

Where Are They Now? The Movers, the Shakers, And the Shaken

A “shakee” of some years ago reports on the adventures of Adventist celebrities.

by Ronald Graybill

RECENTLY, I BELATEDLY READ MERIKAY’S BOOK *Betrayal*, in which she describes her efforts to win equal pay for equal work at the Pacific Press, and the wrenching emotional consequences of her successful lawsuit. I wondered about her and all the other Seventh-day Adventists involved in controversy and change over the years. Where are they now? How do they feel about the church and their changed relationship to it? What about Desmond Ford, Walter Rea, and Donald Davenport? For that matter, what about entertainers Little Richard and Clifton Davis? Those

After earning his doctoral degree in American history at Johns Hopkins University, Ronald Graybill resigned from the White Estate in a controversy over his doctoral dissertation. Today he chairs the Department of History and Political Science at La Sierra University, and spends a part of his time teaching courses on Adventist history and Ellen White for the School of Religion. His relations with the White Estate have remained cordial, and they have been generous, Graybill says, in providing him with all the materials he needs for his teaching. They have, however, kept him at arm’s length when it comes to projects relating to Ellen White, refusing his repeated requests to engage in scholarly editing and annotation of Ellen White’s documents.

mentioned here do not begin to represent all the prominent and well-known Adventists in whom people might be interested. They are merely those I wondered about and about whom I was able to get at least some current information. Some are saints, others mere survivors. Some are vocal, some are silent. Some are famous in society, some within Adventism.

Merikay

As for Merikay, she is still an active and involved Christian. From time to time she will drop in on a young adult Sabbath school class in a nearby Seventh-day Adventist church. More often she worships with the Society of Friends (Quakers), whose services are largely silent, but whose religious activities are highly practical efforts to help the hungry and homeless and promote peace in the world. Merikay is even pursuing a graduate degree in religion.

Although Merikay still cherishes many friendships among Adventists, she is beset by a healthy and understandable paranoia about

the Adventist zealots and crazies who continue to pursue her with pompous or awkwardly naive appeals and warnings.

She expresses no bitterness over what happened at the Pacific Press. She sees it as a time of growth and eventual triumph, not only for her, but for the Adventist Church as well. In spite of the pain, the bigotry, and the betrayal she felt, she cannot see that period of her life as a tragedy. Indeed, when Adventist lawyers gather early next year, they will be taking a retrospective look at the long term impact of the *Merikay vs. Pacific Press* case on the church's practices.

Merikay has continued her interest in women's issues. She served for three years on a county-wide Commission on the Status of Women and has given seminars on how to identify and stop sexual harassment in the workplace. She spoke several times at last July's conference of the Association of Adventist Women.

Merikay continues to be an active writer. She makes her living as an editor and writes in her free time as well. Recently she has been drawing on her experiences in Czechoslovakia, producing articles on the "Velvet Revolution" for local newspapers, an alumni journal, and a magazine specializing in world affairs. Why Czechoslovakia? Where else are writers and artists so involved in government? How thrilling to hear the ideals of Jefferson and Madison espoused as living realities!

Lorna Tobler

But why is Merikay virtually out of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, while her co-plaintiff, Lorna Tobler, continues to be an active member of the Mountain View, California, church? For one thing, Merikay was much younger, and probably much more naive about the capacity of church leaders for venality and vindictiveness. For another, Tobler's steady, godly, and patient husband, Gus, suffered with her from within the confines of church employment, while the trauma of the Pacific Press experience broke up Merikay's marriage.

Lorna Tobler herself points to the fact that she was reared in the church, belonging to a family with long and extensive acquaintance with church leaders. If some leaders turned out to be cowards or liars, Tobler knew of generations of other leaders who were

devoted, friendly, and honest.

Merikay never made a decision to leave the church. She simply felt that there was no church where she could go, no congregation that wanted her in their fellowship. When 300 employees of the Pacific Press seemed to be against her, and only half a dozen helped and encouraged her, it seemed clear to her that the church did not want her.

For Tobler, it was different. She had a big enough circle of Adventist friends and family so as to be able to redefine "church." Church

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was not those leaders who lied in court and fought tooth and nail to deny women simple justice. No, there were still Adventists who stood for the right though the heavens fell.

Yet in the final analysis, these two women's differing responses can never be explained. People are different. Their reactions to hostility and rejection, to isolation and condemnation vary. They judge their own hearts and their own needs differently. Tobler and Merikay were the same only in the minds of those who saw them only as parties to a lawsuit.

