



Robert Lee Litteral

May 8, 1938 - October 11, 2023

Robert Lee Litteral (Bob) was born on May 8, 1938 in Wheelersburg Ohio. His father Raymond R Litteral and mother Lacy Claxson were born and raised in Kentucky, but moved across the river to Southern Ohio. Ray had a passion for his new community and helped found the volunteer fire department in Wheelersburg, and started several businesses. He ultimately found his calling as a grocer, building several stores into thriving supermarkets.

When Lacy was pregnant with Bob (or Bub to his immediate family) it was a time of scarcity for many; there was some consideration given to aborting this third child (two sisters – Anna Lou and Nancy Rae – had been born in the years prior to 1938). Lacy, however, felt the Lord wanted her to keep this child, and she told Him that she would dedicate this child to His service. Dad was born healthy, and as promised he was dedicated to the Lord.

Bob was exceptional from even the early days as he excelled in his studies but also loved athletics. He played basketball, ran track and played football at a high level; he was offered scholarships to play college football. He played baritone horn in the band and loved singing bass in a men's Gospel Quartet. However, he seemed destined to continue on in scholastics, as he had the honor of being Valedictorian of his Wheelersburg High School Class of 1956.

Life changed radically in 1954 when his sister Nancy Rae, right before her

graduation from high school, was paralyzed in an auto accident caused by a drunk driver. Nancy became a quadriplegic, and the focus of the Litteral family became assisting her. From that day forward Lacy gave up everything except church and garden club and made it her life's goal to help Nancy live and later thrive under these new circumstances (Nancy later in life became a world-renowned disabled artist with the Association of Mouth and Foot Painting Artists, creating beautiful oil paintings by mouth; she would become a primary supporter of Bob's work on the mission field).

After the accident, Bob's oldest sister Anna Lou, took on another role as a mother-figure to the youngest sibling, Dave, who was six years Bob's junior. Anna Lou graduated from high school and moved on to Bryan College and then Wheaton College, where she excelled in the Music Conservatory. She returned to Wheelersburg to teach – a time during which she taught Bob how to read choral music; he loved to sing hymns up until his final days on this earth. Anna Lou tragically died in a tornado in 1968.

Bob followed Anna Lou's path to Wheaton College in 1956. He played football for two years, but noticed his grades were adversely impacted during the season, so he left his athletic endeavors behind to focus on his classes. Bob initially considered chemistry as a major, with the thought of some day returning to the Wheelersburg area to work in the local Atomic Plant. However, the trajectory of his life was changed by a Wheaton College ministry with men on Chicago's Skid Row. The Lord directed him toward Biblical Studies, to which he received a Bachelor's Degree in 1960.

Bob's life was changed even more significantly in 1956 with the martyrdom of several missionaries attempting to contact unreached peoples in the jungles of Ecuador. This tragedy created a fervor for missions among youthful Christians of the late 1950s, and through Wheaton College Bob traveled to Costa Rica in summer 1958. Bob stayed with a missionary family living among

an Indian people group in the jungle - a people without the Scripture in their own native tongue. The missionaries were Bible Translators, who were dedicating their lives to bringing the Word of God into this language.

Bob went to Haiti in summer 1959, but his heart had been inspired by the work of the Bible Translators and he felt God leading him to pursue this path. After graduating from Wheaton in 1960, he left for the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) school in Norman Oklahoma, a school specifically established to train men and women how to translate the Bible into languages without an alphabet.

Following completion of his training, Bob returned to SIL to teach. It was during that summer of 1963 at SIL that he was forced to renounce his pledge to be "a bachelor to the Rapture", when a lovely lady named Shirley Carroll entered his life. Shirley was a fairly new believer who had recently had a joyous epiphany when she realized that she could use her lifelong love of languages in the service of God through Bible Translation. She was older than Bob, and was prepared to go to the mission field as a single woman, but the Lord had other ideas. There was a very brief courtship and the two were married in her hometown of San Diego in December 1963.

Shirley was a fluent Spanish speaker, and had planned to allocate in Colombia, but Bob had already been prepared to begin work in Papua New Guinea (PNG). After representing Wycliffe Bible Translators (WBT) at the 1964 World's Fair, the newlyweds sailed for the island of Papua New Guinea and waited to learn where God would have them begin their ministry.

Bob and Shirley were allocated to a tribal people group called the Angor near the western border of PNG. The Angor had only recently had contact with the outside world; they lived in family centered hamlets in the jungle and hunted

wild game and practiced slash and burn agriculture. Bob and Shirley settled among the Angor and began learning the language. Bob focused primarily on learning Angor grammar, and Shirley focused on creating a dictionary. Between them they were able to create an alphabet and begin preparing books to focus on literacy so the people could eventually read the Bible in their heart language.

