

The author shares the ups and downs of his life's journey. He encounters a decade of mental illness, multiple deaths of loved ones, and most importantly through it all, the profound presence of God.

**"Laugh, Cry, and Praise with Me":
A Lifetime of Memoirs and Devotional Writings
By Ronald L. Smith**

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LAUGH, CRY, AND PRAISE WITH ME



A Lifetime of
Memoirs and Devotional Writings

RONALD L. SMITH

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|------------|
| Preface | vii |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Early Years: 1945-1957 | 3 |
| The Midget Race Car | 21 |
| Personal Testimony | 23 |
| Fear..... | 31 |
| Early Jobs | 35 |
| Teen Years: 1957-1963 | 39 |
| Teen Years--Romance..... | 45 |
| Teen Years—Some Stories | 51 |
| My First Deer | 59 |
| College Years: 1963-1967..... | 61 |
| Purdue Years--1964-1965 | 63 |
| Purdue Years--1966-1967 | 71 |
| Young Adult Years: 1967-2000 | 81 |
| Engineering Career—1967-1981 | 83 |
| Scottish Sheep Dog | 91 |
| Berlin: The Early Days..... | 93 |
| Berlin: The Middle Days..... | 103 |
| Regret--1978 | 119 |
| Berlin: The Final Days | 123 |
| Engineering Career—1981-2011 | 127 |
| Traveling with an Angel..... | 143 |
| James McNeal Dickinson--1983 | 147 |
| Asian Trips | 151 |
| Pachinko | 161 |
| Serious as a Heart Attack | 165 |
| Highest Worship--1993 | 167 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| Letter to My Dad--1995..... | 169 |
| Caitlin Marie Mingonet--1996..... | 173 |
| Death1 (Pete Schadow)—1997 | 175 |
| Precious Moments--1998..... | 177 |
| Despair--1998 | 181 |
| Senior Adult Years: 2000-2023 | 183 |
| Snakes..... | 187 |
| September 11, 2001 | 191 |
| Where was God on 9/11?..... | 193 |
| Be Petty—2001..... | 197 |
| Letter to my Mom—2003..... | 201 |
| Schizophrenia | 207 |
| Globus Trips—2007+..... | 215 |
| Music Ministry | 221 |
| Buck--2010 | 227 |
| Death 2 (Helen Dickinson)--2011 | 233 |
| Pickleball—2012 to Present | 235 |
| Alien Cat--2013 | 249 |
| 68-68-168--2013 | 251 |
| Skydiving--2013 | 261 |
| God Answers Hard Questions--2015..... | 271 |
| The C-Word--2015 | 283 |
| Death 4 (Maradell P. Smith) --2016 | 287 |
| My Personal Comments at Mom’s Funeral --2016 | 293 |
| Death 5 (Raymond F. Smith)—2023..... | 297 |
| Favorite Things--2023 | 301 |
| Finale..... | 303 |

Highest Worship--1993

Mitzi and I went to Ridgecrest in 1993 to attend Music Leadership Week. It was informative and inspiring. Each day consisted of specific classes with specific subjects and a joint worship service. Wow, what an experience to be “in church” with 3,000 professional musicians! The preaching was excellent, but the music was the most inspiring experience I’ve ever had. One service stands out in my mind. After getting home, I wrote the following poem to describe worship that day.

I couldn't sing.
Don't misunderstand.
I love to sing, I usually sing.
Singing is vital to my Christian faith.
God blesses me while singing,
and some even say my singing has blessed them.
But at this moment, as tears ran down my cheeks,
I couldn't sing.
Strange, since many around me were singing beautiful praise
to God.

I stood amid three thousand musicians lifting glorious
praise to our heavenly Father,
and yet, at the same time, I stood alone,
face to face with God in all of his holiness.
My head and heart said to sing,
But all I could bring forth was another tear.

