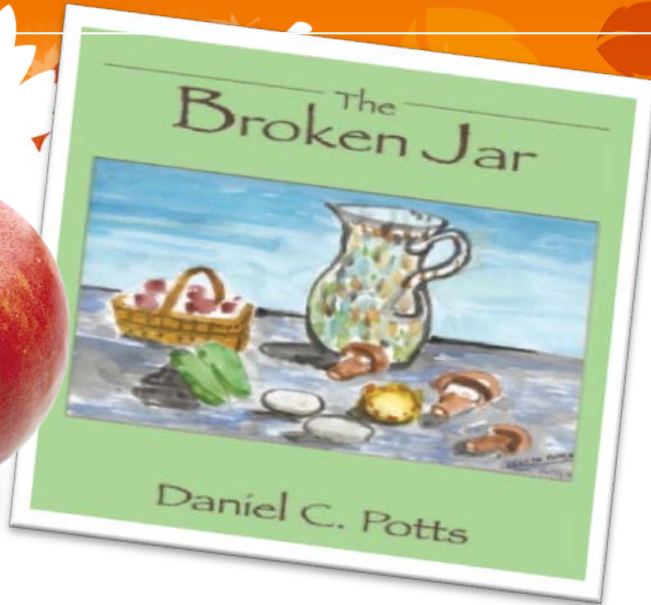


Lifelong Significance

A Ministry Partner Publication of



Lester E. Potts, Jr.



*Lester E. Potts, Jr., who died at the age of 78 from Alzheimer's disease, became an accomplished artist for the first time following his diagnosis. His paintings are featured in *The Broken Jar*, along with poems written by his son, Dr. Danny Potts.*

Keep Your Eyes on the Art

Daniel C. Potts, M.D.

"Mother, please, I don't think we should; you recall what happened last year", I responded to my mother's request to take my father out of the nursing home for the 'Walk to Remember,' an annual fund raising event for dementia daycare. "But it may be the last time," she said. "And besides, he's never seen his artwork hanging in your new office. The wheelchair van could drop us by after the Walk." Against this neurologist's better judgment, I agreed to her plan.

Lester Potts, my father, had become a local celebrity. A 78-year-old end-stage Alzheimer's patient, Dad had been the subject of a book and several media articles because of his art...art that had been created *after* his diagnosis and by a man who had never painted *before*.

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Dr. Daniel Potts



Lester Potts as a young man

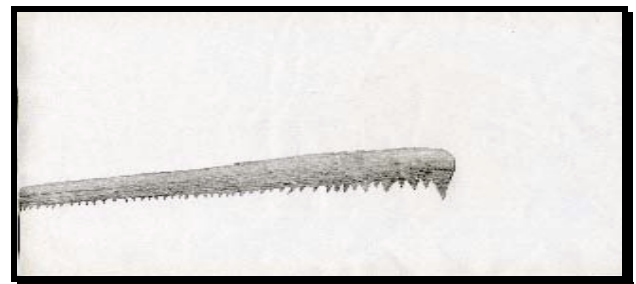
Lester Eugene Potts, Jr. was a child of the Great Depression. Born in the winter of 1928 as the elder son of Lester and Katie Potts, Dad adopted the Depression work ethic while toiling in the family sawmill, an operation that kept food on the table and shoes on their feet at a time when many rural Alabamians suffered impoverishment. He soon became an “oak” of a man himself, and sweat, wood, food, family and love formed the earliest rings in his oaken core.

The diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease came in 2001, after a fairly rapid onset of cognitive dysfunction and behavioral changes signaled its onslaught. This capable, utilitarian man, full of life and optimism, soon became unable to complete a sentence or perform rote tasks, such as placing lights on the Christmas tree or sawing a plank. A man who had prided himself on his resourcefulness now found himself failing at simple tasks. He lost his smile and his sense of self-worth.

It was then that we enrolled Dad in a faith-based dementia daycare center called Caring Days, the longest- running center of its kind in Alabama. Utilizing such interventions as art and music therapy, a carefully tailored program of cognitive stimulation is provided, all within the framework of stability and routine, which are both so important for dementia patients. Literally within days Dad began to globally improve: cognitively, behaviorally, and emotionally. Then came the art.

The innate power of art lies in its ability to meld the heart and mind of the artist with that of the observer, to call to consciousness in one human being the depth of emotion, experience, spirituality and intellect behind the creation of the artistic work. Beautiful florals, inviting still life, breathtaking landscapes, and heartwarming Christmas scenes emerged from Dad’s paintbrush, much to the amazement of our family. And, more poignantly, a broken man was given once again something of which he could be proud.

Lester painted, all in all, about 75 original watercolors. For some he was given a template; for others, he seemed to paint images he had known best, many of them brightly colored with unusual shapes: fences, trees, birdhouses, rocks, and leaves. His art, in many ways, parallels that created by other Alzheimer’s patients, marked by progressive loss of structure and characteristic form as the disease advances. His last images, intensely poignant to the observer, recall the earliest days of childhood: his father’s boots and hat, picket fences, and, last of all, a starkly simplistic saw. This may have been his earliest childhood memory.



