

David Hadley Stancil

August 22, 1912 – March 6, 2006

My father, David Hadley Stancil, was born in Wake County, North Carolina, to David Henry and Agnes Young Stancil on Thursday, August 22, 1912, the fourth of five children. His parents, his brothers Wade and Ryburn, and his sister, Mildred, preceded him to the Heavenly City. His brother, Shirley, lives in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Some people knew my Dad as David Stancil; some knew him as Hadley Stancil. I did not call him by his first or middle names, but I will in these reflections, since that's how nearly all of you knew him.

Hadley grew up on the farm, and tilling the soil remained one of his central passions through all of his life. Growing up on a farm nurtures many important character qualities, not least of which is creativity. Once electricity came to their farm, one of his chores at one point in his life was to get up at "zero dark-thirty" to turn the lights on in the henhouse. Having not yet acquired an appreciation for early rising, Hadley took a wind-up alarm clock and tied a string out the window between the wind-up mechanism and the light switch in the henhouse, so that when the alarm clock went off, the wind-up mechanism would flip the switch!

Hadley grew up in the New Bethel Baptist Church in Wake County, and as a young man he was active in working with youth. Several of the men who were youths in Hadley's groups at New Bethel have told him since how great an influence he had in their lives even in his own youth.

As the Great War came to a close, the Pastor of the New Bethel church was a young man named R. Paul Caudill, who was a great influence in Hadley's decision to go to college. The two were life-long friends, as most of you know . . . but I anticipate the story.

Hadley was a member of what we have come to call The Greatest Generation; and when his country needed him, he answered the call. Hadley joined the U.S. Navy, serving as a Yeoman First Class working with Naval Intelligence in Wilmington, North Carolina. It was my Dad's naval service that would later influence me to spend twelve years in the Navy myself.

Hadley was a faithful churchman across all the years of his life, and while on active duty, he was active in the First Baptist Church of Wilmington, where a cute young woman named Sue Ellen Ray was the Minister of Education from 1943-1945. Hadley and Sue worked on many projects together, and they found that they enjoyed each other's company a great deal. When Sue Ellen moved to become the Minister of Education at the First Baptist Church of Hickory, North Carolina, Hadley began to find reasons to visit Hickory!

Hadley had worked for the Buckeye Cottonseed Oil Company before the war, and he was inclined to return to their employ when the war ended. Always close to his Pastors, Hadley sought counsel about whether to go to work or to school from Paul Caudill in his home church, as I've mentioned, and from Dr. Sankey Blanton, his Pastor in Wilmington.

Hadley asked Dr. Blanton whether it would be foolish to go to college as an older student returning from war. Dr. Blanton asked him, "Hadley, have you ever mauled wood on the farm?" After Hadley replied that of course he had, Dr. Blanton continued, "Well, did you think it a waste of time to sharpen your axe?" Hadley went to school.

While he worked on his bachelor's degree at N.C. State in Raleigh, Hadley continued to correspond with and visit Sue Ellen in Hickory. In the winter of 1946-47, Sue Ellen interviewed to become the Minister of Education at the First Baptist Church of Greensboro, and Hadley realized that his window of opportunity with Sue Ellen might close if she made this move.

So when Sue Ellen returned to Hickory in March of 1947 after those interviews, she found a telegram waiting for her that said, "Sue Ellen, I was planning to visit you this weekend and to ask you to marry me instead of moving to Greensboro." Having been thus proposed to by means of a telegram, Sue Ellen accepted Hadley's invitation, and they were married in the First Baptist Church of Hickory, North Carolina on Tuesday, June 10, 1947—on the very same day that one of the members of the church I now serve as Pastor was married in the room that is now my office!

After their wedding, Sue joined Hadley in Raleigh, a town now flooded with veterans seeking to further their education. Housing was extremely scarce, and they found themselves setting up housekeeping in a basement garage apartment, separated from the owner's car by only a curtain!

Those living conditions were challenging, to say the least! Word of their predicament reached friends in the Garner Baptist Church, near Raleigh, and since they knew both Hadley's character and Sue's skill, these friends offered to renovate an apartment in Garner for them if Hadley and Sue would come to help with the work of the Garner church—which they did.

Hadley's college work was not yet complete when the Buckeye Cottonseed Oil Company asked him to take over management of seven cotton gins and a company store headquartered in Lumberton, North Carolina. This was a very significant invitation, and Hadley and Sue moved to Lumberton where he managed these concerns quite successfully. The move made completing his college work more difficult, but Hadley always felt that those years and that achievement were some of the most impressive and important credentials he ever acquired.

Several years later, opportunity knocked again, and Sue and Hadley moved back to Raleigh in 1950 to become a traveling agricultural extension agent for the state. Soon after, their family was blessed by a bouncing baby boy—Yours Truly—and their living quarters became too small once again.

At about this same time, it became necessary for Hadley's Mother to leave the family farm, so Hadley and Sue built a new house in Raleigh with an apartment in which his Mom could live. Several years passed, and a second son, Daniel, made the family "four-square."

Now when Sue and Hadley married, Sue left her formal ministry career to become a stay-at-home Mom—and the most talented volunteer any church could possibly imagine. So the spring of 1954 found them with a new house, two young sons, one car, and a traveling job that kept the car out of town most of the week.

