembly of God at the age of nine and never looked back. Her lifetime of service to others flowed from her commitment to Christ. Her double cousin, Rev. Dick Dresselhaus, stated in an email sent shortly after her death: "I have had an opportunity to reflect on the wonderful life that Doris lived for God's glory and praise. I have a distinct memory of the day when Doris walked down the aisle at the little church in Decorah and gave her life to Jesus. She was never the same after that."

In 1951, Mom graduated from Decorah High School. Her high school years must have been happy ones, because she always enjoyed returning to Decorah for class reunions. After high school Mom went to Wheaton College, near Chicago, because at that time the Assemblies of God did not have a liberal arts college. She graduated in 1955. Two weeks later she married Bill Menzies, an aspiring Assemblies of God pastor, at the Decorah AG Church.

For the next three years Dad pastored in Michigan, first at Big Rapids and then at Sturgis. Mom gave birth to a son at each location. Our parents lived simply – perhaps too simply. In Sturgis a room Dad had added on to their mobile home caught fire when a heater exhaust pipe got too hot. Fortunately everyone got out safely, but that event encouraged Dad to give up on the trailer and buy a house, a step Mom really appreciated.

When we moved to Springfield in 1958 so Dad could teach at Central Bible Institute (now College), the weather was extraordinarily hot, with temperatures between 105 and 110 degrees Fahrenheit. While many Asians will be not be impressed by this, to most Americans this is unbearably hot!

While Springfield has been a hub around which much of our parents' lives turned, they did not live there continuously. The Springfield eras can be arranged rather neatly by the houses in which they lived, the first two of which were located on Williams Street, just to the south of Central Bible College.

No doubt it will come as a shock to learn that we boys did not always behave. We have vivid memories of fearing punishment and hiding in the bushes that grew in front of the homes along Williams Street. Often it was only one of us, but sometimes we both became fugitives. Sometimes we hid in the Hortons' bushes. Sometimes it was the Cunninghams' bushes. Occasionally it was our own bushes. When we would do something wrong we knew we deserved to be punished, but we would go and hide until Mom found us. Somehow there was always a lot more mercy when she found us than we deserved or expected.

We boys had an idyllic sort of childhood. At one end of Williams Street was an empty lot where we played ball. At the other end of the street was a thickly wooded area where we played "Army." But we also had the nearby CBI campus, complete with ponds, a dump, and a cave to play in, as well as the Ozark Empire Fairgrounds, and a zoo. In those days zoo was free, so we would ride our bikes around and make plans like, "Meet you at the monkeys at noon." There were lots of kids in the neighborhood and, looking back on it, we lived in a kid paradise.

A lot of what gave our lives their idyllic quality was Mom. She was always outrageously supportive of us. Our art projects were always beautiful, our musical performances always wonderful, and we were diamonds in the rough being polished. Deep down we knew the truth, but we liked having such a devoted fan anyway. The only person she was even more devoted to was our dad.

When Dad shifted from teaching at Central Bible College to Evangel in 1970, we needed to move from the house we rented from CBC, and so our folks built a house a mile-and-a-half north of the Springfield city limits. We had a little acreage, so we put up fencing, built a barn, and pastured a few cattle. The farm-girl in Mom seemed to like the country surroundings.

It was a larger decision when in 1985 our parents decided to leave Springfield. No doubt this decision was made a little easier by the frequency with which we used to sing “I’ll go where you want me to go, Dear Lord” in church. After a few years of ministry in Fresno, California, Mom and Dad returned briefly to Springfield and then moved to the Philippines, where Dad served as President of Asia Pacific Theological Seminary and where Mom was thoroughly involved in hosting visitors and in evangelism.

A note to Robert from Emmanuel and Agnes Fave, church leaders in Papua New Guinea, captures a bit of Mom's heart. Emmanuel wrote:

Agnes and I recall our days in Baguio. We have fond memories of your wonderful mother. I recall how our daughter Vaina wandered off on the APTS campus and ended up at Mum and Dad's house, looking for your daughter, Jessica. Mum ended up giving Vaina a tour of their home. We wondered where our daughter was, until there was a knock on the door of our apartment. It was mum. My wife was quite surprised to see the President's wife with our daughter Vaina next to her. We found out that day how she was willing to let a three-year old little girl lead her about. That day Agnes and I felt a closeness to the Menzies family. That left a deep impression on us to this day.

