

Letter to Assessor

AMBASSADOR COLLEGE--1948

A letter I received some time ago:

"Gentlemen,

"From what I have read in the pages of the Plain Truth, I believe the best education I can get is at Ambassador College. Would you please send me the Registrar."

The question is how to send a Registrar to Ambassador College in the year 1948; a college that hardly existed. To take him from a land flowing with milk and honey, bring him out across a thousand miles of desert and keep him in the smog filled L. A. basin.

We might begin the story anyplace, but central Nebraska is as good as any. The year is 1947, twenty-three years ago this summer; I was having difficulty with the light bulbs on my '39 Chevy coupe. First the right headlight would burn out, then the dash light, then the left tail light, then another dash light, then another headlight.

A faulty voltage control was giving me better than usual radio reception on my car radio. I was picking up a variety of radio programs, one of which was the World Tomorrow, from XEG, the voice of North America in Chihuahua, Mexica. The mailing address was Eugene, Oregon.

About the same time a few hundred miles to the southeast, my wife to be was listening to these same programs. But that was the summer of 1947, and she did not show up at Ambassador College until the fall of 1951, four years later.

I turned on the World Tomorrow program at this Nebraska farm where I worked. It just happened to be one of those few programs where Mr. Armstrong made a personal appeal just to his Co-Workers. Finances were serious in those days. The immediate reaction of the people I worked with, "All these radio preachers are after is money."

After that I listened to the broadcast in my car. They were a contrast to other religious programs. Mr. Armstrong gave the impression that he believed what he said.

If he were right about the world he described for the next ten and fifteen years ahead, it was certainly worth investigating. But those ten and fifteen years have now gone by, and eight more with them. Yet the impression at the time was that our time was far shorter.

In 1947 Mr. Armstrong talked about a college in Pasadena; I thought about it and went back to Wisconsin. Colleges cost money. Perhaps a \$1000 would be enough for a year. That would have to be saved first.

First came a winter of preparation. We put up a concrete grain elevator at Edgar, Wisconsin. My boss was the apple-polishing type, instead of a worker. He had started at the bottom some years earlier, complained the first day that the shovel handle tickled his hands, and was made time-keeper. From there it is only one step to being boss.

Cold weather, hard work--from December to July we set forms and poured concrete. For three months the temperature never got above 32 degrees, and that temperature was only attained for a few hours on the south side of the building in the sunshine. If the thermometer showed 11 below in the morning, we went back to bed. If it was 9 below we went to work, drove 26 miles and worked in the open, sometimes without gloves.

When we poured concrete, my job was to handle the wheelbarrow and shovel. The only possible promotion was a new wheelbarrow. We thawed out our sand, gravel and rockpile with a steamhose attached to an old steam engine. If concrete could go 24 hours without freezing it was good.

The day we left--about July 2 or 3, 1948. I had not mentioned college or California to anyone during this time. I had heard only half a dozen broadcasts during the winter. I believe that XEG was off the air completely during that ~~early~~ summer. Irvin, my companion for these next months, had been to North Dakota working in the harvest before. Both of us had cars; I wasn't coming back to Wisconsin, so we both drove. We might also be working separately. But college was an idea I was keeping to myself, and wasn't completely sure about it anyhow.

At 4 in the morning--We were to start for North Dakota early. To do a thing right it should be done on time. And that requires an early start. Irvin was to be at my house. There was a light rain. He lived a few miles away. I was ready and drove over to see him. The house was dark. His dad came to the door. It took me 5 minutes to convince him to let me in out of the rain. Irvin wasn't up yet. I went up to his room, knocked on the door, it was locked. He unlocked the door and let me in. An unusual family, they always locked everything up tight, especially in a thunder storm. He wasn't packed yet. Still half asleep, not packed yet, and still recovering from the night before.

Our North Dakota trip begins late--two miles of slick, muddy road with smooth tires. My Chevy was moving diagonally down the road slowly. My speedometer cable broke. We were getting off to a bad start. These loose ends all add up to trouble later in the day.

