

CAROL TYRANCE GRAVES FAITH STORY

Good Morning, Saint Columba's family.

Between the ages of 2 and 3 and later during holidays and summer vacations I spent lots of time with my maternal grandparents in the small rural town of Ringgold, Virginia.

Being there was wonderful for me. My grandparents kept the family house and farm for my great grandfather and the rest of his children after my great grandmother died at an early age. Monday through Friday my great uncles and cousins worked the farm, tended to the mules, the cows, the hogs and the chickens. They worked with neighbors and others in the community to ensure that the crops were planted and harvested. The women worked to bake, clean the house, garden, can crops, care for the clothes, and serve three meals a day, etc. It seemed like there was never a dull moment for a little girl born in Attleboro, Massachusetts.

Sunday was the one day when all the family was together. Putting on our Sunday best, we walked about a mile to Mount Zion Baptist Church. I can remember skipping and walking along the winding hilly road as others along the way would come out of their homes and join us as we continued the journey to church. I remember that there seemed to be a great sense of anticipation and excitement about going to and being in church. To me it seemed as though people were preparing for a party or a celebration. This was my early sense of church. People wanting to come together, to hear and just be.

There was a joy in worship, a freedom to express that joy with singing, clapping, sharing and shouting that sometimes came from somewhere deep inside the people. This was something new to me. People sang, and clapped, because they were thankful for what God had done for them, for what he had brought them through. People who believed that in spite of what they had faced all week long, they could come to church, and be joyful and grateful. Why? Because they were firm believers that God loved them and cared for them.

At times being there for worship was contagious. You could see and feel that God's word and the music in that little church spoke to the people all the way down to their very soul. It spoke to me. This love of music and beauty of the written word, even as simply done as in spirituals and gospel music from the Baptist church of my preschool days has stayed with me all my life. The sense of community that they shared, the love of God that they expressed and the love and caring for one another, this is the faith that they lived. The faith that they

held and I experienced when with them created in me the beginnings of my faith journey.

When our family got back together on each and every Sunday for dinner, the entire family stood around the table. Grandpa began and then one by one, everyone took turns reciting a verse from the Bible that meant something to them. Even the little children would be asked to say something as simple as “Jesus Loves Me” when their turn came. After everyone had shared their readings, we all held hands and said The Lord’s Prayer together. Only then would we begin our evening meal in gratitude and joy.

I was exposed to faith and being faithful before I knew what either of those words meant or represented by people who believed, trusted, and acted faithfully towards others. Their faith to me was joyfully expressed, simply lived and at times loudly sung. It was also a quiet, deeply rooted and certain, sure faith.

I am not my great grandfather, nor my grandparents nor my parents. My faith is still a work in progress. I feel that I, at my core, inherited an abiding faith that I cannot put into words. Simply, I know that God watches over me; that He listens to me when I pray and talk with him and I know that He forgives me when I err as I constantly do. Through each and every day I am comforted and uplifted because, I KNOW deep in my heart that He loves me as He loved my family before me and I know that He loves each and every one of you, too. Amen.