

In Memory of Ernest Stewart (1932 - 2009)

Crescentia DeGoede
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Name: Ernest Stewart

Spouse: Therese Stewart

Children: Michael

Birth Date: February 9, 1932

Blessing Date: February 8, 1975

Ascension Date: August 8, 2009

Following is a testimony by Ernest's wife, Therese Stewart.

Ernest Stewart and Gladys Hubbard Stewart, parents of three daughters, prayed for a son, promising to dedicate him to God if He heard their prayer. On February 9, 1932, a son, Ernest, was born to the Stewarts. They named him Ernest Clair after his father and an uncle, Clair Stewart.

The Stewarts lived in the town of Granby, NY and farmed land near the city of Fulton, NY. Like many families, they were hard hit by the depression but they made the best of things. They didn't own a car and there wasn't always enough food for their growing family but they survived. Ernest knew from childhood that he didn't want to be a farmer. He liked to read— he frequently walked to the Library and returned home with an armload of books. As for his religious background, the Stewarts were Christian. Ernest said, "While they didn't attend Church regularly. they made sure their children did. My mother was Methodist and my father Baptist. My grandparents on my father's side, together with another family, built the First Baptist Church of Fulton, a city of 25,000. My mother's parents were the spiritual pillars of the Church they attended. The sister I was closest to becoming a staunch Methodist and I became a pretty fundamentalist Baptist."

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Ernest's father considered family time important. The family often spent their evenings playing Parchesi, Checkers, or other board games as well as sharing events of the day. Ernest loved to sing along with his sisters but they'd say "Mom, make him stop!" Unfortunately, he couldn't carry a tune. On one of our visits to see his sister many years later, we drove past the home of his childhood. His mother's flower gardens were missing but otherwise "home" looked the same.

Ernest graduated from Fulton High School in 1949. He enlisted in the US Army the day after he graduated, inspired by a neighbor who had served and been killed in action in WWII. Eddie Tulick became his hero and stirred in him the love of his country. Ernest went to Fort Dix, NJ for basic training. From time to time in later years he recalled among other experiences a grueling 40-

mile march. He applied for specialization in radio communication but much to his disappointment was disqualified because colorblindness prevented identification of color-coded wiring inside the equipment. Instead, he was assigned to personnel work. which defined his career for most of his twenty years in the military.

He served in the US, Japan, Korea, Germany and finally in Viet Nam. After basic training in New Jersey and Virginia he was stationed in Texas for three years, Japan for three years, Niagara Falls two years and Oakland, CA for nine years. In Oakland, he was a recruiting officer, one of his responsibilities being to swear in new inductees. He took pride in routinely warning the new recruits that "If it ain't in writing, it

don't exist!", regarding promises of zealous recruiters. While in Japan he married a lovely Japanese woman (his secretary and a talented floral designer). When some years later he met and joined the Unification Church she was not able to share his beliefs and to his regret, the marriage ended in divorce.

While stationed in Oakland in 1963 Ernest was active in a Baptist Church that he attended. He organized a prayer group and through it he met Peter Koch, a young German engineering student at UC Berkeley. Peter, he learned later was a Unificationist. He introduced Ernest to the Church's teachings. Ernest had been active in a Baptist Church in Oakland and had recently resigned as Sunday School Superintendent and was active on the Church's Board of Deacons. In his words, "I was on the pastor's special advisory committee, one of the primary evangelistic callers (calling on prospective Church members), and secretary of the Men's Club. Normally during the week, I was at Church about five days out of seven." Nevertheless, he accepted the Divine Principle at once and began a deeper study of it as well as sharing it with others. He said, "Like most Baptists, as an ardent Bible student I knew what the Bible said but Peter and his friends knew why it was said." Ernest often witnessed with Edwin Ang, a fellow Berkeley student and "spiritual son" of Peter Koch. Like Peter, Edwin and other early members, Ernest appreciated the training of Young Oon Kim. "Miss Kim", first missionary to America, made a lasting impression on them.



