

I grew up in [Coldwater](#), a small town in Mercer County Ohio. I was the second oldest of seven children, the first born came in July of 1955 and the seventh in September of 1962. We had a busy tumultuous but joyous time growing up, it seemed like the carnage would never end. Mom and Dad were great loving parents, of course some things I would've and we all could've done differently, but through it all they maintained a good family example and speaking for myself I know they always loved us. One thing that I did appreciate was that in all the moments of scolding and turmoil we knew we could be forgiven and they did not use any profanity.

My Parents were raised [Catholic](#), as the great majority of southern Mercer County was and they raised us to be Roman Catholic as well.

Besides my daily chores at home my first job was as a bicycle newspaper carrier for the Dayton Daily News. My next job was helping my Dad at the Mercer County Chronicle, [Coldwater's weekly newspaper](#).

My first adult job was nice, got paid well (\$3.31 per. hr. minimum was only \$1.90) but I was laid off after three weeks. Next I was able to find a job in St. Henry at the Boeckman & Gast Cannery for \$1.90 canning green beans and tomatoes. I also learned to be a professional tomato planter, sitting on top of what looks like a plow with maybe twelve seats we would place the plant in the metal fingers out in the hot sun for six – eight hours. (Yes, I must confess I did plant one upside down to maintain my sanity and sense of humor). I worked there for fourteen months and at age nineteen decided, under God's tugging, to join the Navy. In February 1976 I joined the delayed entry program and was set to go to boot camp in October.

During this break I worked part time with Dad at Bock Printing and Office Supply in Celina. I had money saved up and a motorcycle so my brother and I, third oldest, took our bikes to Florida. We had a great-safe time seeing the beaches, riding and seeing Disney World.

I completed my boot camp at the only [US Navy Camp](#). It is located in the Great Lakes. I had some time to see Chicago, it is beautiful at Christmas and I made it home in time for Christmas. On New Year's Eve I left for San Diego California for my "A" schooling. We were called "Mess Management Specialist" today they are called "[Culinary Specialist](#)." This job involves: the preparation, storage, accounting, serving etc. of the food. I had the opportunity to serve in all capacities of the field and even got to serve the Admirals. The major blessing of this job is that in the officer's mess, we worked two days on, three days off, three days on and two days off. I think they caught on once out at sea and changed it to every other day but shore duty was always the other way.

After "A" School I was stationed in Norfolk VA awaiting the completion and commissioning of the Aircraft Carrier the [U.S.S. Dwight D. Eisenhower](#), a great ship I only got sea sick once when they

pulled into sixty to forty foot swells to test out the ship.

My shipmates and I saw many great ports or sites; St. Thomas of the Virgin Islands was the first, others include: In Italy – Naples, Rome, Capri, the Vatican, the Coliseum, Venice, Florence and Pisa. In Portugal we visited Lisbon and traveled by train to see a bull fight. In Greece we saw the Parthenon. I was able to visit Israel to see Bethlehem, Jerusalem – the Wailing Wall, the Holocaust Museum and the Temple Mount.

Just being on the ship was a joy in and of itself; the friendships, the solitude of being alone especially on the flight deck at night (when allowed) and enjoying the flight operations.

My last year of service is when I was having a great time after all this traveling, we were in port at Norfolk and I was jogging to get in shape and working on my abs like “Rocky”. I had to start out slow on my jogging but I worked up to about an hour a day and I was feeling great, I remember telling God that “I really liked this and wouldn’t mind doing it my whole life” shortly after this I was given the job of collecting and keeping the accounts of the officer’s Mess. On the first week my leg started to hurt, the corpsman said just massage it. The second week it hurt worse I didn’t jog as much the corpsman said use a whirlpool. At the end of the third week I could hardly walk, my leg was all swelled up I went to my last Rock Concert – ACDC & Bad Company – afterwards, on the way to a bus stop, a policeman outside asked if I was OK I said “Yes”. Finally the corpsman had the Doctor look at my leg and He immediately put me in the hospital (like an old boot camp building). Needless to say I was taken off the ship and put on limited duty until I recovered.