After nine years in the Philippines, Mom and Dad retired in Springfield, moving into their house on South Celebration Avenue in 1996. It was shortly after this that Mom was added to the heart transplant list centered in Salt Lake City, Utah. Jimmie Long, who grew up as an AG missionary kid in Calcutta, India, was the head of thoracic transplant surgery at the main hospital in Salt Lake City and supervised her surgery. There are a few interesting things to note about Jimmy: He married Bonnie Buntain, Marc and Huldah Buntain's daughter; he was Mother Theresa's heart doctor; and his father, Jim Long, preceded our dad as the President of the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, which was called the Far East Advanced School of Theology at the time.

After living in Salt Lake City for about a year-and-a-half, Mom received a new heart, and her health improved greatly. She lived with that new heart for thirteen years, and when she finally passed away, it was not from a heart attack but rather from kidney failure.

While Mom was waiting for a donor heart, a Filipino pastor wrote her a letter volunteering to give her his own heart. He was offering to give up his life so that our mom could live! Of course,

Mom could not accept his kindness, but it was a moving illustration of Christian love nonetheless.

Somehow, Mom's heart problems awakened in her a passion for evangelism. Apparently her brushes with death made the boundary between this life and the next both more immediate and more real. In her fifties she began to witness to others in a way she never had before, and those encounters often bore fruit. One encounter that she remembered fondly was with a Chinese-Filipina woman named Catalina. Catalina was well-educated and successful, but she had no personal peace. Catalina took a trip to Baguio City, which many regard as the most beautiful location in the Philippines, with the hope of finding the peace she desired. She found peace, but it did not come from the scenery. Mom introduced her to the Prince of Peace. Sometime later Mom was also able to introduce Catalina's niece to the Lord.

While in the Philippines, Mom was active in multiple ministries. She took teams of faculty wives and students to nearby schools and into the city jail. She conducted Bible studies in homes and on campus and traveled throughout East Asia and the Pacific with our dad, bringing joy and happiness everywhere she went.

Mom's heart transplant in 1998 was not only a medical milestone for her, but also a spiritual experience. One day shortly after her transplant, Dad returned home and found Mom weeping. He was concerned and asked her, "What's wrong?" She explained, "These are tears of joy. I have just committed my new heart to the Lord."

Mom was relentlessly optimistic and positive. She always saw the best in other people. This vision of the world was a reflection of her deep faith: She knew Jesus and that made all the difference. Our mother was also an extrovert; she got her energy from being with people. Mom was known for her love of shopping, but what we think she really loved was *shopping with people*. She was always ready for an adventure as long as other people were involved.

Mom sometimes marched to the beat of a different drummer. At Mom's wake her longtime friend June Hurst told our family about how she and our mom were the first women at their church to get their ears pierced, something disapproved by many in the AG at the time, and that it was our mom's idea. We believed this since Mom used to complain about "clamp-on" earrings. To her, putting little vises on a person's ears sounded more like a torture technique than good fashion sense. Apparently when June and Mom got their ears pierced it broke

open the dam and pierced ears soon became the norm at Central Assembly.

June also mentioned that she and Mom used to sneak off to the nearby city of Joplin to watch movies, something that was not generally acceptable in the Assemblies of God back then. We boys never knew about this, but somehow today the image of these two prayer warriors sneaking off to watch movies strikes us as funny.

We should probably explain a little bit about Mom's career as an educator. Mom taught public schools in Michigan, California, Iowa, and for many years in Springfield, Missouri. She taught at several different grade levels, but fourth-grade was her favorite. She also developed an expertise in teaching reading to those who for some reason were not able to get it on the first go-around. When she earned her master's degree at Drury College, the focus of her study was remedial reading.

Mom did not teach full-time when we boys were young – except for the two years when Dad was doing his doctoral course work at the University of Iowa and some extra income was really needed. Instead she would substitute teach two or three days out of the week so that she could spend a lot of time with us. Then, after we got older, Mom returned to full-time teaching.

Mom was a gifted writer. Apparently having a passion for writing goes hand-in-hand with a passion for reading. She described her experiences in soul-winning in a number of articles. Following her heart transplant, Mom wrote a book about her life entitled *Young at Heart*, centering on this life-changing medical procedure.

Mom was a special person, and she was always herself: educator, shopper, evangelist, missionary, transplant recipient, movie sneak, and people lover. Many loved her, and she is greatly missed.