

Witness Through Roses

DIXIE PLATA

Witnessing Through Roses

by Dixie Plata

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this endeavor to the memory of Norm Middag, a dear friend and mentor. Without him there would not have been Rose Parade floats for the Seventh-day Adventist Church and to honor our Lord. I look forward to seeing him and his dear wife Barb in heaven!

I would like to also dedicate this volume to Donny Gore, a Pathfinder Historian and coworker in Historian Ministry. Without his encouragement I would never have put these stories and photos down for others to read and enjoy. Thank you, Donny, for being there, for your awesome ideas and encouragement and, yes, for pestering me to write. Thank you Penny for putting up with our phone calls and sometimes crazy ideas.

To my husband Arnold, thank you for your continued support and love. You have encouraged me to spend the time needed to put the stories and pictures together. I love you.

God has blessed me with wonderful friends and mentors through the years. To HIM I give all honor and praise.

Dixie L. Plata



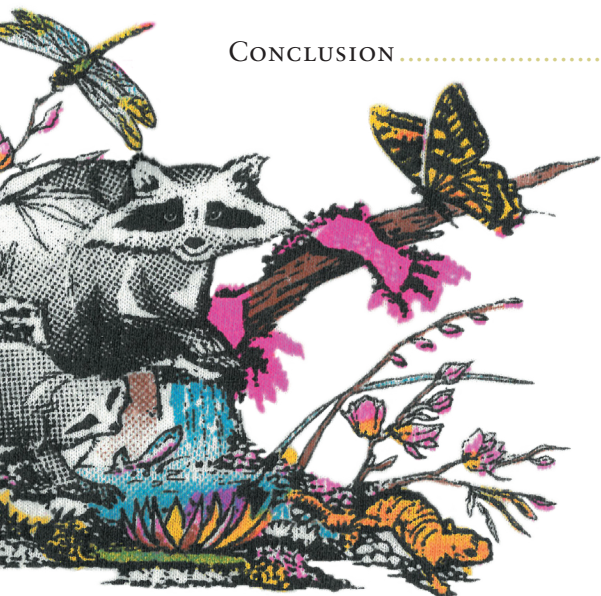
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1990-1991



We waited silently, almost holding our breath, as the Tournament of Roses judges walked around the float. The all-night crew of volunteers—having done the final touches—knew they had done their best to finish decorating a first ever float for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This was a first-time experience for most of the decorators and they hardly knew what to expect. They listened in silence when Fiesta Parade Floats President Tim Estes told the judges that “the Seventh-day Adventist workers were the best decorators he had ever seen.” What a witness for our church! What a blessing for those that decorated and observed the decorating.

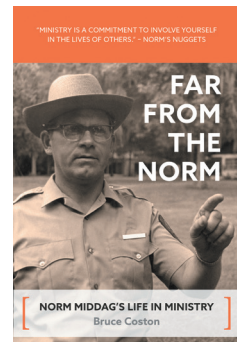
We watched our non-Seventh-day Adventist supervisors, Bob and Darryl Bender, taking a clue from them, and clapping when the judges were finished writing in their notebooks and walking around our float. It was the morning of December 31, 1990, and now to wait until early morning January 1 to learn if we would receive an award and if so, which one? We had learned that there were 60 floats in the Parade that year and only 19 awards so we didn’t dwell on that, but instead enjoyed the moment of being part of such a special project for our church.

For many individuals of the expressly selected all-night crew it was a tired drive to their homes, a hot shower and to bed after being up since early morning on the 30th decorating our float. For Arnold and I, it was the hour drive to Loma Linda and fixing a meal for family, tossing in a load of clothes and then going to bed. After a few hours of sleep, it was up again and

driving to Pasadena to be on the parade route to guard the float while the party goers walked up and down Orange Grove to see the floats in the night.

