

Bruce A. Howell, General Director of Foreign Missions

In Africa they say life is like a book. Some chapters are long. Others are short. Nona Freeman is credited with writing numerous exceptional manuscripts. They edify, excite, empower, and encourage readers throughout the apostolic movement, and have capably done so for years. She is one of the best known writers in Pentecost. Nona's crowning achievement, unpublished in paperback, is what I entitle, *The Faith of Our Faithful Friend*. It is the story of her life; well-lived for Christ and His divine purpose. Like the writer of 2 Corinthians 3:1-3 extols, it is not written with pen and ink. Not hammered out on a computer keyboard. It will never appear in print. "New York Times Bestseller List" will never show off this momentous volume. It will escape the gripping hands of earthly publishers. However, it will remain indelibly engraved on the fleshly hearts of anyone that came within her reach. Her ultimate book, the abstract of her godly life, is known and (sight) read by many! Missed the opportunity to examine the life of this twenty-first century matriarch of the apostolic church up close? Interested in a recap of the chapters of her faithful, faith-filled Christian expedition? Read on. The chronicle unfolds. It encompasses ninety-three breathtaking years. It provides a glimpse of over seventy years of faithful apostolic ministry. I passed through Dallas some time ago, and stopped to see Nona at the hospital. She was dressed, waiting in bed, and anxious to talk about God. He was her endless theme. "...She judged him faithful who had promised" (Hebrews 11:11). As a result, she was not only faithful, but full of faith. She preached the promises. She believed the promises. She lived the promises. God confirmed, with signs following, souls converted, and miracles performed.

Nona was born July 25, 1916 (and passed from this life December 26, 2009). She was the oldest of six children, growing up under the loving, watchful care of her mother, Carrie Eastridge. Her mother's story is truly amazing itself, and provided a spectacular role model for Nona and her siblings. Carrie

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paved the way in apostolic ministry; a road Nona also travelled. She inherited an awe-inspiring example of sacrifice, love for truth, faithfulness, and a burden for world evangelism.

In looking for someone with a firsthand glimpse into the life of Nona Freeman, I quickly found such a person. I will let Nona tell her own story. Then, I will insert my own appraisal. The following are her words, with only slight adaptations, found on the site for the United Pentecostal Church International Order of Faith. E. L. (Bug) and Nona Freeman were inducted in 2004.

“We met January 25, 1937, a date we celebrated the rest of his life. Love came instantly, though both of us were in such denial about a call to preach and a call to Africa, that we did not mention it to each other. God called him before his seventh birthday, and my call came at eleven with the infilling of the Holy Ghost.

“I collapsed at college in March that year and was sent home from the hospital with thirty-six hours to live. Death came, but during those thirty minutes of time when my heart did not beat and I did not breathe, I met Jesus face to face. I confessed my disobedience and failures and promised to do His will if He would allow me to come back. He graciously forgave me and sent me back. My life turned around at twenty. Because of Bug’s apparent lack of spirituality, I immediately broke our engagement, but Jesus has His own beautiful and exquisite ways of working out His will in human lives.

“God later let me know that our marriage agreed with His will, so we were married in August still keeping our secrets. God said I must be still and let Him guide us. Bug’s ambition lay in the business world where he had wonderful opportunities, though he had long sought earnestly for the Holy Ghost. When he decided to surrender to God’s will and preach, the Spirit came on him wonderfully and he talked in tongues for three days. His preaching (and mine) began in a revival in New Mexico, April 1939.

In that revival Jesus told on us about Africa, and from that hour, our predominant thoughts concentrated on going.

“Our deep desire to get to Africa moved us to drive from New Mexico to St. Louis, MO in September, 1939 (with great difficulties and without needed necessities) to meet the missionary board. They greeted us with these words; ‘You look more like you ought to be applying to the TB asylum than the mission field!’ My husband at 6’2” weighing 125 pounds, and myself at 5’9” weighing 106 pounds inspired that remark. They felt insulted (rightly so) that with only five months preaching experience, we would meet them wanting to be appointed to Africa. This was simple ignorance on our part. However, they gave us good advice: Don’t trade on a missionary call: work for God, hold meetings, start a new work, go through every door God opens and come back in three years.

“Without resentment, we took their advice and tried to meet the board in 1941 and 1942, but they did not have time to see us. By this time, we were pastoring our second church in Louisiana. We asked if we could see them at the Conference in 1943. The meeting would begin at 1:00 p.m. and end about 6:00 p.m. If we were there and they had time, they would talk to us. We got to the appointed place at 12:30 p. m. When their meeting ended at 6:30 p.m. they marched out and said, ‘Sorry, we didn’t have time to talk to you this year, come back next year.’