In 1964 Ernest applied for and was assigned duty at 8th Army Headquarters in Korea. This assignment gave him the unique opportunity to meet True Parents, Rev. Moon, founder of the movement, and his wife, Hakja Han Moon, revered by members as the "True Parents of Humankind." Unificationists affirm that Father and Mother Moon are fulfilling the position the first human ancestors failed to fulfill when they turned from God at the start of human history.

Ernest was warmly welcomed when he showed up for Sunday worship service at Headquarters Church in Seoul soon after arriving in Korea. In the months that followed he experienced an intimate relationship with Rev. Moon and early Church members. He was invited to the Headquarters Church for holy day celebrations. He occasionally drove True Father to his destination in the Army Jeep at his disposal. He also met David Kim, a former government official at this time. Ernest once was seen with several early Church members who were in the Korean Army. A curious American soldier asked who his Korean friends were and when Ernest told him the soldier said, "Wow! Do you realize you know three of the most influential officers in the Korean Army?!" They were referring to Colonel Hahn, Colonel Pak and a third, all spiritual sons of Miss Kim who had worked as a secretary in their Army offices.

When Rev. Moon came to the United States in 1965, he traveled by car from the west coast to the east, visiting Church Centers and their contacts along the way. In each city a few members would join Father Moon's party and travel with him to the next city, then returning to their Center while others took their turns traveling with him. Ernest was in California when True Father arrived from Korea and traveled with him and a small party all across the country, finally arriving in Miami where he had been assigned to Homestead AF Base. He hated to say goodbye after Father's brief stay. In Miami, he worked with Chuck Anceney and a couple who were members there. Rebecca Boyd (now Salonen) had a Center in Tampa; she and Albert Meghan, an early member, would visit the Miami Center now and then and Ernest would travel to Tampa, supporting each other's work. Ernest prevailed upon Rebecca to prepare home-cooked meals for soldiers he was witnessing to and would teach them Principle while they ate dinner. (Rebecca said none of them joined but "they sure did eat!")

Ernest's next assignment was to Darmstadt, Germany in 1967 as Personnel Sergeant with the 16th Medical Group. While there he became acquainted with German and other European Church leaders and early members—Paul and Christal Werner, Teddy Verheyen, Martin Porter, the Vanderstoks, Barbara Burrowes (Von Pragh) among them. He traveled to other military bases in Europe and this enabled him to visit Church Centers and members in Austria, England, Italy, France and the Netherlands.



Wherever he was stationed Ernest visited the nearest Church Center, became acquainted with the members, joined in activities in his off-duty time and helped in whatever way he could. Much later Rebecca Boyd would say of him "I must say that I never knew anyone else who gave so freely of such uncomplicated good cheer. We appreciated Ernie's kind heart, gentle nature, thoughtfulness, and attendance to True Parents for so many years."

The Viet Nam conflict had begun by this time and Ernest found himself part of a combat army in the last year of his military career. He served in Viet Nam for six months in 1968, the last three of which he was Supply Sergeant Major for Viet Nam. He oversaw procurement of "supplies"—helicopters and tanks as well as ammunition and Army food rations. Ernest retired from the Army with an honorable discharge in July of 1969. He received the National Defense Service Medal and the Viet Nam Service Medal. He also received a letter of commendation from General Hale, Commanding Officer of US forces in Viet Nam at the time.



Following his retirement from the military in 1969, Ernest spent several years in the Las Vegas Church Center with Jack and Gladys Korthuis, Perry Cordill and others. He was a regional distributor for The Sun newspaper and a bookkeeper for several companies. He worked for the US Postal Service in Los Angeles for six months in 1971 before returning to Miami, Florida. While in Florida, he bought a small home which he eventually sold to his renter (Ernest lived in a mobile home on the property). He liked to recall three coconut palm trees in its front yard.

