

"An Omer of Manna: Using Oral History to Document the 1995 Wheaton Revival"

[Talk given by Associate Director Paul Ericksen to Wheaton alumni during Homecoming weekend, October 3, 1997]

Perhaps you are wondering how an oral history project connects with a container of manna. You may be wondering what the title of today's presentation is even alluding to. In Exodus 16 we read the account of God providing manna for the Israelites during their trek through the desert. Afterward God instructs Moses to preserve some of the manna as a reminder:

Moses said, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the desert when I brought you out of Egypt.'" So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar and put an omer of manna in it. Then place it before the Lord to be kept for the generations to come. As the Lord commanded Moses, Aaron put the manna in front of the Testimony, that it might be kept." Exodus 16:32-34

What was God doing here? He seems to have had in mind a way to remind the Israelites how He had moved in the life of the nation and provide a link between the generation that had wandered in the desert and those to come after them. That symbolizes what we as an Archives are trying to do as well in gathering records here and why we dropped everything to record oral history interviews during the revival. To preserve a reminder and offer it as a link. Those people whose papers we collect, the organizations whose administrative records we preserve, or the missionaries we interview, their legacy is their lives and ministries, but we also have this "omer of manna" which we are working to preserve. What I want to do in this next hour and a quarter is not only tell you that we have this "treasure" or tell you what it's like, but to let you listen and look at some of it and let the participants help tell the story. I have had such a good time preparing for this presentation, especially listening again to the interview excerpts, and even though you didn't have a hand in creating them, I hope they will stir and inspire you.

What are the boundaries of our program? We're building and making available a collection which tells some of the story of how the gospel has been spread. It has a nondenominational Protestant axis, so we're not competing with denominational archives. It has a North American axis, so we aren't trying to gather records that have been created by national churches in those parts of the world to which missionaries



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have gone. And it focuses on missions and evangelism, so we aren't endeavoring to document all the different aspects of Evangelical or Fundamentalist or Pentecostal activity.

One of the ways we have gathered information for the past nineteen years is by conducting oral history interviews. Most of these have been done with retired missionaries who in response to questions tell their stories: what influenced them while they were growing up, what motivated them to become missionaries, where they lived, what they did, and what they observed as missionaries, and how they evaluate their contribution. We have also interviewed some Christian workers and evangelists, and each year we interview church leaders from other countries who are studying here at the Graduate School to ask them about their ministry, their national church, and their observations about the missionary enterprise from a non-North American perspective. Oral histories have proved to be a valuable way to supplement our written documents, or in some cases fill in gaps where we have no documents.

What we have not had is a formal oral history project where we identified a sharply defined subject, whether a person, place, organization, event, or theme and then extensively interviewed numerous people over a relatively short period of time about that topic. Instead, we have interviewed broadly in the area of missions and evangelism. We have always been ready on fairly short notice to interview someone who was to be in the area in several weeks. So, since 1978 and excluding the revival interviews, we have talked with 267 people, recording approximately 800 hours on about as many tapes. Our goal was to build a broad-stroke picture of grass roots Protestant evangelism in this century. In doing that, we have largely avoided interviewing those who were widely known or had written about their experience or had been written about, instead choosing to compile a record from those whose experiences would not be preserved unless we did.

All of that is to say that just as the revival was a departure from the routine here at Wheaton, so the interviewing we did during and after the revival was a major departure from our customary interviewing approach.

During our interviewing, there was one term people wanted to define or not define: "revival." Theologians and evangelists and lay people debate about the appropriate meaning of the word. My purpose today is not to join that debate, so for this presentation, the term "revival" will be used to refer to a spontaneous stirring or awakening of people to spiritual concerns or a refreshing work of the Holy Spirit among Christians.



Let me say before I go further, if you would like more information about we have in the Archives or specifically on the Wheaton revivals, as you leave today, we will have sheets available for you which include on one side the beginning of our Home Page available over the Internet, and on the reverse side a section linked to that page with information about our Wheaton revival materials. The URLs are located at the top of those pages.

I'd like to take you back to 1992 when the Archives staff identified thirteen subject areas on which we wanted to strategically gather materials over the next decade at the rate of about one subject per year. Among those were African American missions and evangelism, sports evangelism, etc. Also among those topics was revivals and spiritual awakenings. In the Fall of 1994, we selected from among those subjects, revivals as the one on we were going to focus our collecting for 1995. (How timely that administrative decision became. This seems to be a delightful example of the interleaving of our routine affairs with the work of the Holy Spirit.) In targeting revival as a collecting area, we wanted to gather papers, interviews, and any other material which documented these powerful movements of the Holy Spirit, with a special emphasis on those which have occurred here at Wheaton in the past sixty years.

The first revival in 1936 began a seven-year cycle, which repeated in 1943 and 1950. The next revival swept in twenty years later in 1970, followed by the most recent one in 1995. But in the Fall of 1994, we were thinking only in terms of documenting those earlier four.

As part of our plan for documentation, we collaborated with a professor on campus who was teaching a class on the history and theology of revival. Among the assignments he gave his students was the exercise of conducting an oral history interview with a participant in one of those four revivals in Wheaton's history. Bob Shuster, the Archives Director, compiled a list of potential interviewees, corresponded with them to see whether they were willing to be interviewed, and got some brief background information from those nine who were. Bob and I then instructed the class on the techniques of interviewing and how to use the recording equipment. At the same time, we developed with the professor a standardized list of questions both he and we wanted answered. It was everyone's intent for the interviews to become part of our collection, so students were given a certificate of gift through which they and the person interviewed would make a donation of the interview to the Archives for later use by researchers. Students were then matched up with the people to be interviewed. In some cases, the interview was done in person, while others were conducted over the phone. Of those nine people, two described the 1943 event, three discussed the



one in 1950, and four talked about the 1970 revival. Here's an excerpt from the interview with Betty Knoedler who was at the 1950 revival. Listen as she reflects on events which might have contributed to its occurrence ([CN 514 - T36](#)):

FELDMAN: How and from who did you hear about the revival on campus?

