

For However Brief A Time

**Memories Shared by a Son
of Simple Christianity in Person:
Northum Eugene Berkley**

By Warren Berkley

Dedicated To Momma

Long before the modern label, “single mother,” our mother had to find her place under enormous heaviness. Daddy died suddenly leaving her with three kids to raise. Besides, her aged parents were already living with us. Our mother, therefore, within a few crucial moments, was thrust into grief and the prospect of taking care of her parents and three children with little financial resources for the task. She took that role, and her three children excelled. She gave us a strong and active conscience, loved us with all her might, and has never considered any kind of life but the life of a Christian. She deserves our praise, and this book is dedicated to her as a token of that praise.

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Warren E. Berkley
www.warrenberkley.com

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What a Simple Privilege

“Going to church” was at least a weekly activity for many in the neighborhood in the 1940s. For Daddy it was a privilege that he looked forward to every time there was a meeting. The expression was common then: “Every time the door is open.” So when the war took young Christian men from their families and churches, letters home would express this loss.

Judson Woodbridge was a gospel preacher in Ft. Smith, Arkansas, during World War II. He received letters from several servicemen who left Ft. Smith for military duty during the war. Daddy wrote this to Judson. It was an item in the local church bulletin.

Well it's Prayer Meeting night and I don't have the privilege of being there. I wish I did, but that will have to wait. My prayers are with you and yours at Park Hill. I am just there in thought. I am sorry I didn't write sooner, but we have been pretty busy traveling, etc. It took us four days to get here. It will take me longer to get use to it. This camp is an anti-aircraft replacement center. It is situated right smack on the Pacific Ocean. I can see ocean as I step out of my barracks. Everything is green out here, the grass and flowers, etc. It's very beautiful, but I'll still take ole' Arkansas and home folks...

Written on a Wednesday night, Daddy was “situated right smack on the Pacific Ocean,” but his heart was occupied with thoughts of “Prayer Meeting night” at the Park Hill church of Christ in Fort Smith. There people were devoting their thoughts to God. They were singing about Him, talking about Jesus Christ, going to Bible classes, and praying for the soldiers.

There is something so powerful about this special privilege that even when you are hundreds of miles away you are still there. The local church is not an accident of social evolution. It is a creation of God, bringing people together in the same locality to help each other, nurture personal relationship, and join in doing what the apostles of Christ instructed. (See the early expression of this in Acts 2:40-47, and note the importance of this in Hebrews 10:23-25.)



Daddy's Family

Daddy's mother was **Ina Northum Berkley**. We called her Grandma Berkley. She was a short, small framed woman, but sweet, with a great sense of humor and with a capacity for an occasional "verbal idiom" when listening to the baseball games. She was one of the first people I knew who loved baseball. Her team was the St. Louis Cardinals, and she loved Harry Caray who announced for the Cards over many years. The games were carried over local radio stations in Arkansas and Louisiana. She would listen religiously and talk to the radio as if the announcer and players could hear her. And for some reason, in those days when we had only radio, you looked at it!

She was a typical grandmother who took great delight in her grandchildren. She would hug you and kiss you and tell you how special you were. But she would join in with parents admonishing her grandchildren, sometimes without the parents really appreciating her supplemental rebukes. Daddy just smiled silently while she lectured us. He loved her, and it was a special love after his daddy died so early (1933). Charles Rice Berkley was one of the first deacons in the Park Hill church of Christ, appointed in 1927.

Daddy's brother, **Uncle Sherman**, his wife, Lucille, and their son, Doug, lived right down the street from us (on "Q" street, then later on "U"). Uncle Sherman was much like his mother, looked like her, and shared her interests in baseball. Sherman was one of the first in the family to get a TV to watch baseball, so when Grandma Berkley came to town that's where she wanted to stay after about 1953 or so. Sherman was a part-time preacher in places like Bethel and Muldrow, Oklahoma. His full-time job was at Berry Dry Goods down on the avenue (Garrison). He went fishing with Daddy some.

