Life of Paul Walterman

 **Beginnings**

I was born in Chicago, Illinois at the Swedish Covenant Hospital on June 11, 1943. It was toward the end of World War II and my Dad (DeVore) was an evangelist. Soon after my birth he was holding revival meetings in Wisconsin while Mom (Joyce) and I were living with my Mom’s parents (Paul and Vera Nybakken).

I developed a croup cough and had some lung issues and Mom was told to treat me with steam from a hot water vaporizer. She had placed it on a table next to my crib and was laying a blanket over the top of my bed when the blanket tipped the boiling water over my right arm and shoulder.

My terrified mother wrote a letter to my Dad after the doctor had come and ministered to my 3rd degree burns. She didn’t know what the outcome would be, but was obviously in a panic. After the doctor visited two days later and saw that the burns were beginning to look better, he told her that I’d have permanent scaring but should be fine other than that.

She immediately wrote and sent a second letter to my Dad, letting him know that he didn’t need to cancel his meetings … I would be all right. Somehow, the second letter arrived before the first one did and he had no idea of what had happened to me, other than I would carry scars and would ultimately be fine.

It was a tough beginning for two parents welcoming their first child into the family.

About this time, the Assemblies of God asked my Dad to direct two Victory Servicemen’s Centers where military personnel from all branches of the service could get a bunk for the night, some food and fellowship while in transit during the war. The first center was in Providence, Rhode Island and the second one near Fort Hood in Killeen, Texas.

My Dad was a very busy pastor. In his early days of ministry he was an evangelist. That meant that he, my mom and I would travel by car around the country holding meetings in churches that had invited us.

They kept me from interrupting by having me sing in trios with them. I guess it was pretty cute with me in my short pants, shirt and bow tie standing on the piano bench and belting out the melody line of our ‘specials.’ In addition, in later year when I was five, they began having me lead a song for congregational participation. It would be a fairly easy song with a strict 4/4 time signature.

I would raise my hands to the beat, they would sing and I would show up in the next newspaper add for the next meeting as “America’s youngest song leader.” I was an attraction! And lest you assume I was something special … well, I wasn’t. This was the era of ‘song leaders.’ You waved your arms while people sang. Even most the adults who had this job did basically what I did for my one song.

This wasn’t the day of Directors of Music like we have now. A five year old couldn’t begin to do what today’s spiritual Master of Ceremonies must do. There are instruments involved that you must lead in at precisely the right times and places. There are possibly hundreds of people who you must get to blend, enunciate and project words. And you must do this while making sure that God gets heard in the whole process.

At some point my parents must have felt guilty using me to bring in people to see the oddity of a five year old flopping his hands to the beat of the piano … because they began sharing the offerings with me. This must have been a difficult decision for them to come to because, to be honest, hardly anybody made money traveling as an evangelist. You really couldn’t be in it for the money, so sharing it with me was a huge sacrifice on their part.

I remember the first time my dad told me that I would get all the change that came in the offering. I was humbled, thankful and immediately began thinking of a five year old’s concept of a 401K account.

**Living next to an alley – our apartment – scaring Mom**

Living in a church is not all bad. It saves long car rides to and from Sunday services. And if the building is large, it gives lots of play room, hiding places and enough dark spooky places at night to keep a five-year old’s imagination going strong late into the night.

And my Dad’s church was large. Actually, to a Kindergarten student it was massive. It had three floors plus a basement. We lived in the rear of said building on the third floor. Looking back, the apartment wasn’t large, just part of a large structure that contained seating for several hundred, plus ample Sunday School rooms to house adults and kids.

Our apartment had a small living room, dining room, a couple of bedrooms and a kitchen with small eating area. The kitchen and front bedroom were connected by a hallway that ran past the one bathroom and ended at the bedroom. It was my route to take when trying to scare my Mom.

It was always too quiet or I was somewhat clumsy because I never could sneak up on her without her turning to see me coming. Until the time I made it stealthily all the way. However, the experience didn’t end as I had hoped, and looking back I don’t think I ever thought it through to its conclusion. Such is the stunted thinking process of a five-year old.

