

Harold Wenger 2025 09 23

Lunch with Harold & Elba at their home in Rocky Mount, Va

Alan: Harold is the cook?

Elba: No, not all the time. This is the only dish that he's so proud of this. Okay, I say. He thinks people won't like my food.

Harold: So, here's salad. So suit yourself to have salad first or soup first or both first. And there's some bread, some of my bread actually. And crackers, as you like.

Elba: I was thinking about making my tortillas and Andean food, but no, he's gonna cook.

Harold: And Kelly, I was very pleased to hear that his Elba was coming along.

Kelly: Well good, thank you for letting me be here with him.

Alan: Well, she likes to ride as much as I do, so. It is a beautiful day.

Kelly: Especially back roads, a lot of our adventure is just involved...

Harold: Come sit down and I will give thanks. Thank you, Lord. Thank you for this beautiful day. We rejoice in your love and mercies and this opportunity. We give thanks for the food and all these gifts to Christ our Lord. Amen.

Elba: Kelly, you say you are new in the Mennonite church?

Kelly: Well, my first husband was Mennonite, so yes, I married into it.

Alan: What's your birthday, Harold?

Harold: February the 15th. Nineteen... Forty-three. Forty-three. So I'm 82.

Alan: So Howard's two years younger than you, right?

Harold: A year and a half. He tries to catch me, so on October the 1st, he'll turn to 81. You know, getting close.

Alan: Where were your folks living when you were born?

Harold: So, I was actually born in Denbigh. While my father was in alternative service in '43. They got married and he was working in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Somewhere, I don't know where. Here in Western Virginia, I think.

Alan: It was near Luray.

Harold: Luray. That's it, Luray.

Alan: There was a CCC camp there. And he...

Harold: So he was working there and I guess he had left his new Elba with her parents. And I was born there. And then he moved to Maine. I don't remember why, but anyway, he continued in his alternative service as a conscientious objecter. Working in Maine as a milk tester. And we moved up there. So my mother took me and Howard on the train to Maine. For a year or two, I remember.

Alan: When did he get out? When did he come back to Fentress?

Harold: Probably in 45. I don't have those dates very well in mind. And we moved around. I remember living in Walter Shaddinger's house for a little while. Oh, really? And down by the airport in a house that Grandpa owned. And then in Herbert's house, across the street from us. Herbert's house, I don't know whose house it was. Or Mary and Charlotte's, I'm not sure.

So we lived there for a while while my dad was building the house at 1032 Bedford Street. Chesapeake VA 23322.

Alan: That's right.

Kelly: Whoa! You got it.

Alan: And it's 4821831. Was your phone number

Harold: Whose phone number?

Alan: Your phone number.

Harold; Oh my goodness. Say that again?

Alan: 4821831. Ah!

Elba: Good memory.

Alan: No. A lot of phone calls.

Elba; Wow. Before, how we have to know numbers.

Alan: Well, Harold was too much older for us to really be friends. But I was friends with Howard. I was friends with Sidney. And I was friends with Preston. In fact, Howard and I were very close friends. Still friends. Still see each other.

We spent a lot of time and many Sunday afternoons at the Wenger house.

Harold: When I was still there?

Alan: Mm-hmm. In fact, you had in the upstairs beside your bed. You had a little

bookcase with maybe 12, 13 books in them. And I was so impressed. Wow, he had all those books. And so it inspired me to start buying books. And by the time I was done, I had almost 3,000 books. But then we moved four times in one year and the books almost all disappeared. And my Elba found some way that they didn't make it to the next house.

Kelly: That's right. He's working on building back up that level of books again.

Alan: These are all on church history that nobody's going to be interested in. Did you graduate from Great Bridge?

Harold: Mm-hmm. 1961.

Alan: And then went to college at EMC?

Harold: Mm-hmmm.

Alan: Is that where you met Christine? Where was she from?

Harold: West Liberty, Ohio. Do you know where West Liberty is?

Alan: Not really, vaguely. Isn't that where Olin's, where Carol Slabaugh came from?

Kelly: Plain City.

Harold: It's about an hour northwest of Columbus. Not very far from Rosedale, actually. Do you know where Rosedale is?

Alan: Yeah.

Harold: I never went to Rosedale. But of course I was in West Liberty quite a number of times, chasing after her and then visiting her parents.

Kelly: Must have worked.

Alan: When you went to the Mount Pleasant School for the first grade, was it in the present location or was it still down in the old store?

Harold: It was in the old school for a period of time. I don't remember how long. So that would have been in 1949 when I started school. I was six in 1949. I started school at the old location. Across from Clayton Bergey's.

Alan: Who was your teacher?

Harold: And I can't remember if I spent the whole year there. Do you know when we moved?

Alan: January 1950.

Harold: Sounds right. That means I was there just a few months and moved to the new

location.

Alan: Who was teaching then? Do you remember?

Harold: Give me a couple of names.

Alan: Sarah Weaver or Wenger, married Chester Wanger?

Harold: I don't think so.

Alan: Okay. She might have already been gone by then.

Harold: When did they start that school?

Alan: I think it was 1942, 1943 or 1943. Because they started it when the building became available because Dwight Miller had moved his store down to the new building by the main gate at the Navy base. And when he did that, that building became available and Chester Wenger and some others pushed hard to let's go ahead and start a school and use the store building and remodel it and have a school. And so it was 1942 or 1943.

Harold: Was it the store before that?

Alan: Yeah.

Harold: Dwight Miller's?

Alan: Yeah.

Harold: Really?

Alan: Yeah. It had been a store. The Millers moved in the community in 1900 and it was already a store then because E.R. Miller bought the store and the property around it and then Dwight eventually inherited it.

Harold: Well, this guy knows a lot of history.

Kelly: I know. Is that the building on Lockheed?

Alan: Mm-hmm.

Elba: His memory's amazing. I don't remember much.

Alan: Well, I was living then, so.

Harold: Did you go to Mount Pleasant School for 10 years?

Alan: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Harold: Yeah, me too. And then Great Bridge for two years.

Harold: I remember visiting Dwight Miller's store and I was impressed with the slogan somewhere there. "I had no shoes and I complained until I met a man who had no feet." Yeah.

Kelly: That did make an impression if you remember it all these years later.

Harold: That's why I've never complained. Hardly ever.

Alan: So, after you graduated from EMC, you went to Africa then?

Harold: Mm-hmm.

Alan: Why?

Harold: I felt it was a call of God. And a few years before that, maybe when I was around 10 or something, Rhoda Wenger spoke at our church about her work in Africa and it spoke to me deeply. And from that point, I had a desire and interest in going to Africa as a missionary.

So, in college, I was oriented that way. Met Christine, talked her into it. And MCC was sending a lot of teachers to Africa at that time.

Alan: Mm-hmm. Is that what you went as, a teacher?

Harold: Mm-hmm. 1966.

Alan: Which country did you go to?

Harold: Zambia.

Alan: How long were you in Zambia then?

Harold: One term to three years. And then MCC asked us to go back. Well, we were considering going back and they asked us to be country representatives in Sierra Leone. Which was just opening as a new place for MCC service.

Alan: So, what did the country representative...what were your responsibilities in that role?

Harold: Just administration of the handful of MCC volunteers in Sierra Leone. So, we were there three years.

Alan: So, you were there under MCC, not under VMM?

Harold: MCC.

Alan: Okay. Who was head of MCC then? Do you know? How long were you in Sierra Leone?