KNOEDLER: I was there. I was sitting in Pierce Chapel when it began.

FELDMAN: Do you recall being part of prayer meetings to pray for revival beforehand? Were you . . . Was there an expectation on campus or was this a sudden . . . sudden thing all of a sudden happened.

KNOEDLER: I don't remember going specifically going to prayer meetings where that was the focus of our prayer. However, in December of the year before that, of 1949, my roommate, Phyllis Bratland, she was an ex-roommate, she had . . . she and I had roomed together our first two years, was killed on the highway. And she was a wonderful person. She was a soloist for the Women's Glee Club, she was well known on campus. She was a very spiritually deep girl. Her parents were not believers. They were good people, but they were not believers. And so, she had us all praying for them routinely. Well, when she was killed, they became believers. And Dr. Edman, who was the president at the time, had the . . . her memorial service and I think her death had a lot to do with a lot of us thinking we didn't necessarily know how long we would be around. And it got us rather serious rather quickly.

The technical and content quality of the interviews varied; some of the students just read the questions off the list, while for others it was a more interactive process. Our modestly paced small-scale project, in which others were doing the bulk of the work, took a dramatic turn in March, and it is at this point that our active part in the story really begins.

The revival began on March 19th, a Sunday evening, at the regular Sunday-night gathering of a campus group called World Christian Fellowship or WCF, where students meet to sing, worship, and hear speakers address issues on world needs and missions. Plans had been made several weeks earlier while students were away for spring break for two students to come from a Texas university to describe the revival which had occurred at their school. The WCF president, a junior at the time, became one of the student leaders during the revival. Here's an excerpt from his interview in which he tells how the process began ([CN 514 - T58](#))



ERICKSEN: Could you briefly describe what went into getting the fellows up from Howard Payne?

INTERVIEWEE: Sure. Let me talk to you about what Charles Finney calls a converging of providences, Charles Finney being that great revivalist preacher of the last century. I had just finished a course with Dr. Beougher in . . . in the MA department in evangelism, a course entitled History and Theology of Revival. And on the last day of that course, which was the Thursday before the . . . the first quad, A quad, ended this spring, so that would have been just a few weeks ago, right before spring break, there was kind of an excitement in class, because we had heard about the revival that had happened at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary as a result of some Howard Payne students coming by and giving their testimony of how God had worked on their campus. Students had faxes in their hands from friends. Dr. Beougher was excited because it was his alma mater, and he had already got a call from a friend. So that brought kind of an exciting conclusion to our class, a practical and real-life experience that we could look at after studying the history and theology of revivals. During that class period, Dr. Beougher turned to me, and he said, "Not to put any pressure on you, but you're the chair of WCF this year, and," he said, "I feel like WCF is one of the most spiritually sensitive places on campus. And I feel like there are students there who would be very receptive to hearing a testimony of something like this." He said, "If you are willing or would like to, I just want you to know, I'd be willing to back . . . of flying a couple of students up here." So that was one providence that I felt converging.

At that point, I took what he said to the cabinet of WCF, because we plan our meetings months ahead of time and our speakers months ahead of time. I also invited him last minute on the telephone on his voice mail during our meeting. It's unusual that he was able to show up during our meeting. He said he just heard it on the way out the door, and so he came over, walked in just as we were discussing whether or not to do this, and I was happy he was there because he was able to give them a better understanding of the history and why this could be a great thing. At any rate the WCF cabinet decided by the end of the meeting to more or less postpone our plans for the 19th of March to another time later this semester and have these students come up if possible.

One of the real benefits (no pun intended!) of interviewing during an event is that you have access to many of the people who are involved, so you get different eyewitness accounts of the same series of events. Nate Fawcett, also a junior then, who helped lead the worship during the revival, was in that cabinet meeting where the decision was made. Here he recounts the follow-up to that decision ([CN 514 - T26](#)):



FAWCETT: So we just sat down and just prayed it out. And we said, "Lord, if this is something that you want to happen, you are going to have to overcome all the barriers, of people who could conceivably stand in the way," and basically left it at that, because we were all going off on spring break, so we weren't even going to be around for a week to see if any of this would . . . to try to help push this through or whatnot. So at that point, I think that was a key moment, because that really became a point of faith, where it was thrown over onto God's shoulders completely, because we had . . . there was no way that any of us would be able to see that through. And I remember coming back from spring break. And I went . . . I went on spring break with three of my housemates, and right at the beginning I shared with them this possibility and asked them to be in prayer with me about it, that if it was definitely something that God wanted to do, he would do. And at this point, I suppose I . . . I have to confess a real lack of faith, because when I came back from spring break I was hoping that these students would be able to come, and yet at the same time thinking they wouldn't. I remember that Monday morning walking into the Office of Christian Outreach and going over to check my box. And I remember the thing that was on top in my box was just a very simple photocopied piece of paper written originally probably in magic marker, some thick black pen that said, "The students from Texas are coming. Praise the Lord." Or something to that extent. Very concise, very to the point. And I remember just being incredibly excited, and I was literally jumping up and down and I ran into Kevin Engel's office, and I said, "Is this really true? Is this really happening?" And he said, "Well, yes, it is. "

I'm going to give you something to watch while I continue. This footage may not correlate directly with what I'm saying, or the interviews are discussing, but it includes scenes from several of the evenings both at Pierce Chapel and College Church, one of the initial speakers from Texas, the beginning of the confessions, the lines, the singing, the prayer, and the applause for the Lord. Hopefully, it will give you a little of the flavor of the events that those we interviewed described. For the most, you will only see the video track, although most of the footage does include sound. You will also notice points at which the screen will go black. One of the conditions under which we were given these videos was that the viewing copies to be used before 2070 would not include confessions. Could you please start the video now.

