



R. D. "Del" Anderson

God's Spirit and Vegetable Seeds

Introduction by Del Anderson

May 4, 2006

Certain facts about a person's life can be recorded in words. Yet, the deeper realities, those of the Soul and Spirit, are not easily verbalized. I simply want to ask you as you read these words to be aware that the deepest and most vital movement of my life, indeed, of everyone's life, is beyond words. The values of life and the purpose of life escape us unless we keep ourselves aware that we are all blind until we see, and feel, and experience and practice. It needs to become an awareness, an experiencing and a realization that the purpose of life is wonder-filled. We discover our oneness with God and all of God's creation. How does one describe God's love and the gradual realization of being embraced and sustained by the great, invisible truth of this love for each one?

R. D. "Del" Anderson, 1906 – 2008

by George Furniss

I first met Del in 1949 when I joined Oakland's Troop 123 where he was Scoutmaster. He became like a second father to me. Through the years Del spoke and wrote much about God and others but little about his own life. In 2002, I interviewed Del for four days, eliciting his remembered life story. Here are answers to some of my many questions.

Where was Del born and where did he grow up?

Robert (Ricardo) Delmar Anderson was born July 17, 1906. Del spent his first three months in a refugee tent in San Francisco following that year's disastrous April earthquake. His family moved to relatively undeveloped East Oakland (E. 73rd Avenue) where he spent his childhood through his graduation from Oakland's Fremont High School. His parents, Del, and the growing family, lived in an unfinished house with an outhouse, while his grandmother, the family matriarch, and his mother's disabled sister lived in an adjacent house.

Del had dark complexion and at one time said that his first name was Ricardo. What was his ethnic background?

Del had mixed race ancestry. His mother Cora Belle Shabin was the daughter of a dark-skinned Nicaraguan woman and a white man, probably an American merchant seaman. His father John Anderson came from Chicago and was probably the son of a black woman descended from slaves and a white man. Coming to Los Angeles from Nicaragua, his grandmother and mother spoke Spanish. Del believed his parents met in Los Angeles.

How did Del's grandmother and parents influence him?

His grandmother, a tall, heavy woman, was very domineering. She had a temper, was profane, and "ruled the roost" by shaming. As a child, Del was fearful of her. She was an able practical nurse employed by several East Oakland doctors to care for patients in their homes. Del's mother Cora Belle, whom Del loved dearly, was not in good health. Despite chronic asthma and heart trouble, she sold knit underwear door-to-door. With education through high school, she helped illiterate Mexican neighbors write letters in Spanish. John, Del's father, was a dining car steward with the Southern Pacific railroad. His work kept him away from home much of the time. He was a self-educated person who liked to read, especially H.G. Wells' *Outline of History*. Del did well in history because of his father's influence. His mother died when Del was eleven, and his grandmother took care of the family from that time.

Del was the second of his parent’s five children. What was his relationship with his four siblings? Del’s brother Ray (Ramon), 17 months older, was very bright and ambitious. His grandmother favored him, taught him Spanish, and conversed with him in a language the other children didn’t understand. Del copied Ray, his imitations came off badly, and for awhile he was put in classes for slow students. Ray advanced rapidly in business, became general manager of a steamship company at age 28, but died of a heart attack from overwork only a few years later. Del’s next younger brother, Cecil, who later was known as C.O., was very creative. Del worked closely with C.O. in later years, helping his brother market his product—lifelike prosthetic limbs—overseas. Del believed his other siblings, a sister, Mary Alice, five years younger, and brother, Vincent, six years younger, were “badly damaged” by their grandmother.

What was young Del’s response to the family’s poverty? He worked from an early age. He and his brothers had paper routes from age 7. He sold newspaper subscriptions. His father collected used magazines off the trains, and Del sold them at closing time at the Chevrolet factory. During high school, he worked a full eight- hour shift. As a delivery boy at Bowman’s Pharmacy, he became supervisor of four delivery boys. Del viewed his family’s limited means in a positive way, as a stimulus to the children to be enterprising.

How did Del do as a high school student? The picture is mixed. He performed well in history, geography and English but not well in math and science. He enjoyed singing in the Glee Club. He described himself as lacking self-confidence and for this reason being a “promoter of others,” including a friend who sought school political offices. Del was a good dancer and dated.

