

Robert Walker, 90, Honored as Pioneer of Christian Journalism'

In April, scholarships were awarded to further Walker's legacy. He's been hailed as a visionary, a pioneer of Christian journalism and a communicator of the gospel through the published word. But Robert Walker says he is just someone who made himself available to obey God.

Walker is the founder and former chairman of Christian Life Missions (CLM), the nonprofit ministry partner of Charisma—whose readers have contributed more than \$1 million in the past five years to ministries that were featured in the magazine.

For many years Walker was editor of Christian Life, which merged with Charisma in 1987. Today, publisher Stephen Strang says his organization continues Walker's legacy not only through Charisma but also through Christian Retailing magazine, which was founded by Walker in 1955 as Christian Bookseller, and through Strang's various publishing imprints that grew out of Creation House Books, founded by Walker in 1970.

In April, scholarships in Walker's name were awarded by CLM to five winning applicants. The \$1,000 grants were given to "help young people who are devoting their lives to proclaiming the gospel through the printed word, which is the legacy that Robert Walker gives," said Strang, who noted that most younger readers don't know Walker's interesting story.

Celebrating his 90th birthday at a board meeting of CLM in Wheaton, Ill., in April, Walker said: "It's really not what we do. It is what the Holy Spirit does in us to create the life of Christ so that when others see us, they don't see us, they see what God does through us."

Walker also told the CLM board: "I praise God for the privilege that is mine to see what God has done with you as a result of the vision God gave me."

That vision inspired Walker to create in 1941 a magazine for Christians called Sunday. The publication was renamed Christian Life after Walker acquired the publication Christian Life & Times from friend Clyde Dennis.

Walker quickly became a mover and shaker in the budding Christian publishing industry. The Christian Booksellers Association sought him out in 1955 to start a Christian trade publication to cover that industry. Christian Bookseller was published twice monthly at that time.

In 1968, Christian Life did a profile on Hollywood star Pat Boone that described the entertainer's experience with the Holy Spirit. From that article sprang Walker's idea to form Creation House Books, which published Boone's best seller A New Song. The book sold 2.5 million copies in six months—something unheard of in the Christian publishing industry in those days.

In 1986, Walker, then 74, met Strang, who had started Charisma 11 years before in 1975. Strang offered to buy Christian Life, and Walker agreed when Strang also agreed to take on Christian Bookseller and Creation House Books.

A celebration of Walker's life followed the CLM board meeting, as old friends gathered to share anecdotes about this 90-year-old man who still goes to the gym three times a week to lift weights.

Many who were influenced by Walker's professional life attended the celebration, including missionary Bruce Olsson, whose book *Bruchko* was published in 1973 by Creation House under Walker's tenure. Walker had convinced Olsson to let him write a book about his efforts to evangelize the Stone Age Motilone Indians of Colombia. The book has sold more than 150,000 copies.

Pat Robertson sent a videotaped greeting to honor Walker, and Ken Taylor, founder of Tyndale House Publishers, came in person to honor his lifelong friendship with Walker. Taylor half jokingly thanked Walker for leaving his post as editor of *HIS* magazine in Chicago, opening up the opportunity for Taylor to take that position and relocate to Wheaton, where in 1962 he started Tyndale House.

"Bob, you and I have known each other since 1934," Taylor said. "I remember the first time I saw you, which was on the campus at Beacon College. I saw you walking by, and I realized that this must be one of the 'football' guys. The other day I was over at the club—and there was Bob—still pumping iron."

Jan Franzen, a former CLM board member who worked for Walker for 39 years, recalled a pep talk Walker once gave her when she was a rookie journalist just starting out at *Christian Life*.

Walker took Franzen aside one day and gave her a very "lively

lecture” about why she was at Christian Life, how she could contribute and “what most likely would happen if I didn’t.”

That lecture drove Franzen throughout her career in Christian journalism and she thanked him “on behalf of all the others you have pushed, prodded and taught through the years, and realize they are better writers and craftspersons as a result.”

This year’s Robert Walker Scholarships were given to Jason Arthurs, University of North Carolina; Anita Harrison, University of Missouri; Jennifer Banks, Berry College; Tynisa Trapps, Regent University; and Yhanique Whitely, University of Florida. Strang said the scholarships will be given annually.

Walker, still vibrant at 90, continues to cast a huge shadow over the world of Christian publishing. The Evangelical Christian Publishers Association gave him a lifetime achievement award in 1994. But Walker mostly shrugs at taking any personal credit.

As he told one interviewer: “It’s not the goal of the Christian that counts. It’s their desire to be filled with the Holy Spirit, then allowing God to establish the goals.”

-Billy Bruce and Christine Allen