As planned, the Texas students reported on what had occurred at Howard Payne University and the role confession had played in their revival. They emphasized that they did not come to replicate what had happened at their school, nor did they want to encourage a specific course of action, other than to be open to what God might want



to do. When they completed their presentation, students were invited to two open mikes to make a comment, pray, read Scripture, confess sin, or ask questions. What students did, however, was limit what they said almost entirely to confessing their sin to the entire group, and this confession, although voluntary, was not vague and general. It was concrete, explicit, and accompanied in many cases by emotion. Another benefit of oral history is that it gives the interviewee an opportunity to tell his or her story. They describe not only what was going on around them but also their internal experience. Their perspective of the events as they interacted with them is an important part of describing what happened. Here's the first interview we recorded Tuesday morning with sophomore Sarah Henning in which she describes some of her interior terrain on that first night ([CN 514 - T32](#)):

ERICKSEN: Do you remember your feelings as it started to unfold?

HENNING: Kind of . . . not really. I guess it's been a long couple three days! I think that it was a little scary at first and a little . . . I didn't know how to feel, just because these people, I guess, people that I know, people that I look at and think, "They have things really together," or that they would never come up and say anything, were getting up and making confessions of sins that if I . . . I mean, that I couldn't believe they were saying. Some people just confessing the most intimate of sins and just being very open and very real. And I guess that my biggest complaint for Wheaton in the past year and a half, two years, whatever I've been here, is that people aren't really real. And so that was pretty amazing to me that these people would get up and admit that they were not as perfect as they'd like other people to believe. And it was really . . . it was really moving to see just all . . . I mean, there was at one point where a bunch of people were just continually, guys particularly, getting up and confessing sins of pride and lust, and you know, things like that, and just that the guy who was kind of, I mean, he wasn't running it but kind of the head of it got up and said, why don't we just have everyone, all the guys who feel that they need to confess this sin, come up and the whole front of Pierce was just filled, I mean, just filled. There were guys in the aisles, guys just huddled in this huge huddle confessing these sins, I mean, to each other and also to everybody else. It was really interesting just even to have the guys to ask girls for forgiveness for thinking of them in wrong ways and that is just something that, I mean, I don't know, I mean, it doesn't . . . it doesn't usually happen and it's not very often that a guy would ask forgiveness for that. And I think they usually blame it on the girl, which . . . which was nice. I mean, it wasn't . . . I don't know. I think a lot of people were really offended by it at the same time, that guys would admit to having these problems, these sins. But then they got up and said, "I'm angry that you got up here." And so it was just . . . Sunday night was just a really big night of honesty and kind of forgiving and getting up and saying "I was angry at you for getting up, but I'm

sorry for being angry," and I don't know . . . So yeah, there were a lot of different emotions that go into that. I don't know if that makes any sense.

The confessions that first night began around 9:30 and continued until 6:00 the next morning. When the meeting resumed Monday night, it began with a half hour of worship, and then the lines of confessions were again opened to those left in Sunday night's lines, continuing until about 2:00 in the morning. This cycle was repeated on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings.

So far, we've listened to excerpts of students. Here's one from the WCF advisor and OCO Assistant Director, Kevin Engel, who was one of the leaders on the platform giving direction and involved in early planning and oversight of the proceedings ([CN 514 - T21](#)):

SHUSTER: Were you seeing the same students coming night after night?

ENGEL: Many of them were the same, although there were different students coming forward all the time. And . . . and . . . and yet the focus was still on confessing our sin, ministering to one another, rooting some evil things out of our lives by bring them forward and . . . and then on Tuesday night we decided some of the . . . the focus on sharing our sin had become so heavy that we decided it would be wise to occasionally intersperse a student's testimony of how God had been working in them outside of the meeting, so a few times on Tuesday night we had some students come forward to share some good news so that we wouldn't get so down and focused on our sin and instead keep the focus on God's amazing work.

SHUSTER: You mentioned on the first night how people were confessing to sins of sexual immorality or of pride or arrogance. Was that throughout the meetings continue to be the kind of things that people were confessing, or were different things confessed on different nights?

ENGEL: I think it was pretty well mixed throughout all of the nights. There were probably in some minor ways some themes that developed, because as one person confesses a sin, it convicts and triggers someone else's heart. "That's right. This is a sin in my life as well, that . . . that I'm in bondage to." But for the most part it was pretty well mixed throughout the entire time. Some were . . . the first couple nights I heard a number of people talking about attitudes of racism, racial prejudice and discrimination, wanting to confess that to brothers and sister on campus that were from minority groups and . . .

SHUSTER: So, theses were whites who were saying that?

ENGEL: Yes, sometimes whites, but sometimes there were black students who were sharing some of this racism and bitterness toward other white students, or majority ethnic students on campus. Some confessed bitterness towards certain groups. There had been some animosity between different musical groups on campus, a sense of competition that wasn't healthy, and so there were . . . it was a very good mixture of ways in which people wanted to reconcile and get right with one another.

On Monday night, students initiated the practice of bring physical objects which contributed to their sin. There is a point in the video where you will see garbage bags piled up on the left side of Pierce's stage and students praying over that. Let's listen to Mary Dorsett describe how this started and what it meant ([CN 514 - T16](#)):

DORSETT: As the week went on and people began to hear the stories and then go and see for themselves, we got a few of the "I wasn't going to come. I spent three nights refusing to come, but the Holy Spirit wouldn't let me go and here I am" kind of confessions, so I know that, you know, many who scoffed at first as the week went on their hearts softened. I don't know it too, if you've talked about it, but the . . . on Sunday night as especially the struggle with lust and pornography and things happen, they said that on Monday night they would allow . . . students could bring anything that was keeping . . . that was hindering them that was in their rooms. Have you talked about this at all?

ERICKSEN: A couple of the people . . .

DORSETT: And so they . . .