Words like "majesty...holy...omnipotent...Father"
took on a much deeper, more relevant meaning.
God's love, and grace, and greatness overwhelmed me.
All that was lovely became lovelier;

Ronald L. Smith

peace became more peaceful;
grace became fuller, deeper, more magnificent.
My senses crescendoed to new levels of awareness.
Every color was translucent, vivid, somehow purer.
The harmonizing sounds were better than perfect.
Could this be an infinitesimal glimpse of our heavenly body?
"Bless the Lord oh my soul, and ALL that is within me.
For the Lord is good and greatly to be praised."

God passed by Moses
who was in a cleft of a rock and covered by God's hand.
And yet, even still,
Moses' face shown with radiance
because he had been in the very presence of God.

Dear God:
Now that you have touched me in this highest worship,
May others see You,
Not only on my face,
But in my heart and actions every day.

"Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness"

(1 Chronicles 16:29)

Despair--1998

Written 1 Sept. 1998

I just did the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my life--I drove my 25-year-old son to a shelter for the homeless (CITA). I kicked him out of my house, and I feel like I've lost a part of myself in the process. I feel an emptiness, a void, a loneliness, like I've actually lost my son. But worse than just losing him, I actively took part in "losing him." Strange I would feel this way, since I haven't really had my son for a long time. Even though he was here, he wasn't here and wasn't part of me. So why should I feel this emptiness now?

He prolonged leaving until the last possible moment. Perhaps more evidence of his tendency to deny reality. He was clearly shaken, even distraught. Probably scared. Mostly hopeless. When I came home from work at 6 PM he was sitting in the study in the dark wearing a shirt and tie with a ball hat so far down on his forehead that no one could see him, nor he see them. Perhaps his appearance was a symbolic gesture of deeper problems within him--a desire to be acceptable; an inability to relate to people. The hat was his shield, his mask, his dark cave. His body was twisted and contorted as he held his head in his arm. At that moment he was a broken spirit and I was a broken father. That image will remain in my mind for a long time.

During our brief words while driving to CITA, I tried to reinforce my desire for his success and my commitment to helping him obtain it. But as many times in the past, I fear that my words came across too judgmental. Were these words too few, too late? Did the circumstances so overshadow any logical discussion that he couldn't even comprehend my thoughts? Does he not believe me or trust me because I'm letting him down by kicking him out? I feel so inadequate to communicate and help, so helpless to make things better. But I'm at my rope's end in trying to help him.

In saying good-bye, I hugged him. He shook my hand. "This is emotional", he said with no emotion, as he turned away. Has he lost all hope? Have I?

Dr. Tony Evans says that God sends angels to comfort us while we are waiting on answers to our specific prayers. That is a comforting thought. God's Word, various Christian writings, and perhaps angels, have been comforting Mitzi in recent days. She offered hope in this otherwise painful situation. She observed that of all the decisions that Steven could have made when leaving our house, he made the BEST possible decision, i.e., to go to CITA. At CITA he has reasonable living conditions and more importantly he will be exposed to the Gospel. The ultimate answer is that Steven needs Christ in his life. Christ's presence is hope (i.e., "assurance") that will overcome the deepest despair.

Note: Steven left CITA that night or the next day. He walked and hitchhiked to Miami where he lived on the street for a while. If I had known that, I would have been in deeper despair.

*"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye
shall find rest unto your souls."*

(Matthew 11:28-29)

Death 5 (Raymond F. Smith)—2023

Mitzi and I were in Branson, MO attending a Christian musical when I received the call that my younger brother, Raymond, had died. It was not a surprise, but it still hurt to receive that call.

The call came during the finale to a musical play at Sight & Sound about Queen Esther. She was a Hebrew who lived in tumultuous times, who became queen of Persia around 480BC, and risked her life to save the Hebrews. A central theme that ran through the musical was “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10)—a message we still need to hear today. The concert hall was resonating with “Be Still” when my sister, Roxanne, called to say Ray had passed. I was blessed to be showered by Christian music at such a time, reminding me of God’s grace, mercy, presence, and promises.

