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SPRING NEWSLETTER, 2003.

Dear Partners-in-Ministry,

This is being written in late January when all of us are anticipating the Spring-time. It can be a depressing time of year: the sap is low, and people are feeling the deprivation of warm, life-giving sunshine. But, what of us?

As I sat here in front of my computer, wondering how to begin our letter to you, I sensed my heart lifting in praise and thanksgiving to God for all his goodness to us. In so many lovely ways, he has ministered to Margaret and me through our brothers and sisters. You are all so precious to us, and once again, we want you to treat our letter as being personally to you.

FLASHBACK

Last September we made a first visit to Corfe Castle in Dorset to Rev. David Foot, pastor of a lovely fellowship in this seaside town. We had a delightful weekend, and in order that I should get home in good time to prepare for another trip to America, David took me all the way to Bristol Parkway so as to circumvent the vagaries of our national railway system.

Margaret and I returned to Pennsylvania, but this time to the Open Door church in Chambersburg. We were met at Dulles airport, Washington D.C. and taken to the motel where we were to stay for the week. We felt that we had landed in the lap of luxury: everything was laid on for us in our room, a fridge, a micro-wave, fresh fruit and even sweets! When Margaret looked at the sweets, she noticed that they were advertised as being from “Bristows of Devon”! This was a wonderful link with our friends Ken & Ruth Bristow of Crediton, Devon. For those of you who study our diary, you will know that Crediton Evangelical church regularly give us opportunities to minister in the gospel.

We had three relaxing days of holiday, during which we were taken out by Pastor Keith Skelton to many interesting places, his wife Barbara often coming too. Then, from the Sunday morning through to Wednesday evening, it was really busy not only with opportunities in the church itself, but also in the church school, the over-sixties group, and three programmes on local television. We felt a real oneness with the folk, and hope to return one day.

After the American trip I embarked on a really frantic programme. To cover every detail would be impossible within the confines of this letter. But a typical weekend was one spent in the North-East of England: Thursday, Darlington; Friday/Saturday, Middlesbrough; Sunday, Guisborough and Ashington; Monday, back to Middlesbrough, and then in the evening, off to Leicester for the Regional Outreach Committee at Torch House, Hallaton. (Wow, what a weekend that was!)

September concluded with a first-time visit to the quaintly named “Church-in-the-Garden” in Rowley Regis, W. Midlands. This is a small, intimate Fellowship, really keen to reach out with the gospel.

October saw visits to Fraserburgh for meetings and recording sessions, (more about that later), Exeter and Guernsey. Margaret travelled with me to Guernsey, after all, for her it is home ground. The folks at Zion Christian Fellowship made us most welcome, and we hope to return there next Easter Sunday.

November was busy, too, with trips to Sheffield, Hull and Scotland. All these were return visits which has its own special joy of renewed fellowship.

The Scottish trip was particularly interesting for me. The first of the two weekends I was joined by Mr. Eric Clarke from Northern Ireland. (Some of you will remember Eric from Filey days.) He has a rich baritone voice and is a joy to accompany in the old gospel songs. We went to Glasgow, Broughty Ferry in Aberdeenshire and Larkhall Baptist church with my special friends, Rev. Stuart & Ruth Wadsworth. We were all very blessed, not least Eric who was so glad to be on the circuit again if only for one weekend.

As Eric returned to Northern Ireland, more special friends of mine were making their journey to Larkhall. Peter Smith, Pam Roberts & Ian Finch and I were to do a series of evenings of gospel songs. This was somewhat of an experiment which was not without blessing, although Stuart and I were attacked with a chest infection. (Apparently there was quite an outbreak of this kind of thing in the West of Scotland at that time.)

December was characterized by local engagements which invariably included food! Christmas lunches for the most part: not very favourably disposed to the slimmers of this world!

Then, everything came to a stop! The following is a report I wrote earlier this month, after which I’ll give you an update of things as they are now.

“On the 18th December, we were on our way to a carol-service in a nearby town.

“We had scarcely driven a mile-and-a-half, when Margaret suddenly saw headlights making straight for us. The next fraction of a second and a car smashed into our offside, propelling our car up a bank.

“I was conscious of Margaret’s groans, acrid smoke, an acute pain, as if a knife had been plunged into my chest. All I could say to Margaret was: “I don’t know what I can do.”

“Even now, we don’t know all the details of exactly what caused the smash. All we know is that, for some reason, the man overtook and lost control. Both his and our car are a complete write-off.

“Margaret was in hospital for five days with facial injuries, a shattered left wrist, fractured ribs and other severe bruising and whiplash.

