

One Nation Under God - Walk Across America

Vol. 4 No 7

July 2005

Our walk in July could be named 'The Tale of Two Towns and Two Courageous Men.' The two towns are Grafton and Bridgeport, West Virginia and the two men are Michael Benedum and Rev. Philip Bottomley. This month's trek began in Grafton and ended at the Simpson Creek Covered Bridge on the outskirts of Bridgeport. Nadine and I also attended two church services, Saturday evening at St. Barnabas' Chapel in Bridgeport and Sunday morning service at Hepzibah Baptist Church.

On July 8th after eating lunch at Jerry's Restaurant in South Grafton, I started westwards along the serpentine American Discovery Trail towards Bridgeport. Grafton is in need of prayer. This town was once affluent but now many homes and businesses are in disrepair, since coal mining is virtually gone in the area. Grafton High School appeared to be in better shape than most of the buildings in Grafton except for the International Mother's Day Shrine, which Nadine and I visited in May. Later I read in a newspaper that the school was unfortunately recently vandalized. The rest of the day was fairly uneventful except for passing a monument honoring the first Union soldier killed in the Civil War. Thornsby Bailey Brown died on May 22, 1861, a half mile west of Grafton along what is now known as US Route 50. War has left its mark throughout this nation, both past and present. After walking eleven miles, Nadine drove us to Bridgeport where we were delayed reaching our motel by the Benedum Festival Parade, which was just starting at the east side of town. Tomorrow we would see small town America at its finest and learn who Michael Benedum was.

The next morning in the lobby of the motel, we met a youth group returning from a mission's trip to Canada. They were from Oakwoods Baptist Church located in Wilkesboro, North Carolina. God calls people of all ages to do His will.

By 8 AM, I was on the trail again. Soon a small white country church appeared with three crosses situated on a hill behind the church. For the second time, I walked by one of the 1,800 sets of crosses constructed across America by one man, Bernard Coffindaffer. Nadine was already talking to Dan, an elder in Hepzibah Baptist Church. We shared our mission with Dan for about fifteen minutes and gave him three different newsletters before resuming the walk. Soon the landscape changed from a forest to undulating grasslands before reaching the town of Bridgeport. The town was totally different from Grafton. It had many motels, an airport, a K-Mart, a Wal Mart, fast-food joints and restaurants. Also the homes seemed to be more attractive. Why was there so much difference in the towns that were separated by less than twenty miles? To better understand one must know the history of why towns and cities arise and grow and in some cases disappear into obscurity.

In the 1600's and 1700's, the first towns and cities were built along the coast as seaports. Near either terminus of the American Discovery Trail are Lewis, Delaware and San Francisco, California. Lewis, Delaware since it does not have a satisfactory harbor became a small tourist town while San Francisco with its excellent harbor became a striving city. Then came into being are the river towns and cities. Parkersburg, West Virginia; Cincinnati, Ohio and St. Louis, Missouri

are examples of river towns. Then came dirt roads joining the towns along the rivers to other towns, and towns grew at the intersections of these roads. There are many towns throughout America that fit that description. In the 1800's came canals and railroads. Hancock, Maryland along the C & O Canal is an illustration of a canal town. The canal era lasted a very short time since the railroads could transport bulk goods at a much higher speed. Railroads needed areas with rail-yards and roundhouses. Brunswick, Maryland became both a railroad and canal town. Grafton, West Virginia was a railroad town. Railroads were the best way to transport people and goods across America until the 1920's. With the invention of the automobile came paved roads. US Route 50, which transverses both Grafton and Bridgeport, crosses the US from coast to coast. Trucks started carrying bulk goods and the railroads slowly lost business. Airplanes also began to take from the railroads the business of transporting people. By the 1950's, the interstate highway system was created and the railroads lost even more business except for carrying items like coal and ore. The coal industry in West Virginia is dying a slow death and the railroads are dying with it, along with Grafton. Interstate 79 was built on the western outskirts of Bridgeport and US Route 50 to the west became four lanes while to the east and Grafton, the road remains a meandering two lane road. With the advent of I79 came FBI Fingerprint Division and the Department of Defense Biometric Fusion Center to the Bridgeport area. Bridgeport's businesses increased while Grafton's decreased.

