

May  
to December  
Miracles

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Miracles

Jerry L Walker Sr

## **DEDICATION**

This book, based on the memoirs of William Aldon Baker, is dedicated to my wife, his daughter, Beulah Alice Baker Walker, who urged me to write the book and was a helpful and patient assistant along the way.

It is also dedicated to all the descendants of William Aldon Baker and his wife, Beulah Ann DeWeese Baker. Dedicated to those currently living and to those yet to be in the far future.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank the many people who, and the organizations which, contributed in so many ways to the writing of this book.

First of all, I thank my wife, (Beulah) Alice Baker Walker, daughter of the subject of this book, William Aldon Baker. I thank Alice for her patience with me during the process: her relating of childhood memories of life with her father, her reviewing and editing of the various drafts, and, most of all, the incentive she provided for the writing of the book.

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I give special thanks to Scott Walker for his expertise and assistance in the formatting and publishing of the book.

I thank the many organizations which provided answers to my research questions relating to the genealogy of the Baker Family and historical facts relative to the events and times of William Baker's life. These organizations include: The Atchison Kansas Historical Society, The Kansas Historical Society, The Missouri Historical Society, The St. Joseph Missouri Historical Society, LegendsofAmerica.com, Ancestry.com, and many other resources.



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## PREFACE

This book was written as an inspiration and challenge to the descendants of my wife's father and mother, William Aldon Baker and Beulah Ann DeWeese. Those descendants are challenged to live Godly lives as did their ancestors and to face the woes of modern society with the same zeal and determination as did their grandparents of old.

William Aldon Baker and his wife Beulah each wrote their memoirs late in their lives, and those memoirs, particularly that of William Baker, intrigued me greatly. I found it hard to believe that my 20<sup>th</sup> century wife, who is now a modern woman of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, adept in using computers, smart phones and other marvels of today, is only one generation away from the pioneers of the nineteenth century. Her grandmother, Martha Baker, was a Union nurse in the War Between the States, and Martha Baker's experiences during that time are documented in the book "Our Army Nurses" by Mary A. Gardner Holland, originally published in 1895 and recently re-published in 2012. Alice's grandfather Abner, and his brother David, were both in that Civil War, and this book will tell you about their miraculous war-time experiences.

Although "May to December Miracles" is historical fiction as told through the eyes of the main characters, the book is true to the facts as presented in the two memoirs of my wife's parents. Besides those memoirs, much of the story is based on facts uncovered by genealogy research and research of historical events.

The character names in "May to December Miracles" are real when those characters are part of the Baker family or when specific names have been provided to us in the memoirs which inspired the book. "May to December Miracles" is about real people in real times at real places, but the dialogue and day-to-day activities and thoughts portrayed in the book are, of course, the creation of my imagination. If one researches deep enough, they may find some discrepancies in my fictional account, but where ever possible, I have strived to be factual. For example, I can find no record of the details of David Baker's (my wife's great uncle) first trip from Indiana to Kansas, but in this book I provide a fictional account based on historical records of what that trip might have been like. In an early draft of the book, I had David making the trip in the company of his cousin Hood Baker and Hood's wife Susan. I now know that could not have been the case since I've found records showing that Hood and his wife made the trip arriving in Kansas on April 15, 1857, whereas David's trip got him to Kansas on September 19, 1857. I therefore changed subsequent versions such that David made the trip with a fictional acquaintance named Oliver. But in most cases, dates and places are relatively accurate.

Readers who are curious how true the book is to the actual memoirs are encouraged to read those memoirs which are at my web-site, [ozarkcountry.com](http://ozarkcountry.com).

Living descendants of William and Beulah Baker at the time of this writing include three of their children and a myriad number of grandchildren, great grandchildren and great-great grandchildren. Within that group, my wife Alice and I alone currently have 34 descendants. So, children, be proud and knowledgeable about your heritage, and make William and Beulah Baker proud of you, their descendants.

Commencing with the prologue, the remainder of this book is in the voice of Alice's father, William Aldon Baker.



## PROLOGUE



Adversity must be in our family's blood. But so is tenacity. Which is the strongest? Read my story and you decide.

My final days, I know, are just around the corner before I join my loved ones who await me in the great beyond. I am William Aldon Baker and I am 88-years-old, but before I leave you, I want to tell you about my journey through life. So join me in this journey as I take you from the day I was born in 1866 to what may be my final year here on earth in 1955.

