

Celebrating a milestone birthday: “Guardian Angel”

Oswald Ragatz

Introduction by David K. Lamb

For more than 40 years, Oswald Gleason Ragatz served as chairman of the Organ Department of the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University. On October 30, 2007, “Ozzie” celebrated his 90th birthday. Witnessing many changes through those years at Indiana University, Dr. Ragatz has also seen many changes in the organ world and in church music practices in the years since his retirement from IU in 1983.

I recently enjoyed the chance to visit with Dr. Ragatz in his home at Meadowood in Bloomington. Full of stories and anecdotes, as always, he was ready to recount his years at IU in full detail. What a joy it was listening to those reflections as Dr. Ragatz revisited the events in his early life that led him to his 40-year teaching position at Indiana University.

“Guardian Angel” is a wonderful exposé by Dr. Ragatz, detailing the sequence of events that made up the path leading him to Indiana University in 1942. In the words of Oswald Ragatz, please prepare to travel with him on this journey to Indiana University.

During my 25-year employment as organist-choirmaster in Presbyterian churches, I never heard the term predestination mentioned from the pulpit. But I understand that belief in predestination is one of the tenets of the Presbyterian faith. My Unitarian and agnostic friends shake their heads in patronizing dismay, when, instead of attributing some event to predestination or to sheer luck, I refer to my “Guardian Angel.” Probably influenced by all those charming angels in Renaissance paintings and those lovely little winged cherubs in the rococo churches in Europe, I personally would rather attribute the chain of events that greatly determined my life to an angel than to luck or to predestination. Luck never did me any good in those very brief encounters with the slots in the casinos in Las Vegas, and of course no serious angel would look after anyone foolish enough to wager hard-earned cash on those automated bandits. And I’m not a Presbyterian. But let me recount those events that directed my life, and the reader or listener can decide, Guardian Angel, Lady Luck, predestination, or whatever.

I guess I must start way back in the midst of the Great Depression and the Democratic landslide of 1932 that brought Franklin Roosevelt into the presidency, and that cleaned out all of the Republican county office holders in Logan County, Colorado, including my dad. The ensuing years found the Ragatz family trying to make a meager living from a small, 40-acre farm at the edge of my hometown, Sterling, Colorado. Farm labor, dust storms, locust plagues, and fundamentalist, straight-laced parents contributed nothing to the wished-for *joie de vivre* of high school student Oswald Ragatz. It must have been about then that Guardian Angel was assigned to look out for this puny kid, whose interests were music and architecture, thus contributing to the general scorn of his macho classmates.

High school days

The angel first appeared in the guise of a high school math teacher, Miss Smith. It was she who set me on the path that would lead to my escape from the dead-end existence of life on the dreary eastern plains of Colorado. It was Miss Smith who asked me to stay after algebra class so that she could talk to me, as she had some very exciting information to impart. My grade average was one-half point above that of one Verda Guenzi, and Verda and I had the highest grade average of our class. I probably should at this point give credit



Dr. Oswald G. Ragatz at the console of the 4/86 Schantz in the I.U. Auditorium at the time of his retirement from the I.U. School of Music in 1983

to the newly hired empathetic gym teacher, who had taken me in hand and had introduced me to gymnastics. This had had a marvelous effect on me. I was no longer the class wimp with C and D grades in gym. I now got an A in gym, which got me that one-half grade point above Verda Guenzi. (Was possibly Mr. Durfee the gym instructor an assistant Guardian Angel? Whatever.)

At any rate, Miss Smith pointed out that the University of Denver gave a four-year, full-tuition scholarship to the graduating senior valedictorian in the six largest high schools in the state. If I maintained a straight A average for the remaining years in Sterling High School, I would be able to go to college at the prestigious university in Denver, a city where there could also be numerous musical opportunities. That put on hold my interest in architecture; the nearest school offering architecture was Kansas U., which of course was out of the question. And anyway, no one was employing architects during the Depression.

My parents were elated by this news, and my mother, who was your basic taskmistress, went into a full cry. For the next two and half years, I became no longer the class wimp but now the class grind, the resident ant being held in some awe by the grasshoppers, my classmates. Verda Guenzi didn’t have a chance, poor girl.

