

Vision *for* God

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The Story of Dr. Margaret Brand

DR. MARGARET BRAND
with DR. JAMES L. JOST



Discovery House Publishers

Books, music, and videos that feed the soul with the Word of God

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*This book is dedicated to
my beloved husband Paul
and*

*To my dear children—
Christopher, Jean, Mary, Estelle,
Trish, and Pauline*

*We're pilgrims on the journey of the narrow road,
And those who've gone before us line the way.
Cheering on the faithful, encouraging the weary,
Their lives a stirring testament to God's sustaining grace.*

*Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,
Let us run the race not only for the prize,
But as those who've gone before us, let us leave to those behind us,
The heritage of faithfulness passed on through godly lives.*

*After all our hopes and dreams have come and gone
And our children sift through all we've left behind,
May the clues that they discover and the memories they uncover
Become the light that leads them to the road we each must find.*

*Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful.
May the fire of our devotion light their way.
May the footprints that we leave lead them to believe,
And the lives we live inspire them to obey.
Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful.*

—Jon Mohr



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Foreword

For nearly a decade I followed Dr. Paul Brand around the world, retracing the steps of his youth in England and observing him with patients at leprosariums in Louisiana and India. Sitting under a tamarind tree, bouncing along in a Land Rover, screeching through the London “tube” (subway), we explored together his remarkable life. I had never met anyone so wise, and as a young writer I greedily absorbed that wisdom. I spent most of a decade working with Dr. Brand, a collaboration that resulted in three books. Meanwhile, all this time my wife kept saying, “When are you going to write about Margaret? She’s the real story!”

As you will see, it would be difficult to invent a life more full of adventure than Margaret Brand’s. Born in England but raised in South Africa, she went away to boarding school in England, took medical training in London during the Luftwaffe Blitz, then moved to India where she reared six accomplished children and became a world expert on leprosy’s effects on the eye. On eye camps in rural India Dr. Margaret would perform more cataract surgeries in one day (sometimes a hundred) than many American ophthalmologists perform in a month.

Three of the Brands’ children followed their parents into careers in medicine and two daughters married doctors. One of these sons-in-law, Jim Jost, finally accepted the challenge of trying to compress this life into one book. He told me that one scene from the family lore convinced him: eight-year-old Margaret and her sister wandering the streets of London wrapped

in leopard skins while carrying bags full of gold coins. Her family had sailed from South Africa, their luggage inadvertently left behind, and arrived in England with no warm clothes and no money other than gold, which was virtually worthless as England had just abandoned the gold standard.

Reading this memoir, you find other colorful scenes: fermented marmalade exploding in the family luggage, Margaret frantically hemming an uneven dress en route to meet the queen of England. You will learn the challenges of being a mother to six rambunctious children in a foreign country. One of the Brand youngsters was always hanging from a tree, battling malaria or a tropical virus, getting her head caught in the jaws of a leopard. You will learn too of the unexpected and providential way Dr. Margaret found herself drawn into the unexplored field of leprosy ophthalmology, and of her consulting trips to places like Turkey, Ethiopia, and China.

You will not, however, encounter the three-dimensional person that is Margaret Brand. You will miss the twinkle in her eye, the ready laugh and good humor, the boundless devotion to her beloved husband and family, the esteem in which her profession holds her. No book could capture that fullness, and if it could she would never allow it to be published. If I had to choose one adjective to describe Dr. Margaret, I would choose humility. She downplays her accomplishments, storing awards in closets and decorating her walls instead with family photos. About her adventuresome life, she simply shrugs and gives God the credit for protection and safety.

When I interviewed Paul Brand, we would inhabit the world of ideas, exploring such issues as the problem of pain and design features of the human body. Margaret could hold her own in such discussions too. I remember asking her a single question, "When you look into a person's eye, what do you see?" and sitting enraptured as she talked for half an hour. There was a difference between the two interviewees, however. Both had uncanny memories of their patients (many of them "nobodies" from the Untouchable caste), but whereas Paul tended to remember best the surgical procedures and rehabilitation, Dr. Margaret would flesh out personal details and family backgrounds. As she talked, resurrecting these details, Paul's eyes would often fill with tears. This unique couple had accomplished the rare medical feat of treating and loving patients simultaneously.

As I spent more time in the Brands' home, I felt drawn into their orbit of love as well, made almost a part of their family. We would dine together on their fresh-picked vegetables and homemade bread, or perhaps Margaret's

famous chicken curry. Sometimes, as we discussed personal or family issues, Dr. Margaret would softly interrupt. “Can we just pray about that?” she would say, and go on to express her compassion in a beautiful and simple prayer.

