

## Chapter 8

### God's Plan for a Broken World: Garth and Betty Hunt

by Brenda Schneider

As the freighter eased into its berth at the Seattle harbour in July 1972, a small group of passengers could be seen gathered at the rail. Garth and Betty Hunt, along with their five children, aged eleven to seventeen years old, had smiles of excitement and anticipation on their faces.

It had been a harrowing month on the *C.E. Dant*, crossing over from Saigon, Vietnam, to Seattle. The ship had been roughly buffeted by a typhoon just out of Taiwan and then spent long days in dense fog as it approached North America.

As the Hunt family walked down the gangplank, they remembered another long trip on the *S.S. Steel Admiral*, which landed in Saigon, Vietnam, on May 13, 1957. Here is the story of Mom and Dad's years of following God's plan for their lives.

#### The Early Years

Born February 25, 1929, in Brockville, Ontario, to parents Whitfield and Evelyn Hunt, my Dad, Garth, grew up in a non-Christian family, though both his grandfathers had been clergymen. His father was a baker and cook who started his own bakery out of their house in 1940. Dad and his brothers, Reg and Keith, worked in the family bakery and sold hot cross buns door to door during Easter.

In 1941, Whitfield moved the bakery to a storefront and started a restaurant where Dad became a short-order cook. They were a hard-working family. Dad got ten cents every week to go to the local theatre, usually to see John Wayne movies. Little did he imagine he would eventually meet John Wayne while filming "The Green Berets" in Saigon many years later.

Dad hated school, quitting at sixteen. He worked for his father for fifteen dollars a week until he became fed up with the restaurant. He then worked in a Sudbury smelter, moving from there to work in a gold mine with his brother Reg. It was there they got into a fight with the Ontario boxing champ. Dad reports that the champ left with the worst of it.

Hockey was Dad's first love. He joined an elite group of "rink rats" who cleaned

the ice at the local hockey rink and were rewarded with free hockey games and broken sticks. This was the brightest part of his childhood; he played bantam, midgets, juvenile, and juniors' hockey. He played hockey in Quebec for a year, where he was feared and hated by the French-Canadian players. His rough play as a defenseman earned him the nickname "Killer Hunt." At one game, the spectators came over the boards and beat him up. While playing for the Pembroke Lumber Kings, Dad was offered a tryout with the Detroit Red Wings. A knee injury in the playoffs of the same year ended his hockey career.

Joining his brother Keith, he went to work for an ambulance and towing business. He lived recklessly, having numerous accidents and wrecking several vehicles. One accident happened in an ambulance with Dad smashing it up and rolling it four times. He cried out to God, promising to be a better person if his life was spared. When released from the hospital, Dad began searching for God.

He was invited to attend a United Brethren Church on Easter Sunday, April 9, 1950. Here is his story as shared with us and many others throughout the years:

"Little did I realize at the time that the Lord had been orchestrating circumstances in my life and preparing me for a faith journey with Himself. In the Spring of 1950, I was bankrupt in spirit and terribly discouraged. The bottom had fallen out of my life, and I had no sense of direction or purpose. My hopes for a professional hockey career evaporated due to injuries, and several car accidents only compounded my disillusionment. I was truly at my wit's end and didn't realize that God was preparing me for the most important decision of my life.

Through God-ordained circumstances, I found myself in a little Evangelical United Brethren Church Easter Sunday night and heard the Easter message with my heart—he gift of life and hope through the Living Christ, and I responded. I opened my heart and invited Christ into my life in simple faith, and God fulfilled His word. The guilt of sin was lifted, my spirit was liberated, and Christ took control of my life and future. From that moment on, God's Word became the source of my strength, the comfort of my heart, and the guiding light of my life. His Word became a "Living Word" to me and the pathway to a growing knowledge of my Saviour."

His life changed immediately. The next night, at a dance, he shared his experience with friends who thought he was crazy.

Dad began to read God's Word, memorize Scripture verses, and pray. He memorized seven hundred and fifty verses and read the Bible seven times in the first year after accepting Christ as his Saviour.

