

MERIDIAN

Men Who Influenced My Life

By Ralph Speas

I'm most grateful to God for the men who invested in my life; men of vision, men of wisdom, men of action. Most of these men were older than I but many have been younger. Five men who had the most influence on my life were:



**Dr. Robert Witty,
Founder and President of Luther
Rice Seminary and College**

A frequent visitor in our home, Dr Witty was a friend but also a great mentor in my life. He taught me how to use the internet when he was in his nineties. He was a visionary believing that education would go online and change the face of academia. He died in 2007 when he was one-hundred.

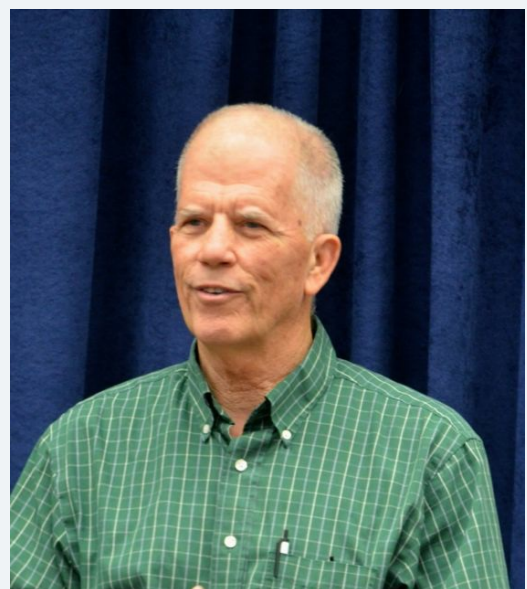
[How he influenced me.](#)



**Dr. Tom Elliff,
Former IMB President
Former SBC President
Pastor**

Tom was my pastor. We worked together for almost 35 years. He is four years younger than I but, next to my parents, Tom had the greatest influence on my life of anyone I know. He's been a great friend but also a great teacher. I have learned much from him.

[How he influenced me.](#)



**Johnny Norwood,
Retired IMB Missionary**

Johnny is an innovative trainer who makes complicated things simple and learning a joyful experience. Most of what I know about orality and methods of helping oral learners retain and practice what they learn was through the influence Johnny has on my life.

[How he influenced me.](#)



**Dr. Avery Willis,
Retired IMB Missionary**
Avery authored the book, Truth That Sticks in a Teflon World. He recognized that a huge segment of the world's population, unreached and unengaged, could be forever changed by hearing the Gospel stories. He was right and thousands upon thousands are coming to faith in Christ because devoted followers of Christ are taking the stories to the darkest places on earth. He was a remarkable man who changed the direction of my life.
How he influenced me.



**Brigadier General
Richard Freeman,
USAF**

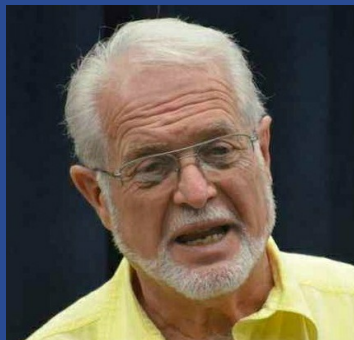
"Dick" passed away in 2014 and previously was on our Board of Directors. He left a great legacy to his family and me. I've been thinking a lot about him lately. He was the one who encouraged me to take Meridian to the mission field. An innovator, he was a great problem solver and always saw things from a greater perspective.
How he influenced me.

Other Great Influencers in My Life

Howard Speas, Paul Markell, Stephen Olford, Paul Dekker, Ira Shannafelt, Don Yonce, Jacob Boss, Bill Smith, David Martin, Doyle Pryor, Ruffin Snow, Bob Oxford, Manley Beasley
How they influenced me.

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God has been good to provide for our every need. We have never cancelled a trip because of the lack of funds.