What were the early spiritual experiences of this future spiritual leader? Del’s family was Catholic but not devout, and Del occasionally attended Catholic worship. When he was in high school, he attended a Christian Science-oriented youth group. This group was an offshoot of an adult spiritual community that held Sunday meetings at the leader’s summer home in the Oakland hills. Del was introduced to the youth group by his girlfriend’s mother who was active in the adult group. The leader, a nurse from Denmark, “Mother” Petersen, used readings from the Bible and *Science and Health* by Mary Baker Eddy as springboards for group discussion of spiritual living. Del was impressed by the honest and intimate sharing by both the youth and adults who seemed to genuinely seek spiritual growth each week. While Mother Petersen adhered to the basic principles of Christian Science, she was critical of its narrow focus on health. Mrs. Petersen became a spiritual mentor and surrogate mother for Del who appreciated her wisdom, levelheadedness, and compassion. She and her community gave Del spiritual and financial support as he moved into adulthood.

A life-changing event. When Del was about 20, he had a side job selling cars. Out demonstrating a car one night to a young woman, he accidentally hit a three-year-old child at a street car stop in downtown Oakland. The child was killed, and Del served a brief jail sentence. This tragedy gave Del understanding of others who experience incarceration, contributed to his great empathy, and helped catapult him into a life of serving.

Del became a successful businessman. Having limited economic resources, how did he get his start? While still in high school, Del began to organize dances at area hotels. He sold tickets, hired a dance band, rented the dancing lounge, and secured refreshments. After high school, when he began day work for an insurance company in San Francisco, he continued to “promote” dances at nicer hotels like the Whitmore in San Francisco. He attended dental college for one year but quit because his hands were too big. His connection with Oakland’s Claremont Hotel helped him obtain a job as a driver for a North Oakland dry cleaner, Revelation Cleaning.

His outgoing personality and genuine interest in others won him loyal customers in his Piedmont district. He also encountered racial prejudice from some white homeowners who resented Del's rapport with their black maids. Eventually Del had saved some money and saw an opportunity to start his own dry cleaning business. Then servicing a district in Alameda, Del asked his boss how much compensation he would want for Del to purchase the client base there. The owner replied that he would give those customers to Del for free. Mother Petersen and a couple from her community added enough money to Del's savings for him to buy a building. Del contacted the former owner of Revelation Cleaning, which had gone out of business, for permission to use that name for his new Alameda business. That permission was granted. In 1936 Del bought a building at 2170 Encinal Avenue and lived upstairs. Del parlayed the original \$1,800 investment into a prosperous business that eventually had nine trucks.

Del was 38 when he married Bebe in 1944. Did he have earlier relationships? Yes. At age 22 Del said that he was seduced into a marriage with a woman in her 30's, one of his route customers. The marriage lasted two-and-a-half years. Del became friends with the woman's two-year-old son. He was unable to keep in contact with the young boy and wondered through the years what became of him.

How did Del and Bebe meet? Adelaide Beale, known as Bebe, was an elementary school teacher. Del and Bebe met about 1936 when singing with the Alameda Choral Society, where Bebe was the secretary. They dated up until Del's induction into the U.S. Army in 1942. They married in 1944 while Del was traveling in the Western states on a military assignment. Bebe's mother was the only witness of their Reno wedding which they kept secret for about a year.

Why was Del, a conscientious objector, serving in the U.S. Army? The cutoff for the draft in 1942 was age 36. Del was drafted at age 35-1/2. He made it very clear that he was a conscientious objector who wouldn't carry a weapon or kill anyone. He went through basic training, treated his officers with respect, and won their respect. He was assigned to the Medical Corps and, although his unit was slated to go to the Pacific theater, he was sent to Illinois to serve in an administrative capacity at a U.S. Army hospital. He said because of his advanced age, he was given the rank of sergeant-major. His work was at a desk, but Del found time to visit the hospital wards and to give solace and counsel to the wounded soldiers.

