

Christian Publishing Pioneer Robert Walker Dies

Robert Walker, the man who published the first national cover story about Billy Graham, died peacefully Saturday in a retirement community in Carol Stream, Ill. He was 95.



[] The founder of *Christian Life* magazine helped bridge gap between Pentecostals and evangelicals.

Robert Walker, the man who published the first national cover story about Billy Graham, propelled Pat Boone's encounter with the Holy Spirit to best-seller status and inspired millions of Christian writers and readers alike is dead at age 95.

The editor emeritus of *Charisma & Christian Life*, Walker died March 1st at a retirement community in Carol Stream, Ill. Although a former athlete and avid weightlifter, Walker had suffered from Parkinson's disease and dementia since 2005.

Friends, family and industry acquaintances remember the pioneering journalist as a giant whose legacy will outlive his years on earth.

"He was one incredible man," said Boone, the popular entertainer whose 1970 book, *A New Song*, sold 2.5 million copies after Walker helped him shape his story. "There was an Old Testament quality to him, like I was talking to a modern Gideon or one of the patriarchs."

Among his many professional accolades was receiving the first Magazine Publishers Award from the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association in 1994.

Born April 30, 1912, in Syracuse, N.Y., Walker attended a boarding school in Massachusetts and then enrolled in the University of Illinois. But after two years there he decided his football talents were better suited to a smaller school

and transferred to Wheaton College.

Walker accepted Christ while at Wheaton and considered enrolling in seminary, but opted to continue studying journalism instead and enrolled in Northwestern University. After graduation, he worked at two newspapers in Michigan and for two years as a copywriter for a Chicago-based advertising agency. He then returned to Wheaton to start a journalism department and served as an associate professor there from 1941-51.

During that time, Walker responded to an invitation from a friend with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship to start a campus magazine titled *HIS*, which would be the first of his many publishing endeavors. In 1941 he started a magazine called *Sunday*, which he renamed *Christian Life* in 1948 after acquiring *Christian Life & Times* from a friend. *Christian Life* would merge with *Charisma* in 1986.

To report on the then-fledgling Christian Booksellers Association in the mid-1950s, he started *Christian Bookseller*, which was renamed *Christian Retailing* after its acquisition by Strang Communications. Creation House Books followed in 1970; the company lives on as one of several imprints under the Strang book division's flagship, Charisma House.

Walker's vision didn't stop with profitable enterprises. When he saw a need to help Christian writers, he started the Christian Writers Institute; when he saw a need for missions outreach, he helped missionaries and founded Christian Life Missions, a 501(c)(3) charity.

Raised in the Methodist church, Walker was present in 1942 when the National Association of Evangelicals held an organizing conference in Chicago. That brought his first exposure to Pentecostals, who stirred up controversy over whether they should even be considered part of the evangelical camp.

A few months later, Walker was invited to the Assemblies of God (AG) headquarters in Springfield, Mo., to lead a seminar

on communications. For the first time he saw people speaking in tongues. The experience sparked a hunger in Walker's heart for a closer walk with God. Still, a decade passed before he was baptized in the Holy Spirit after meeting with a Spirit-filled Presbyterian minister.

"I went through one of the most deeply spiritual, satisfying experiences wherein the Word of God, which had led to my conversion, seemed to fill me," Walker said. "Now, here was the Word of God, the object of truth, and, on the other side of the coin, was the subject of truth, the witness and the Spirit of God with my spirit."

Walker was known for his pioneering nature. He printed the first national cover story on Graham in 1948, withstood criticism from some evangelicals for first reporting on the AG's Sunday school program, and broke new ground by profiling a living cartoonist at a time when Christian magazines restricted such stories to profiles of the deceased.

Despite such efforts, Walker was quick to credit others, praising the late George Otis Sr. for persuading Boone to agree to publish *A New Song*. And remembering the late Herbert Taylor—a prime mover in launching the National Association of Evangelicals—as one of his primary mentors.

"I would like people to think that I was sort of the chap who responded to what God wanted done," Walker said. "I sometimes kicked, and I often blew it by taking off in the wrong direction. [God] had to bring me back."

Walker is survived by second wife Barbara—whom he married in 1995 after the death of his first wife, Jean; five children; two stepchildren; 18 grandchildren and 21 great-grandchildren. A memorial service will be held March 14 at Wheaton Bible Church in Illinois.