

THE SPY GLASS REVIVAL

By Paul M. Riley M.D.

“Why are those flags flying and those tom-tom drums beating so loud over across the valley”; Free Methodist Missionary Mary Ella (Damon) Anderson asked Mrs. Nellie Ndlovu, wife of the local pastor. Mary and her husband had recently moved back to Crichtlow Mission Station from Greenville Station in Pondoland in the Transkei area of South Africa. They had started the Mission Station several years previously. Now Pastor Ndlovu was in charge. He had built his own house, because he wanted to keep the Mission house for visiting Missionaries or other Church Officials.! Land for Greenville, Crichtlow, and Edwaleni Mission Stations had been purchased many years previously by Missionary J.P. Brodhead, using his own personal funds! August Magnus Anderson, who had been born in Norway, had emigrated to the United States as a child. After he had attended Greenville College and married Mary Damon they had been sent as Missionaries to South Africa where they had served on several Mission Stations. Their son, Lawrence, had been born on March 7, 1908 but had died on January 31, 1909 when they were at Edwaleni Mission. While at Edwaleni, they had been able to purchase one of the first cars registered in Natal Province. Then they moved to Greenville mission in Pondoland, about three miles across the river from Edwaleni. If they drove, it was over thirty miles over narrow, rough, dirt and gravel roads. They also had to cross the river on a ferry that was pulled across the river manually by ropes! Now they had been moved back to Crichtlow because that Church was having increasing spiritual problems. Witchcraft and demon worship were increasing. More children were dying because their parents were taking them to the Witchdoctor and were no longer going to the Mission for advice and help. Assaults and murders were on the increase. Rev. Ndlovu, the pastor, said that some Church members were secretly worshipping demons and practicing witchcraft. They lived in fear of spells their neighbors might cast on them! Like many Church goes on other Mission Fields, several of the local Church people thought, that, if they could fool the Missionary, they could also fool God! Once the Missionary found out about their sins, they would rush to the altar, crying for forgiveness! Many people had been praying for a Revival in the Crichtlow Church!

“Oh, Nkosikazi (Queen) Anderson”, Mrs. Ndlovu replied; “Since you started this Mission several years ago, the Church, at first, was growing with very little opposition. Now the Devil is working overtime since that Witchdoctor built all those huts on that far hill side. One of those flags is inviting everyone to a huge beer drink, the other one is to fend off evil spirits. The tom-toms are also inviting people to that large kraal (homestead) for a day of drinking, revelry, dancing, witchcraft, and demon worship. That Witchdoctor has become very powerful. The entire community is afraid of him. Awful things go on at that Kraal. He has even threatened some of our Church members! Many people think he can cause illness, crops to fail, cattle to die, lightning to strike, or snakes to bite them!”

Mary then told her husband what was happening at the Kraal on the opposite hillside. Rev. Anderson had gained the attention of the community when he arrived at the Mission Station in their old Model-T Ford. There were no roads so he had to follow cow paths and wagon tracks. At one place the car had been stuck in the mud and had to be pulled out by a team of oxen. At several others places the car

needed pushing. Everyone he met had never seen a car before. A few people had seen a motorcycle. They crowded around whenever the car stopped, marveling at this giant Isitututu. (motorcycle). Attendance at the Church increased. Many people made long trips to the Mission to see this vehicle. But the Andersons soon realized that most people were coming out of curiosity. The Witchdoctor was curbing the Outreach of the Church. They wondered how they could find out what was going on at that Kraal. They were told that the Witch doctor had lookouts who warned any Church goers if the Missionary came close to his Kraal. Then, Rev. Anderson remembered the gift he had been given by a retired Norwegian Sea Captain. It was a powerful ship's telescope. He opened the window, unpacked the instrument, mounted it on the tripod, and focused it on the gathering crowd at the Kraal. It was a very clear, bright, day. Looking through the lens, he could see every detail as if he was a part of the audience! He saw clay pot after clay pot of foaming beer being brought out and passed around the crowd. The tom-tom beat gradually became faster and louder. The dancing became more vigorous! People were falling to the ground and convulsing. The witch doctor was making small cuts on their bodies and rubbing in "medicine". Shrieks were heard calling on demons and evil spirits. Everyone was dressed in scanty heathen dress. Then; what a shock; he began to recognize the faces of several Church Members, even one of the Church Elders! They were wearing heathen dress complete with good luck charms to protect them from enemies and evil spirits. He saw them drinking beer and purchasing Witchcraft items. He wrote down the names and activities of everyone he recognized. He now had sermon material to use the next Sunday!

