

THANKSGIVING

I'm So Thankful For My Shell (Marie Napier)

In 1954 a young missionary recruit to Alaska was stricken with a paralytic disease which left her bedfast for the last ten years of her life. Her name . . . Marie Napier. The first time I met Marie was in her home in Sunnyvale, California. As I stepped into the front room I immediately discerned the sickening pulsation of her breathing machine. It was a rocking bed . . . the first one I had ever seen. The bed, patient and all, was rocking back and forth in large gyrations . . . movements carefully designed to force air into paralyzed lungs. Marie was emaciated and pale. She had not moved in over five years. I awkwardly tried not to stare at her shriveled body. I clumsily looked at my feet to conceal the expression of shock which must inevitably have registered upon my countenance. I raised my eyes to concentrate upon her face and there I discerned a broad and understanding smile. Her flashing eyes darted back and forth, and I observed a small lateral movement of her head which consisted only of slightly rocking it from side to side.

Gradually I grew more comfortable in her presence and we began to talk. It was evident that even a simple conversation was a difficult task for Marie. She timed her words to coincide with the proper movement of the bed and spoke in short staccato sentences. When I left there that day I walked with an invigorated step. I had been exposed to a contagious mixture of warmth and courage which had blessed my life in a way too wonderful for words. I visited Marie on other occasions . . . each time I inevitably found the same or similar emotion when I left. I had come to give . . . but I had left receiving. Each time there was the same smile . . . the same selfless concern over my problems . . . the same valuable counsel to combat the stress and fatigue of our busy world. Marie Napier was a perennial fountain of praise to God and service to mankind.

The last time I saw Marie before her death was in the Santa Clara County Hospital in San Jose, Calif. A power failure had stopped the rhythm of her bed and by the time she arrived at the hospital the flame of her life was burning very low. I came the next day for scripture and prayers. The pulsing collar of the iron lung had left her neck chaffed and raw. The Dr. therefore had granted a brief respite from the painful lung to a less efficient device that did not hurt the neck. It was a "breathing shell" which was placed across her torso. As I stepped to her side she looked up with tired eyes . . . a faint smile broke upon her face and she gasped . . . "I'm so thankful for my shell."

Somehow I managed to hold back the tears of shame and regret that welled up within my eyes. I had looked upon this woman before with admiration and respect . . . but now in the finale of her life she had granted a majestic and magnificent memory which all but defied description. With life ebbing from her frail body she had risen above the maze of pain and confusion to cast another jewel into the treasure chest of memories which she bequeathed to mankind. Too weak and low for the sham of hypocrisy she bared her heart and exposed her secret thoughts. "I'm so thankful. . . ." Thankful for her shell . . . at a time when

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many would have cursed God for the paralysis, the power failure, the pain, the thousands of heartaches associated with a decade of suffering. . . . Marie Napier speaks from the grave a sermon in one sentence . . . "I'M SO THANKFUL FOR MY SHELL!"

What a wonderful commentary on the verse:

In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you (I Thess. 5:18).

If Marie Napier could be thankful for her shell . . . God forgive us for complaining about anything.

I Am A Debtor

(Seth Wilson)

As I look around me at this moment I am overwhelmed by the way that my life has been enriched by others.

My Bible is open on the desk. It was a gift to me from a friend in California more than twenty years ago. It has an "instant index," a concordance, and center column references which took someone many years to develop. The fact that it is printed leaves me a measure of debt to the selfless and sacrificial service of Gutenberg. The fact that it is in English leaves me in debt to Tyndale and Wycliffe and a host of others who gave their fortunes and even their very lives that the Bible might become a reality in the English language. The fact that I am interested in the Bible is a credit to my parents, my wife, my teachers and a host of others who have constituted a vital part of my religious heritage. I am a debtor.

I live in a land which I did not discover or develop. I use hundreds of items and articles which were invented and manufactured by someone else. The books and technology at my fingertips are a credit to others. The house I live in, the car I drive, the office where I work, the school which I have attended, the clothes which I wear and the food which I eat are available to me through the ministry of someone else. I am a debtor.

On this day I am scheduled to attend a luncheon in honor of Seth Wilson. This day has been proclaimed Seth Wilson Day in the city of Joplin. I am in debt to Seth.

Seth was one of my teachers when I was in college and has continued to give me guidance and direction down through the years. I dedicated a book to him several years ago and even now I have imposed upon him to review and assess another manuscript before I seek to have it published.

One incident stands out in particular to me in our relationship down through the years. I was privileged to travel with Bro.

Wilson to Eldon, MO where he was a featured speaker in a weekend meeting. After two or three days at the meeting we left after evening services for Joplin. It was a four or five hour drive and we arrived on campus about 3:00 a.m. Seth had spoken several times that day and then driven all the way home. I was totally exhausted and even dreaded the drive from the campus to my home. I was deeply humbled to discover that Seth went immediately to his office to catch up on some work before retiring for the night.

It is this kind of dedication which has earned the respect of all who know him. He was labeled by the late A.B. McReynolds as "The greatest Bible teacher on God's green earth. . . ." Then, with tongue in cheek, A.B. would say, ". . . on every subject except the book of Revelation."

Seth is a biblical pioneer who is willing to lead the way into unfamiliar passages of Scripture and to map out positions which have never been held before. This he does with a quietness and resolve which is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. . . ." Who can deny that this kind of wisdom is from above?

There are many to whom I owe a debt of real gratitude, but standing tall in my memories is my teacher . . . Seth Wilson. May God multiply his seed sown and increase the fruits of his righteousness.