During my limited duty and the rest of my enlistment I served at the [Little Creek Amphibious Base](#) in Virginia while there I met a lot more friends. Before my arrival I received a wakeup call from the Lord, my Doctor had told me that I could have died from a blood clot which had passed through my heart and into my lungs. He said I was lucky to be alive. Needless to say that began my return to the Lord and my desire to make sure I was right with Him, I wanted to read His word to see how my life matched up. The Lord used various Christians to lead me back to the Lord and to strengthen my walk, Larry Wh. if you read this please contact me.

A thank you to my patient navy [Navigators Bible study group](#), as I learned a lot with them as we studied God’s word. But times have changed I see where Bono of U2 and Eugene Peterson, who wrote the [Message “Bible”](#), are working with the navigators on the book of Psalms. Peterson also writes an [Ecumenical bible](#) or study bible with the Catholic Church, available through CBD.

I visited two churches after my conversion or I should say my return to Christ. One friend took me to [The Rock Church of Virginia Beach](#), a charismatic Church. A second took me to a large Baptist church which I cannot remember the name of, they were both quite a different group of

sincere Christians. I also attended both Catholic and Protestant services on base until I made my final break from Catholicism.

While serving at the [Little Creek Amphibious Base](#), I enjoyed using little [gospel tracts](#) by [Chick Tracts](#), as they were well read by many of my fellow sailors.

I received a great send off from my Little Creek duty station crew upon the last day of my full four years of service, I did enjoy my tour but it seemed like it would never end.

Some of my early jobs upon my return home included painting rooms at the local nursing home in Coldwater - Briarwood Manor, working at Mercer County Elks Golf Course, house painting, Wendy's, grass mowing and yes six years in the active Naval Reserve program stationed in Fort Wayne Indiana. My first more permanent job began in 1982 with Doll Printing with which I had the pleasure of working with part and full time for twenty-eight years. I had eighteen years in at Doll Printing when I started to work part time at Wright State University Lake Campus here in Celina Ohio. I currently have nine years full time and a total of sixteen years in at [WSU-LC](#).

For fifteen years I served and attended Grace Missionary Church in Celina. There I was baptized and met and married my wife Victoria in 1985. I was blessed with her, her three young boys and our daughter and son. I taught in Sunday school, did Youth Camps in Ludlow Falls and sang in the choir. I also enjoyed playing volleyball and softball. We also served as the Church Custodians for nine years from 1986-1995. I used my VA benefits to attend a bible college from January 1986 – May 1992. I graduated from Summit Christian College in Fort Wayne Indiana currently known as [Taylor University](#) and formerly as [Fort Wayne Bible College](#). I received a Bachelor's Degree in Biblical Studies, with Minors in Pastoral Ministries and Christian Education.

Other Churches we attended include: North Park Community Church in Lima, Adrian Rogers – [Love Worth Finding TV Ministry](#) - watched on channel 44 Lima, Montezuma Methodist Church pastored by Matt Burden who videoed and put together my testimony being used on my website www.thekeysofheaven.com, and [Calvary Christian Fellowship of St. Marys](#).

My awesome tech, Tom Eversman and I have been working on this website together now since around 2010, and this year 2016, as we are revamping and stepping it up to make it more accessible to viewers. Tom and I hope you are blessed and challenged to seek the Lord with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, for then you will find Him. Jesus: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: This is the first commandment" (Mark 12:30). Moses spoke to Israel: "Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the LORD your God ... For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire ... But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find Him, if thou seek Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul ... When thou art in tribulation ... if thou turn to the LORD thy God, and shalt be obedient unto His voice; (For the LORD thy God is a

merciful God;) He will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee ..." (Deuteronomy 4:23, 24, 29-31). Don't quit when you encounter the conviction of God the Holy Spirit, He is doing it out of love and mercy to show you the way to forgiveness and how to escape God's judgment. Apostle John now shows us that loving God with all our heart mind soul and strength is synonymous (after Jesus death, burial and resurrection) with believing on Jesus as our Messiah (Savior). "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment that we should believe on the name of His son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment. And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us" (1 John 3:22-24).

*"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son,
That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish,
But have everlasting life." John 3:16*

If you have read all this,
Thank You and may God Bless You,
A special Thank You to Tom Eversman for all your work,
Our Love & Prayers to All.
<Thank You Jesus for being The Way, The Truth and The Life>

Gary & Victoria Westgerdes