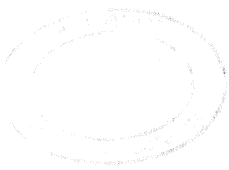


AUTOBIOGRAPHY BY WALDO HIEBERT

What I would like to say to begin this little description of my personal life and development, to say that nothing could have happened here except by the grace of God. I was moved in my own heart to say this morning to my wife, "I trust it is a testimonial, rather than a record of my activities, or our activities while moving around." So I hope it will be that. I'll read you the eight chapters which we have lived through. Rachel has described life in chapters so therefore I do.

I was a Seminary student in 1940-43, single. Tabor College, 1943-44, again 47-49. Marriage in 1944. South America ministry in 1945-47. Pastor of the Hillsboro M.B. Church 1949-59. Seminary 1959-66. Reedley M.B. Church 1966-72. And the Seminary 1972 to the present.

I'm going to take some of these chapters and lift out a few points that we have experienced. I left for seminary in 1940. I was teaching high school in Oregon and doing Summer graduate work in the University of Oregon. My mind had gone through a series of questions and doubts regarding the Christian life, but I figured when I went to seminary these questions would be answered and I would find answers. The Southwestern Seminary is a large Southern Baptist Seminary. Its the largest in the country now, it was then about 600 to 800 students. We were 300 hundred of us that walked into class, the teacher would show up, he would lecture and then disappear. Thats the way it went through the seminary and at the end of the semester we had a true and false test. There was never an opportunity to dialogue and ask



questions. Unless you made an appointment with the teacher. And I did make an appointment with the teacher, my Greek teacher, Dr. Crowder. I went to him and said, "what would it take to become a Southern Baptist?" He said, "you have to be converted." That I am. "You have to be baptized." That I am. "You have to be immersed." Well I am. "Yes but by whom?" By my uncle in Oregon. "Well that wouldn't do, you have a Southern Baptist to baptize you to be part of the church." That was too narrow for me. It hurt me no end. And I found myself going through the first year of seminary coming to the greatest test in my own life to give up faith and the church. I was rooming together with four or five other seminarians who were young preachers and they have different kind of churches. They have full-time churches, quarter-time churches, that means you go once a month, half-time churches you go twice a month, three-quarter time churches. And when they would return from their weekend experiences what they said about the church and how they had quote "lathered" the people I didn't get a very good impression what this business of seminary was all about. And I left with considerable consternation because I had not had the opportunity or the occasion and especially not the openness at that time at least, at that seminary in my first year to ask difficult questions. Except when I turned to some of the authors that I mentioned in some of the papers as being liberal, like E. Stanley Jones, Emerson Fosdick, George Buttrick spoke on prayer absolutely turned my life around. Simply because he asked the difficult questions and answered my inquiring mind. E. Stanley Jones was a profound influence on my life during college and university

years. I just remember one statement in his writings when I was having doubts about the miracles of Jesus and I had a debate partner, I debated all the time in college. I had a debate partner who didn't believe in the Bible and he influenced me because he was a very good debator. And he didn't believe in the miracles of Jesus, so I began to doubt. And E. Stanley Jones makes a simple statement, "make up your mind who Jesus is and miracles are no longer a question." That settled that for me. Then after the first year I went to Kansas City to the Central Baptist Seminary. Actually because I was called by a small M.B. Church in Janzen, Nebraska to come live for the Summer to pastor for them because they didn't have a pastor. So I worked on Sundays, during the week I worked on the farm for them. Then I found a seminary called Central Baptist Seminary in Kansas City, Kansas. This is a seminary of about 150 students, an excellent faculty and lots of dialogue in class, 15 to 20 students in class. I was there for two years. At that time my twin brother Lando also came to that particular school. He had spent two years at Dallas Seminary while I had been at Fortworth. So we caught up with each other and attended seminary together. The experience at Central led me into the interest of Christian Education as a major. I had been a high school teacher and enjoyed teaching very much. And we had a teacher at Central by the name of Eric Hayden, who was a Yale graduate, who was very articulate, who was very open and very enthusiastic about his work in religious education in the local church. I was enamored by it and I majored in it and later taught it at Tabor College. I am forever grateful for his influence in my life. Well when it came to