Paul Brand died in 2003. Margaret lives on in the modest little cottage she shared with him in retirement overlooking Puget Sound in West Seattle. She still travels internationally, serves on the boards of global charities, plays the violin, and remains active in her local church. All who have visited the Brands come away amazed at their simple lifestyle. They have made a tiny footprint on the planet in terms of accumulating resources and consumer goods. But they have left a very large imprint in other ways, by devoting themselves in service to some of the most neglected people on the planet. Having spent many hours with them both, I cannot help but think this was the vision God had for humanity: talented people serving others with cheer and compassion while embracing life—all of it—with contentment and gratitude.

It is one of the great privileges of my life to have spent such intimate time with Paul and Margaret Brand. I rejoice that now other readers can get to know what my wife has always called “the real story.” Maybe you too will get a renewed glimpse of what God had in mind.

PHILIP YANCEY



Preface

Margaret Elizabeth Berry Brand—known affectionately to many as “Dr. Margaret”—spent her childhood in South Africa and returned to England as an expatriate child of the British Empire. She went on to be one of only a few young women studying medicine in London in the midst of World War II. She married a dashing fellow student, Paul Brand, who became a world-famous surgeon, and together they pioneered practices in the treatment of leprosy in India and throughout the world. Without benefit of formal training in eye diseases, Dr. Margaret became an ophthalmologist and one of the foremost authorities on the problems of ocular leprosy. Her contributions to the field extend from America to Ethiopia, Brazil to China.

Most importantly to her and to her husband Paul, Margaret became the mother to six children, raising them in an atmosphere of deep and abiding Christian faith. Her life has been spent as wife, mother, teacher, and doctor, serving the Lord cheerfully in whatever capacity He has required of her.

This, then, is Dr. Margaret’s story, told as much as possible in her own words (in the boldface type), as no one can equal her skill at storytelling. She, however, agreed to the project reluctantly.

It is the grace of God, which is available to everyone, that has enabled me to accomplish what I have done, and His grace that has overruled many of my foolish mistakes.

Dr. Margaret does not believe that her life or her achievements merit special mention. But her husband Paul, who died in 2003, had always hoped that her life story would be told.

Dr. Paul W. Brand was internationally known as a twentieth-century pioneer in orthopedic reconstructive surgery and rehabilitation, a researcher into the mysteries of leprosy, an innovative theorist on the sensation of pain as a gift, an author who wrote of his own theological insights, and a lecturer on Christian subjects. Of Margaret, the love of his life, he would want it said that his success was in great measure due to the Lord giving him such an extraordinary wife and companion for over sixty years. He wanted it known that he could not have accomplished what he had achieved were it not for Margaret.

This book, in the end, then, is a gift from Margaret to Paul, the love of her life.



Acknowledgments

This book is drawn from taped interviews conducted by Dr. Margaret's son-in-law and daughter, Jim and Mary Brand Jost. The Brands' personal assistant, Molly Coyner Cozens, performed the heroic task of transcribing hours of audiotapes to paper—strange names and words and all—giving the Josts a body of written material from which to work.

Margaret and Jim would like to thank Carol Holquist of Discovery House Publishers for her loving offer to publish this book and for committing the considerable resources of Discovery to this endeavor. And we cannot begin to express our gratitude to Judith Markham, master editor, who spent untold hours applying her expert skills to this project. On behalf of our beloved Paul Brand and the Brand family, we thank these two special people for the heartfelt gift they have given us.

Also instrumental in this biography/autobiography were the works of biographer Dorothy Clarke Wilson, including *Ten Fingers for God* (Paul Brand Publishing, 1989), a biography of Paul; *Granny Brand* (Paul Brand Publishing, 1976), a biography of Paul's missionary parents; and *Dr. Ida* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1959), a biography of Dr. Ida Scudder, the founder of Vellore Christian Medical College.

Please note that we have protected the identity of certain people by using either initials or pseudonyms.

In this book the following are used interchangeably:

Vellore for the Christian Medical College (CMC) located in Vellore, South India.

Karigiri for the Schieffelin Leprosy Research and Treatment Centre located in Karigiri, South India.

Carville for the United States Public Health National Hansen's Disease Center located near Carville, Louisiana, USA.



Margaret's Irish Heritage

"If you just work hard enough, you can get there."

It was a Friday afternoon, early in November 1948. We were living on the campus of the Christian Medical College in the city of Vellore, India. I was home with the children. Christopher was four years old, Jean was two, and baby Mary just two weeks old. The weather in Vellore at that time of year is delightful, and I was savoring the enjoyment of being at home as a mother, without any additional responsibilities, when a messenger came to the door and handed me a chit (a note). We had no phones on the campus, so to communicate around the college we would send a messenger by bike, who would then return with the reply. This message was from the acting director of the hospital, Dr. Carol Jameson:

Dear Margaret,

We don't wish to hurry you, but we must have more help in the Eye Department as soon as possible.