The next Sunday, Rev. Anderson preached and described every detail about the Church Members' activities at the festival. Gasps were heard, and faces became noticeably paler, as each Church member involved recognized himself in the sermon. The preacher said that if he could see what was happening from so far away, God, who could count every hair on their heads, could even see into their heart and their thoughts. At the end of the sermon the altar was full of people confessing their sins and crying for forgiveness. People jumped up from the altar and ran home and brought back all their ungodly items. Some made several trips as they remembered items hidden in the thatch of their roofs or buried in the ground around their huts. A large bonfire was lit and piles of fetishes, and good luck charms, were burnt. The fire burned for several hours! People even came from the witchdoctor's kraal to see what was happening. Soon, people stopped going to the witchdoctor. They no longer feared him! He was finally put out of business when even non-believers found out that he has lost his power.

The revival continued to spread throughout the community. The witchdoctor and his family finally came to church, then confessed their sins and burnt everything used for demon worship and witchcraft. A spirit hut was burnt down. Within a few months, that dark part of Africa was changed completely. GOD USES OBJECTS AS WELL AS PEOPLE TO SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS. THE SEA CAPTAIN DID NOT KNOW THAT HIS UNSELFISH GIFT HAD BROUGHT REVIVAL TO A DARK PART OF AFRICA.

The Andersons often spent time at our house when their car was being repaired at Edwaleni. They kept the Riley children entertained with stories of their Missionary experiences. They paved the way for Greenville Hospital to be built in Pondoland. My parents had a photo of the Andersons standing beside

their car on a ferry crossing the Umtamvuna River. The license plate was NUK15, (Natal-Umzumkulu). It was the fifteenth car registered in that large area!

The Andersons were Free Methodist Missionaries to South Africa from 1908 to 1945. But 1929-30 they were sent to Panama. For a few months, in 1945, they lived about a mile from us in Port Shepstone. They were retiring and were waiting for the end of the Second World War so they could return to America. My Mother, Edna Riley, and her four children were living in a small cabin by the sea so we could attend public school. Bro. and Sr. Anderson visited us very often. Our father, John Riley, was still working at Edwaleni. He would spend his weekends with us. In 1945, Bro. Anderson was the first one to tell us that the Atomic Bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima. He was one of only a few people with a radio.

Even after the Andersons left Critchlow mission station, the pastor refused to move into the Missionary house. He wanted the Missionaries, or the District Superintendent, to have a place to stay whenever they visited. Many years later, my family stayed overnight in that house. It was well kept, except the rats, bats, bugs, spiders, and snakes had established residence there. That night was very eventful for all of us!

P.S. Since writing this story, I have done more research on Missionary A.M. Anderson. He received several awards for his stories. Some are still in several libraries, even the Library of Congress (according to the Internet). These include:-

1. AFRICAN JUNGLE – 1920 EDITION

2. AFRICAN JUNGLE—1928 EDITION (UPDATE; obtained by me on 4 June, 2012 through Amazon.com).

3. UKANYA-LIFE STORY OF AN AFRICAN GIRL PUBLISHED IN 1931 (UPDATE; obtained 1 June, 2012 thru Amazon.com.)

4. NKOSI—STORY OF AN AFRICAN CHIEF’S SON PUBLISHED IN 1938 (UPDATE; obtained 9 June, 2012)

I THINK HE WROTE MANY MORE STORIES. NONE OF THESE STORIES ARE IN THE FREE METHODIST ARCHIVES, SO I HAVE DONATED THESE THREE BOOKS TO THE FM ARCHIVES.

PAUL M. RILEY Email—hlinza@ymail.com