



# Seasons of Life: The Story of Marion McKee

as told by Marion McKee to Lois Dailey

(Brother McKee had resisted the idea of writing the story of his life saying, "I can't remember." So it happened that we had to travel in the car with him for six hours. Charles put him in the front seat and told him Lois (in back) was going to make notes on his stories and then proceeded to interview him. He remembered a wealth of events. Later, we had him review the biographical sketch for accuracy.)

The McKees had carefully saved newspaper stories, photos and other records of their life's work. While living in Southern California, insects devoured the documents and the world was deprived of the full story. These pages are an attempt to reconstruct the story with help from the files of the *Christian Standard* and several other publications.

The McKee name is of Scottish heritage. MacKey pronounced *as Mackie*. However, their name settled down to *McKee* in this country.

**In the Beginning.** On November 19, 1919, Edward Millard McKee and Lola Breeding McKee gave birth to a son. The family lived at 3501 Marion Avenue in Mattoon, Illinois. Marion Edward tipped the scale at 10 lbs. He joined his two brothers: Cedric, 14 years and Frederick, 10 years and one sister, Leagreeta, six years' old. Marion was the youngest of the children.

Ten pounds is a good size for a baby. However, Marion couldn't gain weight. He was very frail and at the age of one year, he weighed only seven pounds.

Marion told me that he had two aunts that lived thirty miles away. They would come to visit, and when they arrived back at their homes, they would call and inquire if he was still living.

But good news came when his parents finally found a pharmacist who recommended a powdered formula. They started feeding him the formula and he began to grow and mature until he was a healthy child.



Marion at age 2

How wonderful that he became a strong, healthy man, learned about Christ's claim for his life and yielded himself to the Lord. He turned his life over to preaching the gospel in evangelistic meetings. He served as minister to several congregations over the years. Yes, and the Lord has surely blessed him with longevity. (The exact numbers are a classified secret!)



The Mattoon Christian Church where the McKee family once attended.

**The Day the House Burned.** When Marion was six years old, he was awakened one morning by a crackling sound. He arose and reported it to his dad who calmly said, "It's just the wood in the heating stove." Dad got up and went outside to pump some water and as he turned back toward the house, he saw the roof was ablaze.

Immediately they called "Central" and placed about three phone calls to alert the fire department of the house fire. Marion went to Leagreeta's room to report the fire. The night before Lagreeta had taken a metal box with insurance paper and put it in her closet. When she heard "fire" she grabbed the metal box out of the closet and dashed out of the room. Lagreeta had just gone out the door when the ceiling collapsed over her bed. She had narrowly escaped being trapped in her room. What a blessing!

(Details about Leagreeta: <http://goo.gl/DWcZni>)

There was a fire hydrant about two blocks from the house. The fire crew tried to hook up to the water, but dad McKee told them there was no use, the house was gone anyway.

Back at the house, Marion's mother had managed to move a large piece of bedroom furniture called a chiffarobe. (A wardrobe for hanging clothes connected with a dresser and mirror.) Mother always had dad move it when she was cleaning because it was too heavy. However, in her duress, she had an extra surge of strength and she was able to move it from the bedroom to the front porch. Neighbor men saw what she was doing and moved it on out to the lawn.



Lola McKee

When the fire finished, there was one wall standing, complete with a picture of Marion's grandfather still intact. It was not even scorched.

Marion remembers that there was a vacant house nearby that they could use for the time being. The experience of their house burning was so traumatic to Marion that it comes back to his memory vividly oftentimes.

### **A few memories of early childhood.**

**A Spicy Question.** One day the McKee family had company in their home. They were sitting on the front porch chatting. A dog ran across the lawn and Marion said, "Daddy, was that dog a male or a female?" His dad grabbed him and took him in the house and said, "You never talk like that again! If you do, I'll have to paddle you." Marion was a fast learner and he didn't try that again. Times have changed, with risqué talk almost being the norm.