I must admit it. I'm getting tired. But I'll not let Beulah know. I'll keep pushing, working hard. I've had a good life, but I'm not ready to give up yet. I'd rather wear out than rust out.

Before that final day comes, before I cross over the river, I have one last task I must complete. And this is it. Children, I want you to know what your father's life has been like. To know about your grandpa and grandma. To know my story.

Time has flown by quickly. It seems like only yesterday that I was a child there in Atchison, Kansas. When Papa was a policeman, we lived in a tiny house just off Main Street. I could hear the mighty Missouri River as it sped its course, and especially the deafening roar as it tore out of its banks during spring floods.

Mama and Papa had come to Atchison in 1867 to be with Uncle Dave. Uncle Dave had a lot of friends, some in high places in Atchison County. He had been there since 1857, when Atchison was barely a town at all. In fact, Uncle Dave then lived in Sumner, a town on the Missouri River about four miles south of Atchison. At that time, Sumner had a population exceeding that of Atchison. Soon after the Civil War, Sumner became a ghost town, and memory of it quickly disappeared.

Children, let me tell you my story from the beginning as I recollect it. Let me take you back in my mind as I relive those memories. Relive the memory of those miracles that remain embedded within my soul.

Mama and Papa were both in the big war of rebellion, and they both served in the Officers' Nashville Hospital as nurses, or rather, Mama was a nurse and Papa was what was called a 'wound dresser'. That's a big story, and I'll tell you about it a bit later.

The war ended with the ceasefire agreement of the Shenandoah on November 6, 1865. Mama and Papa and my sister Orië returned to the family home in Indiana after the war ended, and that's where I was born.

Our family left our home state of Indiana in 1967 when I was one and my Sister Orië was seven years old. Papa enlisted in the Indiana 40th Regiment Infantry in 1862, only two months after organization of the unit, and just in time for the bloody battles of Shiloh and Stone's River. Papa must have lived a charmed life because he survived unhurt through some fierce fighting. His luck held at the bloodiest battle of them all, the Battle of Chickamauga, where his unit drew safe garrison duty in Chattanooga. But his brother David was not so lucky.

Many years later, Uncle Dave told his story to my siblings, and his children, and me. I'll relate his story to you, too, in the coming pages. He laid wounded and unattended on the battlefield for four days before being found. Gangrene had set in. The Union surgeon who found him had no choice but to amputate his leg.

His survival was a miracle.

Then another miracle, or at least a most strange coincidence, occurred. The rebels had control of most of Tennessee except for the city of Chattanooga, near Chickamauga. Uncle Dave was taken to a hospital, and that is where the second miracle took place. His brother Abner, my father, found him there and became his wound dresser.

My story will take you back to the early days of my father and my Uncle Dave. It will take you back to the days of the real rugged, untamed west, before Kansas became a state. It was before the Civil War, but war was already well under way with the bloody battles between Missouri Ruffians and Kansas Jayhawkers.

That battle was pretty much just a memory after the Civil War. Anti-slavery pioneers from the east had overwhelmed those Missouri southerners who had hoped to settle and control Kansas. My family, from Indiana, was among those pioneers, and I remember as a youngster my Papa saying, "I'd rather move to Hades than Missouri." More strange events, some might call them miracles, changed his mind.

After the war, Papa took us by covered wagon from his home county of Tippecanoe, Indiana, to Atchison, Kansas. I lived there until I was twelve years old. During those years, Papa struggled to support his family. Uncle Dave helped Papa as much as he could, including getting Papa that job as a policeman. Uncle Dave was an important citizen of the town of Atchison, as well as in the county. The pay was not enough to support the family. I think Papa's near encounter with Jessie James made him question his decision to work as a policeman.

Uncle Dave's half-brother had trained him to be a master carpenter, and he passed along that skill to Papa. Papa worked part time for the next several years doing carpentry work, which was a thankful supplement to his policeman's pay. Besides the carpentry work, Papa also made extra money by repairing farm equipment, and occasionally helping local farmers as a farm hand. Papa tried to supplement his policeman income by acquiring a butcher shop on Main street in Atchison. That venture turned out to be not very profitable.

Papa then began the impossible mission of moving his family to free land in the Dakotas. The mission itself was possible and plausible. But Papa tried to accomplish it in such a way which would have required a veritable miracle. But God wasn't ready for that miracle of which Papa dreamed.