The last meaningful conversation I had with Ray was about 2 months earlier. We both thought he had more time.

I mentioned previously that early in life I wasn’t very close to my siblings due to our age differences. I became closer to Raymond and Roxanne as our parents grew older. We had a common bond as we watched our parents gradually fade away.

I would call Raymond about once per month just to chat. Living about 800 miles apart did not afford us much face time. When you “chatted” with Raymond, you mostly listened. That was OK with me, but it was hard to get a word in if I really wanted to contribute to the conversation. We would mostly talk about family, hunting, guns, farm animals, and health issues.

Ray suffered greatly in his later years. In a way, his passing was a blessing. But we both thought he had more time. Ray had Lyme’s

disease, prostate cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, COPD, damaged lungs, and other ailments. His immune system was totally compromised; when COVID hit he was very cautious about interacting with people. Eventually he died of fungal meningitis after weeks of intense diagnostics and treatment.

I visited him in the ICU for several days, but he was in a coma-like state most of the time. He did “wake up” one morning and smiled at me with those beautiful, twinkling blue eyes. He could only mutter one or two words, but this allowed us one final connection.

The Bowling Family wrote a song called “Love the People That God Gives You,” that could have been written about Ray’s death. It talks about receiving a call about the death of a loved one, thinking there was plenty more time to be together.

James 4:14 says: “Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.” Life is short.

Moses said in Psalm 90:12 “...to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.” I think what he meant by numbering our days is to live knowing we have no guarantee of being alive tomorrow.

Jesus said the greatest commandment is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”. He said the second greatest commandment is to “love your neighbor as yourself (see Matthew 22:37-40).”

The chorus of the Bowling song encourages us to love the people that God gives us because we don’t know when God will call them home.

I wish I'd spent more time talking with Raymond. I wish I'd asked him to tell me some old stories that he remembered but I couldn't.

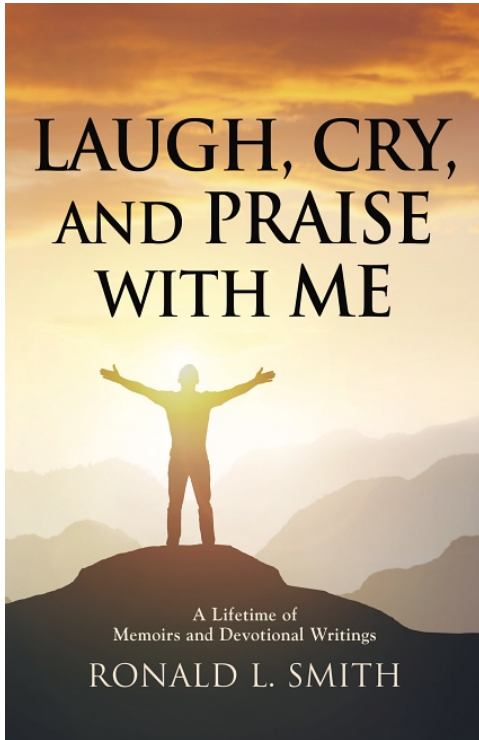
I presided over Raymond's funeral on 31 March 2023. We didn't know how many to expect. I was surprised to see about 70 people attend. Most were Raymond's neighbors—lives he had touched by



loving the people that God had given him. I doubt I will have a single neighbor attend my funeral.

“...we know that when these bodies of ours are taken down like tents and folded away, they will be replaced by resurrection bodies in heaven—God-made, not handmade—and we’ll never have to relocate our “tents” again. Sometimes we can hardly wait to move—and so we cry out in frustration. Compared to what’s coming, living conditions around here seem like a stopover in an unfurnished shack, and we’re tired of it! We’ve been given a glimpse of the real thing, our true home, our resurrection bodies! The Spirit of God whets our appetite by giving us a taste of what’s ahead. He puts a little of heaven in our hearts so that we’ll never settle for less.”

(2 Corinthians 5:1-5, The Message)



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