How did my church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, get a float in the world-famous January 1st Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, California? And why? That is best answered by my friend Norm Middag as quoted in his book *Far From The Norm* as written for him by Bruce Coster.¹ “Back in 1960 when Norm and [his wife] Barb had attended their first Rose Parade, Norm had been impressed that participation in the parade would be a wonderful ministry opportunity for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. At that time, however, he hadn’t had the clout or the resources to make it happen. But now that Norm’s field of ministry included the entire North American Division,² his dream came back to him with renewed vigor. What an incredible witness it would be to put the Seventh-day Adventist Church on display at an event which captured the attention of the entire world! An Adventist float in the Rose Parade could impact millions. Now for the first time, Norm had a platform from which he just might be able to accomplish this dream.”

You’ll need to read Norm’s book, *Far From The Norm: Norm Middag’s Life in Ministry*³, for details on how and why a Pathfinder float was decorated for the Seventh-day Adventist Church for the Tournament of Roses Parade January 1, 1991.



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1 Pp 249-262.

2 In 1985, Norm had been elected Youth Director for the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

3 Available at *AdventSource*, adventsource.org, 402.486.8800



How It All Began



Arnold and I are North American Division Historians for youth ministry. We travel sharing displays showing the history of how God led adults to provide a Christ-centered program for youth, grades 5–12. May of 1989, we had been invited to share the displays for Rocky Mountain Conference’s 40th Pathfinder Anniversary, which was held at Campion Academy in Loveland, Colorado. It was a beautiful May week-end filled with wonderful programing which highlighted the history of Rocky Mountain Pathfinders and their leaders.

Norm Middag, North American Division Youth Director, was a special guest at the event and spoke about the “Witness Through Roses” program. Norm talked with Arnold and me and told us about his dream for a float in the Rose Parade. He asked us to coordinate the volunteers that would be decorating the float. We would need to contact individuals to decorate the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s first Rose Parade float, and schedule people to work the various shifts needed to decorate a float. We said yes, though I have been accused of mixing up the word “no” by always saying “on” as in onward to any project that would help youth learn of Jesus Christ.

Later we wondered if we might have been a bit crazy taking on so much responsibility with our already overloaded schedule in Arnold’s dental practice. (I was Arnold’s office manager, receptionist, part-time assistant and janitor, and he was one very busy dentist.) We were also coordinators for Pathfinder Junior Teens of the Southeastern California Conference, and I served on the North American Division Adventurer Taskforce and the

AY Honors Taskforce. Plus, we were actively collecting Pathfinder stories, memorabilia and uniforms for a North American Division Youth Museum. And most important we had three children, their spouses and at that time four grandchildren.

Neither Arnold nor I had ever decorated a Rose Parade float before but we had been to the Tournament of Roses Parade a number of times. My first visit was January 1, 1956, when I was a teenager, and Arnold had attended a parade about the same time.

On December 31, 1981, Arnold, other adult staff and I were in Pasadena on the parade route spending the night with a group of Pathfinder teens. They were saving seats for a good view of the parade the next day. That night Arnold proposed marriage to me at the stroke of midnight, on the Rose Parade route, January 1, 1982. That’s one parade we won’t soon forget!

It goes without saying that viewing a parade and decorating floats are not the same thing! Consequently, although we had been to a number of parades, we really had a lot to learn if we were going to organize volunteers for such a huge project. We caught onto Norm’s enthusiasm for this project, and we began learning what we could to make this a special experience for all the volunteers and the commercial company, Fiesta Parade Floats, in Azusa, California.