Hours later we crossed the Minnesota line and came to a stop a few miles down the road to check the map. Irvin had stayed with me. He could not follow the road map. He was not aware of the fact that we were in Minnesota. Nor was my construction boss. Why I didn't lose Irvin I don't know. Maybe it would have been better and less trouble.

Our trip continued N.W. across Minnesota toward Fargo, N.D. Some miles later I smelled smoke in the car. The floor boards were hot. Irvin pulled ahead of me honking and I stopped. The battery on the 1939 Chevy was under the floor boards on the righthand side. A worn battery cable had caused sparks and there was a leak in the gas line. Flames came up through

the opening when the cover over the battery was taken off. We scraped up what little loose gravel we could find on the roadside and attempted to put the fire out. We had a few bad moments but finally it was out.

There's an Exodus coming of the children of Israel from all parts of the world, and Exodus that should wipe out the memory of any early Exodus. This trip from Wisconsin to North Dakota, my months of work there, and trip to Pasadena were as sort of an Exodus. Maybe it will fade from memory in the Exodus of the future. But it is still a vivid memory for me today.

Fire had stopped us once. A heavy rainstorm followed, and we were brought to a complete halt in the middle of the highway, unable to move at all. Considerable time had been lost, and it did not appear that we were going to make our intended destination by that evening.

My speedometer cable had broken early that morning; Irvin said I was doing about 70. The left front tire blew and left a streak of melted asphalt as I brought that car to a halt. It had been a new tire, but with an old tube. This was before I had learned the less of that scripture of putting old and new together. That tube was in pieces none larger than 2 inches square.

We inquired about harvest work at a gas station, I believe it was Barney, North Dakota. He sent us to the employment office. Every little town has one. A few minutes later we were talking to our new boss. He had just hired two older men a day or so earlier. After talking with us, he told them his "cousins" from Wisconsin had come and fired them. Half an hour later our boss and his wife went to town with the comment, "Make yourself at home,

there's beer in the ice box." It rained the next day and we found ourselves lying in the haymow, enjoying our good luck. Free meals, no work while it rained. I had not slept that first night. It had been a rather hectic day.

But how long can a man go without sleep? Irvin and I shared the same bed. He slept easily. I couldn't sleep at all. One reason, I knew he was an epileptic, (I did not understand the implications of this at the time) and worse yet he moved his toes up and down against my legs at night. Two weeks went by and I did not know sleep. I went to bed at night, stared at the ceiling through the night, and was awake in the morning when others awakened. The Scriptures say that "the sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much." I may have slept, but it must have been extremely light. Magazine articles on the subject that I have read since, say that a person cannot go that long without sleep.

I had left Wisconsin strong, in good health, muscles that were accustomed to hard work, and hands that were covered with callouses. Mr. Armstrong's comments several weeks ago that his brother-in-law Mr. Dillon, who had been our first college president, looked at these first students of Ambassador college as "panty-waists," I think it was. I had another impression when I came to Ambassador, the hands of these people were soft, including Mr. Dillon's, you had to be careful in shaking hands with them. Their hands were like mine look now.

After these two weeks, I slept lightly. They fed us well. We had breakfast, lunch and dinner like normal people; there was a difference, though.

We had breakfast in the morning, then lunch, then our noon meal which we called dinner, then an afternnon lunch, then our evening meal which we called supper, five good meals a day. And in the evening we always went up town for a few beers and naturally some peanuts, potato chips and things like that to go with it. A working man ought not to go to bed hungry. Still I lost weight. Alkali water was one of the chief problems. I am still allergic to this day to the word "alkali." And coffee five times a day was probably the basic cause of this no sleep business.

A forty-acre field of barley was a good place to start. Today most grain is combined, back then it was cut with a binder, tied into bundles, and had to be set up in shocks. Irvin played with this work. Ordinarily I would have done the same. But going day after day without sleep, and then this alkali water, we were thankful for the cornfield on each side of our barley patch.

Let's back up to my second day in North Dakota, We ate breakfast. A close friend of the boss ate breakfast with us. He went up the road with the grain elevator behind the tractor. Some hours later that grain elevator and tractor were still standing in the middle of the road near a place where the highline wires crossed over. The normal procedure was to take a wooden stick, lift the wire over the metal grain elevator . . . this time it didn't work he touched both the ground and the metal grain elevator, moments later he was dead.