He needed to have a new vocabulary with this new life, literally walking around with a dictionary to improve it. Often, he was asked to speak to young people about Christ.

In the Fall of 1950, Dad started Bible college. He had a zeal for the Lord, feeling he had a greater purpose with no time for social life. Every day before he went to bed, he would witness to five people.

While at the Canadian Bible Institute (later Canadian Bible College and now Ambrose University), he met Betty Sissons, who would eventually become his wife

and my mother. She grew up in Regina in a loving, secure family. She had a happy childhood, always knowing she was loved even though hugs were not a part of their family life. She respected her father and could always ask him for anything; he never refused her, even though money was scarce.



Betty as a child with her mother. Courtesy Brenda Schneider.

When Mom was sixteen, a momentous event took place in her life. During the summer, she went with her aunt and uncle on the train to British Columbia. As she had never been out of Saskatchewan, this was a great experience for Mom. Her aunt and uncle were born-

again Christians, and they went to visit their children, who were now living in B.C. They were also Christians.

Before this time, Mom had gone to church with her aunt and uncle at times. Their church was very different from the United Church Mom attended with her parents. But it was at her aunt and uncle's church that she heard messages about sinners needing to be saved from sin. Mom would shake in her seat when the invitation to accept Christ was given.

So, in July 1947, while visiting her cousins in Oliver, B.C., she went to their small church where a couple of young men, Jimmy Pattison and Vernon McClelland, were conducting special meetings. When the invitation to receive Christ was given, Mom found herself kneeling at the front. After the service, Jimmy and Vern drove her home, telling her she now needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit. At that time, she didn't know anything about the Holy Spirit or even any Scripture verses.

Nevertheless, the next morning she took a blanket and went into the apricot orchard where she laid under the trees. There she began to wait to be "filled with the Spirit." She didn't know what to expect but figured she'd know when it happened. She prayed out loud, asking to be filled with the Spirit. After several hours, nothing happened, so she went back to the house.

The next morning, she took her blanket again, went to the orchard, and began

praying as she had the previous day. She raised her arms to Heaven. Suddenly, as she prayed, the most incredible joy and rapture filled her soul. She laughed and sang and prayed and rejoiced for some time. When she returned to the house, she was told her face was shining. She was baptized in Lake Okanagan with Jimmy Pattison playing his trumpet and the congregation singing.

One evening, on her way to church on the bus, Mom met Ruth Mayell, a girl she knew from school. They soon discovered they had both become Christians and Ruth was on her way to the Alliance church, inviting Mom to go along with her. Mom said that from the moment she entered that humble church, the Holy Spirit whispered to her heart that this was where she belonged, and she never again went back to her old church. That was her introduction to The Christian and Missionary Alliance, which played such a big part in her life.

When she was in grade 12, Mom planned to go to "Normal School" in Moose Jaw to become a teacher. However, on May 22, 1948, her mother suddenly died of a heart attack, the first after years of being an invalid with heart failure.

Mom's grief was enormous. She had already passed with high marks, and in the fall, she was valedictorian at their Commencement Exercises. She felt she could not leave her grieving father to go to Normal School, so she stayed in Regina, taking a business course. She then took a secretarial job with a lawyer.

Little by little, Mom felt herself being drawn to Bible school. The Western Canadian Bible School was in Regina, and her mom's first cousin, Lucille Blackett, and her husband George were in charge of the school. In the fall of 1950, Mom began her four-year course.

There was a young fellow who had also started that fall; his name was Garth Hunt. He made quite a stir in the school with his wholehearted commitment to the Lord. He prayed so loud and so long, Mom felt embarrassed for him and wished he would keep quiet. He was finally asked to pray in the furnace room!

Then one day, he invited Mom to go skating with him, and she was quite thrilled to be on the arm of this smooth hockey player. Little by little, she felt attracted to him because of his wholehearted devotion and commitment to the Lord. He was a diamond in the rough, but he was determined to catch up in all the areas he had missed out on.