Harold: Three years. So, our first son Merlin was born in Zambia and Tisa in Sierra

Leone.

Alan: What are they doing now? What are Merlin and Tisa doing? Tisa's a Yale professor of religion.

Harold: Okay. So, Merlin is a highly skilled machinist in Oklahoma with a company that makes hydraulic pumps. And Tisa's teaching in university at Yale.

Alan: She's a professor of religion?

Harold: Yeah. And then Aaron lives nearby here. Our last son, Aaron.

Alan: That's why you moved here?

Harold: Uh-huh. That's a half hour from here.

Alan: What's he do?

Harold: He does software programming for American Airlines. He started in Phoenix. They transferred him to Dallas. They promoted him and transferred him to Dallas, to their headquarters. It was America West, which was bought out by...America West?? Yeah I think so...bought out by American Airlines. So, they transferred him to their headquarters in the Dallas area.

So, he and his Elba moved, stayed in Dallas several years. And then she's adventurous. She found a place near...She was looking for a place near my brother Howard. And found a place here in Virginia. Howard lives about an hour from us. So, they did not find one very close to Howard, as they had tried at first. But they came to Virginia several years ago. About five years ago.

Alan: And you had no reason to stay in Tucson after that.

Elba; Yes, I did.

Harold: I moved all the way from Mesa. You know where Mesa is, right by Phoenix?

Alan: Yeah.

Harold: All the way from Mesa to Tucson to get her.

Alan: Ah.Ah.

Harold: And then... We are unstable people. You know my history, I lived in five different African countries. Several states. In Arizona, we lived in Tucson about three years. And we wanted to move. And we went to Hemden, Connecticut, very close to Tisa. And lived there two years. And then she wanted to go back to Arizona. Arizona was too hot. Connecticut was too cold. And her grandson was in Tucson.

Elba: I had two sons in Tucson. And the only grandson I have is in Tucson. So that

was difficult.

Harold: So we were back, then we moved back to Tucson after two years. These are, man, as you know, these are big moves.

Kelly: Yeah, they are.

Harold: And we stayed five years. And it is very hot. Man, it is very hot. And anyway, we came to visit in this area. Elba had been thinking about moving to North Carolina, close to some of her friends and a cousin. And we came to visit. Aaron and Megan...

[Melba: The weather in Arizona is terrible.

Harold: Came to visit Aaron and Megan, and they really enticed us to move to this area. So, who knows?

Kelly: So you've been here six months?

Harold: Since March the 3rd.

Kelly: Okay, so you have not been through a winter here yet.

Harold: You know, we might stay here. I took her to Tanzania last year to visit. And to her surprise, she liked it. And made friends.

Alan: Well, you might wind up in Tanzania.

Melba: Nice people.

Harold: But we would like to go back.

Alan: So, after you were in Sierra Leone, where did you go after Sierra Leone?

Harold: Pittsburgh.

Alan: How long were you there?

Harold: Six years. Pastoring. And then two years in Altoona.

Alan: Still in the Mennonite church?

Harold: Yeah. And then from Altoona... At Altoona, Christine and I had a going-back-to-Africa sale. And we went to Tanzania.

Alan: And what was your role there?

Harold: Bible teaching. Mainly Bible teaching with the Mennonite church. Six years.

Alan: And then what?

Harold: Actually, I made a mistake. I forgot. We went to Swaziland for six years.

Alan: That was after Sierra Leone?

Harold: Yeah. After Sierra Leone, I had seminary. I went to seminary at Elkhart. One of my memories about college is that I was interested in going to Goshen for a variety of reasons. And I was getting ready to go when Brother Clayton Bergey warned me to be careful about liberalism. Do you remember him?

Alan: Yes, very well.

Harold: Does that sound like him?

Alan: I t does. And I know that the eastern Mennonites had a suspicion of Goshen that dated from the very beginning of the Eastern Mennonite school. As part of some of my research, I went into the archives at the library in EMU and was reading letters from A.D. Wenger and George R. Brunk and L.J. Heatwell and others of that era and various things. And I was amazed at how irritated they could get with each other and accuse each other of not being spiritual or being off as far as the Bible.

Harold: Who was that in conflict?

Alan: All of them, especially George R. Brunk, Sr.

Harold: With?

Alan: Well, he didn't like Goshen, period. I mean, he was ready to shut Goshen down and in fact did shut it down or was instrumental in helping it get shut down I think from 1920 to 1923, something like that, so they could reorganize it because it was too liberal.

But I know some of the letters there were about C.K. Lehman. Was C.K. Lehman still there when you were in Harrisonburg? Chester Lehman?

Harold: Well, I think when I started, he was still president in 1966...no, in 1961. And then a year or two later, Myron Augsburger became president.

Alan: Well, when they first started the school, he was one of the early professors, but he was the only professor who was amillennial. Everybody else was premillennial and that created some conflict.

Because, I mean, historically the Mennonites didn't care one way or the other. Didn't really preach it, but then when A.D. Wenger went to the Bible school, the evangelist from Chicago who was so instrumental, I can't remember his name now. He's got a...Moody. D.L. Moody. He went to the Moody Bible Institute.

Harold: Who did?

Alan: A.D. Wenger, Sr. And it was at the Moody Bible Institute he picked up premillennialism.

And so, from history I've been reading, apparently he was the first Mennonite preacher to preach on premillennialism in Pennsylvania before he came down here. And it caught fire and so all the leading Mennonites were very quickly premillennialists where before they hadn't cared one way or the other. And Chester Lehman got in hot water because he said premillennialism is heresy.

And of course that caused some problems. But just reading the letters and the way they talked to each other. And George R. Brunk and A.D. Wenger were very much on the dress code and keeping things plain and keeping the Mennonites separate. There is a letter that George R. Brunk wrote to A.D. Wenger who was his brother-in-law and A.D. Wenger's sister. So they were not only co-religionists, they were family. But anyway, he was writing this letter to A.D. Wenger who at the time was living in Fentress and was a minister at Fentress about family stuff, something about some money for their mother-in-law. And then at the very end of the letter wrote: "One of the Eby girls visited us last Sunday and she had the most heathenish Babylonianish collar.

I trust you will look into that". I don't know what a Babylonian collar was but the women weren't to wear collars at all at that time on their dresses. And so A.D. Wenger was supposed to take care of that. Brunk further wrote, "our Eby's did the same and we handled it."

Harold: So Goshen College and Eastern Mennonite College were competing and Eastern Mennonite was more conservative from the beginning. It started as a high school around 1900?

Alan: 1920.

Harold: And grew into a college and Goshen started a little before that.

Alan: About 10 years before, I think.

Harold: There were lots of theological problems, conflicts at Goshen and it was forced by the church was forced to close down for several years?

Alan: Two or three years. What did you think of Brother Bergey? What was your impression of him?

Harold: My memory is that he was a very stern, serious, old man who gave short sermons sometimes. I don't remember very much.

Alan: Which of the church leaders did you have most interaction with at Mount Pleasant?

Harold: Well, A.D. Wenger Jr. was my teacher in high school for two years and Phil Miller was most important to me in my teenage years.

Alan: How come?

Harold: He was pastor when I was a teenager struggling with growing up issues adolescence and also struggling with my father and living at home and was able to get some good counsel and support from him.

Alan: How did your dad get into the plastering? How did your dad learn the plastering trade and get into the plastering business? Do you know?

Harold: How he got into the plastering business?