Off to the University of Denver

Now things were getting under way in this chain of events. My dad’s brother lived in Denver and was married to a professional musician, a singer of some note in the city. They suggested that I live with them while attending the University of Denver. Their four sons were grown and out of college. I could pay for my room by accompanying students in my aunt’s studio and eventually accompanying her on singing engagements. There would be other duties—in-house chore boy, chauffeur for Aunt Ruth on occasions, etc.

Sterling, a town of less than 8,000, had a remarkable music program in the schools; the high school band and orchestra perennially won first place in the state competitions. I had begun playing oboe when just out of the sixth grade, and in six years had become quite proficient. In 1938 a symphony orchestra was formed in Sterling to accommodate the sizable number of graduates of the school’s music program who still lived in town and who wanted an outlet for their talent. Though still in high school, I was playing oboe in this symphony that had been organized during my senior year.

Guest conductors were brought in for the three concerts that we played. The most important of these guests was Horace Tureman, director of the Den-

ver Symphony. I don’t remember what we played, but there must have been an important oboe part. At any rate, when I enrolled in music theory the first semester at the university, who should be the teacher but Horace Tureman! And wonder of wonders, he recognized me. After class, he asked to talk to me, saying that he remembered me from the orchestra concert he had conducted in Sterling, and would I like to fill the opening in the Denver Civic Symphony for the second chair oboe? The pay was not great, but it enabled me to pay my uncle for my board. Did my Guardian Angel arrange for all this? But I continue.

I had played piano since I was six years old, my mother being a piano teacher. And I had my first organ lessons the summer after the eighth grade, and became the organist at the Methodist church that fall. During my last year in high school, my parents managed to scrape up enough cash to enable me to drive the 140 miles up to Denver once a month for oboe lessons and organ lessons with the organist-choirmaster of St. John’s Episcopal Cathedral. Now, living in Denver, I hoped to be able to continue organ lessons, although payment for same would be a problem. But not to worry, said my teacher. There was an opening for an organist at Broadway Baptist Church. He told me to try out for the job; I did and got the job. Those four years of playing for First Methodist in Sterling for little more than a Christmas remuneration had prepared me for the paying job in Denver.

So now I had enough monthly income to pay for organ lessons, textbooks, and music. I had been pretty burned out by the tension of making straight A’s during high school, so now I had decided to slack off a bit in college. However, shortly after the first semester had begun, I received a nice letter from the University Chancellor congratulating me on having won the scholarship and indicating that academic excellence would be expected of me. Furthermore, he indicated that since scholarship students were expected to give some services to the university, and in view of my experience as an organist, I would be expected to play the organ for university functions as needed—before lecture in the chapel, for example.

This was OK by me. It gave me unlimited access to the chapel organ for practice and resulted in my being asked by the Dean of Women to furnish background music on the Hammond electric organ in the posh Renaissance room in the library where teas were the style in those days. For each of these events I was paid \$3 and engendered a high profile among the female elite of the student body who were wanting to go to the teas—the girls

of the Pan Hellenic Society, the Associated Women’s Students, etc.

So my fingers (on the ivories) were doing the walking—well, the earning, and my parents did not have to fork over that first dollar for my undergraduate training, just an occasional dressed chicken sent by my mother to Aunt Ruth, but that was it. I felt that I was independent, I was living in a sophisticated environment at my uncle’s, and I no longer felt inhibited by my strict parents’ restrictions—and I had a ball! I was pretty naïve and thoughtless though; things had worked out so well for me, so why worry about the future? Incidentally, I did graduate eighth from the top in my class, due to the chancellor’s veiled admonitions four years earlier. But I must continue.

Clarence who?

I am not quite finished with undergraduate years. The next vignette may seem inconsequential, but keep in mind, it turned out to be very significant. The setting: a picnic in the mountains. Who was there? I don’t remember, just a bunch of college students. What? I was sitting on a big rock eating a hot dog when a blonde girl I didn’t know joined me and initiated conversation. She was quite hep, and shortly had me telling her about my interest in organ playing. At that point, she became very excited and said that I must meet her uncle from New York, Clarence Dickinson, who would be in Denver in a couple of weeks. Her enthusiasm caused me to think that Uncle must be a man of some importance. And indeed the name was familiar to me: Dickinson was the author of the organ method text given to me by my cousin, my first organ teacher, that summer after my eighth grade.