I remember the big tire swing in their backyard. My cousin Doug would swing me, but the risk was a little too much for me. Aunt Lucille considered herself a poet, and once expressed her dislike for house work with these lines: "Alas! The tasks that rule the day. The cooking, the cleaning, all just so. But my mind is on golden sand far away. While the suds in my dishes are waves at play!" Uncle Sherman worked until retirement at Berry Dry Goods in Ft. Smith and preached in various locations nearby.

Our beloved **Aunt Alice and Uncle Austin** lived in McAlester, Oklahoma, and we spent more time with them than others in the extended family. I was sent off to McAlester almost every summer for a couple of weeks or more. Aunt Alice, Daddy's sister, thought that people needed one thing in abundance and variety: **Food**. She shared the same interests and talent in cooking Daddy had. She wanted to know, several times a day, if you were hungry and what you would like. She was a genuine, caring person.

I will always remember **Uncle Austin** for his laugh. He loved to laugh and his was so unique it became more of an identifier than his looks or time. One summer he suffered a heart attack and was bedfast for several weeks. To occupy his time he would paint those "paint by the number pictures." I would visit him every day that summer, and we would talk about what he was painting, or baseball.

New Orleans was the home of **Aunt Hazel and Uncle Al**. Their daughter was **Peggy**, and Grandma Berkley lived with them. One summer we boarded a train and took a vacation to New Orleans. Except for occasional trips to McAlester, that was the only vacation I remember. A year or so after that trip, Daddy took Paula Kim (my sister, the middle child). We have fond memories of seeing the sights in New Orleans. We stayed with Aunt Hazel and Uncle Al, Peggy, and Grandma Berkley in a small “shotgun” type duplex. Daddy took a bus down Bourbon Street. Because of some of the notorious activity in that section, he wouldn’t let me look out through the bus window. We arrived at a French restaurant where he had chickaree coffee in a miniature cup.

These were the people of Daddy’s family. His parents, Ina and Charles Rice Berkley, are buried in the Berkley Family Cemetery near Cecil, Arkansas. Hazel died only a few years ago. She was the last remaining member of the immediate family.



The Coat Hanger in Morrilton

During the depression there were many orphans. In response to their needs, churches, individuals, and agencies formed orphan homes. One was located first in Ft. Smith, then in Morrilton, Arkansas. It was established in 1926 when two homeless children were brought to James E. Laird, who was preaching at Park Hill. With the help of Mrs. W. T. Bush, the effort began as the Arkansas Christian Home. The name was later changed to Arkansas-Oklahoma Christian Home. It was then moved to Morrilton in 1936, to the former campus of Harding College.

After Charles Berkley died, there came a time when the family moved to Morrilton to be house parents in one of the cottages. Grandma Berkley, Alice, and Hazel were involved in

cooking, cleaning, and supervising small children. Daddy and Sherman had various chores. One job Daddy said he hated.

Daddy and Sherman would visit the infant cottage three or four times a day to help with feeding time. Sherman had a coke case loaded with baby bottles. Daddy would take coat hangers and fashion them into bottle holders. The crude device would be placed in the side of the crib, the bottle inserted, so the baby could be moved over in the bed to be fed. These institutions often suffered with a deeply bothersome absence of essential material care.

When a child hears his father pray to "Almighty God" day after day, that single voice makes a lasting impression...

It was a mechanical, assembly-line process. Fashion the hanger, install the bottle, and move the baby over to the nipple. Even as a boy Daddy knew this was not the best way to feed a baby. He hated the job and later developed very strong feelings about the institutionalized care of children.

Later in life Daddy would remember this and tell people about it, often citing Paul's observation about a gentle, nursing mother cherishing and holding her children close, 1 Thessalonians 2:7. It was a powerful life lesson.



The Effective, Fervent Prayer

Pause and reflect on all the influences that lead you to worship God in spirit and in truth. There is our faith in Jesus Christ who died for us. Add to this our knowledge of all that should be done before God, revealed to us in His Word. Do not leave out the encouragement of association with God's people. These are