Thus my introduction to North Dakota was: First, Fire; second, Violent

Weather; third, a Blowout of a Front Tire; fourth, the Death of a man that we had just eaten breakfast with. An unanswered question even today, was the epilepsy of my harvest companion related in any way to these troubles?

Then, no Sleep and Alkali water.

Now let's add some Mosquitos. We were working in the bed of an ancient lake, called Lake Agassiz, a lake that had been there during the Glacial age. I once counted a hundred bites or attempts to bit in about a five-minute period. Looking back now 19 years later I can almost hear words from the book of Job, "See Ken Herrmann down there, spare only his life."

One day after a rain, it was too wet to thresh, so we went to work with these machines that spread this nice organic material back on the soil. They had cattle and naturally this unmentionable was available in quantity. They were loading with a hydraulic scoop on the front of the tractor, and Irvin and I were driving tractors in front of these spreaders. I was driving an old 10-20 McCormick on steel wheels with lugs on them. We went down through a ditch, an iron casting that held the tractor seat broke. Except for a good solid grip on that steering wheel, I wouldn't be here today.

College ideas came and went as July passed, no broadcast--the last broadcast I had heard in Wisconsin said not expect answers to letters because they were weeks behind in answering. I had never written to Pasadena, nor had I seen a copy of the Plain Truth or any of the booklets. There were only about 4 or 5 at the time. Perhaps I had heard six or eight whole broadcasts. I wanted to come to Pasadena to see Ambassador College with my own eyes. August

came--we were threshing wheat on our last big field. Alkali water and lack of sleep had taken its toll. But this was the end of the job, we had another dozen acres of flax to thresh. A morning's work and my job would be over. So this final afternoon after a long hard day we celebrated with a case of beer or so. So then Irvin and I headed back down the road a couple of miles each with our team and bundle-wagon. First a brief race across the field. He had a faster team, and I knew it, but it was still fun to race. Our next chance came along an old railroad track where there were double lanes and we could race side-by-side for a quarter mile or so.

It was fun while it lasted, but Irvin soon pulled ahead, the gate was approaching and a sharp right hand turn. I pulled back on the lines. The horses slowed a bit, and suddenly something snapped. A metal snap holding the neck yoke below the collar on the righthand horse broke. In a split second the pole dropped and swung sideways under the lefthand horse, the wheels jammed under the rack. The pole broke, the reach broke, and in far less time than it takes to tell about it . . . well, I was still hanging onto the lines and on top the rack and the horses had stopped.

Irvin made the turn into the gate with a big smile and no trouble at all. The boss would be on the way in a few moments with tractor and threshing machine. How could we salvage what was left? We rolled a new wagon under the rack, inspected the damage, lined it all up neatly over by the barn, and waited for the storm to begin. But it all worked out fine. The boss wondered whether any one had been hurt.

There had been something wrong with that rack anyhow. It was wider and longer and lower than the other two. To give a decent appearing load I was probably doing about 50 percent more work than the other two men.

Another day's work with flax and our job ran out. I left Irvin, and leaving him seemed to be leaving most of my trouble. There was one parting shot. We separated at a juncture in the road. He went to the right and I to the left. A mile or so later the water pump on my Chevy went out. A repair job in Oakes, N. D. and I was on the way west to Ellendale.

College ought to start in about two more weeks. My younger brother was working a hundred miles to the west near Ellendale. I spent a night with him and then got a job for approximately two weeks. Fifty cents an hour driving tractor for an Adventist boss.

This is one job I will never forget. Friday morning came. The boss told me to bring the tractor in early, before sundown. That there would be no work on the Sabbath. This was a Seventh Day Adventist family, a home without electricity, a completely different atmosphere than anything I had ever known before. Bibles in the home and they were practically worn out. Children who were well behaved.

Since we were now west in the area of the Glacial Moraine, we had pure water, rather than alkali water. No coffee, no pork, but pork flavoring instead, I had to keep my refreshments locked in the trunk of the car, but I slept like a log.

