

**Cornie Enns:
A Personal and TeachBeyond Tribute
George Durance
14 December 2013 Three Hills**



1. Knowing our part and doing it well

There was a time when people in the church really knew how to sing. It was in the pre-seeker sensitive, pre-worship-band era when solos, duets, trios, quartets, quintets, octets, ensembles, choirs, brass bands, orchestras, organs and pianos were not thought of as quaint or aberrant. We all had our favorite songs and performers in those almost forgotten days and one of mine was the Janz Quartet.

On a Sunday morning in the 60s I was with my family in the Prairie Bible College Tabernacle participating in the Sunday service in ways that 10-12 year old "staff kids" did. The Janz Quartet was on tour and set to sing and speak. When the congregation had sung the Doxology, listened to the announcements, had the pastoral prayer, and sung a hymn, the quartet walked up to the single, radio-studio-type mic and sang, "I'm On the Battle Field for My Lord." Of course we all knew the song. In fact, in those days, any male past puberty either sang in a quartet that had attempted the song or wished he had.

But these four men, accompanied so superbly by Harding Braaten, sang unlike any quartet I had heard. For starters, they stood back from the mic as though it was a superfluous artifact, which caught my attention because the cavernous auditorium was notoriously challenged, both acoustically and architecturally. The very first chord had me sitting up, open mouthed. Such power, such beauty, such blend and harmony! I forgot all about the mental hockey game I was playing. This was amazing. There they were, consummate professionals singing without music, without any strain or nervousness, thoroughly enjoying the music and its proclamation of truth. They were having fun – no, joy as they sang what they believed.

I am still motivated spiritually by what I saw and heard some fifty years ago. Like them, I wanted to communicate Gospel truth with conviction and excellence. When the song was done the Prairie congregants clapped – enthusiastically – which struck me as somewhat scandalous as I knew later on in the day we would not be permitted to play catch or ride our bikes. In those days Christians just knew a lot of things were right and wrong, or we thought we did.

But the truth is, the cheering was spontaneous and could hardly be restrained – not because it was a good show, but because it was so wholesomely beautiful that people forgot themselves. Absorbed in the power of song done well and the energy of the message, they just had to say "Amen" in some physical way.

Each member of the quartet sang his part and contributed to a rich, full-voiced blend that is almost unknown in our “enlightened” digital age. I asked Jack Stenekes, who worked with Cornie in Germany during the late sixties and early seventies, about Cornie’s role in the quartet and he said, “He always sang bass and was the foundation upon which the other parts were built. He was steady, accurate, reliable, and always there with his part.”

What a fine metaphor for his life. Cornie was the reliable base or foundation for all that was going on musically above him, and herein lies one of the great principles of his life. Cornie had a part to sing and a role to play, and he did it about as perfectly as anyone I know.

If you sing bass, you rarely lead. Yes, there are moments to shine – and he did this in a number of memorable songs. But typically you are there to be built upon and to support others in more flashy roles. How did he perform his role? With ease and unassuming grace; with happiness and contentment; without bitterness; without jealousy; without frustration. In this he serves as a compelling model for all of us, for the Spirit has told us we are all members of a Body entrusted with a distinctive, important service function. When we sing the lead, there is much “to do” about us; when we are the base upon which others build, we are often ignored and forgotten.

Cornie knew his role and flourished in it and he never expressed a longing to be something other than what God made him. Going back to Jack Stenekes, he observed that Cornie was “Even tempered, not cracking jokes like the Janzes.” My father-in-law, Ed Janz who was the last of the Janzes in this era, died earlier in 2013. My son Jonathan, who attended the funeral, said that during the viewing he caught himself yelling at one his cousins to make himself heard. The Janzes here – and there are a number – know of what I am speaking. In a high energy work environment – which was Janz Team in the 1960s and 70s – there were enthusiastic, high achieving, “stars” working with Cornie and it would have been easy for him to lose sight of the person God made him to be. But he didn’t, so in a sense, we could say, “He never resorted to yelling.” In fact, the thought of him seeking status or striving for importance seems absurd. This left him at peace with himself and his world – quietly joyful, gently strong, and winsomely serious. From him we learn to be content and grateful to our Father for making us who we are: beautiful in His eyes, useful in His hands.

2. Being so heavenly minded you are of some earthly good

It is easy to associate quietness, self-deprecation and even-temperedness, with genuine spirituality, and, of course, these charming character qualities, which Christians and school teachers so readily venerate, are analogous to fruits of the Spirit. But what we saw in Cornie was not an analogy, but reality. To the degree that we are able to discern these things, he was the quintessential Spirit-filled Christian gentleman. Which of the nine fruits of the Spirit do you not associate with him: love, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? All of them were hallmarks of his character.

