

Exploring Significant Figures in My Life

I think some of the most important people who spiritually influenced me were people like Harold Mallett from First Presbyterian Church who looked at someone like me in my hippie attire and hippie attitude, and welcomed me to teach Sunday school, welcomed me to run the B.A.S.I.C. there at First Presbyterian in 1972. What a milestone that was for me, and perhaps for him. His spiritual influence was key. I remember one Sunday morning I was at church there, and he gave a sermon about the demons that Jesus had chased out of some of those demonized people. He left it as a psychological experience. I went up to him as he sat on the dais during the final hymn and inquired whether it was possible that I could share. He said, 'No problem, go ahead.' And I gave a short testimony about how demons were real and I'd experienced them in my life, and how I was unable at certain times to be rid of them in a human experience, but by letting others cast them out and pray in faith, I was made significantly better. He took it all in stride. His flexibility was obvious and that influence has stayed with me to this day. "Blessed are the flexible; they do not break." (That's my line, not his).

Moishe Rosen, of course, was a mentor to me for 30 years. It actually began in 1974 when I met him in person for the first time in January in San Francisco, in the suburb named Corte Madera. I approached him at the Jews for Jesus office and was delighted to meet him in person. He

wondered if I'd eaten yet that day, and it was about 11:00 in the morning. I said no, and he said, 'Would you like to go to lunch with me?' I said yes. So we went to a Chinese restaurant. From that early conversation, I had one takeaway. He asked me, 'What can you do to help Jews for Jesus?' I was taken aback because I thought that I had nothing to give to the organization. I thought that they were pretty significant already, and I was a brand new pastor in Kansas of a fledgling Jesus movement church. I thought I could learn from them, but I didn't think I had anything to offer. That question stayed with me for decades, even to this day. And his influence was much more than that. He was dogged in how he lived and in his commitments. I'm sure there were problems in his life that he couldn't solve, and things about himself that he wanted to change but couldn't or didn't. But his spirituality was in his maintenance of his commitments, not in his prayer life or his religious observations. That is not the spirituality that I saw in Moishe. But his commitment to his purposes and his ideals, and his unwillingness to give those away for expediency, made him a pretty significant man, even now, 16 years after he passed away.

Individuals like Pam (Pruitt) and Jim Gomer who have been together over 10 years I suppose, but who had previous lives with their original spouses, have, no matter what else happened in the deaths of either the marriage or the spouse, had an influence on me. What was it? Their persistence in faith. No matter what. They are still going.

People like Jonny George, no matter what ailments he and / or Janet have had in Salina, in Lawrence, or the last few decades in Chattanooga, they keep on keeping on. That's huge. That's significant. That's recognizable.

Or how about Barry and Mary (Anderson) Foster who keep going from Lawrence, Williamsburg, Chicago, Cedar Rapids, Topeka, and now in Lawrence again... they never stop believing. They never stop caring for others. Their heart is as one and it's powerful. Their kids and grandkids. Their life along with their heart is on their sleeve, and it's a powerful influence in my life.

Jim and Patti Lisson (Patty's brother and sister-in-law), Brad and Carrie (Weltmer) Mayhew, andSo many others; so little time.



Mary and Barry Foster in one of their homes through the decades.



At their Chattanooga home. Jon and Janet George.



Pam and Jim Gomer. Back in 2014. So proud of these two.

What is the Rest of the Story?

What is ahead for me as I write this in 2026?

I'm in my 75th trip around the sun, and I wonder how many more trips there are. I'm readying to go to another little city in Chattanooga or Allentown or Asheville, North Carolina, to perform some work and help coordinate some activities. I'm hoping to make some contacts and to develop relationships with people. I'm hoping that the work I've given myself to over the last five decades will continue to be around long after I'm gone. I wouldn't mind if any of my children or grandchildren would join the organization and help make it into whatever they think it ought to be.

I used to think that it had to be exactly what I wanted and what I dreamed, and it should function the way I desired. But as time has gone on, I realized everything changes. I changed the organization when I joined. I brought my ideas; I brought my style. So, how could I say it now has to be fixed? I'm thinking of the book by John McWhorter, who was then at Howard University, who wrote the book, "Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue," about the English language. He was theorizing that English was continually changing and without a problem in seeing that. His thesis seemed to be, "Well, if that be so, why do we freeze it in 19th-century Victorian punctuation and say, 'This is the Queen's

English, and this is what English always ought to be?" I wonder if Shakespeare changed the rules.

I wonder who has changed the rules in Jews for Jesus, or in my life, how many times I changed the rules. Sometimes that got me in trouble. Sometimes it got me to a dead end. The best is to go with the rules as they are and see some necessary and slow and small adjustments, rather than throwing the baby out with the bathwater. I think of the example that Watchman Nee used when he wrote about change and used a candle as an image. A nice, big pillar candle with a nice solid wick can go a certain distance left and right in a circular fashion, but it's still going to stay in the middle of that pillar, and it can only go so far. That allows it to burn down at a good rate, at a steady pace, and without worry of collapsing around itself and causing a fire. Change has to happen in measures and not abruptly. Maybe that was my mistake as a hippie. And maybe that was my mistake when I came to New York City in 1996 and tried to change things right away, into my image, instead of pacing it.

When I moved to start the branch in Sydney, there was nothing that had previously been there. So, I was able to put my stamp all over it. Did that help? I suppose so, for a good long time. I wonder what it will look like in ministry in 2030 in Australia. Who will still be there? Will the organization even be existing? But then beyond organizational and institutional commitments, what will be ahead for Patty and me? We've talked about El Camino and walking that. Who knows? Maybe we'll

go to India, where she's always wanted to go, or Antarctica, and follow some trail of an explorer. Maybe we'll just stay in Nashville and play with grandchildren and be available to help our daughters who live there.

Maybe we'll continue to split our time in Sydney and watch the grandsons there grow into godly men and strong men who help the world become a better place. Or maybe they'll take over Cockatoo Comics and let their mom and dad relax somewhere on the Gold Coast. We really don't know, but what we do know is that we don't have to be anxious about tomorrow. We don't have to be dismissive. In fact, we should not be dismissive. We should make plans and consider alternatives. At the same time, we can't plan and expect all of our plans to function easily and correctly. The old expression is, "Man plans, and God laughs." Even so, if I'm around in 10 more years, I'd like to see each of my kids and their kids keep making a difference in the world. I'd like to see some of the grandkids graduate high school and maybe university. I'd like to be able to go to their weddings and maybe even dance there. Some things that I would like to do would be to have my website, TheRealBobM.com, perform well and serve people, and maybe make a difference in the lives of folks. That would be nice. Rather than dreaming, I try to enact these ideas throughout my days.

In the meantime, I'll continue to act as my friend Neville Jones used to say, serving people one day at a time. One of the things I remember from him is how he would always have one appointment only a day, whether

it was playing golf or tennis, or seeing me, or taking his car in for service. Whatever it was, it was the one thing. He didn't live like that when he was an accountant in his 30s and 40s with all his children, but it was that way when he retired and especially after his beloved wife passed away. One thing a day. I think I could get into that.