Tobler currently makes her living as a paralegal dealing with workers' compensation, researching for litigation and preparing for trials. Her Pacific Press experience provided a logical transition to a new career.

Max Phillips

Max Phillips' job at Pacific Press provided a benchmark for the Merikay case by showing what the press did for males who did comparable work. Like Merikay, Max too went through a divorce at that time.

Phillips says he left the Adventist Church for two reasons: he lost confidence in the integrity of the leadership and he lost confidence in the integrity of the doctrines, particularly the church's beliefs about Ellen White and its understanding of Creation. He studied deeply in geological literature and concluded, to put it simply, that "evolution is a fact."

For seven or eight years he attended a Presbyterian church, but discovered that its right wing is no more hospitable to those who believe in evolution than is the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Phillips says he likes Adventist people and from time to time he attends one of the discussion-type Sabbath school classes at Walla Walla College.

After leaving the Pacific Press, Phillips worked for a time at the Stanford University School of Medicine preparing teaching materials for medical students. Now he works for

Cecil Coffey Communications in Walla Walla, Washington, editing *Health Science*, a magazine that provides generic health-related stories to which 150 hospital-clients add their own local news.

Walter Rea

Walter Rea's current relationship echoes Merikay's in some respects. Technically, both are still members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in that their names are still carried on congregational rolls. Rea's problem is different, though. The Long Beach church has been willing to send his "letter" to another congregation, but none of the congregations in central California near his San Joaquin Valley home in Paterson is willing to accept his membership. At least one pastor has even invited him to attend services, begging him to understand why he cannot be accepted as a member. Rea doesn't relish that kind of fellowship.

After moving to Paterson from Los Angeles, Rea started a tax-preparation business from which he has since retired. He continues to farm 400 acres of walnuts, apricots, and cherries, and financially he is better off now than he ever was as an Adventist minister. Rea has also been very active in community affairs. He has served as president of the county's Commission on Aging for four years. He also spent four years as a member of the board of directors for the Del Parto Hospital in Paterson, and served on the county grand jury.

Rea's book about Ellen White's literary borrowing, *The White Lie*, continues to sell, and has been translated into several foreign languages. He is in touch with Adventists from all over the world on a weekly basis, people who call or write to request or offer information.

Rea, who is still an ordained Seventh-day Adventist minister, believes he was fired not over the Ellen White issue, but over his agitation on the Davenport case. His book about church leaders' conflict of interest in investing church funds in risky, unsecured loans to Dav-

enport, titled *Pirates of Privilege*, has been translated into five languages. Unlike *The White Lie*, Rea circulates his Davenport book only among Seventh-day Adventists. In it he claims to demonstrate that it was this issue that cost him his job as a minister in the Southern California Conference.

Still, Rea says he harbors no animosity toward the church and doesn't consider himself an enemy of the church. "Adventism is the only thing I ever knew," he says. "I have no desire to go to another church."

Donald Davenport

Donald Davenport, whose dealings with the denomination so provoked Rea, lives quietly in retirement in Corona del Mar, California. For a time after his investments soured, he returned to the practice of medicine. He has been so berated in the press that he prefers not to talk to reporters. He still feels that much of what happened was beyond his control.

He and his wife were disfellowshipped by their local congregation. For some time they remained close to a Southeastern California pastor. Then one of their adult sons died in tragic circumstances. The pastor consoled them as any good friend and clergyman would, but paradoxically he reminds them of painful memories. The Davenports have had decreasing contact with him.

Desmond Ford

Desmond Ford's activities are better known to many Adventists because of his "Good News Unlimited" ministry operating from Auburn, California. He speaks on daily and weekly radio programs throughout the United States and in several other countries, maintains half a dozen weekly television shows, and travels, preaches, and lectures widely in the United States and throughout the world.

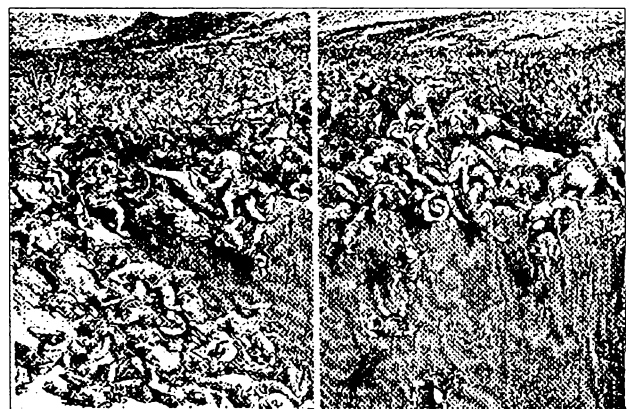
Ford characterizes the bulk of his supporters as "Gospel Adventists," some of whom are members of regular Adventist congregations, and some of whom belong to independent fellowships. He occasionally appears in some of the larger Seventh-day Adventist churches, usually during the Sabbath school hour. On other occasions he appears at the invitation of local chapters of the Association of Adventist Forums.

