

El McMeen is a musician, a minister, and a humorist. He loves the three M's: music, ministry, and mirth. This sequel to El's memoir from 2018, "Growing Up in God's Country." bursts with God-at-work moments in all three "M" areas.

Growing Up in God's Country, Part 2: Still Growing!

By El McMeen

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Growing Up in God's Country

Part 2: Still Growing!



A Memoir

El McMeen



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Foreword

My memoir from 2018 is called Growing Up in God's Country. It was conceived on my wife Sheila's birthday, August 26, and was born on the date of my mother's death, September 15. (To be sure, a few more days were needed to clean up the baby.) It was up on Amazon and other outlets by September 30. It is sometimes referred to in this book as God's Country, Part 1.

Its completion in such a short period of time was an absolute miracle of God. Massive and supernatural bursts of energy at all hours of the day and night were the fuel for the fire. Through the grace of God, Amazon designated it as a "#1 New Release."

This is part two of that memoir. I hope that I am still "growing," thus the title.

God's Country, Part 1 addressed four areas of my life in which I thought different groups of people might have an interest. The first was my early life in small-town America, dealing with a disability (cerebral palsy). That physical problem lingers, and has become more noticeable under certain circumstances, but the Lord has given me some ability to recover fairly quickly from associated fatigue.

My story then turned to education in major cities of the United States, being Boston (specifically Cambridge, Massachusetts), Philadelphia, and New York. You can take

the boy out of the small town, but can you take the small town out of the boy? (I hope not.)

The second area was my career as a lawyer in New York City. The third was my vocation as a guitarist. The fourth was my spiritual condition and growth (hopefully) throughout my life, culminating in ministry work.

This book is more focused. My youth train has left the station, despite regular and perhaps frequent exercises in immaturity. The law is also far behind, since I have been retired from practice for going on a quarter of a century. The guitar career has some interesting twists and turns that I do want to recount. Finally, there is the spiritual side of things, which is actually the overall context and reason for this book.

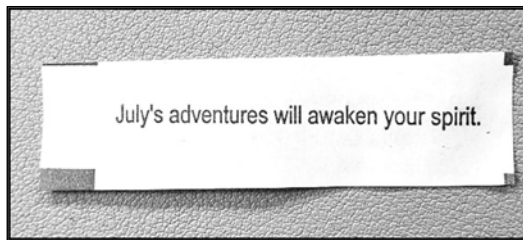
The Holy Spirit of God has, I firmly believe, been leading me into all kinds of activities and ministries. (Those include some ideas for my guitar-playing that seem to have come out of left field.) Most have been totally unexpected. The God of Surprises has been busy at work in the life of this humble servant. Other works of the Lord include re-energizing me in areas where I had been seeding but perhaps the fields had lain fallow for a while.

In God's Country, Part 1, I shared the many surprising ways in which the Lord had entered into my life. My main impetus in *this* book is to give the Lord glory for what He has been doing in subsequent years and to confirm what He can do in *your* life, too.

In writing this book and God's Country, Part 1, I am very sensitive to the fact that this is in large part my personal story. I am, in fact, a happy and blessed husband (53 years and counting), father, and grandfather. Those positions, joys, and responsibilities are critical to my life. One's relationship with the Lord, however, is at its core personal. (Nothing is more personal than the Holy Spirit *in* us, after all.) That being said, one's relationship with the Lord profoundly informs those very family relationships. I am not even close to being perfect, but the Holy Spirit in me makes me a better husband, a better father, and a better grandfather.

My wife Sheila and I, moreover, have been having a lot of fun, with amusing stories to share. The world can always use a good dose of humor and fun, right? Those, too, are a large part of this book.

Check out the text of a recent fortune cookie:



I started and completed this book in July 2024!

Our God worked through Balaam's donkey. (Numbers 22:21-35) He can certainly work through a fortune cookie that was probably manufactured somewhere in Brooklyn (and probably not by the Chinese).

1

Movin' on Up

“The Jeffersons” was a very popular television sitcom. It was a spinoff from “All in the Family” and ran from 1975 to 1985. The catchy theme song summarized the plot that the Jeffersons were “movin’ on up” from the Outer Boroughs of New York City to the Upper East Side of Manhattan, with all that meant in terms of culture, vibe, and some snooty people.