I was only mildly impressed, however, but I did mention this information to my organ teacher at my next lesson. Well, his reaction let me know that Clarence Dickinson was indeed a person of importance, being the head of the School of Sacred Music at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. So, a week later, I was playing two of my biggest pieces at St. John’s Cathedral for Dr. Dickinson, my teacher having somehow made contact with him in Denver. Tall, dignified, with white hair and mustache, Dr. Dickinson was cordial, and, I thought, politely complimentary. But I was still only mildly interested; I was probably preoccupied thinking about the impending fall Pan Hellenic formal. By the way, I never encountered the blonde niece on campus again. Was she my Guardian Angel in disguise? If so, she must have been pretty bored by my lackadaisical lack of enthusiasm. But guardian angels must be patient, and fortunately Guardian Angel didn’t forsake me, as will soon become evident. She just became a bit more devious. So I continue.

Aunt Ruth: gateway to Eastman

I have mentioned my Aunt Ruth previously. There is no doubt that she was my mentor if indeed not my Guardian Angel. She introduced me to the facets of the professional musical world, and she and Uncle Arthur took considerable pains to civilize their shy and unhep nephew from Sterling. By my senior year, Aunt Ruth had sensed my lack of a clear picture of what I was going to do the next year after graduation. My Bachelor’s degree in Social Sciences had presumably prepared me for getting a job in some small-town high school teaching history or social studies. But it was obvious that my interest and talents lay elsewhere—in music, of course.

Aunt Ruth had a former voice student who had gone to the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, and had high praise for the school. It sort of became understood during my senior year



Oswald Ragatz ca. 1940s

that I should go to graduate school the year after graduation from Denver. So I applied to Eastman and was accepted. However, I don't remember now that I was particularly concerned about the financial requirements this expensive school would entail. I guess that I naïvely assumed that it would work out some way. It always had, hadn't it? Of course, if there were sounds of fluttering angel wings, I didn't notice.

I taught some organ students during the summer and played oboe in the Sterling summer band. So I had a little money in my pocket when I started out for New York with my two friends in the model A Ford. We traveled economy class, camping out, cooking our own food, and cheating on entrance fees at places like Mount Vernon. After two weeks of travel and visiting the 1939 World's Fair in New York, we arrived in Rochester. The semester had not yet started, but I went into the Eastman office to see what a student did about housing. There was no men's dormitory, but I was given a sizeable list of rooming houses near the school that catered to Eastman students. The person I talked to about this looked at a register of entering students (probably to see if I were indeed a legitimate entrant), and seeing that I was to be an organ student she immediately told me that an organ job was open and would I like to try out for it?

And OK, yes, a lady had called for an organ student to come to her home and play her pipe organ during tea that she was hosting. It was intimidating that in view of the address this would undoubtedly be in one of the mansions out on East Avenue where the old elite of Rochester held forth. Well, I had brought with me my "tea time" music, thanks to those \$3 gigs I'd played for at the University of Denver—I'd "been there, done that." This gig was indeed in a mansion on East Avenue and was on an Aeolian pipe organ, the instrument of choice in those days for those who could afford such a pipe organ in their home. And needless to say, the pay was considerably more than \$3. And, when I had my audition at Emanuel Lutheran Church, I got that job. So I had money to pay for my room and board—board by eating on \$1 a day at a cafeteria across the street from the school.

Did Guardian Angel arrange it that I got to Eastman several days before the other students arrived, so I had no competition for these jobs and the opportunities to make some money?

By this time things had improved for my parents. Sterling was having a modest oil boom, and new houses were being built. Three blocks of our farm abutted on a subdivision, and it became possible to sell some of our property for city lots. I felt able to ask for tuition money, since I'd cost my parents nothing for my undergraduate education.

Life at Eastman

I found life at Eastman a far cry from my Denver experience. As an undergraduate in Denver, I had played an organ concerto with the Denver Junior Symphony, the Grieg piano concerto with the University Orchestra, and the organ part to the Saint-Saëns *Organ*

Symphony with the Denver Civic Symphony. Big deals!!! Big toad in what I now found out had been a fairly little puddle. My uncle, who was somewhat of a VIP in some circles in the city, reported stiffly one evening at dinner that when he had that day been introduced to someone, he was asked, "By any chance are you related to Oswald Ragatz that young organist?" May I say, that that "made my day." Country nephew, indeed!