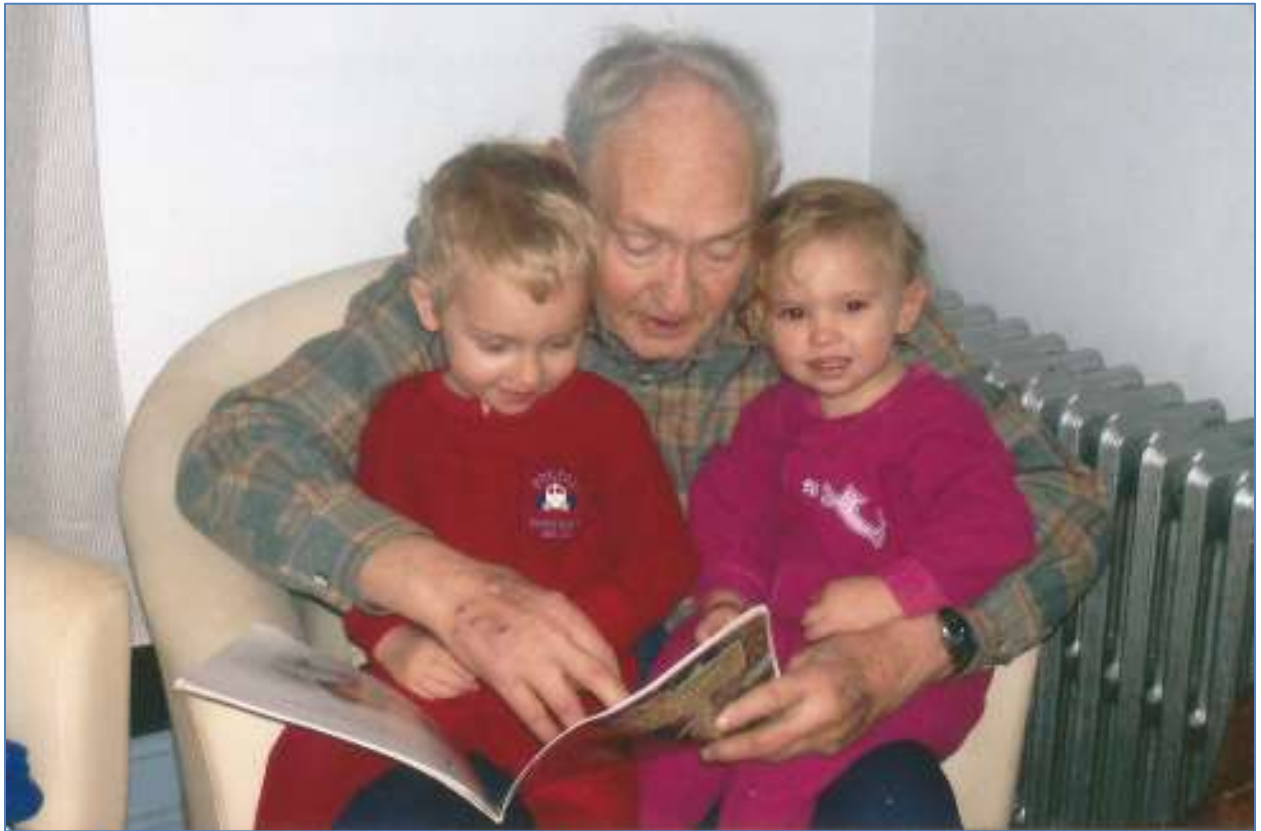
In 1973 Ernest was managing a motel in Tallahassee, FL when he was called to attend the first 100-day International Training Program at Belvedere in Tarrytown, NY. He left Florida reluctantly as he was teaching Divine Principle to twenty students in Tallahassee at the time. But he did participate in the Program and appreciated studying with members from different countries and diverse backgrounds. At Mr. Kim's request, he remained at Belvedere after the Program and worked with staff from 1973 to 1976.

