

# Some Disconnected Thoughts About My Life

David Alexander (Brzozowski) Bruce

I was born on May 6, 1918, in the city of Philadelphia, PA. My mother's maiden name was Stefania Kedyk, but she wanted us to call her "STELLA," because it was more "American" sounding. My father's name was Alexander J. Brzozowski. (I don't recall what the initial "J" stood for—or whether it stood for anything at all, perhaps just an initial to put in the blank forms they had to fill in?)

My father worked in the body shop of the Stutz car factory. My mother worked in a cigar factory rolling cigars! That is my earliest recollection. I remember later her telling me she made 50 cents per day.

We lived in a poor section of the city. I remember one of the streets was named Ann St. and that it was near the Delaware River. It also was near the street car "barns" where the street cars would be parked for the night and cleaned, etc. I remember some of my cousins lived nearby and my Uncle and Aunt Hackimer. His name was Frank—I don't recall my aunt's name. She died while we still lived in Philadelphia. I remember that my father was very upset that a Catholic priest had the service of his sister. But after all, she was also Uncle Frank's wife and he had the right to choose. My folks had the truth by that time, so that was why my father was upset.

My cousins would take me down to the river sometimes, and then they would go in swimming, even though they were no supposed to go. I never did go in and it was a long time before I learned how to swim. They offered to throw me in. They said I would soon learn if they did, but I ran away. I eventually learned to love it, swim, I mean—not getting thrown into the river.



Once when my folks were not in the house, I reached up onto the drain-board and spilled a box of poison lye on my face. Maybe that accounts for how it looks! It's good to have something to blame it on!!?? But for a time, I guess I thought I would lose my eyesight, but all I have is a small scar above my left eye, under the eyebrow to show for it.

I entered school when I was 5 (after I was 5) in Philadelphia. But after I finished 1st grade, we moved to Merchantville, NJ, right across the river from Philadelphia. It was a suburb of Camden, NJ. Actually we were not in the Merchantville city limits. We were in an unincorporated area called Delaware township. It was also a poor neighborhood. In fact, the blacks had a small community that was closer to the city limits of Merchantville than we were.

Because I was such a smart kid, when I entered Joseph Hinchman School (grades 1-8) instead of putting me into 2nd grade, they put me into 3rd! How about that! I "skipped" a grade. I walked to school along with everyone else walking; no busses for school. We did have busses for transportation to go to meetings in Philadelphia. First we would get on the buss and go to the ferry. Then we took the ferry across the river. Then on to meeting in a street car.

Why did we move to New Jersey? We went because I was not doing too well health-wise in Philadelphia. So, my folks thought that the country air would be better for me. We had some friends in the Philadelphia Polish class who lived in Merchantville. So we moved there and then started a little class there. We lived next door to the Wolski family and 3 doors away from another Truth family and another 4 doors away. Etc. The Wolski family had a daughter who we have seen in Santa Monica. "Wanda ----- (forgot the last name). She is also in the picture I have of a convention in Philadelphia in 1923.

This is where I learned how to read and speak Polish. I attended the meetings with my parents and my mother would teach me how to read a small paragraph in Polish and then the leader of the meeting would ask me to read. I have benefitted greatly from this and appreciate the Polish Elders for bearing with my mother and me.

I can go anywhere in France (among the brethren) and Poland and speak and even give discourses in Polish. I never dreamed this would prepare me for that kind of service to the Lord.

My father got a job in construction work, after awhile locally. He worked in Philadelphia for awhile after we moved, but one of the friends was a contractor so he worked with him.



He learned the building business from him, and by the time I was a bit older, he took jobs for building on his own. No licenses, etc., were even thought of—he just did it. He got pretty good at it, and I learned carpentry and other phases of construction this way. I learned how to excavate for a basement, by using a scoop and horse.

Later we got “mechanized” and used a stem shovel. In those days, a carpenter did it all; rough framing, finish work, hardwood floor work, roofing, siding, and we even did the painting. I helped with the plastering by mixing the stuff. It was very hard—the plaster had hair in it intentionally. I don’t even know what kind of hair. All I know is it had hair. (animal??) I carried bricks up a ladder in a “hodd” (wooden box with a pole and shoulder pad on it). Hard work, but I learned it all by experience.

My mother helped to bring over her sister from Poland, Molly. She lived with us for awhile, but it wasn’t long before she married John Kuczynski of Conn.—also a Bible Student, and a relative of the Swiderski family in Merchantville. That’s how John and David are my cousins.

Other relatives: On my father’s side, we had the Hakimers, who later followed us to Merchantville, and the Vollrath’s of Brooklyn. Fritz Vollrath, my uncle (a German), married my father’s other sister, Pauline. They used to come to Merchantville for summer vacations. My mother did not like this. They drank beer and were not interested in the Truth, etc. But we kept in contact—and I still would like to see them sometime. Frankie and Irene, my cousins, that is. I guess my aunt and uncle are gone by now. I lost touch with my Hakimer cousins; they were also a beer drinking, rough crowd; into politics (local type). When we moved to Connecticut, we lost touch with them.

