

‘I’M PART OF A GREATER PICTURE’

**LONGTIME DONOR FINDS HOPE
THROUGH BGEA**

by **Giovanna Albanese**

The sound of Billy Graham’s voice filled the den where the Pierce family sat in silence, eyes glued to the TV. Seated on the couch next to her father, who was smoking a pipe, was 8-year-old Patricia.

“I would always watch my parents to see their reactions, and every time we watched a Crusade, my father would get very emotional,” she said.

Impacted by her parents’ response to the words of Billy Graham, Patricia knew what she was watching had to be important, though she wasn’t quite sure why.

SMALL-TOWN GIRL

Patricia grew up in a home full of love with her older sister, Vivian, and younger brother, Lonnie. Her parents, Lonnie and Wanda, had their own insurance agency and worked hard to provide a comfortable life for their family in Farmville, North Carolina.

“The business was like a part of our family,” Patricia said. “My father traveled during the week but was home on weekends, and my mother ran the office and took care of us.”

Even in the rush of running a business, Lonnie and Wanda prioritized family time.

“We always had family meals together, and we took family vacations to the North Carolina



mountains and beaches,” she continued. “But more important, we always went to church.”

One Sunday in 1967, in their small-town church, the spiritual questions Patricia had sensed while watching Billy Graham Crusades at home with her family came full circle.

“I remember sitting in church with my father and mother, and a very emotional feeling came over me,” she recalled. “At that time, I could not understand what it was, but I just knew that I was important to God.”

In that moment, Patricia surrendered her life to Christ.

A DREAM FULFILLED

Years passed, and after high school, Patricia was off to college. Because she loved spending time with her family, she didn’t stray too far, going mere miles down the road to Atlantic Christian College in Wilson, North Carolina.

After two years, she left college because she knew exactly what she wanted to do with the rest of her life.

“I grew up with the family business,” she said. “And I always knew I wanted to continue in the business because I wanted to be just like my mother.”

THE TESTING OF TIME

As Patricia’s young career at Pierce Insurance Agency was flourishing, she began to pray and ask God to bring a man into her life who loved Him more than anything else. Within a few years, in the middle of a car dealership while Patricia was getting her car serviced, she met Tim, the auto body mechanic who worked on her car. Four months later, in 1983, the two were married.

In the years that followed, the couple welcomed three children into the world: Douglas, Charles and Sarah. The world of parenting inevitably brought highs and lows, but one day in 1997 their world turned upside down when their oldest son, Douglas,

was mistaken for someone else and was shot in the head. Thankfully, he survived.

In the middle of Patricia’s despair, she picked up a pen and paper and wrote a letter to the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA), asking for help and guidance through their family crisis. To her surprise, she received a long, handwritten letter back.

“Right then, I knew without any doubt that this ministry was legitimate,” she said. “The love that came

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—Patricia Pierce Combs

from that letter was so tangible. And that is what really made my walk with God stronger.”

As Patricia’s relationship with God began to grow, her desire to become involved with BGEA did too.

“Some years later, I was looking around on the BGEA website and I saw where you could get involved through Search for Jesus. And so I became an email coach,” she said. “I did that for a period of time, and then I was asked to be an area coordinator. I did that for a couple of years, and now I’m back as an email coach.”

In addition to her role with BGEA’s internet evangelism ministry, Patricia has also completed most of the online training offered by BGEA and has seen three generations of Grahams preach.

But the most rewarding aspect of her connection with BGEA is what she’s found for herself.

“I found that I belong,” she said. “I’m part of a greater picture. ... What God has done for me through BGEA has forever changed my life.”

FAMILY OWNED, FAMILY OPERATED

The life lessons Patricia has been through, coupled with the practical tools she’s learned through her involvement with BGEA, have helped her live out the calling God has placed on her life.

Today, Patricia, along with her brother, Lonnie, runs Pierce Insurance Agency. Their sister, Vivian, retired from the family business in January. Patricia’s husband, Tim, now retired, continues to show his unwavering support for his wife. And their daughter, Sarah, and niece, Carson, have also joined the business, making the Pierce Insurance Agency three generations strong.

“I’m proud of the business that my parents built, and I enjoy working with my brother,” Patricia said. “We pray about the decisions that we make. We ask for guidance. We try to do business in a manner that would bring glory and honor to God.”

Though many Scriptures have carried Patricia through the years, the one she clings to most is Jeremiah 29:11, which says, “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”

And when work gets hard and family situations arise, Patricia thinks of the letter she sent to BGEA years ago. The response she received serves to remind her that she can trust in God and His plan for her life—because she’s important to Him. ■ ©2022 BGEA

The Scripture quotation is taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version.