

Missing Big Canoe woman found at Atlanta airport

By Dan Pool
Editor

A search lasting from late Wednesday, Dec. 8, until approximately 7 p.m. Thursday Dec. 9, ended with answered prayers as 89-year-old Marilyn Grossenbacher was found in good health at the Atlanta airport.

Sheriff Sgt. Kris Stancil said the Big Canoe resident was found by airport security personnel after a statewide alert went out identifying her and her car.

Stancil said the woman was found to be in good health,

though "confused." He said there was no foul play or abduction. The woman had simply become confused and lost.

Going back over the case, Stancil said on that Wednesday when Grossenbacher was reported missing about 10 p.m., she had last been seen at a drug store in Jasper. The first night's priority was in checking all roadways she might have travelled between her home in Big Canoe and the drug store in Jasper. Initial thinking was that Grossenbacher could have run off the

road and become stranded. Checking all possible routes required much searching.

"The low that night was 19 degrees. We were afraid if she were off the side of the road, she wouldn't have a chance," Stancil said. He said the first priority and all resources were placed on local roads.

Stancil said later it was discovered Grossenbacher had used a credit card at a convenience store in the Atlanta area around 3 a.m. Thursday. He said a video from the store showed Grossen-

bacher was alone and appeared calm, so sheriff's officers didn't feel foul play was involved.

He said the different statewide alert systems used included Mattie's Call, which is specifically for missing elderly people or people who may have medical conditions. This alert prompted law enforcement agencies and other public safety groups, like Atlanta airport security, to be on the lookout for a missing elderly person.

Stancil said law enforcement did not invest many resources

into statewide search efforts until Grossenbacher's credit card use was discovered. Until then the sheriff's office had no reason to believe she had left the Pickens County area, he said.

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Christian author talks of sharing faith

By Jeff Warren
Staff writer

"Because I came from a broken home, I didn't trust anybody," said Christian author Ted Sprague of Big Canoe, describing himself as a young man. "I threw myself into sports, my security blanket."

An atheist while studying psychology at college, he was encouraged in that faith by his professors, Sprague said.

Coming of age in southern California, he also became best friends with Brian Wilson, founder of The Beach Boys, Sprague said. Wilson was one of only three people ever to invite him to church, Sprague said. He went.

"I thought it was the most boring thing ever," he remembers.

Soon he was unhappily drafted. "I had this terrible attitude that I could take on anybody, including the Army," Sprague said. Too belligerent to serve willingly, he wound up in a base hospital with amputees returned from Vietnam, a place he was threatened with experimental surgery, Sprague said.

He made a 30-minute appointment to see a chaplain and spent 20 minutes boring the man with his life story, Sprague remembers. During the remainder, the chaplain pressed on Sprague a Gideon New Testament. "Read this," he told him. "I think you need God in your life."

Missing an arm, Sprague's Army roommate moaned through the night. It kept Sprague from sleeping, so he found a spot away from the room and read his Bible.

"A college professor told me to be well-read you need to read the Bible," Sprague explained. "I never intended to read it to get close to God." But two and a half weeks into the New Testament, he was changed.

"I made my way to this little chapel at Beaumont Hospital on Fort Bliss," Sprague said. "With a little faith, not a lot, I accepted Christ as my savior." He was alone at the point of his conversion. "At first I couldn't stop crying," he said. "Part of it was surrendering my ego and at last finding God's peace for my life."

"As a new believer, I wanted to ask men how they applied Christ to their life," he said. "I wanted to find a man who could tell me how to apply Christ to their daily life. For a year and a half I couldn't find one man."

Out of the Army, Sprague worked for the Long Beach, California convention and visitors bureau, where he eventually discovered Christian Businessmen's Connection. The group congregates for eating meetings, and each time a different speaker stands up to talk about the difference Christ makes in his life, Sprague explained. He became active in the organization, traveling as a speaker, even leading at mayoral prayer breakfasts, he said.

His career brought Sprague to Atlanta, where he worked for the convention and visitors bureau in the lead-up to the 1996 Olympic games. He made the cover of Georgia Trend magazine, Sprague recalled.

But when advocates of parimutuel betting and nude dancing sought Sprague's support at the bureau, he didn't give it. When the gay community asked for its own bureau department, Sprague declined. And he wound up opposite the Atlanta newspaper on a tax issue, Sprague said.

After one of Sprague's bureau board members bad-mouthed the paper in a board meeting, journalists declared war on Sprague, and he was soon out of a job, he said.

He had already authored two books touching faith before his job loss, Sprague said. Those came from a position of strength, he indicated. His third book, *If We Are The Light, Why Is America So Dark?*, came out of weakness, he said.

It came from a strange beginning when Sprague was desperately without work and daily listening for God's direction on a

bench beside the Silver Comet Trail, he explained. He sat that bench daily, waiting to hear from God, Sprague said.

"I consider that one of the spiritual high points of my life," he said. But it was refinement by fire, he added. "Refinement by fire is not fun," he said.

Those trail day appointments kept with God focused on three exercises, Sprague said. "I cast all my care on him," he said. "I would praise him for all the good in my life. I would keep my mouth shut like Job."

