Thank You, Alma. . . for a courageous, blessed act

BY BILL AVERA
First UMC, Mesquite

Alma, single and pregnant at the age of 30, was born November 14, 1924. She was of Irish, German, and Indian heritage. She was five foot nine and one half inches and weighed 185 pounds. Her mother and father were both in their fifties, and she had a 29-year-old brother. That is about all we know about Alma, except that she was due to deliver a baby on October 10th and that she was Protestant.

Elmo, age 37, of English, Scotch, and Irish descent, was the putative father of Alma’s baby. Not much else is known about him.

Much is left to our imagination about how Alma and Elmo met. We know nothing of their circumstances, or their relationship, for that matter. Were there other children? Did they eventually marry? Many questions are unanswered.

We do know one thing for certain: Alma did what thousands of other women in similar circumstances over the past 110 years have done: she found herself at Texas Mission Home and Training School (now the Methodist Mission Home) in San Antonio.

Madame M. L. Volino, who ran a brothel on San Saba Street in downtown San Antonio, Texas, founded the home in 1895 in the wake of a dramatic and spontaneous conversion experience. Inspired by a street revivalist, Madame Volino returned to her home in the red-light district, vowing to begin a new life. Through financial and emotional support of the Methodist community and Travis Park Methodist Church, Volino converted the brothel into a rescue home for “fallen” women. By the early 1900’s, most of the women were like Alma, pregnant and unwed, and the Rescue Home became known primarily as a Maternity Home. According to the home’s website, www.mmhome.org, “Over the years, a changing social climate was reflected in the activities of Methodist Mission Home. In 1938, residents of the overcrowded San Saba residence moved to the old Baylor Hospital building on 9th Street. Continued growth led to the building of the current multi-building, 25-acre campus on Whitby Road in 1968.”

When the number of women seeking adoptive placements for their babies dropped in the 1970’s, the home looked for new ministries to serve those who had special needs. Initially serving the hearing impaired, the program has evolved over the past 30 years to now include persons who are seeking a higher independence and the ability to live independently.

Guest Columnist

“...most of all, thanks be to God for loving us, guiding us, and sustaining us”

Chair, NTC Board of Trustees
Bill Avera
Continued from Page 1A

leads the arts program, became involved after getting to know Deering at community-based outreach meetings.

Each participant received a certificate of completion and ended the summer of 2005 with a new sense of community. “Not once did the kids bickereach other or say a cross word. We had some attention span issues, but no conflicts,” she explained.

Rev. Millsap worked with the summer program each day and particularly helped with the writing group.

For some of the families, the Pleasant Mound programs were a family affair. Several of the arts program participants had younger siblings who enrolled in Project Transformation (PT), which Pleasant Mound also hosted during the summer.

Mix arts program teens, PT children, and hosts of volunteers and Pleasant Mound UMC was one lively place throughout the summer.

**GDCC Support**

Food was provided through the Greater Dallas Community of Churches summer feeding program. Since the majority of arts’ program participants were on free or reduced cost lunches at school, the group easily met the GDCC feeding program criteria, Rev. Millsap explained.

Rev. Millsap laughed as she explained how the youth could get innovative with their food as well as with their art. They figured out how to freeze their breakfast juice and enjoyed an improvised “icee” in the afternoon. The youth developed new admiration for Pastor Connie as she taught them another trick from her youth: how to take a peppermint stick and stick it into the orange, and suck the juice through one very sweet straw.

**Strong leadership**

Looking back on the summer, she credits strong leadership as a key to the arts program success. Minor is a successful professional actor, known for his roles in The Tuskegee Airmen, Problem Child, Dark Angel, JFK, and Born on the Fourth of July.

His television credits include appearances in Walker Texas Ranger and With Ossie & Rub.

His skills in engaging youth, drawing out their individual best, are evident after only a few minutes of observation, not surprising for the person who founded The Citizen’s Committee to Save Our Children, Inc.

Dance instructor Sandra Bryant has 25 years of experience as a cultural dance educator. She is dedicated to working with youth and helping them develop to their full individual potential. Drum instructor S-Ankh Rasa, founder and director of the KUMAASI African Ensemble, has more than 40 years of musical experience, including tours with Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, and other well-known artists.

Instructor Rashid Bryant has been a drummer with Omari for ten years. He is the father of one whose life goal is to teach youth how to play drums and become better people. Jamaica-born Theo Budd is a Pleasant Mound UMC member and church pianist. He sang with large community choirs and has been an improvising soloist in works ranging from Handel’s Messiah to Captives of Babylon. He is an experienced church organist and music director who serves on the board of the Southeast Dallas Emergency Food Center.

Ken Runey is a native of Indianapolis, Indiana. He sang as first solo at age four and has performed in many local productions. His current areas of emphasis are writing and recording. El Tonya Minor is the 24-year-old daughter of a beautiful two-year-old boy. With a background in both the arts and in marketing, which she studied at Prairie View A&M, she hopes to build a public relations and talent business. Teen helper Kendra Millsap enjoys dancing and singing and hopes to enter the ranks of a professional ballet troupe in the future.

Dance instructor Sandra Bryant leads stretching exercises before morning practice.

Thank You, Alma... 50 years later connections are remembered

Continued from Page 1A

Methodist Mission Home looks primarily to the United Methodist churches, pastors, and lay persons of Texas and New Mexico for its financial support. The home receives no apportionment funds whatsoever. It is governed by an independent board of trustees and is under the able leadership of Jennifer Sample, Executive Director since 2001.

