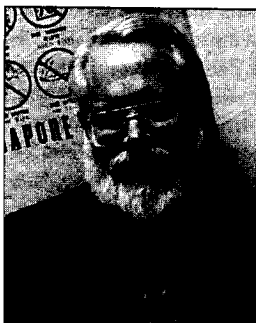


# One Family, Two Centuries of Adventist Education

**BY CHARLES H. TIDWELL, JR.**



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**W**e may not be that unique. Certainly, there are other families that have a long history with Seventh-day Adventist schools. But for me, the Tidwell tribe is synonymous with Adventist education. Are there many other families that have more than two centuries of worldwide involvement?

I cannot remember a time in my life when I haven't been at an Adventist school. When I was a toddler, my parents were teaching at Adventist schools. I studied in church schools from first grade through my master's degree. For the past 32 years, I have been a teacher or administrator in the Adventist school system.

It wasn't just us children in school. My father started and completed a doctorate during our first furlough from India. My mother was a senior at Atlantic Union College in Massachusetts the year I was a freshman. But, I never thought it bizarre to say "Hi, Mom," when meeting her in the hallway. We were proud that after a hiatus of 17 years, she returned to finish a degree first started at Union College (Lincoln, Nebraska) before I was born. A few years later, all of us except my father were simultaneously in school—two in graduate school, one in college, one in junior high, and two in elementary school.

A survey of the 36 schools my parents, my four siblings, and I have attended or worked at in the past seven decades is daunting. It is 12 elementary schools in Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, Nebraska, Massachusetts, West Virginia, Maryland, India, and Thailand; 10 secondary or language schools in Texas, Arkansas, Massachusetts, Michigan, India, Japan, Singapore, and Thailand; and 14 colleges or universities: Southwestern Junior and Southwestern Union, Union, Atlantic Union, Andrews, Columbia Union, Spicer, Mount Klabat, Newbold, Salève, Canadian Union, Pakistan Adventist Seminary, and Hong Kong and Mission colleges.

Together, the seven of us have accumulated more than a century (110 years) as students in Adventist schools from elementary through master's level (and four of us have degrees from Andrews University in Michigan). Since completing our formal education, my parents, two siblings, and I have spent most of our careers as elementary, academy, and college teachers. To date, six of us have worked more than a century in Adventist schools (131-plus years and still counting!)

So what does Adventist education mean to the Tidwells? It is our life! Yes, it has meant financial and personal sacrifices. Not only did both parents work as missionary teachers, but in academy, all of us siblings also found jobs (usually 20-plus hours a week during the school year and full-time in the summers) to help cover school expenses. Somehow, even when all of us were in school simultaneously, we were still able to clear our accounts (at least before the start of another school year). All of us left home for most of academy and college—usually in a different country. Because my parents and three of us siblings chose mission service, we have usually been scattered around the world. Even today, family reunions are, at best, sporadic.

But none of us has regrets. Adventist education has always been worth it. It has been instrumental in keeping us an integral part of the church. Adventist schools, through the influence of dozens of committed teachers, have been pivotal in forming our philosophy, our worldview, our characters. Most

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of all, Adventist education has trained us for a life of service. For those of us who continue as educators, teaching in an Adventist school is more than a way of making a living; it is the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others.

My father, Charles Tidwell, Sr., sums up the Tidwell perspective: "Each day, through the wonders of E-mail, I hear from former students and colleagues from schools around the globe where my wife and I have worked. Even in retirement, I remain as committed to Adventist education as I was starting as a youngster in the one-room New Hope Church School in East Texas in the 1930s until most recently as a volunteer administrator for Mission College in Thailand in the 1990s. Adventist education has never been a 'sacrifice' for the Tidwells. It has been the glue that keeps us together." ✍

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