Though deeply moved and thankful for Dad’s newly discovered gifts, I quietly struggled with his plight and grieved the loss of my father. On a whim, my perceptive wife gave me a poetry anthology by Henry Van Dyke, a Presbyterian minister, noted educator and member of President Woodrow Wilson’s cabinet. From the first line which met my eyes, then wet with tears, my soul was stirred and my life changed. The urge to tap into my heart and try my hand at writing became a

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consuming fire, and during the first few weeks of 2005 I wrote approximately thirty poems. What gushed forth was an unfiltered flood of memories and gratitude, directed, I believe, by the Holy Spirit, and inspired by an artist's brush and poet's pen.

So powerful was this spiritual experience to our family that we published a book of Dad's art and my writings called *The Broken Jar*, and gave it to Caring Days to sell for the benefit of the organization. This title was chosen in reference to the Apostle Paul's metaphor of the Christian life as a clay jar filled with the treasure of God's living Word. Lester became a "broken jar," and, through his brokenness, God's indwelling love and beauty were revealed.

Our experience has given me a message of hope to share as well. If Lester Potts, a rural saw miller, can learn to become a watercolor artist in the throws of Alzheimer's disease, then I should encourage caregivers to listen through the stammering for the song, to focus past the faltering for the dance, to "keep their eyes on the art." Dad's story can belong to other Alzheimer's patients, too, if someone will provide the brush and paint.

We acted against my better judgment, and I'm so glad we did. The wheelchair van picked Lester up from the Veteran's Nursing Home and dropped him and Mother off at the 'Walk to Remember.' Dad was greeted

affectionately by hundreds, and, unlike the year before, exhibited no agitation. He had advanced beyond that, and was only capable of handshakes and blank stares this time.

Upon leaving the mall we took Dad to my new office where his artwork is prominently displayed and placed his wheelchair in front of a particular piece that forms the cover of *The Broken Jar*. There the artist stared at his work for at least 30 minutes. I'm not sure what was happening in his ravaged mind at that moment, but I hope, in some way, by keeping his eyes on the art, he was able to "meld the heart and mind of the artist with that of the observer." Perhaps, if only briefly, he was reconnected with himself through the hands of the Master Artist.

The Last picture completed by Alzheimer's patient Lester Potts before his death was of a primitive saw, much like the ones he had used as a boy at this father's sawmill. However, the saw in the painting was missing its handles. After Lester's death, his son, Dr. Danny Potts, was given an antique 2-handled antique saw by his friend and colleague, Dr. Michael Parker to commemorate the now complete life of Lester Potts, who experienced complete restoration of spirit, mind, and body on September 15, 2007 when he went to be with his Lord.



Book can be purchased for \$30 at www.caringdays.org.

Email Hoaxes and Urban Legends

Retirees seem more vulnerable than most

Dr. Pete Menconi

If you communicate by email, you probably have received those messages that herald the end of the world, some eminent doom, or a cautionary tale. During the past presidential election, thousands of these unverifiable emails were clogging cyberspace each day. Many of these emails ranged from the ridiculous to the sublime. "Barack Obama's presidential candidacy endorsed by the KKK." "Joe Biden to step down as vice presidential candidate for Hillary Clinton." "John McCain declared on 60 Minutes that he was a "war criminal" who "bombed innocent women and children." Then there was the photograph of Sarah Palin posing in a U.S. flag bikini holding a rifle.

Certainly the Internet and email allows us to communicate in wonderful ways, but it is also easily abused. Often well-meaning family members and friends forward emails that warn us of health dangers, anti-Christian movements, financial opportunities, and other issues of concern. Often the information is false or only partially true. Many email messages are hoaxes and urban legends. Perhaps because they have more discretionary time on their hands, retirees seem more vulnerable to the lure of these messages than most. And Christian retirees are no exception. Here is a sampling of emails making the rounds:

- A group known as "The Second Coming Project" is seeking to clone Jesus from the DNA of holy relics.
- You must sign a petition to stop Jesus from being portrayed as a homosexual in an upcoming film.
- Airlines will not pair Christian pilots and co-pilots out of fear that The Rapture will snatch away both crewmembers capable of landing the plane.

While many of these email messages are laughable, others contain enough truth or are truthful sounding enough to be believed.

Here are a few tips on how to avoid email hoaxes and urban legends:

1. If the message has been past from email to email, be skeptical.
2. If the email message tells you "this is not a hoax," it probably is.
3. The more urgent the plea, the more suspect the message.
4. Be skeptical if the message overuses exclamation points or uppercase letters.
5. Check with online websites that hunt down hoaxes and urban legends. Here are a few: www.snopes.com; www.urbanlegends.about.com; www.truthorfiction.com.

When receiving these emails, even from family and friends, be careful and thoughtful on how you respond. As followers of Jesus, it is good for us to reflect upon his words when he said, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."



OPTIONAL PAGE

**THIS IS THE PAGE FOR YOUR LOCAL 2ND HALF MINISTRY
ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PERSONAL MESSAGES**

“Better Together”

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