Things we learned included:

Name of our float company	Fiesta Parade Floats— builds floats
Company president	Tim Estes
Vice president and floral director	Jim Hynd
Project manager	Beverly Stansbury
Location of Fiesta Parade Floats	Azusa, California
Float designer	Raul Rodriguez

Supervisors for the float	brothers Darryl Bender and Bob Bender
The size of our float	55 feet long, 18 feet wide, 25 feet high (meters)
Hours needed to complete decorating a float	8,000 to 10,000 volunteer hours
Sundays in December	First three—doing dry prep
Two shifts each day (after Christmas)	A total of 14—7-hour shifts
Starting and ending dates for decorating	December 1— December 31, 1990
Volunteers needed	500 with 75 each shift
102 nd Rose Parade Theme for 1991	“Fun & Games”
Theme for Seventh-day Adventist float	“Playing in Peace”

Witness Through Roses

On January 1, 1991, the eyes of the world will be on the Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, California. For the first time, 400 million viewers will see a float representing the Seventh-day Adventist Church. A gift from the Parahiblers and the young people of the church, this float will positively impact the world's perception of the Church. You can help our young people make this float a reality.



Brochures and letters
sent to encourage
fundraising for the float.



Arnold Plata DDS
37 East Olive Avenue, Suite B
Redlands, Ca. 92373

May 15, 1990

Dear Colleague,

I just heard some exciting news! The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been selected to sponsor a float in the January 1, 1991, Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, California. The viewers, however, stretch around the globe. I'm told that almost 400 million people from 80 countries and territories will see the parade via the media.

As I see it, the benefit of this float is positive name recognition for the church. It will certainly be a conversation-opener for me. The various people I see every day know that I'm a Seventh-day Adventist but most are probably unaware that the church is a world wide organization.

Because I believe the float is such an excellent idea, I am making a contribution of \$400. to help cover the costs. I'm enclosing a flyer that explains its theme and size. As you think about its impact, why don't you join me and be a sponsor too. Your contribution, by June 15, would be appreciated.

Whatever you decide, be sure you tell your associates and patients about the float. I think it will be a beautiful tribute to Christ and the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Cordially,

Arnold E. Plata DDS
Arnold E. Plata DDS

P.S. To remind people to watch for our float I'm going to give a rose to colleagues and patients the last few days of December. It will be interesting to see their reactions!





Fundraising



Since this was a huge Pathfinder fundraiser as well as an evangelistic opportunity for the church, many individuals became involved in sharing the good news. ASI provided the seed money, but it was up to Pathfinders, with the help of interested family, friends and churches to raise the rest. There were skeptics, maybe you were one of them, that felt that their church should not be involved in such an expensive project or that this was not a witness at all.

Although no monies came from church tithe, still some said, “Rose Parade floats do not baptize people!” Of course, some thought it a waste of money and said things like, “A parade float can’t share God’s love, and it is too much money that could be used elsewhere.” We heard the comments, but after much prayer we felt the project and time were right to share the name Seventh-day Adventist with the world. It was evangelistic.

Norm had brochures printed to share with the North American Division churches to encourage their help with fundraising. Church members were urged to invite their friends and neighbors to watch the parade on January 1, 1991.

It was a blessing that the Seventh-day Adventist Church had monthly publications that could share the story of this awesome project. Yes, admittedly Rose Parade floats are expensive to build and decorate but just think of the millions of individuals around the world that would see and hear the name Seventh-day Adventist, many for the first time. Maybe this experience would, for some, bring back good memories of attending a Seventh-day Adventist

Vacation Bible School as a child or a Pathfinder Club, or of a special Seventh-day Adventist neighbor. Maybe seeing the name Seventh-day Adventist would encourage those that no longer attended church to think again about the family of God. The evangelistic part of the project was in God’s hands.

Norm contacted Arnold at his dental office and asked him to correspond with all the Adventist dentists in the Pacific Union requesting their participation in the fundraising for the church’s float. The letter was sent to help with fundraising and to ensure they were aware of the church float, asking them to share with their friends and patients.

We believe that the Lord took this opportunity to help many lay Seventh-day Adventists to become involved in their church through giving, decorating and asking friends and neighbors to watch the parade for “their” float.

Arnold and I were not the only ones that caught Norm’s vision and soon we were receiving calls from throughout the North American Division, from individuals and groups that wanted to experience this wonderful opportunity and decorate a float to honor God.

