

[It Isn't]



All About Jane

By Beth Foreman, Features Editor

Dr. Jane Fryar's life résumé is overflowing: Writer. Teacher. Facilitator. Weightlifter — really! More about that later! — Cardinals fan. Speaker. Doctor of Strategic Leadership. Prayer warrior. The list could go on, but Jane is quick to make clear that this life or even this story isn't about her.

"The older I get, the more I realize that none of these titles and degrees really matter. What really matters?" She pauses. "Baptized child of God. That's the best title I have. It's all about Jesus."

And in Jane's trademark phrase ... *Now listen, ladies! If that doesn't make your socks go up and down!*

Indeed, it is all about Jesus. But just for a few minutes, let's peek into this busy woman's life, a woman whose published words have touched thousands of men and women. She may feel a bit uncomfortable about the publicity, but even in sharing her story, His story shines brighter.

Perhaps you've seen her byline on one of countless Lutheran publications over the past thirty-something years: devotions in *Today's Light® Bible*, *Armed and Dangerous*, *Servant Leadership: Setting Leaders Free*, *I Believe but I Have Questions* and the newly released CPH women's devotional, *A New Song*, to name just a few of her hundreds of published pieces.

Yet all too often, we see a writer's name on a book or an article and she remains as one-dimensional as the paper on which her name appears. Today, we're going to spend time with one woman whom God is using powerfully in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod — and beyond — to accomplish His mission to grow His church and His people.

Jane's story includes trials, obstacles, and overflowing blessings.

"Over thirty years ago I started having chronic back pain, and a doctor told me to get a corset, a hospital bed, and to bring in the papers for Social Security Disability and he would sign them."

Clearly not a woman to accept such a dismal diagnosis without a fight, Jane knew God had a ministry for her.

"I asked myself, 'What would a corset do?'" Strengthen her abdominal muscles. So she spent time at the library and read books about strengthening her muscles. "Then I started to walk and then I started to run. And later I started to lift weights."

Now lest you imagine Dr. Fryar standing in the middle of her living room lifting a couple of pink padded five-pound weights to build up her biceps and triceps while she watches the evening news ... you need to know that today, she can squat press 250 pounds. Yes, you read that correctly. 250 pounds.

"The weight-lifting and aerobic stuff helps me deal with the back pain. It doesn't really relieve it so much, but it relieves stress." She adds, "And if I'm hurting, then I can just tell myself that I lifted too much yesterday!"

Her real strength is not in her muscles, however, and the story behind her book on prayer, *Armed and Dangerous*, illustrates this truth in a powerful way.

"I had wanted to write a book on prayer for quite a while. Prayer is an amazing thing. God could just do everything by divine fiat. He could just say 'this is how it is.' Yet He lets us be involved in His work here on earth, not just by what we do but through our prayer life. The power is not in prayer. You hear people talk about the power of prayer, but really the power is in the God who invites us to come to Him with our needs and requests.

"At the time, I was involved in the *Today's Light® Bible* and I was also working on the *Life-light®* series. I always get involved in so many things," she laughs as she considers her work. "As usual, it was a very busy time of my life."

However, God must have wanted her to slow down because "all of a sudden I pulled something in my back and suddenly I couldn't move."

Working with her editor, Jane stayed home to heal while starting a book on prayer. "I lay on my living room floor with my legs up on a hassock and a pencil and a clipboard — you know an ink pen won't work upside down! I lay there with my Bible and my ice pack and wrote all the chapters of that book."

Every so often her secretary would stop by to pick up a finished chapter. "She'd bring me supper on occasion!" By the time the book was finished, her back was stronger.

Writing the book kept her focused on the Word and on Jesus. "Actually I was wrestling through many of the issues I was writing about personally



at the same time. I mean, what can you pray for in a situation like this — chronic back pain and little or no freedom of movement — and expect God to do? How can we expect Him to respond?"

Jane explains that much of the book is based on the Lord's Prayer. "It's instructive that the first three petitions focus on "You" or "Your" — Hallowed be Your name ... Your kingdom come ... Your will be done." She points out that the prayer doesn't focus on our needs — "Give us today our daily bread ... deliver us from evil ..." — until later. "It's not that those are unimportant, but the focus is always on God's Kingdom and God's glory."

Reflecting on how God has blessed her with opportunities she had never imagined, Jane talks about her career path. She started teaching in a one-room Lutheran school in northwest Iowa where she juggled her work as a teacher, track coach, custodian, and "assorted other things!" After three years she moved to Milwaukee where she taught fourth grade. Her writing career started one muggy summer day when she was walking in an Iowa bean field. "That was in the 'olden days' when you walked with a hoe and chopped out the weeds."

She had applied to attend the Writing for the Church workshop, but she was way down on the waiting list. However, God knew that Jane had a

writing ministry, and this is where He wanted her to begin. "I came in from the field one day and took a call from the instructor who said the waiting list had dissolved. Could I come right away?" That was Friday night and the class started on Monday morning. "I dropped my hoe and went to the workshop!"

What began as a summer workshop with two or three devotions blossomed into countless devotions, curriculum materials, Bible studies, and books. In 1980, she was nominated for a position developing curriculum for the Board of Parish Services, and when she left Concordia Publishing House, she was director of the Curriculum Development Department.