Alan: Yeah, or how he learned how to plaster.

Harold: I think he was pretty desperate to support his family and looking for every opportunity he could find. So after he did welding in the shipyards...I don't know what prompted him but he decided to go into business for himself and he learned plastering by working for somebody else for a short time and then started his own business. Worked very hard at it and then developed it into... became a building contractor as well, on a limited scale but he worked as a building contractor for a number of years and was an amateur architect, drew his own plans was very proud of planning his houses to be well designed.

Alan: How would you describe your dad?

Harold: It's a very big question but I remember him as a very hard worker, a lot of fun playing games with us when we were young also remember him unfortunately making things hard for my mother.

Alan: How so?

Harold: Oh by very heavy expectations and demands on her imagine one baby after another and all housework she had to do. First of all she had to make breakfast very early in the morning for him going to work and then all day with her growing family and then he was not in the church for many years and mother always took us to church. And then one day my grandpa Abram Wenger came to visit and appealed to him very strongly on spiritual issues, his relationship with the Lord he said I can't go home without knowing that you are returning to the Lord. But he did anyway. But it must have been a few months after that. It was actually when I was away from home that summer on the trip to Australia that he went to see brother Phil Miller... and what happened??..made things right? made his confession and returned to the church in the summer of 1961 when I was 18 right after high school

Alan: Somebody told me that your dad did not like music

Harold: He really didn't appreciate music and normally would go to church at the last minute or after the opening hymns. He went for the sermon. Primarily. Scripture reading and sermon

Alan: The way they put it was that John would be in church but if there was going to

be a chorus or some singing he got up and went home

Harold: Sounds right

Alan: And I had never observed that so I was curious so I left home

Harold: I left home you know. In 1961 I went to college and he paid for college the first year and then he said he could not afford to send me back the second year and I would have to work so I worked, I worked for him in plastering and also did some of my own because he didn't have enough work for me at that point so I worked very hard in that summer of 1962 and then went back to EMC for the second year where I met Christine in her first year no, her second year she started the year I was out

Alan: Well that made the hard work worthwhile then. How would you describe Phil Miller brother Phil

Harold: Phil Miller was was very very good with young people and very important to me in my spiritual development and youthful struggles. Yeah very supportive very friendly encouraging to me "God has something special for you Harold" I remember that.

Alan: Interesting. Who else was... oh yeah A.D. Wenger Amos Wenger was still preaching then too wasn't he? I have been trying very hard to find a recording of his sermons because he had a unique way of speaking that made for me anyway it made him very difficult to follow but I'd still like to hear one of his sermons again now to see if I can make any sense of it at this late age but I've not been able to I found sermons that brother Berge preached that Phil Miller preached and other people preached but nothing from A.D. Wenger yet .

So you went to...what are the African countries you went to again in order?

Harold: Zambia and Sierra Leone and then seminary and from there to Swaziland Swaziland in 1975

Alan: What was your job there?

Harold: Bible teaching with independent African churches under Eastern Mennonite missions for 6 years. That was my assignment but I was pulled into the council of Swaziland churches as secretary. It was the time of riots in South Africa around Johannesburg where the young African students were rebelling against the white rule and learning Afrikaans and then the police cracked down and many of them fled to neighboring countries so the council of Swaziland churches was organized by Catholics and mainline Protestant churches partly to assist those young people that had run away to Swaziland and we started a little school for them which MCC was supporting because MCC was in Swaziland and we were together. And then when the council was organized they looked around the circle and said now we need a secretary. The chairman was the Catholic Bishop Zwane and he looked at me and he said here here's my man for secretary he lives close to me in Manzani he'll be our secretary. I said

“Bishop thank you but I came to serve churches not to take a leading role like that.” He said, “since you've come to serve you will do what you are told.” So that was so funny and that became my main work then for several years continuing with Bible teaching with independent churches but also working as secretary for the council of Swaziland churches; an interesting adventure

Alan: I would think so and then after Swaziland is when you were a minister in Pennsylvania?

Harold: Yeah, at Pittsburgh and Altoona. And then to Tanzania and Mozambique

Alan: What was your role in Tanzania and Mozambique.

Harold: Bible teaching.

Alan: (To Kelly) Didn't Maggie go to Mozambique

Kelly: Yeah Nevin and Christina Mast were there at one point. But yes Maggie went there, my daughter, my youngest daughter went to Mozambique for a couple months

Harold: What's her name?

Kelly: Maggie Miller.

Harold: When did she go?

Kelly: Maybe about 5 years ago 5, 6 years ago

Harold: Yeah, we were there from 1996 to 2002

Alan: Yeah would have been after that.

Harold: Swaziland was a very interesting adventure too with the council of churches and working with the Catholic Bishop and learning to know others in the Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran churches, etc

Alan: How did that change your outlook

Harold: I would say that I became more ecumenical, generally more appreciative of those churches and the Bishop was a very impressive young man, very gifted and died in an accident unfortunately, while I was still there I think. A shame. And in what outlook are you talking about

Alan: Exactly that how did it affect your viewpoint or your thoughts of other churches other than the Mennonite church

Harold: Yeah, so in that I would say opened my eyes to working with other churches and appreciating them but in Tanzania I was strictly devoted to the Mennonite church, very passionate about it and assisting the church with Bible teaching

church planting and learned a little bit about other churches in Tanzania but in Mozambique was more significant more significant ecumenical experience with the Anglican church.

Alan: How so?

Harold: because before us Jim and Donna Shenk and Fremont and Sarah Regeer had been in Mozambique and worshipped with and worked closely with the Anglican church and we followed in that tradition with a very fine pastor Pastor Carlos Mazzini. By the way the leaders spoke good English as well as Portuguese. We were struggling with Portuguese, of course, so we appreciated Father Carlos Mazzini very much as a wonderful pastor and also gave some assistance with projects to the Anglicans and Catholics. Learned to know some Catholics and had a priest as my spiritual advisor in Maputo, Mozambique which was very helpful. But the experience of the Anglican church was really pivotal for me because I was introduced to the liturgical worship, the sacraments, the centrality of the Eucharist, the communion. So when we came back I pastored at Stuart's Draft Virginia, Mennonite church.

Alan: Which one? Stuart's Draft Mennonite church?

Harold: Stuart's Draft Mennonite. I was already somewhat uneasy with the Mennonite church.

Alan: because of what?

Harold: Because of my ecumenical experiences and yeah especially with the Anglicans but also with the growing acceptance of same-sex marriage in some quarters of the church and soon after I started pastoring Stuart's Draft a certain woman from Harrisonburg a Mennonite woman whose name I forget; she stopped by to see me in the church office to ask how I was doing. She was like a a very well trained and a good woman, good counselor so she came to give me support. Stopped in and she said "do you have a spiritual advisor?" Well not really. "Well, I have one to recommend to you. He's a Catholic priest, well experienced counselor, advisor, teacher, retired about an hour's drive away and I began going to that priest for counseling on a regular basis. Wonderful.

So I'll finish the story because I'm Catholic now I'll continue. Christine and I moved to Arizona in 2005. We were in the Mennonite church in Chandler Koinonia. Koinonia Mennonite church in Chandler right by Mesa and Phoenix and we were devoted there for several years. And then I was really troubled. I was confused about my own call to pastoring at the time we moved and still in Arizona but the church chose. Well I had various misgivings about the church and the direction of the larger church. The church chose a young man who was poorly qualified to be the new pastor and meanwhile I had enough reservations about the church that I decided to take leave for a while.