Unlike Rea, Ford's ordination was officially revoked. However, his local church membership remains with the Pacific Union College Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Southern College Alumni

Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists was also a hotbed of controversy in the early 1980s, what with self-appointed mothers-in-Israel and their zealous counterparts eavesdropping on religion professors, eager to discard any who had escaped the assembly-line cookie-cutters.

Not a few of the refugees from that overheated factory escaped to Southern California where they live in balmy and productive contentedness. Ed Zackrison spent several years teaching at La Sierra Academy before joining the School of Religion at La Sierra University. Jolene Zackrison heads the Department of Office Management for La Sierra University.



Both are very active in church and school activities. Ed continues his interest in drama, leading a Christian drama group for the university and supervising the annual drama production at La Sierra Academy.

Teamed with Bill Allen and Melvin Campbell, who are also both refugees from Southern College, Zackrison leads out in a popular and effective Sabbath school class for university students at the La Sierra University church. Librarian Charles Davis, another Tennessee transplant, is reference librarian at La Sierra University and serves on the faculty senate.

Lorenzo Grant, another former member of the Southern College religion department, now pastors the University Seventh-day Adventist Church near the University of Southern California in Los Angeles.

Jerry Gladson, who was voted Outstanding Teacher of the Year at Southern College in 1981-1982, was forced out in 1987. He is presently academic dean at the Psychological Studies Institute in Atlanta, Georgia. This institute is a graduate-level professional school in psychology and religion.

Frank Knittle, erstwhile president of Southern College, is a respected and beloved professor of English at La Sierra University. A former chair of the English department, he now heads



the Liberal Studies program in addition to his continuing work in English. In his spare time he operates one of the more successful Kawasaki motorcycle dealerships in Southern California, and serves as the senior pastor of the Riverside Seventh-day Adventist Church for \$1 per year.

Smuts van Rooyen

Actually, Pastor Knittle is rarely in the pulpit at Riverside anymore. That honor usually falls to Smuts van Rooyen, who is officially billed the congregation's minister of counseling. Van Rooyen, formerly a religion teacher at Andrews University, left Adventist employment because of his support for Desmond Ford. He even worked with Ford at Good News Unlimited for two years after leaving Andrews. Then he went to South Africa for a year to sell real estate. Returning to the United States, he spent two years as a substance-abuse counselor at the Battle Creek Adventist Hospital, then went back to Andrews to get his doctoral degree in counseling psychology.

Through it all, though, van Rooyen was unsatisfied. He felt a powerful calling to preach. He was, as he puts it, an organist without an organ. Then came the opportunity to serve in Riverside. Under van Rooyen's "counseling," the Riverside church's attendance has swelled from a little more than 100 to nearly 500 each week. Membership has increased by 55 in the year he has been there. Tithe is up 42 percent over the previous year, with August 1991 tithe 100 percent more than August 1990 tithe. Like Ford, van Rooyen suffered the revocation of his ordination. He now holds a ministerial license, but there is talk of renewing his ordination.

It was said of the great English preacher George Whitefield that he could move a congregation to tears just by pronouncing the word "Mesopotamia." Van Rooyen's earnest, loving, passionate preaching, which often

touches on the tragedies and triumphs of the Christian's walk, is like that, too. His power in the pulpit is even greater when one knows the deep personal anguish he has experienced.

Ronald Numbers

One of the earliest individuals to shake the Seventh-day Adventist Church was Ronald Numbers, who taught medical history at Loma Linda University until the mid-1970s, when his book *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White* appeared. The book showed that, in her health teachings, rather than being ahead of her time, Ellen White was a product of her times.

Numbers has gone on to a highly successful career in academia. He is professor of the history of medicine and the history of science at the University of Wisconsin, Madison; editor of *Isis*, the leading scholarly journal on the history of science; and the author of several books. Numbers' latest work, a history of creation science, will soon be published by the prestigious Knopf publishing house. In it he covers the leading Adventist figures in creation science, from George McCready Price to those who have participated in the Geoscience Research Institute. The book also deals with creationists outside the Seventh-day Adventist Church, primarily Anglo-Americans.

