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He Molded My Life: Elder C. Mervyn Maxwell, My Teacher

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Teachers mold lives. And no teacher molded my life more than Elder C. Mervyn Maxwell. When I was his student, his Ph.D. hadn't yet been completed. I had come to Union College, in Lincoln, Nebraska, as a Junior from Southwestern. When I met him, he handed me this paper reproduced in the ditto fashion, a syllabus for the class I was taking from him. I read the introduction. "A teacher ought to challenge his students to reach the highest reasonable standard of achievement," it read. The paper went on to say, "A teacher, if he is to be a teacher, ought to do his very best to help his students to reach this standard." And every day, in his class, he operated that way.

The classes I loved. The tests I hated. In those classes I learned much. Our family had not had an Adventist background, but in those classes I became convinced once again that we had made the right choice when we came to the Adventist church. When I heard about the Scripture as he taught it, I believed it. When he talked to us about Ellen White, I believed it.

In preparation for this assignment, I looked up some of my class notes. I didn't always like to take notes because I was so inspired as I listened. But I knew that terrible day was coming. There would be a test. I looked at a few tests, too. They weren't so inspiring. A few circles here and there—no, to tell you the truth, there were a whole bunch of circles. And one of the tests had a message scribbled in his handwriting, which said, "You don't spell very well." I never did get over that.

But the class! Oh, I loved it! I sat there on the front row as I listened to him talk about Galatians. And I especially loved his class illustrations. In one class, Elder Maxwell brought in an old tree and presented it to us. Then I watched him as he tied fruit onto that old tree that was already dead. And there in my notes, I have his words, as he explained what the fruit and the dead tree were all about. I will never forget that lesson. His class props represented a rela-

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tionship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me tell you, when I came into his classes, I was convicted to be a Seventh-day Adventist. But when I left his classes, I was not only convicted to be a Seventh-day Adventist, but I wanted to be a Christian Seventh-day Adventist—which meant I was determined to know Jesus personally.

No man, no teacher molded my life like Elder Maxwell did. Some of the molding was in class, for I think I took every class he ever taught at Union. Most of the molding took place outside the classroom, for teachers mold lives inside, while teaching their classes, but they mold students outside their classes, too. That's where Elder Maxwell molded my life virtually every day. When I became the Junior Class President, I met with him regularly. And he taught me how to manage committee meetings. He taught me the value of an agenda, He taught me the value of completing that agenda on time. I learned. He molded my life.

He molded my life. I was trying to decide what I wanted to do with my life. He spent time with me on a Friday afternoon as the two of us sat in your Ford automobile, Mrs. Maxwell, and we looked at the back side of that old Administration Building that is no longer there. And he talked to me about serving Jesus. He prayed with me that I would make a decision that would be the best for God's work. He taught me that a good way to make decisions is to consider how the decision will advance God's cause. I learned that, Mrs. Pauline Maxwell, in your Ford behind the Administration Building. Teachers mold lives, and no teacher molded my life more than your husband.

Teachers mold lives. When the ministerial students heard me telling too many jokes, they voted to kick me out of the Ministerial Club. One of your husband's fellow faculty members wrote a note to my soon-to-be Conference President telling him what a lousy pastor I would be. Your husband continued to tutor me in the MV Officer's Meeting every week on how to be a pastor. No teacher molded my life more than your father, Stanley.

From your father I learned a lot in class, but much more out of class. From your father I learned the value of talking to boys and girls. For he taught a class in Christian story-telling, describing how we ought to be doing it. He molded my ministry, helping me realize kids are important.

He molded my ministry, teaching me that reaching people who are not presently in our community is worth the effort. While others were trying to throw me out of the club, he was helping me organize so I could reach out to the entire city of Lincoln. Together we developed a leaflet that talked about Jesus and invited people to learn about him.

Today, when I opened up my annual, I saw his picture, standing beside the car, giving directions as people were headed out of the campus. He told people how to do good things and encouraged them. He molded my life.

He molded my life when I watched him deal with a person who had made a mistake. One of the ministerial students had unintentionally gotten his girl-

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friend pregnant. The authorities decided that act of indiscretion made the student an unlikely candidate for the pulpit. He was forced to make new career plans. While almost everyone in the religion department was ostracizing that poor young couple, Elder Maxwell handled the situation differently. He didn't challenge the authorities concerning the young man's future as a minister. However, he did his best to help that devastated couple pick up the pieces. I joined Elder Maxwell one quiet weekend and watched him as he conducted that wedding. It was small, with no frills and few attendants, but Elder Maxwell tried to make the occasion something to celebrate. He furnished that wedding with his own prize geraniums. A quarter of a century later, that unfortunate couple and I happened to make contact. They were still happily married! For what Elder Maxwell had done for them in their time of crisis, they were grateful. At that wedding, Elder Maxwell taught me a lot about church discipline. He taught me how to put an arm around somebody who's made a mistake. He molded my life.

He molded my life as he taught me how to deal with adversity. I remember it. I can see it right now. It's a light flashing! It was in a little skit for vespers. We had put on dozens of them. Elder Maxwell was always helping us perform. This wasn't a class assignment, but this was where he taught me. This is where he molded my life. And there on that Friday night, he molded it. Then, on Sabbath afternoons, he molded my life again. The play was about that man who was so terribly disappointed that Jesus had not come—William Miller. There he was, looking again, wondering, "What do I do now?" And then, there was the light—flashing on the stage—as people asked, "When do you think Jesus is coming?" And the light flashed on and off, revealing the letters that read, "Today! Today! Today!" I don't know when Jesus is coming. But any time people ask me when I think He's coming, what I learned—what I'd been molded into thinking by your husband, Mrs. Maxwell—is, "Expect him today!" And so I remind you to look to the Creator of the Universe. I don't know when He's coming, but, like William Miller, I look for Him today, today, today! And I want to know Him today, today, today!

Let me take you back into that lesson about Galatians when Elder Maxwell brought that dead tree into the room. Your husband said to me about Jesus, "Don't tie on this fruit. Learn to know Him." And I want to know Jesus. And therefore I look for Him to come today, today, today. And when He comes, I anticipate that you [the surviving members of the Maxwell family] will meet your brother, your father, your husband, in that great Resurrection Day. I look for him today, today, today—until He comes!

Elder Mervyn Maxwell, you are a teacher and a man I cannot forget. You molded my life!

He molded my life.

Don Schneider, a former ministerial student at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, was President of the Lake Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists when he delivered this funeral eulogy in tribute to his former religion teacher. Schneider is

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