Alan: You were there just a member, you weren't part of the pastorate?

Harold: I decided to take leave for a while and visit other churches and for some reason

I was led to go to Holy Cross Catholic Church in Mesa as my first to visit. The date was 10-10-10; 10th of October 2010 and at that mass I felt the presence of Jesus so real so powerful I was just overwhelmed and very soon after that I went to a retreat at a Catholic monastery and then I went to see the lady in charge of the instruction class called RCIA which means Roman Catholic Initiation, Roman Catholic Initiation for Adults and got into the class and was reading and reading and praying and talking with Christine a lot. She was very supportive all the way and I was confirmed in the church at Easter 2011.

One of the most significant parts of this journey was learning to know the Virgin Mary and the apparitions of Mary who has continued to make appearances and give messages to the visionaries calling people back to her son "come back to my son" and these apparitions which these apparition centers which I visited now Mexico, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Lourdes in France where Bernadette spoke with the Virgin Mary in 1858, Fatima in Portugal 1914 beginning of World War I. Three young people had these apparitions of Mary in Medjugorje in Bosnia Herzegovina that was the first one I went to that is more contemporary started in 1981 and these messages are so Christ centered. Mary is always prayed come back to my son, back to my son, pray pray pray. If you knew how much I loved you you would cry for joy so learning to know the Virgin Mary was one of the most important parts of the journey and that started during that time of searching after I visited Holy Cross.

Gefore that I knew nothing of the apparitions of Mary. Mary the Virgin Mary and her apparitions were a key element in the church throughout history. Very very important .Mary is a great hero, heroine greatly admired and appreciated and we are praying Holy Mary Mother of God pray for us sinners. It's always pray for us pray for us. It's a wonderful experience. So I've been to Medjugorje two times to Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico with her two times

- Alan: Where is it in Bosnia?
- Harold; Bosnia and Herzegovina used to be part of Yugoslavia.
- Alan: Which city?
- Harold: Medjugorje Medjugorje
- Alan: (To Kelly) Did you go anywhere near there?
- Harold: Near Mostar?
- Kelly: Hh yeah I was in Mostar.
- Harold: You were there?
- Kelly: Yeah just in June
- Elba: Very close to Mostar

Harold: I went there right away after I became Catholic I went with a tour group to Medjugorje in the fall of 2013.

Elba: And then we went twice.

Harold: Christine and I were going together. We planned very carefully and as I said she was very supportive all the way so we were planning together to go to Medjugorje and she got sick with cancer we postponed the trip and in November I went with a tour group anyway and left her with friends to look after her while she was struggling with cancer

Alan: What kind of cancer did she have?

Harold: Ovarian. So I went there by myself. Elba and I have been there twice and we've been to Lourdes and Fatima so visiting the apparition sites of the Virgin Mary has been a wonderful blessing for me I cannot describe how wonderful

And meanwhile I was reading church history of course and if you read church history from the early centuries you can't, as John Henry Newman said, you cease...you cannot continue to be a Protestant if you read church history. So for us Mennonites the key to history is the Anabaptist Reformation starting in 1525 and the Anabaptist leaders and Anabaptist theology, that's the key. For the larger church, for the historical church, it's Jesus, it's Jesus, the apostles and those appointed by him that continue. And to read church history is to find out those early church fathers are describing the Catholic church of today exactly the same theology, same leadership, the same sacraments, amazing that have continued all these years centuries so it's a very different perspective on history

Alan: What kind of blowback did you get? What kind of feedback did you get from Mennonites after they found out that you had converted.

Harold: Nothing very negative. Surprise of course

Alan: Yeah I'm surprised.

Harold: We went to mass in Tanzania in Arusha for nine o'clock mass on Sunday morning. Walked across the street from our motel we waited outside while the people from the first mass left. They had started at 6:30, must have been a thousand people there, second mass a thousand people, the third mass another thousand people and the choir was the best church choir I've ever heard. That church

Elba: Almost three hours the mass.

Harold: Just full of millions of people millions of Catholics in Tanzania Kenya Nigeria Nigeria's one of the strongest Catholic churches in the world.

Alan: One of the more conservative too isn't it

Harold: When I was there six years I never visited a Catholic church. Oh yeah, I did

one time for the Bishop's funeral. Otherwise I never went to a Catholic mass. Learned very little about it so we went last year we had a chance now to visit the Catholic church

Alan: Did Christine ever join the Catholic church too or she stayed in the Mennonite church?

Harold: She was very positive and was going to mass with me quite a bit and then she got sick and her friends, her Mennonite friends, were so supportive she said I can't leave while I'm sick and they're praying for me like this. We also had a Catholic prayer group praying with her in our home. But no, she stayed with the Mennonite church. Maybe that was more than you wanted.

Alan: No, no, no, that's exactly I love hearing the nitty gritty because I've been Methodist and Mennonite you what I've been Methodist and Mennonite but not Catholic. not yet not yet

Harold: Well who knows nobody knows. Have you read any early church history?

Alan: Yes I have.

Harold: Anything special or any special...

[Alan: I've been reading one now and I can't remember the writer. Not just church history but also... well I just finished reading Thucydides Wars and I'm part way through Josephus in his book writings and of course he's not a church leader but who was it I just finished Herodotus Herodotus yeah Herodotus the wars but that's Greek that's Xerxes that's Persia Persians versus the Greeks a cowboy story really but I just ordered a book on a second century Christian writer and I can't remember the name that I'm getting ready to start but he was a Christian bishop somewhere in Turkey.

Harold: Clement, Ignatius, Irenaeus

Alan: No it wasn't one of those no it might have been Clement but anyway I haven't started it yet because I can't read but so much and I've got too many books. One will strike my fancy and I say "I've gotta get this."

Kelly: We've added three bookshelves to our dining room just to hold all of his books.

Harold: We belong to a small Catholic church here with an English mass and a Spanish mass so we go back and forth. We have friends that are going to Our Lady of Nazareth Catholic Church in Roanoke. I've been there two times and Elba and I went with them together this last Sunday. Beautiful! Must hold about 500 people with three masses on Sunday. Just beautiful. Christ in the worship all the way. There's several important features including scripture readings three scripture readings and a song at every Sunday mass the third scripture reading is a gospel reading always. The mass, the sacrament of the mass is so important. And this church, beautiful mass, beautiful choir.

Elba: Is too beautiful. Our church is humble. I prefer this one

Alan: So how did you two meet?

Elba: In Arizona.

Harold: On line

Harold & Elba: Catholicmatch.com (in unison)

Elba: I had been alone, raising my children for...I had been alone for more than twenty years. So when I children left I was very lonely and I was very deep involved in the church. With my children's father is was not good. My marriage was annulled. My children wanted me to find somebody, they didn't want me alone.

I said, yeah, this is a good idea. But I never, in church, know nobody, and years were passing by, so 10 years probably prior to meeting him, I started asking God for somebody.

Alan: So you met this nice Catholic boy who wasn't Catholic at all?

Elba: This one? No, he was Catholic. I thought that I was going to teach him, because I was the teacher of the RCIA class for newcomers, and I was in charge of many Catholic things in the church.

It was a good thing. He was struggling with death of his Elba, and I was a psychologist. I wanted to help him, but less than six months later we got married.

Kelly: Oh, there you go.

Elba: Very good, very good. Wonderful companion. I'm very happy. God bless me. Yes.

