

YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR WORLD!

By Ellen Priest Hardt and Jan Webb McQuistan

*“If you only look at us, you might well miss the brightness. We carry this precious Message around in **the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives**. That's to prevent anyone from confusing God's incomparable power with us. As it is, there's not much chance of that. You know for yourselves that we're not much to look at.” II Corinthians 4:7,8 (The Message Bible)*

Can God really manifest his power best through unadorned clay pots, ordinary people facing the day to day challenges of life? Can one ordinary person make a difference in the world? Before you answer that question, consider the story of Louise.

Louise entered life as an ordinary girl born into a poor immigrant family in 1888. Her parents had emigrated from Germany and settled on a farm in eastern Missouri where they began raising a family of six children. One day a Christian literature evangelist knocked on their door and introduced the family to the book, Bible Readings for the Home Circle.

As the family studied the book, they began to see a clearer picture of God's character, and were drawn to the beliefs of a faith community grounded in the Holy Scriptures, the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Louise and her family discovered the Bible is like a road map containing clear directions to heaven and eternal life, inspired by the Creator of life itself. Louise found God's love irresistible, and she began a lifelong adventure in growth and service.

Louise and her family discovered that God sets aside one special day each week to celebrate his creative power. For Louise the seventh-day Sabbath was a park in time—a weekly holiday of rest and worship, fellowship and service. When she was unable to attend church, this young girl loved to line up her dolls on the stairway and teach them the Sabbath School lesson.

Little Louise had big dreams for God. She wanted to become a missionary and help people learn about God's love and His offer of salvation. She dreamed of having a personal part in sharing the special message of the prophecies of the Bible, announcing the soon return of Christ, and the importance of accepting Him as Savior as well as Lord of our lives.

Louise experienced the first challenge to her dreams when her beloved father suddenly passed away. The family was grief-stricken. Her mother knew she could not maintain a farm and raise six children by herself, so the children were divided up among nearby relatives. After Louise completed the third grade, the aunts and uncles decided that all the children should stay out of school and work on the farm. Louise never was able to make it back to school.

At the age of seventeen she left home and headed for Wichita, Kansas where she found a job as a housekeeper in the home of an attorney. She met a young man named Tom, and they married and started a family. Now the focus of her dreams and her mission in life turned to her children.

Louise believed with all of her heart that education should be redemptive in nature, for the purpose of restoring people to the image of God. She knew that the school operated by her church in Wichita was part of a worldwide system of Christian education forming a core of essential values, promoting mental, physical, social, and spiritual health, intellectual growth, and service to humanity. When their first two daughters became school age, the family moved to the west side of town near the church school, where she gave birth to four more children.



(Caption: Louise and Tom Priest with their two oldest children, Marguerite and Mildred)

Suddenly her husband Tom, who had a good job running a printing press in downtown Wichita, developed lead poisoning. The Great Depression struck, and Tom was never able to find another full-time job. Now it was up to Louise to provide for her large family on a housekeeper's income. Christian education is costly. What would become of the dream of this young woman with a limited skill set, this dream of giving her children the Christian education she had been unable to obtain?

Tom, who was not a member of the Seventh-day Adventist church, believed that public school was more than adequate for his children's education. But Louise was determined her children would receive a Christian education, so she started taking in laundry in addition to her housekeeping jobs—without the help of an automatic washer or dryer. She had to carry water from the hot water heater to the big tubs in the kitchen. Each piece of laundry had to be put through a wringer. Some pieces had to be scrubbed on a washboard. The collars and cuffs on the cotton shirts had to be starched. The clean laundry was put in a basket and carried to the clothes line in the back yard. Sometimes in the winter the clothes and sheets would freeze on the line, so she would have to bring them in to finish drying by the coal stove in the dining room.

Like the starving widow in the Old Testament who miraculously had a never-ending supply of oil and flour to feed her family and the prophet Elijah, the Lord blessed Louise. Somehow she was able to clean enough houses and take in enough laundry to pay tuition for each of the children to complete their elementary school education at the local church school. Amazingly, she also had enough to pay tithe, and church expense, and she was especially happy when she had enough left over to help with evangelism.