Brother McKee observed in his later years that when he was a boy, you never spoke about a lady being pregnant but you always said that she was in a *family way*. Again, times have changed.

**Pay Without Play.** Marion was six years old when he started studying piano. He took lessons until he was 15 years of age. He told of one piano teacher that weighed 500 lbs. If he went to his lesson unprepared, you still had to pay but you were sent home without a lesson. He soon learned to practice.

**Musicians Don't What?** One day when Marion was about 11 years old, his dad told him to mow the lawn. Marion informed his dad. "Musicians don't mow lawn." His dad corrected this notion.

**Passing the Barr Exam.** Marion's sixth-grade teacher was Miss Barr. He recalled that she was very strict. Sometimes she would grab him by the chin and say, "You act like you are from Pumpkin Ridge." That was her way of shaming him when he was goofing off. Miss Bar gave a geography exam. Actually, she gave it three times until he passed it. She was insistent that he learn the material.

### **Beyond Childhood**

**The Seven Sons.** Marion excelled in classical music. So it was a natural to put a band together. At one point he had a seven-piece band. They

called themselves Seven Sons of Syncopation. Marion conducted the band and often played the piano as well. Also, being an accomplished singer, he often sang.

**Seven Becomes 14.** Another point, Marion had a 14-piece band. He told of one honky-tonk where they played for some long time one night and then stopped. The fellow behind the bar threw a beer bottle and made a big hole in the drum. The bartender didn't like it because they stopped playing. They struck up the band again, but they were a drum short. They played for the rest of the evening.



Millard and Lola Mckee

**The Beginning of Change.** All of the growing up years at home, Marion had godly parents. They were both excellent Bible students. His father was an elder at Mattoon, Illinois and later moved to Peoria, IL. This was in the 1940's. He was an elder there for many years.

Although being reared in the church, Marion was enamored with the glitzy life since he had received a lot of musical training. The life of directing a dance band beckoned him and he sowed some wild oats. But Marion had a friend that urged him to come to church with him one night. He went and he listened, but he was very upset with his friend afterwards. When they were outside, he asked his friend, "Why did you tell the preacher every thing I've done?" His friend said, "I didn't. Let's go back and talk to the preacher."

Mr. O. A. Trinkle assured Marion that he knew nothing of his life and didn't even know that he was in the audience. This was very overwhelming to Marion and he was drawn to this man's preaching, so he went back the next night and again was impressed. I love the way the Holy Spirit convicts through the preaching of the word. Needless to say, Marion definitely was convicted and he surrendered his life and was baptized into Christ. A new creature in Christ, now to turn his zeal over to the Lord. Marion determined to study for the ministry. He attended *Indianapolis School of the Bible and Music*.

**Marion Loses His Bite.** One incident while attending this school happened on a Saturday when the choir was going to a concert in a large bus. The president of the school let his teenage son drive the bus. He was young and inexperienced and swerved into the left lane, colliding head-on with a cattle truck. The two men in the truck were killed instantly. Several passengers in the bus were injured, some seriously. Marion had his teeth broken out. Consequently he had to have dentures as a young man. He also fractured his arm and knee.

## The Proclaiming Years

**Preparing to Preach.** At this time, the school hosted a radio program on Sunday morning. Marion's parents always listened to it and that's how they learned of the accident. His father got him from the hospital. They put Marion on a cot and he and his dad rode in the baggage car of the train back to his parent's home.

Marion attended *Indianapolis School of the Bible and Music*. Among other schools, he went to *Burton College and Seminary* in Colorado Springs where they granted him an honorary Doctorate.

He also took Greek and Hebrew at *Life Bible College* in Los Angeles in 1953. In fact, he was the first student to recite the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm in Hebrew. He also recited the Lord's Prayer in Greek. He received extra credit for his efforts.



He also attended *Pepperdine University* where he studied psychology.

While Marion had a broad educational background, it was interesting that as a young boy, his mother taught him recitation. (Like reading out loud.) It was this early background that has helped him through the years with his public speaking.