In 1966 a son, Daniel Robert, was born to Bob and Shirley in the coastal town of Lae. The birth of this child was instrumental in helping the Angor see these strange foreigners as humans just like them. Dan was raised in the village as one of the Angor kids, learning the language and helping the family fit into that very different world. In 1969, a daughter Nanette Louise, was born in Lae and the family of four settled into the village called Fifiari, where they would make there home for many years among the Angor.

Language helpers like Waf, Dufai, Ismoi and many others became family members and called Bob and Shirley 'Ape' (father) and 'Meao' (mother). These men and their families became some of the earliest Christians and helped establish the Angor church.

Bob became a man of all trades in the village; carpenter, plumber, hydraulic engineer (bringing in fresh water to the village from a distant spring), mechanic, electrician, doctor, counselor, cook, agronomist, nutritionist. He built four houses over the course of his 40-year ministry. Bob and Shirley not only cared about introducing the Angor to Christ, but were also passionate about bettering the present lives of the people. They introduced nutritious plants like sweet potato and peanuts to this generally malnourished area and began implementing Bob's dream that the vernacular (rather than English) be taught in the earliest grades. In subsequent years, vernacular education would be shown to have great benefits.

Bob had always been a scholar, and SIL encouraged him to pursue a PhD in Linguistics. His degree would assist in his translation work but also would allow for him to teach linguistics in the PNG University system. Bob received his Doctorate in linguistics from the University of Pennsylvania in 1980. This was in addition to his Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Wheaton College, and a Master's degree in Linguistics from the University of Michigan.

While pursuing translation work, Bob was also a technical advisor in language and literacy with PNG's National Department of Education. Time was shared between the village and PNG's capital city Port Moresby where Bob taught in the University. While in the capital, the Lord provided the Litterals with a prison ministry – they became father and mother to a group of incarcerated men, some of whom came to be like family.

The Litterals returned to their respective homes in San Diego and Wheelersburg following each five-year term on the field for a one-year furlough. These were times to travel and visit the churches that were essential partners in the translation work. Without the support of churches and individuals committed to the ministry there would be no translation work.

In 1984 Dan left for school at Wheaton College, followed by Nanette in 1986. Bob and Shirley took their furlough in 1987 and were able to reunite the family in Wheaton as Bob was Missionary Scholar in Residence at Wheaton College's Billy Graham Center for the year.

In 1991, Shirley was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's Disease. This was a severe blow, but Shirley thanked the Lord for the blessings she had been given and continued to help with the translation work as best she could. Bob and Shirley would continue to work in PNG, returning as often as possible to reunite with family and friends in the US. Children's weddings (Dan to Lisa Holmstrom and Nanette to James Hamilton) and births of grandchildren

(Bethany and Jonathan Litteral and Kara, Rosie and Nathaniel Hamilton) were celebrated and each reunion was cherished.

In 2001 there was a great celebration in Angor land as the family (with three grandchildren in tow) travelled to the village area to celebrate the dedication of the Angor New Testament. There was great rejoicing in the presentation of God's Word in the heart tongue of this people.

A new stage in Bob's life began as the Lord asked him to step away from his linguistic work to care for his beloved Shirley. In 2002, Bob and Shirley moved to their new home on Old Bumpy Road in Tallahassee, Florida. The Lord had provided a wonderful piece of property for Dan and Lisa with more than a little touch of PNG jungle about it.

Dear friends, the McHaffies, followed the Lord's leading and offered to help Bob build an apartment attached to Dan's home (other wonderful friends from the local church, Piedmont Park Alliance, and from around the world came at different times to assist in this effort). Over the course of the next five years Bob's ministry was to Shirley, as he cared for her every need. Nanette and family were able to visit often and wonderful memories were made of these times together. Shirley passed on to be with the Lord in January 2007 and was buried on the property near the apartment.

Thus, began yet another stage in Bob's life. He had asked the Lord to give him a new ministry and through SIL the opportunity arose for Bob to help several communities in Kenya, Nepal and India with grass roots literacy work. Over the next twelve years Bob traveled to these countries every year, finishing up back in PNG with the Angor before returning to Tallahassee for the winter.

In 2015, his granddaughter Bethany was able to travel with him to Kenya where she felt the Lord's call on her life to also go into missionary work. She now lives in Colombia – the land her grandmother first felt called to. On Bob's last trip to PNG in 2019, his grandson Jonathan, was able to travel with and assist him as they returned to Angor land one last time. However, Bob's health was no longer robust.

Bob settled into his retirement in Tallahassee, cherishing his time with friends at church and continuing with his correspondence and helping friends in Africa, India and PNG. He returned to Wheelersburg annually to visit his wonderful sending church, Wheelersburg Baptist, where the congregation and numerous friends poured out their love on him.