She studied the Bible with her four daughters and her son each evening, and she and her children never missed going to Sabbath School and church. She was a witness and shared her faith not only with her family but also with her friends, neighbors and people she met along her way. She always kept small tracts in her purse to share when appropriate. People joined her church as a result of her willingness to let God shine His light through her. Little did she know that this was just the beginning of the fulfillment of her dream as a young girl to be a missionary.

However, even Louise found that it's easy to become discouraged and even disillusioned under trying conditions that go on year after year. When Louise lost a 15 month old baby due to heart complications, she fell into a period of grief and depression. Later, after years of hard physical labor, she lost her health and felt she was near death. Fortunately, through the encouragement, help and prayers of family and friends and her trust in God, she found healing.

What can one person accomplish, especially when life is difficult and circumstances are challenging? As a result of her faith and love and trust in the Lord Jesus, and her courage, perseverance and commitment, all five of Louise's children graduated from a Christian Seventh-day Adventist high school, Enterprise Academy, and then went on to attend the church's Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska. Several met their life partners at Union College. The ripple effect of Louise's life was just beginning.



(Caption: Tom and Louise with their son (front right), first grandson and four daughters. The three men on the back row are Dave Olsen, Leonard Webb and Cree Sandefur, each married to a Priest daughter.)

Now there were five additional families, each actively serving God, and raising their children with the same values they had learned at both home and school. Louise was beginning to see her dream of service to God fulfilled in ways she could never have imagined! Three of her daughters married ministers. One son-in-law became the announcer for her favorite evangelistic radio program, *The Voice of Prophecy*. Another served as a missionary as well as president of local and union conferences. All the children were very active and involved in their local churches.

The next generation produced ten children, all of whom received Seventh-day Adventist Christian educations, many receiving graduate degrees. Each of these cousins married and had children, most of whom are now raising their young families.

What has become of little Louise's big dreams of spreading God's love? The descendants of this emigrant girl with a third grade education include one grandson who leads the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, a world-wide organization which seeks to identify and address social injustice and deprivation in developing countries. Another owns a construction company and frequently goes around the world to help build urgently needed churches and schools with

the Maranatha ministry. A granddaughter and her physician husband moderate a weekly TV program promoting healthful living, broadcast around the world on the Loma Linda Broadcasting Network.

One of Louise's great-grandsons is fulfilling her dream and responding to God's call to serve as a missionary to Armenia, where he is leading the work of the church in that country. Other descendants are pastors, physicians, attorneys, teachers, counselors, business people and homemakers, all doing their best to make their world a better place to live.



(Caption: Most of the living descendants of Tom and Louise Priest gathered for a recent family reunion to celebrate God's great faithfulness.)

Can one person make a difference? Can an unadorned clay pot, an ordinary person, make a powerful impact on their world? Certainly the person who sold the Christian book to a family in eastern Missouri in the late 1800s made a difference! Consider the powerful influence of one little girl who was determined to have a part in spreading the message of God's love and his soon return to the world. By implementing this mission first in her home, passing on her values to her children, and then making certain those values were reinforced by Christian teachers and a Christian values-based educational system, Louise definitely made a difference.

We may never know the impact we will have on those around us, as well as on future generations. Each time we allow God's power and love to flow through us, and share the Good News of His salvation and soon return, the ripple widens. As we chose to let God exercise his power through the clay pots of our ordinary

lives, we **will** make a difference in our world by the power of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Side bar by Ellen Priest Hardt:



(Caption: Louise Priest)

Mom always did certain things on each day of the week. Friday was the preparation day. She cleaned the house and prepared the food for Sabbath dinner. The smell of freshly baked whole wheat dinner rolls and polished furniture made the house smell wonderful and reminded us that Sabbath was coming.

Mom taught us to guard the edges of the Sabbath. Before the sun set on Friday, Mom was through with her work and sitting in her rocker, reading the Review and Herald. She would gather us in the living room for sundown worship. We sang songs from the Christ In Song and found profound meaning in the words of every song. Sabbath was truly a “Day of Rest and Gladness.”

Mom lived to 95 years of age. Even though her memory stayed good, it became more difficult to keep track of the days so sometimes during the week she would ask, “Is today Sabbath?”

--Ellen Priest Hardt

(about the authors:)

Ellen Priest Hardt is the daughter of Louise Priest.

Jan Webb McQuistan, one of 10 Priest grandchildren, is an inspirational speaker and concert pianist.