“My husband immediately began to encourage me to have the right attitude and not resent anything, promising that when we returned home we would be able to settle everything by prayer. In that all night prayer meeting, God gave me a scripture, John 15:16, ‘Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit.’ As I read this to my husband, I

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started shouting. He had received the same verse and finished reading it; 'and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.'

"At a Louisiana district conference in 1944, the missions director announced that we had a missions call. Our precious friend, George Glass, Sr. said, 'We love the Freemans and do not want them to leave us, but if they have a call to Africa, we need to send them. Bring your gifts to them and put it in the guitar case!' Everyone began to weep and most of them made several trips to the case to add to that offering. The war raged then, and America still felt the steely grip of depression, but \$3,400 resulted. Three weeks later we received a letter from the board appointing us to Africa, if I could pass a doctor's examination on being able to go. At age fifteen a doctor discovered that I had only one lung, but Jesus gave me a new one just in time so I passed the test. In March 1948, that offering paid the Freemans' fare to Africa on a cargo boat with five children, ages ranging from nine years to six months. No planes to Africa then.

"I've written books about our forty-one years of adventure in Africa which prove beyond a shadow of doubt that the incomparable grace of Jesus is sufficient for every situation. No matter how ugly or desperate, He is forever able! One of the most amazing things Jesus did early in our journey was guiding Brother Freeman to visit other African countries by faith and claim them for Jesus. Within a short time of his unofficial visits when he walked over that country and claimed it, someone in America would get a burden for that land and go! Then speedily revival's flame would blaze from unexpected quarters. Speaking of revivals, we saw incredible miracles of healing and salvation in the twenty years of tent revivals that we held, often under very challenging conditions all over the country, a rich reward for the small sacrifices we made.

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“All the missionaries that went before us to Africa were sent to Liberia a small country on the West Coast known as the white man’s grave. E. L. Freeman refused to go there. He said, I am not afraid of the climate, but the rest of that vast continent needs the true Gospel! He carried an immense burden for Africa and after twenty-three years in South Africa, the board handed him the whole continent except for the five countries at the top of it (they fall within the Europe/Middle East region.) During the time T. F. Tenney served as the Missions Director, for two years he arranged for us to visit, encourage, and try to open other countries. We continued to do this for another eighteen years after Bug’s appointment as Regional Field Supervisor (now known as Regional Directors.) We had many more adventures in Jesus name trying to open up new areas for the preaching of this glorious gospel, and saw unusual success in that endeavor.

“Somewhere along there, my dearest Bug had to go to St. Louis for a board meeting while I remained in Africa. Jesus visited me in a vision saying, the churches in America are in trouble, the affluence of America has robbed them of their trust in me, and they don’t even realize it. I’m cutting your missionary work short and sending you back to America. Accept every invitation you get to visit the churches and tell them what you have seen me do and what I can do for them. When Bug came back, he excitedly told of having the same vision. Shortly after that the Board decided we were getting too old to be missionaries. We knew why! We came back to America in 1989 and did what He said together for ten years. There were also some visits overseas. Then my darling got the call to go higher in 1999, but before he left me he told me what to do. Keep on doing what you are doing, and be happy.”

Nona still travelled throughout North America, and celebrated seventy years of active ministry in April 2008. As Nona reflected over the journey she thought of the lyrics, “I don’t regret a mile I’ve traveled for the Lord.” In her last public e-mail of December 8, 2009 she says, “My life has been one

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amazing blessing and miracle after another. I had a loving childhood; married a man that I still love to this day and God blessed me with five amazing children.” Her life articulates *The Faith of our Faithful Friend*. The last time I spoke to her was about four days before she passed away. She quoted me a Scripture, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against us” (Matthew 16:18). She was always positive, upbeat, full of faith, and left the devil and his deteriorating kingdom in ruins. She believed in end-time revival and encouraged me to believe God was doing a mighty work in me, and through me. Her message to me, and to you, is “Move forward! Never be discouraged!”

Bug and Nona were pioneers; truly full of faith, faithful, and a friend to multiplied hundreds of thousands globally. They went to Africa when only one nation was open to the United Pentecostal Church International. Today, we have representation in thirty-seven African nations. Over 416, 548 constituents, with 3,854 ministers, preaching in 3,892 churches and preaching points stand in ovation to the work and memory of E. L. and Nona Freeman. They are a towering tribute to the Freemans (and others) because of their relentless efforts and outstanding achievements. What greater epitaph could one receive? As Jon Mohr wrote, “Let us leave to those behind us the heritage of faithfulness passed on through godly lives....May the fire of our devotion light their way. May the footprints that we leave, lead them to believe, and the lives we live inspire them to obey...May all who come behind us find us faithful.”

Thanks, Nona! You paved the way. You were full of faith, faithful, and a dear friend. May all who come behind us find us faithful!