West Virginia has become a global leader in biometric research and development. Biometric science is the science of identifying a person by their unique physical characteristics such as fingerprints, retina scans, voice recognition and behavioral characteristics. In the post 9/11 era, biometrics is considered by most a key technology for national security and in the war against terrorism. At the Pennsylvania Turnpike rest area on our way to West Virginia, I noticed a sign by Homeland Security that was asking everybody to be involved in the security of America. I believe that we can be involved by seeking our Lord's face and praying. That is where our real security lies.

Later I strolled by the Michael Benedum Festival, to which both Nadine and I would return later in the afternoon. After rounding a bend, I passed St. Barnabas' Chapel with its sign, Service Saturday 6:00 – Come as you are. Would they accept me, dressed as I was, being hot, sweaty and probably not smelling the best either? Four hours later I would have my answer.

After arriving at the Simpson Creek Covered Bridge at 2:30 PM, we decided to return to the festival by car. Amidst the car show, carnival and live music, Nadine and I shared our mission with others, including a woman, who is raising her grandchildren, because her daughter was murdered. She needs our prayers for complete healing.

We learned that the Bridgeport School System is one of the tops in the state, with both scholastics and sports. There is prayer before football games and Christian groups are allowed into schools to minister to the students. Then I learned who Michael Benedum was. Michael Benedum was a very successful oil wildcatter, who was born in Bridgeport and passed away in 1959. Besides being a thriving businessman, he was also a philanthropist. In 1944 Michael and his wife, Sarah, began the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, as a memorial to their only child, who died in the influenza epidemic of 1918. This foundation has given

over \$169 million in grants to West Virginia organizations. When I questioned a man about Michael Benedum, he turned and asked the lady beside him, “Didn’t he donate a stained glass window in your church.” The answer was, “No, he donated the whole church.” In Michael’s last will and testament states with wealth comes responsibility. It also acknowledges two standards that guided his decisions: first, that “we know not where seed may sprout”: second, that he seek “to appraise and balance the needs of each and available potential for supplying those needs.” I think those standards should apply to both businesses and churches.

Nadine and I then drove the short distance to St. Barnabas’ Chapel. Barnabas was the first philanthropist in the church according to the Book of Acts. Why did it not surprise me when Rev. Philip Bottomley spoke on the parable of sower and the seed? I was deeply touched by Rev. Philip humbly admitting that in his life the Word has not always taken root. That is true in all our lives. Yes, both Nadine and I were welcomed in that church.

That night I prayed for Rev. Philip Bottomley because he is a man of God and is standing in the gap for our Lord, Jesus. He is preaching the whole Word of God as it written in the Bible not to please people or himself but to please God. I was told that his superiors have commanded him to change. Some denominations in America have changed their views on what is sin. Rev. Philip has not. Some denominations in America are not walking with God, but are walking one step behind the world. I praise Rev. Philip Bottomley for his stand.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for their’s is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

The next morning before Sunday school at Hepzibah Baptist Church, I was asked to speak before the congregation by Elder Dan. Since the interior of the church was decorated with red, white and blue, it seemed to be the perfect place to ask them to pray for America. I did not. I asked them to pray for Rev. Philip Bottomley and for the stand that he has taken.



There should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another and whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it: or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular.

Before the sermon, the congregation sang the hymn, *Each Step I Take*. A man sitting behind him, whispered, “This song was made for you.” Then Pastor Mike Delligatti of Park View Church of the Nazarene gave the sermon. In a Baptist Church, the congregation was spoken to by a Pentecostal and Nazarene and asked to pray for a pastor of different a denomination. Churches are coming together in America.

In my research I noticed that the demographics of Bridgeport and Grafton were very similar for two items. Bridgeport had a higher percentage of married couples and the median income for the family was over twice as high. Does that mean Bridgeport is more blessed than Grafton? We sometime mistake the things of the world for blessings. The bible warns us that the deceitfulness of riches that choke the Word and that the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. If God does not judge man by what he owns, then why should we judge man by the car he drives, the house he owns or the clothes he wears?

To learn more about the One Nation Under God –Walk Across America, go to our web site, www.walkacrossamerica.info.

**God bless,
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Total miles walked of the American Discovery Trail	- 521 miles
Number of walkers	- 45 walkers
Number of people praying for America	- 39,334 prayer warriors

On the Internet, I read about Don Vermilyea, who for the last three years has been prayer-walking in the West and Mid-west with all his possessions on his back. Recently police in Missouri handcuffed him and placed him in jail while they searched all of his belongings. Then they released him and told him to get out of town. He is being judged by the length of his hair and beard and what he wears. His ministry is A Walk Across America. Please pray for his ministry. Thank you.