

June 2018

Dear Brethren:

Although it may not be evident from reading individual issues alone, many of the *Monthly Letters* that you have received from this author over the last eight years are part of a larger, comprehensive project to document the history and *informed interpretation* of events that occurred in the life of Mr. Herbert Armstrong and the Worldwide Church of God in the twentieth century. Each element is a piece that adds to the picture *as a whole*, and provides an analysis of real facts that other authors outside of this remnant body have never recognized or been willing to admit. There is nothing in this project that has not, in some way, been documented already in various articles and letters published by Church of God, The Eternal over the past forty years. But this project in particular is an attempt to structure that historical account to show succinctly *the fabric* of a *complete picture* for future reference. With God's help, that project will be completed one day.

Here is another important piece of that story:

As documented already in the summary timeline of the history of Mr. Herbert Armstrong's work from his own words, the 1960s and 70s showcased a number of dramatic events which affected the Worldwide Church of God and its ultimate "fate" as an organization. Yet every other author who has written retrospectively about these events seems to miss the real crux of that story. Depending upon the bias of the author, much emphasis is laid either upon glorifying Mr. Armstrong as a last-day Elijah who could do no wrong, or else vilifying him and his work as being evil and deceptive from the inception. There is little perspective apart from these two extremes.

Therefore, analyses by these authors often highlight critical events from either the 1930s through the 50s, or else the 1970s through the 90s, especially by those who believe the most serious threats to the church occurred in the decade just before or just after Mr. Armstrong's death. Somehow, the 1960s seem to fall through the historical cracks. More importantly, the role of Mrs. Loma Armstrong seems to have been forgotten altogether.

### **The Forgotten Matriarch**

Recall that Mrs. Armstrong died in early 1967 after an unexpected illness lasting just a few weeks. It was a shock both to Mr. Armstrong and to the whole church. How

important had she been in the work of her husband and the operation of the church? Her influence was far greater than most people today remotely realize. Yet Mr. Armstrong himself highlighted his wife's importance consistently over many decades. Here are just a few examples:

A minister's wife is PART OF HER HUSBAND'S MINISTRY. Mrs. Armstrong has always been a very definite PART of this ministry, from the first. It was thru her God called me in the first place. If she had not had just the right personality, just the right abilities, the depth of character, the insight and understanding, the judgment, the complete yieldedness to God and His Spirit and His leading to hold up her part of this work, so that we could work together as a perfect harmonious team. MY part of the work could never have been accomplished. We have been instruments, TOGETHER, in the hands of God these many years (*Co-Worker Letter*, February 21, 1952).

Do you realize that, actually, God started His Church of this "Philadelphia era" through Mrs. Armstrong? First, He opened her mind to His Law and His TRUTH. Then, through her, He brought me to Him and to His TRUTH. Then He used us together as a TEAM.

God says it is not good that a man should be alone. He made a help for Adam. He gave Mrs. Armstrong to me for my help. After He used her for the first starting of His great Work -- now becoming powerful and worldwide -- and for starting His Church for this era, He has used her ever since as my loyal, faithful, loving, and very helpful PARTNER. Our ministry has been as a TEAM -- together. She is a vital HALF of that team! Most of our members know that! (*Co-Worker Letter*, March 2, 1967)

Perhaps I might be permitted to say that this amazing growth, as I now look back on it from the beginning, is very gratifying indeed to me personally. From the beginning my wife shared the responsibilities, the concerns, the problems, and the triumphs with me until her death in April, 1967 -- just 3 1/2 months before our golden wedding anniversary (*The Plain Truth*, Personal from the Editor, October 1968).

Perhaps the members *at that time* knew all of this to be true. If so, it seems her significance to Mr. Armstrong's success was soon forgotten by later generations. Current authors seem to be silent on her role in that church's history. But right after she died, Mr. Armstrong wrote a special memorial to her in his church letter of May 1967. Here are some excerpts:

Through the wife God gave me, He called me — and us together — into His service. He chose us as a husband-and-wife TEAM. Through us He built His end-time WORK, proclaiming to the whole world the GOOD NEWS of His coming world-ruling Kingdom, as a witness to all nations.