Later as I got older, that seeming victory produced the same consternation in me as I one day finally threw a stone that actually hit a bird. When it fell lifeless to the ground, I didn’t know what to do about it. My feeling of pride in my aiming was dashed by the recognition that I had killed the poor bird.

In my sneaking down the hallway, I had not thought about the result of scary my mother. Connecting the dots that far into the puzzle hadn’t happened. So ,when I got to my mother and her back was to me I grabbed her legs, gave my best scream and waiting for the response.

The response was immediate as she screamed back louder than I had, fell to the floor and began to sob hysterically.

What response then is a tiny little kid supposed to give. A formal apology … an arm around her trembling shoulders … a quick retreat to my hideout under the dining room table?

Looking back now I realize that both of us gained some perspective to living the rest of our lives. I learned to do a better job of thinking things through before I acted (or acted up.) I learned that the phrase ‘scared to death’ did contain a potential outcome if I wasn’t more careful. Good lessons.

And my mom’s lesson learned? Never turn your back on your son until he has grown into maturity.

**My Radio**

I have no idea if it would have been considered our most important piece of furniture to my folks, but to me it was. It was our Stromberg Carlson radio that sat in our living room. I call it

furniture because it really was. This was not the tiny Bose radio that sits quietly behind a table lamp until it begins to pump out the sound … oh, no. This was a console that measured about four feet tall and two and a half feet wide.

The dial was located in the top third, leaving a massive amount of room for the speakers, including a woofer that weighed several pounds. It was made of wood and had a whole herd of glass vacuum tubes and a dial that listed far more cities than you could ever reach on this radio without an outside antenna.

This radio was mine, from 4:15 until 5:15 in the afternoon … five days a week. My listening interrupted my playtime, stopped phone calls from friends and ordered the early part of the evening.

At 4:15 I listened to “Sky King.” These recorded episodes featured Sky King, a western constable who covered the desert area in his twin-engine plane. He was uncle to Penny and her brother Clipper. They had a strong western flavor to each plot. Years later the series became a television series, but having had a radio introduction to the crew, I knew immediately that these folks weren’t the original uncle and niece and nephew.

Radio took advantage of your imagination as no other medium can. During my next quarter hour of radio entertainment I listened intently to “Sergeant Preston of the Canadian Mounted Police. “Again, nail biting crime in the cold Northwest Yukon. I was probably seven during this time with MY Stromberg Carlson radio days, and I remember listening to the Mountie with is horse Rex and faithful husky named Yukon King as they braved blizzards pursuing the bad guy … and I could almost feel snow going down the back of my tee shirt in a living room that was probably over 80 degrees.

The next fifteen minutes belonged to a series called “Straight Arrow.” Again, a Western theme about a mild-mannered rancher who, when trouble came to good people turned into a mighty Indian warrior that came from his hidden Comanche native background. Now - who couldn’t make good stories for 5-11 year old boys?

My last fifteen minutes of air time was my favorite: The Lone Ranger! “Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear. From out of the past come the thundering hoofbeats of the great horse Silver… the Lone Ranger rides again!” This series like Sky King eventually became a television series and lasted for a long time.

I credit the radio with building my imagination. It was ‘heady stuff.’

**Playing in the neighborhood (and on train cars!)**

A block west of our church apartment, several sets of train tracks ran through our neighborhood. They were seldom used, but good for storing unused train cars until they were needed. It was like having Disneyland around the corner … although we would not hear of Disneyland for a number of years.

There were empty box cars with their doors open that we could explore – empty tank cars with narrow walking grates that went all around. When you are six or seven, these are colossal playthings! We would wander down there and hide, play tag and imagine trips we were taking hanging onto one of these gigantic train cars.

It was during one of our games of tag that I either met someone coming from around the corner, or I slipped, but I fell onto the track below and landed on my head. (And for all of you who know me and have wondered how I became like I am … this could be a clue!) There was a bit of pain and a lot of blood and one of my friends drove me home on the handlebars of his bike.

My fall necessitated a trip to the hospital and several stitches and my boyhood version of a ‘war story’ that I survived and lived to tell about even these 70 years later!