But things now were different in Rochester. I was just a new student in one of the top professional music schools in the country. And believe me, there is no place more competitive than a big music school. Nearly all of my fellow graduate students had undergraduate degrees in music, many from Eastman itself. During my time at Eastman I learned discipline, humility, and respect for what the music profession really was like.

My Guardian Angel was no doubt cheering a bit seeing her/his protégé getting his comeuppance. But I was not being crossed off the list that year. Oh no! So I must continue this saga.

About the Lutheran church: it had an organ the likes of which I had not encountered. At that point, the organ world in the United States was just beginning to become aware of a renaissance in organ tonal design that had begun in the middle of the 20th century. The new instruments that were being built by many European builders and by a few *avant garde* builders in the United States were referred to as Baroque organs because the builders were attempting to design their organs on the tonal principles of the great old European organs of the 17th and 18th centuries. The organ at my church was a newly built instrument by the Walter Holtkamp Company, one of the first of these *avant garde* American builders. After a year with this organ at Emanuel Lutheran, I understood how to use it. This experience became very valuable for me, as will be noted later on.

The choir director at church was a talented young man who was the choral person in one of the big Rochester high schools, and his church choir was made up almost entirely of high-school age singers. I was getting some very good experience in choral techniques by observing how Ernie Ahern worked with the choir. I had had no training in choral work up to this point. The second year in Rochester, I actually did some private coaching with Mr. Ahern, and what I learned became the basis of my career as choirmaster through all my life.

One other facet of the Rochester experience must now be mentioned to make clear how the chain of events developed. If one link in the chain had not been there, there would have been no chain. When I obtained the list of rooming houses suitable for an Eastman student, my choice was purely arbitrary (or was Guardian Angel getting into the act again?). The first place I investigated was a big, old, three-story Victorian home, housing a dozen or so men, half of whom were students, the others single professional men. The maiden lady that ran the establishment had a nice vacant room (due, I presume, to the fact that I had gotten there before other students had arrived in the city). It was a congenial bunch of fellows, who all seemed to be on a tight budget, so we frequently ate supper en masse (I could hardly honor the meal as dinner) at the aforementioned cafeteria.

Wilson College

One of the students, a fine violinist, and I became very good friends. It turned out that John's father was the head of the music department of Wilson College, an undergraduate woman's college in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. When John came back from Christmas holidays, he told me that the organ teacher at Wilson College was going on sabbatical the second semester the next year, and his father, Prof. Golz, thought I might want the job as substitute for a semester. Of course I was most interested, and as a matter of fact I went down to Chambersburg with John during spring break to be interviewed. I played for Prof. Golz, and he seemed pleased and

offered me the job. A real teaching job with a salary—\$850 for the semester as I remember it! But that was 1940, and remember, I was eating on a dollar a day, so that seemed like a gold mine. I was just beginning to cope with the competitive stress of Eastman and the demanding teaching of Harold Gleason, my organ professor, so I was very glad to stay on at Eastman for the summer and fall semesters, which enabled me to get a second major, namely in music theory. Then in January of 1941, I arrived at Wilson College, with its faculty comprising chiefly elderly ladies. Now that was an interesting experience for a 23-year-old kid hardly dry behind the ears. It could furnish material for another different document, but that would have no relevance in this tale, except for two non-Wilson people with whom I made friends.

There was a young lawyer in Chambersburg who was very interested in music, and since there were not many opportunities for social contacts with people in their twenties, he immediately contacted me, and we became lifelong friends. He lived with his mother in Chambersburg, and they were frequently visited by his sister Selma, a music teacher in Baltimore and a graduate of N.Y.U. Selma was about my age, and we became good friends also—we dated in fact.

The semester at Wilson College was all too short, and I was having to face a very uncertain future. World War II was in full cry, and I had registered for the draft while in Rochester. So that dark cloud was hovering over my head. But I had had no word from Uncle Sam, so in the meantime I had to hunt for a job. I registered membership with a teacher's placement agency in Chicago—Clark Brewer. And in May I went to New York to interview with a couple of agencies there. But they wouldn't even take my registration. Colleges were retrenching because of the war and were hiring no new faculty.

