***Lives of love and service at home and abroad***

David R. Hiebert

Retired physician, Robert Martin of York, PA complied a book about his life. It includes lots of photos; a chronological telling of his life’s story, and marriage to Nancy Rudy; 18 years of medical missionary service in Nazareth Israel; Nancy’s death in September 2019 [pre COVID-19]; and a postlude by he and Nancy’s children and other excerpts. And if it’s chronological, the first item has to be the date of Bob’s birth, in August, 1938 in York County, PA.

[“Truth in lending” disclosure] I was part of the Nazareth Project Board for a dozen years and served with Bob for a decade on that board. I’m not mentioned in the book, but I am in one of his pictures.

Bob and Nancy were in Galilee the following times for a total of about 18 years: 1965 to 1968, 1971 to 1978, 1987 to 1995.

After buying the book, look at the pictures. There are lots included. It will be like looking through a family photo album on one of your visits to their home. The only thing missing will a family member beside you adding interesting tidbits and responding to your questions. But you might get lucky if you know one of them and can have them sit with you. Some have gone on, but others might be enticed to enliven your evening.

Don’t buy the book for its photography. Included are many of what I call “deer in the headlights” type. People staring into the camera with eyes wide open—from before this current era where that type of photo is commonplace.

Also included are vacation photos. They took lots of times to reconnect with each other, family and friends. But Bob said, “It didn’t seem worth a chapter in the book, to say, ‘We took a vacation in Florida.”. These extras are kind of plopped in randomly, it seems.

Some of the photo captions are inadequate. With the caption probably composed while working on the body text, the context of the photo gets lost. And if it is important enough to include the picture, names, places and date are good.

And don’t buy the book if you are expecting great war stories. Though the 1967 Six Day War zipped past and the Gulf War started during the times the Martin family was in Israel, they do get a chapter. But “the glories of war” are not glorious to a healer.

In choosing how you read the book, be sure you read the chapter on Nancy’s cancer diagnosis and death before you read the children’s reflections. Karen’s reflection is especially moving with that the previous chapter in mind.

As Bob grew as the youngest in a large family, he notes that he did not take easily to the title of baby of the family. And in my experience, he never did act like a youngest according to birth order theory. He was more an initiator.

The family love and support Bob felt gave him confidence to do adventurous things. He participated in a National Institutes of Health human nutrition experiment as a post college student. He tackled hospital administration when his training was as a physician. He took months-long Hebrew language study to prepare him for relating to both workers and government officials in Israel. And later, after moving back to York County, he did kayaking on the Susquehanna River.

One evening, Bob and Nancy were exploring the river by kayak, but Nancy did not follow his lead. They ended up separated with Bob getting in a few extra miles to get around an island. The extra time separation—in the dark—worried Nancy enough that she called emergency responders. But they were safely reunited before any tragedy struck.

If you are familiar with the “Six degrees of separation” theory, I would project that three degrees of separation might apply in Bob’s case if you are a Mennonite. He just has had contact with so many people. As one example from my congregation, the book includes photos that show Scottdale Mennonite Church members David Cressman in a work party at the Nazareth Hospital and David Hiebert as a board member with Bob. It also includes background information on the film *Brother, Brother* produced by Sisters and Brothers with Mike and Ginny Hostettler, who were also part of the Scottdale community.

The book also discusses the Hostettler’s role in the subsequent development of Nazareth Village. The Village is developed on land managed through Nazareth Trust EMMS, the umbrella organization that also includes Nazareth Hospital and Nazareth School of Nursing. Due to pandemic cations, the Village is temporarily closed.

Currently the hospital staff includes about 700 employees, the largest employer in Nazareth. It is built on the foundations laid by Bob Martin as a hospital administrator, and Nancy Martin, who developed and supervised the nurse education program for the Nazareth School of Nursing. When she began her work, it was essential to get local nursing staff trained, as the Israeli government had begun restricting visas for workers from other countries. The 18 graduates in the first nursing class, were quickly employed at the hospital or in government positions.

On the negative side, Nancy felt that her work in the education development of nursing curriculum was not given enough credit—she found no credit—when the work was borrowed for use in other schools of nursing.

And impact: Supporting this work definitely extends the healing ministry of Jesus to the region. In a study of neonatal health, the area served by the hospital had a lower mortality rate for both mothers and babies. Priceless!

The Nazareth Project is another key connection for the hospital. Developed in the 1970’s, this tiny organization collects and transmits individuals’ donations to support the hospital chaplaincy program and special causes. But their main benefit to the hospital—after the spiritual support and connection to Jesus’ healing ministry—is the capital raised through managing USAID grants. This money, from a special foreign aid department of the USA government, has been used for larger capital projects, like adding a surgical floor to the hospital and currently in process, an upgrade for the dialysis unit.

Bob currently lives in York County, PA in a home he and Nancy built on land obtained from their daughter, Karen.

*Together in Galilee*

Robert Martin

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<https://www.masthof.com/collections/new-books/products/together-in-galilee>

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For more info on various entities see:

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