



The Happy Hoper

Jerry and Laura Burton



Jerry

Birthdate: June 27, 1942

Birthplace: San Angelo, TX

Children: 4 from previous marriage
8 grandchildren, 4 great grandchildren and
1 on the way

Marriage: December 8, 1990

Occupation: Retired Air Force, Lt. Col.;
Corporate Executive; Ordained Minister

Hobbies: Published author, geology, rock
hunting, horses, chickens

Laura

March 13, 1965

Akron, OH

2 together - Daughter, Elizabeth (Abq.);
Son, James: Michigan

Where: Albuquerque, NM

Associate Director of Business Operations,
UNM Health Science Rio Rancho Campus

Working on work/life balance; swimming,
animals, pottery, reading, and listening to
lectures

Jerry has a brother, Larry, (two years older) who lives in TN. As a child the family lived in San Angelo, TX, Clovis, NM, and near Wichita, Kansas. His dad worked for the Santa Fe Railroad. Eventually, the family moved to Ohio where his dad worked for GE on the atomic airplane project. Jerry's mother, Mattie Louise, worked as an executive secretary in several organizations.

Jerry shared several experiences he had that confirmed and strengthened his belief in God. His family was Christian, but he "needed to know for himself." Let me share one story which truly impacted his military career. While in high school and college Jerry was a pole vaulter setting twenty seven high school and fourteen college records. In high school he had a vaulting accident resulting in a slipped disk. He was in a brace for nine months and his physical activity was severely curtailed. After the nine months, he amazingly returned to vaulting.

Jerry's dad, a Navy veteran of World War II, encouraged Jerry to enroll in the Air Force ROTC program in college. During his junior and senior years of college, Jerry was the Commander of his unit. In his senior year he completed Phase I of flight training. During his commissioning physical they found a disk with a strange spike on it. Consequently he was separated from the Air Force and rated (4F, unfit for service).

Jerry graduated from Capital University, a Lutheran College, in Columbus, Ohio with a B.S. in Geology in 1965. He started a master's degree in business at the University of Miami in Oxford, Ohio. He accepted a full time job in IT. He married. In 1972, Jerry met a co-worker in IT who was also a member of the Ohio Air National Guard. This friend convinced Jerry to pursue his Air Force commission again and offered to help. After pushing his previous paperwork through the

system, the Air Force required Jerry to undergo three months of grueling physical exercises, stress and agility tests. The conclusion of the Flight Surgeon was that Jerry satisfied the physical requirements. The Air Force did not x-ray his back in spite of Jerry's strong suggestions to do so. Jerry did have an x-ray taken and it was perfect. Eight years had passed.

Jerry's career in the military had many twists and turns. He flew, was in air operations, did flight training, operations intel, re-wrote operational training manuals and had many top secret assignments both here and abroad while rising through the ranks. No, he didn't wear his cowboy hat while in the military!

As his military career neared its end, Jerry transferred to the US Air Force Reserve. He was transferred to Space Command and later attached to the Air Force Academy. Jerry retired at the rank of Lt. Col. in 2002.

During his military career, he continued working in IT for Champion International, moving to Stamford, CT in 1980. While there he went back to school at Sacred Heart University earning an MBA in Financial Management. After Champion, he worked in the music and movie industries.

While in CT he lived in a neighborhood that had several mafia members. The FBI called Jerry asking him to gather information on the movements of a mafia member. After a little over a year, he was approached by two men. It was time to get out of town. At the time Jerry was also going through a divorce. He decided to move with his youngest child, Carson, to New Mexico where his parents were living.

Once resettled in NM, Jerry worked eight years as an IT consultant and eventually as a Director of IT for a local company. He went to Trinity Theological Seminary, was ordained in 1999, and received a PH.D. in Church Administration in 2003. After "retiring," Jerry started teaching General and AP Chemistry, General and AP Physics at Hope Christian High School. While teaching full time, he enrolled in a Masters program at NM Tech. He graduated in 2012 with a Masters of Science Teaching (Math, Geology, Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Astronomy).