The fellows and girls were not allowed to talk with each other at school. However, they could get permission to go to the library in the evening and sit across from each other and converse for fifteen minutes. This is how Mom and Dad got to know one another. Mom says, "I found myself being more and more attracted to him because of his amazing commitment to the Lord. He was also quite good-looking, which was a plus."

Even though Dad warned Mom she would be a widow at thirty (because he planned to burn himself out for the Lord), they were married on September 6, 1952. Mr. Blackett married them, and they were among the first group of students who were allowed to marry during their training.

After graduating from the Canadian Bible Institute in 1954, they pastored a little church in Wimborne, Alberta. It was a town of seven hundred and sixty people, one hundred of whom attended the church. They had no fixed salary and averaged seventy-three dollars a week. The farmers took care of them, often bringing food such as live chickens. It was there they were first blessed with a daughter, Donna, and then a son, David.

During this time, Mom and Dad visited a Calgary church and heard Arthur Mau, a missionary from Borneo, speak. Then, at the Three Hills Bible School, they were deeply challenged in their hearts and felt God calling them to be missionaries. An application to the Alliance New York office was sent in; shockingly, they heard back within a month. They followed up and were approved as missionaries by December, with the Alliance asking if they were willing to go to Vietnam.

## **Ministry in Times of War**

With two babies and heading off to Vietnam, it was then Mom realized that her little ones would have to leave home when they were only six years old to go off to boarding school in Malaysia. She says, “I couldn’t face that, and I cried and cried and kept saying, “Lord, I can’t, I can’t.” The Lord knew I wasn’t saying, “I won’t, I won’t.” Then He reminded me of something one of our Bible school teachers had said. Some of us were afraid if we were ever tied to the stake to be burned for our faith that we would recant. But Mr. Downey said: ‘No, you wouldn’t. Don’t expect to have dying grace until you have to die.’ The Lord used that to remind me that I was trying to part with my precious little ones years before I had to. He assured me that when the time came, His grace would be sufficient—and it was.”

They arrived in Vietnam on May 14, 1957, after thirty-nine days on board a freighter. They had never felt such heat. Mom stood on the dock with the children as Dad went off to handle the paperwork.

They were eventually assigned to Ben Tre, a town south of Saigon set in beautiful coconut groves. Here, the infamous “culture shock” hit Mom like a brick wall. She even envied a missionary in Cambodia who had been stricken with polio and had to be sent back home!

For two years, they underwent language studies and then moved to Quang Tri, the northernmost and most primitive part of South Vietnam, where homes were



Family picture, 1961. Courtesy Brenda Schneider.

made of mud and thatch. Their second daughter, Lolly, was born in December 1959. By Christmas the following year, my twin sister Sandra and I were added, and the Hunts now had five children.

In 1963, their second term brought us to Saigon, where Mom and Dad began working with the hospital and military. They now lived in the heart of the war. Mom wrote, “There were explosions and the boom of distant artillery. Tracer bullets arced a red path across the sky in the evening. But

through it all, we weren’t afraid. We had beautiful peace because we knew we were exactly where God wanted us to be.”

Dad became a chaplain in the Vietnamese armed forces and worked with several of the army generals. He was flown out to the frontlines by fighter helicopters to preach to the troops before they went to battle, distributing small personal care packages containing the Gospel of John.

In October 1966, Dad wrote, “To those who daily face danger and death, God has sent us with His Living Word. We go by military plane, helicopter, convoy—over the enemy-filled jungle and on often-mined roads. Is it foolish to take such risks? Dare we consider our own safety when we can preach to either a handful or hundreds of troops and leave in their hands a gospel portion? There are fear, loneliness and death on the war front, but when the Word of God reaches a man’s heart, there is new hope, joy and salvation.”

In 1967, having completed their second term, the family looked forward to being away from the war on home assignment. On the way to Canada, we landed in Lebanon on the first day of the Six-day War between Arabs and the Israelis; we had to be evacuated. We spent the second home assignment in Ottawa, where we kids could experience a traditional Canadian winter.