**The Emerging Song Evangelist.** An article in the *Christian Standard* of 1940 reads:

### A NEW SONG EVANGELIST

A young man not widely known, but already proved effective in evangelistic work with some experienced evangelistic workers is Marion E. McKee, of Indianapolis, Ind. Brother McKee comes

from the church of Christ at Mattoon, Ill., and W. Graham Walker, minister of that congregation, introduces him with the following words:

Marion E. McKee, one of our Mattoon young men, is a minister of music in the field of evangelism. He belongs to a good Christian family, with a splendid parental background, having high Ideals of his own for the church and the Christian life.

Marion has had training that fits him well for leading. He has developed into an excellent leader of choruses and congregations in songs of the evangelistic type, as well as hymns of worship. As he has led a number of evangelistic song services for the writer, I speak with certainty as to his ability in this phase of the work.

He has a very pleasing tenor voice and sings very effectively in solo work. He manifests a fine sense of choice in his solos. I am sure he will make good in any field to which he may be called, and you need have no hesitancy recommending him. Anything you may do for him I will consider a personal favor.

*W. Graham Walker.*

Owen M. Walker is one of the best known of our song leaders and a veteran among evangelists. He writes as follows of Brother McKee:

We found Marion McKee to be a young man of sterling character and ambitious to be of service to his Lord. He has a charming personality and well-trained voice which he knows how to use most effectively as soloist and leader. He has had quite a good deal of experience in directing choirs, as well as congregational singing, and will make a very valuable helper to any who might wish assistance in evangelistic meetings.

Wife and I were highly pleased with his work and found his standing in his home church to be of the very finest, and therefore we commend him heartily to the brotherhood, and feel certain that he will give valuable service wherever he labors as leader, soloist and personal worker.

*Owen M. Walker, Song Evangelist. Muncie, Ind.*

Brother McKee has recently been living in Indianapolis and has been in active fellowship with Englewood Church there. This congregation in November ordained him as minister of music,

and the minister, O. A. Trinkle, endorses Brother McKee in the following terms:

I am happy to give a word of commendation on behalf of Marion E. McKee as one of our singing evangelists. While his home is in Mattoon, Ill., he is a member of the Englewood congregation. He has been with us much in our services, worked with our young people, has sung for us to the delight of all, has made his home in the home of one of our elders, and has assisted me in evangelistic work. I can give unqualified commendation as to his life and work. The eldership of our church joins me in this recommendation. While his experience has been limited, his ability and aptitude make up for that limitation. Any church desiring the assistance of a well-trained and consecrated song leader will make no mistake in calling him. *O. A. Trinkle.* Indianapolis, Ind.

**God was Preparing Doris.** While Brother McKee was attending the *Indianapolis School of the Bible and Music*, he had a very disappointing experience with a young lady. They were engaged and he had remembered her with a gift at each meeting when he was away, but this time when he came back to town and went to see her, she met him all dressed up to go out, but not with him! That was the end of their relationship.

Brother McKee was saddened by the matter, but it was at this time he realized that he hadn't been praying properly for the girl whom he should marry. He decided then and there to start praying for the right girl.

It was at the *North American Christian Convention* held at Cadle Tabernacle in Indianapolis that Brother McKee was seated on the platform with Carol Lankford. The soloist was announced as Doris McKinney. This little lady (very diminutive in size) stepped up to the platform with dark curls bouncing. Brother McKee thought, "Why would they ask a little girl to present before this group of 10,000 people? (The choir loft seated an additional 1,500.)" Then she began to sing. Brother McKee was absolutely captivated by her singing ability. He leaned over to Carol Lankford and said, "I'm going to marry that girl!" He took note when she returned to her seat. She was seated by her parents. After the service, he went directly to meet her. He asked if she would sing for an evangelistic meeting he had scheduled in a few weeks. Doris was attending *Butler University* at the time and she agreed to the invitation.



