



Alfred Youngberg and Bertha Oss Youngberg and their family of 6 children, four of whom became foreign missionaries. Back row, Left to Right: Olive, Russell, Margaret, Stephen. Center row, Left to Right: Bertha Oss Youngberg, Alfred Youngberg. Front row, Left to Right: John Blanchard, Gordon Alfred, c. 1938.

Photo courtesy of John B. Youngberg.

## Youngberg, Alfred (1889–1958) and Bertha (Oss) (1891–1984)

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### JOHN B. YOUNGBERG

Dr. John B. Youngberg served 25 years at Andrews University, where he chaired the Religious Education department. He and his late wife Millie authored 35 books, served 2,700 couples in Marriage Commitment Seminars, directed Family Life International for 25 years, founded WIN! Wellness, co-authored by their son, Wes, and translated into 31 languages, and trained leaders in six continents.

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Missionaries to India themselves, Alfred and Bertha Youngberg, belonged to a family line of missionaries. The four generations of the Youngberg-Oss family produced 25 missionaries. The first generation had two foreign missionaries, the second generation--counting spouses--nine, the third seven, and the fourth seven.

Alfred G. Youngberg was born November 20, 1889. Both Alfred and his older brother, Gustavus (Gus), became teachers, and in 1912 they taught in country schools near Coleman, South Dakota. One day, a Seventh-day Adventist evangelist visited the area and rented Gus's schoolhouse for his evangelistic meetings. Both Gus and Alfred attended the meetings, loved what they heard, and were baptized. Immediately, their life dreams changed. Both studied for the ministry and became pastors. The Youngberg siblings, Alfred, Gus, and their sister, Ruth, graduated together from Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Early in his ministry, Alfred assisted in evangelistic meetings in Burke, South Dakota, where he got acquainted with

Bertha Oss, the organist for the meetings. Bertha had been born February 19, 1891. The oldest sibling of Ole and Theresie Oss, she had a unique conversion. "I had been trying to be a Christian," she acknowledged, "but it seemed to me I should sometime have a session . . . with the Lord and be sure my sins were forgiven. I was thinking about it as I was husking corn that day, and then the thought came to me, 'Why delay?' So I asked the Lord right there as I worked . . . and I felt that He heard and did forgive right then." As Bertha and Alfred became better acquainted, they fell in love and married on December 25, 1917.

The three Youngberg siblings later became missionaries. Gus married Norma Rhoades and they served in Borneo. Alfred and Bertha went to India. Ruth married Theodore (Teddy) Oswald, and they worked in Peru. As time passed, the Burke Adventist Church members saw many of their youth leave to serve the Lord in other countries. Among them were a number of the Oss siblings. John Oss and his wife, Olga, spent 30 years in China. Gordon Oss and his wife, Alpha, went to Trinidad. Melvin Oss and his wife, Mae, received a call to western India. Yes, the Burke Church was smaller, but blessed, as their youth responded to the great commission.

Alfred and Bertha Youngberg spent seven years in India. After studying the Bengali language, they settled in eastern Bengal where Alfred directed the Gopalgunj Training school, also coordinating educational and church programs in that part of India, later called Bangladesh. Three of their six children were born in India.

When Alfred and Bertha lived in India, sickness and epidemics were rife. Alfred suffered repeated malaria attacks. When he walked by the cemetery, he wondered how soon he might be buried there. Their son Russell had a bad case of dysentery. Bertha asked her husband where they would bury him. Alfred replied that he was going out to get the best doctor he could and that Russell would live. And he did.

In 1929 Alfred and his family returned to the U.S.A., and soon after the return, baby Gordon was born. He could hardly gain weight and was sickly. His parents chose not to return to the mission field. They gave priority to raising their children, and four of them became foreign missionaries. After Alfred taught Bible at Plainview Academy in South Dakota, the Youngberg family transferred to the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. Six Loma Linda-trained doctors practiced there which undoubtedly influenced the Youngberg children, since four of them became physicians.

Strongly believing in Adventist Christian education, Alfred founded Valley Grande Academy in Weslaco, Texas, and bussed in grade school and academy students from Edinburg and Brownsville, a total of 200 miles each day. All the Youngberg children had an SDA education but with much sacrifice. The six children paid their way by selling Christian books during the summers.

