

ORANJ Leaf



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THE STORY TELLER'S STORY

Maggie Heineman interviews Paul Basham

ORANJ Leaf #10 is a story by Paul Basham about two Medford Leas residents, Neil Hartman and Warren Sawyer. With ORANJ Leaf #11 Maggie Heineman of Medford Leas interviews Paul Basham of Wiley Mission.

Maggie: Have you always been writing stories about people?

Paul: During my career as a minister I have always been interested in the stories that people have told me about themselves and, with their permission, I have loved sharing these stories with others. How fascinating it is to hear people talk about the places, events and persons that have shaped their lives.

Maggie: What about your own personal story?

Paul: I have written a memoir for my three children and seven grandchildren. I think everyone should write a memoir, so that when we can no longer be heard or seen, we can be read.

Maggie: What events in your childhood have influenced you?

Paul: Looking back on my childhood, I can remember the exact place I was standing on our front porch one summer day when my mother explained that every kind of tree had its own shape of leaf. This ignited inquisitiveness in me about the natural world that has never subsided. I am one of four children,

and when we were very young, our mother was always reading to us. I like the words of Strickland Gillilan who wrote "Richer than I you will never be, I had a mother who read to me."

Maggie: Did you always want to be a minister?

Paul: Church was always an important part of my life and in my youth I aspired to be a minister. However, I had a speech impediment. I will never forget the expression on my junior high school counselor's face when I stuttered to him that I wanted to be a minister. The issue with my speech defect took center stage when in my tenth grade all-boys English class the teacher assigned each student a date to read or recite a portion of literature in front of the class. As I was walking to the front of the classroom to speak on my assigned date, I sensed that my fellow classmates were preparing to be amused at my expense. But I had a surprise for them. I had memorized a chapter from the Book of Proverbs in the Bible and I quoted that chapter flawlessly, pronouncing every word clearly and distinctly. I made the words come alive. When I was returning to my

desk, that classroom of boys had a surprise for me. They all rose as one from their seats and gave me a standing ovation. That's when I started conquering my speech defect.

Maggie: Just as all persons have interesting stories from their past, so all retirement centers have their own unique stories about their early days. What are some interesting stories about the history of the Wiley Christian Retirement Community in Marlton, NJ, where you are now a resident?

Paul: It was back during the Great Depression in the late 1920s when Rev. John Hackett was asked to become the pastor of a church in Camden, NJ. He was told the church had very little money and only a few people. In fact, some were saying it might be best to close the church. Shortly after Hackett became pastor of the Camden church, his wife was looking out of the kitchen window one morning and saw children rummaging for food in the garbage can. That's when Hackett and his wife started serving breakfast to the children of the community. By 1934 the church was serving entire meals to over 400 people per day in the old Post Office Building in Camden, and of course the church was growing. In 1935 a lady known as Mother Johnson commended Pastor Hackett on all that was being done for children and their families, and then she asked, "What will you do for persons like myself when we will need

others to care for us?" Hackett's response was, "We will take care of you!" In 1940 the church purchased a farm in Marlton, converting the large farm house into private rooms for the elderly and the barn into a sanctuary. That was the beginning of what the Wiley Christian Retirement Community is today, with 135 cottage units for independent living, 60 rooms for assisted living, another 60 beds for skilled nursing, a preschool, a food pantry, a summer youth program and a large church building. In addition, the Wiley Christian Adult Day Services was established in 2003 in Pennsauken. Rev. Hackett not only cared for Mother Johnson but his vision launched a ministry that has cared for thousands of people that have walked in Mother Johnson's footsteps into the compassionate embrace of the Wiley Christian Retirement Community.

Maggie: In what way is ORANJ helping Wiley to fulfill its mission?

Paul: We have received many excellent ideas from other retirement centers. For example, when we announced to our residents that some CCRCs suggest that a reasonable figure for a resident to give to the Staff Appreciation Fund at Christmas was based on a dollar per day (\$365.00), the Appreciation Fund for our staff doubled over the previous year. Our antenna is always out to learn better ways to face new challenges.