

Sue Ellen Ray Stancil

February 23, 1918 – January 14, 2012



Our mother, Sue Ellen Ray Stancil, was born on a farm near the Lilac community in Grayson County, Kentucky, to Samuel Crittenden (1881-1965) and Mary Verda Watson Ray (1887-1981) on Saturday, February 23, 1918. She was the second of their four children, and was named for both of her grandmothers.

James William ("Jimmie") had been born in 1914, and John Andrew ("John A.") would be born in 1919, with Mary Samuel ("Mary Sam") being born in 1922. Sue Ellen's parents preceded her to the Heavenly City, as did her brother, Jimmie, and her sister, Mary Sam. Her brother, John A., lives in central Indiana in a life care retirement facility.

Sue Ellen was born at 12:30 a.m., and there was ice on the ground as the doctor made his way out to the farm from town. Her mother always said that if she'd been born thirty minutes sooner she could have been born on Washington's Birthday.

Although Sue went by Sue Ellen during her growing up years, she has gone by Sue during the years most of us have known her, so that's how she will be referred to for the balance of this story (rather than "Mom" as well, for the most part). Her father, S. C. Ray, was from Edmonson County, Kentucky, where Mammoth Cave is located. The Mammoth Cave National Park eventually took part of the family farm, including their homestead.

Her mother, Verda Watson, was from Grayson County, Kentucky, the next county north of Edmonson. They met while both were training to be school teachers at the Western Kentucky State Normal School, now Western Kentucky University.

Both of her parents were college graduates, a most unusual circumstance for their time. Both eventually served as teachers, and S. C. also served one term each in the Kentucky House and in the Kentucky Senate. Beyond this, he was also a bi-vocational pastor for many years.

After they were married, S. C. and Verda lived in and around Cave City, Kentucky, where Jimmie was born. They eventually bought the farm near Lilac in Grayson County in order to be near Verda's parents, John and Susan Watson. Part of that farm is now submerged under the Rough River Reservoir, and part of it has become the Rough River State Resort Park.

When they moved to Grayson County, the Little Clifty Baptist Church could only afford "preaching" once a month, and her father became a bi-vocational pastor so they could have church more often. He also pastored the Hanging Rock Baptist Church in the county.

Sue's Dad did some study at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, and he frequently had "state workers" from the Kentucky Baptist Convention come to help the Little Clifty Church, which became a strong one for those days. Her Mom began the Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) in the church. Baptist State workers many times spent a week at their house.

Both of Sue's parents could read music, and her father gave her ten cents for each hymn that she learned to play on the pump organ in their home and to play on the pump organ at church. Dan and I well remember that pump organ from visits to our grandparents' farm in Leitchfield as children . . . but I anticipate the story.

Grandfather Watson died when Sue was six years old, and Grandmother Watson lived out her remaining years spending part of the year with each of her children. Since Verda was her only daughter, she stayed longer with Verda than with her sons' families. This presaged the many years during which Sue would later care for Hadley's mother and her own parents in our home.

Because Sue has a wonderful memory, and because she took the time to record many of her growing-up memories, I'm able to recount many delightful vignettes from her childhood and youth, decades before Dan and I were born. According to Mom's written and oral accounts, their farmyard had a white-washed fence, and besides the house, the other buildings were the barn, the corn crib, the granary, and the tobacco barn, the hen house, the turkey house, all made from lumber from trees on their farm.

Decades later, when my family lived in Louisville, I was visiting the father of one of my friends, who was in the hospital in Louisville. He was from Grayson County, and when I described where my grandparents' house was in Leitchfield, this man said, "Oh, you're talking about Preacher Ray! I used to think it was funny how loudly he preached against tobacco and then he'd grow it on his farm!"

In addition to tobacco, S. C. grew wheat, corn, and hay, and raised chickens, turkeys, horses, cows, sheep, hogs, goats, and guinea hens. Dan and I well remember Grandmother Ray's wringing the necks off the chickens we were going to have for dinner and watching those headless creatures then flopping around the yard!

The farm on which Sue grew up had four fields, known as the "Sweet Apple Field," the "Red Gate Field," the "Harris Field," and "the Bottom." In addition to the cultivated crops, these fields also produced apples, pears, peaches, blackberries, hickory nuts, hazel nuts, and chestnuts.

The oldest of seven children, Sue's Dad was always eager to try new things. He bought a Model T Ford about 1928—before the Depression began—and he found a spring high enough above the house to serve as a source of running water. Although the house never had electricity (they used kerosene lamps, though there was one gas lamp that gave more light to study by) he and the boys laid a half-mile of pipe to that spring so that they could have running water in the house. They never had either a well or a cistern.