He used us to prepare the way for Christ's coming in supreme POWER and GLORY to rule all peoples, and to bring to earth PEACE, prosperity, happiness and joy. He used us in bringing many thousands to CHRIST, to be begotten as God's own children, to be BORN into His divine Family! . . .

So now I can only be exceedingly GRATEFUL to the Great God of all creation for having allowed me a half century of her loving companionship and help. After our marriage in 1917, and before my conversion in 1927, the one unselfish thing I can remember putting into my prayers was always to THANK GOD for the lovely wife He gave me. Of course I only prayed, in those years, for two reasons — because my parents had brought me up to believe in God and to pray, and because I wanted to GET something from God. Yet, somehow, even then I KNEW God had selected my wife and given her to me. I don't know how I knew — it was just in my mind to know it (*The Plain Truth*, Personal from the Editor, May, 1967).

Concerning her moral character and positive influence upon others, Mr. Armstrong would often laud his wife and highlight evidence of her valuable personal example and tireless service. Toward the end of that same memorial letter, he stated:

Mrs. Armstrong was Guidance Counsellor to the young women students on all three Ambassador College campuses. She, herself, marvelled at the wisdom that just came spontaneously from God as she counselled with these many girls about their many problems.

She set them a splendid example in so many ways. In her was no guile — no hypocrisy — no pretense.

She was born in a small town in Iowa, had taught school before we were married. She had come from plain, simple, yet solid and substantial stock, well above average in success and accomplishment in the world. Her father owned a retail store. Two of her uncles were doctors — one reputed to have been a "millionaire" — one an attorney, one owned a drugstore, one a successful farmer, another prominent in politics. Her great grandfather on her mother's side had emigrated to Iowa from England, established a linen mill, and built a whole town.

But they were not pretenders. My wife had no patience with flattery or pretense. She was just down-to-earth common clay — just what she was

— she put on no airs, or veneer of affected sophistication, yet she was every whit a QUEEN (as a Queen SHOULD be). She had a sound and understanding mind of great depth. She was my main counsellor in all problems, and plans.

God blessed me with just the wife needed for HIS WORK — a true HELP such as God intended a woman to be. Always I held her, not only in my own mind and thoughts, but before all others, in the very highest esteem, admiration, and honor (*The Plain Truth*, Personal from the Editor, May, 1967).

So Mr. Armstrong was never shy about giving praise to his wife as an instrument God had used powerfully—in partnership with him—to raise up the Radio Church of God. In writing his *Autobiography*, he gave much credit to her—without jealousy—as an instrument God used actively to inspire them both with wisdom. That is the reason this particular historical rendering gives credit both to Herbert *and* Loma Armstrong, as sharing in that very lasting legacy. Regardless of whether you are one who hates that church or loves that church, it is a legacy still exerting an impact upon many today, regardless of what became eventually of the corporate enterprise. Loma Armstrong's role in that endeavor should not be dismissed.

### **A Reaction for Every Action**

But what evidence is there that the death of Loma Armstrong was actually a critical turning point for the Radio Church of God?

If it is true that Loma Armstrong had been such a critical and trusted partner in the conduct of her husband's work—and key to his success over a thirty-five year period—is it likely that her death would produce no *threatening tremor* or *ensuing vacuum* within the church? Isaac Newton's *Third Law of Motion* states, "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction." Was there really no equal and opposite reaction to the death of Loma Armstrong?

Mr. Armstrong never seemed to acknowledge that there was ever any let-down in power, wisdom, or direction from God after Loma's death in early 1967. Whereas he had always given her credit for being a very key partner in that Work, now, without her, the impression was given that God was *filling that void* by inspiring him unilaterally. The question is, even if he really believed that to be true, was it true in reality?

Was it really true that the sudden illness and death of Loma became a "wake-up call" to the whole church, spurring ministers and laymembers alike to redouble their efforts to grow close to God and to invest in their spiritual futures for "the home stretch"? That was the claim.

The thousands of God's people backing and helping in this great Work of God needed an EXTRA spiritual rejuvenation for this final supreme effort coming "on the home stretch."

And GOD USED MRS. ARMSTRONG'S TWO-MONTHS-LONG CRITICAL ILLNESS FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE. Nothing like it had ever happened before. There was an unprecedented SHAKING UP — hundreds — THOUSANDS — were brought to their knees in tears, realizing their own shortcomings — their urgent NEED of a closer contact with the living CHRIST — of a greater filling of HIS SPIRIT!

