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G.E. Stewart Interview - Transcript

R. Vernon Boyd

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VB: Would you tell me something about yourself where you were born and how you came in contact with the church?

S: I was born in a little town near Shreveport, Louisiana called Gail on July 29, 1906. My mother was a native of Texas and my father a native of Louisiana. They brought me to Texas when I was six months old and so Texas is all I know. I was reared in South Augustine ~~Texas~~, Texas until I was sixteen years old. That's a little town about 5 miles below Longview. My oldest sister and I went up to Dallas after that and she later moved to Fort Worth. I went to the State School for the Blind for about eight years in Austin. I moved to Fort Worth in 1930 where I was baptized by the the late G. P. Bowser on March 15, 1931. I stayed there for about two years until I began my first work for the church at Stanford, Texas (near Louisiana). I preached then for the church in Abilene for two ~~S~~Sundays a month for three years. My first full time work was in Memphis, Tennessee where I moved in 1936 and stayed there almost six years with the Vance Avenue church. Next I moved to the Third Ward church in Houston. I went to Oklahoma City where I preached almost six years, then to Detroit at the West Side church for nearly four years. I went back to Dallas for two years where I operated a preacher's workshop for Southwestern Christian College. I moved to Fort Worth in 1955 and I'm still there.

VB: Are you with the same church?

S: Yes, sir. I've been there 20 years.

VB: How did you come in contact with Brother Bowser

S: Actually, when I was 13 years old I was baptized in the Church of God of Anderson, Indiana. My father had been a Baptist preacher for 40 years or more when he went into the Church of God and stayed there about 15 years. When we moved to Shreveport, Louisiana with my father after I had finished school in Austin. I had always wanted to be a Church of God preacher and I decided to preach. There was no Church of God at that time in Shreveport and my father had gone back to the Baptist church so I went to the Baptist Church. They took me in but they did not baptize me. I preached for the Baptist church for almost two years when I went to Fort Worth where I was preaching in a few night meeting in a little Baptist church. Brother and Sister Bowser and Brother and Sister Miller came down to hear me. Brother Bowser was impressed with my quoting a lot of Scripture in my preaching. If you are acquainted with ^{the church} the Church of God you know that they use a lot of Scripture. so I was brought up this way. Brother Bowser, who was living in Fort Worth at the time, began to visit me and I would attend their weekly Bible class. He began a meeting in March of that year (1931) and I obeyed the gospel during it, on the 15th. So it was his visiting with me personally and my attending the midweek Bible class at the church where he preached that brought me into the church.

VB: Was your father preaching in Louisiana when you were there?

S: No. My father and mother moved to ~~Louisiana~~ Texas to my mother's people when I was six months old, and we stayed there until I was 16. My grandmother passed away when I was quite small.

VB: Your father must have been a religious man all his life, and your mother, too.

S: Oh, yes. I guess he started ~~ap~~preaching when he was quite young. He was a native of Louisiana and his first wife died and in the meantime he was preaching for the Baptist church in my mother's home town, so that is how they met and married. She went with him to Louisiana but when I was six months old, they went back to Texas.

VB: They did not have full-time preachers so what was your father doing for a living?

S: He worked as janitor of the white school in our home town.

VB: What was the amount of education he received?

S: Not very much but he did a lot of reading and studying on his own, and especially of the Bible. He memorized a lot of the Bible and I suppose that is where I got into the habit. I feel like my father read himself out of the Baptist Church because when the Church of God came into our home town he went into it and stayed about 15 years. He was not preaching at that time for them.

VB: Do you know anything about his family?

S: No, they died long before I was born. They were born in slavery and I used to hear him tell stories of things that happened in his boyhood but nothing of his people other than that they were slaves in Louisiana. I think by grandfather was a preacher but I'm not sure where. It was referred to as being down the river from Shreveport.

VB: When you grew up in San Augustine, did you have any contact with the white people of the church?

S: There was no white church of Christ there until after I left.

VB: I know of the Church of God as primarily a white institution. How do you account for it among the blacks?

S: There are a number of churches among black people. They have a very large church here in Detroit. Perhaps they are stronger in the North than they are in the South.

VB: Did your father hear of the Church of God from a white or black man?

S: It was a white man who came in there from Oklahoma ~~CA~~ City and started a work in our ~~home town~~ little home town. It was through him that my father got in contact with a black man from Monroe, Louisiana named S. T. Burns, who came down and preached in a meeting and baptized quite a few people and got the Church of God started among the black people.

VB: How old were you when you went to the blind school?

S: 14.

VB: Why did you not go to school earlier?

S: There was a local ~~Jack~~ Judge who misinformed my father, saying they were doing some renovation on the asylum and I could go as soon as it was finished. It was the asylum and not the State School for the blind which was being reconstructed and I could have gone there sooner. My father found this out when he went up to Austin to inquire for himself. I lost my sight when I was 12 years old and up until that time I attended the public school. But I lost some time due to the Judge being misinformed.

VB: Did you learn Braille in school?