Prior to the arrival of the Model T, all travel was either by horseback, by muleback, by surrey, by wagon, or on foot. Mail came to the farm in saddle bags on a horse, and it was half a mile from the house to the mailbox! The dirt roads leading to town were so primitive that it took four mules to pull the wagon through the mud in bad weather if the load was really heavy.

The house was heated with a wood stove, using wood cut with a five-foot cross-cut saw, and cooking was done on a wood stove as well (they heated with a coal stove during the years Dan & I visited in Leitchfield). In those days everyone slept on goose-feather beds with straw ticks, heated with flat irons in the winter. Those were also days in which children always ate at "second table" when there were guests, and when the treatment for stepping on a nail was to soak your foot in kerosene and then tie a piece of fat meat over the wound. That sounds awful, but it apparently worked!

During the summer, the children sometimes slept outside on a rug because the upstairs rooms were so hot. All their rugs were homemade, and were frequently woven from ripped-up old clothing. Grandmother Watson had a large wooden loom that was put up on the front porch when in use. Grandmother engineered and Sue did the treadling. Summertime also brought swimming in the creek, which Jimmie and John A. enjoyed, but which Sue and Mary Sam didn't. Mary Sam almost drowned once, and she and Sue were skittish of water ever after.

That part of Kentucky is pocked with sinkholes due to ground water dissolving the limestone under the soil—which is how Mammoth Cave developed. Their fields were plowed with mules, and once a newly-formed sinkhole trapped one of the mules. Among other animals,

Sue remembers horses “Old Joe” and “Horse Kate,” so named to distinguish her from “Mule Kate.” The famous Floyd Collins, who died spelunking the Mammoth Cave system, was a former student of her father’s.

In those days, corn was harvested one stalk at a time and stacked in shocks in the field. Sue helped with the planting and harvesting of tobacco, as well as with milking cows, nursing lambs, churning butter, rendering lard, smoking meat, mucking stables and hen houses, and even spreading manure.

Summertime found Sue working with her Mama and Mary Sam in the garden, planting, tending, harvesting and canning food for the winter. Lots of gardening and canning was still going on when we visited Grandmother and Grandfather Ray as children. Sue’s Mom always cut the children’s hair on the farm, and Mom tried that on Dan and me once, too . . . and once only!

Sue’s childhood years were halcyon days after World War I and before the Great Depression and World War II. Those were years in which the family ate popcorn every night during the long winter evenings and Christmas trees were cedars from the farm, decorated with popcorn and hawthorn berries.

Those were years in which farmers helped each other with killing hogs, threshing wheat, and baling hay. “Lum & Abner” and “Amos & Andy” were favorites on the new-fangled radios, and telephones were party-line. Once, when Mary Sam was talking to her boyfriend and eventual husband, Bob Tanner, he loudly commented, “If all those old hens would get off the line, I think I could hear you!”

With both of her parents being trained schoolteachers, Sue never had another teacher until the eighth grade. She and her siblings all went to the one-room Lewis school and were taught by both parents in turn. The schools were heated with pot-bellied stoves, and were outfitted with “his” and “hers” outhouses complete with Sears catalogs.

School was routinely dismissed to include the fall revival meeting as part of the school day, and winter brought snow sledding and pond skating, too. Sue made her profession of faith in Jesus as her Savior during an August revival meeting at the Little Clifty Church when she was ten years old, and she was subsequently baptized in her Grandpa Watson’s pond.

When the Great Depression came the next year, feed sack dresses became the style. One of the jingles of those days went like this: “Eleven-cent cotton and forty-cent meat! How in the world can a poor man eat?”

As I’ve mentioned, attending college was quite unusual in those days, and even attending high school was far from the norm. Students had to pass a county-wide test in order to be admitted to high school tuition free, and Jimmie, Sue, and two other boys were the only ones from either of their communities who went on to high school.

Getting to school involved a twelve-mile round trip on a horse, with a mile walk at the end. After making that long, cold ride for a year, Sue boarded in Leitchfield for two years of high school so the ride could be avoided. Among many other differences we might mention, in those days the high school biology teacher took the students frog gigging in order to secure their frogs for dissection rather than just ordering them from a catalog, as is done today.

Jimmie attended Georgetown College in Georgetown, Kentucky for one year as a boarding student, but this was quite expensive, and since Sue’s parents hoped to send all four children to college, they rented out their farm and moved 150 miles to Georgetown during the summer

of 1934. This meant that Sue spent her senior year of high school in Georgetown and graduated from Garth High School in 1935 rather than from Leitchfield High.

Although Sue didn't graduate from Leitchfield High School, the processional for graduation exercises at Leitchfield each year was "Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart," and the recessional was "Lead On, O King Eternal." Because the entire student body participated in the processions and recessions, those hymns were always very special for Sue.