graduation from seminary at Central there was no place for me to go. There was no contact between me and my home church. There were no bulletins sent to me, I had no letters from them. In those two years I had one contact from my home church while I was in seminary and that was through Dr. P. C. Hiebert who came to Kansas City. He came to the campus and made a visit. I recall that as being a very warm experience. But about ten days before graduation and my preference would be to go and teach at the college. Although pastoring was a secondary choice. But on my desk was a contract to sign for a Baptist college in Oklahoma. An invitation to come there and teach in my field. And that was the only way that I had. But I really didn't want to go there, I really didn't want to go to the Baptists but this is one time in my life when I became inwardly angry with Mennonite Brethren. They didn't care about me. I had no contact there was no where to go, there was no one that was calling me for anything. I remember working through an inner anger and wondering whether it might be a good idea to go to the Baptists or some other denomination. And really at that point it was not much of a deal for me. And I would have gone to the Baptists except that ten days before the graduation I had a phone call from Dr. P. E. Schellenberg at Tabor College. He asked me if I would come teach at Tabor. It didn't take me very long because it was in the field that I was interested in, so I accepted that call. Well at Tabor we had wonderful years. One thing that I enjoyed much is teaching forensics, contemporary preaching, forensics, oratory debate. I'll tell you this one little incident we had with two debators, probably our best. They were Loyal Funk and Dwight

Wiebe. Those of you who know these fellows know that they are good communicators. The problem that I had with that debate team was I could never get them to sit down and work out a case, either negative or affirmative with a national debate question. They always winged it and they actually went to McPherson College in the tournaments as debators and won the tournament. And in the halls you always heard, did you hear the team from Tabor College they have a crazy case, they have a very funny case it changes every time they debate. Another interesting thing happened at Tabor College, there was a librarian there by the name of Rachel Wiebe. Well Rachel and I had met at high school before we had had communication once in awhile when I would come through Hillsboro and I would usually make a visit there. She had taught at Zoar Academy for a couple of years and then had been invited to come to the library at Tabor. And so we soon began a friendship and we had a courtship going what we thought was secretly. We didn't want people to know that we were doing this. And so we didn't, she had a car, I didn't have a car so I would meet her at a certain dark street in Hillsboro. She would pick me up over there and then we would drive out of town. However, it wasn't the secret that I thought it was. It was my turn to make a chapel talk and I always appreciated the library in school, I think the library to me has been a place not only of learning and research but a vision and prayer of inner searching and inner growing. So I was giving a talk on the heart of the college is the library. And there was snickering in the audience and some students laughed throughout the talk and I was deadly serious. I wasn't talking about Rachel, I didn't even think

about it, I was giving this serious talk to inspire them to go to the library. So I caught one of the students after chapel and said, "what in the world is so funny?" Well you were talking about Rachel weren't you. We were married in 1944 and soon after that the Mennonite Central Committee came to us and asked if we would go to South America for a two to three year period to help reopen the high school in the Chaco that had been closed for a year because of the Nazi influence in the colonies. And not knowing what was ahead of us we took a two year leave from Tabor and went to Paraguay. At that time it took a week to travel from Asuncion to the Chaco. First by river boat and then by train, then a night and a day on the buggy. This is 1945. When we came there we found mixed feelings towards them. There were those who embraced us as brother and sister and there were those who called us "the crazy Americans." And I can understand that because international politics is a very funny thing. How could the North Americans fight war with the communists against the Germans. The communists persecuted us. The Germans helped us to get into a new country and how crazy can you Americans be. And it was difficult over these years that we were there for some to overcome that kind of, whatever it takes to make sense from that. We went to the first meeting of the colony which was in _____ there is only one assembly place in Filadelfia the center of the colony. A large picture of Hitler was still on the wall. The people on the streets were still greeting each other with "Heil Hitler." And the situation in the colony was very, very tense. There was that time when the Paraguayan government was informed through a North American worker

down there that the colonists were being influenced by Nazism and that they were being asked to sign to defend the Third Reich and as soon as Germany would win the war against Russia then they would all move out of this wilderness of the Chaco back into their home in South Russia. At one time 80 percent of the colonists signed such a paper. So one day the military trucks rolled into the colony and ordered three of the leaders onto the truck in 24 hours to be transported to another place in the Chaco, or in Paraguay, east Paraguay. They were the leaders of the car that had overthrown the regime. Fitz Kliever who was the leader of education and the principle of the high school and Johann Harder who was the leader of the _____.

