

Chapter 3

"I WILL GO BEFORE YOU"

I enjoyed that day with Don Evans and often thought about him in the following months, little dreaming how our paths would cross again.

I continued my studies in Mathematics and Physics with the hope of going on to university the following year. The requirements for entering university were that you had to choose four colleges, rank them in order of preference and submit that list to a central agency. They would then inform you of the academic standard you needed to attain in each subject, for each of those university colleges to accept you as a student. Birmingham was considered to have the best faculty for Mathematics, my forte, so it topped my list, followed by Cardiff, Swansea and Aberystwyth, colleges of the University of Wales.

Many hours of 'swotting' preceded the dreaded two weeks of Advanced Level examinations in my three subjects, Pure Mathematics, Applied Mathematics and Physics. It was with great joy, and a little surprise, that I heard some weeks later, that I had passed in all subjects and with sufficient grades to meet all the required standards. Until that time I had had no doubt that Birmingham was my goal, but now other thoughts began to surface. A new destination was coming to the fore in my thinking. Birmingham was "too industrial", Cardiff was "too near" and Swansea was becoming "the #1".

So it was that I wrote to the pastor of the Elim Church in Swansea asking his assistance in finding 'digs' for a new university student. I was rather naive in thinking that a pastor has time for such house-hunting so I was still without an address when a letter arrived which shook me into action.

'We regret that we shall not be able to send you a grant towards the cost of tuition, books and accommodation for the coming year, if you are unable to provide us with your address in Swansea. The deadline for such information is'

The date was the following Wednesday, five days away !

Though Swansea was only thirty miles from my home, I had been there but once in my life - an afternoon visit with an uncle to watch a cricket match. The day the letter arrived I was on my way again, hoping to find the Elim Church and its pastor. I left the bus at the city centre and entered a telephone kiosk, hoping to find an address and telephone number for the Elim Church office. Though searching thoroughly through all possible avenues, I found no Elim church listed in the directory. Two young ladies standing outside the kiosk, saw my concern and offered their help. I doubted they could assist me as I told them my dilemma. However, much to my surprise, not only did they know the location of the pastor's home and the bus I would need to take to get there, but they were able to encourage me, both of them being believers also! I remembered that the Bible spoke about the possibility of our 'entertaining angels unaware'.

When the pastor realised the purpose of my visit he was very apologetic as he had forgotten to follow up my request. A cup of tea did little to calm the anxiety I was beginning to feel as he rummaged through his desk looking for a list of potential landlords. He had prepared this list when my letter had arrived some weeks earlier, but the busyness of the pastoral office had taken over and my request had slipped from his mind. A few minutes later, with the list in his hand, we got in his car and started toward the eight homes where he thought digs might be arranged.

"This first lady has twin boys" he said as we turned into a lane alongside the university park. "One of them is going to Bible College and the other will be starting university with you. I haven't got her name on my list but we might as well start our search by asking her, seeing we are passing so close to her home."

I thought, "How foolish! No mother is going to let a stranger take the place of one of her twin sons."

Despondently, I sat in the car while the pastor talked with the lady in the house. He didn't look very hopeful as he returned. I felt even less hope.

"Come in. She wants to meet you." he said with little enthusiasm.

I entered the home and listened as the lady of the house expressed her doubt that her sons would approve her giving lodging to a stranger. However, she would ask them and let me know. Of course, that was of little value to me as I was already at the deadline date in determining my university home. In reply to the pastor's question as to the whereabouts of her sons, she said, "Russell is at the university and Don is up the street at the local store."

"Don?" I said, my memory flashing back to the cricket game almost a year before. "Did you say Don? Did he captain the Swansea Grammar School cricket team last year?"

"Yes!" came the reply as a familiar figure walked in through the front doorway. He wasn't in cricket whites but his face bore the same pleasant grin that I remembered. "Mum, this is Gareth. He's the boy I met at Cowbridge. The one I told you about. The new Christian!"

Don hugged me and I saw his mother hold her arms open towards me also. I had found a new home and a family that would soon become as close to me as any natural family could ever be.

I began to wonder. "Was God at that cricket match? Was He already planning this accommodation?"

I am convinced He was! While I was planning an education at Birmingham, He was preparing a home at Swansea.