Stephen, the oldest son, became a medical doctor and spent 40 years in Honduras. He is buried there with his wife, Verlene, in a grove at the orphanage and nutritional hospital at Peña Blanca that they gave their lives to establish. Their daughter, Aileen, and grandchildren, Anita and Stephen, have carried on and strengthened the work left to them as a legacy of four generations of missionaries.

Alfred and Bertha's oldest daughter, Margaret, and her husband, Earnest Horsley, were both physicians and worked in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico (1958-1963) at the Bellavista Hospital. Another son, Russell, specialized in physical medicine and then taught at the Loma Linda University School of Medicine. Then he and his wife, Dot, served at Montemorelos University Medical School, Mexico (1980-1987), where he taught anatomy, neurology, rehabilitation, and physical medicine. Their daughter, Susan, went as a student missionary in 1971 to Brazil, first as a surgical nurse in Belen, and then aboard the *Luziero III* on the Amazon and also on the amphibious plane "Leo Halliwell" to remote Amazon jungle villages. Susan married Dr. Sam Harboldt, and their son, Bjorn, was a student missionary in Africa in the countries Zambia, Malawi, and Tanzania (2007-2008). Susan and Sam's daughter, Elise, was a missionary in Haiti, Panama, and the Bay Islands of Honduras. Again, four generations of missionaries.

Russell and Dot's second daughter, Joy, married Dr. Drew Wagner. He had been a student missionary (1976-1977) in Gopalgunj, Bangladesh. Joy and Drew served in the Gilbert Islands on the Abemama Island Atoll of Kiribati (2009-2010). Their daughter Janna was a student missionary in Chad (2011-2012) and later worked with "Doctors Without Borders" in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, and Mali.

Alfred and Bertha's youngest son, John Blanchard, left for South America at age 23 with his wife, Bonnie. They spent 15 years in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Bolivia. John B. founded the Pathfinder Clubs in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil. He also taught theology at what is now River Platte University and was president of what is now the Adventist University of Bolivia at Vinto. When Bonnie suffered a glioblastoma in Bolivia, the family returned to the United States. After Bonnie passed to her rest, John B. married Millie Urbish. John and Millie while professors at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, and after retirement, traveled to numerous foreign countries giving seminars on marriage commitment and healthful living.

John and Bonnie's older son, John Nielan, with his wife, Ivette, served in Guam for seven years. John N. was principal of the Guam Adventist Academy, and Ivette directed the early childhood education program. John B. and Bonnie's younger son, Wes, and his wife, Betsy, spent 14 years in Guam, where Wes directed the lifestyle medicine program at the Guam Adventist Clinic.

Wes and Betsy's son, Dakota, spent six months, largely in the jungles of Nicaragua, practicing international rescue and relief. Daughter Madie spent her second year of college as a student missionary, teaching elementary school in Saipan. She also worked on mission projects in the Philippines and Peru. Katie, the youngest sibling, participated in evangelism in Thailand (2017) and in Kenya (2018). The three children have gone on multiple mission trips to Mexico. So, again four generations of foreign missionaries.

In their later years, Alfred and Bertha pastored in Albany, New York. While there it was their privilege to give Bible studies to the great-great-granddaughter of William Miller, the primary voice in the Great Advent Awakening of 1844, and to baptize her in 1944, 100 years after the Great Disappointment.<sup>2</sup>

Alfred Oss died January 23, 1958. The epitaph on his tomb reads: "He that believes in Me though he were dead yet shall he live" (John 11:25).

Bertha Oss died Dec. 15, 1984. Her tomb has inscribed on it: "Thou shalt call, and I will answer" (Job 14:15).

## **SOURCES**

*Atlantic Union Gleaner*, September 8, 1944.

Youngberg, Bertha Oss and Melvin Oss. *The Saga of Mr. and Mrs. Ole Gullikson Oss*. Self-published, 1970.

Youngberg, Bertha Oss and Olive Hoogenboom. *Alfred Grover Youngberg and His Family with Tables of His Ancestors, Descendants and Collateral Relatives*. Self-published, 1975.

## **NOTES**

<sup>1.</sup> Bertha Oss Youngberg and Melvin Oss, *The Saga of Mr. and Mrs. Ole Gullikson Oss* (Self-published, 1970).?

<sup>2.</sup> *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, September 8, 1944, 3.?

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