Ernest's work at Belvedere, the Church Training Center in Tarrytown, often took him to East Garden in nearby Irvington, NY, the Moon family's home in America. Among the people with whom he became acquainted was Grandmother Sunae Hong, who would tease him about not speaking Korean. For a year or more Ernest set up the sound equipment and recorded Father's speeches at East Garden and Belvedere. He considered this another great blessing. He often told about hearing a heated discussion underway in a meeting of Father and the leaders at East Garden. At some point Father said strongly "I'm not doing it the Korean way, I'm not doing it the Japanese way, I'm doing it God's way!"



In the 1970s Sarah Witt, a former Nightingale Conant copywriter developed a local radio program on Divine Principle, (later continued by Shawn Byrne, an Irish priest and UTS faculty member). Sarah and Ernest had spirited discussions of Divine Principle topics at least weekly. Coming from their respective Jewish and Christian backgrounds, they poured over the manuscript Sarah had prepared for her next talk until both were satisfied.

Ernest went to Korea for the 1800-Couple Blessing on February 8, 1975, in Seoul. He was blessed in marriage with Therese Klein, a former Catholic Sister who had met the Unification Church in New York City. Ernest and Therese had met briefly several times before, once at the Center in NYC where he had interpreted a dream which she had had while studying Divine Principle's view of the second coming of Christ. (Divine Principle taught that Christ would come as a person other than Jesus who lived 2000 years ago, but who would be one in mission with him). In her dream, Therese had come upon a dead elephant lying on its back on the side of the road collecting dust. It looked like it had been lying there for ages and she lamented not having a bucket of water to clean it up. Looking into its hollow interior she saw a large white object projecting from the backbone of the elephant. It appeared to be stone or bone. Some psychoanalysts view the elephant as a symbol of the world or of an age. But the white stone? Ernest proposed that it symbolized the Messiah for the new age, based on a passage from one of Paul's epistles, "They all drank from the rock and the rock was Christ." (1 Cor 10:4) The dream concluded with Therese again traveling down the road—now gathering fresh golden straw.



As was the experience with many couples, Ernest and Therese found their course challenging but over time they were grateful to be together. In 1976 Ernest joined Therese on the staff of the newly established Seminary in Barrytown, NY. They were active in the UTS community through June of 1994.

The Stewarts lived on campus in Massena House from 1976 until 1985, and then in Harvest House, a farm building, the second floor of which John and Elizabeth Kayadu had converted into several homey apartments. Ernest worked in general affairs and with auxiliary staff—he was a sort of "resident uncle" to staff and students alike and a source of encouragement and understanding for many. Students did fundraising at that time and Ernest provided them with affordable vehicles for their work. He also acquired a reputation for being a patient and supportive driving instructor, teaching perhaps as many as twenty mothers to drive, to the appreciation of their husbands.



In 1981 their son Michael was born, conceived for them by friends Dirk and Barbara ten Wolde, a couple also in the 1975 Blessing in Korea who by this time had three children of their own. Michael's arrival set them on a challenging new course as he matured through preschool, grade school and his teen years. Ernest devoted a great deal of time to Michael. Whenever Michael came up with a new interest Ernest

would encourage and support him in pursuing it. He took Michael to NYC to see a Yankees game. Seminary students and staff with young children shared childcare responsibilities in the weekday afternoons. Because his schedule was somewhat more flexible, Ernest took responsibility for the playgroup— Michael, Donsu, Christina, Nurie, and Tigo—when it was the Stewarts' turn to do so.

In 1990 Ernest wrote, "Since my retirement in 1969 I've been a bookkeeper, a newspaper regional distributor, a postman, an office manager, a security policeman and a motel manager." In truth, while in each of these positions, he did a lot of witnessing, teaching of Divine Principle, and serving others. He was a consummate collector—his son Michael says he collected so he could give—radios, music tapes, videos, cd's, books, cars and motivational albums.

