



News from the Blue Ridge



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Claire & Lorin Cranford

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Family Events:

Wow! What a hellish month September has been for Claire and me! It began in high promise with positive starts to the school year for both of us, but quickly turned negative with the mess that has enveloped GWU and Claire's rapidly deteriorating health issues. Finding pleasure and fun has come exclusively from family, and grand-kids in particular.

Claire was diagnosed with sleep apnea early in September after going through extensive testing at the Sleep Solutions Clinic at Cleveland Regional Hospital. Although being in bed for ten to twelve hours nightly, she wakes up still exhausted and barely able to function during the day. Her tiredness has been increasing with greater intensity for the past several weeks. Our hope is that the treatment she is beginning now at the start of October under the supervision of a sleep specialist doctor will gradually remedy the problem before other major health problems surface.

When the chaos at GWU first exploded the middle of September, I had the sickened feeling of reliving the nightmare of both the forced retirement and later the firing of two different seminary presidents at SWBTS. See University Happenings column for my reflections on this. Thus on Saturday, Sept. 14, I went into a spell of uncontrollable tremors that was followed by hyperventilation. I had to be taken by ambulance to the emergency room of the hospital so that medications could be given to force my body to calm down so that I wouldn't slip into unconsciousness or a coma. After quite a spell at the hospital, things settled down enough for them to release me.

Health wise things are better, at least at the tremor point. The unavoidable tension that surrounds the campus has driven my blood sugar levels and my blood pressure up about 15 to 25 per cent in terms of Oct. averages over Sept averages. As I disassociate myself from GWU both physically and emotionally, these will hopefully come back to a more normal pattern. Most of the present health problems stem from staying in the SWBTS nightmare way too long; I don't intend to repeat that at GWU. Life is too precious and short to waste it on trying to work with fussing Baptists who quickly abandon any semblance of Christian principles.

My neurologist diagnosed this week another problem caused by the diabetes, called lateral femoral neuropathy. Fortunately, the affected section on my left thigh is gradually loosening sensation, rather than moving toward increasing pain, as sometimes happens. At this point it doesn't appear to pose serious health issues, apart from having less and less feeling across the side and top of my left leg.

The good news is that the soy diet is beginning to make a positive impact in reducing somewhat the pain in the feet, along with helping in a slow weight loss pattern. Hopefully this will continue making a positive impact. Claire kids me because I have become the major 'cook' around the house with fixing the nightly soy milk shakes for supper along with breakfast on the weekends.



University Happenings:

In US culture these days, 9/11 is the infamous day that brought naive Americans into the real world of terrorism and conflict. At GWU, 9/10 will wind up being remembered in a similar way as the day a section of the faculty launched a public effort to oust the university president. The result has been a division of the faculty both pro and con in their position about Dr. White. Students have been whipped up into a lather with the same divisiveness over the university presidency. The local community through the media reporting of one side of the issue has gotten involved in the pro/con stances as well. The board of trustees and upper level administration have reaffirmed solid support for Dr. White, along with many of us faculty and students.

As I have reflected over the situation, time and time again my thoughts have gone back to a much worse situation that I experienced twice at SWBTS in Texas during the over 30 years I was associated with the seminary as either a student or a professor. The further I have distanced myself from the seminary over the past five years, the more I have come to realize the extreme dysfunctionality of the seminary. An atmosphere of high level distrust of one another among faculty existed even during the best of those days. Frequent pot-shooting of one another, even in the class room, was normative. Automatic high level suspicion of faculty against administration and vice versa was a given. From the faculty standpoint, the ultimate enemies of everything good were the trustee board members. The effect was a political polarizing of viewpoints into small pockets of faculty members, often across school and department boundaries. Thus when almost any issue come up in either school or general faculty meetings, its acceptance or defeat had more to do with generating a coalition of political power groups in support or objection, than it tended to have with the merits of the issue. If the issue was controversial, and especially if it involved curriculum, the coalitions that could muster the larger number of votes forced the issue through no matter what. With the seminary president as the chief faculty officer presiding over the general faculty meetings, especially in the earlier Naylor days, faculty meetings of the entire seminary faculty often erupted into battle royal confrontations. Of course, most of this was somewhat hidden from the students, except those working at the doctoral level in the Theology School.

With the SBC controversy erupting into the public arena by the early 80s, tensions among faculty stiffened. One dared not discuss any controversial issue in the classroom or on campus without repercussions from students who were offered substantial monetary rewards by the fundy SBC leadership for incriminating evidence of liberalism among faculty, from fellow faculty members who were pipelines of spying for the fundy trustees and SBC leadership, from an increasingly nervous administration that moved from protecting faculty to preoccupation with its own survival, from a growing hostility by trustee board members who increasingly were aligned with the radical



Claire's Musings:

Oct, 2002

September has not been one of the easier months this year. Gardner-Webb is under a huge strain right now with divisions in the school that to me seem insurmountable. I don't understand a lot of policies in running a business of any kind. A mistake was made at G-W and all of a sudden, after about two years, a quick meeting was called, complete with news reporters.

