



## God's Big Givers

BY MADLYN HAMBLIN

A new trend in America giddily defies television convention. Oprah's Big Give has 10 handpicked contestants competing to give rather than receive as they crisscross the country lavishing hundreds of thousands of dollars upon unsuspecting people in need.

ASI members are also known as "big givers," and we're not speaking exclusively about money. The people comprising ASI have diverse ways of giving, including time, talent, and expertise. Take Dr. Phil and Sherry Mills, for example.

Phil and Sherry first met at prayer meeting at Loma Linda University. Phil was a medical student, and Sherry was finishing her master's degree in public health. She attended Phil's Sabbath school class, and a series he presented on courtship and marriage – with the disclaimer that he planned to be single all his life. That drew a very interested crowd!

Sherry had every intention of remaining single also. However, as the couple worked together on com-

mittees and soul-winning projects, they became better acquainted; and it became clear that God was leading them toward marriage. "We happily surrendered our commitment to singleness and have been married for 33 wonderful years," Sherry says.

Together they started My Bible First, a ministry that evolved after attending their first ASI Convention in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 2000. They left inspired by the dynamic testimonies they heard, and with hearts warmed by the unselfish spirit and obvious joy they saw on people's faces. On their way home Sherry told Phil, "We need to pray for a wider ministry."

With three home-schooled children, Sherry's ministry needed to be done from home. Their outreach also needed to be something that would fit into Phil's busy schedule as he ran a full-time medical practice.

At this time they were members of a wonderful church in the Kansas-Nebraska conference. "Evangelism was central to everything our church did," says Sherry.



**Phil and Sherry Mills discuss final details with Jennifer Dietrich before printing.**

As a result, there were always lots of visitors attending, and many church members were new to the faith and still learning biblical truths. One family attending was Buddhist with no prior Bible exposure. Sherry realized that the children in these families had unique needs that were not being met by the limited children's materials available at Sabbath school.

As the children's Sabbath school superintendent, it was priority for Sherry that all families in the church, new members or not, be thoroughly nurtured in the Word of God. The Sabbath school council recommended that primary level lessons be written to meet this need.

"We had no experience in producing Bible lessons and no layout and design expertise. Other than Phil's computer, we had no printing equipment to produce lessons," Sherry explained. "With our busy schedule, we had no time to write lessons, and we had very limited office space in our small home," she added.

Sherry knew that the biggest hurdle would be to find a volunteer willing to help write the lessons. But God had already prepared for this very need. Sherry's parents, Elwood and Amy Sherrard, had spent 20 years in foreign mission.

Sherry asked her mother to write new primary-age Bible lessons, and she agreed. At 82 Amy had never used a computer, and no amount of urging, arguing or reasoning could get her to even consider it. Early on Phil had to scan each typewritten lesson and convert it with optical character recognition software. It was a great day when Amy decided it was time to overcome her fear of computers. With delight and enthusiasm her grandkids took on the responsibility of launching Grandma into the computer generation. After Grandma wrote the lessons, Elwood would meticulously copy edit the pages.

As the lessons became ready for printing, Sherry



**Amy & Elwood Sherrard, principle author and principle editor of the Bible lessons.**

During that time, Amy assisted in developing a child evangelism program for the local church division, and wrote children's Bible lessons.

Sherry remembers as a child waking up long before sunrise hearing the "clack" of the old manual typewriter. She remembers peeking into the office and seeing her mother at the typewriter with the Bible on one side and the Spirit of Prophecy on the other. It was an example of dedication and communication with the Lord that she has never forgotten. Over time, those materials were used in many countries.



looked for ways to illustrate them. Early on she used her childhood collection of old pictures that her grandmother (who had been a missionary in India years before) had given her. Others shared their royalty-free collections, and over the years God has never failed to provide the ministry with beautiful illustrations as they are needed.

Phil and Sherry launched the three-year cycle of Bible lessons for their church with the expectation that they would be done in a couple years. During the last week of 2000 they watched the first lesson print out Friday afternoon, just in time for Sabbath. Phil comments, “We could hardly believe what was happening!



Amy Sherrard prepares illustrations for lessons.

than what we were prepared for,” Sherry said. “We didn’t even know how to price the lessons, and were only producing them a week at a time! But with the Lord’s help, we were able to meet the growing requests and complete each lesson deadline.”

