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In Tribute of Rev. Jacob DeShazer

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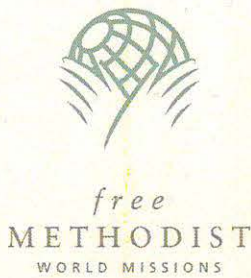


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In Tribute of Rev. Jacob DeShazer

Free Methodist World Missions is thankful for the gracious and dedicated service of Rev. Jacob DeShazer. As a faithful servant, he followed God's leading. We personally grieve for our loss, but are thankful that Jacob has lived a life worthy of his heavenly Father's calling.

While Jacob, born November 15, 1912, in Salem, Oregon, was raised in a Christian family, as a teenager he drifted away from God. Following high school, Jacob (Jake) tried farming, sheep herding and turkey raising. He finally entered the Army Air Corp in 1940, two years before World War II started. He trained for airplane mechanic work and learned how to operate a bombsight. In April 1942 Jake was one crew member of the 16 planes that made up the Lieutenant Colonel James Doolittle bombing mission to Tokyo. His crew made it to their target and headed for China, only to run out of fuel. They had to bail out over Japanese-occupied China, becoming prisoners of war.

Jake spent more than 30 of his 40-month incarceration in solitary confinement in different Japanese and Chinese prison camps. Although conditions were deplorable, God worked in his life in extraordinary ways. After almost two years of prison life, Jake was given a Bible to read. He had the Bible in his possession for three weeks. Jake admits he was very bitter toward his captors and the Japanese in general. Yet, reading the Bible, Jake not only found forgiveness for his sins, but also chose to love his enemies, the very guards who were persecuting him. Jake was sick for some time and nearly died, but he believed God could heal him. He sensed God's direction for his every move. On the morning of August 10, 1945, Jake was directed to pray for peace. He prayed until God released him from praying. Jake had no way of knowing this was the day the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. After all he had experienced, Jake sensed a direct call from God to return to Japan someday and teach the Japanese people of His saving grace.

Within two months of being released from prison on August 20, 1945, Jake entered Seattle Pacific University (SPU), Washington. He met Florence Matheny who was also following God's call into missionary service. They married in 1946. Jake graduated in 1948 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in missions. Later, Jake was honored by his alma mater; in 1973 he was named alumnus of the year.

Upon his return from war, Jake was a popular speaker. Many North American audiences were touched by his message of love based upon his prison experiences. His story was told in pamphlets and a variety of media including a made-for-TV movie (1956). Some were translated into Japanese.

Six years and eight months after his first trip to Japan, Jacob, along with Florence and their young son, Paul, arrived in Japan, December 28, 1948, on a different mission. The Japanese people were initially curious about the "Doolittle Raider," as local newspapers referred to him. But after they heard him speak, curiosity turned to conviction. With the translation aid of Rev. Kaneo Oda, president of Osaka Christian College, revival spread as Jake spoke to people in factories, mines, school and churches.

In one of Jake's audiences were a number of Japanese prison guards, including Captain Kato, head guard of one of the prisons where Jake was held. Captain Kato became a Christian. In addition, Mitsu Fuchida, captain of a Japanese warship involved in the attack on Pearl Harbor, was converted under Jake's ministry. Fuchida became an evangelist.

Jake believed the material, educational and medical needs of the people were being met, he wrote in 1951, but what the Japanese critically needed was the gospel of Jesus Christ. There seemed to be a lack of spiritual understanding as people were relying on themselves and not perceiving the call to a Christian life.

The DeShazers carried on a unique church planting ministry. This included children's outreach and English Bible classes. They also sought to build bridges of friendship with neighbors. For a time Jake served as superintendent of the eastern conference.

During the DeShazer's career, 23 new Free Methodist churches were established throughout Japan. When each group of believers became a worshipping congregation, a church was organized and the DeShazers moved to a new assignment. The DeShazers established a church in Nagoya, the city Jake once helped to bomb. The last two years of their assignment, the DeShazers worked north of Tokyo in Tokorozawa. They retired in 1978, making their home in Salem, Oregon.

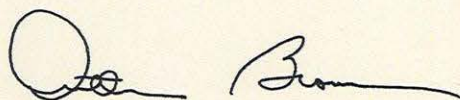
"My first acquaintance with Jacob DeShazer was in 1953," writes Dr. K. Lavern Snider, missionary to Japan 1957-1992. "Jake had already been in Japan for some time preaching the gospel across the nation with amazing results. I heard that he had led many people to Christ – probably more converts than any other missionary to that time.

"As a conference, a Youth Congress on Evangelism, neared the time to close, I needed to see Jake about some scheduling. Not knowing how to find him, I sent a messenger to find him so that I could see him but for a few moments. The response each time was 'He is busy and cannot come.' I asked what he was busy about. The response was, 'He is leading someone to Christ and will not be free until he had completed this task.' I was stunned. But this was Jake. He had a divine compulsion to lead people to the Savior he had come to know as a prisoner of war of the Japanese.

"Through his missionary career he was an evangelist and ardent church planter. When Jake was looking for another location for planting a church, he and I went to the city of Nagoya, which had become in a short period of time after the war, a fast growing city. As we looked at a certain area, Jake stopped quickly and said, 'I've been here before. I dropped bombs in this area.' We chose that area to plant another church.

"Our close friendship grew across the years – in reaching people with the gospel, in planting churches, playing golf at our summer vacation spot, Lake Nojiri, and at frequent missionary meetings. Jake has gone from us; we will miss him. But we know that he is rejoicing with Jesus whom he knew so well and with the many people he was able, through the grace of God, to bring into faith in Christ as Savior and Lord."

On March 15, 2008, the Free Methodist missionary family lost a faithful friend and colleague, Jacob DeShazer, whose decision to follow Jesus to the ends of the earth, including 30 years of missionary service, has brought eternal fruit.



Dr. Art Brown
Free Methodist World Missions
March 19, 2008