I enjoy organizing and started a notebook with names of people and their contact information. We printed pages for the decorators to sign in for each shift so we could be certain that there was the required number of individuals working to accomplish this fun and exciting adventure. Name tags were needed for the volunteers as Fiesta Parade Floats was a closed company and volunteers would need to wear them to enter the area of the float barn.

It was a blessing that the local conference Youth Directors, Rudy Carrillo of Southeastern California Conference and Bob Wong of Southern California Conference, were friends and helped to recruit within their conferences and also came to be a part of this adventure.



*Youth Directors Rudy Carrillo
of Southeastern California
Conference and Bob Wong of
Southern California Conference*

.....

Meeting the Fiesta Parade Floats Company



With much excitement and a bit of nervousness Arnold and I drove to Azusa, California where the Fiesta Parade Floats company was then located. The drive that Sunday morning from our home in Loma Linda, California took a bit less than an hour. We arrived early to join Richard and Lyndene Wright from Southern California Conference, whom Norm had asked to help. Richard, a school teacher, was a Southern California Conference Pathfinder coordinator and Lyndene a Pathfinder Club director. It was a blessing to learn that the Wrights had previously helped to decorate several floats and knew something of the amount of people needed to complete the project. Lyndene scheduled group leaders for each shift, made name tags and scheduled volunteer staff to work checking in our volunteers. Actually, most everything outside the float barn was their responsibility. Later they were also able to do a bit of decorating.



Others were arriving by then so volunteer registration began and when the group had assembled, they were ready to go inside the float barn. The Wrights spent much of their time at the gate to the float barn and signed in

each of our volunteers. Lyndene also coordinated a meal for the volunteers, asking the church members in Southern California Conference to provide a hot meal for each shift after Christmas. She had typed a letter and sent it to each club or group leader for information on what to expect. Paragraph titles included: Name Badges, Schedule, When to Arrive, What to Wear, What to Bring, Food, and included a map of the location of the float building where they would be decorating.

There were other floats also being decorated, but on those first three Sundays in December the Seventh-day Adventists were the only group working as the other groups were working on the Saturdays of December. When we say being made, we do mean the metal and foam work was still in progress, though much of the float was completed so we could get a good idea of how huge 55 feet long and 18 feet wide really looked. What a major but exciting task it would be to prepare materials and to decorate!

Our float supervisors were brothers, rancher Darryl of Lakeview in South-eastern Oregon and Dr. Bob Bender of Southern California. Randy Bender, Bob's son, was also part of their team. They met with our group, explained what we would be doing and separated the group into areas for the various tasks before us. The Benders were well acquainted with float decorating and had been supervisors before, so they knew just where to place us to do whatever task was to be completed by the end of that shift. Fiesta's Project Man-



Volunteers cut statice and strawflower.

ager and Floral Director and the Benders had spent months formulating the bible for the church's float, carefully preparing a thick 3-ring binder that outlined every detail of the float's decoration plan. There were little squares to fill in whenever a task was completed.

As you might have guessed, it was too early for the famous fresh colorful flowers but there was plenty else to be done. We were told that every inch of the float must be covered in natural materials. The variety of seeds, bark, shells and mosses that are used is incredible. Who would have thought to use corn husks for a skirt, cork on the bottom of sandals or cut potatoes for a pathway? The first projects were with dry prep including ironing corn husks and cutting them to required shapes. Many individuals were put to cutting strawflower, the outer cut pedals in one container, the middle cut pedals in another and the petal closest to the center in another. We had never noticed that there were lighter and darker parts of strawflowers and each area could be used somewhere on the float, for shading and to cover something. There was a huge amount of statice to cut and it too came in a variety of shades that when being cut was separated for later use and placed in clean, clear trash bags with the name 7th Day clearly marked.