As a boy growing up in a community that stressed the importance of living a “crucified life,” it was easy for me to become jaded about expressions of piety which appeared to my juvenile, judgmental mind to be grounded in something other than sanctification. How

different it was to step into the Enns' home in Germany as a teenager where the warm hospitality of Kay was complemented by a pervasive sense of spiritual warmth in Cornie. I remember as a boy sitting with my future cousins-in-law listening to him lead family devotions, quite possibly reading a favourite passage like Ps 121. And then he would pray earnestly for each one of his children by name, and me too – by name.

My wife Beverley has similar memories. She writes, "When I was 16 I had the privilege of staying with the Cornie Enns family for a month in Germany. It was obvious during that month that my uncle, as quiet as he was, had a clear idea of what it took to raise a godly family. The daily devotional time included Bible reading, several family members praying (maybe not always with complete enthusiasm), and the singing of all the verses of a hymn. In this and many other ways, Uncle Cornie 'led his family.'"

Christians used to say ostentatiously spiritual people were so heavenly-minded they were of no earthly good. I think C S Lewis must have had someone like Cornie in mind when he corrected this to say, "Be so heavenly minded that you are of some earthly good." Was Cornie, who was so evidently heavenly-minded, living in an unreal world, out of touch with humanity and all its needs? Definitely not.

One time following an evangelistic meeting which I attended, our German hosts offered us the best wine in the house. Cornie very kindly, very graciously, and very immediately declined. Auntie Kay, probably earning more gems in her crown than Cornie for her act of self-denial, likewise demurred. What surprised me about this was not the counter-cultural decision Cornie made, but the ease with which he aligned his will and behavior with his conscience – all without obvious offence.

While temptation is ever before us, we learn from Cornie that one can develop a pattern of choosing wisdom and righteousness that makes them constant companions, not strangers. Those of you who only knew him in his senior years might think that the joy and peace which literally radiated from him as he sat quietly in his chair by his bed was the result of good food, green tea, exercise, plenty of sleep, a clever concoction of dietary herbs, and positive frame of mind. Actually, it was the result of a lifetime of making good choices and wise decisions in accordance with God's Word. He was simply "a tree planted by the streams of living water that yielded fruit in season."

He was very much in touch with his world. He loved people – lost people and Christ's people. And so people loved him in return. One longtime staff member from Black Forest Academy, Mrs. Cathy Schmidt, who heard of Cornie's death, wrote to tell me of how her husband Steve and she loved Kay and Cornie. She said the Ennses left them as a couple inspired to think that "maybe God could use them in a special way – just like He was using the Ennses. She writes, "They not only touched our lives, they touched the lives of Germans, fellow missionaries and anyone who crossed their path." This was precisely how Jack Stenekes' remembered it too: "Cornie was loved and respected by all."

His earthly good, if we want to put it that way, was not just intimate and personal, although this was clearly a distinguishing characteristic of his life. It was also corporate and on a big

stage. The radio broadcasts he hosted were heard for years in Europe, North America, and South America and he sang on many records and CDs. A few months ago he reminded me of one of the early evangelistic meetings in Zurich where 900 people showed up to join the crusade choir. Facility limitations forced him to split singers into three groups of 300 each. The reason 900 showed up to sing under his leadership was that he took his choir members beyond technical excellence, which was important, to spiritual ministry. It was all about the grand message and the opportunity to support a gospel proclamation that presented hope to all. He helped the choir members see themselves as servants in the communication process – the very role he lived out all the days of his ministry in Europe.

From this platform he brought what Jack calls “a spiritual tone to the organization.” He never took formal organizational leadership and he didn’t need to because he led by attitude and character which influenced all around him. Bev relates one incident that illustrates the way he led: “During my second to the last visit with him just a few weeks ago, he asked about my work at TeachBeyond. He listened with rapt attention as I described my passion for helping candidates and TeachBeyond missionaries fundraise for their ministries. His eyes gleamed with joy as I talked and I wondered what he was thinking. ‘Oh, Bevvie,’ he said. ‘I am so happy because I can now pray much more effectively for you.’ I almost broke down and cried when I realized that this dear uncle, with one foot in glory, was still tenaciously bringing me and many others before God’s throne.”

There are quite likely hundreds of thousands of individuals in the Kingdom today because of the ministry of Cornie, Kay and their colleagues. By God’s grace there will be multitudes even beyond this in the years to come as we seek to build faithfully on the foundation he and the team laid for those who followed. Today we give special tribute to Cornie for his legacy of sincere, genuine spirituality which remains a fragrance in our organization. Therefore, TeachBeyond (and of course all of us present here today) respectfully, lovingly, even reverently says a temporary and temporal farewell to an esteemed founding father and spiritual model.