



# *Adventist Heritage*

## **H. M. S. Richards Script**

By Richard Wright

Harold Marshal Sylvester Richards was born in Davis City, Iowa, in 1894. Both his father, H.M.J. Richards, and his grandfather were Seventh-day Adventist pastors. From an early age, Harold assisted his father during evangelistic campaigns.

Harold attended and graduated from Campion Academy in 1914. He then attended Washington Missionary College – now Columbia Union College. He graduated in 1919. During his college years, he conducted his first series of meetings in a small town near Pike’s Peak.

After graduation, the young Pastor Richards accepted his first ministerial assignment in Ottawa, Ontario, in the Canadian Union. It was in Ottawa where Harold met and fell in love with a young schoolteacher, named Mabel Annabel Eastman. They were married in 1920.

As early as 1920, Elder Richards conceived the idea of using the new medium of radio to spread the Gospel. At this point, however, he had no way of making this happen.

In 1926, Elder Richards and his wife moved to California, where he was called to be a conference evangelist. Evangelistic meetings were held in Fresno, Bakersfield, Lodi, Los Angeles, Long Beach, and San Diego. During some of these campaigns, Richards experimented with radio by making announcements about the meetings. These announcements drew large crowds and resulted in many baptisms.

H.M.S. Richards was now determined to utilize the radio as a means of evangelism. An opportunity came in October, 1929, when radio station KNX in Los Angeles began to offer free air time for religious broadcasts. Richards took advantage of this valuable opportunity, and began to broadcast 15 minute messages several times a week. Due to the limitations of the broadcast agreement, these messages were of a general Christian nature.

In 1931, Richards also began a weekly program – by remote wire – from his home studio to station KMPC in Beverly Hills. His studio was a renovated chicken coop at the back of his garage.

During a tent-meeting series in Long Beach in 1933, Elder Richards began daily live broadcasts of what he called “The Tabernacle of the Air” over station KGER in Long Beach. This time, the Southern California and Pacific Union Conferences agreed to sponsor the program. This allowed Richards to preach on Seventh-day Adventist issues, such as prophecy.

Richard's "Tabernacle of the Air" became a popular program in Southern California, and the innovative pastor became more adept in radio production. In 1936, a quartet – originally from Texas – known as the "Lone Star Four," joined the daily broadcast. Elder Richards came to believe that God wanted him to expand his radio ministry into other areas.

The opportunity for expansion came in January, 1937. H.M.S. Richards was able to arrange with the Don Lee Broadcasting System to offer his radio program on stations in several different cities in California. At this time, Richards changed the name of his program to the Voice of Prophecy. Elder Richards thought that the name "Lone Star Four" was too regional, so he changed the name of the quartet to the "King's Heralds."

According to Elder Richards, the "greatest thrill of his entire ministry" took place on January 4, 1942. He was able for the first time to broadcast coast-to-coast on the 89 stations of the Mutual Broadcasting System. The Voice of Prophecy had achieved national status.

In February of that same year, the Voice of Prophecy began a Bible correspondence school, under the direction of Fordyce Detamore. This school would eventually graduate nearly a million people.

During the next few years, evangelists in other parts of the world began to join the Voice of Prophecy family by offering radio programming eventually in 80 different languages. The most well-known of these offspring was the Spanish-language program, La Voce de Esparanza, with its long-time speaker, Elder Braulio Perez. The King's Heralds and Del Delker – who joined the ministry in 1947 – became adept at singing in many different languages. A running gag was that organist Brad Braley could "play in any language."

During these decades of ministry, H.M.S. Richards and his Voice of Prophecy team visited camp meetings, colleges, General Conference sessions, and other gatherings of Adventists. They were much in demand, and would often spend months on the road – often traveling together in an old 1938 Cadillac limosine that had previously belonged to the actress, Delores del Rio. They would also eventually visit many different places throughout the world.

Elder H.M.S. Richards was a very humble man, who was interested only in bringing the Gospel of Christ to as many people as possible. However, people in the broadcasting world could not help but recognize his talents and hard work. In both 1967 and 1970, Richards was awarded the Honor Citation of the National Religious Broadcasters Association. In addition, Andrews University awarded Elder Richards an honorary doctorate in 1960.

Elder and Mrs. Richards had four children. Virginia Cason was their oldest child. Her name is familiar to people involved in Children's Ministries, since she has

written many songs and produced other materials for Sabbath Schools. Harold, Jr. decided to follow in the footsteps of his father and enter the ministry. He spent several years working as a pastor and evangelist in New Mexico. Kenneth Richards, the second son, also became an Adventist minister. In 1974, Kenneth became a researcher and then an assistant speaker for the Voice of Prophecy. The youngest son, Jan, teaches at a university in California.

Richards wrote many books, including *The Indispensable Man*, *Promises of God*, and *What Jesus Said*. He was also a poet, and he would often write new verses of his famous "Have Faith in God" poem, to meet the occasion. He had an extensive home library and was well-versed in many subjects. However, his key advice to young ministers was to continually read the Bible.

Harold, Jr. joined the Voice of Prophecy in 1960, as an assistant speaker. In 1969, H.M.S. Richards, Sr. retired from the full-time leadership of the ministry that he had founded. He continued to assist his son for the next 16 years, until his death.

People who met, who were acquainted with, or who worked with H.M.S. Richards were always impressed by his quiet, but warm and friendly personality. He was always very approachable, and was always willing to counsel and pray with anyone who requested help. Richards died quietly in 1985