

Message in a Bottle

Biographical Series on Tyler County Folks

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‘Aunt Gloria’ Continues Teaching Children of East Texas about Jesus

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Born in Lufkin, Texas, Gloria grew up in Trinity County. After graduating from Apple Springs High School, she married Clifford, who was in the Navy.

Making a career of the Navy, they moved all around for 20 years. Clifford was a Navy diver and spent time on nuclear submarines. When he retired as a Chief Petty Officer in 1977, they made their home in Lufkin. Part of Gloria’s vision was inspired during their eight Navy years in California. The Child Evangelism Fellowship introduced her to sharing the Christian Gospel with children (CEFonline.com).

Gloria was struck by the fact that only two out of three kids ever came to a church. Those facts broke her heart and the seed of her ministry was planted deep.

When Clifford retired, Gloria started her Gloria Russell Children’s Ministry (GRCM) in 1977 and incorporated a 5.01(c)(3) in 1991 (ChangingGenerations.org). In the photo Gloria and Clifford are in front of their home with their family, all of which have been a growing part of GRCM through the years.

The entire ministry of family members and volunteers revolves around Gloria’s vision to target elementary age children with the Christian gospel.

Gloria started with a back-to-school rally at the Lufkin Civic Center, and these continued for 20 years. Over 1,000 kids came to each rally. She also held after-school Bible clubs in neighborhood homes.

In 2001, the U.S. Supreme Court in a 6-3 vote held that discriminating against a school club “because of its religious viewpoint” violated the free speech rights (*Good News Club v. Milford Central School*). Gloria wasted no time. Soon 12 different elementary schools were holding her Bible studies on elementary campuses all over East Texas.

Today, GRCM has 14 after-school Bible Clubs, including one in Colmesneil, one at Sinclair Children Center in Woodville, five in Nacogdoches and four in Lufkin.



Gloria's ministry includes Homeland Teen Missionaries, teaching teens how to share the gospel with children.

How does one teach the gospel to young children? With delicacy and patient understanding.

One tool is the "Wordless Book," small, about two by three inches. The solid green cover stands for growth. When first opened, the first and second pages are gold, representing heaven's streets of gold and how God loves us and has a wonderful plan for our life. The dark pages (dark blue or black) symbolize how all have sinned. The red pages represent the blood of Christ that cleanses all who believe. The white pages represent how we can receive Christ and be cleansed from sin. The Wordless Book is simple and made alive by a master story teller.

In addition to the after-school Bible Clubs, Gloria started a children's camp. For 20 years, they rented the Daniel Springs Camp in Gary, Texas. A few years ago, they purchased 33 acres surrounding their home and started Victory Camp Colmesneil. On site is a 40' by 60' air-conditioned tent serving as a chapel. The swimming pool has certified lifeguards. Twelve fishing piers at the pond allows for instruction on baiting a hook.

A little train motors through Victory Camp. As the engineer drives, the conductor gives nature speeches as they wind through the nature trail. Their pottery making is small scale with plans to expand. Volunteers bring horses to the small corral. Children can ride a horse led by a volunteer.

During a day a camp, one experience after another is gently guided to help the child have the most splendid time of his or her little life. Then at appropriate times the life-changing gospel of Christ is shared. These days, they focus on day camps on Saturdays in the spring and fall.

Gloria has a morning program on KSWP Christian radio station for children each Saturday and she also writes a column for the church page in the Tyler County Booster each week.

In June, 2012, Gloria and her ministry sponsored a mission trip overseas to Zimbabwe. The eleven days included children's Bible clubs and a youth rally. The relief efforts included the feeding of the homeless and providing purified water for a squatter village.

One little orphan boy, whose mom and dad died from AIDS, lived in a shack made of tin.

"It looked just like a chicken coop," said Gloria. "His leg was broken. He could not get around. A lady in the shack next door took care of him. Some of our kids wept. After the Bible study started, the lady brought the boy to the study in a wheelbarrow. Our team was so happy." There are a thousand stories like that, from Zimbabwe, Colmesneil, Lufkin, and all over East Texas.

"Yesterday a man came out to fix our TV." Gloria smiled. "He said, 'I grew up in your Bible school.'" What a lovely testimony.

Another man, Jay Jenkins, is now married and an SFA graduate. "As a child camper, Jay got saved and came back to every camp, and then joined the teen mission program," said Gloria. "Every time I see him he reminds me, 'I got saved at Victory Camp.'"

When asked what advice she would give to a young parent, Gloria said, "You have got to spend time with your children, each one. Good quality time. If kids are lucky enough to have both a father and mother, it is still very difficult these days to make ends meet. Still, parents should "make sure children understand the gospel message."

Gloria's vision for Victory Camp Colmesneil includes a multipurpose building and ten cabins, so children can spend more time at camp in Colmesneil learning about Jesus. To date, over 250,000 children have been reached with the Gospel of Christ because 'Aunt Gloria' said, "Here I am, send me."