I digress for a moment to mention that it was during this time that we knew the Malik family in Philadelphia. They attended the Philadelphia Class, and we would go there quite often and were closer to them than anyone else I recall from those days. Plus Helen Folchik, now in Phoenix (forget her married name). Fred Malik is one of 3 or 4 boys of the Malik family. I’ll have to ask Freddie about them sometime.

By now I got through “grade” school—and am the “Salutitarian”—next in honors to the Valedictorian. I played a song on my violin at my graduation—“Song of India.” Plus, of course, my “message” to the student body and parents.

I then went to High School and planed in the orchestra. Became the “1st violinist” in my senior year. Played in a little dance band for school parties, etc. The kids from Merchantville (city) were the “rich” families.



I was not only one of the “poor” but also “Polish” and I really had an inferiority complex, which I eventually overcame to a degree with the help of the “coach.” He had me manage the baseball team for I think 2 years which helped me. His name I still remember—it was Mr. Bobby Elder.

You will remember I mentioned the black community near us. One of the boys and I became very good friends. He would usually sing at our High School functions and was always requested to sing “Old Man River.” He did a good job on it. Our music instructor had us organize a string unit, and we played for the local PTA and even other school districts and on the local radio station in Camden. We would get free tickets to operettas, etc., from time to time in Camden, or Philadelphia. I enjoyed that. Getting back to the black community, my mother’s doctor was a black doctor who took care of our needs very well. (Including me!)

During the depression years, 1929—on we were on what we called then—“relief.” That meant, we would get baskets of food once a week. It also meant we could remain in our homes, and not need to pay on mortgages until we had jobs, etc. At least the houses did not remain empty and get vandalized.

We had a fire once in our house also, which was VERY providential. We met a “Public Insurance Adjuster” (a James J. Oxley) who represented us and who later gave us a lot of work on other fire damaged buildings. This experience helped me later, when I went to work with Br. Pollock, as a carpenter and as an estimator, and later as I went into business for myself in repairs to fire damaged buildings. I cannot help but be amazed at how the Lord’s providences prepared me so far ahead for future work.

After High School—I graduated in 1936—things were still slow and I had heard from Aunt Molly that jobs were available in Connecticut at U.S. Rubber Co. so I went up there alone to work in Naugatuck. Then the rest of the family came up. Florence was now on the scene (born in 1931?). (That makes her 60 this year??? Wow!)

I worked in construction in the summers with my father, then in the factories during the winter. I also had worked at the Waterbury Tool Col, who manufactured electric motors (for submarines, especially, plus other ships also, I guess.)

During those years, I also met Michael and Lillian Litwin (and parents, of course) plus the other Litwin family with the two girls Helen and Julia. Then I met Br. Ed Fay and we got acquainted with the Dawn. This was a wonderful development because in the early 30’s my father could no longer stay with the “Watch Tower,” although my mother stayed with them until about 1933— just about when the Dawn began.





Then we met with others in Connecticut who joined with supporting the Dawn Brethren. Molly, my mother's sister, never left the Watch Tower...so John and David stayed also. But, we still kept in contact over the years, especially with John and his family.

Along came the 2nd World War and Uncle Sam and the draft all combined to get me in the service. I was able to get into a non-combatant role, in the air force as a weather observer, map maker, etc. I was sent overseas from Brooklyn Navy yard, thinking I was going to England. But instead the ship went south, through the Canal, and to Australia. (40 days on the water eating peanut butter sandwiches.)

I was "attached" to a Bomber group of the 5th Air Force under General MacArthur. Almost 4 years of my life—a lot of experiences. Almost killed twice—got the Dengue Fever and in the hospital for a month. I went on a "landing" on a little island called Wakde; later I saw Bob Hope there. Then I came home and got on a special project in New Jersey. (Very secret??)

It was then that I had an opportunity to go to the Dawn to work on my three day passes, and I met Shirley at a gathering at Br. Sargent's apartment in New York. I could think of nothing else but wanting to see her again. We wrote to one another, then seeing encouragement from her letters, I decided to go out to see her after I got out from the army. We met again and she talked me into marrying her, and we still are walking the same path together.

Lots of good things happened after that. Br. Pollock gave me a job, then I went into his office, after I built our first home. We worked together along with Burton Brown. Then Br. Pollock gave us each 20% share of the business corp. We worked hard, sometimes 12-16 hours a day, but it has also resulted in a good living for the Bruce family, and a good retirement. And so it has gone for almost 46 years—with Chris coming along and then Ginger, during that time.

In 1978 we moved to Washington, and Chris and Joanie and later Casey joined us there; as did Ginger and then Michael.

There were times when it wasn't very easy. There were times when it was. But most of all it was the spiritual blessings of Bible study at Los Angeles that has given us the hope and comfort that far surpasses anything that has happened to me in the 73 years of my life.



I know I have left out a lot of details. But, I'm getting tired—I find I get tired a lot faster than every before. I wouldn't want to exchange any part of my life for anything else in the world. I love my wife, my children, the friends I have made along the way in the Truth. Maybe I'll add some more some time later. (Dec. 4, 1991)

DB