ERICKSEN: . . . mentioned going with friends and getting things or seeing their friends bringing things up.

DORSETT: Monday night they took out five, you know, big trash bags full of things, and most of it came in what I was laughingly calling "the Wheaton equivalent of the plain brown wrapper." It was Wheaton College bookstore bags, and you just knew that what was coming in those bags hadn't been bought at the bookstore. And I would guess, you know, thousands of dollars' worth of CDs and videos and who knows what else went out Monday night. And then nobody planned it Tuesday night, but the students just evidently assumed . . . I think they . . . I think maybe the leadership thought Monday night that was the end of it, but then Tuesday night students just started bringing it again, and more came Tuesday night, and less came Wednesday

night, because I think most of it got cleaned out, but I think there were another four bags of it, big huge trash bags full of it on Tuesday night. And you just think about what's been cleaned out of dorm rooms and lives and how symbolically freeing it was to put it there, and who knows who else threw things away in places that, you know, we just didn't see it, they didn't feel comfortable for whatever reason in bringing it to the stage.

To give you an in-the-trenches perspective on the emphasis of the week, here is something the WCF president said near the end of Monday evening: "We don't want an experience that we can tell our grandkids about. What we want is a new beginning of obedience to God." I think that is why confession of sin was the predominant feature on the landscape of the 1995 revival. However, the confessing ended late Wednesday night when the lines had no more people in them who wanted to speak publicly. So, Thursday night's session, the last of the meetings, became a time of celebration and worship. Senior Nathan Oates talks about the impact of that Thursday night celebration ([CN 514 - T42](#)):

OATES: I can describe the first four nights, but it's hard for me to describe the presence of the Lord that was . . . I mean, how do you really describe what the presence of the Lord is like? I can . . . during the first four nights when I would ask friends, "Were you there?" and they said, "No," I would say, "Gosh, I really encourage you to go, because this is a incredible thing that is happening in the public confession and in the healing prayer." But as I asked people if they had gone on Thursday night and they said, "No, I wasn't there," I just . . . I just sort of went, "I'm just sorry you missed it," you know, because there's nothing to encourage them about. It wasn't like I wanted to try to convince them that this was real or something. I mean, everybody who was there I feel like was aware of the presence of God, like probably never before for a large percentage of us. It was just an unreal yet totally real. That was what was so amazing about it was that His presence was just so real, felt tangible, and the unity of the community that worshiped there was . . . was just affected the core of my being, I feel like. It was an amazing experience. I'll take that with me. That's what I'll take with me, is that experience of worship that night. Not that it was an experience that I was seeking, but it was just the ability to praise God with a cleansed heart with the rest of the community, and the deep-seated desire to thank him for just such an incredible blessing that he poured out on our campus in healing of the students here, and the faculty, I'm sure. And a result of that is just a renewed desire to share God with people. You know, you're supposed to be motivated by your love of God to evangelize, and sometimes I just don't feel like I am. I feel like I have to convince people that they need God. But it's when you experience his presence like that, and you realize just . . . you get a glimpse of how wonderful he really is, I

feel like we were all motivated by a desire to share him with others. I mean the only less than absolutely wonderful feeling that I had during that experience was just a sense of "I'm sorry that this special friend isn't here next to me worshipping or that my parents can't experience this or some friends back at Santa Clara who would love to experience the presence of God. You just wish that there were other believers that could experience this, and how much more do I wish that someone who's unforgiven at this point, because they haven't received the forgiveness of God could experience his love like that because that would motivate them, that would convince them to embrace him and his gift of salvation, I think.

For the five nights of meetings, the guesstimates we heard were that about a half to three-quarters of the student body attended at least one of the meetings. Pierce Chapel, where the first three revivals occurred, held about a thousand people. As it was unavailable for Tuesday night, College Church's sanctuary seating about thirteen hundred was offered for what became the last three nights and was filled for them.

But things didn't end on that Thursday night, because what happened at Wheaton was not an isolated incident in the country either. Just as word of what occurred in Texas came to Wheaton, word of what had happened at Wheaton spread and soon Wheaton students were being invited to speak at churches and campuses locally and throughout the United States. And when they spoke, many of them reported that like at Wheaton, their presentation was followed by confession of sin for several or many hours.

The first obstacle we faced in getting started was actually hearing about what was going on. Since it was a student-led meeting, not heavily attended by college staff and faculty, word about the revival traveled much more slowly among those of us on campus who were not students. So, we didn't hear about any of this until Tuesday morning, when several of our student workers in the office began describing some of what was happening. The Archives Director was out of town at the time, but he and I talked briefly on Tuesday morning and agreed that we should begin trying to interview various people who had been at the meetings. Thankfully, we had already developed that list of questions for the class to use for their assigned interviewing, so we could immediately use them. And for starters, I interviewed several of our student workers who had been the first to tell us about what was happening.

In addition to recording people who had attended and get their reactions and observations, we were particularly interested to interview student leaders, faculty and College administration who were more directly involved in those events leading up to the revival, who had responsibility for making arrangements while the meetings were going on, who were responsible for the school, or who were on the platform during



the meetings. However, some of these same people were heavily involved in the meetings, so they were unavailable to be interviewed until later. Once the meetings concluded, students suddenly had schoolwork and sleep to get caught up on. Those students and faculty who were being invited to report at other schools were out of town. And some of them were being interviewed by the media, so they were not only unavailable but were going through the repeated process of describing what had happened, and to some degree analyzing it, a dynamic over which we had no control, but which would affect the immediacy of their comments and reflections, something you want in an oral history.

For the purpose of documentation, we not only had four historical events which occurred in the College's past, but we had a revival occurring right around us, plus we had similar spiritual awakenings taking place around the country to which the Wheaton revival was directly linked. Altogether, we interviewed twenty-three people, some for a half hour, others up to two hours, but totaling altogether over thirty-two hours. Among them were ten students (two of whom were key leaders in the event), five College staff, three faculty, the College chaplain, the College president, and one of College Church's pastors. We also interviewed two Multnomah administrators on the impact of the visit of several Wheaton students on their campus.

