



# I Am Second

by Sue Wright

## GARY SMITH

Did I faint when Gary Smith's salutation and notes for I AM SECOND popped up on my computer? Well, not really. But

apparently Gary thought I might. That's why he warned me to sit down rather than fall over with surprise when I found his story attached to

an e-mail from him. Guess he forgot I'm a woman of faith. I knew with a bit of "gentle exhortation," as he put it, he'd be getting some thoughts together for me so we could make him a feature of the Weekly. He even submitted both a condensed and humored-out version of his life. If you're like me, you'll relish both. His is a narrative full of family, friendship, feeling, faith, and witty asides. In fact and fun, here's Gary.



**Gary and Debra Rouser-Smith with Matthew, Amanda and Emily.**

We start with the facts.

"I was born in Harrisonville, Missouri," Gary begins, "It was night (but not last night). I grew up in Virginia, mostly in a quaint little arm-pit of a town called Front Royal (pronounced by the locals, Frun Rall). Note, I say armpit because the town always smelled of rotten eggs due to a viscous fibers plant that operated there. I graduated from Warren County High School and James Madison University. They call James Madison a university but I am not sure why. As for me, I graduated from neither high school nor college with distinction or acclaim. (Au Laudy would be more appropriate.)

I joined the US Army in 1982 and became a Morse Code Intercept Operator. (Don't ask, can't

tell.) I met my wife of nearly 28 years around the same time (Seems like just yesterday, right Debra?) I lived in Okinawa, Japan for about two years as a member of the Army (The Army said I was 'stationed' there but I've always puzzled over how a person can be stationed anywhere. You can station a trash can, open a station to sell gas or change horses—you can station sentries around the perimeter of a base—but stationed in Japan? Not me. I LIVED there.) Debra and I moved to Liberty in 1986. We have three children: Amanda, Matthew, and Emily (listed in order of their birth to be clear). Off and on, I have spent the last 26 years in telecommunications as an engineer. (Actually, engineer in name only. My degree is in history.) For a time my family and I lived in Colorado, a period I equate to the dream season on 'Dallas.' We returned to Liberty in 2000 where I rejoined the only church where I have ever been a member. (I still hope for a designation of 'good standing' at some juncture.)"

And now, here's a bit of introduction from Gary before we enjoy him fleshed-out and, as always, fully himself. Gary asks us, "Want to cultivate a highly defined sense of humor? Pray for patience. If you don't learn to be patient—to laugh at yourself and the situations you find yourself in—you risk being hauled off in one of those jackets tied up in the back." It seems to Gary, God's preferred medium for comedy (which also happens to be Gary's favorite kind) is irony. "Think of all the times you lobbied the 'Almighty' for a decision of your choosing," he says, "and what you got back was diametrically opposite what you wished for. Then consider the comedy of it all . . . the divine irony . . . how things worked out if you gave them time (stayed patient). You have to smile. You may even want to laugh out loud." Our invitation to you as you keep on reading.

"Without giving you details I would have to deny later, mine was in many ways the very definition of a misspent youth," says Gary. "Thankfully, my love of sports saved me to some extent from earning a record of those deeds (That and the fact everyone in town knew my

**Want to share your story?**  
Please contact Sue at  
[Suewrights@att.net](mailto:Suewrights@att.net)



**SECOND**  
BAPTIST CHURCH

father and grandfather. Everything I ever did beat me home.) I played whatever sport was in season and sometimes more than one sport at a time. My forte was football; my love, baseball; and the bane of my life, track.

"I was also a musician, the trumpet my ax. I WAS the Jazz Band (we couldn't afford an ensemble) and its student conductor, and my senior year, I sat first chair in the concert band. I loved music (though I admit, I never liked practicing). A band I played with just one night before quitting gave me a solo in 'Sun Goddess.' If you remember the song, give yourself 10 points. (Yes, it was written by Ramsey Lewis.)