This ended church relationships. So they were gone and when we arrived they had already put into place a new administration of people who had not signed the document to defend the Third Reich. And these administrators who were in charge were generous and kind, they were sympathetic towards them. We started our school and I remember waking up one morning and I hear some marching going on, we woke up and we found that (tape was turned over, some script lost).

I was so shook up that I went to Menno Siemens, Mr. Siemens who was editor of the Mennoblatt who had staunchly held to I guess the Nazi influence and said, "What are we going to do here?" How long is this going to continue? And it was difficult to sort out the literature in the library or the textbooks which were all written from the German's point of view, from the Third Reich point of view. So he said, be a little patient it will take time but through the process of time you will gain the confidence and we trust that our colony will be

reunited. The M.B. Church has split, the families have split over the issues and there was a lot of tensions and fear. After the first year of teaching we were asked to do some interesting things one was to do vacation Bible school in each village, 18 villages. Do vacation Bible school in the morning and evangelism in the evening. I told the brethren I don't consider myself to be an evangelist. Oh he said do it anyway because we haven't had evangelistic meetings here in years, we've been talking politics. So we undertook the task and God was very gracious, there was a lot of melting and reconcilliation. Many of the young people were converted at that time because they had never had an invitation to come to Christ for years. And the way the alter call was made was if there was anyone that wanted to come back and talk about accepting Christ could come back into the school house, they didn't have church buildings, they only had school houses, come back into the church building and we were there to pray with them. The second year there was already an entirely different attitude and different situation. We worked more in harmony, there was another teacher added in the church and the school was growing. When we were about to leave under the Board of General Welfare and Public Relations, B. B. Janz was sent to help reconcile our M. B. congregation to come together again and to be a reconcillor in the group. They pressed me for sometime and certainly in the second and into the third year about undertaking some efforts of reconciliation. But being an M.C.C. person I felt it really wasn't my task. When Brother B. B. Janz came we made the trip on the buggy and went through the villages. He gave his opening address and I gave my farewell

address. And he had one text (German quote), everyone knew what he was talking about. And he said to Rachel one day, today sister you welcome me to the chapel and later I will welcome you into heaven. It was also the time when M.C.C. sent H. A. Fast the Vice-Chairman of the M.C.C. to help in the reconciliation processes. And we had serious talks with him because we had endured a lot of criticism because we were so _____ upon us. And he said, "Well how far did Jesus go. How much criticism did he take." And that took our eyes away from ourselves and gave us a new focus. A focus on Christ and he endured criticism as he hung on the cross. It was very helpful. Well this story has only been written up in recent years. It was first written up by Gerhard Ratzlaff under the supervision of Peter Klassen at Fresno State University. And it was "hid" in the archives because there were names hidden in that thesis that would hurt feelings of people if they read those stories. In fact the generation that went through this turmoil did not tell their children about it because they were so ashamed of it. But they had been so influenced by this man. Now two years ago when I was once more back in the Chaco to do some ministry a new book had just come out by Peter Klassen one of the teachers in the colonies who wrote up this story in the German language and had just been published and was available in the stores. I was just amazed that this was only two, three years now since 1945 that the story about the struggle that these people had gone through during that time. We have since that time in the Chaco developed friendships that have lasted and are still intact. Many, many friends. This is one of the most enriching experiences, one of the

most difficult ones where we found ourselves crying through the night because of the contradictions that we found. But they had also born wonderful fruit so that we have many wonderful friends and its like a second home to us. And also many of them have come here to the Seminary to study and they have now assumed leadership, they are now pastors, presidents of Bible Institutes, they are leaders in the colonies. And for them to have been here a few years and to have had association with them their is a very special wonderful bond between us and the Paraguayan brothers and sisters. At this time I would like to have you meet one of our Paraguayan brothers, Horst Bergen. Horst and his wife Norma are here. He was youth leader in Asuncion churches and is here for the second year now. And thats the way it has been throughout all the years.

