

# Come in the House

*Faith Lessons from Shake  
Rag and Beyond*

Howard Williams

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I put off reading Howard William's journal of life anticipating painful memories of a dear friend and colleague. That was a mistake. There was pain but far more joy. As I read, I felt him whispering in my ear. Fred Craddock wrote that the most powerful communication of the gospel is in whispers. Howard was not a shouter. His soft voice carried truth and feeling. This journal whispers to us as he would tell his story to someone he loved. This work of wisdom and wit brought to mind a favorite spiritual writer and a favorite literary work. The former was Thomas Merton, who said that Jesus had the power to reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary. Howard left that gift in his manuscript. The reader will be moved by memories of their own loved ones. Howard's confessions of stumbles along the path bring smiles to the readers lips as we remember personal missteps.

The other thing that came to mind was Thornton Wilder's classic American play "Our Town." Surely it is the most read and performed American drama. In the play a woman who dies long before she should is permitted to return to earth and home for one day. After being struck by the wonder of people in her life and little ordinary daily events, Emily cries out to her guide: "Does anyone ever realize life while they live it... every, every minute?" Her companion responds " No. Saints and poets maybe..." Howard Williams has left us a diary of the ordinary that puts him in the class of "saints and poets." The reader will be tempted to hurry through the book in a single sitting but it will be most effective in small bites followed by thoughts of one's own journey.

Raymond Bailey



## Foreword

Howard Williams knew how to celebrate the little things in life, and that, more than almost anything else, is the purpose of this book: to remind us to celebrate the little things and to love one another while doing so.

I met Howard one night about ten years ago when he came for visitation to thank us for coming to Weatherly Heights Baptist Church. My daughter, Emma, was a little less than two years old at the time, and my son, Matthew, had just been born. Emma, being a night owl, was still awake but seemed to be wearing her shy PJs that night for once in her life. She was afraid of the big, tall, bald guy who was talking to her mommy and daddy in the living room, so she kept peeking around the wall from the foyer.

Howard smiled at my girl and spoke to her as if she truly mattered.

She's loved him ever since. And so have I.

Howard loved.

About three years ago, Howard wasn't feeling himself, and sometimes, being the frail beings we are, it showed through the ministry he was offering to the church during the opening announcements. But it never interfered with his ability to notice and celebrate the lives that surrounded him. Once, during the middle of his announcements, Matthew, who is on the autism spectrum and doesn't speak often, decided to let out a "YEE-HAW!" at the top of his lungs. The rafters shake when the voiceless speak, and Howard, always listening for a still small voice, certainly heard this one.

My friend stopped, looked at me, and smiled. And he told all of us, "Y'all, I just have to stop for a moment cause I just got a 'Yee-haw!'"

More than almost anyone I've known, Howard knew how to appreciate the little things in life. And that's the legacy he leaves with us here. Whether it was seeing the light of God in some delicious homemade sausage or in the wonder of a child's eyes witnessing the miracle and blessing of birth, Howard saw the little things, the little ones in life. He always invited us to come on in, sit a while, have a bite to eat, and celebrate together the joy and the suffering, the triumph and the pain of this life.

Because it is in the little things that we can best see the handiwork of the God who invites us to come in the house.

Russell Winn  
Sunday, March 1, 2015  
Huntsville, Alabama



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