

The Spiritual Heritage of Sedona

The pastors that meet here have a real desire to see God's Kingdom make advances in this city. We feel it is very important for the body of Christ to understand the spiritual roots of the city. To do that I'm going to share with you just a bit of the lives of several influential people in Sedona's history. Sedona Miller, a young Methodist girl in Missouri, fell in love with TC Schnebly. Both were from a Pennsylvania Dutch background. Her father had a problem with this, because TC was 'predestination' Presbyterian. Why couldn't she fall for a Methodist? Sedona married on her 20th birthday, 1897.

By 1901 they had decided to join TC's brother, Ellsworth, in Arizona. In October of that year they arrived at Jerome Junction and made their way to what is now the Los Abrigados Resort. TC built a large home there in which they put up travelers. Sedona was known for her Protestant work ethic and great home cooking. This is where the church of the city began, in their home. TC had brought a piano with them. The guests would gather around the piano and TC would read portions of the Bible. Then they would sing hymns accompanied by Sedona on the piano. Sometimes a visiting minister would bring a sermon. It was the simple sweet fellowship of believers.

In 1905 an accident took the life of Sedona's 5-year-old daughter Pearl. Sedona had such a hard time dealing with her death that they decided to move back east. It would be many years and several failed business ventures before they returned.

In the meantime, the city that became known for her name slowly grew. In November of 1918 someone from the American Sunday School Union began a formal fellowship of believers in a home in Sedona. Once the Brewer Road School was built, they began meeting there. Almost everyone who lived in the area came to worship together and to hear the Bible read. In '31 a visiting minister from the Assembly of God preached a series of revival meetings. Out of those meetings Jess Purtymun, my great uncle, received Christ and his life was completely changed. A one-time bootlegger, he now wanted to serve the Lord. His construction crew built the first Assembly of God church building in '31 and a parsonage on his property at the mouth of Oak Creek Canyon, where Lomacasi is now. He later became a deacon and played the accordion for worship. The first baptisms took place in October of '32 as an early snowmelt from the rim chilled the water of Oak Creek. By '36 it was the 2nd largest Assembly of God in Arizona.

When TC and Sedona finally returned, they became involved in what remained of the American Sunday School Union group. After they returned, the school in which they met burned down. The Assembly of God folks invited them to meet in their building, and thus began the first cooperation among churches. Sedona was fully restored and surely a person of deep compassion because of the losses she had suffered. She taught Sunday School to children there. In her position as church treasurer she carefully invested their surplus offerings into bonds in the hopes of building a non-denominational church building someday. While that church building was becoming a reality, Sedona was diagnosed with cancer. She returned from the operation in time for the dedication of the building in April of 1950, but the doctor had sad news. Sedona was dying from the cancer.

Family gathered around her deathbed as the minister from Wayside Chapel shared communion with them. Sedona had a request. She asked the family to let everyone know that instead of flowers, she would like donations for a bell for the church. Her son, Hank, found a bell in Colorado and TC built the belfry. On Christmas Eve 1951 the bell was dedicated in her memory. The service was packed as people came to hear of the testimony and life of Sedona. That bell still rings out on Sunday morning, calling people to worship the King she lived for.

Sedona and Jess were just a couple of the many Christians that founded this city. They were born again Bible believing Christians. That is the heritage of our city. May God help us see that heritage fully restored through our faith. Sedona belongs to Jesus!