I spent my early grade school years in an actual school in the growing city of Atchison, Kansas. Formal education ended after my sixth grade, when Papa decided greener pastures lay to the north in the Dakotas. My education, however, did not end there. Mama was well educated and determined that her children would also have a fine education. I'm sure the teaching she provided gave me and the rest of her children an education superior to that of the country schools of those days.

Then, there's the rest of the story. The next 77 years. What a changing world I have seen. The Industrial Revolution was already well under way when I was born. Invention of the steam engine had given rise to steamboats, which were by then a common sight along the Missouri River. I remember, as a child living near the Missouri River in Atchison, being awakened by the whistle of a steamboat or, better yet, by the wonderful music of a steamboat's calliope. Even then, the glorious era of steamboats was threatened by the sound of the steam locomotive, which I could also hear from my bedroom window.

I marvel at how the world around me has changed since those pioneer years of the mid-nineteenth century.

Farming was the lifestyle of most folks back in those days. Farmers of yesteryear would not recognize the farmer of today. When I was busy farming, prior to 1914, I thought I'd reached the height of efficiency using the bottom gang plow, disk and peg-tooth harrow, and 2-row planter for corn and a seeder, harrow, binder, thresher, wagons, and horses in harvesting the wheat. I never even dreamed of commercial fertilizer, or needed such, in the rich Missouri River bottoms land. Nowadays, it seems all farmers depend on commercial fertilizer, ride tractors to work the field instead of using draft horses, combines to harvest the wheat. One farmer today can accomplish over what ten could when I was farming.

My eyes have seen changes of which my mind could not even have dreamed. When I was a youngster, the telegraph was the only means for rapid communication. Party, operator controlled phones, were a luxury to me as a young man, whereas you know what they are today. I'll tell you about the first automobile I ever saw; it was in 1898 at the Omaha International Exposition and it just looked like an ordinary buggy, but didn't have horses pulling it. It was only about 15 years later that I was driving my very own Buick automobile.

I read in the 1903 Atchison Daily Globe about some brothers in North Carolina flying a motorized contraption a short distance. What a far cry that was from the article I read a few years ago in the same paper stating that on October 14, 1947, a fellow named Chuck Yeager flew the X-1 at a speed faster than the speed of sound. More recently, there was much ado about our F-86 Sabre Jets, flying at almost 700 miles per hour, wreaking havoc on the Russian MIGs in the Korean War.

When I was born, in 1866, there was no automobile, no dynamite, no typewriter, no telephone, no sound recording device, no electrical light, no skyscraper, no machine gun, no movie, no aspirin, no radio, no airplane, no television, no antibiotic, and the list goes on and on. All these are now commonplace in my current world of 1955. I can only imagine, no, I can't imagine, what even greater technology the future will bring. Will the greater technology bring peace and happiness to the world? I

pray that will be the case, and my children and their children for generations to come will enjoy a bright future. But I fear the worst. For among the things I have seen in my lifetime, include the development and the use of the most destructive weapon ever conceived by man.

On August 6, 1945, a single bomb dropped by the United States on Hiroshima in Japan, destroyed the city and caused the death of over 100,000 people. Three days later, a second bomb destroyed the city of Nagasaki and killed additional tens of thousands of human souls.

Is the end time near?

The Good Book forewarns of those times. Wars and rumors of wars. Nations against nations. Earthquakes and famines. Ezekiel, in the 37<sup>th</sup> chapter, predicts that before the end times, the Jews will be reunited in their country of Israel. It was only seven years ago, on May 14, 1948, that our great Missourian President, President Truman, cast the deciding vote in the United Nations, which recognized the State of Israel. That had to take place before the end times.

Again, is the end time therefore near?

The Good Book also tells us that “the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.” And in Mark 13:32 we read, “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.”

So, my children, though I or any man know when that day might be, and I know that the number of my days on this Earth are nearing their end, I pray you will prepare yourselves should that time come within your lifetime. Our Lord, being a loving God, has provided the way for you to do that in 1 John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

I’m sure by now you’ve had enough of my preaching, but you know I do so because I, too, love you.

So, let’s get on with the story. It begins with my earliest memories and then goes back to before I was born as it tells you about Papa’s and Uncle Dave’s experiences prior to my entering the picture. Enjoy!