Harold: So this church in Roanoke has three, has a Saturday evening Mass and three Sunday Masses, and they're full house. We went to another Spanish Mass at a different church. That was packed out.

Elba: And we have gone to the Martinsville. The thing is, our priest has two communities, two different parishes. Not many priests in the Catholic church.

We had that problem. And in this area, they needed a Spanish-speaking priest. So they brought this priest from Spain, originally from El Salvador, but he was living in Spain. So he came from Spain, and they gave him these two parishes. So that one, the other one is larger, the community, so he has services on Sunday.

Harold: Saturday evening Mass is here. Sunday morning, Martinsville.

Elba: Yeah, but we are used to go on Sundays, so we don't get it. We have to go to

other churches. Not rarely, though.

Alan: So to what do you account the increase in interest in religion, Catholic and all, apparently, by young men in the past year or so?

Harold: Say that again?

Alan: There seems to have been an increased interest in religion, especially by young men, over the past year, kind of across the spectrum.

Harold: Yeah. I don't know. I don't know.

Elba: Do you think that it has increased? Because we don't have that many priests.

Harold: Right. We still have a shortage.

Elba: All our priests are older. Very few young.

Harold: One of the other features that I appreciate is the international nature of the church. So there's less patriotic nationalism in the Catholic Church, because the head is the Pope in Rome, and it's international. There are still many, many Catholics who are nationalistic, patriotic, and MAGA people.

But overall, the church is, you know, this influence of the bishop and the international church, the Pope in the international church, is very significant in the teaching of the church. Last Sunday was the first mass after the killing of Charlie Kirk. And our mass was so beautifully Christ-centered, all the way. With a message and scriptures about compassion for the poor. Not a word about Charlie Kirk. Nor should there be. Beautiful goodness.

Alan: Yeah, I was frankly surprised to hear him mentioned in the Mennonite church, but he was.

Harold: Do you belong to Mount Pleasant?

Alan: Yeah. Yeah, I was born and raised in Mount Pleasant, and then when Evelyn and I divorced and I remarried, my Elba Linda wanted to join the Mennonite church, but they wouldn't let her. Robert Mast came to see us, and he said, "Alan, you're a member in good standard, no problem." Because I really thought they'd say, "because you're divorced and remarried, you can't join or belong to the church."

And he said," however, with Linda, she's not a member, and if she joined, it would create social problems," meaning my ex-in-laws. And so he said, no, for social reasons, she won't be allowed to join, which of course made her mad. She said, "I thought Jesus was running that church."

So we started visiting other churches, and then we went to Mount Pleasant Methodist, and it was like being home. I mean, these were people I knew growing up. They were people from the area.

She loved it, so we joined the Methodists. For, I guess, 15 years, we were Methodists. And then when she started getting bad,(advancing dementia) and didn't know what was going on, she did a lot, I mean, she did, but we started going back to the Mennonite church, and then rejoined the Mennonite church.

Harold: So I'm going to tell you another important feature of the church for me is the saints. Okay. The saints are extremely important in the history of the church.

St. Augustine, St. Francis, St. Teresa, major reformers in the church throughout history. I mean, major, very important reformers. The saints. St. Francis, wow. St. Teresa. In India, Mother Teresa.

Alan: Okay. She's Albanian, isn't she?

Harold: No, she's from... You know the story of Mother Teresa, don't you?

Alan: Yeah.

Elba: Calcutta?

Kelly: Oh, Calcutta.

Alan: No, but I mean, in Europe, she was originally from...

Harold: From Albania. Albania,

Harold: So the stories of the saints, just phenomenal. A priest ministering to the lepers in Hawaii, giving his life and getting sick. A priest named Peter Clover in Columbia, in the 18th century, the thousands of slaves were arriving regularly, and he gave his life ministering to the newly arrived slaves, went on board to help the sick and the dying, and helped them get established, and got sick and died as a young man, St. Peter Clover.

And I just illustrate on and on, you know, the saints of the church. St. in Poland, Maximilian Kolbe, developed a monastery, a printing press in the 1920s in Poland, and went to Japan, served a number of years in Nagasaki, went back home, and was arrested by the Nazis when they took over Poland. And one day, there was an escapee, one of the prisoners escaped, and the Nazis rounded up 10 men to die, to be killed, because one had escaped.

And the one man cried out and said, but I have children, Elba and children. So Maximilian Kolbe said, I take his place. They killed him, the father went free.

But the stories of the saints have really gripped me, and I continue reading about them, and we have feast days remembering the saints throughout the year. You know, in the Mennonite church, the saints are just out there somewhere, you know.

Alan: If they even think about them at all.

Harold: Yeah, so I think back, wow, I didn't know anything about the saints, except the saints in glory somewhere.

Alan: And St. Nicholas, you knew St. Nicholas.

Harold: And I didn't know anything about the apparitions of Mary. Yeah. And these spiritual riches, I knew nothing about.

Kelly: What role do the saints play in the Catholic Church?

Elba: Intercede. Intercede for us. To God, probably, the role of the saints. Now, after they are gone, you mean?

Kelly: Yes.

Harold: Yes. Oh, they're praying for us. They're praying for us. This is from the scriptures, you know, the saints praying for us. So, role models, inspiration, and praying for us.

Elba: We believe that they are closer to God.

Alan: To back up a number of decades now. Who was in your first grade class? Do you remember?

Harold: Nancy Miller, Phyllis Kurtz. Maybe Willie...maybe Willie Yoder

Alan: He would have been that age, yeah. They were in the community for a while, then they went out, then they came to Kempsville, then they came back.

Harold: Yeah, so, I don't know what, maybe he was not there at the beginning. Phyllis, Nancy. Phil Miller was ahead of me. Wayne Miller was a little behind me. I can't remember who else there might have been..

Alan: Those three, I was pretty sure were in your class, but I wasn't. I don't remember anybody else to ask about. Do you have any school remembrances there that would have been poignant, funny, good, bad, interesting?

Harold: Sister Lenora Winger was a wonderful teacher. When I was, what, fourth, fifth, she had an ink pad. And she put it out to dry, and I walked over it. She said, "oh, my dear boy." And I remember spelling bee competitions with Nancy. She was my chief competitor. Yeah, spelling bees. So, we were always competing.

Alan: Yeah, I remember those. In our class, it was Carol Kurtz and myself.

Harold: Carol.

Alan: Yeah, but Carol always won. Did you get any grief from your brothers and sisters at all? For leaving the Mennonites and joining the Catholics.

Harold: The only one of my brothers and sisters that is still in the Mennonite Church is

Chris in Michigan. And I think she and her now-husband Dave are in a joint church, Mennonite and Church of the Brethren, in Michigan. She's the only one left in the Mennonite Church, all nine of us. Of the nine of us.

Alan: Well, the Wengers... it was my perception anyway, that the John Wenger family was always a little out there. They were a little weird. They had strange ideas, and they were a lot of fun to discuss things with.

Harold: Do you remember what kind of strange ideas you were thinking about?

Alan: Oh, anything. I mean, your brothers and sisters were not like my cousins, who were straight-laced. The church said this, therefore it's true. They were always willing to discuss things with an open mind, whatever it was.

Harold: Really?

Alan: Yeah. I mean, that was just my perception. It may not have been true, but it's what I thought.

Harold: It probably wasn't true of me.

Alan: Well, that's why I didn't have any discussions with you. They were with Preston, especially Preston. He was always fun to discuss things with. In 1960, there was a debate at school on the election, Nixon-Kennedy election.