From her work at CPH, Jane moved onto Concordia Seward as an instructor, teaching Educational Psychology as well as a methods class, Teaching the Christian Faith, and a graduate course, Church and Society. After a couple of years, she was called to be Dean of the Graduate School.

From a one-room school to dean of a university graduate program! What a journey! Jane laughs when she thinks about it. "Who could believe it? They encourage kids today to sit down and plan a career map. Who could have mapped this? God has been good to me."



Jane shares her home with her "adolescent" dog, also known as Marty the Wonder Dog. "She turns thirteen this year, and I don't know what I'll do with a teenager in the house!"

Currently residing in the St. Louis area, Jane shares her home with her "adolescent" dog, also known as Marty the Wonder Dog. "She turns thirteen this year and I don't know what I'll do with a teenager in the house! Is she suddenly going to rebel? I keep trying to get her to go get a night job as a watchman or something!"

Never married, Jane believes God has used that to "keep me freed up to do the ministry that He

has called me to do. I look back, and I don't think I could have done many of the things I've done if I had a family."

But Jane isn't one to be alone for very long. "All my life I've had this habit that three or four days a week I go out for breakfast. When I was on my way to work at CPH, I would stop at Hardees and read my devotion for the day and just look over my calendar and get ready for the day. Often people would come up to the table and say, 'Are you reading the Bible?' Quite often somebody would say, 'Can I sit down for a minute?' It would be amazing. Moms with kids on drugs. A woman whose husband wouldn't let her go to church. Family members who were diagnosed with cancer. God continues to bring people across my path. I have two people right now that I meet at breakfast."

One of her current breakfast companions is a man who is searching. Recently, he asked her about creation and evolution. She looked at him honestly and said, "Maybe you're asking the wrong question. If Jesus Christ really came out of the tomb, then that really changes everything. Have you thought about that?"

Jane sees these breakfast encounters as planting seeds. "We just plant the seed." Her seed might be as simple as telling someone, "I'll pray for you."

"Witnessing doesn't have to be unnatural. She explains that planting the seed doesn't have to be forced as in 'I'm going to open my Bible and let's fold our hands and bow our heads.' Jesus is my friend, and I want to tell you about my friend! The authenticity is key," she explains.

Authenticity is challenging, however, in our fast-paced lives. Jane agrees. "I'm taking the second Friday of every month for a personal prayer retreat." (See Jane's book *Armed and Dangerous* for prayer retreat ideas.)

"Once or twice a year, I try to take a real retreat." Last summer, Jane spent four days at a retreat center in Nebraska, "a beautiful place out in the middle of nowhere." Armed with her Bible, a few books, and some paper, she arrives almost breathlessly. "The first twenty-four hours, I just

LUTHERAN WOMAN'S QUARTERLY (USPS 322-660) is published quarterly – spring, summer, fall and winter – by the Lutheran Women's Missionary League of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, P.O. Box 411993, St. Louis, MO 63141-1993.

Periodicals postage paid at St. Louis, MO. Canada #R129889093.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to LUTHERAN WOMAN'S QUARTERLY, P.O. Box 411993, St. Louis, MO 63141-1993. Annual subscription rates: 10 copies or more to one address, \$4.00 per year; individual subscriptions, \$5.50 per year. Single issues available for \$1.50 plus postage. Call office. (Available in Braille, large print or on cassette tapes free from Lutheran Blind Mission, 7550 Watson Road, St. Louis, MO 63119.)

pace! It takes one day for God to slow me down. There's no television, no radio. After that, God slows my spirit and when it's time to leave," she's not quite ready to re-enter the 21st century.

Daily, she's in God's Word. "I just finished reading Deuteronomy. I try to go back and forth between the Old and New Testament. I am in John's Gospel now, looking at Jesus' promise in John 14: *And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*

"In this section of John, look at the connection between the Father and the Son sending the Spirit, and the Spirit transforming what *we* want so that *we pray* for those things that *He wants*. It struck me, this whole partnership thing within in the Trinity! God involves us in His plan for the universe — really! Now if that doesn't make your socks go up and down, you're not paying attention!"

Make your socks go up and down?

"It's kind of a little trademark expression of mine. I taught a Bible class at my church in Nebraska during the summer and I'd always say, *Now listen ladies — this will make your socks go up and down.* At the end of the summer, the women came with different colored socks!

"It's not Jane Fryar, God's Great Woman of Faith and Power! It's the furthest thing from that. It's that the Father and the Son are glorified and the Spirit is moving in us. Later in John 17 in His High Priestly prayer — now this is something — Jesus prays that we would be unified. And later we read that the 'glory that you have given me I have given to them!'"

Jane's enthusiasm about how the Lord has worked in her life and in the lives of all believers is contagious and tangible. "Christ shares His glory with us! We deserve grief and pain, as the hymn verse says. Yet here He is — His plan all along from all eternity — sharing His glory with you and me!

"When we get to heaven, we are going to be astonished at who we are when we see each other! The identity that God has so honored us with — it's so astonishing. There aren't words for that."

Yes, there are words for that, as Jane would say: *Now if that doesn't make your socks go up and down, you're not paying attention!*