That was a very low moment in my life. For the first time I was faced with having no idea what to do next. I was suddenly out in the big world. I started

walking aimlessly up town on Fifth Avenue, my mind swirling. I may even have contemplated how near the Hudson River was and how long would it take one to drown oneself. But maybe I wasn't that far down or that stupid. At any rate, by the time I'd walked from the '40s where the agencies' offices were and reached 59th Street and the beginning of Central Park, my befuddled mind began to remember that Selma, who of course had lived in New York City while attending N.Y.U., had at some point asked me why didn't I look into Union Theological Seminary. That had seemed like a dumb statement. A seminary? I didn't want to be a preacher! Far from it!

Oh, that Clarence

But now my tiny memory began to function, and by the time I got up to the Metropolitan Museum, I thought of the blonde at that picnic in the mountains years ago, and her uncle, Clarence Dickinson, who was the head of the School of Sacred Music at—yes—Union Seminary in New York City. With a quick visit to a phone booth, where wonder of wonders there was a phone directory, I determined that Union Seminary was at 120th Street and Broadway. The next 50 or so blocks were covered with considerable resolution, and crossing over west to Broadway, past the Cathedral of St. John the Divine and Columbia University, I found the Gothic towers of Union Seminary and its quadrangle, which occupied two city blocks.

Hot, tired, still dispirited and thinking that this was totally mad, I entered the main entrance and located the offices of the Music School. When I made it known to the secretary that I might be interested in becoming a student there, things began to move very rapidly. I was ushered into Dr. Dickinson's office, where I was warmly greeted by Dr. Dickinson and then was introduced to Mrs. Dickinson, who, it developed, actually seemed to manage the business end of the school. The introductions were barely over when Dr. Dickinson said he remembered my playing for him in

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Oswald Ragatz at the organ in studio MA407

Denver, and that I had played very well. Where had I been since then? Eastman? Teaching at Wilson College? Interesting. Well, of course they would be delighted to accept me as a student working on the two-year curriculum leading to the Master of Sacred Music degree.

I had no money? No problem! The dormitory had two-room suites for students at \$10 a month, and I could work a shift in the refectory for all my meals. And all of their students were placed in churches in Manhattan and in communities around New York City—on Long Island, in Westchester County, in Connecticut or over in New Jersey. Auditions for a job would be set up for me during the next month.

I could hardly believe all this. An hour earlier I was plodding the streets of New York wondering if I should be heading for the Hudson River. And had I listened, I might have heard Guardian Angel wildly flapping wings and snarling, "Oh ye of little faith, you silly twit. Why do you think I had that blonde girl join you on that rock that afternoon in the

Rocky Mountains? And all of that other stuff we went through to get you this far!" Of course I wasn't listening, but I do hope that I had the good grace to think that too many good coincidences were beginning to occur. My parents once had told me that the German name Oswald meant "Chosen of God." What's in a name? Maybe I should have paused to think. But of course, pausing and thinking were two things I'd not yet learned to do.

So I was set for two more years, Uncle Sam willing. I went back to Rochester for the summer to finish my master's thesis. I had enough money saved up from that great salary at Wilson College to pay for a room at the Y, eat at the cheap cafeteria, and pay train fare to New York City twice for auditions.

The second audition was at Hitchcock Memorial Presbyterian Church in Scarsdale, a posh suburb in Westchester County. As it turned out, this was one of the prime jobs the Union students had. I would be replacing Robert Baker, a doctoral candidate at Union, who had just been hired at First Presbyterian in Brooklyn, a real, full-time professional position. I felt the audition went well, but nothing definite was said at the conclusion of my playing and answering questions. I would have a junior choir, a choir of twelve high school girls, and a professional quartet—VERY professional. The soprano had just sung a solo recital at Town Hall and the contralto was singing at the Metropolitan Opera a couple of years later, and several years later I read a rave review of her *Carmen* sung in Vienna.

This would not be the first time I was faced with a task for which I was not really prepared. But I will say, without professing any modesty, that I never ducked. I learned how to conduct from the console by doing it—not that that quartet needed as much conducting as I thought I should be doing. At the end of the interview the chairwoman, an elegant middle-aged lady, said she would like to take me to dinner at the Scarsdale Country Club. That didn't scare me: my aunt and uncle had seen to it that I knew how to behave



Oswald Ragatz with student Kay Greenshaw

at dinner, hold the chair for the lady, use the flatware from the outside in, etc. I seemed to pass muster with my hostess, since she informed me at the conclusion of the evening that I was hired. Eureka! Not only was the salary quite sufficient to pay for the organ lessons (which were outrageously high even for those times), tuition, and incidental living expenses, but even for a concert and opera now and then and a few heady evenings taking a date dancing to big name bands on the Astor roof.

