

**STILL GOING
TO MULLINIX
A BREATHTAKING JOURNEY**

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© 2021

Published in the United States by Nurturing Faith, Macon, GA.
Nurturing Faith is a book imprint of Good Faith Media (goodfaithmedia.org).
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

ISBN: 978-1-63528-143-9

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Illustrations (cover and interior) by Clara Jebson.

Many thanks to...

Clara “Mimi” Jebson, who captures the heart of these stories
with her gifted artistic illustrations

Candace Legere for her technical expertise and hours of labor
in preparing this manuscript for the publisher

My wife, Jean, who “loves” everything I write and constantly pushes
me to quit rewriting and call it finished

To the Walnut Hills church family, who shared their lives with me
and with whom I grew up in the faith

To all those readers of my first book, *Going to Mullinix*,
who encouraged me to write another book

To all those individuals whose lives have enriched my life
with reflections of God’s presence and love

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Preface: And So It Continues

There wasn't much to do in my hometown of Mt. Gilead, North Carolina, when I was growing up. Mostly we were dependent on our imaginations. Usually that was more than enough.

I read somewhere about a man saying his hometown was so small that “temptations were harder to find than resist.” It wasn't quite that bad for us, but the one theater—creatively named the Gilmont—closed in 1954 when I was fourteen years old. That sad day marked the end of our places of entertainment.

But, like I said, we had our imaginations, so on Friday or Saturday night—and sometimes both—when there were no football or basketball games, my good friends, Wayne Dunn and David Warner, and our young basketball coach/teacher James Walton and I would pile into Walton's 1953 dark green Dodge sedan. Occasionally we would ride in Wayne's white 1952 Chevy.

Our conversation was always the same. “Well, where are we going tonight?” was always met with “I don't know” and “I don't care.” So the familiar response would follow: “Okay, we'll just start out and see where the road takes us.”

Back in the late 1950s, that was cheap entertainment since gasoline averaged around fifteen cents a gallon. When service stations engaged in a gas war, the price would drop even lower—sometimes into single digits.

Since our journey had no planned destination, we would sometimes end up in a strange town, searching for a sign telling us where we were. But that only added another dimension to our adventure. If you don't care where you are going, any road is okay, and any destination will do. If you care where your journey ends, however, the roads you choose to travel are crucial.

My first book, *Going to Mullinix*, grew out of my Pa-Pa's reply when anyone called out, “Where're you goin', Arthur?” Pa-Pa's answer was always a cheerful, “Goin' to Mullinix,” followed by his signature big laugh.

Pa-Pa was my maternal grandfather with whom I shared the cab of a 1950 green Ford pickup as we made farm trips delivering chickens and chicken feed and then transporting the resulting eggs and fryers to processing plants in Rockingham or Hamlet. Most of that took place in the years between my tenth and twelfth birthdays.

Pa-Pa never told me where Mullinix was located, so it became, in my imagination, that mysterious safe place where everything fit and life was as it should be. Later, when I became a pastor, I almost subconsciously adapted Mullinix as a metaphor for that place of maximum kingdom living in which I take on the likeness of Christ to the degree my fallible discipleship is capable.

So Mullinix is not heaven. It is as close as I can get to *heavenly* citizenship while still living as a citizen of this world.

I told stories in that first volume of people, critters, and events, which I called “signs,” giving direction to my journey. A pilgrimage like this is a step-by-step process and a lifelong challenge. Disappointment, discouragement, and failure hide around every curve, lurk in every valley, and poise atop every mountain.

Therefore, in this book, I tell the stories of a new collection of people, critters, and events that have “put heart back into me.” Sometimes these “signs” were gentle nudges easy to miss unless I carefully exercised the “discipline of noticing.” At other times they were dramatic, unmistakable road markers along the journey toward the “full stature of Christ.” All of them together, however, revealed God’s presence in such a way that it took my breath away.

So, with bated breath, the journey to Mullinix continues.