



# I Am Second

by Sue Wright

## STEVE HEMPHILL

I love our traditional mailbox—walking up the street to the double-decker row of boxes that sits ready for the post person's stop on Seaport Circle; pulling at the tiny bar that opens the door; peering inside for any form of Miss Charlotte on a web-site; then lifting out what's been delivered. Sometimes it's little as a bill or two and sometimes it's a lot—an armful of paper to sift through. Whatever the load, there is always-for-me, the thrill of anticipation at what might be waiting. After all, our trusty mailbox has been known to hold royalty checks, years of birthday cards, letters addressed to us in hand-writing, both familiar and from far away. Truth is, most days Old Hon and I find ourselves in a race to see who can be first to pick up the mail and get it sorted. We "heart" the regular mail! Thank you, mailmen and women in our church for all you do at the post office to keep Americans in touch.

Of course, I also love tapping on my i-Pad for the mail sitting in my AT&T mailbox. One finger on the envelope icon and no telling what new correspondence I may receive. Sometimes it's a picture of our grandbabies in San Francisco or a fun Evite from MOPS. Too often it's another rejection from an agent I've sent the query—will you represent my book? Actually, even those are better than SPAM.

Lucky for all of us, a note from Steve Hemphill flew into my cyberspace last week, complete with the paper clip sign that indicated there was a picture and a document attached to his message. In bold type I read, "Newsletter Column . . . finally" and then, "Hi Sue." I yelled "Yippee," smiled big, and read on.

Steve let me know he hadn't forgotten I had asked him to be a feature of I AM SECOND, and he hoped what he sent was "ok." It was more than okay as you will quickly see. It is Steve and facts about his life that are sure to give you pause . . . pause like the ellipsis he used to get my attention in the subject line of his e-mail. His choice of punctuation and its promise of taking us "so-forth-and-so-on," provides a fascinating outline of Steve's adventures; but I warn you, leaves all of us begging for more.

This once-upon-a-time school mate, neighbor, and colleague of many in our church begins his letter with, "I'm home! After too much moving around the world the last few years, I'm thinking my next move will be horizontal and in a box!"

Well maybe, Steve; but knowing you and your history, I'm guessing it will be a



Steve Hemphill

### Want to share your story?

Please contact Sue at  
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miracle if you're settled as you expect. Should that be the case, though, your Missouri friends and acquaintances won't mind a bit. We're tickled you're a regular part of our community again. But, back to Steve in his own words! He goes on to explain, "I first joined Second Baptist Church as a freshman at William Jewell, 'recruited' by a fellow Monettian (someone from Monett [which lies 42 miles southwest of Springfield]), Mary Leese. By the early 80's, I had moved to Parkville and would transfer my membership to Parkhill Baptist. At that time, I had begun working in the Platte County Prosecutor's Office." Steve doesn't tell us where he got his law degree so, if you're curious, I suggest you ask him yourself. Seems the perfect question to start a conversation!

In 1987, Steve moved back to Liberty and, in no time at all, found himself getting very busy. He was teaching at Jewell, practicing law on the square, running for county-wide office, and serving on the Liberty City Council. Then, around 1995, a friend of his became a Judge in Monett, and Steve decided to return to his home town to take over the practice left open by this friend and new judge. Soon after, Steve would be elected Prosecutor; and, at the same time, become an active co-owner in the B&B Cinemas here in Liberty and in Monett. According to Steve, he remains involved at B&B. Last year, he and his partners added another location in Florida.

"After the attacks of 2001," continues Steve, "I decided I could 'save the world' better if I went international. So instead of running for re-election as Prosecutor, I accepted a White House appointment to the senior Rule of Law position in the Baghdad Embassy and served there for 18 months." Personally, I can only imagine the challenges that people face working

there. Do you know how far Baghdad is from us? Google says Baghdad, Iraq, is 6,663 miles from our part of the country. And that doesn't count the cultural distances, even more contrasted during war!

I'm not surprised when Steve tells us, "My next assignment was a picnic by comparison to the first. For these last five years, I have lived in Prishtina, Kosovo, an area of Southeast Europe, in the role of Human Rights Advisor for Security Issues at the OSCE Mission in Kosovo. The OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) is the treaty organization (kind of like NATO) which was created after the fall of the Berlin Wall in an effort to guide the evolving democracies of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. I really enjoyed my time there and still have many dear friends among the native Albanians in this tiny country.

"In early 2010, my Kosovo pastor (an Albanian Pentecostal) asked me to mentor a medical student who had recently converted from Islam, a young man who had survived the war between Kosovo and Serbia fought in the late 1990's. I was happy to oblige and quickly became a great friend of Labinot Ibrahim (Labi).

"Though Kosovo is a Muslim country, internationals can attend Evangelical churches without harm. To the contrary, Albanians converted to Christianity and going to church with fellow Christians have not been as fortunate. When harassment from fellow students due to his religious beliefs became too much, Labi had to quit medical school. Consequently, it was necessary for me to help him matriculate into the American University of Kosovo. At that time, I told Labi if he did well, maybe I would be able to get him into an American college. I'm glad to say he is now a nursing student at William

Jewell and adjusting to American life just fine. I hope you make an effort to get to know this outstanding young man. I've certainly been blessed by doing so."

Through the grape vine—another favorite form of communication available to folks like me—I'd heard Steve had bought a house when he returned to Liberty. I wasn't aware of the location, however, until he extended this invitation and set of directions to us as a friendly ending for his Second Story. Steve writes, "When you come out the back door of the church [that's the Welcome Center entrance], just look across the street to the house flying the United States and Kosovo flags and that will be mine. If you see me sitting on the porch swing, come on over for a visit!"

I urge you to take Steve up on his offer and spend a moment filling in the dot-dot-dots of his remarkable life. No stamps required; no fancy electronic gadgets either. Only a little of your time and this warning to remember what your mother said, and don't forget to look both ways before you cross the street. There's a lot of traffic at Lightburne and Kansas, and it's almost always going fast! Suewrights@att.net



Steve and Labi