

British Actress Returns to Spiritual Roots

Joan Winmill was a rising London stage actress in 1954 when a friend invited her to the **Billy Graham** Greater London Crusade at Harringay Arena.

Reluctantly, Winmill agreed to go, even though she was not in a place to hear anything about God.

"I'll never forget it. As I walked in they were singing 'Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine,' " said Winmill during a recent trip to the Billy Graham Library. "I thought, *I don't have any assurances and Jesus isn't mine.*"

But everything changed that night for Joan, who had "felt so low, I really thought I was going to kill myself."

Until she heard the **gospel** message.

"I had never heard anyone preach like that ... with such sincerity," Winmill said. "I thought I would never go forward but (Billy Graham) caught my attention. And when they gave the invitation, I found myself walking forward.

"I just felt for the first time in my life like I really needed Jesus."

Winmill's life story is remarkable. From actress to author, she wrote 18 books, including the autobiography *No Longer Alone*, where she describes her relationship with **Ruth Bell Graham**.

The special bond between the two women began that night in 1954 as Winmill made her way forward and Ruth counseled Joan, leading her to the Lord.

"Remember, Joan, you don't walk out of here alone, Jesus goes

with you," Winmill recalls Ruth's words that night. "Then she asked if I would like to meet her husband."

Not knowing who Ruth was, Winmill quickly agreed.

"Ruth took me down a long corridor and knocked on this door," Joan said.

Opening the door was none other than Billy Graham.

"Ruth said, 'Joan just made a decision for the Lord,' and he said, 'That's wonderful,'" Winmill said. "Later I think he asked Ruth, 'Do you really think we got through to her?'"

"And the next day Ruth called me on the phone and said she'd like to meet with me and I said 'yes.' She invited me to the hotel and we had tea. She sat down and told me about people who had lived a hard life who found Christ. Then she gave me the *Peace With God* book."

The two women kept in touch through the years. A package would randomly show up on Winmill's doorstep from time to time and inside would be a Bible from Ruth with a handwritten note.

"Going through the exhibit of Ruth," Winmill said of the Billy Graham Library's "Journey of Faith." "It made me cry."

Winmill's journey is emotional in its own right.

Shortly after the Haringay Crusade, she came to the United States for a starring role in the World Wide Pictures feature film *Souls In Conflict* and met Bill Brown, who would later become the president of World Wide Pictures from 1970-1988, producing films like *The Hiding Place* and *Joni*.

Brown, originally hired by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in 1952 to distribute and show Billy Graham films in churches, was Winmill's driver during a *Souls in Conflict* publicity tour: Boston, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Chicago and New York City, among other cities.

The tour wasn't all that long, but by time it was finished, Bill was ready to put a ring on Winmill's finger. And he did so, pulling over on the ever-romantic New Jersey Turnpike to propose.

"I was afraid she would go back to England," Brown said. "So I was driving down the New Jersey Turnpike, and I pulled off the side of the road and gave her the ring."

Brown and Winmill began their marriage touring the country in a \$125 trailer, hopping from town to town across the country to pitch *Souls in Conflict* to local churches.

"I would call up a church and say, 'If you can have a showing on Saturday, March 15, I can make plans for the star of the film to be there,'" Bill said.

And after showing up with both the film and Winmill in the trailer, he would deliver the punch line: "Oh, by the way, the star is also my wife."

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