Brother McKee's next revival was in Urbana, Illinois. He was waiting at a street corner and a young man drove around at high speed and struck Brother McKee, throwing him high in the air. He suffered injuries including a broken sternum. He had to be hospitalized for a few weeks – held rigidly with sandbags. Obviously, the meeting had to be postponed and interaction with Doris was interrupted.



But finally, in Vandalia, Illinois, the revival was held and they made connections. One day Doris and Marion were taking a walk when Marion said, "I would like for you to sing with me for the rest of my life." That was in the Spring and they were married in August.

So in 1941, Marion married Doris McKinney of Brooklyn, Indiana. He was the minister at Blue Springs, Missouri at the time. Morris D. Wilson of Indianapolis conducted the ceremony. It is now 60 some years later and they are still singing the joys of life together. What a beautiful tribute to wedlock.



#### **Added Endorsement from Mr. Trinkle.**

#### **AN EVANGELISTIC TEAM**

We have previously introduced Marion McKee as a singing evangelist and he has made good with services to many of the churches.

But Brother McKee has not only taken to himself a wife, but has also begun preaching the gospel. Therefore, we are happy to present this couple as a new team, Mrs. McKee singing and leading the music.

Brethren write of them and their work as follows:

I have known Marion E. McKee for many years. I have worked with him in evangelistic campaigns, and have had an opportunity to observe his character. I regard him as an able director of music, a splendid soloist and a capable winner of souls. I know him as a consecrated Christian worker, loyal to the gospel and a faithful preacher of that gospel. He and his

wife make a good team, either as a full-team evangelistic party, or as evangelistic helpers. I take pleasure in recommending them for service in Churches of Christ.

O. A. TRINKLE,

**Life as a Traveling Evangelist.** Sometimes they concluded a revival meeting on Sunday and left right after church. They would drive to the next city where they were to begin the revival meeting Monday night. If it was a distance away, they would take a train to that city. They would ask for a berth in the Pullman car. The conductor would go through the car. If he found an empty berth, he gave it to soldiers even if it had been promised to someone else. This was during WWII and soldiers had first priority to the berths.

So Marion and Doris would just roll into a berth with their street clothes on. They would wait until the conductor had passed through the car, then get up, undress and go back to bed.

Marion McKee wrote: “During a revival meeting in Monroe City, Indiana, there was a lady attending who was a Lutheran. I went out to see her one day to talk with her and I asked her if she had a Lutheran Catechism, which she did. I said please get it and I would read out of the Catechism and then out of the Scriptures.

“I guess I must have done this for close to an hour without any comment. When I finished she was in tears and she said, “I have been lied to for over 50 years.” That night in the meeting, she confessed Christ and was immersed for the remission of her sins. It was a real victory for the Lord.

“In that same revival, there were so many people from the Brethren Church who were baptized into Christ that they had to close down the church. There weren't enough people to carry on. Again, another victory for the Lord.

**Choir Tours with a Chartered Bus.** The McKees recall they led choir tours two different years. They used Christmas vacations to schedule choir tours. The tours were to various churches of the students home towns. Various states were Indiana, Ohio and Illinois. The young ladies all dressed alike in formals and the young men all wore tuxedos. One young lady wanted to go on tours so badly, but she didn't have a trained

voice. She went home that year and took voice lessons and learned to sing beautifully. The next year she was able to go on the choir tour. She learned to sing and sign for the hearing impaired. This was Betty Allen and she assisted the McKees in evangelistic meeting for a few years.

**Baptizing the Brilliant Braggart.** One revival meeting was in Powersville, Illinois. Brother McKee had an opportunity to speak at the High School Assembly. There was one very brilliant science student that boasted, "No one will ever persuade me to believe in God." So Marion went ahead and made a presentation and when he was finished, he went home. A little later, there was a call came in where he was staying. The school principal asked to speak to Mr. McKee. He said, "We have some questions we can't answer. Would you come back for a question and answer period?"