What does a man do on his first Sabbath? My new boss and his family went visiting and I was home alone. I went downtown, enjoyed a pork chop dinner, and got a few hours work for the afternoon with a different employer.

My Adventist boss and I talked Bible every evening. I didn't believe what I had heard Mr. Armstrong say. These doctrines needed testing. One good way was to try out the doctrines on someone else and see the reaction. My boss couldn't answer them. So he coaxed his Adventist preacher to come out one evening. We talked Bible for four hours. Two controversial points Sabbath and Millennium. He had the best of me on one, I on the other. He plagued me continually with regard to the Sabbath. I could give him a bad time on the question of where the Millennium would be spent.

My two weeks till college were about up, the job was practically done. I had spent those two weeks on a tractor studying the Bible, or so my boss claimed. I memorized it in the evening and during the day studied what I had memorized. The fields were extremely rough. One could sit only so long on the seat, stand, sit on a fender, or on the gas tank and ride backwards. But all the time turning these scriptures over and over.

Adventist cooking did have its weak points. I remember one lunch they sent out along with me. Two big slices of bread cut through the loaf lengthwise, scrambled eggs in between, and some sort of tomato sauce on top the eggs. I dug a hole and buried the tomato sauce and eggs, and ate the bread. After, of course, wiping it off carefully.

I had my revenge on Adventist cooking accidentally some years later here at the college. I just couldn't eat all the roughage our Adventist cook put on our plates. As we left through the kitchen we were to put leftovers in one garbage can, napkins in another. "Is this where we put the garbage?" I asked. "Well you don't have to call it garbage while it's still on the plate."

My two-week job was coming to an end. Should I go to college? Or was I too old at age twenty-four? A college-educated friend of my boss came over that evening and told of his experiences in going to an Adventist college. He didn't know of my college plans and it seems strange to sit there and listen to him give all the answers to the questions I was in doubt on.

My last day in North Dakota. I still have my Selective Service Registration card dated September 3, 1948. I parked my Chevy outside the Ellendale courthouse with pretty well everything I owned inside, and went in and registered. I remember the question, Address? I didn't have any. My car was outside. Destination West and California.

So the next days were spent on the way out to California with a short stopover in Nebraska where I had worked previously. I remember coming through Denver late in the evening, tired, hoping to drive through the city and find a place to stop on the other side, planning to sleep in the car that night. The mountains were a real surprise. Had never seen any real ones before. Steep slopes going down what seemed to be thousands of feet, and no guardrails. Back in Wisconsin every ditch six feet or so deep is going to have some sort of railing.

There was only one significant event on my whole way out. My Chevy boiled and nothing we could find at the gas station would seem to help. There was one more problem and it seemed a serious one. A gas strike was going on in California. I remember rather vividly the remark of one service station attendant, "You're headed the wrong way son, there is no gas ahead." It gave a sense of urgency to the trip. Many stations were out of gas and more closing continually.

That trip through the mountains and desert was certainly no pleasure back in 1948. Our fine modern roads did not exist at that time. Everything seemed narrow, winding, and full of chuckholes. Las Vegas slot machines claimed two dimes, more since. Cigarettes stayed in North Dakota. Fire hazard around thresher.

Now, my first day at Ambassador. I would like to describe briefly the college that I found 22 years ago. It was grey and overcast the day I arrived. I learned later that this is called smog. I spent my first night at a motel just across the street from Gwinn's Resturant. The motel proprietor knew of no Ambassador College (probably still doesn't). We finally found the address in the phone book. And the next morning found my Chevy with one low tire and one flat tire. I had seen enough of North Dakota, enough mountains and too much desert. There was no turning back.

So I changed a tire and drove over to 363 Grove Street. The first man I met on campus was the gardner. In the weeks to come, he frankly stated what he thought, "that Mr. Armstrong was in it for the money and just running a racket."

But let's take a look ahead five or six years. This same gardener inherited a fairly good sum of money and promptly retired. At age forty-five or possibly fifty at the most he had what he wanted. Someone else's hard earned money. His goal in life had been met.