I remember one time taking advantage of my raggedy good looks as a kid. I wanted to earn some money, so took several of my toys out of our apartment and into the next street. I would knock on a door, put a ‘pitiful look’ on my face and ask if they’d like to buy a toy to help a poor little boy. I can’t remember if I ever sold any, but it shames me to think about it now. (What was I thinking?)

Railroad cars weren’t the only dangerous things in our lives back then. We could find danger almost anywhere. Like the time Peter and I road our bikes the several miles to Lake Michigan one cold late winter day. In an unusually cold winter, much of the shore ice had frozen on this massive lake. The ice was beginning to break up and chunks of it bobbed in the water close enough for two eight-year-olds to be able to jump onto some of those chunks! What could be dangerous about that? It wasn’t until I had a more adult-acting brain that I realized what falling between large pieces of ice could have meant. It would mean that my memoires would have ended with this paragraph! Yikes!!!

**All Eight Grades In One Room**

When I was in the third grade, my Dad started a Christian school in Chicago. It was called “Chicago Christian Academy” and got its start in the basement of a church on the north side of the city. If you want to see the church building, use the Google map and type in ‘Mozart and Wabansia’ in Chicago. My cousin and I would take a bus, then a streetcar to get there.

The streetcars were old by our current standards and had seat backs that could be flipped at the end of the line so that passengers could seat facing the front of the trip. We had fun turning them around earlier and watching disgruntled passengers fume over traveling backwards. Obviously, most of them didn’t realize how easy it would be to get to sit facing forward.

Two interesting experiences stay with me. My cousin was nine months older than I … was a lot taller and not as extraverted as me. My aunt Laurene, Peter’s mother, had purchased new metal lunchboxes for us. We were pretty proud because they were miniatures of the ones the big workers used. In the domed lid was a thermos in which we could take hot soup or cold beverage to school and it was pretty much the same temperature at lunch as it had been at home that morning.

We got on our bus for the final trip home and being small and able to scrab between loading passengers and get onto the bus long before my taller and shyer cousin. I made my way back to the full seat across the back of the bus. Peter soon joined me, slid to the opposite window, but left his empty lunchbox in the middle of the seat. No problem … yet.

Soon another friend of ours, a girl … a large girl for her age, finally paid her fare and started back to join us. As she began to trip down the aisle, the driver popped the clutch, the bus lurched and it propelled Sandra quickly toward us. She wasn’t able to stop, but she did the most authentic and graceful pirouette a moment before crashing rearend first onto the back seat and a bull’s eye on poor Peter’s lunchbox with a crushing blow that basically flattened his metal lunchbox.

I will always remember Peter, with tears in his eyes, carrying his squashed lunchbox as he made his way off the bus.

And speaking of lunchboxes, I got on the Belmont Ave. bus after school on day and attempted to board an extremely crowded bus. I got up to the first step and couldn’t move another inch further. In the meantime the driver closed the door with me inside and my arm (holding my precious lunchbox sticking out of the bus door all the way to my destination.

**Taking the train to California**

Laurene was one of my Mom’s sisters. She was married to Thor. They had just one son – Peter, my earliest and best friend and companion ever. We made snow tunnels through the drift of heavy Chicago snowstorms. I watched my first zombie movie in his apartment.

In a busy pastor’s house and life, it was normal that I would hang with Peter every chance I got. As soon as I was old enough, I’d walk down to Southport Avenue and take the bus the two or three miles to Irving Park. From there it was a short walk to my cousin’s apartment.

It was in his apartment on Belle Plaine Ave. that I saw my first zombie movie (probably behind the large chair where I peeked at my first stock car race!) It was also the first (and only) place where I was given fish oil to drink. I assume my aunt thought it would make us tougher or else our breath would be so rank as not to allow any girls to get close to us.

You can probably understand how my life came to a screeching halt in the early summer of 1952 when Peter’s family decided to move to Southern California, which was approximately the same distance from Chicago as was China or the moon.