Top to bottom:
Arnold Plata
works on a bird
Volunteers
trim cornhusks



Volunteers Get to Work



My responsibility lay inside the float barn, following the requests of our supervisors and relaying the messages to the volunteers, whether it be a “well done” or “move that person from that task; it is just not working out.” In spite of the difficulty of such an assignment almost all the volunteers were very understanding and the work went on in a friendly, encouraging way throughout each of the shifts.



Sam & Elda Eller decorating a duck.

Fiesta Parade Floats President Tim Estes, Vice President and Floral Director Jim Hynd, and Project Manager Beverly Stansbury told us that they had anxiously watched the Seventh-day Adventist workers. Later Beverly said, “Dixie, when I first heard a church group would be decorating their own float, I said heaven help us!” Beverly had worked with church groups before, but later told us that she “had not worked with a church group that took decorating as a real responsibility and commitment.”

That first Sunday of December we arrived 179 strong (we had been required to have 100) and after a couple hours Beverly said, “We have no worries about 7th Day decorators; they are exceptional workers!” We were called 7th Day as each box or bag of materials designated for our float and each container of strawflower or other materials that we cut all had the names

of the float sponsor on them. Seventh-day Adventist was a lot to write so it was shortened to 7th Day, and that was what everyone in the float barn called us.

The second Sunday in December Arnold and I arrived early with our motorhome and set up to feed the bus load of young people that were coming from San Pasqual Adventist Academy. Our daughter Tammy and her husband Paul Turk were teachers at SPA and had shared this opportunity, recruiting students



San Pasqual Academy and staff.

and a few faculty to be involved in this adventure. Paul drove the bus and Tammy and their 3-and-a-half-year-old daughter Laeci and her 3-month-old baby sister Kaeli rode along with the students. I had promised breakfast for the group as at the academy Sunday's brunch was not available until 10:AM and the bus left San Pasqual Academy at 5:30 AM. After a breakfast of pancakes, applesauce, peanut butter, syrup, scrambled eggs, orange juice and hot chocolate they were all ready to go inside the float barn and learn what their tasks would be for the day.

It was a delight for Arnold and I to watch our granddaughter Laeci with her little scissors cutting away at strawflower and sticking with the task when some of the teens were ready for something more exciting. (We have



Group working together.

been told that OSHA no longer allows children of that age to be involved in float decorating but we are thankful that Laeci had the opportunity to experience it.) Laeci really enjoyed watching Grama's friends Sam and Elda Eller place orange lentils on the duck's bill, in neat

rows, one at a time. There were so many interesting projects going on and there was a lot to see.

The third Sunday we worked at Fiesta was much the same with added decorating on the float with strawflower, statice, corn husks and other dried materials. That Sunday we had 239 volunteers so a lot was accomplished. The supervisors had watched the careful work of the sometimes-boring cutting and running cornhusks through a mangle and knew which volunteers they could trust to be on the float working from the scaffold and gluing bark, mosses and dried cut flowers. It was quite a thrill to be on the float actually decorating!

On the Sundays when we were working alone, the volunteers could be heard visiting as they worked and often broke into song, singing choruses where everyone joined in. Following Christmas with other groups decorating the floats they had been assigned to, singing came to a stop but the friendly visits continued. One of the questions Beverly asked me was, “Do you know all these people?” She had witnessed greetings with hugs and the friendliness of our group. Of course, the answer was “no,” but I explained how the Seventh-day Adventist denomination is



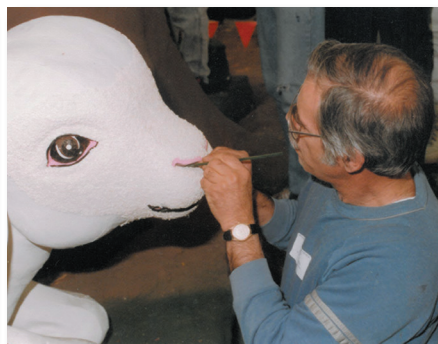
Ruthanne Leeper and sister-in-law Darla Leeper glueing seaweed on butterfly wings
.....

more than a church, it is really a lifestyle, and more than just a religion but being part of a family, the family of God. Once you meet there are no strangers; you become friends. We love to visit and sing. Many of the decorators found that they knew some of the same people and were actually related to some of the same people, as the Seventh-day Adventist Church is world-wide and quite closeknit. Our beliefs embrace keeping all of the commandments, including the fourth, Exodus 20:8-11.

