

Robert Walker's Legacy

When Robert Walker died March 1, just weeks before his 96th birthday, he left a legacy unequaled in the world of evangelical publishing. Long before there was Christianity Today, Walker was publishing Christian Life. Long before there was a Christian Booksellers Association, he was shaping the world of Christian publishing. Long before there was a Tyndale House

Publishers, he was mentoring Ken Taylor, who later founded it. Walker grew up in a family of nominal Christians, but during the summer before his senior year at Northwestern University, he met Jesus Christ. After praying that if God existed He would speak to him through His Word, Walker found himself reading the Bible for hours and becoming a Christian.

In the early 1940s, he founded HIS magazine for InterVarsity. Later he took over publishing a magazine titled Christian Life & Times from a friend and renamed it Christian Life in 1948.

Walker helped establish the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in 1942. During the next decade he worked with others to organize the Christian Booksellers Association and then published the first Christian trade magazine, Christian Bookseller (now Christian Retailing). He was also one of the founders of the Evangelical Press Association.

In the late 1940s Walker published the first feature-length article on Billy Graham at a time when the evangelist's ministry was not yet well-known. He also published in the early 1950s one of the first articles about what later became the charismatic movement, posing the question to evangelicals in the headline: "Are we missing something?"

After being exposed to Pentecostals in the NAE, he sensed the answer to that question was yes: The "something" was a deeper walk in the Spirit. Walker began to hunger for such a walk and later received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Through the years he was a bridge-builder between the two groups of

Christians.

Walker gave even greater impetus to the charismatic movement when he published singer Pat Boone's testimony, *A New Song*, which chronicles how Boone's life changed after he received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The book sold more than 2 million copies and helped launch Walker's book publishing enterprise, Creation House (which continues today as a division of Strang Communications).

Walker was the first to write about Pat Robertson and his fledgling Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) and the one to discover a young missionary named Bruce Olson, whose story appears in the book *Bruchko*, soon to become a movie produced by Matt Crouch.

The list goes on and on. And Walker wasn't motivated only by entrepreneurial interests. He started the Christian Writers Institute to train the next generation of Christian writers and founded a 501(c)(3) charity, Christian Life Missions, to support missionaries around the world.

He also influenced the lives of many leaders. In 1986, at age 74, he took a chance on a young journalist who felt he had a similar calling for his generation—me. We merged our magazines, and I continued his legacy. That's the reason Strang Communications produces books and magazines and serves the Christian retail industry with various publications today. During the last 22 years Walker and I developed a close friendship. But after our last visit in November 2005, his health deteriorated, and in February he contracted a case of pneumonia from which he never recovered.

Thankfully, in 1996 I videotaped an interview with him "for posterity." You can watch an edited, 13-minute version of it at (also, see our tribute to him beginning on page 86 of this issue). In the video, Walker shares openly about his work, family and relationship with God.

I admired and loved Robert Walker, and on a personal basis, I'll miss him greatly—though I rejoice that I'll see him in heaven one day. In the meantime, I consider it an honor to continue his legacy in Christian publishing. He was a great

role model, and I hope I can be as faithful to my calling as he was to his.

» Stephen Strang is the publisher of Charisma & Christian Life. He invites you to visit our Web site (charismamag.com/robertwalker) to watch an interview with Robert Walker and read additional articles about him.