

## Keith Britton



### *The Joys and Struggles of Growing up on a Farm*

Keith Britton lives to help people. As a missionary in Brazil, he risked a lot to do his work, from an attempted kidnapping of his only daughter to losing children to a mudslide on a field trip he was leading. Nothing deterred him from bringing food and clothes to the needy in Rio de Janeiro's and Sao Paulo's favelas, or the word of God to those with spiritual needs.

That kind of tenacity came from his parents, who owned a farm in Kinsman, Ohio. Herbert Kline Britton and his wife Elsie Jane Fonnor, along with their three sons, Lyle, Darl and Keith produced maple syrup so famous that folks from Cleveland would drive more than 90 minutes to Kinsman just to buy it.

Keith, the youngest, was born July 24, 1930, a child of the Great Depression. One day when Keith was about six, he was helping his father plough a field. Keith sat atop one of a pair of horses, who'd been pulling the plow. Herbert had just unhooked the plough when the horses spooked. Little Keith had no idea as he laughed and clung to the horses as they galloped off while his father was dragged along, holding onto the reins for dear life. Ultimately, everyone was fine, even if Herbert's overalls were stuffed with mud.

Keith would always remember those horses, how when it was time to tap the trees, his father had them so well-trained that they would stand and wait at each tree patiently and only advance when his father gave the word. But all that hard work couldn't overcome the economic realities of the Depression, and soon they lost the farm.

Keith's older brothers both served in World War II and he grew up listening to President Franklin Roosevelt's fireside chats. Nicknamed "Windy" because he liked to talk a lot, Keith was always very devout. He went to Bible college and then planned to become a missionary in Brazil. He was drafted, but was excused when he said he planned to be a missionary.

Keith met his wife Lois Jean on a street corner. They were taking part in a youth festival with their church. Lois Jean was the sister of the pastor's wife and an avid musician. She'd taught herself to play piano at the age of 3 and she also played the accordion and the church organ. The couple went to Brazil together and their only child, Linda, was born in Sao Paolo.

Keith never did learn Portuguese fluently, but despite the danger - Linda's attempted kidnapping and the floods that took out one of the church's campers, killing two young girls who were with their group - Keith and Lois Jean tried hard to stay in Brazil. They went back and forth until Linda was 9. That year, there were political riots, and they got caught up in them. After that, Brazil started to require that missionaries pay a \$10,000 deposit, and the family couldn't afford it.

Upon returning home to Dayton, Keith worked for a Christian radio station, WEEC. He was manning the news ticker on the day that President John F. Kennedy was shot. Later on, in the 1980's, Keith sold life insurance. The family kept up their good works stateside. On Sunday afternoons, they'd play music at senior communities. They helped widows, taking them food and making sure they had their finances in order. Keith loved making ice cream for July 4th barbecues. The family also took in children in need on the weekends, feeding them.

Ever the Depression child, Keith would always try and fix anything that went wrong at home - doing plumbing, heating, and odd jobs. But he rarely succeeded. Keith loves being a grandfather to Linda's two boys. He'd treat them like little adults, enlisting their help to fine-tune their tricycles or other toys, or teaching them to garden as he'd taught his daughter. And eventually, he did make it back to Brazil a couple of times in the late 1980's, helping to found a missionary organization called the Brazilian Evangelical Association.