Preston was on the team who was representing Nixon, and I was on the team who was arguing for Kennedy. Both sides were holding their own, and then in the rebuttal, Preston just blew everybody out of the water by quoting all these facts and figures and proving his points with all kinds of stuff. Wow.

They won. Of course, they were going to win anyway, because they were for Nixon. No way Kennedy was going to win that debate, not in a little Mennonite school.

Later, I asked Preston, where did you learn all that stuff? He said, I just made it up. I knew nobody was going to check.

Harold: I was on the Nixon team also, and I don't remember Preston being on it.

Alan: At the Mennonite school?

Harold: No, no, this at Great Bridge.

Alan: Okay, no, this was at the Mennonite school. Yeah, because we were in the upper classes then, so yeah, it would have been after you were out and gone.. But I remind him of that every now and then, especially on Facebook when he gets way out in left field or right field somewhere.

Harold: Hey, we have lots of time. We are very happy to have you here. We have lots of time today. That's point one. Point two is, I'd like to make some coffee to

serve with banana bread. Would you drink some coffee?

Alan: She will. I'm not a coffee drinker after I have a cup of coffee in the morning, and then I'm done.

Kelly: I actually had a cup of coffee the whole way up here, so I kind of nursed the cup.

Alan: But feel free to make coffee.

Kelly: Yeah, feel free.

Harold: No, we don't need coffee. We do it for you. Let me finish cleaning off the table.

Alan: We have to leave by about three o'clock, because we've got to be home tonight, because first thing tomorrow morning, she's got grandchildren to babysit.

Harold: I want to show you a couple things in the basement.

Alan: Oh, okay.

Harold: Kelly. Come with us to the basement just briefly. Elba, you want to come?

(Down the steps to the basement)

Harold: This is a key part for the Wenger family.

Alan: Ah, yes, yes, yes. (I saw a ping pong table)

Harold: And here's the Virgin Mary, the Rosary. Our Lady of Guadalupe. The operation was in the year 1531, after the Spanish had cruelly conquered Mexico. The Aztecs. Were crushing them, their culture, their religion, everything. And the bishop was writing back to the pope, protesting about the bad behavior of the Spanish landowners and so on.

And they had a few converts. The church had a few converts. One of them was named Juan Diego. And in 1531, the Virgin Mary appeared to him and said, "go tell the bishop to build me a church at this place." And on a later visit... he didn't get to the bishop the first time. They made fun of him. On a later visit, she (Virgin Mary)said, "go." (He asked) "How can I go? They won't even listen to me."

She said, "you go up the hill and pick those flowers and take them to the bishop." This was December, very cold at high altitude. And he went up there and found some flowers and took them to the bishop.

He held them in his robe and got through, this time to the bishop, and opened up his robe to give the flowers to the bishop. And on his robe was imprinted the image of the Virgin Mary. It's still there.

And church scholars have studied this and have discovered that in so many

ways, this reflects the Aztec culture, symbolism of the stars, her robe, the crown, and her appearance is kind of between Spanish and Aztec. That was 1531. In a period of 10 to 15 years, there were 9 million baptized Christians in Mexico.

The message from this apparition and from Juan Diego's evangelism was so powerful. People came traveling long distances begging to be baptized. So this is one of the most amazing stories and evangelism.

So while the Catholics were losing about 9 million people in Europe, 1531, they gained 9 million in Mexico. And of course, in Mennonite history, we never heard of it.

Alan: No, of course not. It didn't matter. They weren't anabaptist.

Harold: This is Miriam Medjugorje when we were there with her in 2018, I think. Beautiful woman. One of five visionaries there.

Alan: What's a visionary?

Harold: Yeah,

Elba: That she says the Virgin talks to her, which is...

Alan: Is she Bosniak?

Elba: She has seen her.

Kelly: Is she Bosniak?

Harold: Yeah, oh yeah, she's local. There were five young people that spoke with the Virgin Mary and she's actually still giving, still communicating with them occasionally. This started in 1981 and after that was a horrible Bosnian war. Right.

So in 1981, she gave a powerful witness and appeal for peace, for prayer and for peace. As in Fatima in Portugal in 1914. So, you know, illustrating the significance of the Virgin Mary and the apparitions calling people to Jesus, my son.

Elba: During the war, these children, there were six children that the Virgin appeared to them. And during the war, that was horrible in Yugoslavia. That time was Yugoslavia. These children were tortured to stop saying that they were seeing the Virgin and the Virgin was asking for peace. They were burned with cigarettes, with electrocuted.

Harold: So there are pilgrims, thousands of pilgrims to Medjugorje. And each July, they have a youth conference with up to 50,000 young people from around the world. And in Lourdes and Fatima, oh my goodness, streams of people every day throughout the year. And Mexico City, millions, huge.

Elba: Every day, the United States is very steady, very, the United States participation in the Catholic Church is, I would say, poor. It's not as huge as in the other countries. Latin America is very strong. Mexico, Spain, those countries.

Harold: Philippines, Korea.

Elba: There is no priest. Something is, nevertheless, even if the church has one priest every other time, it's a lot of people getting together. In this town, we have about 10 different other churches, huh? Probably more, just one Catholic church.

Alan: Well, you can't have three Baptists or three Mennonites without two churches.

Elba: Not always.

Harold: So, there's this international church that continues to inspire me, what a blessing.

Alan: Well, that's totally different. I said, that's totally different than the congregational-based church of the Anabaptists. Or the Baptists, too, for that matter. Because if it's congregational-based, then you can't have a hierarchy. I mean, it's like the Mennonites, I think one of the...

Harold: Can you speak up, my hearing is really poor.

Alan: This thing with the gay marriage and recognizing gay marriage and allowing gay folks to hold positions in the church. If it's a hierarchical church, like the Methodist or like the Roman Catholics, then they can be controlled. But in an organizational church or a congregational-based, you can't. Because one congregation in Denver can say, well, yeah, we're going to ordain a gay guy and we're still Mennonite. And other Mennonites get upset, but they don't control that congregation.

Harold: Very different. Yeah, so in the Catholic church, there's no way that gay marriage can be accepted. There's no way, because...

Elba: They can visit the church. They are welcome to visit, to go to mass. But they won't get the sacraments.

Harold: Here's a book by Jimmy Akin called The Father's Know Best. And with the long tradition of the church and the succession of the Apostles and Popes, the liturgy, the basic theology has been established. And it cannot be changed.

The Pope cannot accept, cannot change the rule on marriage between man and woman. He cannot change ordination of men only. No women, no women priests. Pope cannot change that. And I've been talking about the Saints and the Virgin Mary. So the role of women in the Catholic church is extremely important. But not as priests.

Elba: And a grown woman has already children, has already responsibility. And the priest has to be devoted to the church.

Harold: I'm sorry, I'm dumping so much on you.

Alan: No, no. Do you think it's possible they will ever allow married priests?

Harold: Say what?

Alan: Do you think it's possible they will ever allow married priests?

Harold: That's possible. And there are Catholic churches in the U.S. that have married priests.

Elba: But not approved by the Pope.

Harold: And associated with the Roman Catholic Church. Yes. I think it's called the Marianite Rite. Yeah, that's more of a possibility. Looking for my...

Elba: The Pope can approve that. We're just waiting for the priest to get married. So that's more possible.

