

Meeting God Halfway

By Juli Miller

Hailey, Idaho—I start the engine, check my gauges, switch on the radio and lights and tighten my seat belt and shoulder harness. Worship service is about to begin.

My greeter is Dan up in the airport tower. “Goooooooooooood morning! Super Cub eight-two-three-one-four cleared to taxi to three-one.” The sound track encoded onto my ear’s permanent CD begins to play Purcell’s *Trumpet Tune and Air*, a stately invitation to a major celebration. I make the long taxi to the other end of the airport in order to take off to the north into the wind and towards the mountains. As I roll past the rows of still-sleeping single-engine, twin-engine, and jet aircraft, the smile on my face gets broader,

and my toes dance on the rudder pedals to the music.

“Cub three-one-four, cleared for take-off. Wind three-four-zero at niner. Altimeter three-zero-zero-two. Have a good flight.” I take three deep breaths of the cold morning air, scan the instrument panel one more time and put my hand to the throttle. Bach’s dramatic opening bars of *Toccata in D Minor*—the organ’s lower register rumbling in anticipation—and the sound of the engine at full throttle fill my ears as I accelerate down the runway, lift the tail, pull full flaps, and we’re airborne. Amen!

Rising over the town of Hailey, I maneuver to the right a bit to follow the noise abatement procedures, putting me over the cemetery and then the bike path. Tombstones and cyclists and cars shrink; the mountains and clouds loom larger. The ridges are etched with sunrise gold, and I hear Grieg’s *Morning*, the simple melody of uncomplicated innocence with majestic possibilities, as I

make my way between the Pioneer and Smoky ranges.

I continue my ascent abeam the ski lifts and lodges of Sun Valley. In a minute, civilization is behind me. The Wood River flows below, meandering from one side of the broad valley to the other, sharing its cheerful company with the colorful rock walls and aspens of the Boulder Mountains and the hot springs in the grassy meadows below the Smokies. Sometimes



I hear the swirling and twirling of Smetana's *Moldau*, sometimes Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, depending on the colors and shadows beneath me, the mood of the heavens.

Dependent on a continuous feed of voice-mail, e-mail, faxes, FedEx's, phone calls, meetings, memos, press releases, and reports to do my daily work, I long for worship experiences free of words, talk or messages. Free of human babble. *Come unto me and I will give you rest.*

I level the plane at ten thousand feet, kneeling at the pew of the White Cloud Mountains, glimpsing into the Promised Land of the awe-inspiring Sawtooth Mountains and the baptismal headwaters of the Salmon River. Creation on a grand scale. My kind of nature story. *My Lord! What a morning!*

Crossing over Galena summit just over the tree tops, I catch a thermal and gain a few hundred feet before I bank the plane into a lefthand turn in order to cross over into the jagged snowy peaks of the Sawtooth range. The sun is finally high enough to send some warming rays into the cockpit window. I close my eyes for a few seconds, savoring the heat and inhaling the fragrance of the high forest.

Antelope run beneath me in the field next to the cows. In every direction I look, there are more mountains, more sky, more river canyons and creeks, more forests. I begin to see aquamarine glacial ponds tucked between the sharp-edged peaks. Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto #1*. Soaring violins. Majestic piano chord progressions. The plane floats through the intricate and spectacular Sawtooths, and I am thinking about unseen forces: density, altitude, lift, drag, thrust, fronts. Angels, Holy Spirit, faith, prayer, universal truths.

I turn out of the Sawtooth range over the breathtaking Redfish Lake, not far from the small community of Stanley and close to the famous stretches of the Middle Fork of the Salmon River. Hearing other air traffic on the radio, I announce my position and intentions: "Cub three-one-four at eight-point-five over Redfish for Smiley Creek."

A familiar male voice responds, "Hey, is that you Top Cub?" It's Hurricane Hannah, one of my fly-buddies.

"A—'firmative!"