Fortunately my folks decided that I was never going to heal from my cousin’s absence unless able to visit him and spend a summer with him in California. So, plans were made with Pete and his Mom and Dad… a train ticket was purchased and the big day loomed. Now, realize that I was and had been a ‘flatlander’ living in the Midwest most of my life. I’m not sure that any surface of Illinois rose to 800 feet about sea level.

Going to California and being invited to join Peter’s Boy Scout troop and camp in a tent in the mountains was something that could rob me of sleep in the time leading up to the trip. To become a Boy Scout required getting a physical exam. So my Dad took me downtown in Chicago to the Children’s Memorial Hospital. The examination turned out far different from the ‘in and out’ with OK in hand when the doctor detected a serious heart murmur.

**My heavily substantiated Divine Healing**

Not too difficult to check an almost twelve year old as examinations go. But the stethoscope showed something was badly amiss. After three other heart specialists listened (one of them being the head of the Heart Department, they let us know that the murmur was serious enough that it would effect my life if not fixed. A heart murmur is the sound the doctor’s stethoscope picks up easily. It’s a ‘sloshing’ sound that reveals one of the heart’s valves being defective and after pumping blood through it, closing so the next portion of the heart can keep the flow moving into the body. One of my valves was allowing much of the blood top sneak its was back into the chamber it had exited. Not a good situation and it was sure to change my trip.

As the doctors worked out their plans to addressing this situation, they asked us to wait in the hallway as they conferred. My Dad and I walked to the end of the hallway and stood at a window overlooking the street several stories below. I was too young to be overly concerned about my long term health - more focused on my trip to California.

Dad said, “Paul, we’re going to pray and ask God to heal this murmur.” I’m sure he was much more clear about what this meant to us as a family and to my future. He quietly put his hand on my shoulder and simply asked Jesus to heal his son. It wasn’t a long prayer. It wasn’t a noisy prayer (although he did pastor a Pentecostal church!) But it was a believing prayer.

We went back in to get their results of their ponderings and one of the doctors listened once again to what all of them had listened to many times in the last hour. He looked confused. “Listen to this” he said to one of the other doctors. They were listening to a miracle and the miracle had no sound except the normal sound of blood moving through my heart just as God had made it to work!

I have lived in the strength of that miracle my entire life

Again, ahead of the story to follow – I not only traveled to California, not only joined the troop, not only made my first trip into the mountains, not only carried my own pack …but carried the additional pack of a fellow-trooper who wasn’t able to climb and carry at the same time.

God has been good to me!!!

**California in the 1950s**

**A Sunday house fire**

**A neighborhood lake**

**Waiting for Dad**

Have I mentioned that my Dad was a very busy pastor. He took his calling seriously. He gave it everything he had, including the minutes in a day. I remember his coming to a red light, quickly taking pen and tablet from his pocket and telling me, “Let me know when the light changes!” When you work through red lights, you have a special kind of drive.

Not only did he work hard, but he suffered a severe disorientation to the passing of time. He always assumed time would slow down as his work pace quickened. He would set off for a hospital call on the southside of Chicago, knowing the trip would take at least 45 minutes each way and then assume he could be back for a meeting near our church in an hour.

We took public transportation (read: buses) to school and back home after. I might add, the bus didn’t take us ‘back home’ but ‘toward home.’ Half the trip was on bus, the other was in our car, picked up by our father to complete the journey. On many days he wasn’t even to his hospital visit 45 minutes south when we were getting off the bus for the pick-up. Needless to say, we got in lots of waiting time. We knew for sure he’d be there … just never sure of the time.

I don’t think any of us five kids held it against him or suffered maladjustment syndrome because of it. We knew our Dad … not just his foibles, but the amazing man he was. He just had trouble adding and subtracting numbers!

**Helping Dad drive**

But my Dad and I shared a somewhat interesting episode while my father was still pastoring in the northern suburbs of Chicago. My busy dad always took part in a 24 hour prayer meeting downtown once a month. Various pastors attending would take a two hour segment of leading the prayer time. Dad’s slot was always 2:00 a.m. to 4:00 a.m. He chose that time.

I don’t believe my dad had gone to bed before our drive from the suburbs and so was stretching his day to between 18 and 20 hours. In other words, he has not at his best or sharpest on that drive home that night. He knew he would be a danger to those still out in the middle of the night if he kept driving.