When Mr. McKee went back and took his place on the platform, the brilliant student stood up and walked to the front. In a subdued way he said, "Mr. McKee, I don't have any questions, but I want to confess Christ." That evening he was baptized into Christ. There were seven other young people who came to Christ that night including the young man's sister.

**An Echo From the Old Crowd.** In a revival in the same area where Marion grew up, a lady approached him and asked, "Are you the McKee that once had a dance band?" Brother McKee said "yes." Then the lady told him that she had been in the audience and heard his dance band play one time.

<p><b>YOU MUST HEAR THIS MAN!</b> <b>AUGUST 8 - 22</b></p> <p>7:30 each evening (except Saturday) (no collections taken)</p> <p>A former nightclub musician and show man, but now a nationwide evangelist . . . . .</p> <p><b>Marion McKee, Inglewood, Calif.</b> WHY NOT COME?</p> <p><b>Hamburg Church of Christ</b></p>
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August of 1965

**Embarrassing Moments in the Life of a Preacher.** Two men of the church were serving at the Lord's Table. After prayer, the men lifted the linen cloth and there sat a mouse. One of the men looked down and saw the mouse, looked around and gave a weak little "Eh, heh heh" and went ahead and served the people the Lord's Supper.

At another revival meeting, this time on the state line, Brother McKee decided to do something to get the people's attention. So he stepped on the table on the floor below the platform. As he stepped on the table, it began to roll. He always says that was the night he started preaching in Missouri and ended up in Oklahoma. Through it all, there was a lesson to be learned. Never step on a table without checking to see if the legs have castors on them. When asked if he injured himself, he responded, "No, I was young."

Brother McKee recalled when he was beginning a meeting in *Westwood-Cheviot Church of Christ* in Cincinnati, he needed to walk with a cane. It was the first Sunday morning of the meeting and as he walked to the platform, he tripped on the step. He was young, and - oh, so very embarrassed.

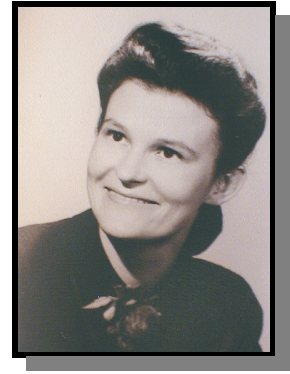
Brother McKee writes: "In another revival, a nurse was attending the evening service and would go directly from the service to the person for whom she was caring. But she was also able to rest at night and she had an alarm clock with her and this night I was preaching and exhorting folk to realize that they needed to give their lives to Christ now. I was saying, 'now is the time, I repeat, now is the time.' Well the nurse had the alarm clock wrapped up in a package and the second time I said, 'now is the time,' the alarm clock went off and the poor lady had a hard time getting the package undone so she could shut off the alarm.

On another occasion, Marion McKee describes an embarrassing moment. "I was conducting a revival in Indiana where there was a man in the church who would talk out loud. While you were preaching he would say, 'uh huh, well, then what happened?'"

"I was using an illustration of a friend who got drunk and went out on his boat in Lake Michigan, fell over the side and drowned. And the man was sitting there and listening and saying, 'uh huh, well, and then what happened?'" And when I said he fell over the side and drowned, he used an expletive out loud in the service.

**The Tangled Tongue.** Brother McKee was preaching away and he got his tongue tangled. He stated, "I'm not mad most foble Mestus, but I feak spreely." (I'm not mad, most noble Festus, but I speak freely.) *Sometimes your tang gets so tongled, you can't stalk trait.*

**Out of the Mouths of Babes.** Sister McKee often put baby Lonetta in a basket near her while she was playing the piano. One night a couple of unskilled ladies were scheduled to sing a duet. Every time they would take a breath, Lonetta would “splutter.” The McKees said it was perfect timing and so funny, but they dared not laugh.