Harold: Well, there's a coming home network inviting people back to the Mother Church, coming home. And this is one of them with my story, cradle Mennonite to Roman Catholic. So the Catholic Church, as you know, has had very serious problems and conflicts and corruption and persecution.

The Church has suffered persecution over the centuries, and the Church has persecuted Anabaptists and others. Shameful stories. But it has survived. With reform movements over and over, including the charismatic movement, which is very strong in the Catholic Church.

Home, coming home.

Alan: Is that what it feels like to you?

Harold: There are many. There are many, many converts, people coming home from all kinds of denominations. Including Mennonite. But a lot of Baptists, Methodists, Anglicans, Pentecostals. All of them.

Alan: Have you met any other former Mennonites who are now Catholic?

Harold: No. I know of a couple of them.

Elba: You have a cousin that is Catholic.

Harold: The one in Kentucky? She became Catholic, yeah.

Alan: Did you know Leon Yoder? Not...not... I'm sorry. Leon Miller. He was from Kempsville.

Harold: Leon Miller. Not sure.

Alan: Anyway, he was raised in the, either the Conservative Church or the Amish Church. And he's now Greek Orthodox. I don't know how that came about. I haven't talked to him, but...

Harold: You have to be free if you have more questions of a different vein.

Alan: I will email you or ask you when something comes up, and then if I think of something later. But it'll take me a while to just go through this and edit it and get rid of the stuff that I want to. But it's been interesting.

Harold: You're, were you in business?

Alan: Yeah.

Harold: Are you still?

Alan: Yeah.

Harold: What is it?

Alan: Real estate. It's a real estate brokerage and we manage rental property and own rental property. So. No.

In Norfolk.

Harold: I worked as a realtor in Mesa for several years. After I left the pastorate.

Alan: Oh, then you know everything that we do. We sold most of the business because we were managing about 800 properties. And so we sold the property management business to somebody else and we kept the real estate business and the properties that we had. We're still in the business, but we're semi-retired. Who is we?

Alan: She and I.

Harold: Not with your brothers and sisters?

Alan: No, no. This is me and her. Now my brothers and sisters are in the oil business. Home heating oil and gasoline..I was in that for a number of years, but I got out of that.

Harold: That was from your father's tradition? His father started a business of delivering fuel. Heating oil to our home and many others.

Alan: I got out of that 30 years ago. And then started into real estate and it's been good to us. But mostly we're retired.

Kelly: Retired so we can watch grandkids.

Alan: Well, we need to get on the road before too long, honey.

Harold: You need to go already? What time is it?

Kelly: We have 15 minutes.

Alan: Okay, we've got to leave by 3 anyway, because I know we can make it home by 8. And my eyesight after dark is not so good. So I like to be home before it's dark.

Elba: We don't drive at night. We just drive around here to the church and back to the house. We don't like driving.

Harold: So you are regular at the Mount Pleasant Mennonite now?

Alan: Yeah. Yeah.

Harold: Good. Is Nevin still the pastor?

Alan: Yeah. He and Keith Miller. Keith Miller also. That's Merlin's younger brother.

Harold: Did you know that Nevin and Christine were in Mozambique with us?

Alan: Oh, I knew they were there, but I didn't know it was the same time you were there.

Harold: Yeah, we were the country representatives. And when they arrived, so we helped them get settled.

Alan: So what's your impression of Nevin?

Harold: Oh, I appreciate him very much. I didn't know him as a pastor, of course, but I appreciate a very fine fellow.

Alan: Yeah, he's done well. You knew that the church left the Virginia Conference, right?

Harold: I heard that.

Alan: Actually, that had been talked about for probably a decade before it happened. So it took about 10 years for them to talk it through and talk it through and finally make the change.

Harold: And quite a number of churches have left.

Alan: Yeah. And quite a few of them...What was it? The network? Rosedale. Most of them, or at least Rosedale, seems to be growing faster than any other Mennonite conference.

Harold: And Lancaster Conference.

Alan: Oh, it is too?

Harold: Yeah. So are you affiliated with Rosedale?

Alan: Yeah. My brother Dale is the overseer because he was an overseer for, I don't know, half a dozen or 15, whatever Rosedale churches around the country. And so they also made him overseer at Mount Pleasant.

Harold: Do you have interesting dialogue with your brother Dale?

Alan: Oh, yeah. He talks, I listen.

Alan: Have you ever taken a look at the mtpleasantmennonite.com website?

Harold: No. I see, I follow Facebook a little bit. So I see some entries there and see the craziness of my brother Preston. And do not respond to him.

Alan: That's Preston. He was like that in the third grade. He has always, always loved pulling chains just to see people jump.

Harold: (to Kelly) Do you know him?

Kelly: No, actually, I don't know if I've met him or not. I know who he is, but I don't know if I've met him.

Harold: Oh, how's my uncle Herbert?

Alan: Holding his own. I mean, he's, he's, he's not really getting any better. But he comes to church every Sunday and he's out and about. So he's doing okay. He's holding his own.

Kelly: Herbert is 90?

Alan: At least. (To Elba) Have you met all of Harold's brothers and sisters?

Elba: Oh, yeah. We go to, yes, we have come to family.

Alan: Which one's your favorite?

Elba: The older siblings. Christine and Barbara.

Alan: I don't know Barbara very well because she was so young. But yeah, Christine's a gem.

Elba: Yeah. This, this meeting, this year meeting, we didn't go. We got very sick. We were ready to go and suddenly we got sick. We didn't go.

Harold: Oh, to the reunion. Yeah, we, we were sick. Too bad. Yeah. We have Zoom about once a month. And a couple of weeks ago, all nine of us were on Zoom. Yeah. Preston makes his, his scandalous comments on Facebook and not a

single one of his brothers or sisters answers him.

Alan: No, but mine do. My brothers and sisters comment and they're all on his side.

Harold: But not you.

Alan: No.

Harold: I've noticed that.

Alan: I'm still a college sophomore communist.

Harold: You don't have to be communist, man. You can be a Christian.

Alan: Well, that's, that's my biggest point of contention with the MAGA Mennonites is, and I get in, I don't get in trouble because I don't push it, but it's, how can you express the love of Christ and kick everybody out? I don't understand it.

Harold: So you realize this is also persecution of the church. The Catholic church has been growing with immigrants. Now they're being kicked out. This is persecution of the church.

Alan: From the Catholic's viewpoint.

Harold: But not only that, it's just horrendous diabolical treatment. So contrary to Jesus, who welcomes all kinds of people. Yeah.

Harold: And so did his followers. So does the church around the world minister to all kinds of people. How can you possibly be a follower of Jesus and kick out your brothers and sisters?

Alan: Yeah. Well, the answer is, well, you're also commanded to obey the laws. And the law says they have to go.

Harold: So in Pittsburgh, we had a refugee sanctuary. We kept a family from El Salvador at the time of the Nicaraguan Contra War and all the disturbances. And it was a part, we were part of the sanctuary movement, providing sanctuary for these so-called illegals, immigrants. And the immigration office called us downtown. Me and a couple of their pastors called us downtown to interrogate us and said, don't you realize you're breaking the law? And we said, what law are you talking about? What law? We are responsible for the law of Moses and the law of Jesus. So what law are you talking about?

Kelly: Yeah. I didn't realize there were Mennonites in Pittsburgh.

Harold: Yeah. Not a big church, but I was there in the 80s. Yeah. And the church continues.

Kelly: What area of Pittsburgh? Do you remember?

Harold: East side, very near Wilkinsburg.

Kelly: I don't remember the part by now.