5 weeks ago, Bob returned to Wheelersburg for the annual Labor Day event that had been initiated by his father many years ago. There was joyous reunion with friends and great fellowship. Nanette and Dan, with his wife Lisa, were able to join Bob – though none knew this would be his last journey. Three weeks ago, Bob failed a swallow test and it was clear that no nutrition was reaching his stomach. A feeding tube was inserted and family fed him via this tube over the last weeks of his life. Bob was able to continue to function fairly normally, but it was difficult to give up eating as he had been a wonderful cook and enjoyed preparing his meals every day.

A week ago, Bob had a raspy voice and his breath was audible in his trachea. Tests revealed a massive thyroid tumor impinging on his trachea. The doctors had been aware of a small growth in the area, but it was not considered likely to be a concern and had postponed further assessment until Bob regained strength. It turned out to be a very aggressive cancer – generally present in only 1% of these growths.

Bob had experienced excellent lucidity during the last few days, allowing Nanette and her children to make it to the hospital and enjoy the old grandpa

for a few days. Dan spent one night with him there and Nanette spent the following night with him. Bob was set up with hospice and returned home on Tuesday, October 10.

At 3 AM on Wednesday, October 11, Lisa felt an urging (we believe prompting of the Holy Spirit) to move over to Bob's apartment and sleep on the couch in case he needed help. He got up to use the bathroom and spoke with Lisa, complaining of a shortness of breath. Lisa called Dan over and started preparing medications to help ease his breathing.

I, Dan, was able to hold Dad and tell him it was OK. Nannette and the grandkids came into the room and were able to hold his hands while he breathed his last. The Litterals had savored a special hymn over the years, Great Is Thy Faithfulness, and we were all able to sing this even as he passed on to his Savior.

Dad had a few memorable sayings, and one that stands out is this: Always be prepared to preach, pray or die at a moment's notice. He certainly lived by this creed. We watched him put this into practice over and over. Whether he was in the PNG bush, at an African church, or here at home in the US, he would never turn down an opportunity to share the words God had laid on this heart.

Dad loved to quote a favorite verse, 1st Timothy 6:6, "But godliness with contentment is great gain". He embodied this in his life, like Paul he found contentment in all circumstances.

I admire this man who remained undaunted by any adverse circumstance. It was a testament to his faith that he was willing to attempt things that may have seemed impossible – it was not done in his own strength. If it was to be done, then the Lord would be in it and He would receive the honor.

We are so thankful that we were able to feel the warmth and share the glow of

Dad's reflected Sonlight...

Bob is survived by son Dan (Lisa) Litteral of Tallahassee, Florida and daughter Nanette Hamilton of Goose Creek, South Carolina as well as five grandchildren (Bethany and Jonathan Litteral and Kara, Rosie and Nathaniel Hamilton). Bob is also survived by his brother David Litteral of Wheelersburg, Ohio.

Shirley, who is buried on Dan and Lisa's property in Tallahassee, will be disinterred and buried with Bob in the Litteral plot in Memorial Burial Park in Wheelersburg, Ohio with Bob's father, mother and sisters.

A memorial service celebrating Bob's life will be held at Wheelersburg Baptist Church, in Wheelersburg Ohio on Saturday, December 30.

Breanna Green of Bevis Funeral Home is assisting the family with their arrangements.

Tribute Wall

GD

“ 4-19-2024

I have great memories of 'Bob' Litteral. He was from our Church in Southern Ohio. Humble, scholar, missionary & a Christian who translated God's Word to an area overseas who never knew Christ!

Gale Dalton

Ohio

gale l dalton - April 19, 2024 at 03:43 PM

BJ

“ *Bob was a truly outstanding, humble and giving man. My condolences to his family.*

Brooks Jojnson - December 26, 2023 at 04:36 PM

BJ

He also would have gotten a kick out of the fact that I just misspelled my own name above.

Brooks Johnson - December 26, 2023 at 04:37 PM

DS

“ *Such beautiful words about Bob's life "well lived" for God and his family. His labor of love on the mission fields for he & Shirley will forever be remembered in The Bible translation they provided. Loved visiting with them as they came back to Wheelersburg, Ohio to visit the family. Love & prayers to Dan, Nanette and families* ❤️🙏

Diana Claxon Stonerock - October 19, 2023 at 05:36 PM

JU

Bob was the "rooster" of the sit n fit class for years! It was an absolute pleasure to be the instructor and enjoy everything he had to share with us all. He will be greatly missed! What an awesome man he was!!

Judy Upchurch - October 23, 2023 at 04:26 PM

LL

Dear Judy, Bob loved your class. He kept asking when he could return. You all were so gracious to all his stories and objects from his travels. Can't thank this sit and fit class at Chaires enough!(I know he loved being the only old guy)

Lisa Litteral - December 02, 2023 at 09:24 PM