

## *My Life Story, Reverend George Gordon Harris*

*(written for audio-taping in June, 1968, re-written May 31, 1973)*

*Typed by Paul Harris -Jan.1994*

In this, my 85th year of life, I feel that I have much to be grateful for. Beside my continued fine health, I appreciate the affection of the four families of our children, and their partners in life, Evelyn and Angus MacLeod, Gordon and Justyn Harris, Alan and Dorothy Harris, Rod and Shelagh Harris, and our fourteen fine grandchildren, twenty-two persons in all. You are all very dear to me and to your mother and grandmother Agnes, who has gone on into eternal life before us. Two of the grandchildren, Patricia MacLeod Gordon, and her brother, Gordon, have already entered upon fine adult careers, and during the next few years, I shall be hearing of the choices by the younger grandchildren of their life work, and preparation therefore, and also their choices of life partners. I know they will bring honour and happiness to their parents, as well as to themselves.

My life began on August 21, 1883, in the Methodist parsonage in Teeswater, Ontario, a village about 120 miles northwest of Toronto, in Bruce County. My father, being a Methodist minister, we moved every two or three years. This was considered normal life for Methodist ministers, the 'itinerancy' it was designated. Each man, it was believed, had qualities that appealed to certain members of the communities. The family histories of my parents, Alexander G. Harris, and Sarah Margaret Williams, both of Ingersoll, Ontario, are recorded in their own handwriting in my Book of Memories, as also the family histories of my wife's father, Norman McLeod, and her mother, Rebecca McKaig. Their family homes were in the same part of Ontario as my birthplace, Norman's near Lucknow, and Rebecca's near Cromarty, in Huron County. My parents made our home, for my one brother, Percy Dewart, and three sisters, Mabel Mildred, Ada Margaret, and Winifred Evelyn, and myself, a place of genuine affection, and rational, firm discipline, and therefore of pleasant memories. One of mine is, - hearing my father's strong voice singing familiar favourite hymns, such as, "Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing my Redeemer's praise", in the kitchen, next to my bedroom, as he

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made the porridge for breakfast. Of my mother, I have the picture of her busy Saturday morning's baking of pies for the week's use. She was an expert on pies. She also loved to play the organ for our singsongs, Sunday evening after church. My high school education was acquired in Central Collegiate, London, Ontario, in which city my father had pastorates for five years.

Nearing my 17th birthday, 1900, I obtained my senior matriculation standing, then worked at odd jobs for six months haying, peeling apples in an apple evaporator (in Lucknow), etc. - the going wage was .75 cents to a dollar per day of ten hours. Another summer holiday job I tried was peddling books, scopes and views, and portraits of the Royal family, travelling on my bicycle in the rural area around Lucknow, where my father served from 1900 to 1903.

In January, 1901, the month of the death of Queen Victoria, and the accession to the British throne, of Edward the 7th, I began my Arts course in Victoria College of Toronto University, choosing Philosophy and Psychology as my honour subjects, with a view to entering the Christian ministry later on. By May, 1902, I had completed my sophomore year, and then had to break my course to earn the needed money. On my 19th birthday, Aug. 21, 1902, I boarded the harvester excursion train at Lucknow, for Regina, NWT. (now Sask.)- fare \$12. At Selkirk, Manitoba, I spent two or three days with brother Percy and his wife, May Harding, and their infant son, George. Percy was then principal of the Selkirk Public School.

Having graduated from the Regina Normal School just before Christmas, 1902, I was lucky to obtain the position of teacher of the LeCain School, No. 224, 16 miles north of Grenfell, at the going salary of six hundred dollars for the school year. Providence led me to the hospitality of the Norman McLeod home, where Norman and Rebecca lived with their four sons and five daughters on their two thousand acre ranch in the lovely Qu'Appelle Valley, at a spot named Hyde, Assiniboia, NWT (now SK). Norman, after working on CPR construction from Lake Superior to the Kicking Horse Pass, had

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homesteaded at Hyde in 1883, the year of my birth and his marriage to my future mother-in-law. In due time after teaching for nearly two years, I returned to the University of Toronto, and completed my B.A. Course in May, 1906, winning the Gold Medal in Philosophy. Then, returning to the Qu'Appelle Valley, I claimed the second daughter, Agnes McLeod, for my beautiful and talented bride-to-be. I served as student minister near Wolseley - 1907 - 08. After Agnes had spent a year in Havergal College in Winnipeg, while I was studying theology in Wesley College there, we were married in Sept. 1909, in her home, by my father, Reverend Alexander G. Harris (with my mother also present). Other ministers attending were Rev. Hugh Dobson, Methodist, and Rev. Adams, a Presbyterian - a preview of the Union to take place in 1925.