Mom and Dad’s third term started in July 1968 and brought them back to Saigon. War was in full swing. Surrounded by constant gunfire and explosions, the Lord kept them in perfect peace with the knowledge they were still exactly where the Lord wanted them to be.

Mom and Dad were among the missionaries who ministered at the Benh Vien Cong Hoa (Gum Wa) Hospital. This was the largest Vietnamese military hospital with over three thousand young wounded soldiers. Mom wrote, “A big part of my





Betty sharing Scripture and visiting with wounded Vietnamese soldiers.

Courtesy Brenda Schneider.

ministry during those days was visiting the wounded Vietnamese soldiers. I would go from bed to bed giving them literature and explaining the good news of the Gospel.”

Sunday night services were held weekly for the soldiers. Dad and his team would drive around the massive hospital grounds with a flatbed truck picking up soldiers who could not make it to the auditorium independently. He would carry heavily wounded men, placing them gently on the trailer.

Close to four hundred wounded soldiers gathered. A short film, like a Laurel and Hardy comedy, would be shown, then there was music and a gospel message. Many soldiers prayed at the end of each service, giving their lives to Christ. The missionaries would do follow-ups the next week with these new Christians. In the ten years or so this ministry was carried on, some ten thousand soldiers put their faith in Christ! Every soldier always got a copy of the precious Word of God.

Dad worked alongside World Vision and its founder Bob Pierce, Food for the Hungry and founder Larry Ward, and the Kathryn Kuhlman organization to distribute humanitarian aid to the soldiers, such as wheelchairs and personal aid kits. He received ten decorations from the Government of Vietnam; among them was Vietnam's highest civilian medal of honour.

On their return to Canada in 1972, Dad and Mom booked passage on a freighter. It had twelve passengers, seven of whom were Hunts. We passed through a typhoon in the South China Sea, and at one point, the Captain came asking Dad to pray for the ship. We noticed Dad "disappeared" for several days, later finding out he had been on his knees in prayer for the ship's safety.

Dad recognized the war was lost, with it being just a matter of time before South Vietnam fell. Not wanting to endanger his children, Dad felt their missionary career in Vietnam was over. He began an itinerate ministry while waiting for God to open a door. After many interviews, he described himself as "the most sought after and least-hired missionary of the C&MA."

## Translating the Living Word

In June 1973, he bumped into Ken McVety in the Winnipeg airport. Ken invited him to join his team doing Bible translations across Asia. Dad started as Ken's field secretary, moving to White Rock, B.C. He founded Living Bible International, which would become Bibles International and then finally World Serve.

Accepting Ken McVety's invitation to work with him in the Living Bibles ministry meant that Dad would be travelling throughout Asia much of the time. Mom stayed home with the five teenagers. It was hard, but she never resented it, knowing this was God's plan for them at that time. God helped us in every way, and for many years that was our life. During those years, one thing that really helped Mom was



Garth with Major General  
Stolyarov of the Russian Military.  
Courtesy Brenda Schneider.

travelling overseas with Dad once a year, visiting all the countries where he worked. When she saw the wonderful national workers' commitment and sacrifice, it made it easier for her to fulfill her part of the ministry.

Dad received a doctorate degree from the California Graduate School of Theology in January 1979. On April 15, 1992, he was commissioned as Honorary General of Love and Hope in the Russian Army by the Assistant Commander-in-chief of Russia's Armed Forces. Dad often called the



development and provision of Russian New Testaments, with co-managed covers to the Russian Armed forces, a highlight of his life.

## Reflecting on the Past



Garth and Betty in their later years. Courtesy Brenda Schneider.

In 2006, after retiring from World Serve, Dad started spending his “retirement” years assisting the Dalit Freedom Network organization under Sherry Bailey. During this time, Mom had a ministry leading a weekly ladies’ Bible study at Peace Portal Alliance Church, their home church for many years.

