



DR. JOHN J.
DAVIS

THE RENAISSANCE MAN • THE COMMUNITY RESOURCE • THE OLD TESTAMENT SCHOLAR • THE STALWART

GUARDIAN OF GRACE

by KERITH ACKLEY-JELINEK

DAVIS *Guardian of Grace*



THE REAL-LIFE INDIANA JONES / Dr. Davis with his archeology students discussing an artifact.

THE RENAISSANCE MAN

At Dr. John J. Davis' (MDiv 62, ThM 64, ThD 67) inauguration on Oct. 10, 1986, Neal Carlson, chairman of the community advisory committee, had the audience laughing as his list of descriptors for Davis continued on and on. "We are proud that Dr. Davis is a professor, a lecturer, a writer, a photographer, a fisherman, a hunter, a botanist, an archaeologist, a scholar, a roller-skater, an evangelist, a musician, a father, a husband, a former Boy Scout, a Kiwanian." Ask anyone to describe Davis and it's almost certain they'll call him a renaissance man. He is a jack — and master — of all trades.

Ron Henry (BA 58, BD 62) remembers, when he and Davis were faculty members, how Davis developed an interest in hockey. He had never played it himself, but within months Davis was a color commentator for Fort Wayne's minor league hockey team. "I remember hearing the play-by-play announcer say he'd never seen anybody who hadn't played hockey become so well versed in understanding the nuances of the game," marvels Henry.

Davis has participated in 13 archaeological expeditions to Jordan and Israel as a senior staff member. He's recorded five classical country CDs, three Hawaiian CDs and recently produced a comedy music CD.

Henry says that every Thursday night you can find him and a few others playing a "Jam Session" at Grace Village in Winona Lake.

THE COMMUNITY RESOURCE

Davis' broad and limitless interests were especially useful when he assumed the presidency and took on the responsibility to cultivate major donors and continue to bridge the gap between the academic and local communities. They also gave him numerous opportunities in Grace's local community and beyond, throughout the world.

Henry remembers Davis using his love of the outdoors as a bridge to the community. "For decades, Davis wrote articles for outdoor journals, magazines and newspapers," recalls Henry. "Outdoor Scene," his weekly column in the Warsaw Times Union, appeared for 31 years.

Davis also spent a lot of time at Breeding Cigar Store in Warsaw, Ind. Men from all walks of life would gather there to unwind from the day, and Davis enjoyed their camaraderie. During a July 2012 interview, Davis remembers, "The owner of the place ended up having a Bible in there because at the back table we got into biblical discussions."

NOVEMBER 9, 1989

Berlin Wall opens to the West

90

FEBRUARY 7, 1990

Communist Party relinquishes sole power in Soviet government

AUGUST 2, 1990

Iraqi troops invade Kuwait initiating the Persian Gulf War

DECEMBER 25, 1990

First World Wide Web server and browser completed

THE OLD TESTAMENT SCHOLAR

When he and Davis were fellow seminary students, Henry remembers Davis' eager capacity for scholarship. "We were in our Homiletics class and we'd received our assignment to come up with a sermon outline based on a certain passage of Scripture. I had worked and worked and worked on an outline, and when we came to class, Davis showed up with four [outlines]."

Davis has contributed numerous articles to various books, dictionaries and journals, including: Harper's Bible Dictionary, The Higley Sunday School Commentary, The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia, the Evangelical Commentary, The New

International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology, Holman Bible Dictionary, and Hermeneutics, Inerrancy & The Bible. He has served as a translator for the New International Version of the Bible and is a contributor to the study edition of that Bible. He has also contributed to the study edition of the New American Standard Bible and the Christian Life Edition of the New King James Version of the Bible. He's published 19 books and has taught in 45 different countries. Chairman of the Grace Board Dr. Jim Custer (BA 60, BD 63, ThM 77, DD 91) says, "Davis' knowledge of the land of Israel, its customs, history and folklore, plus his understanding of the Old Testament law, literature and covenant is profound and prophetic."

THE STALWART

Although the counseling program under the seminary was increasing when Davis became president, the M.Div enrollment was declining. Davis was one of the few who discerned early on that something was awry. Bill Male (BD 55), who hired Dr. Larry Crabb as director of the counseling program, says although the master's program thrived under the leadership of Crabb, several years into the program, Crabb began to change his position on the purpose of the degree. "Originally, we were all in agreement that the counseling program should be about developing counseling skills for pastors. But it started to become more about counseling than pastoring," recalls Male. Davis began



COMMUNITY CONNECTOR / Dr. Davis is a prolific writer and has authored more than 15 books, many of them on the Old Testament.



THE FISHERMAN / Dr. Davis is an avid outdoorsman and an award-winning outdoor writer.