On November 1, 2017, Sheila and I were movin’ on up, but not to the Upper East Side, the Upper West Side, or any other side (thank God!), of Manhattan. No, we were moving up North. Well, at least North of Route 80 in New Jersey. We were not exactly going “North to Alaska,” as the song goes. But Sparta, New Jersey does experience somewhat more severe winters than were the case in the town of Huntingdon, set among the fields and rolling hills of south-central Pennsylvania.

Having lived in Huntingdon for a very pleasant five years, we were headed back to New Jersey. We simply had to be closer to our children and grandchildren. In fact, as I recount in [God’s Country, Part 1](#), I felt a strong call from the Lord to return to New Jersey because our children would somehow, somewhere, and under some circumstance, “need” us. That is something quite deeper in importance than mere geographical proximity.

We, of course, on a lighter note, quipped that we were two of probably the eleven people who moved to New Jersey in 2017 for retirement. It may be the “Famous Garden State” and all, but a garden spot for retirees it is *not*.

The “up” part, then, was a matter of geography, but not of house size. We were continuing to downsize. In that regard, we closed on the purchase of our New Jersey house on October 31, 2017. That date was the 500th anniversary, to the day, of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. I believe that the timing was prophetic for us. What you will read later in this book may provide some grist for that mill. I continue on the lookout for further evidence and the joy of experiencing the manner in which God moves in our lives.

Our move started on a beautiful, sunny day, but complications quickly arose. The movers insisted on taking an inventory of *everything* they were moving, however minuscule, claiming that it was for “our mutual protection.” Of course, it was not, since we had to sign off on *their* inventory without being able in any way to verify it.

Moreover, it took up valuable time. As the hours passed, and the specter of driving in the dark became alarming, we got antsy. The agita increased when it was discovered that the truck was too small for all our stuff. We had to get going! What to do? Praise the Lord for our friend Amy Dell, whom we left in charge of the movers and who whipped them into shape after we left.

We took two cars, with the following allocation of responsibility: I had the guitars and Sheila transported our cat Millie in the cat carrier. I got the better of the deal. *Way* better. The guitars were quiet and happy. Millie was not. Early on in the trip, Millie had a “wardrobe malfunction.” Technically, what happened was that her bodily digestive systems functioned all too well, and her wardrobe (i.e., her fur) got wet and soiled. Sheila had the joy of driving 4-1/2 hours with Millie in a state of extreme and vocal feline unhappiness, while Sheila was enduring an atmosphere desperately in need of a massive air freshener.

It was dark upon our arrival at the inauspicious, gray house on Glen Road in Sparta. We were eager to get into the house, prepare for the movers to bring at least our bed inside, and deal with a hysterical cat. Son Jon had hidden the key in one of the planters. We did not know which one. We could not *find* the key, after feverishly searching in the dark. We called Jon, who was rushing to Municipal Court to handle his full docket of cases that night. He said it was in “the planter.” We kept looking. The movers were on the way, and no key. The cat was howling. You get the picture.

We finally found the key, hiding in a mound of dirt on the ground that we had scooped out of one planter in desperation.

Welcome back to Sparta, El and Sheila.

2

Home Sweet Home



The statement in Chapter 1 that we closed on our New Jersey house on October 31, 2017 tells only a small part of the house story. We go into these matters not to whine or snivel, but simply to express solidarity with you, the reader, who, if a homeowner, have undoubtedly gone through matters like ours at one time or another. We feel your pain.

In August of 2017, we had decided to move from Huntingdon, with all its central Pennsylvania charm, back to Sparta, with all its Sussex County, New Jersey, charm. But how to house hunt?

Enter our beloved son Jon and beloved wife Erin, who became our house-hunting agents and representatives. They

seemed to enjoy that mission, and tirelessly scoped out house after house in an attempt to comply with our fulsome list of requirements that no house in creation could possibly meet. We trusted Jon and Erin completely, and entered into contracts on two houses in town *without having set foot in either of them (!)*. It was a kind of arranged marriage with a house, subject to closing conditions as a prenup.

