

# Down Home: The God of all our moments

September 6, 2013

Fifty years zips by in a hurry, doesn't it? Well, yes and no. In some ways, 1963 seems like only moments ago. In others, it feels like eons.

To be quite honest, many bygone years have dissolved into a milky blur. I couldn't tell you precisely if Event A happened in Year X or Year Y, or if Event B occurred in the spring or fall of Year Z.

But I remember some parts of 1963 quite clearly.

## **Only 6 years old**

I recall black-and-white news reports of the March on Washington, which took place in late August. I was only 6 years old at the time and couldn't grasp the social and historic importance of the moment. But I guess I remember the march for a couple of reasons.

First, I lived in Dalhart, home to 5,000 or 6,000 folks. When I heard maybe 200,000 people attended the march and assembled on the National Mall, that blew my little mind.

And second, the keynote speaker was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., not only a Baptist preacher, but a Baptist preacher's son. My daddy was a Baptist preacher (and still is), so I figured we had a lot in common. And he got to speak to 200,000 people.

1963 also was the year I started first grade—five decades ago last week, to be exact. Back then, kindergarten was not universal, and due to space limitations, I didn't go to kindergarten in the fall of 1962. So, I started school in 1963.

## **My sister Martha**

That was a big day for our family. The inauguration of my academic pursuits lagged behind what happened with my sister.

Martha was two years younger than I, and she was born with several physical problems, including deafness. Back in those days, deaf education had not been incorporated into the public schools. Mother and Daddy faced limited options for Martha's education, and until that education began, she could not speak, much less read and write. They enrolled her in Jane Brooks School for the Deaf in Chickasha, Okla., 320 miles away.

So, the day I carried my pencils and crayons into a first-grade classroom, Mother and Daddy loaded their precious 4-year-old daughter into the family sedan and moved her to a boarding school in another state. Although parenting has presented me with myriad experiences, I can't begin to comprehend how Mother's and Daddy's hearts broke that day.

Later that fall, President John F. Kennedy died, the victim of an assassin's bullets, down in Dallas. I remember my first-grade teacher, Mrs. Harbart, looked ashen as she stood before our class and said: "I have some horrible news. President Kennedy has been killed today."

## **Sad and lonely images**

That horrific event sent more sad and lonely pictures into our home—Lyndon Johnson's gaunt face as he took the oath of office on Air Force One; the president's coffin lying in state in the Capitol rotunda; a riderless horse, with boots backward in the stirrups; little John-John saluting his father's casket; Jackie Kennedy's searing grief.

Even a child knows when the tides of history shift.

The year ended on a much brighter note. Key Heights Baptist Church in

Perryton, a mission planted by First Baptist Church there, called my daddy as their first pastor. We moved to the parsonage right around Christmas. We lived there the next 10 years, and it's still the place I call home when people ask me where I'm from.

### **God in every moment**

Well, I don't really know why I've told you all this. Except maybe to say you never know when you'll find yourself surrounded by moments that change the nation or at least change you. God is with us in the mundane, day-to-dayness of life. And so God already is present when the big events overwhelm a person, a family or a nation.

God inspired Dr. King and gave him a dream for all people in all times. God comforted our family when Martha moved off to school and calmed me when I started first grade. God stilled a nation and walked her through grief for a young president gone too soon. And God guided our little family to a new home and a community that embraced us with love and care.

Whatever you're facing today, that same God abides with you, closer than your next breath.