

Mamas and Papas

SALVATION ON SAND MOUNTAIN

BY CARMEN LAU

Like many others, I think of grandparents when I think of who has influenced me. Mama and Papa, my grandparents—Lula Dixie Musser Peterson and Raynold G. Peterson—exhibited temerity, loved beauty, sought to learn, and were practical.

Papa wanted to be a physician, but they had heard Mrs. White speak in person and believed the time was short. Rather than take the time to pursue medicine, he decided to complete a one-year nursing course at Madison Hospital. In 1914, Papa left on foot to plan where he and his bride-to-be, also a Madison graduate, could serve the Lord. Papa, born the youngest son of Swedish immigrants in Chicago, and Mama, an orphan from the Midwest, decided that Sand Mountain, Alabama would provide the best ground on which they could work to spread the Adventist message. Purchasing eighty acres, Raynold married Lula on Sand Mountain and received a chivaree celebration from the community to start a life of adventure.

They practiced whole-person care before that became a “thing.” A local “mountain man,” (Papa’s term), did not want to talk about pregnancy, but when it was time for his wife to deliver, it was common for him to come to the

Peterson home, stating, “My wife has a stomach ache and can Mrs. Peterson come?” Mama would set out in a long, black, riding suit on horseback. A kind lady in Eugene, Oregon had heard of their ministry and kept the Petersons stocked with homemade layette sets to be given to the new mothers. Through the years, Mama served as a “wet nurse” to more than one baby.

Papa and Mama saw value in visiting churches of all denominations. In fact, Papa was a semi-regular, guest Sunday School teacher. One time, a man at a Holy Roller Church got the “spirit” and punched him, knocking out some teeth. In the 1930s, as the Great Depression raged, Mama had the idea that growing flowers would be nice. She ordered seeds and bulbs from a Dutch catalogue, and Sand Mountain Flowers began. Papa found that gladiolus, tuberose, dahlias, and baby’s breath did well in the loamy soil. Other families in the church joined the endeavor, and part of the process included giving

tracts to florists and people in the surrounding area who purchased the flowers. Eventually, Floral Crest Seventh-day Adventist Church would be built just a stone’s throw from the Peterson residence.

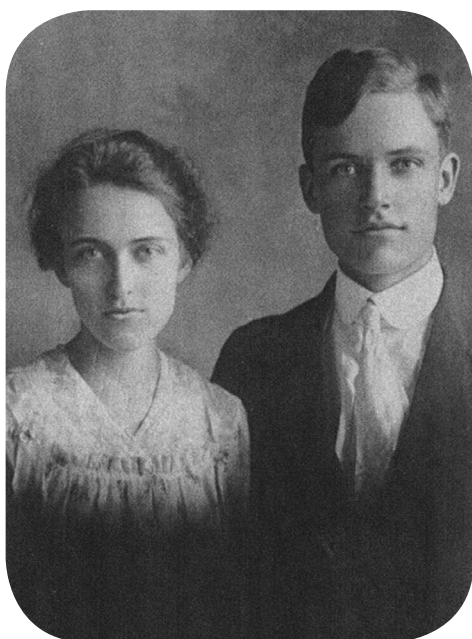
Using contemporary technology, Papa and Mama optimized reel-to-reel recording capability as they recorded,

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listened to, and shared sermons. As practical nurses, they valued Wildwood, a community just down the road. When technology churned forward, the Petersons began a transition to cassettes to stay “with it.” After acquiring a manual typewriter, Papa became a faithful writer to their six adult children who had dispersed around the southeast. Papa’s carbon-copy, onion-skin letters featured references to articles in the latest *Adventist Review*, the *Sabbath School Quarterly* (always the “teacher’s” edition) or to a Bible verse. In his later years, he read the Bible completely every year, saying the hardest books were Leviticus and Ezekiel.

1970, Papa mentioned hearing someone from the theology department at Loma Linda who said it was “idolatry” to hold the Adventist beliefs without love in one’s heart. Papa told his children that he concurred, and then, in the practical Peterson way, he moved to the next topic, stating, “I plan to go out to try to raise another \$100 for those young folks who were burned out of house and home.” Then, he described his strategy for canvassing the community for additional money to help neighbors recover from disaster.

I imagine many people could share stories of grandmas and grandpas—mamas and papas—who exhibited



Mama and Papa’s wedding portrait
July 11, 1916, Sand Mountain



Raynold and Lula Peterson, 1960

In 1970, his letters referred to a new publication, *Insight*. He asked the grandchildren, “What do you think of it?” Then a few months later, he wrote that he and Mama had subscribed and asked whether anyone had particular issues of the periodical. Apparently, they were collecting a complete set.

With inquisitive minds, Papa and Mama were grounded in practicality. One letter from 1972 states: “Brother Johnson sent me a few little booklets on the sanctuary and wanted to know what I thought of them. I told him I was more interested in Isaiah 58 and Matt 25:34–40.”

Their lives featured frequent journeys to Collegedale in their sturdy Volvo to hear prominent Adventist speakers. In

a spirit of Adventism that consisted of energy and hope. Such pilgrims brightened the corner wherever they were. From Mama and Papa, I learned to make the road by walking, while finding beauty and humor along the way. From Mama and Papa, I learned to seek lifelong learning which will find connections with other groups, while remaining tethered to the Bible and the practical Christianity described therein.



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