Next chapter briefly is Hillsboro M.B. Church. These ten years rebuilt or built my faith in the church. I was profoundly affected and influenced by that church. Marvin Hein told me one time what I had said to him when he became associate pastor. I had said to him as we looked into the auditorium and saw the people there and I said to him, "this church you may not build it but they will build you." And thats the way it happened to me. They built my faith, they restored my confidence in the church and it developed in me a real desire and a longing to pastoral ministry. I was the only, I the janitor and a secretary were the only ones on the staff, there were 800 members. And after seven years I developed stomach trouble, went to the clinic, the doctor took me into his private office. He said, "Hiebert you've got a choice. You either quit the ministry or get your health." So I

went to the council and decided to get help, and we found Marvin Hein pastoring a congregational church north of Hillsboro. He had graduated two years before that. He came on half-time and half-time at Tabor College. It was crazy. Then we had a call in 1969 to come to the Seminary to teach in Christian Education. This was at first a difficult time. The first seven years that I was here. Mainly because it had the stamp of dispensational, fundamentalism and particularly the fact that there was not openness to discuss any other points of view. I remember once bringing up the peace issue in the faculty meetings and was soon told that that had no relevance for our discussion here. There was such a time where I didn't have the freedom to ask questions. And there was not very much dialogue. Then in 1966, this is going over just a little bit 60s period that we are in, we went to Reedley to pastor there for six years. Next we were called back to the Seminary. Let me say two things about Reedley. One, we did try to call out ministers out of the congregation, by that I don't mean ordained ministers. We tried our best to find some people that would be open to minister to one another. And it came about in a critical time, a crisis time. It was three o'clock in the morning in my first year the call came, the sister said my husband has just died can you come to the house. Again I called Henry Janzen who is our part-time assistant, 500 hundred families and a pastor and a half. He said, "who died." I said, "so and so. I don't know them." He said well we will find out we'll take the address and we will go see these people. And when we went home I said to Henry, "this just can't happen again, because neither you or I or anyone else is aware

that here is a sick person who has not been called on, has not been shepherded, we must do something." So we took this to the Board of Deacons, we asked to come to their meeting, they had a monthly meeting and I attended their meeting and then they called on me to give a talk. They hadn't warned me about that. I said I don't have a talk but I have a question, What's your job? What do you do? And they were all very quiet. They and their spouses, they were kind of embarrassed and did not answer the question, except serve communion and help the pastor. So one of them finally said, well the pastor usually gives us a list of the widows and we divide them among us 18 couples and we have been visiting them. So from then on we began to devise a plan. I don't know if its still working or not. But we doubled the size of the Board of Deacons from 18 to about 33 and gave them each 12 to 15 families to shepherd, to oversee, to visit, to counsel, to comfort. The act of shepherding them. We called it their parish and we developed ten simple lessons which we later put into a little booklet like this "Deacons and Their Ministry." And what we did is we, Henry and I took a Sunday school quarter, twelve Sundays and put them into this class. They left their classes and came to this class and we had inservice training. They each had 12 to 15 families in their parish and on Sundays we went over the questions that they brought in and we tried to give them some guidance and encouragement. I noticed that the calls to the office became fewer and fewer. I know that once a man came to the office and said, I am going to the hospital for surgery. And I said, are you nervous about it? And he said, never mind you are very busy and I just wanted to

tell you. I walked with him to the car and I said I really wanted to talk to him before the surgery. Oh you don't need to, he said, I have Paul. Paul Funk is my deacon. I have him. That's significant. He would rather share with him. When I went on to visit the third day out comes Paul out of his room and I asked him has he shared his heart with you. Yes, indeed he has. And the others began to be amazed not only what it did for the people that were being visited and counselled and so forth, but what it did for the deacons themselves. They said this has done more for me anyone else. I didn't know that I had gifts for ministry. The other thing that we tried to do is to build small groups. That was the time when Vernon Janzen was an associate pastor and he worked with the small groups.

Now to close. Two things. One is our family. We have four children and I want to be very frank and also to say that my spiritual mentor is Rachel. Deeply devoted, I always walked with the Lord but I always cherish and is probably the greatest influence in my life. Our family of four children, three of them are married have become ecumenical. We have Mennonites, Catholic, Methodist and Lutheran and Presbyterian in our family. What that has done is create some discussion and some dialogue and we've had a great growing experience through that.

My last comment is this. It says every minister has really only one strength and if I have had only one strength its entitled "A new beginning." I've had sermons that I just change the title. I was accused here at Seminary that I didn't make very many sermons I just changed the title. And so many of these I notice have been called new

beginnings. And thats my heart still. Either its a spiritual formation or spiritual retreat, wherever it is, its the cry of my heart to renewal.