"I went to college in the fall of 1977 where I took up space majoring in self-indulgence with a minor in graduation. Okay, my major was History (I have a B.A.) and my minor was Economics. I had a great time in college; loved the town, Harrisonburg, Virginia. It was about four times bigger than the town I grew up in (bigger than an armpit and not quite as smelly). I must have had lots of fun because I have almost no memory of any of it. As I remember, not remembering anything WAS the measure of having a good time in those days.

"About the time I graduated from college, Ronald Reagan shut down government hiring at the federal level. By the end of 1981, state governments were following suit. And so, my dream of becoming a despotic bureaucrat (an insignificant but paid cog in the vast government machine) was dashed cruelly on the shoals of expedience and fiscal austerity. After looking for work for about six months, my college loan deferments having run out, I decided to join the Army. I hoped to be a door-gunner but the recruiter talked me into signing up as a 05H, that's Morse Code Signal Intercept Operator. (Came with a bonus and I learned to copy Morse Code.)

"While in training at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, I met the single most important and significant human being in my life. You're thinking Debra? No, I met...OF COURSE . . . it was my wife Debra. Nearly everything that is good and

worthwhile about me, I attribute to her. I wasn't much count as a human being until she came along. Debra gently and in a nurturing manner beat me into a shape pretty similar to the one I am today. (No potter, my Debra. She was a blacksmith.)

"There are three other people to whom I owe the rest of my humanity: my children, Amanda, Matthew and Emily. Their impact on my life started the moment I held them in my arms and they continue to humble and teach me to this very day. I've been a raving maniac and devoted father in turn. You'll have to ask my children which I was the majority of the time. (Hopefully, I'll rate a 50-50.) They are such forces of nature these kids: immutable, unstoppable, indefatigable, and most important, creatures unique and marvelous. What Debra did not shape gently, my children sculpted with a chisel of razor-sharpness (a chisel and their mother's nine-pound-hammer).

"I love to play Ultimate Frisbee. When I'm disposed to read, it's mostly physics and science fiction (which I find rather complementary in a strange sort of way). I have recently renewed my acquaintance with the guitar and am learning to play in an almost discernable way. Currently, I work for Ericsson on the Sprint Nextel network in the roaming operations group. I enjoy comic books, mostly Marvel titles. I am an avid film buff (my favorite, 'Bringing up Baby'). I am the Assistant Deputy Under-Sous-Chef Apprentice for Debra at her business, Debra's Kitchen, where I make a pretty mean chocolate chip cookie, if I do say so (and I do)! I remain the active father of three, though lately, I'm more checkbook and less 'Ward Cleaver.' I'd rather laugh than anything, and my favorite color is black. My favorite band: The Allman Brothers.

"To reflect on Second Baptist Church where so many people have left their thumbprints



on me, mentioning one would require me mentioning all of you. Still, if I may, this observation about the Middle Schoolers I've taught in Sunday school. It's been my incredible blessing and honor to have known each one these kids so willing to 'endure' me. From this extension of my family (my family of faith), I have received much love, laughter and fellowship. Every face—every kindness, smile, laugh, tear, sorrow—are indelibly etched in the fiber of my being. They (you) have resonated through me like the clear, bright tone of a tuning fork. Thus, I have become pitched to the same tone and tenor as your warmth, love, passion and compassion. God is first, but you are Second. I believe the world is the beneficiary of our collection of souls.

"To conclude what's me, this little snippet to explain my theology. God made the world good and all that's in it. It is mankind and man's specter that has visited nearly all the woe upon the denizens of our universe. Earthquakes, floods, tornados—natural disasters of all manner and extent do occur, but not in anyway near the magnitude of what we have wrought against ourselves. It is not up to God to prove there is good in the world. It's up to us."

Thanks, Gary. You are what I've read between the parentheses of our Sunday morning conversations—a true "Word" Smith. Isn't it ironic, someone SECOND as you could also be second to none! Suewrights@att.net.