"Where you been?"

"Church."

"Where are you going?"

"Heaven!"

"You cleared for landing?"

"You betcha! Cleared to land."

"See ya."

"See ya."

I descend over Galena summit and head for home.

*Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!
. . . When I look down from lofty mountain
grandeur and hear the brook
and feel the gentle breeze*

*Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!*

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Shut-In, Not Shut-Out, At Home with LLBN*

By Thomas G. Dwyer

Loma Linda, September 19, 1998— My 82-year old mother, Ruth, is sitting on the couch in her aqua velour warm-up suit, sipping coffee, and working the *Sun* crossword puzzle. My 81-year old father, Charles, is still asleep, as is my 11-year old son, Mark. But both soon join us.

Ruth: "Hello, Dearie."

Tom: "Good morning, Mom."

Ruth: "There's some fruit I just cut up in the kitchen and some doughnuts. Help yourself."

Tom: "Are we going to church today?"

Ruth: "Well, we usually just stay here and watch on TV."

Tom: "Okay, that's fine."

Ruth: "But, if you want to go, take the car. I just can't fight the parking over there."

Tom: "I think it's best that you stay right here. I don't want you driving any more than you have to. I have nightmares of you running over some poor freshman med student in the crosswalk."

Charles: "Hello, Lump. When did you arrive?"

Tom: "Late last night."

Charles: "Was I awake?"

Tom: "Well, you were up. I'm not sure how awake you were."

Charles: "How did you get here?"

Tom: "We flew."

Charles: "From point A to point B?"

Tom: "Yes."

Charles: "But how did you get here?"

Tom: "We rented a car, since it was so late."

Charles: "And the little man came with you?"

Tom: "Yes."

Charles: "We're glad you fellas came. Can I get you some coffee?"

Tom: "No, I'm fine."

Mark: "Well, what's the plan?"

Tom: "We're going to stay home and watch church on the television."

Charles: "Okay, where's the hoocus?"

Mark: "Here's the remote, Grandpa."

Marvin Ponder: "Joyful observance of this holy time, sunset to sunset, is a celebration of God's creative and redemptive acts. Join us on the campus of Loma Linda University for the music, prayer and study of God's word at the Sabbath Church."

* Loma Linda Broadcast Network

- Brass Ensemble:** "Lead on, oh, King Eternal"
- Charles:** "There's old Dennie! He can really blow that horn, can't he?"
- Audience:** Applause.
- Marvin Ponder:** "Good morning, and welcome to worship at the University Church. We're glad you're here this morning. The lavender insert that you see is about the Real Life Seminar that is to happen Wednesday night. And Doug, I see your name on that sheet."
- Doug Mace:** "Have you ever said this: 'You know when I was a teenager we used to do it this way at my church.' And before they finish I'd like to stop and say, 'Oh, oh, oh, wait a minute. It's a different church and a different time. This community is very unique. Loma Linda is very unique for teenagers. Teenagers now have Daytimers. . . . So, come out, and worship with us in vibrant discussion and talk about what's so unique about the teenager of Loma Linda"
- Tom:** "That's enough doughnuts, Mark. We're going out for lunch later."
- Marvin Ponder:** "Let's worship together now in the beauty of holiness."
- Brass Ensemble**
- Organ and Choir:** "Face to Face."
- Tom:** "HMMMMMMMMMMMMM."
- Ruth:** "How do you know what song that is?"
- Tom:** "It's, 'Face to Face.' See, there are the words."
- Ruth:** "You're right with it."
- Esther Ames:** ". . . . some of our members and some of our families are in isolation. But as a family we come to you to worship. . . ."
- Charles:** "Shall I clear?"
- Tom:** "Um, I guess I'm finished."
- Charles:** "Another cup of Joe?"
- Tom:** "Okay."
- Bernard Taylor:** "I'd like to welcome you to Systematic Benevolence 101. This is not a tithe envelope, though it's often referred to that way. If you notice, it says "Tithes and Offerings," so that when you have opened it and put your tithe in there, you have not put it to its full use. In fact, tithe is just the first of many things listed here. Church budget is put along with tithe inside a tithe and offering envelope. They're your friends. Put them to good use. The deacons will now receive your church budget and your tithe this morning."
- Brass Ensemble:** "Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing."
- Audience:** Applause
- William Loveless:** "Oh, yes, yes. Thank you, Duane and Brass. . . . Did you hear that rag lip on the trumpet way up high there this morning?"
- "Where's Jennifer. Here she comes. Come over here Merlin."
- Ruth:** "Did you know Jennifer got married? They had the whole church service."
- Tom:** "Who did she marry?"
- Ruth:** "I don't know."
- William Loveless:** "This is Sabbath church continuing from the sanctuary of the University Church in Loma Linda, California. The choir have their boots on now. They're going to be 'Wading in the Water' as they bring us our morning anthem."
- Sanctuary Choir:** "Wade in the Water."