Numbers' book on Ellen White as a health reformer is about to be republished with two long additions. One, by Jonathan Butler, covers the impact of the book itself, including the controversies it sparked within Adventism. The other, which Numbers co-wrote with his wife Janet, a clinical psychologist, is a discussion of Ellen White's personal mental health and her teachings on the subject of mental health. Numbers no longer professes Adventism, but he continues many friendships with Adventists from his past.

Grady Smoot

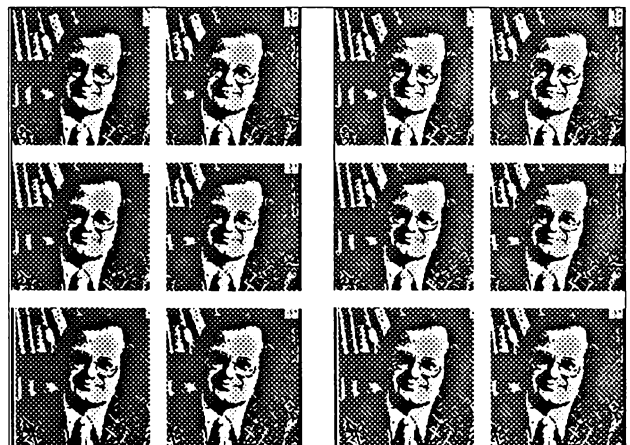
Also a refugee from Adventist higher education is Grady Smoot, who served as

president of Andrews University from 1976 to 1983, when personal problems forced him out. Smoot is still in education, now as vice president for development at Pittsburg State University in Pittsburg, Kansas. Under his supervision is a public radio station as well as the alumni, public relations, and development activities of the university. Pittsburg State, with some 6,000 students, is one of six regional Kansas universities. The school prides itself in its fine program in marketing studies and on its athletic teams. Since his arrival in 1984, Smoot has increased the school's endowment from \$2 million to \$10 million.

Smoot says nothing has changed in his relationship to the church, except that now, of course, he and his wife worship as lay persons rather than as leaders.

Donald McAdams

Don McAdams is another former Adventist college president with a new life. McAdams left Southwestern Adventist College of his own choice while going through a divorce. Except for the entertainers I will mention below, he has probably enjoyed the greatest financial success through his change in employment. McAdams lives in Houston, Texas, where he works as an adjunct consultant with the American Productivity and Quality Center, an organization of which he was previously executive director. His clients, which

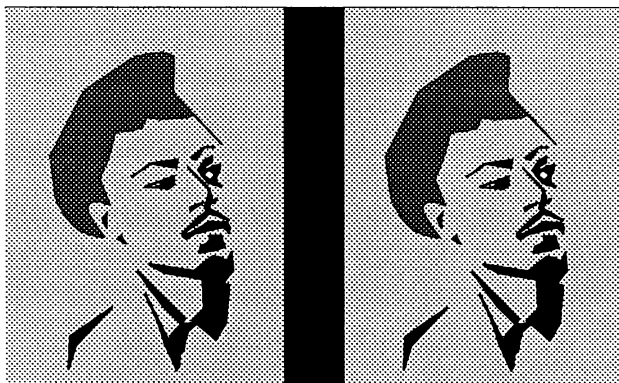


include some of America's biggest corporations, call on him to teach them the techniques such as those that have made Japan such a formidable competitor to American business. His company helped design the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in 1987, and the techniques he now teaches to organizations could help them become winners of the award.

McAdams remarried in February of 1991. His wife, Anne Pace, is an attorney for Exxon, whose chief responsibility is the Exxon Pipeline Company in Alaska. He has two grown sons by his first marriage, and a three-year-old Peruvian daughter he and his new wife have adopted.

When McAdams quit working for the church, he says he found his mind free to be "logical." He did not have to reach any set conclusions on the troubling scientific, historical, and theological issues Adventism faced. He concluded that there was little or no evidence for some of the positions the church holds. Although he maintains warm friendships with many Adventists elsewhere, he has few Adventist friends in the Houston congregations, and his own participation in the church is largely confined to financial contributions.

Despite his marked financial success, McAdams is most proud of his public service. He has been elected a member of the Houston School Board, which administers the fifth largest school system in the United States. Sud-



denly, McAdams the historian has become McAdams the civic leader, dealing with the leaders of local and state politics.