Our honeymoon trip was a long one, across the wide Pacific Ocean from Vancouver to Shanghai, China, via Japan, in one of the old CPR Empresses (India 6,000 tons), then up the Yangtze River for two thousand miles to Chengtu, SzeChuan. It took us from Oct. 28, 1909, till the middle of Mar. 1910, to reach our destination. Most of the time was spent on a houseboat on the Upper Yangtze, pulled by trackers. Our happy, hopeful group of young missionaries, commissioned by the Canadian Methodist Church, led by Rev. James L. Stewart, included a doctor, a dentist, teachers and evangelists - six couples and one bachelor. Our ranks were broken at Chunking by the sad death of the bride of our respected leader, Belle Duncan Stewart. My sister Ada and her husband, Daniel Kern were in the same party, and put in two terms in the educational work of the West China Mission. We witnessed the Revolution of 1911 - 1912, by which the Manchu Imperial Dynasty, which had ruled China since 1644, was ended, and the Republic begun. The students and teachers joyfully welcomed the new era, glad that they could now imitate America with a government of the people, by the people, for the people, the motto of Dr. Sun-Yat-Sun, the first President, who was an admirer of Lincoln.

During the Revolution, we had to take refuge in Shanghai, with hundreds of missionaries from the interior of China. Agnes, during the

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winter of 1911-12 had the opportunity to take part in a Concert given by the Shanghai Philharmonic Society, composed largely of foreigners, singing the new operetta, Hiawatha. After a couple of months of work in Famine Relief, with the Red Cross Society, in Kiangsu Province, for which I received a medal from the Governor, I recovered from an attack of typhoid fever in the high mountain resort of Kuling, south of Kiukiang, where the Fergusons (Dr. Will and his wife) and Harris's shared a bungalow. In Sept. 1912, we returned to Chungking, this time, with the Fergusons for travelling companions, we were able to travel all the way by steamship, navigating the Upper Yangtze, above Ichang to Chungking, in Captain Plant's pioneering vessel, the Shantung. Evelyn, our firstborn, went through the experiences of the flight down river to Shanghai, during the Revolution, and the return to our High School work in Chungking.

Our term of work as educational missionaries, lasted from the fall of 1912 to the spring of 1916. Agnes taught music, organ and vocal, while I taught English, World History, and Christian education. Our school, situated a few miles north of Chungking, was known as the "Chiu-Djing, or Seeking the Heights Boys School", grades seven to twelve. Our grads, all professed Christians, usually went on to the West China Union University in Chengtu. (Now, 1973, it is operating as a People's University, Gov't. controlled). Our two older sons, Gordon, July 1913, and Alan, July 1915, saw the light of day in bungalows on the hills south of Chungking, where we lived during the hot days of summer. Mother's (Agnes) solo singing ability was always greatly appreciated by fellow missionaries, business people, diplomatic personnel and military or naval men, at both church and social events. I recall vividly an occasion in the summer of 1914, when at the summer home of the British Consul at Chungking, at a social evening, Mrs. Harris was asked to sing a solo for the gathering which included the crews of the two British gunboats which patrolled the Yangtze River in those imperialist days, and frequently were at anchor at Chungking. Your mother sang first the favourite - "My Task", and when heartily encored, gave the audience the Irish song about the girl whose heart was won by her suitor's boast about his fine litter of

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piglets, - "the little pigs had done it, Oh, the dear little girl". How those British boys did applaud the beautiful young matron, the missionary lady with such a good sense of humour. Our term of work in the Chungking School came to an end in April 1916, when our furlough came due. We were suitably farewelled by staff and students, who presented us with lovely scrolls, and bade us a final good bye on the shore of the Little River below our home, as we boarded the small houseboat. Mr. and Mrs. Bert Rappe, our American colleagues also went home on furlough that spring, and we met them later in Canada. We crossed the Pacific on the; Empress of Asia, (16,000 tons) while the First World War was going on, feeling safe under the protection of the Japanese Navy, as Japan was then our good ally. Having decided finally not to return with our young family to China, and to continue in the teaching profession, we spent a couple of years in rural schools in Saskatchewan - Eden Grove, near Wapella, - Wheatwyn, near Markinch, then, in the summer of 1920, settled in Moose Jaw, which was to be our home for more than a quarter of a century. Here, I joined the Central Collegiate staff. Rod, our youngest child, had arrived in Grace Hospital in Winnipeg, during our years stay in that city, in Jan. 1918. My sister, Ada Kern and her husband completed two terms in the Mission School work in Sze-Chuan, and returned to Canada with their one daughter, Muriel, in 1925. Dan then resumed ministerial work in Manitoba. Two medical missionary cousins of mine, Henry Williams, and Wallace Crawford, put in long years of service in Sze-Chuan. Today I am sure that the Spirit of Christ or of God, whom missionaries strove to reveal in their lives and labours, is present in Red China (1973) e.g. Mao's motto -"Serve the People".