It absolutely appalled me that what has been happening since is much worse than what started it. What I have seen and heard since disappoints me greatly. What before was a quiet small town and school has now turned into a fiasco. Before, the college was close knit and now faculty has become divided. It has lost its closeness and the trust they had in each other. Almost daily the local newspaper reports the situation, and, of course, blows it all out of proportion. Driving by the school one day I saw students picketing with signs, one saying, "Honk if you are on our side". For some reason I am unable to see how that is considered a Christian attitude.

People are saying that Christian values were at stake. What I am seeing now does not seem any different. In the name of religion I am seeing people acting in a much worse way. What I see are people that refuse to back down on principles, are unforgiving, and who will undermine the good that the university has accomplished. I am embarrassed that Christians can attack others in this way, all the while making sure that there is plenty of news coverage. In my limited business knowledge, I at least know that there are proper procedures for taking care of problems and it does not have to include (as one newspaper put it) "lynching".

I am saddened by how all of this affects the university and our quiet little town. I realize that everything right now is being sensationalized (just like many had planned) and that it will quieten down eventually. But the lasting effects on the university will hurt many of the faculty and the present and future students. All in the name of religion and doing what is "right".

Of course, with what Lorin has already been through, with health, and previously at the seminary, it has affected him greatly. I have never seen him so down. A couple of Saturdays ago he became so ill I was getting ready to take him to the emergency room. He got so bad that I was unable to get him to the car, so we had to call an ambulance. He stayed at the hospital a while and they helped him. Thank goodness he is better, but remains deeply troubled about G-W and the criticism of Dr. White. I am very proud of his stand and proud of the fact that he does not feel like he has to be on the side of the majority or of the side if the loudest. Even being in the minority he still has the courage and wisdom to follow through in what he believes. And he doesn't have to broadcast it to the news to sway people to his side.

SWBTS took place after this demon was unleashed. But, SWBTS became a model for divisiveness by its example, in spite of the teaching coming verbally from the class rooms. That has reaped untold havoc on SBC churches over the past half century. That has played a role also in the recent steady decline of the enrollment of the seminary to barely half its size at its zenith.

May God give the GWU community wisdom to see its Lord again as the One who declared, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jhn. 13:34-35).



Lorin's Musings:

To be resumed next month.

fundamentalist elements and were operating under a mandate to take over complete control of the seminary and then remove every faculty and administrative member so that 'their people' could be brought in to 'save the seminary from liberal collapse.'

Today this agenda has been totally achieved at SWBTS, yet with certain ironies. Faculty have virtually no input into any of the decision making processes, apart from rubber stamping decisions made by the trustees and administration. The orientation of the seminary is theologically slanted to the far right wing side of Baptist life. Yet, the current president represents a shallow pep-rally version of a revivalism kind of religion, while the many new faculty and administrative officers brought in by trustee requirement represent the hugely rationalistic and frequently highly legalistic approach to Christianity echoed in the Dallas Theological Seminary training and background of a growing number of both administrators and faculty.

Frequently over the past few years I have asked myself, How in Heaven's name could such a mess have developed?

The roots of it lay in a faculty public eruption in the early 1950s when faculty split publically over the dismantling of a faculty council that made the decisions largely to the exclusion of general faculty, and were the cronies of the seminary president. When the faculty regained the upper hand, they established meetings for the general faculty and meetings for each of the three schools (colleges in a university styled structure). The acrimony over that forced several faculty to leave the seminary. But a demon of suspicion and a resorting to public confrontation from a politicized power base was unleashed over the seminary. That demon is still alive and well over seminary hill some fifty years later, and has played havoc over seminary life at every opportune moment. A high percentage of present day Southern Baptist pastors and leaders received their theological training in this atmosphere. I deeply believe that God holds SWBTS responsible for much of the mess the SBC is in today.

What troubles me the most about the GWU mess is that Sept. 10 unleashed a similar demon of suspicion and polarization over the campus of our university. Once unleashed this demon won't ever be corked back up. The persona of GWU has forever changed, and not for the better. Students, departments, general faculty, and the entire university community will never again be able to function with the same level of respect and trust of one another that was present prior to 9/10. According to one long time faculty member's comments to me, we were able to handle our differences privately without airing our 'dirty laundry' publicly for almost a century up until 9/10. But now the temptation to 'go public' over controversial issues will be almost irresistible since we have now taken that initial step that brought about lost innocence. To be sure, we have now become like most universities, large and small. But, in the process we have lost something far, far more precious. Instead of modeling to fussing and feuding Baptists a better way of handling problems, we have sunk down to their level. Can God still use GWU? Of course, He can. But only to the extent that the forces of divisiveness are silenced and principles of brotherly love and respect for one another in the midst of differences of opinion begin prevailing. The greatest growth in the history of