Carol

The Eye Department! I thought. She has to be joking! I turned the piece of paper over and wrote:

Dear Carol,

I don't mind being hurried but I know nothing about eyes. You'll have to look for someone else. Sorry.

Margaret

I assumed that was the end of the matter. But one hour later the messenger returned with another chit. It simply said:

You'll learn. Please start on Monday.

Carol

So six words on a little slip of paper changed my life!

Changed her life, indeed. And what a remarkable life it has been, characterized by the confidence that she can accomplish whatever is required because of her trust in the Lord. This remarkable life began in a small Irish village with two young people who had a tremendous sense of adventure and a drive to succeed.

Margaret's parents were born in Ireland. Both came from Protestant families in areas that were predominately Catholic, and their family loyalties were as much with England as with Ireland. Her father, William Arthur Berry, was the son of parents of modest means who owned a draper shop in the village of Bundoran, located on Donegal Bay on the western coast of Northern Ireland. He was the middle child of the family, born in 1879, with an older sister, Matilda Jane, and a younger brother, Fred. His parents' church background was that of the legalistic Scottish Presbyterians and was associated with a more restrictive attitude toward behavior, which did not appeal to William, who had an adventurous spirit and reveled in taking on challenges. William's character also was marked by an intense drive to master any subject put before him and a desire to explore the world beyond Ireland. He would later impart this same intensity of purpose to his three daughters.

One memory that echoes across the years was my father saying, "If you just work hard enough, you can get there." He had disciplined himself, so not surprisingly he encouraged us to do the same.

William worked hard at his studies and did exceptionally well, but there

was no money available to send him to the better schools. His only hope was to win scholarships, and at about age eleven or twelve he did just that. He sat for an open examination and won a scholarship to the famous Portora Royal High School in the small city of Enniskillen, County Fermanagh. While there he found that he enjoyed the sciences and began somewhat ambitiously considering a career in medicine. Practically speaking, the possibility of his pursuing this dream was slim, given his lack of funds and his modest background.

After finishing high school Will apprenticed himself to a chemist (pharmacist) in Ireland. This work confirmed his interest in the medical sciences, but the position did not satisfy his ambitions. He was determined to see something of the larger world, to pursue his love of learning languages, and to continue with preparations toward an eventual career as a physician. He had done well studying French in high school, so when the opportunity arose to apprentice himself to an apothecary in Paris, he did not hesitate.

In Paris his days were spent mixing stock medicines, ointments, and pills in the apothecary shop. At the end of the workday he would retire to his garret room above the shop, wrap himself in his blanket, and study a correspondence course from London through which he hoped to qualify for the London Matriculation, a pre-university qualification. Will's room had no heat and no running water, and his daily food rations were little more than a loaf of bread, a piece of cheese, and a few apples. His most prized possessions were a woolen blanket, a candle, and his books. On the colder nights he kept warm and awake by walking the floor, candle in one hand and book in the other.

After two years he sat for the London Matriculation examination and received a "first-class pass," which was a remarkable achievement for a correspondence course student. In fact it was remarkable enough to win him a scholarship at Queen's College, Belfast, in Northern Ireland, where he began the next phase of his medical education. In typical fashion, he excelled at Queen's College, and on the strength of his grades he next won a scholarship to St. Mary's Hospital Medical College in London.

St. Mary's had a good reputation as a medical school, but its reputation as a soccer-playing school was better known! My father had no idea how to play soccer. He didn't even know where the sports field was. He was absolutely focused on studying, and he later expected us to do the same—that was the hardship of growing up with a father such as he!

At St. Mary's my father won nearly every prize for which he competed. He could not afford to buy the expensive textbooks, but he won most of his library as prizes.

William Berry attained his MB degree (comparable to the MD degree in the United States), qualifying him to enter medical practice as a general practitioner, which would have been enough for most students. There were few medical specialty-training programs at the turn of the century, and most doctors went no further than the MB degree. But William chose to continue onward and obtained the British "Doctor of Medicine" degree (comparable to a PhD in the United States), with his specialty interest being communicable diseases and public health, both major fields at the turn of the century.

During one of his clinical rotations, William met a nurse at Trinity College Hospital in Dublin. Margaret Muriel Johnston, known as "Peggy" to her family, was also from the Donegal Bay area and was also Protestant, although her family were members of the Church of Ireland, a bit less strict than the Presbyterians. Peggy grew up in a large and happy farming family of seven girls and two boys. Her daring spirit must have been refreshing to William—"Will" to her. Here was a girl who rode horses bareback and climbed trees, who could work outdoors on a farm or indoors on a sick ward. What better person to share William's sense of adventure and his desire to explore new worlds?