Moose Jaw proved to be a fine little city for the bringing up of our family, and in spite of the depression of the thirties, we managed to have a happy life in our good home in River Park beside the Moose Jaw Creek, fine for swimming, canoeing, and skating. We had nice neighbours, good schools, and pleasant church associations, in Zion Methodist, later Zion United. All four children finished their high school years in Moose Jaw, while I served as teacher, vice-principal, principal, inspector, and vocation guidance officer (the first in Moose

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Jaw), from 1920 to 1946. Mother, in addition to doing a wonderful job in running the household in difficult times (e.g. we had a salary cut from \$3000 to \$1800 in the year 1932), worked hard in Zion Church Women's Organizations, (especially the WMS), in the Women's Canadian Club, the Wilson MacDonald Poetry Society, the YWCA, and the IODE, yes, and the Eastern Star Lodge. In the IODE, she spent many hours during the Second World War, '39 to '45, preparing parcels for the boys overseas, among whom were our three sons, all in the RCAF. Alan won the Distinguished Flying Cross for bringing home to Britain his badly damaged Lancaster, by flying low over the English Channel. How thankful we were when the War ended in the summer of 1945, and our boys came home, to rejoin the fine wives they had married during the war years, - Justyn Montgomery, of Denver, Colorado; Dorothy Wright, of Winnipeg, Manitoba; and Shelagh Williams, of Toronto and Vancouver. Now we began to expect news of arrivals in the growing clan, to add to the two young people growing up under the good care of Evelyn and Angus MacLeod. (Patricia and Gordon) Twelve more grandchildren were welcomed between the years 1946 and 1959, - David, Debbie, and Matthew to Gordon and Justyn; Paul, George Edward (Ted), Peter, Evelyn Adele (Patsy), and Susan to Alan and Dorothy; Wendy, David, Judith (Judy), and James (Jim) to Rod and Shelagh. Having completed nearly forty years of teaching, I decided, with Mother's consent, to offer our services for pastoral work in the United Church, to commence in the summer of 1946 - I had been ordained as a minister (Methodist) in China, in 1914. Between 1946 and 1954, we served United Churches in Rouleau, Saskatchewan, Rapid City, Manitoba, Naramata, Peachland/Westbank, British Columbia. In Naramata, beside Lake Okanagan, we had the privilege of working with Rev. Bob McLaren, in his newly begun Christian Leadership Training School. In Peachland, we were close to Kelowna, where sister Ada spent some time living in the Orville Dunlop home - his wife is our niece, Beth Thompson, sister Mabel's only child. So we had some pleasant family parties, augmented by Alan, Dorothy and family, who arrived in the Okanagan Valley in the summer of 1953. In 1954, we began our retirement life in a nice bungalow, constructed of two older cottages for us, by a

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neighbour and friend, Laurie (Mr. Lawrence, a carpenter) on the shore of the Lake, with a lovely view northward of fifteen miles towards Peachland. We planted a little orchard of some sixty trees, apricot, peach, cherry, and pear, and had a good irrigated garden. The year 1955 was a memorable one, with many visitors, a lot of work for Mother. Only a year later, in June, 1956, her health was evidently deteriorating so we decided to sell our Naramata property, and move to Rapid City, to be near to our only daughter and her husband. (we did well financially in the sale). In Rapid City, we acquired a good old house, 680 Fourth Ave., with plenty of land (five lots). For two years, Mother was able to do some travelling, so we visited with all three families, Gordon and Justyn in Buffalo, NY., where he had become a professor in the Chemistry Dept. of the University; Rod and Shelagh in Idaho Falls, Idaho, where Rod worked as Food Chemist with the American Potato Company, and Alan and Dorothy in Kaleden, B.C. where both had jobs with the local fruit industry. I might say that Gordon and Justyn had spent about five years in Australia, where Gordon was professor in Melbourne University. The big event of our life in Rapid City came in the summer of 1959, when the families gathered to celebrate our fiftieth wedding anniversary, a very happy occasion, indeed. I meanwhile, served two years as Mayor of Rapid City, 1958 - 1959. Your mother and I had the privilege of attending a social function in Brandon, with other municipal officials and their wives, when the Queen, and her husband, toured Canada in the summer of 1959. Soon after our celebration, in August, 1959, Mother became an invalid, needing constant care. Fortunately, she did not suffer much pain, just gradual loss of understanding and ability to do things. She was not difficult to take care of, and I was well able to do everything required, with the good help of Evelyn and Angus. After a two month stay in the Brandon Assiniboine Hospital, she passed away quietly in her sleep. She was buried in the beautiful Rapid City Cemetery, on May 26th, 1964. The gathering together of so many of our own family, and of relatives, was a great help. Her sister, Effie, always a close pal, and older sister, Margaret Sarkissian, stayed with me for the week of the funeral, which I appreciated. Then, within a month, Effie joined Agnes "on the other side", and I had a vivid dream