The overwhelming response to this ministry

continued. Requests came in for cradle roll and then kindergarten lessons, which were soon added along with Spanish editions. Their biggest project ever began three years ago with junior-age lessons that included posters and charts.

Sherry is quick to point out that, “The Lord put it into the hearts of others to give of their time and expertise in providing supplemental materials.” Additional resources such as memory verse songs, coordinated table activities, teaching helps and devices are now available.

The Mills’ family—along with Sherry’s parents and many others—has given generously of their time, talents and expertise to My Bible First over the years. I asked Sherry what effect that giving has had on their lives, and what inspires them to continue giving.

She said, “It’s the only way to stay alive! It keeps us constantly aware of our dependence on the Lord and of the needs of others. When we contemplate how much Jesus has done for us, an eternity of time won’t be enough to show Him our gratitude. There is no greater joy or satisfaction than working with the Lord. He is a wonderful employer.”

We prayed earnestly over this issue as we carefully hand-folded each paper, ready to hand out at church the next day.” They never could have imagined what was ahead; that this small beginning was the launching of another ASI-spawned ministry.

The entire family soon became absorbed in producing My Bible First. Son Philip helped with the computer work. The oldest daughter,

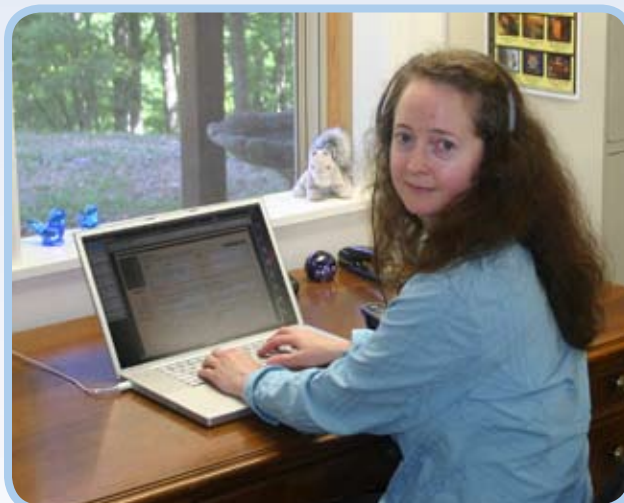
Rachel, assisted with the bookkeeping and records, and Ruthie, though younger, was a great help in answering phone calls.

In their retirement years, Sherry’s parents were now writing and editing full time. The only reimbursement they desired was to see children and families saved for God’s kingdom.

The My Bible First project became a full-time ministry when a church member asked if she could post the lessons on her website, after which requests began pouring in daily. “We realized this was becoming bigger



James Dietrich, IT Administrator, assists with part of an outgoing shipment.



Tanya Tessier managing phone calls and order fulfillment.

Phil and Sherry say that this ministry has been life changing for the entire family. "Realizing our great need as the ministry grows keeps us on our knees. We constantly cry out to God for His divine guidance. It is a sobering responsibility to prepare material that represents our awesome God. We know we are living in the end times. We know the devil is seeking to destroy faith and trust in God's Word. We know he is attacking the foundation of our beliefs and is especially aiming to undermine families. Many children are growing up with little or no spiritual training. If they don't receive it in the home and [if they] attend public school, the only avenue left is the Sabbath school. What we feed them during that golden hour will have eternal consequences. This is the passion of our hearts!"

The Mills family are truly Christian "big givers." A hearty "thank you" from those blessed by their work is always encouraging. But their greatest reward comes from God, who promises in Proverbs 11:24, 25, "The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself."

**Madlyn Hamblin** writes from Tecumseh, Michigan. She was ASI first lady from 1989-1995.



## MY Bible First

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To request a Resource Catalog call toll-free: 1-877-242-5317 Email: [sales@mybiblefirst.org](mailto:sales@mybiblefirst.org) Web: [www.mybiblefirst.org](http://www.mybiblefirst.org)

MY Bible First! is a supporting ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and a member of ASI. The Bible lessons are ideal for Sabbath school and homeschool, and assist families in establishing regular, life-changing worships. They help children understand the plan of salvation and the great controversy theme by a chronological presentation of the Bible stories.

Booth 231

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