Life in New York City

Guardian Angel now left me for a time as I devoured the life in New York. Our church jobs only required our presence at Sunday morning services, so a number of very compatible friends from Union would rush back to Manhattan by 3 o'clock, meeting at one of the big churches that had afternoon vesper services, oratorios, etc. A typical Sunday afternoon would be St. Bartholomew's on Park Avenue at 3, where the 60-voice choir sang an oratorio every Sunday with a stunning organist on an enormous triple organ—chancel, rear gallery, and dome, playable from a single console in the chancel. Then over to St. Thomas on Fifth Avenue to hear a fine boy's choir sing the 5 o'clock vesper Evensong. Then after a quick snack at our favorite bar, Tops, it was to St. Mary the Virgin Church on 46th Street, where the young avant garde organist, Ernest White, presided over a high-church late Evensong service. When I heard Mr. White play, I knew that I would have to study with him someday—which I did one summer after I had been at I.U. for a couple of years. These experiences taught me more than all the courses at the School of Sacred Music about what music could be in an enlightened church—with money. I HAD A BALL, needless to say.

It was the summer after the first year in New York, and I had had a very lucrative June playing for eight or more fashionable Scarsdale weddings. I was set indefinitely at the Scarsdale church and at Union, and after the M.S.M. degree I could continue working on a doctoral degree at Union, as had my friend, Robert Baker. I had dreams of eventually also moving on to some big Manhattan church. But this had to wait for a few decades for one of my students, who now is at the First Presbyterian Church in New York and is a big name there. Guardian Angel had other plans.

Hoosier holiday

Mail time was always a time of anxiety. Several of my friends had been drafted, but there was no message from the government for me. BUT, there was a letter from Clark Brewer Teachers' Agency in Chicago telling me that there was an opening for an organ teacher at Indiana University. INDIANA? That was just a state to quickly get through when one was en route from Colorado to New York (with the exception of that adventure at Spring Mill Park in 1939). But I could get my expenses paid to Bloomington, and—always on the lookout for a deal—I figured I'd go to Indiana and then on to Colorado to visit my parents. I hadn't

been home for two years. I would go by train and stop off in Rochester to take my orals on my master's thesis. Sneaky. Smart. I wasn't even remotely interested in a job in Indiana.

So that is what I did, and after a night sitting up on a train from Rochester to Indianapolis, and then a bus to this village in the wilderness, I was even less inclined to take it seriously. After a night in a hot room in the Graham Hotel, I wandered out to the campus, past yellow clay around the old business school and the auditorium, both of which had just been completed. With the help of a kind lady who thought I was a new student (my ears were slow to dry), I found the new music building. First I was interviewed by Dean Sanders, a smooth, formidable, sophisticated young man, and then by the chairman of the theory department. Then I was taken up to a small practice room where the only organ on the campus existed. And guess what? The instrument was a Holtkamp almost identical to the one I'd had in Emanuel Lutheran in Rochester. And of course I knew how to handle it. (Did Guardian Angel snicker smugly?)

So I played a couple of big pieces, and because I didn't give a tinker's cuss about the job, I was cool, probably to the point of being arrogant. Consequently, I greatly impressed the interviewers. It was explained to me that there was one organ major who would be a senior. Her organ teacher, who was also a pianist and taught theory, had been drafted. The organ "department" had been set up two years before when one Mary Christena had come over from the main campus wanting to major in organ. An organ curriculum was hastily fabricated, the Holtkamp was promptly purchased, and now they needed a regular organ teacher to get Miss Christena through her senior recital.

I would teach any other organ students that might show up when it was learned that there was an organ teacher (there were nine of them), I would teach two sections of freshman music theory (after observing the chairman of the department teach another section of the same class each day), a music appreciation class for the general student body (there were about 70 enrolled, it turned out), and I would conduct the Choral Union, the only choral group on campus. This would result in my conducting in the auditorium a performance of *Messiah*, with orchestra, just before Christmas. I had never conducted an orchestra, to say nothing of an orchestra with a big chorus of 90 or so singers. But as I said earlier, I was not one to duck. I was new at academia and didn't know that this teaching load was brutal and now would be considered illegal. It was a job, and I intended to be a success at any cost.