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soon after, of their meeting in the great reception hall of the Beyond. In another dream, Agnes broke off our conversation, seated together in a lovely park, with the abrupt good bye - "I must be going on now, George". And that is my faith, that we continue to go on. (Now, re-writing this story in May, 1973, I can record the passing of Margaret Sarkissian, very suddenly, on Christmas Day, 1972, in Edmonton).

In these critical times of rapid change, and the spread of knowledge and ambition among the millions who have been in the night of poverty and ignorance, (e.g. China and India, Africa and South America), we can still have faith in the universe, God's House, our mysterious and wonderful home; in His Goodwill or Love, as revealed in the life and teachings of Jesus, and in the slow but sure coming of the Kingdom of Truth and Love and Life and Light on this earth, when, "Earth shall be fair, and all men glad and wise; Earth shall be fair and all her people one." "For the love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind, and the Heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind."

And now, May, 1973, I have reached my 90th year, thanks to good heredity, sensible care of my health, my dear departed wife's good cooking and loving companionship for 55 years, all gifts to me from the God who is Love. During the past five years our grandchildren have nearly all reached manhood and womanhood. Two more have recently entered the married state, Evelyn Adele (Patsy), teacher, with Mark Rawkins, gas company technician, of Penticton, B.C.; George Edward (Ted), welder, with Mariette Mawhinney, secretary, of Okanagan Falls and Vancouver, B.C. (My Grandmother Harris was Marietta Hyde). Debby (Buffalo, NY) and Wendy (Idaho Falls, Idaho) have both graduated in Arts, and will soon enter careers, Debby as college teacher of French and Drama, Wendy as Medical Laboratory technician. David (Buffalo, NY), after three years in the USAF, with term in Vietnam as mechanic, will take up Geography; David (of Idaho), is in a medical course in the University of Salt Lake City, Utah. Paul is in the wholesale grocery business in Penticton, B.C.; Peter is with the B.C. Telephone Co. in Vancouver. Still to choose their life work are Susan (18), Judy (17), Matthew (19), and James (13).

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Gordon MacLeod, ex RCMP, is with the Dept. of Indian and Eskimo (should be Inuit) Affairs in Edmonton; Patricia Agnes Gordon and her husband, Ron, a civil engineer with the Manitoba Highways Dept., live in a nice home in Winnipeg, with their lovely children, Keith, 4, and Donna Leanne, nine months. (all fourteen mentioned). I have recently been making family pedigree or history charts, of ancestors and descendants. Taking my parents, Alexander Gordon Harris and Sarah Margaret Williams as generation 1, there were five in generation 2, all married; eleven in generation 3, ten married; twenty-three in generation 4, ten married; and now sixteen in generation 5. To produce generation 5, Harris's have intermarried with 26 other families - no wonder we are all one human family, since such intermarriage has been going on for thousands of years. In 1969, Angus MacLeod reached retirement age, and he and Evelyn fortunately acquired at a good price, a comfortable brick home in the centre of Rapid City, much to my satisfaction. My own choice was and is to remain in Rapid City for the rest of my days in this life, since it is in the Rapid City Cemetery, a beautiful spot, that my body will be interred. In 1969, I bought, with Henry Solomon's help, in Dauphin, a good mobile home, and placed it on my west lot under the spreading maple trees, where I have a fine view of the River Valley to the west, and can see the cattle grazing in the Hyndman pasture. Here I am much closer to nature, the handwork of the Creator than I would be in a city apartment. And I can still enjoy the hobby of gardening. My house tenants, five different couples in less than four years, have been fine people, and I am pleased to see young children enjoying the lawn. Now, with the increases in both Dominion Gov't. Old Age Security, and Saskatchewan Gov't. Teachers' Pension, and the house rent, I am in a better position financially than ever before, despite the rise in the cost of living. I preached probably my last sermon on August 27, 1972, in the Grenfell United Church, on the theme "Can there be reconciliation of Christian, Jew and Moslem? Yes, we all agree that God is Law and Love and Light, and keep on seeking to know Him better, and to love what He loves and do what He would have us do." In a book of 22 handwritten sermons of 1907 - 08, I have one on "Faith and Works" which I preached in the Grenfell Methodist Church, in February, 1907,