"Public education," says McAdams, "ties in so well with what I do for a living and who I am as a person." In a school district plagued with the typical problems of crime, drugs, and poverty, McAdams has found a mission that employs his knowledge of history, his expertise in management, his Christian compassion, and his Adventist zeal to better the world.

Meanwhile, he has just obtained a huge contract to teach better management procedures to the entire Veterans Administration system—13 hospitals, including Pettis Memorial, and 14 regional administrative centers.

Little Richard

Then there are the artists, entertainers, and celebrities who name Adventism as their religion. Richard Penniman, popularly known as Little Richard, has doubtless puzzled many Anglo Adventists by his television appearances during which he often plays the rock 'n' roll songs that first made him famous in the '50s and '60s, before he attended Oakwood College and became a Seventh-day Adventist minister. Appearances aside, Little Richard is still very much a Seventh-day Adventist. He regularly attends the Ephesus church in Los Angeles. In fact, some of the limousine drivers who ferry him to church on Sabbath have themselves joined the church. During the intermissions at his concerts, his aides blanket the audience with copies of *Steps to Christ* or *Desire of Ages*—Tutti Frutti meets Ellen White.

Clifton Davis

And what of Clifton Davis, who played Rev. Reuben Gregory on the NBC television sitcom "Amen"? With the show now in syndication, Davis is in Chicago starring in the play *First Lady*, with Vicky Winan.

Davis, who has a B.A. in theology from Oakwood and a Master of Divinity degree (1987) from the SDA Theological Seminary, served as an associate pastor at the Loma Linda University church for a time. He resigned from that position because the pressures of his television series and other public appearances made it impossible to do justice to the job. He still does the radio show "It's a Celebration" on a Christian radio network, and has a gospel album, *Say Amen*, in circulation. As the tabloids have reported, Davis is currently going through a divorce, but his ties to the Adventist Church remain strong.

Archie Moore

Meanwhile, in San Diego, California, Archie Moore, once light heavyweight boxing champion of the world, continues both his sport and his devotion to Adventism. Moore works with inner-city youngsters, and helps train and coach prize fighters. His ring exploits include helping to prepare heavyweight George Foreman for his recent unsuccessful comeback bid. Moore is a member of the 31st Street church in San Diego, California, although his attendance is not regular due to his travels.

Herbert Blomstedt

On a gentler note, what of Herbert Blomstedt, the music director of the San Francisco Symphony? While Blomstedt may not be a household name for many Adventists, his achievements are commanding widespread attention in the music world.

Blomstedt, a Swede, was actually born in the United States. His father, an Adventist minister, pastored Swedish congregations in New England before returning to Sweden to minister when Herbert was only two.

Blomstedt received his musical education

in Sweden, but also studied at Juilliard School and with Leonard Bernstein at Tanglewood's Berkshire Music Center. He conducted orchestras in Sweden and Denmark before becoming music director of the Dresden Staatskapelle, the world's oldest orchestra.

Blomstedt became music director of the San Francisco Symphony in 1985. Many critics have been favorably impressed with his work. National Public Radio called him "a model of old-world integrity, and a conductor with an almost mystical relationship with music. Still waters run deep... but not too deep for Blomstedt." The *New York Times*, reviewing one concert, said he "conducted with clarity and a sense of unswerving interpretive drive." Reviews of the recordings he has made with the San Francisco Symphony have been equally glowing. When *Gramophone* published its "Critics' Choice" selections of favorites from 1990, five different critics and the editor himself named Blomstedt recordings.

His faith continues to inform his artistry, although in ways that may not be apparent on the surface. Consider, for instance, the story behind the new symphonic work by Charles Wuorinin, *Genesis*. Wuorinin (WAR-nen), a MacArthur Genius Award recipient, was composer-in-residence with the San Francisco Symphony in September, 1991. The choral parts consisted of excerpts of the Creation story drawn from the Latin version of the Bible. The work is dense and demanding, both on the orchestra and on the listener. Still, the *San Francisco Chronicle* found it cast in a "striking and profoundly thought-out form." The *New Yorker* noted how the setting for the Sabbath rest was "treated calmly... not in a busy flap and flurry of construction and manufacture but as a depiction of creation by dictate." But the message of the composition that most impressed Blomstedt was the shouted praise to the Lord who "himself made us and not we ourselves."

He travels widely, conducting orchestras around the world, but when he is in San Francisco on Sabbath, he will be found at the Mountain View Seventh-day Adventist Church for services.