What kind of college did I find? Mr. Armstrong interviewed me in what recently was Mrs. Armstrong's office. It was then the Registrar's office. I asked a seemingly innocent question, "How many students do you have?" Mr. Armstrong answered rather vaguely and got off the subject. I asked again and the same thing happened. Even the little training I had had in etiquette told me that it would not be polite to ask a third time. Either he was hiding something or else he unintentionally had forgotten to give me the specific information I wanted. So the solution was to ask someone else.

I really wanted to know how many students we had. I asked Betty Michel and got another vague answer. My own estimate said a new college might have thirty or forty students for the first year. This was now the second year for Ambassador and there to be more. The general type of answer I was receiving, "Well, there is Herman and Dick, and Raymond is still in Oregon and Mr. Armstrong has had letters from a lot of applicants. We don't know how many there will be. Oh, have you seen. . ." and the subject was changed.

I wondered about dormitories, a campus cafeteria, why no radio program was heard in Pasadena, why no one out here seemed to know about Ambassador College. Looking back at the problem today I can understand why my Exodus from

Egypt was full of troubles. Had the way been easy, I probably would have taken one look at Ambassador College and left.

How many students were there? Well, there had been four that first year. Mr. Dick Armstrong, whose real interest in the Scriptures was to develop some years later. Mr. Raymond Cole, who did not return that second year in time for registration due to illness (he came October 6). Miss Betty Bates, (whom we now know as Mrs. Gene Michel), was the only girl those first few years. And Dr. Hoeh, who could listen to my questions, eat an apple and read his book all at the same time. That was the Sophomore class. Four with one missing made three.

And how many new Freshmen? There was one who was interested only in learning French, and was a neighbor of Mr. Armstrong. Another who had come out from Wisconsin, thinking he would find a college out here. That did not make a very impressive total. Three from the first year and two new Freshmen; five. Mr. Cole was to come the next week, that would make six and two more a month or two later made a total of eight. One (the French student) left, and we were Seven.

I attended my first classes, not fully aware of all this student count. Perhaps a bit naive. After all, more were coming, no one knew how many. Freshman Composition was first. There were two of us. One student, one teacher--Mrs. Martin.

My next class was Algebra. Here again I was the only student. And I wasn't too enthusiastic about Algebra, having had no math of any kind since the eighth grade, none in high school and having been out of high school seven years.

But Survey of Physical Science the class was a 100% improvement. Here we had two students. The only problem was that one of them was the teacher. Dr. Hoeh was my teacher that first year (instead of Dr. Taylor as listed in the College Bulletin). It did not take too long in this Physical Science class to come to the conclusion that I knew about as much science as my teacher. (We came to a gentlemen's agreement on that) and that I knew somewhat more about science than the man who had written the text book. He was a Californian and had written this to get his Master's Degree. Crater Lake, California was the caption of one picture. Those of you from Oregon understand the problem. I took delight in pointing out a dozen or more errors in the book.

Now French class was different. There were three bonafide students. But the professor Mr. Mauler-Hienney was another problem. You see, he had but a single tooth. This one tooth he often enjoyed showing to little Negro boys that he met on the way to school. Mr. Mauler-Hienney, educated in Paris by the Jesuits. An energetic individual who had earned the name (L'American savage) by running in front of the teams of horses on the streets of Paris and jumping up on the end of the wagon pole, much to the anger of the drivers.

I had shocked acres of grain in North Dakota but two more shocks were to follow. They arrived from Arkansas November 8. I had never heard this dialect before in my life. The most perplexing item was the continual use of the word (you all). I would be studying by myself and be approached by one

of the McNair brothers with a "Have you all completed your algebra assignment?" I would instinctively look both ways. The most fascinating thing about this language peculiarity is that most people from the South will deny that they use it with reference to a single person. Yet I looked around and could see no one.

The first copy of the Plain Truth I saw after arriving on campus. I had not written because our parents trained us not to write for these things. Magazines are filled with puzzles, coupons, invitations to write in. My mother had repeatedly forbidden us to answer these. "They want your name on their mailing list . . . they will send you a bunch of junk to sell and you'll have yourself in for a lot of trouble." XEG, this Mexican station, was another reason for not writing in. If you have heard the station I think you will understand why. Their commercials sound just too good to be true.