“I was in hospital for two days with a fractured sternum, and bruised ribs, but with no other injuries.

“At this moment in time there is some doubt that Margaret’s wrist will ever be quite what it was. We shall have to see when the plaster is off. But one thing we know that, although we were not preserved from this accident, we were certainly preserved in it. It could have been so much worse, but our work is not yet finished this side of heaven: Hallelujah!”

BACK TO THE _PRESENT

This happened almost six weeks ago, and we are making good progress. Margaret starts physiotherapy on her wrist today also continuing the treatment for her whiplash. We have faith to believe that she will get all the movement back in the wrist in spite of there having been several broken little bones.

My chest is much better, the pain gradually reducing as the healing takes its time. We cancelled all engagements for January, and will see how February goes, but hoping definitely to resume as from March.

We sadly missed the Christmas houseparty at Herne Bay Court, but all the folk there greatly blessed us not only by their prayers for us, but a very special financial gift which helped us enormously. We have benefited so much through the prayers of God’s people.

Some of you will remember how, at the beginning of last year, Margaret had an accident which nearly cost her a finger. During that time, Pat & Joe came all the way from Gornal in the West Midlands to help us. (We were then looking after two of our granddaughters.) That was a fantastic help to us then. Once again, Pat & Joe came to our rescue. When they knew of our great need, they dropped everything, shut up their home, and have been with us since 30th December. They have an open-ended commitment to us as long as we need them. It is hard to find words adequately to express our praise to God for his goodness through Pat & Joe. Their coming has aided Margaret’s recovery in no small measure. Pat does all the cooking and driving, helping Margaret with the shopping etc. We would like you all to join us in giving praise to God for such faithful, practical friends.

Our family, too, rallied round to do what they could. As soon as Chris & Marcella heard, they got the very next boat over from Ireland, and they were here by the time I

was released from hospital. Because Margaret hadn't done any food shopping in view of our going to Herne Bay Court, the cupboard was bare. So Chris & Marcella went on a shopping expedition on the Saturday, buying in meat, Christmas pudding, and all sorts of goodies for Christmas. They returned to Ireland on the Sunday, and then on Monday Margaret came home looking bruised, battered and not very "with it"! Margaret's mum was a great help, and Beth came on Christmas day to cook our lunch. But Christmas seemed to pass us by as we rested and started the seemingly long recovery together.

But all through this, we were sure that God had been merciful to us, and that our work was not yet finished here on earth.

Jesus prayed, and was able to say with confidence: "I have finished the work you gave me to do". Not until the work is finished that we have been given to do is our pilgrimage finished here. Conversely, when we have finished all that he has given us to do, we reach the finishing post.

Fresh in our minds at this particular time is the sadness of the Oake family in Manchester. Stephen was only forty when he was struck down. We can't understand why these things happen, yet, might there be a clue here? Was dear Stephen's work that God had given him to do complete? All we know is that he left a wonderful testimony to millions of viewers of television and listeners to radio. His family, too, have given a glorious response to this evil crime, being totally positive.

A few of you will remember Reg & Grace Tomlinson with whom I used to work, and who greatly influenced me in my formative years as a young Christian. They were brutally shot down in cold blood in Canada whilst pastoring a church out there. Once again, questions were asked, and I still ask them. Yet again, was their work finished? It seems to me that, when the work we have been given to do is finished, God is only too pleased to bring us straight to himself, which is why the death of his saints is described as being precious.

So we're still here, knowing not how much or little work there is for us to do: how near to the finishing tape we are where Jesus stands to welcome us. But we know that our times are in his hands, and they are safe there!

All this means, too, that we are going to need your prayers still, and we thank God for each one of you who stand with us in the ministry that God has given to us.

Now before we close, we must mention the fact that there is a new album out which was recorded in Fraserburgh. "Sound of soothing strings" has been produced on a Roland keyboard. I use the strings on the keyboard, playing some of what I reckon to be some of the best of the old hymn tunes with one or two more contemporary melodies. This is a totally relaxing album to be played at the end of a stressful day. Just let the beauty of the music sink into your being.

Please get in touch with us if you would like this either on CD or cassette. £11.00 (p-&-p included, £6.00 (p-&-p included).

One more announcement concerns the second edition of “One day I’ll see you”. This is a more detailed book having eight more chapters, an epilogue, and a generous foreword by our friend Rev. Stuart Wadsworth. This will be out by 1st May, and a special price reduction will be made for our Partners. Please be in touch with us as soon as you can, and we’ll look forward to hearing from you.

We close now, praying that God will bless you each and everyone: thanking you again for all your support and fellowship.

Yours in the Lord Jesus,
Margaret & Peter.