What happened after the war? Del and Bebe bought a house at 4202 Santa Rita Street in Oakland and began married life. Bebe's mother lived with them, something of a challenge for Del because both Bebe and her mother were obsessed with neatness, and orderliness was not one of Del's virtues. Eventually Bebe bought a small home for her mother in the Oakland hills in Mother Petersen's "compound." Del had hurriedly sold his cleaning business in 1942 as he was being inducted into the Army. Planning his return to civilian life while still on duty, Del bought another building, then a potato chip plant, at 2309 Encinal Avenue to re-establish his firm. He was able to buy back Revelation Cleaning, but it cost him three-and-a-half times what he had sold it for three years earlier. In 1950 Del sold the successful company, became an active real estate investor and manager, and devoted himself to volunteer service.

How did Del get into Scouting? Del was listening to the radio broadcast from Oakland's Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church. Dr. Harold Geistweit made an appeal for a Scoutmaster for Troop 123. Del had a love for boys, had no children, and felt called to respond to Geistweit's plea. He told the pastor that he had no Scouting experience but was willing to learn what was needed. A Scout executive gave Del a crash course in Scout leadership. Providentially, Stennett Heaton, a contractor with knowledge of camping and nature, was available to serve as

assistant Scoutmaster. Because the sponsoring church had relocated from another neighborhood, Troop 123 brought together older Scouts from working-class backgrounds and younger Scouts with middle-class origins. Del did a masterful job of integration. Quickly we rose to be one of the leading troops in Oakland. Our fierce competitor at jamborees was Troop 95, led by a Scoutmaster whose leadership style was military and autocratic. Del's style was the opposite. We liked to win honors in the competitions, and we especially liked to beat Troop 95!

Did Del exert a spiritual influence on the young men of Troop 123? Yes. Del dreamed big for each Scout, holding our potentialities before us when we could only see our limitations. Bebe was involved with Del in directly influencing us spiritually in the God and Country group where Scouting allowed religious formation. Looking back, Del said he wanted to create the same atmosphere of honest sharing and spiritual quest in the God and Country group as he experienced in Mother Petersen's spiritual groups. We studied Scripture, learned key Bible verses, and discussed spiritual principles with Bebe and Del. Sitting around Glenn Clark on the Anderson's living room floor, we heard him challenge us to become "athletes of the Spirit." Del, Glenn Clark and Frank Laubach were role models of strong men who were spiritually-oriented. Their example was extremely important for me, because my father, an engineer, believed when I was growing up that religion was good only as a moral influence for women and children.

How did Del and Bebe get involved in Camps Farthest Out? Bebe read a book possibly by Glenn Clark that mentioned CFO. She wrote to the publisher, Macalester Park, asking about it. She learned that the publisher's representative, Alice Sanderson, lived in Berkeley. Bebe phoned Alice, ordered some books, and heard that a CFO would meet the next week at Oakland's Mills College. Del and Bebe attended that camp in June 1953. That October they went to the Asilomar CFO where they met Glenn Clark, Glenn Harding, and other key CFO leaders. They also met Maziebelle Markham, a wealthy woman with large real estate holdings in Palm Springs who became one of their spiritual advisors and a financial backer of some of Del's later projects.

How and when did Del and Bebe's international service begin? Bebe quickly emerged as a music leader in the camps, beginning with the Hawaii CFO in 1954. At that camp, Del and Bebe met (William) Merrell Vories, an American architect married to a Japanese woman, who was leader of a Christian community, Omi-Hachiman, near Osaka, Japan. Vories designed Western-style buildings across Japan and was greatly respected by the post-war Japanese government. Vories invited Bebe and Del to come to Omi-Hachiman for a year, Bebe as a teacher and musician and Del to organize Scouting. At first they declined, but Vories was a persuasive man. They agreed to go in 1956. Their international trip lasted 20 months, twelve at Omi-Hachiman and eight traveling through East Asia, India, and Europe visiting missionaries, among them Lillian Dickson who ministered to lepers in Taiwan.

How many Christmas letters did Del and Bebe send to their friends around the world? Their "trademark" Christmas letters on red and green sparkle paper commenced in 1953. Making further international trips in 1961, 1963, 1967, and 1970 to develop CFO groups and promote Del's brother's business abroad, they increased their world contacts, and by 1967, the "circulation" of their annual Christmas letter reached 2,000!

After Mother Petersen, who exerted key influences on Del's spirituality? Among the many with whom he was in contact, Marian Bushnell of Coventry, England, is at the top of the list. Del's approach to meditation was shaped by her *Seed Thoughts for Daily Meditation*. In this little book she articulates the principle that Del said transformed his life:

How are we to become possessed of the Spirit of Christ?

