

Christmas 2000

On Christmas night all Christians sing to hear the news the angels bring. ("Sussex Carol")

"My feet never get tired," LaWanda Mangrum, who had just turned six, said at the beginning of the CROP Walk. We were walking together on the first block of a 6-mile walk, and she asked, "Are we almost there?" I thought, "This is going to be a long walk." I said to her, "We have a long way to go. I hope your feet don't get tired." She said, "My feet never get tired."

This is the first year LaWanda has been in the Epworth Tutoring Program. She is the daughter of Wanda Mangrum and granddaughter of Alberta Watts, whose other grandchildren have been in our program for seven years.

We took the el downtown, along with 17 other people from Epworth Church. While we were waiting for the other 900 walkers to arrive at the starting point of the walk in Chicago's Loop, LaWanda's tooth fell out. Her cousin Glenda Watts found it and washed it. I told LaWanda the tooth was a sign of her starting to be a big girl.

During the walk LaWanda was curious about everything she saw. She noticed bronze sculptures of books, globes, and dolphins on the wall of a large condominium complex, and she talked about those. We talked about fog covering the tops of skyscrapers. As we walked east from Clark Street on Roosevelt Road, toward the orange line of the el, LaWanda started talking about "the museum." That was a strange thing to be talking about. There aren't any museums in that part of Chicago. After about three blocks, I saw it—the top of the roof of the Field Museum! LaWanda had seen that from afar and had recognized it as the museum! She started talking about dinosaurs and said she had gone to the museum with her preschool class at her other school! This was a smart little girl to have remembered and recognized the roof of the Field Museum from that far away!

We walked south to 21st street, and then the route was straight north for 3 miles on Michigan Avenue to the Loop. All of us in our mini-group were tired—Shanese Watts (age 8), Jessica Cox (age 9), LaWanda, and myself. The children asked how far we had to go. I thought a good goal would help. I pointed to the skyscrapers covered with fog in the distance and said, "We only have to go to those buildings over there." That was the wrong thing to say! We all knew it was impossible to walk that far!

We started talking about what part of our legs and feet hurt. Everything hurt on everybody. Then I said to LaWanda, "Who was it that told me that her feet never get tired?" She was silent a minute, then she said, "I did." Then we didn't talk about that any more.

The 8- and 9-year old girls didn't think they could keep walking. We had a couple of M&Ms which Diane Walker, Epworth coordinator, had bagged for the Epworth walkers. Then suddenly LaWanda started singing: "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus in the morning, Jesus in the noontime, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus till the sun goes down," the song the youth choir had sung in church earlier that morning. We all joined in, singing the song a couple of times, walking and walking. After another block, LaWanda started singing, "Love him in the morning, love him in the noontime ...," and we all joined in. It was as if she was singing the song in her mind and all of a sudden started singing out loud. Every few blocks, whenever we would start to lag, LaWanda started singing, and we all joined in. And we kept walking.

Finally we got to the Loop. We walked down State Street and over on Washington, back to the starting point, singing, "Praise him, praise him, praise him in the morning, praise him in

the noontime....” All of us had made it. We got our ice cream treat and had a massage.

All 19 walkers from Epworth walked the entire 10 kilometer route. For the past two years Epworth has been awarded a gold-painted gym shoe for having the most walkers (including many kids from the Tutoring Program). This year we didn’t have the most walkers, but we raised more money than before to alleviate hunger across the world, over \$1100.

When sin departs before His grace, then life and health come in its place.

About 10 years ago we saw how some of the “grads” of the Tutoring Program were being influenced by gangs. We have had various workshops and speakers as part of our program to help the students resist the influence of gangs. Last year 15-year old “M,” who had been in our program for 6½ years, started asking people where he could get drugs wholesale to re-sell. During the summer he was going around with 16-year old “X,” who had been in our program for 7 years. “X” reputedly has some “rank” in the gang. He wears expensive brand-name clothes and has his own apartment—in a building with a doorman! These boys had been some of our favorite students.

Another student, 13-year old “U,” who has been in our program for 7½ years, has been getting into fights, has been making trouble at the branch library, and reputedly is the head of a gang of younger boys of a different ethnic group. “U” was kicked out of the local school to try to separate him from the younger boys. We know “U” is kind and gentle. We can’t understand the change.

One of our former students of a few years ago, “O,” was heavily part of a gang for several years – to the extent of getting a bullet lodged in his skull; he couldn’t get it taken out so it’s still there. Without telling anyone, “O” moved to another state, and we hear he has a job.

12-year old “K,” who was in the Tutoring Program for 6 years, came home one day with \$70. His mother, without warning her kids, moved her whole family to another state. She didn’t want “K” to get involved in the gangs.

Currently, around seven 12-year old boys come early to the weekly tutoring sessions so they can use the Internet. They love downloading and printing pictures from the Internet. We know some of these boys are being influenced by a gang, but we keep trying provide a good foundation for them, and we hope that positive peer pressure can keep them making good choices.

All out of darkness we have light which made the angels sing this night.

Pat Charles’ children Janice and Finner were in 1st and 2nd grade in the Tutoring Program 15 years ago. A couple of years ago Pat’s youngest daughter Khadijah started coming to our preschool section. Pat also started coming to the Epworth worship services. In October Pat mentioned to me during Community Hour one Sunday that she wanted to have Khadijah baptized. I talked a bit about it and she exclaimed, “I should have my whole family baptized!” I said she should talk to our new pastor, Lois McCullen Parr, and I took her over to where Lois was talking with someone.

The next week Pat came to talk to me after the worship service and said, “I’m going to have my whole family baptized and also all my neighbors” (children who were/had been in the Tutoring Program). I was amazed. The Tutoring Program is secular, concentrating on reading, writing, and arithmetic. A few children come to church, especially as part of the Youth Choir, but very few have been baptized. Pat said, “I have 14 people who want to be baptized and several

who want to join the church.”

When the day for the baptisms came, there was such a crowd at the front of the church that when Lois called the names, people could hardly reach her to be baptized. This year Pat will head up the group serving dinners to Epworth’s Shelter for Homeless Men.

“Glory to God and peace on earth, now and forevermore. Amen.”

The Palmers have moved. After 24 years in our wonderful apartment, we were told that a new buyer was going to tear down the 2-apartment building (with its good view) and build 6 condominiums. We were gentrified out. Finally we found an apartment within walking distance of Epworth Church which is at the top of our low price range and can accommodate our piano. Friends and professional movers helped us move last May, and now our new place is home.

What disturbed us most was the lack of view in our new home: a highway on one side and a fence and buildings on the other. A friend suggested window boxes of flowers, and that has been a lot of fun. Someone else said, “What about a bird feeder?” Now we have “Frank’s Cheeper Café,” which gives us a view and delightful entertainment.

Our new address is **Frank and Beth Palmer, 5715 N. Ridge, Chicago, IL 60660-5506**. Our phone is still the same, 773-561-4759. Our e-mail addresses are flpalmer@ripco.com and epworthtutoring@aol.com.

Blessings to all of you.