

The Gideon Bible

(Written sometime in the 1990s)

By Tim Wood

Pack rats hang onto a lot of things, and occasionally they are rewarded for their trouble.

It was one of those forgotten treasures that one stumbles upon from time to time. While moving some boxes to the attic, I took a moment to rummage through some old boxes. One and one-half years after my family moved 700 miles across the country, there still are some unopened boxes and others that haven't been fully checked out.

A few weeks ago, my older son had brought home a red Gideon Bible. The Gideons are an organization that distributes Bibles. They are perhaps best known for placing Bibles in hotels and motels.

But they also distribute small red Bibles, containing the New Testament and the Old Testament books of Psalms and Proverbs, to school children, usually fifth graders.

Most readers of this column likely received one of those red Bibles in school.

Seeing my son's Gideon Bible brought back memories of receiving mine.

The teacher had told us ahead of time about the Gideons' visit. One of my brothers had told me that I should refuse the Bible, because I already had one and refusing would make more Bibles available to others.

When the Gideon representative came, I initially turned down the Bible. But he persuaded me to accept it.

That little red Bible was what I found in that box in the attic.

I showed it to my son, who seemed interested in it. We compared our Bibles, noting how similar they were. Each one had a color illustration of the United States flag across from the title page. Mine did not list the zip code of the Gideons' home office, probably because it was typeset before the advent of zip codes.

I showed him where I filled out the dedication page. We both received ours in November. I encouraged him to fill out his page, so he would know when and where he received it, and from whom. A Mr. Hough gave me mine.

After we finished talking, I looked at my Bible again. There was a verse reference written on one of the front pages. It turned out to be the beginning of a series of verses marked in the Bible which outlined the plan of salvation. I recognized the handwriting as mine, and realized that it's the only Bible I own that's marked in that way.

That Bible has survived numerous moves over 28 years of school, college, marriage, and career.

Recently, a member of the Gideons spoke at my church. After the service, he told me that Gideons are not allowed in many public schools now. They try to find other ways to distribute the Bibles to school children.

The Gideon Bibles were distributed in my son's school because it is not a public school.

There are good reasons for not allowing distribution in public school. For example, a family of the Jewish faith may not want a New Testament given to their child at school. Also, if a public school were to allow the Gideons to distribute Bibles, they should allow other religious groups to distribute materials.

Public schools should not show preference for one religion, because some day, the religion they promote may be one with which you disagree. Or, you may not believe in any religion and not want any religion pushed on your children in school.

My other son attends public school, and I do not know if he will be able to receive a Gideon Bible when he reaches fifth grade. Like me, he won't need it. There are plenty of Bibles in the household, and if he wants another one for himself, he just has to ask for it.