It started with me — but also at almost the same time with the ministers at Pasadena Headquarters holding the top responsibilities in this Work. From there it spread rapidly to our ministers stationed in all parts of the world — and also like a shock-wave to Co-Workers by thousands around the world. There was intensive heart-searching never before experienced by these thousands who have this Work at heart (*The Plain Truth*, Personal from the Editor, May, 1967).

By this account, Mr. Armstrong, all the ministers under him, and the entire laity were now poised to *move forward* with *more power and enthusiasm* than ever before! Loma's death was *the wake-up call* that would jump start the church toward unprecedented achievements!

Is that what actually resulted? What did those key events transpiring in the immediate aftermath of her death demonstrate historically? Did that church really move forward, or did it begin to veer onto a path of a slow but steady unraveling of all that Herbert and Loma had worked for together? You will be the judge.

### **Vanity Was His Natural Weakness**

One of the very critical, but subtle, benefits that Loma Armstrong had offered her husband was a check upon his natural tendency to crave worldly acclaim. Recall his own admission of this weakness from his youth—to "become somebody" in this world. As quoted from his *Autobiography*, he gave credit to his *down-to-earth* and *most unpretentious* wife as the *balancing force* which helped him to become so successful.

In those days I had developed a very excessive case of swelled head. I was snappy, confident, conceited—yet *sincere*, and intending to be completely honest (*The Plain Truth*, November 1957, *Autobiography* p. 4).

My wife gone into religious *fanaticism*! I was horrified, outraged! What would my friends — my business associates say?

I had been humiliated, my ego punctured, by unpreventable business reverses. But this was the greatest humiliation of all. This seemed more than my vanity and conceit could take. It was a mortifying blow.

"You can't tell me that all these Churches have been wrong all these years and centuries! They all teach that SUNDAY is the day to keep and hold church services, all but one strange, queer, fanatical sect."

My wife was broken up, too, when for the first time in our married life I threatened divorce. She was sobbing.

"But I can't help it," she sobbed. "I have seen with my own eyes in the Bible that God made holy the hours between Friday sunset and Saturday sunset. I would be disobeying GOD if I gave it up now — I would be LOST!"

I was boiling with indignation and anger (pp. 286, 288).

It was humiliating to have to admit my wife had been right, and I had been wrong, in the most serious argument that ever came between us.

It was shocking, disillusioning, to learn, after intensive study of the Bible for the first time, that what I had been taught from a child in Sunday School was, in so many basic points, the very opposite of what the Bible plainly states! . . .

The opening of my eyes to the TRUTH brought me to the crossroads of my life. To accept it meant to throw in my lot with a class of humble and unpretentious people I had always looked upon as inferior. It meant being cut off from the high and the mighty and the wealthy of this world, to which I had aspired. It meant the final crushing of VANITY. It meant a total *change of life!* (pp. 298–299)

Every person has his IDOL. God cannot receive and convert a human life until his idol has been smashed or torn from him. My idol had been an egotistical sense of self-importance — a cocky self-assurance — a passion to become successful in the eyes of the material world. God is creating in those He calls a righteous character which can be developed only through *experience*; and experience requires TIME. God has a lot of time — He is Eternal — He has always existed — He always will.

It took *time* to eradicate from my heart the love of the praise of men.

God gave me, instead, the false accusations, the unwarranted oppositions, the scheming persecutions of people. It required *time* to bring me to a place where I no longer set my heart on material possessions and the finer things of this material world.

This process required not one or two years — not seven — but *four sevens!* For 28 financially lean and humiliating years out of *the very prime of life*, God continued to root out of my life and character this vain idolatry!

From the first and for many years I was the *least* of the ministers. I was the greenhorn tail-ender among the ministers of the Church of God (world headquarters then Stanberry, Missouri). And I was never permitted to forget that fact! *God knew I needed this* (pp. 392–393).

But once he had learned this vital lesson of humility, was the natural impulse truly eradicated for all time? One of Mr. Armstrong's key teachings to the whole church asserted that our carnal natures are *always there*—even until we die—requiring our *vigilant efforts*, using God's Spirit, to *vanquish those impulses* and to dominate them with the mind of Jesus Christ. If that is so, was not then Mr. Armstrong required continually to "ride herd" upon his own natural weakness, even for his whole life?