"That was a breakthrough in my life as I would go to that bench two to three hours at a time. I was thinking I just gotta find out what God's got in mind here, because he's up to something."

Like Job, he had friends who looked in on him, Sprague said. "I was given no peace by the reasoned advice of my friends," he remembers. To onlookers, his contemplation looked foolish. His wife had a hard time with it, Sprague said. "It was very hard on her," he said. "She was very supportive, but she couldn't understand."

For money reasons, the couple moved in with their daughter and lived with her five years, Sprague said. "My wife, she is very different from me," he said, "but she hung with me through this whole thing."

Progress dawned from another friend's suggestion, Sprague said. "Why not build your own non-profit Christian ministry?" this friend suggested, Sprague began. Along the way, unlikely Christians, some with little means, contributed sacrificially to help him get started.

"God called me to multiply the gospel," Sprague says. By "multiply the gospel," he means to spread the good news of life in Christ, the daily personal experiencing of God's love, forgiveness, and provision through faith in Jesus.

The thrust of Sprague's ministry is teaching pastors and other believers a way to talk about Christ that is non-threatening to non-believers and meets them where they are.

If We Are The Light... is a workbook, a teaching tool Sprague uses in seminars how to lead teaching Christians how to talk about their faith in Jesus, Come January, Sprague's Witness Breakthrough ministry turns nine years old.

Sprague said his faith sharing has changed since days when he was a young Christian. "The first eight years I was a kamikaze pilot running over people with the gospel," he said. Even with those buzz tactics, some people he talked to did come to know Christ, Sprague said. That was despite the flawed approach he used, Sprague said.

"I was like a pesky yellow jacket sharing the gospel," he remembers. "I was cram and jam."

"If God can use a donkey, he can use me," Sprague says, but his early method wasn't the way to do it, he eventually realized. Today the Christian witness Sprague teaches is grounded in love, love modeled on how Jesus interacted with people he encountered in the Bible. Christians can learn how to communicate about God by observing the way Jesus did that and applying the same compassion to people they engage in personal conversation, Sprague said.

"Love as he loved," Sprague noted. "Ask meaningful ques-

tions. Listen intently. As they express their lives, you fall in love with their soul."

He mentioned Jesus' conversation with the rich young ruler as recorded in the book of Mark.

nicate the good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ, we've gotta learn how to listen."

A Christian witness that flows from the compelling love that comes of knowing an individual will never be a canned exchange, Sprague said. Listening is key to that process, he explained.

"See, the practical side of love is listening," Sprague said. "I've found people are trained to talk but not how to listen. Listening is an important sign of love. You don't have to strategize when you're compelled by love."

And as every human comes equipped with a capacity to love, all possess the most important tool for sharing faith, he contends.

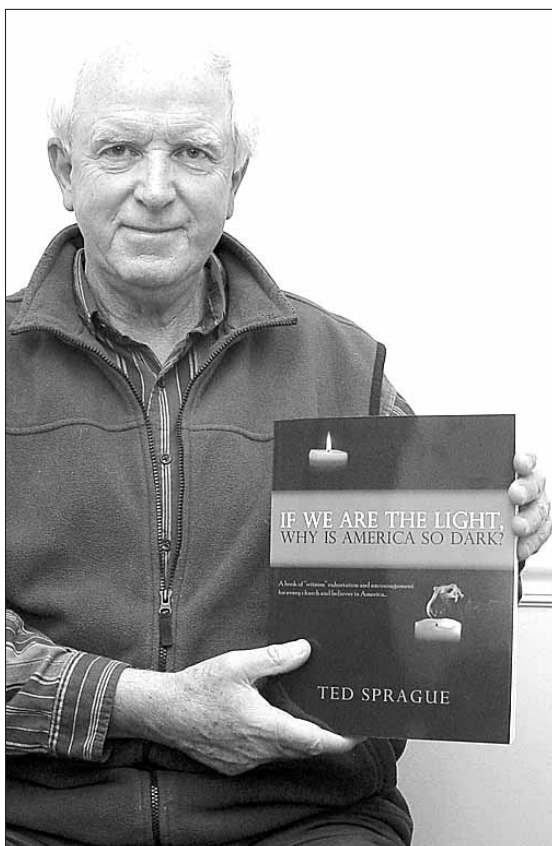
"Ordinary people, that's who God specializes in. Ordinary people, not super stars," Sprague said. "People will listen to somebody who uniquely loves them and doesn't have a canned message. When people know you care for them, they'll listen to you."

"God was compelled by love to give the world Jesus," Sprague said. "We should be compelled by the same love to give the world Jesus."

"First John, Second John, Third John—it's all about love," he said. "We've missed it without love."

Christian author Ted Sprague will greet guests and sign copies of his book, *If We Are The Light, Why Is America So Dark?*, at Jasper Drugs and Gifts this Saturday, Dec. 18, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

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From chapter 10, verse 21: "Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest—"

"As you listen to them, you'll be compelled by love, not duty, to share the gospel," Sprague said.

"Listening is one of the great strengths of a communicator," he said. "If we're going to commu-

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