... [she quotes 2 Corinthians 3:18 where Paul speaks of us being transformed by our mirroring the glory of the Lord.] **Looking, loving, longing, we grow like.** This is the spiritual principle behind these daily thoughts. If day by day we gaze upon the glory of the Lord, upon the foundation principles of our Master's life, they will by degrees become part of our own life.

Del distributed countless copies of this book to his many contacts. Another British woman, Marian Dunlap, founder of the Fellowship of Meditation, also influenced Del's spiritual life. Then of course there was Glenn Clark. Del frequently quoted his *Soul's Sincere Desire* and *I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes*. In recent years Del was influenced by Dr. Howard Thurman, the African-American pastor of San Francisco's Church of All People, whom he got to know through Lucile. Central to Del's spirituality was daily contemplative meditation focused on listening to God.

Bebe died of cancer on November 3, 1972. What happened next in Del's life? Del knew Lucile Hanford from Asilomar CFO, where they were both on the Council Ring. Lucile had divorced, and after Bebe's death, Del made contact with her. Their strong interest in spirituality was a common bond. Within a few months, they decided that they would like to marry. Del had a hesitation, wondering if people would think he hadn't loved Bebe enough. Early one morning (Del was an early riser and often made telephone calls at an unreasonable hour!) he called me to discuss this issue. Undoubtedly like others with whom he talked, I reassured him that no one would question his love for Bebe and that he and Lucile should do what was in their hearts. Lucile and Del were married by their friend, Rev. Rod Romney, former pastor of Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church, in the garden of Rod's home in Seattle on Del's birthday, July 17, 1973.

Did Lucile understand exactly what she was getting into when she married Del? No, she later asserted. Two months before the wedding, at the first international meeting of Camps Farthest Out at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, Del had been elected president of Foundation Farthest Out, Glenn Clark's quiet international arm of CFO. Del understood the yearning for Christian spirituality and fellowship across sectarian divisions in other countries. He and Bebe had experienced the joy and freedom that CFO set loose abroad. But in 1973 there were only seven CFO camps outside North America, only one strong one in Sri Lanka. Del was committed to activating FFO to help strengthen those camps and create many others.

After their marriage, Del and Lucile moved into a lovely condo-minium at 1131 Via Alamosa in Alameda. But Lucile wasn't prepared for what Del had planned two months later: hosting a Board meeting of FFO in the complex's community room. Del depended on Lucile to handle the logistics of a multi-day meeting of prominent CFOers flying in from different cities. This was just the beginning. Later in 1973, Del set up a two-month trip to Kenya, Southern Rhodesia, and the Union of South Africa. Lucile managed all right, but she was challenged by all the adjustments: a new husband, the new condominium, new people, and weeks abroad in Africa. Their marriage would continue to be challenged by Del's far-reaching projects.

When did the Foundation Farthest Out become Camps Farthest Out International? During Del's ten years as president of FFO (1973-83), the number of CFO camps in other countries multiplied. The North American leaders sent by FFO to organize new camps expressed Del's vision of collegial Christian relationships. Del remarked,
 They went to work *with* people, learning from them, going as equals, so that the overseas people felt more of their inner worth. We wanted them to be empowered, not to be dependent on us.

With new camps needing guidance and resources, an administrative office for the international work was established in Walla Walla, Washington, with Bob and Barbara Deal as administrators, serving under a Board of Directors of the expanded organization renamed Camps Farthest Out International. Del was named President-Emeritus and a new president, Gerry Rahill, was elected. Del continued to work closely with CFOI. Lucile attended Board meetings with Del and was a speaker at several CFO camps, despite the challenge of her declining eyesight.

What was the Resource (Self-Help) Committee? For years Del had been sending resources to people in developing countries. With Bebe he had sent Christian literature, packets of vegetable seeds, and instructions for “square-foot gardening,” fish farming, and other low-capital technologies to enterprising people. His efforts to foster self-development continued after 1983 when he headed the CFOI Resource Committee. Del enthusiastically brought news to the CFOI Board of technological breakthroughs for the third world: “miracle” trees, solar cookers, and plastic sheeting for creating fish ponds. Through a growing network of enterprising indigenous people especially in Africa, the Resource Committee distributed written instructions for these simple technologies (translated when needed) augmented with good diagrams.