Peggy Johnston went on to take a position at a hospital in London, and she and Will married in 1912 in Paddington Presbyterian Church in London. Although Peggy changed her last name from Johnston to Berry, Will wanted, for unclear reasons, to change her first name as well:

She was generally called Peggy as she was growing up, but when she married my father he said he wanted her to be called Greta, like Gretchen, which was the equivalent of Margaret in German. For some reason my father loved German names. I never heard her called anything else.

Will's first position as a qualified doctor was in public health in the London area. Neither Will nor Greta had any relatives in England, so they relied upon each other for comfort and support—a situation that would assume even greater importance in the near future and would remain true for the rest of their lives.

The Berry's first daughter, Anna, was born in 1914. That same year also saw the start of World War I, and Will enlisted, as did most young physicians of his day. He was commissioned as a captain in the Royal Army Medical Corps but remained in England at the beginning of the war, during which time, in 1915, the Berrys' second daughter, Frieda, was born. As the war in Europe intensified, however, Will was sent to a military base on Bere Island in Bantry Bay off the Irish coast for a year, where Greta and the girls were able to accompany him. When his next assignment sent him to the war front in Belgium, however, his family returned to London, where they lived through the terror of the German Zeppelin dirigibles flying overhead and dropping bombs.

Will never forgot the images from the trenches, not only of the injured but also those sick from pestilence and disease. As many soldiers succumbed to infectious diseases as to wounds. His knowledge of public health issues, such as clean water and safe food supplies, was as important on the battlefield as it had been in London. He not only dealt with war casualties but also with more mundane problems such as lice and fleas, bedbugs and rats.

When Will was given the opportunity to transfer to a different theater of the war, the war zone in East Africa where the Germans controlled the region of Tanzania and Kenya, he accepted—as much to escape the mud of Europe as to see more of the world. To reach East Africa, troop ships from Europe had to travel down the West African coast and around the Cape of Good Hope off Cape Town, South Africa. The Suez Canal, opened in 1869 to connect the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea, would have been the most direct route but was under threat of attack from Turkish forces under German command. On the way to East Africa the ship stopped at Cape Town, and when shore leave was granted Will explored the area as much as he could. He was enthralled with the climate and the landscape, vowing that if he ever had the chance he would return to this enchanting place with his family.

When the war ended in 1918, Will returned to London and took a job as Medical Officer of Health in Kingston-on-Thames, involved once again with the health of the general public rather than a typical medical practice. The Berrys' third daughter, Margaret Elizabeth Berry, was born on June 19, 1919.

**Margaret was my mother's name, Elizabeth my grandmother's.
Nothing wrong with those, but Mother knew of children with those**

names who were called Maggie Liz. She did not like the sound of that, so early on she decided to call me Pearl (one of the meanings of Margaret). Pearl was the name I went by until I was in college, when I chose to use my given name Margaret.¹



In 1921, Will saw an advertisement for a position as Medical Officer of Health in the town of Bloemfontein, South Africa, and he considered this an exciting opportunity. The government was seeking a district medical officer in the area of public health who would be based in Bloemfontein but responsible for a large territory surrounding the city. South Africa was divided into four provinces: Cape Province, the Orange Free State, the Transvaal, and Natal. Bloemfontein, which means “fountain of flowers” in the Afrikaans language, was the capital of the Orange Free State and was located on the Highveld, where the landscape was rolling grasslands with scattered trees.

A few miles outside of Bloemfontein was an abandoned British military compound with houses available for those government employees in need of a residence. It was here that Will brought his young family, thousands of miles from England. They traveled first by ship to Cape Town and then by train some six hundred miles to their new home located amid a somewhat flat and arid landscape, where the primary industry of the area was sheep farming. Yet they were not totally isolated from civilization or from their English heritage. The town of Bloemfontein had several shops that sold imported goods from England and Europe, and any number of materials and foodstuffs could be ordered from England. There were also plenty of British expatriates living in the area, including other families with small children.

Will looked forward to the challenge of public health issues that would encompass everything from cities to farms to native villages. The weather, the diseases, even the pests were new to him, and he was pleased with the opportunity to learn new languages, both the Boers’ Afrikaans as well as native dialects. For Greta, it was a chance to leave the grime and dreariness of London and return to the countryside.

Despite the unusual terrain and climate and dangers that were very real,

1. To this day Margaret is still called Pearl by some Berry family members and old friends.

South Africa was an exciting place—a blend of foreign cultures that encouraged self-reliance and innovation. Both Will and Greta possessed the kind of spirit such an endeavor required, and they embraced this new adventure with gusto.