Harold: Okay. North Point Breeze, not far from Squirrel Hill.

Kelly: That sounds familiar.

Harold: Yeah. It's shocking. How can our brothers and sisters do that?

Alan: And not even see it. Not even realize it.

Harold: How can any Christian approve of the slaughter of the people in Gaza? The slaughter, the ethnic cleansing, people in Gaza, God's children.

Alan: Well, the other side of that though is they're just catching up. You know, God initially said kill everybody in the land and they didn't do it. So this is their second chance.

Harold: For Jews.

Alan: For the Jews, yeah. To cleanse the land. Now that's harsh, but that's a viewpoint.

Harold: The church in Gaza, the Catholic church in Gaza has survived so far providing homeless shelter, food for as many as they can.

Elba: A couple of weeks ago that church was bombarded. That church was bombarded.

Harold: And Pope Francis was on the telephone every day with the priest at that church.

Alan: I read that. No, and in fact, we've got one of our, one of my cousins who is Mennonite. He said, we have to support Israel because God blesses those who help Israel. And so I asked him, I said, well, which Israel?

If we went back to 620 BC, do we support Jeremiah who said, surrender to the Babylonians? Or do we support the government that said, no, fight on to the end? Or if we're today, do we support Netanyahu who says we're going to eliminate all the living people in Gaza? Or do we support the liberal Jews who are against Netanyahu? Which one is supporting Israel?

Harold: Just reading Jeremiah this morning. If you truly amend your ways, if you truly execute justice, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood, this place, if you do not go after other gods, so on. God bless you.

Alan: Who?

Harold: That's prophet Jeremiah. Chapter six. If you do not oppress the alien.

Elba: And people live in fear. We have friends that, is truly afraid. People in this town, because it's a small town, immigrants have been like hidden from, from the crowds in, in Virginia. But some of them have forty years in this country, with grown-up children. And they are afraid, several of them are very afraid. Of all being sent back. They don't have anything over there.

Alan: Yeah. Well, my solution for it. Nobody wants my solution for it.

Harold: Nobody wants your solution?

Alan: Right.

Harold: What is it?

Alan: If you can make it to the border, here's your citizenship card. Good luck.

Harold: So, why have a border?

Alan: Because the other side has one. It's not our border, it's their border.

Harold: Why have a fence? A wall?

Alan: No, they put the fence there. I'm saying, on our side, there is no border. But on their side, there is one. They created one.

Elba: The Mexicans? No.

Harold: No, there's a huge, a huge wall.

Elba: Somebody from this, from here.

Alan: No, no, no, no, no. From my, when I'm dictator of the country.

Kelly: That's his viewpoint.

Elba: Oh, yeah, yeah. Ok.

Alan: Right. Then I would say, we don't have a border. If they can make it out of Mexico, then here's their citizenship card. Good luck.

Kelly: They start paying taxes.

Alan: Start, get your job. Do what you want to.

Elba: You know that most of them pay taxes.

Alan: You're here.

Kelly: The what?

Elba: Most of the immigrants pay taxes.

Alan: Yeah, you can't work without paying taxes.

Kelly: Yeah, they get paid under the table.

Alan: Yeah, but they pay taxes every time they buy something and pay a sales tax.

Elba: That is true.

Kelly: Well, a sales tax. That's not the Medicare and Social Security.

Alan: But they don't collect it either. More of them pay it and never collect it. They don't collect it.

Elba: They pay, but they do not collect it. Unless if they get the citizenship.

Harold: But Alan's reminding us, it's so difficult for them to get papers and documents of any kind. It's a stupid argument to say they're illegal. They don't have documents. Well, give them documents. Why make it so difficult?

Elba: The ones that enter from three years and up to last year, they got papers. They had, and they enter with a permit. And they got a job work permit right away.

And they got Social Security with something on top saying that they were not citizens. But they have a legal permit to stay, most of them. Some of them came to do wrong things so they, they have no permits. Supposedly those are the ones that need to go. But the ones that enter with children and are working, paying taxes and doing right.

Harold: Well, most of them are here to work and get a better, make a better life for themselves.

Elba: Life in Venezuela is horrible. Most of them, some of them, if they go back, they will go to jail.

Harold: So are you running for office?

Alan: Good Lord, no.

Kelly: You can write his name in though. The governor, we'll start him off as governor. You can write his name in on the ballot. We'll get him in there first. And then we'll write him in for president. I'm going to go to the restroom before we go.

Alan: Okay.

Harold: I'm really pleased that you came to see us.

Alan: Well, I was glad to do it. I enjoyed it. Well, and I've recorded it all.

Elba: Oh my gosh.

Alan: So you are now for all posterity. No, there are...We started interviewing people 20 years ago. And if you go to the mtpleasantmennonite.com, there are some of those interviews on there. Not all of them, but like we've got Ivan Miller and Francis Miller, Ann Kurtz.

Elba: Are they on YouTube?

Alan: No, they're not on YouTube. They're only on that website. It's a history website. I mean, it's mtpleasantmennonite.com, but it's more on history. There's a link to photographs. We've got over 6,000 photographs, including several of you. Several photographs of you.

Harold: Thank you.

Alan: Including the one that was in the newspaper when you were getting ready to go on your trip (to Australia) and you're outside the front of the house with you and your sisters.

Elba: Yeah, we have that. Somebody sent that to me.

Harold: Where is it?

Alan: It's on the website.

Elba: I think it's upstairs.

Alan: And you can search. If you go to the website and put in Harold Wenger, then all the Harold Wenger pictures will pop up.

Elba: What is the website?

Alan: mtpleasantmennonite.com. And just click on the history link and then it goes to... Pictures and stories and background and so forth.

Harold: Thank you for the good work.

Alan: But, you know, it's nice to meet folks that you knew 100 years ago.

Elba: And you are welcome. Come back.

Harold: Let me see. I left in... I was there in 62, okay. And back a little bit after that. That's been 60 years.

Elba: Oh my gosh. You were young.

Alan: Closer to 100 than to zero. Well, when the first time you all came back, there was a meeting at your parents' house where the young married couples... I don't know what it was all about. But you and Christine were there and you were

answering questions. And I was married to Evelyn at the time, who I never... I was always able to irritate her.

Harold: To irritate her? You could?

Alan: Yes. Easily. She didn't like my sense of humor. Or any... Or the...Well, it was fun while it lasted. But anyhow, they were asking questions about you and Christine's time in Africa. And I asked the question, "well, what did you do at night?" You know, what is there to do? And I was... You know, we were young. And I'm thinking, at night you go out. You party, you play, you do. What do you do in Africa?

And I asked it about two or three times. And finally, Evelyn kicked me and said, "shut up."

Elba: You were hoping them to say, we go to the nightclubs.

Alan: But they didn't. Probably didn't have any. Anyway. Well, thank you very much. I appreciate you taking the time.

Harold: Peace.

Alan: And feeding us lunch.

Harold: Thank you for good work. Greetings to everybody back there.

Kelly: Thank you.

Alan: And I told Willie Yoder I was going to come see you, so he said, especially tell him I said hello. So Hello from Willie. We need to get a picture of them.

Kelly: Oh, OK, yes. With you, with them.

Alan: All right.

Harold: We can play ping pong before you go.

Alan: I'll give you one game.

And so we did. One rousing game of ping pong, about 60 years since our last game in the Wenger's upstairs game room. Harold won handily, 21 to 13, just as he had 60 years previously.