A project like this has limits, especially when like us you're also running an archive. So, we intentionally tapered off our interviewing. But there was an additional element to the project which emerged after the meetings had ended and many of the visits to other colleges concluded. Student leader [and WCF president] was contributing to a book about the revival. As a part of the group we had trained for the earlier interviewing, he was ready to go. His chapter was on what happened when Wheaton students went to other campuses, the area about which we had done the least interviewing. He asked whether he could use our equipment, to which we agreed. We asked that we would receive the interviews when they were completed. Some interviews he did face to face, but because it was already summer vacation, most interviews were conducted over the phone. Most of the interviews were with students, although several were with chaplains at schools where Wheaton students had spoken. Here's a sample from one of his interviews with a student who went to Trinity College in Deerfield ([CN 514 - T56](#)):

INTERVIEWEE: So how did the response unfold after that? What happened after you sat down?

WALKER: What happened . . . when I sat down, Hutz took the microphone and made some remarks to conclude, and then he said, you know, "We're gonna invite . . . we



have a few minutes left in chapel. We're gonna invite you just to, you know, just stay where you are and if you want to pray, you can go ahead and just stand up and pray. And that was it. Then he just stayed there and there were a few moments of silence, and a student got up and prayed and then another student got up and prayed and then the third student got up but he didn't pray. He walked up to the microphone where Hutz was, because Hutz was the only one on the platform at the time. And he walked up there and he said that he had something to confess, and he confessed to a very serious sin, of course, along the lines of sexual sin, and he was a campus leader, one of the campus leaders. And that was . . . and that was it. He stopped, and then Hutz said "Well, why don't we just pray for you right now" and put his arm around him and prayed, and then as the student was going off the stage a bunch of guys flocked to him.

INTERVIEWEE: Did they?

WALKER: Yeah, and I went up too, of course, because I'd gone through the same thing.

INTERVIEWEE: Right.

WALKER: So, I felt I should pray for him too as well. So, we took him over on the side, and to tell you the truth, I don't know what happened after that. [laughs]

INTERVIEWEE: [laughing too] Okay. Because you were praying.

WALKER: Yeah, because I was too intent to pray for this guy. There were about fifteen or so guys who'd come down to pray for him, and throughout the next, oh, forty-five minutes we got everyone's story and prayed for everyone 'cause everyone. . .

INTERVIEWEE: Really.

WALKER: . . . they came 'cause they were struggling with the same thing.

INTERVIEWEE: Wow! It's kind of like a mini-accountability group.

WALKER: Yeah, yeah and they did. They exchanged numbers and started chatting. Now I know no one else got up to the microphone to confess, you know, while we were off praying for this guy.

Altogether, he conducted sixteen interviews, making a total of eighteen interviews about what happened elsewhere. Combining those with the nine interviews the class did for us, and our twenty-three, we logged forty-five and a half hours of interviewing with forty-eight people.

What we have gathered to date is a scanty record of what happened in previous Wheaton revivals, a pretty extensive account of what happened here in 1995, and accounts of a nationwide spiritual movement of which Wheaton was only a part. In addition to interviews, we compiled e-mail, the video footage you've seen some of, and clippings and written accounts.

Some observations about the process. You can see that the major part of this project developed in response to events as they occurred. As we became aware of the revival, we began interviewing in order to capture some of its immediacy and peoples' impressions before they became colored by later events and explanations. In addition, the key people we interviewed, along with the students who attended, were worn out by the experience and had recounted their reflections to various other people, their families, the press, and to themselves. Our interviewing was not done with fresh people, and this undoubtedly had an impact on their sharpness. However, the oral histories were conducted in the heat of the event and capture even some of that fatigue.

However, gathering materials which record the spiritual dimension is difficult. Documents lend themselves well to recording information which can be quantified. But papers which tally numbers of participants or how many people responded in a given way only contribute part of the picture. And reports, correspondence, statistics, and memos, which comprise a large portion of our administrative records collections, can give details but simultaneously create a sense of distance from the events and may lean toward analysis in the abstract of what occurred. How to get at the heart of what has happened is another question.

Interviewing was a valuable way to explore that spiritual dimension. It allowed us to ask questions of people who were there, the people in the pews, people in the lines, people who were exhausted. It opened the door for people to talk about what they saw, how they felt, what dynamics they sensed were in play.

Confession was a significant component of what happened here. So was prayer and that is where alumni, perhaps some of you, had a hand in what happened. I was able to interview Dr. Armerding during the 1995 summer and here he describes the role he



observed prayer to have in the 1970 revival as well in this more recent one ([CN 514-T5](#)).

ERICKSEN: What would you say was the impact that the revival had on you?

ARMERDING: Well, it was another indication how that God does respond to fervent intercessory prayer that He continues to work in people's lives and that with that there would be an expectation that in His broad strategic scheme of things, He was doing something that was going to make it effective to redirect people's lives into more obedient areas of service. And to listen to these students all through the night talking about renunciation on the one hand, which I personally happen to believe, you know, repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, that there was a renunciation on the one hand and a desire to commit themselves to the Lord and to serve Him. That I just felt was a marvelous demonstration of how God works in kind of a . . . a friend of mine used to call it "season of the soul" type of activity. And I also feel that and have felt for some years that if it could happen on one occasion, not that it had to be precisely the same, but that generically a similar type of moving was possible and frankly necessary, and that has been the focus of my wife's prayers and mine over these years and that's why we're extraordinarily grateful for what the Lord did on this campus.

A much less prominent part of the revival was conversion. For that reason, I'd like you to hear a rather extensive excerpt by a grad student in the missions' program here who was deeply affected by the movement of God's Spirit in her life ([CN 514 - T40](#)).

