

TAR PAPER AND LACE

BUILDING A NAZARENE COMPASSIONATE MINISTRY NETWORK IN OKLAHOMA CITY

Chapter 1: Tar Paper and Lace

"Let me tell you about our first date," says Alice Stark as she shoots a grin at her husband of fifty years. "Wayne picked me up in an old school bus, and we ended up in the slums of downtown Oklahoma City."

Filtered evening light glanced off the tar paper shacks huddled around the Nazarene Gospel Mission at Community Camp. At the slum's epicenter stood a mission church that supplied the neighborhood's electricity and running water. There was also a piano. "I could play 'There is a Fountain,'" said Alice, pausing to hum a snatch of the chorus, "and there were two other hymns I knew, too . . . 'A Child of the King' and 'All for Jesus.'" So I was the mission pianist. Wayne preached and drove the school bus."



Other college students joined the couple in leading Bible lessons for children. Some of those students witnessed the vows Wayne and Alice took at the corner of 6th and Lee on March 25, 1963. Alice wore a

handmade lace and taffeta dress and carried red roses clustered on a white Bible.

Over fifty years have passed and the Starks are still united in marriage and ministry. The church where they've twice pastored now sits in the shadow of Oklahoma City's latest, greatest landmark. The Devon Tower took three years and \$750 million to complete, yet its faceted crown disappears when the fog rolls in.

Rejuvenation of the downtown area is oozing southward, bringing with it persistent offers to buy outlying properties. "We'll have to sell eventually," says Rev. Wayne Stark of the 1st Indian Church building and property. He and his wife Alice have pastored in this neighborhood for almost three decades. Relocation could very well lead to a wider outreach for the church. Tar paper and lace have already laid the foundation.

Lessons learned during Wayne and Alice's student days helped prepare them for ministry on the derelict side of town. "While at BNC, the Lord provided a position in the cafeteria to help pay tuition," recalls Alice with a wry chuckle. "That started my very long career in mass food production." Today 1st Indian serves hot meals to a hundred or more people each week; many are homeless. A side of wisdom comes with each heaping plateful. "We've learned to trust God during the lean times," Rev. Stark says with quiet authority.

"There's no district funding for our church, but various people do send money," explains Alice. "Wayne, that reminds me, do you remember the time you held a revival at Eddie's church?"

"Yes," says Rev. Stark, whose brother pastored in Clinton, Oklahoma at the time. "There weren't many seekers that week, but I did get to brag on God."

[“After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying:

**“Give thanks to the LORD,
for his love endures forever.”**

As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated,” (II Chronicles 20:21-22).

Consider this passage in context by carefully reading verses 1-30. What straightforward instructions did the Lord give King Jehoshaphat in verse 17? What compelled King Jehoshaphat to appoint singers to lead the army into battle?]

“Because of the \$40 we’d just received out of the blue?” asked Alice, her eyes bright with the memory.

“Yes,” declared Rev Stark. “We didn’t even know the people who sent that check. But God knew, and He made sure that the money came in time to pay an urgent bill.” Yet Wayne Stark didn’t tell the whole truth to the revival audience in Clinton. Of that time, he now admits, “I hadn’t received a salary in a while, plus the church owed back taxes . . .”

Interrupting the reminiscences, Alice blurts out with, “The most amazing thing happened that next week. Money came in from other places. Enough to pay the debts.”

“God taught us something,” Alice says, confidence strengthening her gentle voice. “He wants us to depend on Him.”

It's a typical day in the 1st Indian Church neighborhood when drug dealers trawl the alleys and streetwalkers ply their trade. "Pastor, you're my line to God," Sally* shouts to Rev. Stark from across the street. Her stilettos catch in the cracked sidewalk. "The church is in her neighborhood," says Pastor Stark. "When she walks by, we invite her in."

*Name has been changed