Dad and Mom were able to return to Ambrose University in 2015, over sixty years after graduating, to witness their granddaughter’s graduation. Three weeks later, Mom was called home to glory. Dad was never so conscious of the impact and comfort of experiencing the power of prayer by family and friends to sustain him in his deepest hours of grief.

After Mom’s passing, Dad was interviewed at Peace Portal Alliance Church in Surrey, B.C. When asked

why it is essential to reflect on what God has done in our past, Dad responded with his personal testimony.

In 1950 I had a personal encounter with God that changed my life and my whole world. God gave me two wonderful gifts: the gift of the Living Christ as my Saviour and the gift of Betty, who became my precious wife and my lifelong partner in ministry.

Now, as I reflect on the last 65 years, I can declare with absolute certainty that God is trustworthy and faithful, and I can face the future with confidence, peace and joy...

I never planned on being a Christian, and I certainly didn’t plan on being a missionary. But God had His plan for my life that I was to discover step by step...

Dad happened to be in Vietnam when the Communist government celebrated their fortieth anniversary of Saigon and South Vietnam’s fall. He wondered what God’s purpose was in bringing him into Saigon for the final hours of freedom for South Vietnam.

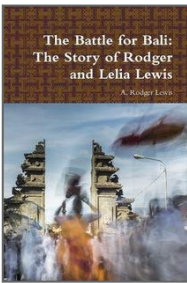
Many Vietnamese pastors were desperate and wanted to flee but had no way of escape. But God showed up at that very moment and opened a miraculous door to freedom through Dr. Larry Ward, President of Food for the Hungry and Dad.

Together, they got 1,700 Vietnamese, whose lives were in danger, manifested onto U.S. military aircraft and flown to the Philippines, Guam and the USA. Dr. Ward and Dad were evacuated on one of the last planes to leave Saigon.

It was then Dad realized the Lord wanted to bring a nucleus of His Vietnamese Church to North America. Amid all this desperation, God was demonstrating His faithfulness to these believers. This was the beginning of the Vietnamese Church in the USA and Canada; today, Vietnamese churches are scattered across the continent. Dad said, "I believe God wants to show up in all of our lives and demonstrate His power and love and the scope of His redemptive plan for broken people and a broken world."

Dad went home to Heaven on November 13, 2018.

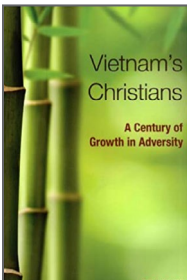
## More Stories of Those Who Went



### **The Battle for Bali: The Story of Rodger and Lelia Lewis** by A. Rodger Lewis

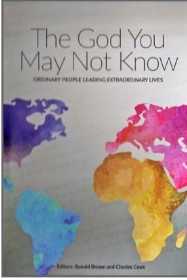
Demons were driven out, and people were set free, but it was a battle. With religion intricately entwined into both family and culture, becoming a Christian often meant ostracization and economic isolation for the Balinese. At first, few responded. The struggle seemed to no avail.

The Lewises often felt like they were living "within a yard of hell." A Communist takeover of Indonesia also threatened. The "garbage" pit, dug by the family helper in their own backyard, was actually a grave-in-waiting for the entire Lewis family. Despite supernatural but evil manifestations on every hand and defiant opposition to the preaching of the Gospel, Christ has built His Church on the beautiful isle of Bali.



### **Vietnam's Christians: A Century of Growth in Adversity** by Reg Reimer

This is a well-written account of the history of evangelical Christianity in Vietnam. It goes back to the early centuries of Catholicism, but more emphasis is given to the time since missionaries left in 1975 and recent human rights violations.



**The God You May Not Know: Ordinary People Leading Extraordinary Lives** edited by Ronald Brown and Charles Cook

Reg Reimer tells of Alliance Protestant missions in Vietnam in chapter 9, “The Coming of the Protestants.” In chapter 17, “Bringing Relief and Reconciliation to the ‘Cruel Edges of the World,’” he also shares his and his wife LaDonna’s autobiography.