But I wasn't offered the job on the spot, which was of no concern to me. I wanted to go back to New York. As a matter of fact, I called my parents and suggested that they come east instead of my going on to Colorado. They would meet me in Chambersburg, where I would go to visit Rudy and Selma Wertime. Did I tell Dean Sanders about this? NO, of course not. (Guardian Angel almost gave

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Dr. and Mrs. Oswald G. Ragatz. Mrs. Ragatz (Mary Christena) was the first organ graduate of the Indiana University School of Music.

up on me at this point.) Three days later, my family and I were at the Wertimes in Chambersburg, when I got this irate call from Dean Sanders wanting to hire me. I don't know how he found me. He probably contacted someone at Union who knew I had a girlfriend in Chambersburg and knew the name. I never asked. Maybe Guardian Angel slipped him a note.

So I was being offered a real job, a permanent job, albeit in the hills of Indiana. Well, I stalled a bit. My parents pushed, Guardian Angel was pushing, I am sure. I thought that surely that draft would get me any day, and a job at Indiana University would look good on my résumé some day, so I gave the dean a reluctant "yes." The Dickinsons called me a day later suggesting that I postpone the appointment for a year, so I could finish the degree, but that was out of the question since Miss Christena would be awaiting her new teacher in September. So after a week in the city with my parents, I was off to Bloomington, Indiana, for an entirely new life, and as it turned out, a wife.

Mary Christena turned out to be a fine organist, and again I was faced with a situation I wasn't quite ready for. But I didn't duck, and she got a performer's certificate with distinction for her senior recital. It was not until after Mary's graduation that the student-teacher relationship segued into a more personal one. After a summer of dating, Mary went to New York to Union Seminary on my recommendation. I wanted her to experience the school, and especially the milieu of New York City and the great church music. However, she spent only one semester at Union, terminated by my going to New York to propose at Christmas. And that event can be subject for another paper—shorter than this one, I assure the reader. We were married June 4, 1944. (I never had trouble remembering that date. The assault on Normandy was to take place that week.)

There is one loose end that must be taken care of in closing: THE DRAFT. During my first Christmas vacation at I.U., I had three recitals scheduled in the East—for the American Guild of Organists Chapter of Baltimore, before the New Year's midnight service at First Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., and in Chambersburg. Of course I had as yet not learned how to cope with the stress of this sort of behavior, and I took sick on the B. & O. train returning from Washington to Indiana. A few days later, my landlords called a doctor, and I was promptly swished off to the hospital in an ambulance with a severe case of pneumonia. (Guardian Angel was taking severe measures!)

I was very ill, and had not the sulfa drugs just come on the market, I might have died. But after three weeks, I was released, only to go back to my room to find THE letter from Uncle Sam telling me to report for induction in Indianapolis. Why had it taken them so long to find me? I had registered in Rochester, giving my address as Sterling, Colorado, but I found out later that my registration had been sent to Sterling, Pennsylvania, wherever that is. And when they finally

found me, it was discovered that I had registered as a conscious objector—and that is another story—so interviews had to be made with all sorts of people in Colorado to see what sort of a jerk I was. (Was Guardian Angel back of all this? Surely not . . .) But now I was going through induction in Indianapolis, then, pale, and suspect. The late January quota for draftees was unusually low that

month, and after the examining doctors took a good look at me and they took a look at my I-A-O classification, I was told that I probably wouldn't do much good for the U.S. Army and to go back to I.U. "and teach them how to sing the Star-Spangled Banner."

So that's how I met my wife. Do I believe in a Guardian Angel? Sometimes I almost think that I do. Maybe everyone has a similar chain of events that direct them through life. They just don't spill the whole tale in a writer's club. I leave it up to you, with apologies for being too forthcoming. ■

What a pleasure it has been to prepare this essay for publication in THE DIAPASON to honor and celebrate the 90th birthday of Dr. Oswald G. Ragatz. This inspirational tale provides a glimpse of the organ and church music scene in New York in the early forties, as well as the documentation of the beginning of the I.U. Organ Department at that same time. When Dr. Ragatz retired in 1983, that organ department that he found in Bloomington in 1942 with the Holtkamp organ in the practice room had grown to a department with a notable historic concert organ in the I.U. Auditorium, two respectable studio organs, and eleven pipe organs in practice rooms for student use. Ragatz built the department to a level where it could take its place along with the other large university organ depart-

ments in the United States. Currently, the organ department of the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University is one of the largest institutions offering degrees in organ in the United States.