A number of memories from those early days at Ambassador are rather vivid. First, the realization that people here believed the story about Jonah and the Whale. I had heard it as a child. The library here afforded a chance to see what the educated scholars said about it. I would imagine I picked up Clark's Commentary or Jamison, Fosset and Brown. Here was a chance to check with the great accredited authorities. Just as I thought, these priests of Baal didn't believe it either. Just a story.

Then came a comment from Mrs. Armstrong. I can still see her sitting in the Library on the south side of the room telling me, of course that story was true, that Jesus had quoted it and that made it factual.

Some weeks later Mr. Raymond Cole, then a Sophomore, came up with a comment on when the day begins. At Sunset? How far back in history do these people want to live? I can still see him standing in the doorway between the main part of the library room and the reception room.

About this time I did mention to Mr. Armstrong that I did not believe all the things he taught but had come out to see whether they were true. I wanted to know and yet how could I be sure? Mr. Armstrong sounded convincing. But where was the proof? And how could I be the judge? The commentaries certainly offered no help.

I had seen proof of God, but was the Bible true? I did not know. Had Jesus Christ ever lived? I gave that point the most critical test I could think up. What a man's enemies will say good about him, that ought to be true. So I picked up the Jewish Encyclopedia. Why don't you take a look some time? It is convincing evidence.

Evolution? What did that have to do with life? It made me no difference. Mr. Armstrong had made some statements that Charles Darwin was wrong, that his logic in the Origin of the Species was wrong. But Darwin had been dead since 1882 and this was 1948. How could Darwin have any bearing on the problem.

Betty Bates brought up the question of Israel, that we were descendents physically. Again my thinking. What does that have to do with the problem?

Another puzzle came in those first weeks of school. The Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and then they were all going to take off for Oregon

for a vacation. Mr. Armstrong personally invited me to go along. I thanked him but had come to the conclusion that I ought to stay on my job here. I was working at the Walgren Transformer factory at Waverly and Raymond. College was in session Monday, Wednesday, Friday. And I was working Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday.

My "college dormitory" was a small room over behind the Civic Auditorium. I ate in the Cafeterias of Pasadena and sometimes in my room. My favorite order at the Cafeteria near the Citizens Bank was Hash. I can't stand the sight of it today. One crowded day I sat down at a table with another man. He happened to be from Michigan and we found much in common to talk over. A day or so later I came in again and found the place very crowded and the same man motioning me to come to sit down at his table which had about the only empty chair left. He offered me a chance to live at his place in Northern Pasadena about 1800 North Walworth. Rather than a bare room with four walls to look at, I had a desk, a telephone on the desk, his typewriter to use when I wanted to, and he offered to let me put my car in the garage. It was a tight squeeze and I didn't think it would go in. But with the bumper tight up against one end I found we could shut the door and it was a perfect fit. Now I was doing my own cooking, washing my clothes in the washing machine, and my thousand dollars I had put aside for college could be stretched out over four years time. What I had planned to be a single year of college, was going to become a full four-year college course.

I remember asking Mr. Armstrong in our conference how much the tuition was and what it would cost to attend college. I have often wondered if the exacting nature of my question was not what prompted the decision to offer that year of college without tuition. But I do have my cancelled check for a tuition payment September 9, 1949 which was registration for my Sophomore year.

The proper name for Pasadena is "the Crown City." But there are other names for Pasadena. One is "The City of the Living Dead." I'm not sure of that origin but it seems to refer to the retired widows, the little old ladies, living off their deceased husbands' bank accounts. I was to have this title made clear one hot September afternoon. The smog, the heat, a general need for a bit of relaxation and for a single glass of that bubbling liquid with the foam on top. I started east on Colorado Blvd. from about the corner of Marengo. I looked each way at each corner and kept going east. There ought to be a Tavern about half a block away at least by Wisconsin standards. Euclid, Los Robles, Oakland, Madison, El Molino, Oak Knoll, Lake, Mentor, nine blocks, over a mile. One could properly call that twenty-seven blocks if one included the fact that I looked North and South at each intersection. Pasadena was truly "The City of the Living Dead."