

Herb, Harry, and Don

MY FATHER-IN-LAW, Herb Bleakney, worked in a steel mill. So did Harry O'Brien. Don Goehring painted signs.

Although they lived in different neighborhoods and worked for different companies, they came together on Sundays at First Christian Church in Ellwood City, Pennsylvania. Deeply committed to the church and its future, these three men served for many years (with the help and support of their wives, Lois Bleakney, Florence O'Brien, and Dottie Goehring) as youth teachers and youth group sponsors.

They committed Sunday nights to youth groups and Wednesday nights to Bible study. They devoted additional nights to board meetings, calling programs, and church softball. They gave up weekends to attend conferences, conventions, and youth outings. They spent weeks of vacation at church camp. Their efforts did not come without sacrifice—sometimes for the entire family. But these men made their ministries family affairs. Dads, moms, and kids participated.

Out of the youth groups these men led, 22 young people attended Bible college. Many of them are in vocational ministry today, while others are using their gifts in fields such as education and business.

These three men—working full-time jobs, raising families, tending to needs in the church and community—still found time to make an impact on young lives.

Dennis and Mary Herko are founders of the Herko Family Mission in Jamaica, West Indies. They write,

We thank God for Herb Bleakney, Don Goehring, and Harry O'Brien. We firmly believe that we may not be missionaries today if it were not for their ministry in our formative years. It is amazing to think that there are people from Jamaica, West Indies and other places around the world who are going to be in Heaven because of what these

men have done in the lives of young people.

Bobbi Bleakney Philson is Education Coordinator for Lawrence County Social Services Head Start in New Castle, Pennsylvania. She writes,

When I think of our youth sponsors, Harry O'Brien, Don Goehring, and my dad, Herb Bleakney, the word that springs to mind is sacrifice.

My dad is the greatest teacher I've ever known. He spent countless hours in Bible study, and he knew how to inspire us to study, too. Although he had five children of his own, he became a father figure to many more. I became a teacher too, a feeble shadow of my dad's talent.

Harry was incredibly good natured and patient with us. He listened carefully to our adolescent tales of woe and offered wise counsel.

Don was the creative genius of the group. When we hosted youth groups from other churches or took trips, he helped us turn our decorating plans and object lessons into something special.

None of these men went to college, but all were excellent students of Scripture. They understood the Great Commission and carried it out with vigor and enthusiasm in their hometown. I could never express my feelings eloquently enough to thank Harry, Don, and Dad for the guidance, joy, and depth they brought to my life.

Nick Tomeo, professor of youth ministries at Cincinnati Bible College & Seminary, Cincinnati, Ohio writes,

Passion is what separates true youth leaders and influencers from those who are merely chaperones. Herb, Don, and Harry demonstrated a passion for the Word of God and for young people. Every time one of these men stepped into the classroom, we knew they had studied. They had read, taken notes, and read some more. Their lessons were delivered with passion. They taught us about the return of Christ, living

an honest life, the importance of baptism, and many other spiritual truths. While all three had a great sense of humor, their lessons were intense, straightforward, and to the point.

They showed passion for young people. They made sure we had opportunities for building relationships—parties, retreats, youth rallies, and mission trips. They did this on their own free time. No one paid them to take care of us. We knew they loved us in Christ, because they spent time with us.

David and Sharran Pryor are on furlough as missionaries with Pioneer Bible Translators. Sharran writes,

My father, Harry O'Brien, was one of my youth leaders, along with Herb Bleakney and Don Goehring. These men gave us the best of their lives.

The things my dad taught me at home, as well as what he taught me in church with the help of Herb, Don, and others, prepared me for the day God called my husband and me to the mission field. During the 25 years we were in Papua New Guinea, my father prayed for me daily and wrote to me weekly. He supported us financially, knowing that by doing so, he was part of the work God called us to.

After having been away many years on the mission field, God has now given us time with family. My dad now has my children and their children around him daily. We see this as a gift of love from God. The only way I could hope to repay God for all he has done for me is to give myself to others as my dad, Herb, Don, and others have done for me.

Herb, Harry, and Don are worthy of honor. Three ordinary men—with extraordinary commitment—who helped change the world for Jesus Christ. We could use more men like them. ■



Shawn McMullen, editor