While still in Ohio, Jerry became an FAA Advanced Flight Instructor (1972). Upon moving to New Mexico, he joined the New Mexico Civil Air Patrol (CAP). He trained people to perform border patrol search and rescue missions. In 2005, Jerry was the Operations Officer for the state of New Mexico. When Katrina hit New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, he and two other CAP members, both retired Lt. Cols. flew to New Orleans and then to Tyndall AFB in Panama City, FL. They flew search and rescue, federal dignitaries, and damage assessment crews from Panama City to New Orleans and back every day for several weeks. Shortly after that Jerry began flying as a civilian contract flight instructor and check pilot for the USAF at Kirtland AF Base. During this time he was the Assistant Operations Officer as well as a test pilot.

Now that Jerry is allegedly retired he is busy writing books —"Clouds of War" and "Get a Grip on the Bible." He is in process of writing the second volume (of three) of "Get a Grip."

Now for Laura's story. She is the fourth of five children (only one boy in the bunch). The family moved from Ohio to Knoxville TN when she was eight. She has lived in many places finishing high school in Connecticut. Laura went to college dropping out after one year to get married.

Both Laura and Jerry were in abusive marriages. During her divorce, Laura moved back to TN and then CT where she met Jerry in church. (Her divorce was a dark time for her.) Jerry and Laura stayed in touch after he moved. In 1989, once Jerry settled in NM, Laura decided to move here too. They married in 1990. Both were committed to building their relationship with God in the center. This commitment has brought them closer in their faith and each other.

When children arrived, Laura stayed home. She was active in the community, church, volunteering in the schools, and starting her own PR business. Laura went to Trinity Theological Seminary with Jerry. She worked part-time as the seminary's administrative assistant and event coordinator. She earned a B.A in Theological Studies. After substitute teaching in the public schools, she decided to pursue an M.A. in Health Communication at UNM, earning it in 2009. Laura traveled to Guatemala twice to conduct research on intercultural provider-patient communication among the Achi Maya people. She worked closely with a missionary who was with Wycliff Bible Translators. In 2016 she completed her Ph.D. in Health Communication and Culture with a focus on meaning making and hope. Her doctoral research explored and identified the communication processes that help people move toward hope in recovery groups. Laura also provided speaking and training in Egypt on a mission trip in 2019.

Laura taught undergraduate and graduate students at UNM. In 2018, she was recruited for her current position as the Associate Director of Business Operations for UNM Health Sciences Rio Rancho Campus. Over 3 years, she developed a new program for post-baccalaureate students planning to apply or re-apply to graduate health programs, such as medical school, college of pharmacy, physical therapy. The program focuses on developing mindful, engaged empathetic communication and growing in cultural humility, sensitivity and respect for the cultural background of patients. (I just saw a piece on TV which said how badly this is needed in medical training.) In addition, students develop deep reflection skills, critical thinking, explore psychology in medicine and engage in a wide range of cultural experiential learning. The first cohort graduated in May, 2023. Laura, rightfully is proud of the program believing that God calls us to bring His goodness and kindness into the world. In her role as Associate Director, she oversees the general operations of the campus and a variety of healthcare workforce development efforts and community engagement.

Jerry and Laura had been members of Cross of Hope while Dale Bauer was pastor. In 1994 Laura and Jerry went to Billy Graham's School of Evangelism. Afterward, Laura told Pastor Dale about the Alpha program, thinking he would take this on. Instead, he said, "Seems like God is calling you to do it." At that time, Jerry also had a leadership role in the church. Both Jerry and Laura felt God calling them to go elsewhere. During this time, they both grew in the Lord and lead various ministries. Laura started a support group for abused women which changed her life. Jerry established a group for men in difficult life situations—prison, drugs, etc. It is good to have them back at Cross of Hope.

Laura likes to read theology and philosophy books. Before returning to Cross of Hope, Laura re-explored all the denominations and their theological basis. Laura thinks about these things all the time. While gone from COH, she came to believe that part of the purpose of gathering together at Church is to retell the Gospel as a community for God's glory. This weekly retelling and experiencing the Story recalibrates our hearts toward God.

I have mentioned Jerry and Laura's human children. They also have three horses, two dogs (Corgi's) and currently 16 chickens. Jerry is in charge of feeding the critters. Sorry we don't have a picture..

Jerry and Laura are a fun, engaging couple. We truly are blessed to have them back at Cross of Hope.