In 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ernest joined other Unificationists in conducting workshops for teachers and students in Russia and Ukraine. The project promoted Rev. Moon's vision of world peace through blessed marriages and true families. Ernest kept the sound system and projection equipment in working order and usually operated the equipment, also befriending participants in the workshops.

Ernest and Therese retired from the Seminary in 1994 and lived in Highland, NY for a year while Michael and several friends studied at a language school run by the Church at its Headquarters in Seoul, Korea. They moved to Albany in 1996 and worked with Sebastian and Mereth Huemer, Farley and Betsy Jones, Shawn and Traudl Byrne, the Denny, Harts, Bickertons, Nordquists, Beaudoins, Waltons, Hamnetts and other families until 2003. Michael completed high school in Albany and began his undergraduate work in Troy, NY in 2004. In 2004 and 2005 the Stewarts lived in the Red Hook, NY area in an apartment in the Byrne's home.



Michael and Elizabeth Bonini were blessed in 2003. Elizabeth (Liz) is the eldest daughter of Bruce and Betsy Bonini, then copastors of Pocono Family Church in Mountain Home, PA, Ernest and Therese became grandparents with the birth of Kieran in 2004. In 2006 they moved to Ithaca to live with the younger Stewart family. Annoura was born the week they moved in 2006. The growing family enjoyed their active household, homeschooling activities, and Sunday gatherings for study, fellowship, prayer, and lunch at the home of Cornell Chaplains Chad and Ann Hoover. After four years of an hour commute to Syracuse and his work at SUNY Upstate Medical Center, Mike took a position at Cornell University which greatly increased his time at home and made possible walking or bicycling to work!

Ernest's sister, Betty, passed to the spiritual world in January of 2009. When her house was subsequently sold, Ernest came into possession of several boxes of scrapbooks which his mother had created after she became a born-again Christian in the early 1960s—at the same time that Ernest embraced Divine Principle. (Also in the box were Ernest's high school yearbooks, bowling trophies, and other memorabilia she had lovingly kept for him). A number of her writings were dedicated to Ernest and one book was filled with poems written by his father. Whatever some lacked in grammar or spelling they more than made up for in wisdom and simplicity. They reveal a family with limited material wealth but clearly rich in spiritual bounty. The writings give deep insight into Ernest's roots, the simple poems of his father casting light on their life as a family.

Ernest had successful heart surgery in 2006 and enjoyed relatively good health for three years. After surgery and weeks of recovery and rehabilitation, he suffered a major stroke. He was in a local hospital briefly, and then transferred to the NYS Veterans Home in Oxford, New York. His condition improved for a while but he then grew progressively weaker and departed this life on August eighth, 2009.

As Michael said in a eulogy to his father that prompted both laughter and tears,

My Dad loved to give. I think he needed to do this. At some point, almost everyone at the Seminary owned a car either owned or serviced by him. (If anyone here still has one of those cars, I regret to inform you that the warranty has just expired)!

When I was a teenager and realized how much the cars, groceries, donations added up to I would ask him "Why don't you cut back a little and save up some money for you and Mom?" Usually, he would just shrug and say it was okay. Sometimes he would point out that other people had less

and that he should help them, In truth, I think he never really stopped being a Supply Sargeant. The only things that changed were the items, quantities, and funding.

And it wasn't just things that he gave. He really saw the best in people and he usually told them so... I can't tell you how often he would say that someone was a really excellent speaker, or a loving person, or the best in the world at something. Sometimes I thought he was losing touch, and stretching reality. In retrospect, I can see that in many cases he was right; that many of the friends and families surrounding us are truly amazing and exceptional people.

We can imagine the faces of those who welcomed Ernest to the spiritual world—loved ones, brothers "in arms," and friends who had gone before him. Ernest left a legacy of giving, and of service to God, family, and country that will light the way for others. We remember his remarkable life with grateful hearts.