**The Man with the Weak Argument.** The McKees had a travel trailer they used for revival meetings. It was nice to know what your lodging was going to be when you arrived in a town. In one place, a man came to the trailer and said, “If you preach on baptism, I’m going to shoot you.” Brother McKee said, “Well I’m going to preach on baptism tonight.” The man came to church armed. However, they had a sheriff in the audience and the church men were put on notice. The man sat on the first row. Brother McKee preached on baptism. The man stood up and two men and the sheriff escorted him out of the building.

**That Numb Preacher.** In a winter revival in Illinois, 20 people wanted to be baptized. The baptism took place in a river near by and Brother McKee was in charge. By the time the last person was immersed, Brother McKee’s feet were numb from the very cold water. He had to have help getting out of the water.

**Momentarily Toothless.** Brother McKee was holding a meeting in Winslow, Indiana. He had worn dentures since he was a young man in Bible College. One evening while preaching he made a gesture with his hand in front of his face. His denture flew out. He quickly slapped them back in his mouth and went on preaching. Brother McKee was invited back for a revival the next year. There was a couple of fun-loving young men in the church and Brother McKee told them in confidence, “Something happened last year when I was preaching that you didn’t know anything about.” They broke into laughter and said, “Oh yeah?”

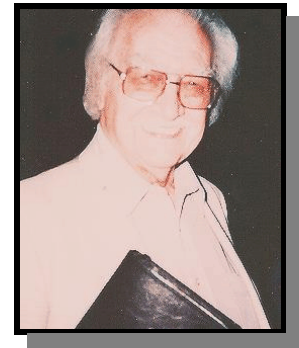
**The Pole That Would not Budge.** It was the last Sunday of a revival meeting at the *South Sacramento Church* where Darrell



Reyman was ministering. They had a church picnic at the park and afterward played softball. Brother McKee was running and did not see a pole in his line of travel and hit it full force. It crushed his cheekbone and surgery was necessary.

The first doctor that he went to couldn't take his case because he was leaving town. However, the doctor that stepped in had experienced a similar accident and a doctor had operated, leaving him with an obvious scar. The doctor assured Brother McKee that he could operate and not leave a scar.

Often doctors skilled in cosmetic surgery are prompted to learn the art because of a poor outcome they have experienced. Indeed, this doctor did a beautiful job and there was no scar. God is so good.



**Even A Politician can Recognize a Good Man.** In 1982 Ronald Reagan was president and Brother McKee was ministering in Bell Gardens, California. The President invited 200 preachers to a luncheon; Brother McKee was among them. All of the preachers traveled to Washington, D. C. and were honored there. A news story was written up about Brother McKee concerning this event.

In later years, Brother and Sister McKee moved to Oregon. He ministered at the *Myrtle Creek Church of Christ*. In the late nineties he had a serious throat condition and lost his voice completely. The therapist that he found was a lady who gave him stringent limitations about preaching. He could not speak out loud for several months. When we would get together, he could only whisper. Finally, by degrees, he was permitted to do a bit of preaching. Starting out, he could speak for 10 minutes and Doris would time him. Of course, he made the most of his 10 minutes. When there was Scripture to read, a member in the audience would be selected to read it. Although, a lot of time has elapsed, he still preserves his voice by having others read.

**He fell again, but not for Doris this time.** Along in the Spring of 2002, Brother McKee was at the church building by himself. He was caring for some things and stepped wrong and fell off of the platform, landing on his shoulder. When we asked, "How did you manage to get up?" he said that he just had to lay there on the floor and groan a while, he hurt so bad.

Finally he gained enough strength to get up and drive home. Doris then drove him to the doctor where they X-rayed and found he had broken his collar bone. It was very painful, but soon he recovered and was back in form again.

**Editor's Observations.** Charles and I always thrill when we hear this brother speak. He has a great command of the audience, even in his advanced years. He often used silence to get his point across. A short time ago, Brother McKee was given the text in Matthew 7:21 and following. He drove home the passage by stating the saddest words we could ever hear from our Lord: *I never knew you*. He made several comments, punctuating them with that quotation, complete with thoughtful pauses. It was very effective.