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1990

Admitted to the membership of Independent Colleges of Indiana Foundation

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receiving letters from churches where Grace counseling graduates were criticizing pastors and dividing churches.

Consequently, the seminary began suffering from credibility issues. In 1989, Davis dissolved the counseling program after approaching Crabb, who Davis says left graciously, recognizing the issues at hand. “We all hated for Larry to move on. He’s a national figure, very well known, highly respected ... and he understood,” said Davis in a Grace interview earlier this year. Furthermore, it brought criticism



THE SCHOLAR / Dr. Davis is a sought out lecturer and has taught at more than 20 schools across the globe.

from the faculty because Davis made the decision without bringing it before them. Nevertheless, Davis’ administrative assistant Nancy Weimer (BA 75) says, “He knew the program needed to end. It took a person of his character and personality to do it.”

As the counseling department ended, divisions within Grace seminary began to escalate, and Dr. John Whitcomb (BD 51, ThM 53, ThD 57), one of the seminary’s most respected and popular professors was at the heart of it. Whitcomb had been teaching side by side with Davis since the mid-60s. They’d written a series of books about Old Testament history together, and Custer says they were “brother to brother” in all that they did. But Whitcomb began to suggest that Grace’s faculty was no longer adhering to a literal interpretation of the Word of God. As an extremely popular conference speaker, Whitcomb was invited to ministerial groups and used that pulpit to criticize his colleagues and to express his concerns about the reliability of Grace’s historic stand for biblical accuracy and authority. “Although Whitcomb was repeatedly admonished to cease such criticism, he refused to desist or to be accountable for his own comments,” Custer says with great sorrow. In 1990, in the middle of the school year, just six months before Whitcomb was 65 years old, Davis dismissed one of his

oldest friends and one of Grace’s finest professors.

Whitcomb did not go quietly, and although Grace breathed a sigh of relief to be rid of the tension he consistently stirred up, the public wasn’t sure whether Whitcomb’s dismissal only served to prove he was right: Grace was diverging from the centrality of God’s Word. Davis told the faculty that Grace wasn’t going to get involved in the public dialogue or defend every charge. “I told the faculty we’re just going to get on with our business and let the Lord take care of that, and He did,” says Davis. Custer, who was in the trenches during the denominational turmoil and debate, says it was one of the darkest periods for Grace College & Seminary, dealing a near fatal blow to the seminary. And for the Fellowship of the Grace Brethren Churches, it ultimately led to a split in the denomination in 1992.

Henry is confident Davis made the right decision in each circumstance even though it wasn’t always popular. “If there was a problem, he faced it head-on and dealt with it. He was willing to make tough decisions. No question in my mind about that.”

Weimer agrees. “He faced a really rocky time both externally and internally. He was the one who could handle it. He was the one who held the ship together.” *

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FEBRUARY 2, 1992

Bush and Yeltsin proclaim
end to the Cold War

FEBRUARY 22, 1992

U.S. lifts trade sanctions
against China

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JANUARY 20, 1993

William J. Clinton
becomes 42nd President

SEPTEMBER 13, 1993

Israeli-Palestinian
accord reached

NOVEMBER 30, 1993

Clinton signs Brady Bill
regulating firearm purchases

THE SMOKE- JUMPER

When a wildfire breaks out, smokejumpers combat fires in the riskiest of conditions. They're capable of penetrating the interior of a wildfire, making critical and sometimes difficult decisions to extinguish it, preserving the landscape for future generations. They choose in some cases to actually create small fires to stop big ones. They make triage decisions regarding 50 acres to preserve 50,000.

In many ways, this is what Dr. Davis did while leading Grace. His years as president were some of the toughest in Grace's history. "Davis' presidency came at a very difficult time in our nation," Custer explains. "The controversy regarding Billy Graham, the controversy surrounding the rise of neo-evangelicalism, the attempts to soft peddle the authority and accuracy of Scripture in light of modern scientific research. These tensions escalated significantly on the campus of Grace during Davis' presidency."

His mantle was managing all of that. To keep the school consistent with the biblical ideas of its founders and embrace a more evangelical and less fundamentalist stance. And Davis did. Although it was painful, Davis helped clear the way for current Grace president, Dr. Ronald Manahan, to move the school forward. "Several times I have told Dr. Davis that his dedication regarding Dr. Whitcomb was crucial to the future of the institution," says Manahan. "Left unattended the circumstance would have been negative and disruptive for Grace during the following years. Dr. Davis' decision was strategic for the future of Grace College & Seminary." When Manahan took over the office in 1993, he did so with greater freedom. The landscape of Grace had been preserved.

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AUGUST, 1992

Lancer Gym renovated;
NAIA Men's Basketball National Title