The family lived in Georgetown for six years, with Sue's Dad continuing to both pastor churches and grow tobacco allotments in order to pay the bills. Sue also attended Georgetown College, majoring in English and minoring in Bible. She did her student teaching in Paris, Kentucky, just fifteen miles from Carlisle, where I would eventually begin my pastoral career, and she graduated from Georgetown in 1939.

Conjointly with her college studies, Sue lived back in Grayson County with her Mother's brother, Uncle Will Watson, while teaching in the one-room Ramsey School during the school years of 1938-1939 and 1939-1940. She remembers having to get to school very early to start the fire in the pot-bellied stove so there would be a little heat when the students arrived.

When World War II began, S. C. couldn't find enough help to manage the farm back in Grayson County, so the family moved back there. Jimmie had graduated from Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky by this time and was pastoring in northern Kentucky, while Sue was attending the Woman's Missionary Training School of the Seminary, having begun her studies there in 1940. Mary Sam was in nursing training at Baptist Hospital in Louisville, and John A. was off at war in North Africa.

Sue wrote of her first year in Louisville that "The seminary professors came to our building (downtown at Broadway and Preston) to teach first-year students. The second-year students rode an old school bus to the seminary campus and were in classes with the men students. The young women took the same classes with the men and the same exams, but we were never called upon or recognized in class."

World War II began during the fall semester of Sue's second year at seminary, and she moved to a dorm room over the main entrance to the brand-new WMU Hall—which many had objected to locating on the seminary campus. Many WMU groups around the country sent food to sustain the women who were studying at the Training School. Virginia sent country hams, for example, and Georgia sent pecans. And many years later, as a graduate of Georgetown College and Southern Seminary myself, I would teach classes in WMU Hall as an Assistant Professor of Psychology of Religion & Pastoral Care.

Between her two years at the seminary, Sue spent the summer doing Vacation Bible School across the mountains of eastern Kentucky. Among the many things she remembers about that summer are coal miners, swinging bridges, flash floods, and bed bugs! Sue graduated from the Woman's Missionary Training School with a Master of Religious Education in 1942.

During the summer of '42, Sue worked in educational ministry in Spindale, North Carolina, southeast of Asheville, and she taught Bible in the schools in Tazewell, Virginia (quite near where I pastored in Bristol from 2001-2011) during 1942-1943. In June, 1943, she became Minister of Education at the First Baptist Church of Wilmington, North Carolina, taking the place of a man who was off at war.

Wilmington provided Sue's first view of the ocean, as well as the occasion for her to meet David Hadley Stancil, a North Carolinian from Garner who was serving in the Navy and who

happened to take his meals at the same boarding house where Sue lived. He had been stationed in Wilmington for more than a year before Sue came.

At the close of the war, the former Minister of Education at First Wilmington returned safely home. Sue knew that the staff position in Wilmington would again be his, so she took a similar position with First Baptist Church in Hickory, North Carolina, where she was Minister of Education from June, 1945 – June, 1947.

Sue and Hadley had been good friends in Wilmington, but they hadn't dated. After the war, he attended college at North Carolina State University in Raleigh while Sue was in Hickory. (After completing his Ph.D. at M.I.T., Dan began his teaching career on the faculty of the Electrical Engineering Department at N.C. State, where, after two decades on the faculty at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, he has returned to be the Chair of the Electrical Engineering Department. He and Kathy live quite near our Dad's old haunts in Garner.)

Sue and Hadley dated during this period, and they were married at First Baptist Hickory on Tuesday, June 10, 1947. They set up housekeeping in a basement apartment in Raleigh that they shared with the owner's car (!), but soon moved to an attic apartment in Garner to help with the Garner Baptist Church. Hadley continued his studies at N.C. State, while Sue worked at the Baptist Book Store in Raleigh.

Before long, they moved to Lumberton, North Carolina for two years while Hadley managed eight cotton gins; then they moved back to Garner, bought a four-room house on Hilltop Avenue, and Hadley began work as a North Carolina Agricultural Extension Agent. It was on Hilltop Avenue that I joined the family in December, 1950 (at 4 lbs., 12 oz.), making the house much too small.

It also became necessary at about that time to sell the family farm in Garner, which resulted in the need for Dad's mother to live with us, which she did for the next ten years (1953-1963). Dad built a larger house on Powell Drive in Garner that had an apartment for his mother, and it was in that house that Dan joined the family in January, 1954.

In August, 1954, our family moved to Atlanta, Georgia, where Dad took a job as the Assistant Regional Manager for the Cotton Division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. We moved to a rental house on Drewry Street and became active in the Virginia Avenue Baptist Church while a twin of the house on Powell Drive was built at 2841 Bob White Drive in southwest Atlanta.