Did Loma Armstrong continue to play a *key part* in helping him to maintain this humility in the face of every new temptation? Notice this account of one such temptation that came his way in the mid-1940s:

About that time a certain advertising agent in Los Angeles asked me to have lunch with him. I believe it was at the Jonathan Club. He was the advertising agent for a religious broadcast that was then spending two million dollars a year buying radio time. This agent urged me to give up the ministry.

"Listen, Mr. Armstrong," he said. "All you'll have ahead in your religious ministry is problems, troubles, and headaches. I know. That's all Dr. Blank (not his real name) has. He is terribly harassed getting in that \$2 million a year to pay radio bills. He gets practically nothing out of it but headaches. I'm the one who gets the money out of it. As his Agency, the radio stations pay me 15% of that \$2 million a year -- I make \$300,000 a year. You have ability as a news analyst. With World War II going full blast right now, I can get you a sponsor for a 15-minute news analysis 5 days a week -- Mondays through Fridays -- at a fee of at least \$100,000 a year to start. I think in a year I can have you making \$200,000 a year -- and NO HEADACHES! You can even bring in a small amount of Biblical

prophecy once in a while -- though of course not like you do now -- for it must not sound religious, of course."

Was I tempted? Not at all, though I think Satan thought I would be.

That "temptation" came at a time when the income for the Work had been cut in HALF! The income for the whole Work was probably about \$35,000 a year by then. And Satan tried to tempt me with an offer between \$100,000 and \$200,000! And ALL FOR MYSELF! Most of that \$35,000 had to go for radio bills -- and I was beginning to have a small number of secretaries on the payroll.

In all this, Mrs. Armstrong was my faithful partner and helper. She even "scolded" me (she wasn't really serious) for telling her of that offer. SO -- we continued that year, as before, RELYING ON GOD -- and that year, despite HALF our income being withdrawn, the income for God's Work increased 30% as usual! (*Co-Worker Letter*, September 1, 1968)

So Mr. Armstrong claims that he was *not tempted* by the offer to make a lot of money as a radio personality without the hassle of the religious side of things. It is more likely that he simply *squashed that temptation quickly*, even though it very likely tickled his fancy for a moment. The very fact that he referred to Mrs. Armstrong's involvement at all speaks loudly of a subtle but forceful "help" behind him to remind him of his true priorities. Is that not exactly the kind of credit he always attributed to Mrs. Armstrong as his partner in God's service? There is absolutely no shame in this.

But if that is true, once again, is it certain that he would become as strong in defeating every new such similar temptation without Loma's support? Would he now manifest a new level of *solitary power* to keep himself from falling into that old trap of vanity, in absence of her *down-to-earth* and *unpretentious* influence? Time would tell.

The death of Loma Armstrong would present Herbert Armstrong and the entire church with a brand new challenge that would test the very foundations of that Work.

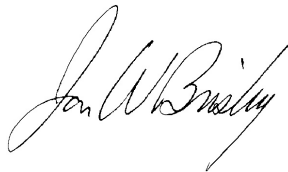
Mrs. Armstrong suffered through 28 long years of poverty with me, getting God's Work going -- and GROWING! We learned what REAL joyous HAPPINESS is, in poverty. We had God's Holy Spirit to lead us. We were constantly learning NEW TRUTHS in God's Word -- a FAR GREATER THRILL AND JOY THAN MATERIAL THINGS! . . .



Brethren, Mrs. Armstrong struggled with me, at sacrifice greater than you can know, for a WHOLE GENERATION, that YOU might have the JOY to have part in this glorious WORK OF GOD, now. I no longer have my dear wife at my side. I have to carry on without her (*Co-Worker Letter*, September 1, 1968).

Dear friends of the common faith, in the next installment, you will receive a summary of the key events that transpired within the first two years of Mrs. Armstrong's death—events that will prove that her loss in 1967 *did indeed* become one of the most critical turning points in the entire history of the Radio Church of God.

With special love and affection to all, in Christ's name,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in black ink and is centered on the page.

Jon W. Brisby