

POW: PROMISES KEPT

POW: Promises Kept
The Inspiring Stories of Walter Boots Mayberry
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This is a work of nonfiction. All details are accurate to the best of the subject's memory.

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The Inspiring Stories of Walter “Boots” Mayberry

AS TOLD TO Linda Apple



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PREFACE

By Linda Apple

I met Boots a few months before his ninetieth birthday and had the pleasure of hearing about his incredible life. While listening to him I knew his experiences must be written down and shared.

When I first conceived this memoir I decided to focus on Boots's service during World War II. But after hearing stories about his childhood, I realized how well growing up during the Great Depression had prepared him and young men like him for World War II. Not only that, his being held prisoner by the German army had formed the man he is today and clarified his purpose. Therefore, I divided the book into three sections: his childhood, his war years, and his life after he returned. I've also included several poems from his book, *A Distant Drummer*, to give a glimpse into his soul as only poetry can.

Boots asked that I not be graphic about his experience as a prisoner of war, stating that it opens old wounds. I have honored his request, but as you read about his capture and time spent in prison camp it is important to realize the inconceivable pain, trauma, and dread he experienced. And yet, he not only survived but he has grown into a wise, faith-filled man as a result. He did not allow the pain, discouragement, or fear defeat him.

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As Boots puts it, “I try to not look back. Yesterday is past. You cannot do anything about it. Tomorrow is not yours, it belongs to the Lord. Today is the only one you can do anything about. Help someone.”

Helping others is what this book is about.

Boots also asked that I not portray him as a hero. I must confess that is hard to do because I consider him a hero, as I do all who spend their lives in the service for others.

It is both Boots’s and my prayer that you will find hope, encouragement, and strength as you read *POW: Promises Kept, The Inspiring Stories of Walter Boots Mayberry*.

INTRODUCTION

Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for those who are gracious and compassionate and righteous. ~ Psalm 112:4

A huge black cloud of metallic splinters burst under the bomber and caused it to rock. Holes were blown through the aluminum fuselage. Two bursts hit close. The third hit the in-board engine on the right wing and it caught fire.

When Boots bailed out, he couldn't tell where he was in relation to the ground and didn't realize he was falling head first with his feet up. When he pulled the ripcord it jerked him around with such force two vertebrae in his neck broke. He lost the use of his hands and he couldn't guide his parachute. Boots floated helplessly to earth under a thirty-foot silk canopy.

All around him was a cacophony of anti-aircraft fire. Shrapnel and wreckage from destroyed airplanes hurtled past him. Fear and dread filled his mind. *What if this wreckage hit him or his parachute and dragged him down to certain death?* In the deafening noise of all this melee, he cried out, "God, help me."

In the 1940's, life's path filled with promise for most young men. Some went to college, others began a trade. Some fell in love and married, others played the field. All looked to a bright promising future.

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Some, but not all.

Walter “Boots” Mayberry, a member of the Army Air Corps, felt he had no promise of a future. At twenty-one he was already an old man. Due to injuries he sustained when his airplane was shot down, malnutrition, and exposure, he lay in a building where the guards moved captives who were dying in order to get them out of the way. Death waited at Boot’s door and frankly, he no longer cared. It would have been an escape from the German prison camp, Stalag Luft #13 in Nuremberg, where he wasted away as a prisoner of war.

But there was a promise waiting for him.

One evening a guard stepped through the door and said, “The American troops have advanced. We are moving to Moosburg. All who can fall out do so. If not, we will leave you here to die.”

That one last spark of the will to live fired in Boots. He rolled onto his hands and knees and crawled toward the door when he noticed through the dim, dusky light, something on the floor. Curious, he inched toward it and found a New Testament and Psalms bible. It was opened to Psalms 91. He couldn’t see very well, so he squinted and bent closer. The words he read were a promise from God.

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty

I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”

Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence.

He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.

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A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.

If you say, “The Lord is my refuge,” and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent. “Because he loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.”

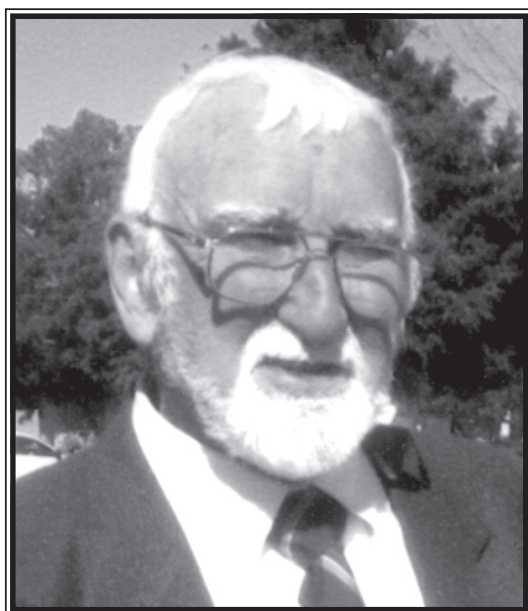
Boots hadn't given God much thought, but in the dank gloom, he knew he had heard from Heaven. These words gave him the strength to go on, to walk out of the door of death with renewed hope. God had something for him to do and promised him a long life in which to do it.

Boots celebrated his 91st birthday in August of 2014. God has indeed given Boots a long life for a purpose—to share the love of Christ and to keep the promises he has made throughout his life.

For those imprisoned souls, those who are ready to give up, and those who feel there is no hope, this book is for you.

It is a reminder that even in darkness, light dawns.

BOOTS



MY NAME IS BOOTS MAYBERRY

On August 11, 1923, Walter Morris Mayberry struggled his way into the world, fighting for his life. He didn't enter the new world the way most children do, head first. He met the world bottom first, a breech birth.

His exhausted mother, Edith, and anxious father, Walter, for whom he was named, welcomed their new son into the family home on East Sixth Street in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. He was their fourth child. His difficult birth left him a sickly child. However, he soldiered on and overcame the odds, as he would do all through his life.

Little Walter began life in the bustling love of a large family. In addition to his mother, father, older brother, and two older sisters, his grandparents also lived in the house on East Sixth Street—a very special Colonial-style house. His mother believed it was haunted. He remembers his Grandfather Richter telling about being woken in the night by something pulling his toe, though no one and nothing else was around. His mother also told of dishes falling off the mantelpiece in the night. Though proof of ghosts' existence was never actually proven, the family accepted their presence in the home.

The Great Flood of 1927 was the catalyst for Little Walter's nickname "Boots." The warm weather that year led to an early snowmelt in Canada that caused the upper Mississippi River to swell. The upper

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Boots, age 6

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Midwest had an unusually wet spring sending full rivers rushing into the Mississippi. Both of those events, combined with the excessive rain in Arkansas, made the Mississippi and Arkansas rivers and all the tributaries overflow their banks. It was the most destructive flood in Arkansas history, to human and animal life as well as financially.

Walter was four at the time. He remembers lying on his front porch dangling his fingers in the brown, muddy water as it flowed by his house on the east side of Pine Bluff. One afternoon his sister, Dell, took him to town and bought him a pair of rubber boots with a red-rimmed tops. Excitedly, he put them on and splashed about. From that point on he never wanted to take them off, not even to bathe or go to bed. Even if he didn't have anything else on, he always wore his rubber red-tops. Therefore, Dell started calling him Boots.

The name became official when he started first grade at Sixth Avenue School. His teacher, Miss Ovida Sanders, asked his name and he replied, "Boots Mayberry."

And so it has been ever since.