S: No. They had what they called the 4-dot New York Point system which was taught and Braille was just coming in as a 6-point system. I learned it after I graduated.

VB: How soon after your baptism ~~did~~ did you start preaching for the church?

S: Well since I had been preaching before in the Baptist Church for about 2 years it was not long after being taught the gospel that I began preaching under the ~~influence~~ influence of Brother Bowser. He said I learned the gospel quicker than anyone he had taught. I believe that was partly due to two things: ~~first~~ first I believe it was my attitude toward the Scripture. I always believed the Bible was true and whatever ~~it~~ it said was right/ I used to get into an argument with my father who did not believe in the essentiality of baptism. I used to quote the text "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." He said that if that was true ~~then~~ then all you had to do was to put a man ~~in~~ under the water and he would be saved. Now he did not believe in instrumental music in worship. He used to say that ~~you could~~ ^{God did} not get any ~~glory~~ glory out of a mechanical instrument. I didn't know too much about that and didn't discuss it with him much. Our biggest argument came over baptism. By my believing that whatever the Bible said that was what we had to face. So it was quite easy for me to learn and obey the gospel truth. Then, too, ~~it~~ I was not too long ~~out~~ out of school so it did not take me ~~too~~ too long to learn.

When I finished school I went to Shreveport where my father lived and with another sister, then finally I moved to Fort Worth.

VB: What did you do in Shreveport?

S: Not too much. I worked ~~at~~ at a place which made brooms and mattresses for a while until I moved. I tried to get a job in the schools but I never was successful in that. I had a classmate who got a job teaching in Baton Rouge and they needed another teacher. I applied for it but they said since they had ~~others~~ 2 other teachers who were ~~with~~ totally without sight they felt they should not hire another. ~~I~~ I was about 26 ~~at that time~~ and unmarried at that time.

VB: What was your early experience with ~~with~~ white people?

S: When I ~~grew~~ grew up, since my father worked with white schools there was quite a bit of contact, but after I left ~~for~~ home at 16, not too much.

My father was well known in that small town where everyone knew everyone else. Generally, our relations with white people was quite good as he was well thought of ~~xxxxxxx~~ by them as he was always looking~~x~~ after their children, helping them across the road after school and seeing them toward home.

VB: When did you get married?

S: In 1930. I met her in Shreveport. She was a Baptist, ~~Wxx~~ but we did not have any religious wars. We sort of progressed in our religious understanding together. My wife I have now I met in Houston. She was raised a Catholic. My first wife died not too long after we were married. My present wife obeyed the gospel before I did in what was ~~xxxxxx~~ about the first meeting Keeble held in the ~~sate~~ state of Texas~~x~~ in Houston. She was the only one that was baptized in that meeting.

VB: Why did you go to Fort Worth?

oldest

S: I traveled around in Texas for a while before I finally to go with my/sister to Fort Worth. I was preaching for the Baptist Church at the time, wherever I could get an appointment. I didn't have too much trouble getting them.

VB: By the way, how many brothers and sisters do you have?

S: There were about 12 of us. One I never did know. I was ~~about~~ the sixth one down the line.

VB: You traveled ~~away~~ around preaching with your ~~x~~ wife after you left Shreveport?

~~Sxx~~: Yes, ~~xxxxxx~~ wasn't too hard. But after I got to Fort Worth, it was in the heart of the ~~xxxxxxx~~ Depression and things were much harder. I was still preaching and my wife worked. We had two childr~~n~~. One of my daughters ~~diex~~ died here in Detroit last November. Our other daughter is in California

VB: Will you talk about ~~w~~ your relationship with Brother Bowser?

✓ S: I spent a lot of time with him from time to time. He recommended me to ~~fn~~ first work in Memphis, Tennessee, for meetings, and singings. When he started his little school in Fort Smith we worked together quite closely. I never did live there but I would go back and forth ~~fromxxxxxxx~~ to there. My first preaching in Stanford, Texas was for a meeting but I do not think he had anything to do with that. I baptized 11 in that one. The white brethren want a man to work for the ~~gxnp~~ group among the blacks and a white elder, Brother Hargese, got me that work and for Abilene, too. I preached in Stanford twice a month and in Abilene twice a month. They are about 20 miles apart. ~~Alxx~~ Although that meeting was fairly successful, it was not my first meeting in the Church of Christ, but was my first one in West Texas. My first one was for a little biddy place down below Corsicana. I can't think of the name of the place. I believe there were ~~lx~~ about 10 responses in that meeting.

✓ Brother Bowser left Fort Worth~~x~~ and had started his school in Fort Smith along about this time of my first meetings.

VB: I hear one of the oldest churches among the black was a place called Midway, Texas. What do you know about it?

S: I've never been there but I know a lot ~~x~~ of people from there. When I preached in Houston and in Dallas I found a lot of members who had come from there. I don't know how that congregation got started, but it is an old, old congregation. It used to be a large church before a lot moved away to the city. I think the place is near Madisonville, Texas