We went forward with house number 1. That deal blew, with some minor recriminations. We then proceeded to house number 2. That blew because the septic system failed inspection to a biblical extent. We returned to house number 1, and went to contract. Squabbling ensued among the lawyers for the parties, and some concern arose about getting the deal done in a timely fashion. Another pesky issue involved a substantial assessment on the house due to a flooding and cleanup issue relating to a nearby “lake” that was more in the nature of a “pond” and whose utility to us was negligible at best. That got solved, with no small expense to us. *Mucho dinero*.

Then a basement water issue leaked into the pre-closing, during which son Jon watched at a distance while a couple of individuals seemed to be vigorously at work with wet vacs in the basement. That got sorted out with a \$1500 concession on the purchase price for upgrading the gutters or some such. We were in Pennsylvania throughout all this.

There is more. A problem cropped up *at* the closing itself because the seller’s lawyer wanted us to sign a piece of paper

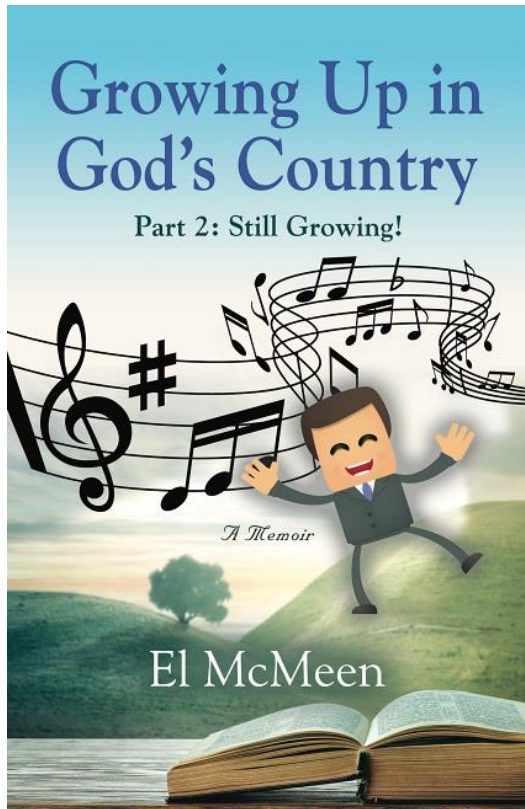
that our lawyer properly resisted because it was not in the contract. Deep into that matter, I did something I had never done before: I said that if the matter were not resolved in ten minutes, the deal was off, and we would go back to house number 2 and go to contract with the seller of *that* house. The matter got solved in twenty minutes. (Nobody was counting the minutes too closely.) We closed. There may have been recriminations, but we weren't physically present to experience them.

The \$1500 disappeared quickly into an upgrade of the door opener on the garage. It never made it to the gutters. The fact that it was offered at all should have been read by us as more of an omen than a blessing. After \$40,000 or so (!), and a couple of years, we finally got various issues sorted out, including a major repair on the drainage system in the basement, landscape grading, new gutters, a new water tank, a new fireplace insert, a new shower stall, and a new whole-house generator with a tank full of propane. This is not to blame the seller. I think he got hosed – no pun intended – when, at his expense and before we came along, he had to replace the whole septic system to the tune, allegedly, of \$25,000. And we did end up - on a house built circa 1956 - with a new roof, new windows, new boiler, new AC system, new walkway, new septic system, new paint job, and a modernized interior. Not bad.

A former neighbor of ours referred to the house in passing as “a little shabby.” That is not really accurate. It *is*, however, very gray. Our next-door neighbors, who had watched with

great interest all the renovation work being done on the house in 2016, prefer the gray to the rather sickly green color it had been before. Sheila, moreover, likes it. As for me, well, the color gray has never inspired me to wax poetic.

I close this chapter on a more serious note. The day we moved in, I prayed a prayer of consecration over our house, dedicating it to the Lord Jesus. Despite my many failings in living up to His model and commands, I remember and take seriously that prayer, and the status bestowed on our humble dwelling.



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