During that spring, as well, corneal ulcers that had developed during the war began to become so troublesome that Hadley's eyelid had to be sewn shut. His doctors told him that with his impaired vision, he could not safely continue to be on the road.

By God's providence, it happened that at this same time, Hadley's excellent work record brought an offer of a non-traveling Federal job with the Cotton Marketing Division of the Department of Agriculture in Atlanta. Hadley didn't want to move his mother again or to leave their brand-new house; but he knew that he needed this job.

Hadley moved to Atlanta to begin work in August of 1954, but after extensive searching he remained unable to find suitable living quarters for his tri-generational family. On one evening when he was particularly despairing and desperate—not to mention lonely, since his family was still in Raleigh—Hadley fell across his bed in tears. That night God gave him a verse that guided all the rest of his years: *“You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you”* (Isaiah 26:3).

Not too long after that, Hadley found suitable temporary quarters, moved his family to Atlanta, and built a carbon copy of the house they left in Raleigh. That was the house in which Dan and I grew up.

During their sixteen years in Atlanta, Hadley and Sue were active in the Beecher Hills Baptist Church, where Hadley served as the Chair of Deacons, and Sue served at one point or another as the Chair of nearly everything else!

While Hadley was the Assistant Regional Director of the Cotton Marketing Division in Atlanta, he went to night school at Georgia State University to earn an M.B.A. Because he could only go to school part-time, it took him six years to earn a two-year degree—but he did it!

In 1970, Hadley and Sue moved to Memphis, where Hadley became the Assistant Director of the entire Cotton Marketing Division. He retired as the Director of the Division in 1981.

When Hadley and Sue moved to Memphis, Paul Caudill was Pastor of the First Baptist Church, so deciding where to worship and plant their lives wasn’t difficult. Always willing to try something new for the sake of the Kingdom, they were very supportive of later efforts to start new work in the growing eastern edge of town, and when First Baptist birthed the new work now known as Trinity Baptist Church, they were anchors of that effort.

Hadley was always quietly committed to the practical dimensions of Christian service, and retirement brought many new opportunities. Hadley—and Sue with him—did volunteer mission work in Michigan on several occasions, out of which labor two churches were born. They spent a month working in Upper Volta, now Burkina Faso. They did mission work in Juneau, Alaska, and they traveled with the Woman’s Missionary Union of the SBC on a centennial visit to the “Lottie Moon areas” of China.

Hadley was on mission in the community as well as in the church. And, as his hearing began to deteriorate, he focused on volunteer opportunities that didn’t require much hearing:

- He delivered Meals on Wheels with MIFA for more than fifteen years;
- He did more than 5,000 hours of volunteer work at the library of the VA hospital;
- He stuffed mail at the Church Health Center;
- And at church, he continued to work with young preschoolers. It was a match made in heaven: he couldn’t hear, and they couldn’t talk! Just two weeks before the diagnosis of Dad’s cancer last December, you here at Trinity honored him and Sue for their long commitment to preschool ministry. That was timing made in heaven, and as it became apparent that Dad’s journey Home was fast approaching, he told me, “I hope my job when I get to heaven is to work with the little children.”

Earlier I mentioned Hadley's life-long passion for tilling the soil. That passion found expression during these thirty-six years in Memphis in gardening, growing lovely flowers, and tending a large rose garden.

Not only did Hadley nurture plants and young children; he also nurtured his two sons, our wives, Jill and Kathy, and his grandchildren, Nathan and Anna, Brian and Mike. As some of you know better than others, my father's faith was an anchor that God used to bring my own life back from the "far country" of the spirit and into the Lord's vineyard. And for both of his sons, there was never any doubt that our Dad was going to do "the right thing," no matter what that might be, and no matter what that cost. His was a life of faith-full integrity.

It seems to me that more often than not, as persons grow older and as our ability to maintain a social façade diminishes, our true character becomes more and more apparent. When I asked Mom Monday night for some adjectives that described her soul mate, she said that Hadley was sensitive, loving, stable, honest, of absolute integrity, and always interested in life. To these I would add that my Dad was thoughtful, considerate, grateful, humble, and kind. I think he was the most genuinely humble person I've ever known.

As you know, these months since Hadley's ninety-third birthday have been difficult. His hearing and mental acuity had been failing little by little over several years, but now his energy level began to erode as well. Tests eventually revealed that, though he had never smoked, his malaise was due to lung cancer.

In concert with his physicians, our family decided together that the most appropriate response to this disease was to welcome it as the mechanism of Hadley's Final Release. On the night that we made this decision last December, I asked him, "What's it like to know that your ticket Home has been issued?" And my Dad replied, "I'm ready to use it."

The last thing I ever said to my Father was, "I love you, Dad. If you should cross over before I return, I'll see you on the Other Side." And so it was that on last Monday morning (March 6, 2006), just an hour or so before my return, my Dad began "the Real Story, for which all of his life in this world had been only the cover and the title page. He began Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever, and in which every chapter is better than the one before" (C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*).

For such a life, and for such a Story, I thank God!