MASON: Thursday morning I got up, went to work . . . went to class and was at work, and this friend who had challenged me to find the root thing had left a note on my book bag saying that he would like to speak with me. So, I had five minutes before my class started at 11:15 and went up to the library on the third floor of the Graham Center, in here, and I saw him and said, "Hi," you know. He said, "Can I talk to you," and tearfully he said, "Penny, I just notice in you that you're selfish. You're being selfish," he said. I also notice that you would rather please people than God." And at this point I couldn't get mad at him, because Wednesday night, the Lord had showed me that Himself. And so, I just walked away, but that was it. That was the last straw. I was not . . . I just left the library saying, "If this is all I'm going to see about myself, then I quit." By this time, I was thirty minutes late for class, and I standing in front of the door just debating whether or not to even go in. It was a two-hour class, so I wouldn't have you just walked in for the last minute. But I saw another friend there, and he's the one who had called at the very beginning of the revival saying, "You've got to come." He said, "How are you doing?" And he had been rejoicing because he

had been freed. And I said, "Well, I'm not good." And we went into another room, and I totally confessed hypocrisy and pride and self-righteousness to him. And I still didn't feel better. We had prayed and I left feeling rotten on the inside. And I knew that something had to be done. I had completely forgot about going to class, and I just needed to pray. So I remembered that there's never anyone down in the chapel in the museum, right?, so I'll go down there and I'll pray. So, I went down the stairs and as soon I was walking into the chapel, there was a lady signing the book. I thought, "Great! What a time for someone to be in here."

SHUSTER: Do you often go to the Museum chapel?

MASON: No, hardly ever. And just a few times. Maybe three or four times I had gone there before. But I just needed quiet. And she was at the very back and I went to the very front, and I just fell on my face there, my carpet, you know, the carpet was right there and just use that for my altar, and I was just crying. I couldn't really talk but my whole body was just shaking. Well, about fifteen minutes later, this lady came over to me and she got on the floor with me on the floor, and she said, "Are you okay?" And I looked up and I said, "No. We've been having revival services here for the last couple . . ." 'cause I didn't know this lady. I don't know her context or where she'd come from. She could have just been visiting from another state.

SHUSTER: Like Kalamazoo.

MASON: Yeah. So, I said, "We've been having revival here and I have just noticed in the past couple of days a lot of hypocrisy in my life and I feel like junk right now, and no, I don't feel good at all." She hugged me and she felt very soft like a mother, and she just hugged me, and she started praying for me. She prayed a beautiful prayer that God would help me forgive, you know, a let me feel freedom. She also prayed at the very end of her prayer was that I would know and experience love for other people, which is totally the opposite of my selfishness. And she sat there and talked to me, and she said, "My name is Joan." And introduced herself. I said, "Well, Joan, it's nice to meet you," and I told her my name. And she said, "I've come with Campus Crusade for Christ just for this week. We had a booth set up Sunday night at WCF and they told us just to stay." So, she had been at every service, and she'd knew totally about the revival. But she told me . . . she said, "My calling is prayer and I'm glad I had time to pray with you." And she looked at me and she said, "Well, Penny, I'll see you in heaven." And she got up and she left. So, the chapel was then empty. And I had a tissue in my hand. And I was just sitting there and still on the floor, and there's at the front of the chapel, and two steps that lead up to kind of a little platform. And I had that tissue and a lot of sin had been confessed into that tissue. So, I took it and I

laid on top of that stage in front of the cross and I went back, and I sat back on the floor. And I was looking . . . there were some Bibles there. I was flipping through Proverbs and then I was flipping through Romans, and Romans 10 says, "Because they did not understand the righteousness of God, they tried to establish their own." And that's what I had been doing. And it made so much s . . . it was like a light that came on. "That's what you've been doing Penny." And I looked away from the cross and back to it for a while, and I . . . the craziest thought just came, "Penny, you have never, not only have you never seen yourself to be a sinner, but because of that, you have never asked Jesus to forgive you of your sins." And I said, "That makes no sense at all, because I thought at three, I had done that." But I never remember having done that. And I mulled around with that for five or ten more minutes, thinking "This is crazy. I can't do what I'm thinking I'm getting ready to do." And I said, "I don't care. As crazy as it sounds, that's what I'm going to do." And I looked at the cross and I told the Lord, I said, "God, I'm a sinner and I confess to you that I've been prideful, and I've had a lot of hypocrisy in my life, and I've been very self-righteous. I've compared myself to other people," and I asked Him to forgive me. And not a second later for the next few seconds I felt a burning in my heart. A literal burning. And I felt like something was being burned away. And two or three seconds later it just went away. And in it going away all of that gross feeling, it went away too. And I felt free, like clean on the inside. And I sat there, and something had happened in my heart. And I didn't know what to call it or what to label it, but all of a sudden I felt extremely happy, joy like I've never felt before, and in the Museum there's a cloud room that I call it, you know, it's blue . . .

SHUSTER: That's what most people call it.

MASON: And it plays the Hallelujah Chorus, and you know, I, from the chapel you can hear the chorus playing, and when I first walked in there I thought, "Oh, how nice it would be to walk into that room," but I was too cruddy to go into that room, and I knew it. But at that point, I knew I could go to that room. So instead of going immediately to that room, I went through the path . . . the life of Christ where you start so, so I went to the front of the beginning of that path and I was looking at all the scriptures, and I noticed that there was this type of stand that says "Please take one" and there were these pamphlets there that says, "I am the Light of the world." So, I opened it up and it said, "If you accepted Christ into your heart today, please fill this out. 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Old things are gone. Now all things are new." So, I started leaping because I knew that that's what had happened in my life. So, I . . . nobody was in the room. So, I started leaping and jumping up and down thanking God that old things had gone and something new had happened. And I was looking at the verses that had been chiseled into the wall. "He came," you know, "so the Word became