With approximately 400 living IU alumni organists, the former students of Oswald Ragatz can be found all over the U.S. and in several foreign countries. Teaching and playing in both churches and universities, these Indiana University organists carry the Ragatz legacy with them in all of their endeavors. We salute you, Dr. Ragatz. Happy birthday and many happy returns.

—David K. Lamb

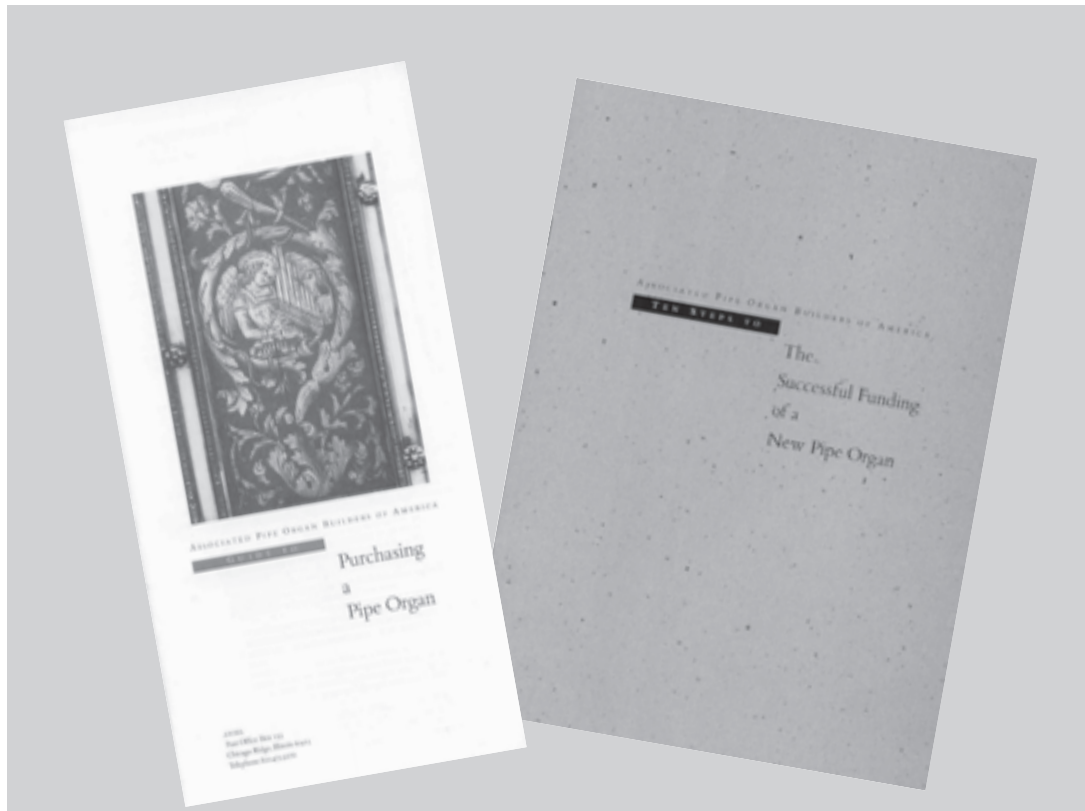
Oswald G. Ragatz served as professor of organ and chairman of the organ department at the School of Music at Indiana University from 1942–1983. Sadly, Mrs. Ragatz passed away after a long illness in 1998. When the Positive division was added to the organ at First Christian Church, where Mary so lovingly played for so many years, the Reuter organ was dedicated in her memory. Dr. Ragatz can be reached by contacting him at Meadowood Retirement Center in Bloomington, Indiana.

David K. Lamb is currently the organist/choir director at First United Methodist Church in Columbus, Indiana. Graduating from IU in 1983, the year Ragatz retired, he completed the Doctor of Music degree at Indiana University in 2000. Dr. Lamb was recently appointed the District Convener for the State of Indiana by the American Guild of Organists.

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