At the same time Alma was looking for an adoptive placement for her yet-to-be-born baby, there was a married couple in East Texas who could not have children. God had placed upon their heart the desire to be parents, and their local Methodist pastor suggested that they submit an application to the Methodist Mission Home. Many trials and tribulations would await the couple on their journey to adoption. Originally they were told that the wait would be extensive. In fact, quoting from one letter they received: “We ONLY have for placement the babies born in this HOME and voluntarily released by the mother. God, the laws of the state, and this HOME invest in the unmarried mother the responsibility of deciding whether or not she keeps or places her baby. Thus you can understand why we regret that our situation is such that we cannot accept another application at this time.”

Within one year, the couple’s application was accepted, and a home visit was conducted. It would be another six months before the couple would hear from the Home again.

On October 1st at 9:17 p.m., Alma gave birth to a healthy baby boy, and then she penned these words:

I Alma gave birth to a boy, weighing 8 pounds and 14 ounces, at [10] pm on Oct 1 at the Baptist Memorial Hospital.

Since it is impossible for me to keep my baby, I would like to have him placed for adoption. I would appreciate it very much if you would make all the necessary arrangements.

I am confident that you will place my baby in a good, Christian Home.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely yours,

Alma

The rest is history, as they say. H.R. and Marjorie, the couple I mentioned earlier who wanted to adopt, were contacted by Miss Lena Mae Rust, a social worker at the Methodist Mission Home, who informed them that they had been selected to receive the baby boy that Alma had delivered. They quickly made the necessary arrangements and headed for San Antonio. Full of anticipation and excitement, a new baby awaited them.

This October 1st will mark 50 years since the birth of that baby boy. Privacy laws at the time protected Alma’s identity. We don’t know what happened to her. What we do know is that she did a very courageous thing that day, and I know God has truly blessed her for that act.

The adoptive parents have gone on to their eternal reward. H.R. was a veteran of WWII, and Marge was a respected social worker, working with the mentally ill for more than 30 years.

The baby grew up in a loving, Christian home, just as Alma wanted. Baptized as an infant in the Methodist Church, confirmed as an eleven-year-old, he continues to serve his local congregation, his district, and his Conference in a number of leadership roles. In fact, he now serves as a trustee for the Methodist Mission Home.

Words cannot adequately express MY gratitude to Alma. Although I’ve never met her, I will always be connected to her.

Nor can words express my appreciation to the mom and dad I knew. Their encouragement and support continue with me today.

Thanks be to God for all the Alma’s and all the H.R.’s and all the Marge’s. But most of all, thanks be to God for loving us, guiding us, and sustaining us.

**AMEN**

The “Connecting the Pieces, Mind, Body & Spirit” Singles’ Retreat at the Mount Sequoyah Conference and Retreat Center in Fayetteville, Arkansas, will be Oct. 7-9. John Riley, a motivational speaker who works with individuals in the areas of goal setting, mission statements, and vision statements, will be featured speaker.

Guitarist and singer Peter Mayer, known for his songs for a small planet, will be featured entertainer. The schedule also includes a large array of workshops dealing with practical and spiritual issues single adults face in daily living.

The Mount Sequoyah chapel will be open for reading, prayer, and meditation throughout the retreat. The South Central Jurisdiction of the UMC owns Mount Sequoyah Retreat Center.

Special rates are available for groups of five or more if registration is postmarked prior to Sept. 14. For more information Craig Olney at 317-873-6503, ext. 1020, or e-mail: craigo@zip.org. For traveling directions contact the Mount Sequoyah staff at 479-443-4531.
DNE UMW sets annual meeting

“Vessels of Mission in Joy” will be the theme for the Dallas Northeast District United Methodist Women’s annual meeting Sept. 17. A celebration of local units and their mission work will be held from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at First UMC Richardson, 534 West Beltline Road.

Featured UMW units will include First UMC Rockwall, Ridgewood Park UMC, and First Richardson. Lillian Hunt, a native of Malaysia with music degrees from Southern Methodist University and the University of Texas at Austin, will be worship speaker. She and her husband served as UMC missionaries in Malaysia, Singapore, and Austria.

Dorothy Lee Johnson, president of Dallas Church Women United, will install new district officers.

To arrange childcare call First Richardson at 972-235-8385. For more information, call Gale Ragland, DNE UMW president, at 972-423-5468.

Rev. Davis

C.C. Young sets Grandparent’s Day activities

C.C. Young Retirement Community, located at 4847 West Lawther Drive, Dallas, will host a Grandparent’s Day celebration for residents and their families on Veteran’s Day, Sept. 11, from 1:30-3:30 p.m. “Grandparents are Heroes” is theme for this year’s event, which will feature the Bryan Adams High School Marching Band. In recognition of Veteran’s Day, a flag raising ceremony and tribute to veterans will be performed in their honor. Local fire station #55 will have a crew and fire truck on exhibit. Other activities will include a family photo booth and a performance by the Mesquite UMC Choir. For more information, contact Heather Waggner at 214-827-2832. Residents pictured are Lewis Wendell and Bernice Howells. Children pictured are from Lovers Lane UMC Weekday School.

Rev. Davis
You are Cordially Invited
to Attend
The North Texas Annual Conference
of
The United Methodist Church Ministry Center
Groundbreaking Ceremony
September 18, 2005
4:00pm
Reception to Follow
   at
Central Market

North of George Bush (190) off of Coit Road, Plano.
North of Central Market—320 Coit Rd—across
from WalMart, turn onto Mapleshade Lane.
Mapelawn is to the left.