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just before going into my year of probation on the Greenville Liberty Circuit or Charge, south of Wolseley. And now, as I approach my ninetieth birthday, I repeat my thankfulness to the Infinite and Eternal Source of Intelligent Goodwill for the Love that has blessed my life, the love of parents, teachers, ministers, doctors, brothers, sisters, and cousins of my own family and the MacLeod family, my beloved wife, our children and grandchildren, our nephews and nieces, and now the great - grand generation, already 16 in number. Praise God from whom all blessings flow, for all the gifts He does bestow, Life Light, Law, and Liberty, and boundless Love to eternity. May 31, 1973

### *Obituary*

George Gordon Harris was born on Aug. 21, 1883 in Teeswater, Bruce County, Ontario. He graduated from Central Collegiate in London, Ontario, in 1900, at the age of 17 years. He then taught school in 1902-04 at Lecain School # 224; 16 miles north of Grenfell, Saskatchewan at the rate of \$600.00 per school year. He returned to Victoria College in Toronto and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in May, 1906. He also won a Gold Medal in Philosophy. He studied Theology at Wesley College. On Sept. 15, 1909, he wed to Agnes McLeod, in her home, by his father, Rev. Alexander G. Harris. Going to China as a missionary had been in his mind for a some time. He was sent as a delegate of the Student Volunteer Movement to Nashville, Tennessee. Speakers there helped make up his mind and when his fiancée' agreed to go to China, the decision was made. Their 'Honeymoon' (late Oct. 1909 - mid Mar. 1910) took them from Vancouver to Chengtu, Szechuan, China where they served as missionaries til 1916. Reverend George G. Harris' sister and brother-in-law, Ada and Reverend Daniel Kern were also in the same party of missionaries. The quartet spent the first year learning Chinese and then took up their duties. Mr. Harris taught history from Myers History and religion, both in Chinese and English to grades 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12; in the Union High School, American and Canadian Methodist of Chungking, Sze-Chuan. He has mementos that bring back memories of his years in China. A small flag is reminiscent of a railway that ran from Hankow, west to Ichang over the mountains. The corruption of

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this railway partly led to the Revolution of 1911. They witnessed the Revolution of 1911-12 by which Manchu Imperial Dynasty(1644-1912), was ended and a Republic begun. Reverend G.G. Harris received a medal from the Governor for famine relief service with the Red Cross Society in Kiangsu Province. The two couples got permission to build a cabin up in the hills where they could get away from some of the heat. A farmer allowed them to build it on his land. One night, the young people watched, with the farmer, a procession of bandits going to raid a village. The farmer paid the bandits for protection, so the four missionaries had nothing to fear from them, Mr. Harris said. The educational missionary completed his theology degree by correspondence in 1914 and was ordained in China. Three of their four children were born in China; Evelyn (1910), Gordon (1913), and Alan (1915). Their fourth, Roderick (1918), was born after their return to Canada. Reverend G.G. Harris and his family, after returning from China in 1916, taught at rural schools for about 2 years in Saskatchewan. At Eden Grove, near Wapella and at Wheatwyn, near Markinch. In the summer of 1920, they settled in Moosejaw, where they remained for more than 25 years. In the early 50's they moved to Peachland then Naramata. Between 1946 and 1954, Rev. Harris served as the Minister in: Rouleau, Sask; Rapid City, Man; Peachland ; Westbank, and Naramata, BC. He also taught at The Naramata Centre. In June of 1956, his wife's health deteriorating, they moved to Rapid City, Manitoba to be near their only daughter and her family. Rev. G.G. Harris served as Rapid City's Mayor for 2 years, (1958-59). Rev. Harris's wife passed away May 22, 1964, in her 76th year. He preached what was probably his last sermon on Aug.27, 1972 in the Grenfell United Church, at age 89. In March of 1981, in his 97th year, Reverend George Gordon Harris passed away in his sleep. He was survived by 3 children, (son Alan died in 1973); 14 grandchildren, and 8 great grandchildren. The total Great grandchildren count reached 21 by 1987 and could be higher by this date. (Jan.2003) Rev. G.G. Harris was prolific writer, and submitted many letters to magazines and newspapers. He kept all his faculties to his demise. The Reverend George Gordon Harris left his mark on this

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world, and his achievements should be looked upon with great pride by all of his ancestors.