- Ruth:** "We usually see Becky in the choir. There she is."
- Charles:** "She's about the last one left on our little cul-de-sac. Did you know Nate moved out? He's down in Mexico. Teaching, I think."
- William Loveless:** "Our Scripture lesson just said that Jesus has made a place for us, and He will come, and we will be with Him, that we don't know when this is going to happen, that this will surprise many and that's a straight forward idea."
- Tom:** "Is that another bowl of cereal, Dad? Aren't we going out for lunch after church?"
- Charles:** "Okay, I'll eat lunch then, too."
- William Loveless:** "Not a head of your hair will perish. A great deal of reassurance and confidence right in the middle of this discussion."
- Charles:** "Willie has been eating well, too."
- William Loveless:** "It's time now, until I come back again, for you to spread out across the world with your resources and energy and your time and your talents and tell the world. Teach them about me, and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Here's what you do 'til I come back."
- Charles:** "Did you know Willie and I are twins?"
- Tom:** "Twins?"
- Charles:** "Yeah, we were born on the same day."
- William Loveless:** "All of this gives us hope. Most people who are older in this congregation thought when they were kids they would see Jesus when He came. Paul thought that, too."
- Charles:** "Ole Willie had quite a series back in the old days at Hyattsville. Really brought them in. Sonny Liu, I think, was with him. We had a good group back then. Paul Hines, Ophah Mays and all the Sines boys. We all pitched in."
- William Loveless:** "This is not a discussion of marriage, this is a discussion of the end of time. He isn't talking about marriage. He's talking about the end of the world. That's the thesis of this passage. He says, 'I want to spare you trouble.' Not spare you trouble of getting married. Ha, Ha, Ha. No, that's not it. No, that's not the point. Ohhh, it's way off, 380 degrees off target if you read that into it. It's a discussion of the end of the world."
- Ruth:** "Is that Edna Maye?"
- Tom:** "I think so. She was a patient of mine in dental school, you know. I think I did two fillings for her."
- William Loveless:** "Yet we find all this build-up of plaque around this simple, simple beautiful teaching of the return of Jesus. What we have done to this beautiful, simple teaching is unconscionable."
- Charles:** "I think I must have nodded off."
- Mark:** "You were snoring, Grandpa."
- William Loveless:** "Jesus is coming personally. He will appear to us. He has come to take us with him, and during any terrible time of difficulty, He will protect us until the end of the age. Not a head of our hair will perish. He is able and promises that."
- Mark:** "Ya know, at home I don't get a whole lot out of the sermon. So I try to pay attention in Juniors and the study the *Guide* and try to get something out of the lesson. But it's hard to listen to the sermon."
- Charles:** "Well, Mark, I guess a lot of us could say that."

A graduate of Loma Linda University school of dentistry and graduate school, Thomas G. Dwyer is an endodontist who practices in Roseville, California.