flesh, and he dwelt among us. Priests had come and they had done all their works, but he is our high priest. One time only, came, and then he now is sitting at the right hand of the Father." And then I walked through the passageway of the cross and seeing the cross which made sense to me for the first time. I mean, if you don't see yourself to be a sinner, then him dying for your sins makes no sense. But I had. And he had done it for me. Walking into that cross is the way you feel, and I was so thankful that he had come, and he had given his heart, and well, his life for me. And then the next part of that passage there's a very dark hallway, and I ran through that because the next room is the cloud room, and I didn't want to be in the dark anymore. I was totally . . . I didn't want to be in that. So, I ran through the dark part, and I went running into the cloud room, but when I got there the lights were off. Now this is the whitest room I've ever been in, the lights were off, the music wasn't playing, and I was like, "What is going on here," 'cause I had heard the music playing from the chapel. Something's going . . ." I knew this thing couldn't be broken. Little did I know that there's a sensor system that when you walk in, about a second later, boom here came the lights. Boom, here came the music, and that's what the Lord had done in my heart. I felt like I had been in this darkness. But all of a sudden, this light and the music and had just come on in my heart, and so I started jumping around some more, and leaping, and just thanking God that now I can go to heaven. I really know that I can go to heaven and be with the Lord and see his face and understand what he's done. Well, I had jumped around for about a minute or two and a security guard comes walking into the cloud room. And I looked around at him and I was too excited to be embarrassed, so I looked at him and I said, "I think I just got saved!" And he said, "What?" 'cause he knew I was in the missions program. And I said, "Yeah, I just asked Christ to forgive me of my sins and I feel free." And he said, "Well, that's great." And I said, "Yeah." So he left and I jumped around for some more and finally I said, "I know I've got to tell somebody what's happened"

I think this is a priceless example of what an interview can capture.

What is missing from this collection are the critical voices. Those we interviewed referred to members of the campus community who were skeptical or critical; we asked them what they heard, but we were unable to record those perspectives ourselves. It would be nice to have a randomly selected group of people to interview, but this was not the case in those we talked with. Of the participants in the revival, we interviewed those who were close at hand and who were available. Those College faculty and administrators we interviewed were directly involved. So, it would be true to say that those we interviewed were largely favorable. I'm not sure how we would have found those who were openly critical, particularly because the College president had endorsed the value of the revival. Furthermore, the nature of the meetings was not



in conflict with the character of the school, historical precedent existed just within the College's previous sixty years, and alumni reported that they had been praying for just such a thing. We did harvest e-mail messages from an on-campus news group, among them some criticism, and also invited written reactions through several College networks, which also resulted in some additional criticism. The interviews we did allowed for critical reactions about the revival, but the responses tended to question style or details, rather than taking issue with the value or nature of the event as a whole. So, there was some discrepancy in the interviewees' perception of how spontaneous the event was. There were discrepancies about how long the meetings went, and how many people were in attendance. But no one said the College would have been better off had the Sunday night meeting ended on time as scheduled. We have no statistics on which to base this, but the reflections we gathered certainly don't represent the full campus spectrum of perspectives on the revival.

A condensed oral history project can exclude the element of longevity unless follow-up interviews are conducted. All of the interviews we initially did were done within less than two months of the revival itself. So, while some of the immediacy gained is a great benefit of this spur-of-the-moment interviewing, it does not reflect accounts of the longer-range impact of the revival, perhaps disappointments, outcomes, etc. However, this past spring, we did sixteen follow-up interviews with some of the people we interviewed at the time of the '95 revival. This introduced that element of evaluation and reflection. Listen to faculty member Lyle Dorsett's analysis of what took place ([CN 514 - T71](#)):

DORSETT: I see a lot of people whose lives have been transformed, and that was not a flash in the pan. It was not just a momentary thing. I'll give you one example. There's a young woman that I . . . that confessed sin one night there and she confessed that she was addicted to alcohol. And she graduated that May, she's been away for two years now, and I've seen her two or three times since then. And I prayed with her that night that she confessed. I've stayed in touch with her and she's still free from drinking alcohol and she lives in another state and she's doing her own thing, but she's staying close to God and she's being victorious. And I . . . that's an isolated incident, but it's not . . . I mean it's one that I'm citing, but there are many such people as that. There are people that have overcome. Furthermore, several hundred went forward the last night on the praise night and committed their lives to full-time Christian service. And that was more than just an emotional high, for some at least. And there are people now on the mission field or in seminary or going into full-time ministry because they felt a call that night and they made a commitment and they're going forward. One of them is Doug Jones. He was the first guy to confess sin at the revival, Doug Jones who graduated in that class of '95. And Doug went in June of that

year to be with the mission my wife and I oversee, Christ for Children International, down in Mexico, and he's still there. He . . . he got right with God, he went to the mission field and he's still down there. And just this year he committed to a three-year term coming up. And again, that's one example, but I know many young people that have committed their lives to ministry. Still another thing that I've seen as I look back on it is a there is a commitment to prayer among many people on this campus.

ERICKSEN: An increased commitment?

DORSETT: An increased commitment to prayer. And I have had several students, especially grad students who've been around for a while, some seniors who were here when this was going on, who've told me that there were small groups that were formed and prayer groups that were formed, some that still go on, some of the personnel has changed, but there's prayer activity in dorms that has not been there, that was not there prior to that time. So there's a momentum of commitment to Christ and a commitment to be close to God and keep short accounts, hold one another accountable. There's this kind of commitment that was a manifestation of the revival and it's gone on. I think there is still more reverence in chapel. I think there are a lot of other reasons for that, but certainly the revival's had in impact on that. And I think our president's had an impact on . . . on some of this, because he has tried to . . . this is no criticism of previous presidents. I'm not saying that, but what I'm saying is that Dr. Litfin has a . . . sort of saw this as an agenda item to see more reverence in chapel, more concern with Scripture, and holding . . . bringing your Bibles to chapel, holding the Scripture high. And I see a commitment to that. So overall, the evidence to me is very clear that we indeed had a revival. I think the effects of it are still going on. And nobody will convince me we didn't have any revival.

