

A Baby Born in Troubled Times

It was early morning, December 21, 1891, in the little town of Oxford, Mississippi. The large, wood frame house resounded with constant noise and activity that had little to do with the approaching holiday. In fact, there was little money, and there would be few gifts. The noise erupted from seven boys ranging in age from two to seventeen gathering around the rectangular wooden table, hungrily awaiting the usual morning oatmeal. The chairs were too close, tempting silent rib punching and an occasional kick skillfully hidden under the table edge. Tattling was not a wise action, for it would only bring discipline for all involved. The parents of these boys, Corra and George Leavell, were trying to teach the next generation thoughtfulness and responsibility, and there were consequences for bad behavior.

The wood was burning fiercely in the cast-iron stove, and Corra was stirring the bubbling oatmeal with an unusual determination. Stopping suddenly, she turned to her husband, stating quietly and forcefully, "I don't think I will make it through breakfast." The breakfast scene took on a different mood and tempo as Corra disappeared and George hurried the seven boys through the food and clothes routine. He secured the wagon, hitched the horse to it, and whisked the older boys away to school while the younger boys were taken to neighboring relatives.

Returning home in less than an hour from Corra's declaration and disappearance, George found his forty-year-old wife, a neighbor lady, and a brand new, bright-eyed baby boy.

It would seem that the last thing this family needed for

Christmas was another baby boy. However, the value of a new life can be put into perspective only in retrospect.

Parents often react differently to the birth of a first-born son than the arrival of an eighth-born son. This is especially true when these are older parents who are facing some of the most difficult days of their lives. After some consideration this baby boy's name was chosen. This was the eighth boy name this couple had struggled to finalize. In their belief, names gave meaning to a life. The final choice was "Roland," for a family friend, and "Quinche," for a university professor who was instrumental in preventing the Union Army from razing the University of Mississippi campus.

When Roland was barely old enough to understand the words, an aunt told him something that would color his life, all 71 years of his life: "You were not wanted." This sensitive little boy absorbed all the rejection that comes with being told he was an intrusion into his family. He told this incident over and over throughout his life, and perhaps this childhood pain was the driver that made it necessary for him to prove his worth in his family and in this world.

He was always the teacher's pet, and as a young adult and a successful senior adult, he was admired and loved. Seldom did he have to relinquish the center of attention to others. He proved his rightful place over and over. However, he had indeed come at an inconvenient time for this family.