

Getting to Know Pappy...

By Carol Smith



In 1925 Pappy (aka Rev. Dick) Smith was born across the street from his grandparents in a coalfire-heated home in the small farming community of Parryville, Pennsylvania (1.6 sq miles), where the population spoke their own special dialect of "Pennsylvania Dutch" along with English. Even though you could stand at one end and see the other, Parryville was "town" — because it had two mom-and-pop stores, a post office, a school, and two churches. It consisted of Main Street, Back Street, and Church Hill Road. Main Street was actually Route 309, the main highway through Pennsylvania — where the kids could play ball on any given day without any worry of interruption. Life was a quiet affair in the 1920s and 30s. Pappy attended school in a 3-room schoolhouse. 1st and 2nd grades together on one side, 3rd and 4th grades together on the other side, and 6-7-8 in a room upstairs. The townsmen (like Pappy's father) earned their living working at the New Jersey Zinc Company (NJZC), a huge factory nearby. The factory was so vast that a train ran between the buildings, and Pappy's grandfather was the conductor on that train.

As one of 11 children, Pappy's father had to drop out of school to help support the family. But he was always an avid reader with a thirst for knowledge and information. He eventually landed a job as a chemist at the NJZC, and even served on the Board of Education for the county. He converted a room in their basement into a pomade-scented barbershop with Courier & Ives and Norman Rockwell prints on the walls, where he shaved and snipped and trimmed his neighbors in the evenings after work. In the Smith household, his word was law. Pappy's strong kind mother likewise had a bright and curious mind, always seeking to learn, though one year of high school was all that was offered to girls of her time. She heated her iron on the stove, kept food cold with a block of ice in the "icebox", fed her wet laundry through a wringer by hand and hung it outside on the line to dry, cooked and baked rings around Martha Stewart, helped her boys pedal their newspapers when necessary, sold frocks door to door during the Great Depression, volunteered wherever needed. She was active in the church and community. And as Pappy says, "She was always there." Pappy had a brother, Bob, two years older, a Commander in the Coast Guard. And a sister, Elaine, five years younger, who at age 90 still plays piano for her Methodist Church services in North Carolina.

Music and flight have always been two of Pappy's favorite things.

It seems Pappy was born with a silver flute in his mouth. He was one of the founding members of the Keys Community Concert Band, and never missed a practice or a concert for as long as he was able to play. Even as a shy hot-tempered youngster, Pappy always loved music — and played his flute and piccolo in the Parryville community band, where his father also played an instrument. They played for town picnics and parades and other special events. At home, the family played together in their parlor just for fun: mother on piano, father on clarinet, brother on violin, Pappy on flute. They also played special music for the churches. His father always wanted to keep his children busy and productive.

The world was at war when Pappy came of age. And he wanted to be a fighter pilot. Following high school, after his night shift at the silk mill, he would go to the airport to participate in a project of building a piper cub from the ground up. But before it was completed, he enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps at age 17. They took him for training when he reached 18, first to a converted hotel on Collins Avenue in Miami Beach, where they pulled out all the carpets, pulled the plug on the elevator, and

replaced the furniture with bunkbeds. And then to Las Vegas before deploying to England. Color blindness disqualified him for the pilot training, a bitter disappointment. So he was assigned to be a gunner on a B-17 instead.

Home on furlough before shipping out to Europe, he and his best friend walked into a diner one evening in a neighboring town and... bam! Love at first sight. The waitress was a pretty petite backslidden preacher's daughter named Betty. He ordered peanut sundaes one after the other all night long just so he could keep talking to her. He told his friend, "I'm going to marry that girl." And when he came home from the war, he did. Now, Pappy had a short-fuse and fiery jealous temper. And Betty had a strong stubborn independent will. Neither one was in fellowship with the Lord. And there were fireworks aplenty as the young couple headed up life's road together. Then friends invited Betty to church camp the following year and she went to the altar there and gave her heart to the Lord in August of 1946. She came home and told Dick about it. He huffed and puffed and grumbled. But he saw a change in her. And a few days later Pappy said, "I was sitting in our tiny living room. And something just wasn't right. I had such a disturbed feeling. Couldn't read or write or focus or think. I went and told Betty and she said, "Well let's pray about it." So we knelt down together by the bed and used that for our altar. I said, "I don't know how to pray. You pray for me." So she did. She prayed and I said, "Yes." And in that instant the fire fell! The Lord saved me and changed my heart and changed my life forever!" In November of 1946 Pappy attended a revival meeting and when the altar call was given at the end, only one person responded: him. As he prayed, it became clear as a bell in that moment: God was calling him to preach. The shy backward kid who couldn't even talk to people, who got an F in high school for freezing in front of the class when he was supposed to give a 3 minute speech! Betty came from a family of singing brothers (she was also the youngest of 11), and she played the accordion and piano, so Dick would travel around with Betty and her brothers singing in various churches. He was all in!

In 1951 Pappy was ordained a Nazarene minister. And that calling defined his life. Loving and serving Jesus. Loving and serving others. Pointing others to salvation through the life-changing love of Christ. Bringing others into the Kingdom of God with the assurance that Heaven is their ultimate home. What could be better than that?



He and Betty had three children— Rick, Kurt and Carol. And pastored churches in Massachusetts, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, Ohio and Florida. He loved preaching so much he had to retire three times before it finally stuck! Carol had moved to the Keys in 1972 and a few years later bought a home in Tavernier for her parents to retire to... one day. Dick and Betty moved to the Keys in 1985. And it gave them the greatest joy to lead the choir at MUMC and play piano there, and to get to know and love the wonderful friends in this

community. Friendships he treasures. And now at age 95, the physical challenges are real but there's still a song in his heart and a sweet spirit in his life. Because he believes what he's been preaching all these years: the best is yet ahead for the child of God!

