

December 8, 1976

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

The holiday spirit is beginning to grow stronger and stronger as the days are counted down. We are feeling a loneliness for our family and friends that are far away so we are writing to share with you some of our experiences during the past year. Somehow Christmas brings us closer together at least in spirit and mind if not in body.

First we begin writing about our boys, because we are very proud of them. Marvin, Gregory, Jeffrey and Kenneth started the year out by playing hockey as usual at Yale. Gregory also played on his High School team until he was kicked off because they are not allowed to play on other teams while they are playing for the High School team. Greg was hurt for a while but he survived it. This is the happiest time of year for the boys because it's too cold to do many chores around the house and they can participate in many sports.

In December of last year our local pastor was taken ill and had surgery just before Christmas. He was not able to attend church during the first part of the year; and I, being the Chairman of the Board of Directors and a trustee, had added extra duties to my work in the church. During this time we all were depressed and in April our pastor passed on. By this time it was spring which helped us to get over our depression and look forward.

We joined the church in April 1962 and worked very close with the pastor, Bishop Robert Lee Harris, Sr. It was a small young mission of members from North Carolina, Danbury, Bridgeport, and New Haven, Connecticut. We worked with Bishop Harris as he grew and developed from a deacon to the Assistant Pastor, then Pastor and finally Bishop of the New England District.

Johnnie worked as a layman, served as choir president, deacon and chairman of Board of Director. Bishop Harris was taken ill and passed on April 30, 1976, after a few months of illness. His death affected the whole church and it was very hard for all of the members. A great deal of responsibility fell to me since we did not have an Assistant Pastor.

The first order of business was to help arrange the funeral. We met with the Bishop's family getting their concerns along with the church family ideas. Then we called the National Church office and notified them of the funeral arrangements.

The wake took place at the church, Ebenezer Apostolic Faith, on May 4, 1976, and the funeral was Wednesday, May 5, 1976. Bishop Jesse Handshaw was contacted to do the eulogy. Shortly after the funeral we arranged for the installation of another pastor. Our Associate Minister, Rev. Eddie Graham was installed as pastor in the summer. Just as the church seemed to get settled, our pastor resigned. Being an ordained deacon, more responsibility fell on me with internal struggle going without a pastor to lead us. We continued our duties as a deacon and president of the Board of Directors.

We continued to meet with the Board of Directors and scheduled the preaching among

the lay members; and attended Choir rehearsal along with looking for a pastor.

Bishop Harris, Sr. was one of the greatest pastor's we have ever known. Full of love and compassion and very talented. He could sing, play the guitar, dance all at the same time. He was highly anointed to pray, preach, and teach; he was full of wisdom and power. Johnnie was encouraged by Bishop Harris to learn to play the guitar. They both played together for many years in the worship service. Yes, we miss him a lot.

Everyone looked forward to spring, especially Marvin and Greg because this is their junior year in High School, and the Junior Prom was approaching. In May Greg received his driver's license just a few days before the Prom. During this month we had friends visit us from Switzerland that we had not seen in eight years. This marked another exciting moment for us all. Also in May I received my Bachelor of Science Degree from Quinnipiac College.

In June all the boys were promoted, Marvin and Greg seniors, Jeff a freshman in High School, and Kenneth our youngest in fifth grade at the Intermediate School.

We tilled the soil and planted our vegetable garden, which produced plenty of vegetables for the family and friends. Marvin did not work this summer so he painted the outside of the house while Greg, Thelma and I worked at the labs. Our other house projects this year were to install a new radiator and finish off the basement.

August is vacation time. We took the boys to Vermont and New Hampshire for a few days on our Annual Camping Trip. We had a great time; the boys did not want to come home. After that Thelma and I took off for a few days to New York, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island celebrating their Anniversary August 26,1976. Then it was fall and back to school and work again. Gregory was able to continue his part-time job this fall at Yale. He works about ten hours a week in a lab at the Medical School. Thelma and I are still working at Yale; work is going very well for us. The lab has replenished itself again and research is moving on.

Thanksgiving we spent with our family at my sister's in Bridgeport. We are looking forward to having Christmas dinner with my mother and father in Bridgeport. We hope that your year has been full and happy as ours and if we don't see you, have a Merry Christmas and a successful New Year!