How did Del stay abreast of new knowledge in the field of rural technology? Del was a humble man who recognized his need to utilize the talents of others in leadership. This was his secret of success as a Scoutmaster, as an international ambassador for CFO, and as head of the Resource Committee. Del developed a close association with John Jeavons, executive director of Ecology Action, in Willits, California. Jeavons pioneered new technologies to increase food production in developing countries. He was committed to ecologically-sound methods, many of them millenia-old, applicable to small farms. In the 1980’s Del brought Samuel Teimuge and other rural African visitors to Willits to study Jeavons’ techniques. Del developed a close association with the people at Solar Cookers International, paying them to ship an inexpensive solar cooker with instructions for how to use and to fabricate it as a demonstrator to his interested contacts. Spirit in Action has expanded promotion of the solar cookers, vital tools in the campaign against deforestation.

What was the origin of Del’s foundation, Spirit in Action? In 1989, after the 6th International CFO in San Diego, Lucile hoped that Del would withdraw from his busy international involvements. As he was phasing out of CFOI, he hoped that others in the organization would continue the resource (self-help) work. However, CFOI understood its purpose principally as establishing and supporting spiritual camps around the world and did not maintain the Resource Committee. So Del sought a vehicle for continuing his work of serving the whole person—body, mind and spirit. In 1995 Del sent a letter to people who he thought would like to help carry on his self-help work. Marsha Johnson and Margaret Arner responded and formed the nucleus of the board of directors of a non-profit corporation, Spirit in Action. A highly-dedicated group of talented people was assembled to direct the foundation. Marsha became its administrator in San Francisco, serving in this capacity until 2007. Del played an active role as a “lifetime” member of the SIA Board and, after he was no longer able to attend board meetings, he was an adviser to the board for major decisions. Del continued to send out packages of literature and resources to overseas people with the help of his “office volunteer angel,” Aileen Gillem. Now twelve years old, Spirit in Action serves people in developing countries with grants for families to start small businesses, with larger grants for community projects, as well as with self-help and spiritual growth printed materials. Tanya Thomas Cothran, granddaughter of Jim Thomas, former CFOI president, founding board member of Spirit in Action, and Del’s longtime friend, is the current administrator. Del’s mission of serving enterprising yet disadvantaged people abroad in body, mind and spirit continues.

Would you like to learn more? You can read some of Del's writings on the Spirit in Action website: www.godsspiritinaction.org. Tax-deductible contributions to SIA are welcomed.

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Alameda writer Len Grzanka is working on a biography of Del based primarily on my interviews with Del. If you have information on Del that you would like to contribute, you can write to him at the following address: 2909 Madison St., Alameda, CA 94501.

DEL'S DREAM

This is my dream:

**To encourage and support people
To know they are spiritual beings in the world,
And that they can co-create with God
To sustain themselves in the world.**

**Where we go in the world,
We will look for persons in that area
Who can become a role model
For their world.
We will search out and connect with people
Who want to be role models
For spiritual living
Which contributes to their total well-being
And to those in their communities.**

**Del Anderson
November 2004**

Co-Creators with the Divine

God will not do for us what we can do for ourselves. We are not created as puppets to be manipulated and controlled. The Holy One does not force us to make certain decisions or to take specific actions, but honors us as co-workers and gives us free will.

We are created as junior-partners, ambassadors, and co-creators with the Almighty. The work is not complete until we fulfill God's divine plan and destiny in our lives by expressing and manifesting "God's kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven."

As we pray, listen, hear and act, we receive the abundant life; all the good our Father/Mother God has already provided (created) for us, and whose “good pleasure it is to give us the kingdom.”

Let us fulfill God’s divine plan for us. Let us pray, listen and work, resting in the Holy One, waiting confidently and expectantly, alert and doing our part. Thus we discover that we are God’s answer to the needs of humankind.

It is our joy, privilege and responsibility to transform God’s dream for us into a working, living reality.

You are greater than you know. You are of more value to God than you believe possible.

Let us believe enough to act, to start now on a holy journey of love and faith, obeying our Lord Jesus’ commands, “Feed the hungry” and “Only believe (and act as though you believe) and you shall see the glory of God” manifested in and through you.

Del Anderson