The last Sunday before Christmas we took a break and watched our float driver take our float out for a test run. The Rose Parade officials were there

to be sure that everything was safe and working correctly, including the animated parts of the float. It was a real joy to watch our float moving along the street by the float barn, and the trial run went well.

Our volunteers were divided into groups to work on various projects with a supervisor over each group. We tried to rotate the groups every couple of hours so you wouldn't get tired working on just one project. Some of the things that were done included: glueing orange lentils on the back of the petals of large metal flowers that were to be place on the float at a later time, pulling gray moss from bunches of moss, separating the dirt and woody parts, and gluing orange lentils on the feet of geese. Lots of the work is done at tables, with finished items being placed on the float. Some work is done on the float and some is done while seated or standing over work areas, then added to the float after certain things on the float have been completed. No wonder our supervisors need a "float bible" with every little item written down!



*Top to bottom,
left to right:
Mindi & Jim Nix
Arnold Plata
details a lamb
Paul Turk
and student*

Playing in Peace



The theme for the Rose Parade in 1991 was Fun and Games and the Seventh-day Adventist float was themed Playing in Peace. Float

Designer Raul Rodrigues had drawn five children in the Hummel style surrounded by a variety of animals, trees, plants and flowers. Though Raul drew the design it was Fiesta Floats Jim and Beverly that decided what materials to use to best show up that design in a colorful natural way.



Don Biggar holding box of flowers for daughter Diane Taylor

Following Christmas, Seventh-day Adventist volunteers came, all at their own expense, from many parts of the North American Division, including: Alberta and Quebec in Canada, Wisconsin, Oregon, Washington DC, Arizona, Idaho, Florida, Virginia, Colorado, Texas, Washington State, Tennessee, Missouri, Iowa and California. There were students from Walla Walla College, La Sierra College and Columbia Union College (now all Universities), and Auburn, San Pasqual, Redlands and Loma Linda Adventist Academies all working together to make this dream a reality.

There were people from many nationalities all working together for their Lord and for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Our supervisors were astonished at the variety of workers and how well we all worked together.

Division, Union, and Conference leaders, Area Coordinators, Pathfinder leaders and lay workers that gave of themselves and their time to make this

dream a reality felt that they were truly a part of a great witness for the church. They witnessed by doing each project that was assigned willingly and carefully. Another witness that was noticed by Fiesta was that youth workers, retirees and youth all worked together—no generation gap, with no bickering or animosity. Everyone worked as a team, which Fiesta said was very unusual. We were certainly “working in peace!”

We did give our supervisors a bit of a problem. After Christmas we had been told that we were to have only 75 volunteers on a shift, around our float, when all the volunteers were there working on the various floats. We often had 100 or more volunteers show up at a time. I spoke with Beverly about the “problem” and Beverly spoke with Darryl and Bob and they came up with a solution. The Benders would share our extra volunteers with another float in the float barn that was short of volunteers. This worked well for all concerned and only a few volunteers mentioned that they didn’t get to actually work on the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s float. But by now our supervisors knew whom they could trust to do certain tasks and wanted to keep the good work going.

Whenever I was placing individuals on a task, at the request of our supervisors, I noticed that Arnold had been given some very detailed projects and was quietly working away doing an awesome job. He certainly had



Teri Stimmel placing mums on head scarf.

the patience to spend hours on details. I didn’t get to decorate much as my responsibilities were to keep volunteers happily involved.



Diane Taylor glues the backs of flowers.