So to make sure he did his part for keeping Chicago safe … he asked me to drive home. And I did. I was probably thirteen, had ridden in cars all my life, had watched them being operated innumerable times, knew where the brake and gas pedals were and my head was above the steering wheel. What could possibly to wrong?

Well, actually, nothing did until we were well on our way out to the suburbs when I noticed the red and blue light behind us. As I pulled over, my dad … suddenly wide awake … quickly changed places with me before the officer got to our car. As my dad rolled down his window he wasn’t asked for his license or insurance paperwork. The office looked at him, glanced at me and said, “Sir, I need to speak to the one who was driving the car.”

I am glad to say that it wasn’t my driving that had caught his attention, but a tail light that was out. For some reason (actually I have always assumed that it was God’s way of thanking my dad for his ‘dead-of-the-night-leadership’ of the prayer meeting) we were allowed to continue our trip home - ticketless … with my dad at the wheel. God was good to us.

**Living in a tree house**

Our house in Des Plaines was quite small and there were seven of us living in it. In my junior high years I took a strong swing toward outdoor living. At first it was pushing my bed up against the window and opening it in the winter with my pillow on the window sill and my head sucking the cold, clear air (and snowflakes on occasion.)

However, my Dad and I got hold of an old, ornate wooden phone booth. Now in this era of smart phones it’s hard even for old people to remember actual phone booths. Going back 20 years or so, you could find banks of phones in the hallways of airports. Business men would exit a plane and rush for phones to connect to their home offices, get tips for the scheduled meetings, etc.

But out on the road, you looked for a phone booth wherever you could find one. There had to be multitudes of these metal and glass stand-up booths because Clark Kent had to be close enough to one to change into his Superman outfit. But I’m taking the phone booth back further into ancient history … before anyone would need to find a phone while driving!

In those days businesses, and especially hotels and fine restaurants, would provide wooden booths. You would step in, close the door and with a light above you, proceed to make your call. Well, those days finally came to a close. And Dad and I picked up one of these solid wood, ornate and very heavy phone booths. Somehow we got it back to our suburban home and I soon planted it in the large tree in our backyard.

It was dismantled and piece by piece reformed into a phone booth on its side, tightly anchored to the tree. To that I added a taller piece at the open end, tall enough to be able to stand upright in it. Then I added another story to the phone booth part and now had a very desirable place to spend my nights!

I, along with friends fortunate enough to be invited, spent many summer, along with cold spring nights and frosty fall night sleeping in the swaying branches of our backyard tree.

But I must add a few words about my choice of friends during this time. Although a preacher’s kid through and through – and although I had given my heart to Jesus as a five year old – and although I probably knew better … I got in a little too tight with some not-so-good friends for a time.

My Christian school friends all lived in the city and my usual friends were those guys who lived close to my house. We would swim daily in the small lake a block away. We’d fight imaginary wars at night when we’d come down from the tree house and head down the road looking for excitement. A couple of our adventures still give me a headache and probably are causing my Mother a bit of anxiety in heaven!

One night we decided to head about a half mile away where the state and federal government were building one of the superhighways (called Interstates now). It was destined to move Chicago traffic north to Milwaukee and points further north and do it as unheard of speeds.

Late at night, after getting chased off a private fishing lake by an angry man with a shotgun, we found ourselves on the site of the new highway. They had been preparing to pour cement and the grade was perfect. There was large important looking machinery around and one of my friends found a road grader, somehow started it and managed to gouge the underpinnings of the new highway.

They someone else lit a barrel of oil on fire and we were all silhouetted in the flames, running as fast as we could back to the safety of our neighborhood. I believe those two experiences helped God get my attention and put me back in the company of people who would help me survive, not try to get me killed or arrested.

Indeed, one or two of those ‘less-than-quality’ friends did spend time in prison. Again, God has been very good to me.

**Testing the waters**

**House fire**

**Camp Grounds temp housing**

**Meeting the girl of my dreams**

**Bible School**

**Marriage**

**Church troubles**

**Moving to California**