Unlike interviews for which we do preparatory research, this time we did our research as we went. Think back to the excerpt in which I asked about getting the "two fellows" up from Howard Payne University. It turned out that it wasn't two fellows, but rather one male and one female student. The first accounts we got were from students who hadn't been at the opening session or were unclear in their description, so they referred to "two guys" which then translated into the question. It's a small point, but it highlights the fact that our research for the next interview was occurring in the one we were presently doing. That is not an uncommon element in an interview, but it is rarely as predominant as it was in this project.

Another complication involves the issue of confidentiality. When we ask questions of an interviewee, we typically ask for details which make their comments concrete. However, the event we were documenting had many hundreds of students standing



before a group of over a thousand people and confessing sin, an act which in some religious traditions assumes the "privacy of the confessional." That respect for privacy was brought into the recording. No student who described standing in line and confessing their sin was asked what sin they confessed. Interviewees were not asked who spoke or what they said. Questions about the nature of the confessions were general, and interviewees were reluctant to go into a great deal of detail about what was confessed. So, there was a threshold beyond which even the interview did not document the spiritual experience.

You should know, too, that we were not simply curious bystanders nor brought in from the outside to simply record the facts. While we were methodical in following oral history procedures like avoiding asking leading questions, I don't think we were viewed by those we recorded as being hostile or perhaps even as neutral. But the revival was having an impact on us as well. Completely apart from the converging providence we perceived of being almost poised to record the interviews, our souls were probed and refreshed as the Holy Spirit moved, and so at several levels, it was a revival we were part of. Like students, we wanted it to be more than just an experience to tell our grandkids or researchers or you about.

As you have heard, it's not just the words we were recording, but the joy in the voice of a surprised new convert, the tiredness of numerous students, the gratitude of a former president. It also points to what will stick from those long evenings ([CN 514 - T16](#)):

DORSETT: I guess my memory isn't . . . my mind . . . in my mind it's not so much what I heard, but the faces, the faces of people waiting.

ERICKSEN: What do you see on their faces?

DORSETT: On their faces, yeah, that's more what I'm . . . I'm . . . of this one co-ed I spoke of earlier, just this absolute almost frantic need to just get right. Some were like that. You could just see it. Some were very pensive, some were obviously scared, just scared to death, white as sheets while they waited. And some waited six hours the first night to talk, so it was a long wait. But the other thing, and it was just so spontaneous: when one would start to falter, they couldn't get the words out, they were trying and they would literally be stuttering trying to get it out, without anybody saying, "Go help them" or . . . you know, nothing was ever said, it wasn't really orchestrated this way at all, a friend went up and then maybe sometimes two or three friends, and just stood around them and didn't say anything to them but just to strengthen them. And others would . . . you could just watch the room as somebody was faltering or losing

courage, there were people stopping and just praying, "Lord, give this one courage to finish and say whatever he or she needs to say, and then just that sheer relief as they finally got it off their chest. I think it's the faces that will stick with me forever. I just... yeah, it makes me want to cry right now, just that sense of freedom . . .

Our interviewing certainly gave us a close-at-hand look at the revival. We were getting daily updates on what was happening. Both Bob and I went to a part of one of the evenings. And we were able to acquire videotaped footage of the worship and messages, of some of the lines, and for researchers seventy-five years from now, some of those confessions. But our purpose in gathering the information was to give our patrons some of that same immediacy, whether they use the interviews and accompanying documents next year or in twenty.

Before I conclude, I would like you to hear one more story, that of how this video footage we have watched came into being. Pat Bell, a grad student, several weeks before the 1995 revival had been planning for an evening meeting to consist of prayer and worship and a speaker, hoping that perhaps God would again bring revival to Wheaton. But he had been reaching the conclusion that the Lord was directing otherwise. ([CN 514 - T8](#)):

BELL: I talked with Melissa and felt like she didn't think that we were to do it, and the next day, it must have Tuesday, I saw Nate Fawcett who was going to lead worship the next Sunday (I didn't know that), and I was just lying out on the grass doing homework, and he walked by and said, "Hey, we've got two students from Howard Payne coming up to share about the revival there." And at that moment I knew that God was going to do something. It was just . . . it was clear to me, just like the series of events with Melissa, and just felt the Lord had spoken to me that I wasn't to do it and then Melissa said, "Someone else is gonna do it. It would have to be someone else," and then Nate said, "We've got two students coming." So, I was ready, so we were praying about that that week and I thought, "God's gonna do something big and I'm gonna get this on video." And so, I asked permission from the WCF leaders and they said, "Fine," and they actually wanted that too. So, I took my video camera along and set it up and got what had happened the first three nights.

Another converging of providences.

Those students who came to Wheaton in the Fall of 1994 and were freshmen at the time of the revival are now graduating seniors. They are the last class who will have been here to tell incoming students themselves about what took place and so



beginning with the incoming freshman, this will become much more truly an “omer of manna” for them.

The interviews and videotape and miscellaneous papers are now arranged, described, and open to researchers. When we're finished here or tomorrow you can go upstairs and use in more depth what we have gathered. Hopefully, these will be of use to those who were there and want to revisit some of that immediacy. It will be a valuable resource to students of evangelism and revival. To those who want to examine the social and psychological components of spiritual experience, these interviews may become a rich source of firsthand accounts. To those who weren't there and only heard about it third hand, they may be curious to hear what happened. And who knows, in the same way the reporting process. Perhaps you are wondering how an oral history and-a-half years ago, perhaps some who listen to these interviews will feel their hearts warmed and consciences awakened as the impact of the revival continues on.

[Explore all the interviews collected about the 1995 Wheaton Revival, as well as earlier revivals, in [CN 514: Ephemera of the Wheaton College Revivals](#)]



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