We moved to Bob White Drive in 1956 and lived there until 1971, being very active in the Beecher Hills Baptist Church in Cascade Heights. One of the highlights of our Atlanta years was a five-week family camping trip to the west coast and back in 1966.

Mom hardly ever worked for pay after she married, but she was the best volunteer any church ever hoped to have during all the years since! Always active in teaching mission studies in our church and association, she also learned how to teach English as a second language (ESL) when Beecher Hills resettled and employed a Cuban refugee family. Literacy missions has been a significant focus in Sue's life ever since, giving her life a truly global impact.

When Grandmother Stancil died in 1963, our family experienced one year of just the four of us before Grandmother and Granddaddy Ray moved in with us in 1964. Granddaddy was resurrected about six months after the move, but Grandmother Ray lived with Mom & Dad for seventeen years (she moved to Mary Sam's in 1981). While I'm sure that this faithful care for their parents was a significant strain for Mom and Dad, what it meant for Dan and me

was that we never had a babysitter from outside the family, and we enjoyed the company of grandparents a great deal . . . but I've anticipated the story again.

After the war ended, Grandmother and Granddaddy Ray sold their farm in Grayson County and moved to a small farm on Water Street in Leitchfield. They had a large garden there, and both went back to teaching school until they had completed enough years to retire. They were very active in the First Baptist Church of Leitchfield.

During our childhood years, we generally visited Grandmother and Granddaddy Ray for two weeks in the summer, and Mom and Dan and I rode the bus from Leitchfield back to Atlanta because Dad had to go back to work before our visits were over. It was during those visits that we saw the chicken necks wrung. Dan and I spent many happy hours roaming what seemed like endless hillsides and meadows, sliding down the banisters of spiral staircases, playing that old pump organ, and crocheting rugs in the swing on the porch.

Dad was transferred to Memphis in July, 1971, while I was at Georgetown College. Grandmother Ray had a much larger apartment in the house on Cole Road, where she lived until Dad retired in 1981. He retired as the National Director of the Cotton Classing Division of the USDA.

In Memphis, Mom and Dad became active in the First Baptist Church, then pastored by Dr. Paul Caudill, who had been Dad's pastor in Garner as a youth. With Dan and me grown up, Mom worked for several years as a substitute teacher in the Memphis City Schools as well as a volunteer Juvenile Probation Officer for six years.

Continuing her literacy work, Mom helped to organize the Memphis Literacy Council in 1974, shortly after I was blessed to marry Jill Martin in December, 1973, and then Dan was blessed to marry Kathy Campbell in September, 1975. Having obviously never had a daughter, Sue was delighted to add Jill and Kathy to her circle of love; and she was even more delighted to add our children, Nathan and Anna, and Dan and Kathy's sons, Brian and Michael, to that circle.

The family circle has continued to enlarge with Nathan's wife, Lisel Adams, Anna's husband, Matt Cumbow, Brian's wife, Lindsey Bennardo, and Michael's wife, Jacqueline Cooper. Beyond even these have come four great-grandchildren, Matt & Anna's Hadley (Hadley was born in December, 2006, after "Old Hadley's" resurrection in March); Mike & Jacqueline's Cadence, born in November, 2008; Matt & Anna's Afton, born in May, 2009; and Nathan & Lisel's Forrest, born in July, 2011 (pictured on the cover).

During their retirement years, Mom and Dad remained active in mission work so long as health allowed, which was fortunately a long time. In February, 1982, they spent a month doing missions in Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso). They spent three weeks in Alaska in 1987, and they traveled to China in 1988.

Mom and Dad moved from their home on Cole Road to Kirby Pines in August, 1997, shortly after they celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary with a family gathering at Petit Jean State Park in Arkansas. Mom continued her literacy work, and on Founder's Day, 1998, the Training Room at the Memphis Literacy Council was named in her honor in a lovely ceremony.

Dad was resurrected in March, 2006 after a few months' illness, and, while Dad's absence led to a challenging soul journey for Mom, she continued bravely on, not "somehow,"

but *triumphantly* through her deep faith and indomitable spirit. Although her last years brought physical challenges, Mom remained mentally agile and spiritually vibrant.

She continued to enjoy knitting and crocheting, and she remained perennially curious. An avid miner of the wonders of the Internet, Sue learned to use an MP3 player well into her 92nd year. She continued doing challenging reading on evolution and other current issues, and she read and reread the “Christian Classics,” often with a dictionary at her elbow.

Mom’s deep faith and committed love have sustained Dan and me across many decades, and we give thanks for such a godly heritage of faith. We thank God for her!



Sue visited the Memphis Literacy Council on her 93rd birthday and was greeted as one of their “patron saints”!

Soli Deo Gloria!