

DON'T **EVER** GIVE UP!

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF **ROBERT HUNTER SR.**



Regular Baptist Books
Schaumburg, Illinois

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www.RegularBaptistPress.org • 1-800-727-4440

RBP5263 • ISBN 978-1-60776-365-9

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FOREWORD

FRANK E. GAINER

ROBERT F. HUNTER and I met for the first time during an annual Fundamental Baptist Fellowship Association (FBFA) conference in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1978. Up to that time I had not met many men who demonstrated willingness to consistently do the right thing even if it meant going against the grain or against the crowd. At that time, doing the right thing meant doing those things that were not offensive to God, or doing those things that are righteous in the eyes of God. If the thing that was to be done even had a hint of offense toward God, Robert Hunter would not partake of it, nor would he be in favor of it.

I observed the character of Brother Hunter and wondered what made him stand out above others around him. Part of the answer to my wonderment lies in the word “brother,” and the remaining part hinges on Hunter’s lifestyle. He was truly respected as a brother by all of us men within the rank and file of the FBFA. To use the expression “Brother Hunter” just seemed more endearing than “Robert” or “Hunter.” We would hear his wife call him Bob or Robert, but the men generally would not call him by those names. Even after Brother Hunter received an honorary doctorate from Carver Baptist Bible College and Institute, many of us were not moved to change the way we greeted him. Most of the men still referred to him as “Brother Hunter” rather than “Dr. Hunter.” Trust me, this was out of endearment rather than disrespect for the well-deserved title of “Doctor Hunter.”

Brother Hunter could be entreated just as easily as anyone's blood brother, and if you were a believer, you would instantly know that you had a friend in him. On the contrary, if you were a pretentious believer and spent time with Brother Hunter, you would soon find that your chemistries did not mix. In fact you, the pretentious Christian, would be the one to part ways because you would quickly notice that Brother Hunter's gaze was on spiritual things. "A man that hath friends must [show] himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24).

Brother Hunter's lifestyle is simple and based on spiritual integrity. He is a humble man, and his life is characterized by love. It is difficult to find fault in him except for those idiosyncrasies that beset all mankind. He is a man of principle, and he lives by his principles in every aspect of life. The good thing is that he gathered his life's principles from the Bible, which never changes. It was that Biblical consistency that I saw in Brother Hunter when I first met him.

He is not much of a prankster, but he is somewhat of a jokester and is able to laugh at himself. The subtle humor presented on the forthcoming pages is so reminiscent of that which the men of the FBFA experienced over the years and cherished so deeply. Also, he can laugh at, and with, others. I guarantee you some good laughs, too, as you read this book. Brother Hunter is pleasant in his demeanor, and as a younger man I was always at ease in his presence and generally had fun with him.

In his own way, Brother Hunter was truly a trailblazer for racial reconciliation within fundamental evangelical circles, but he seldom, if ever, drew attention to himself regarding such matters. He has shared stories of his plight with his associates, but he never expresses bitterness or anger over the unkindness he encountered during his ministry and lifetime. You will read about some incidents as you continue through this book, but you will be hard-pressed to find one occasion toward which Brother Hunter responded unbiblically. Somehow, along the way he mastered the Romans 12:17–21 text. He clearly has lived out verse 18: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."

And a peacemaker Robert Hunter was. He is not a quarrelsome person, and he would not make disparaging remarks about anyone, not even about

those who knowingly wronged him. Privately or publicly, he was the same disciplined man. I had the pleasure of being alone in his presence on many occasions during travel or brainstorming sessions on behalf of the FBFA, an organization to which he devoted a significant portion of his life.

On the lighter side of things, you should know that our Brother Hunter does not care for flying, so we always traveled together by automobile. I was around Brother Hunter at public places such as hotels, restaurants, shopping areas, roadside parks, and even on an ocean cruise to the Caribbean. I had many occasions to observe him at organizational gatherings such as executive committee and steering council meetings, other group meetings, planning sessions, banquets, and picnics. I feel that I can speak with authority to state unequivocally that Robert F. Hunter is an honorable man.

Having the blessed privilege of being a friend, associate, colleague, confidant, and traveling partner of Robert F. Hunter has significantly enriched my life. It is my hope that as you go through the pages of this book, you will find that jewel or nugget that will be a blessing to your life as well.

On February 13, 2010, Robert F. Hunter celebrated his ninety-fifth birthday. God has endowed Brother Hunter with long life, which I believe is, in part, a testimony to his faithfulness.

The pages of this book are sprinkled with candor and humor as Brother Hunter so cleverly chronicles his life's story. He does not preach to the reader; rather, time-tested Biblical truths will alert any reader to the nature and character of God and His Son as the Savior of mankind.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THE WRITING of this book began many years ago, and its pages fulfill the hopes and dreams of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship Association (FBFA) along with its sponsoring churches and their members. Many people desired a book written by someone from among the men considered to be the association's founding fathers. Two of those men, Drs. Walter L. Banks and Richard C. Mattox, preceded me in death before having the opportunity of putting their life stories in print. Those men were giants and left great legacies even though they are not in print. Another founding father, Dr. John C. Williams, is yet alive and is still blazing trails but has not published his life story. I thank these three men for being role models and trailblazers whom I could emulate.

I am thankful, also, for the pastors who have served the association faithfully over the years and for the men and women of our association's churches who encouraged me and even challenged me to write about my life before I passed off the scene of this earthly life.

Thank you, FBFA, for affording me the opportunity to serve as your first executive director and later as your national representative with responsibility for the northern states. The years spent in those positions were both challenging and rewarding, but I would not exchange them for anything.

Thank you, FBFA Steering Council, for enabling the association to help underwrite the book-publishing costs.

Thank you, Dr. Michael Loftis, president of the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism, for your tender heart toward me and for empowering the agency to assist in the publishing of this book.

Mrs. Alice Gainer was such an encouragement to me after I finally decided to write this book. In fact, she was an exhorter, and I appreciate her words, which still ring with me. When I became slack in my undertaking, along came Dr. Frank Gainer, Alice's husband, who told me he would become my hands in getting the book published. I am eternally grateful for the Gainers.

My family history is possible because of the research done by my nephew, Charles J. Weiker, and cousin, Anita I. Burdon. They have searched through archives and records from cemeteries, county courthouses, newspapers, census data, and public libraries for information about members of our family. Many of my mother's ancestors were found in Shelby County, Ohio court records. The Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Library in Fremont, Ohio, was also useful, as it houses all the Ohio census records dating back to 1820. Another valuable resource was the Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana, which boasts one of the largest genealogy departments in America. On occasion, genealogy sites on the Internet were also searched.

Appreciation goes to Virginia Scott, who has a penchant for writing informally and who left few pages unmarked as she edited the manuscript for punctuation and readability. I was pleased upon learning that Jeannie Stephenson was asked to do a preliminary review and edit of the manuscript. When I learned that she accepted the assignment, I was overjoyed. Her past experiences enabled her to make observations and recommendations that quickly moved the manuscript from a homegrown version to a more professional level.

Lastly, I am appreciative of all who prayed, including my wife, Shirley, for the successful completion and subsequent distribution of this book. Shirley not only prayed, but she was a valuable resource to have by my side during the time I was handwriting first drafts of the manuscript. She would then use a typewriter to make the manuscript more legible for reading.

1

HAND-ME-DOWN HISTORY

MY BROTHERS, sisters, and I share a rich and varied heritage. Some of our ancestors were slaves; others were free. Some information about our family is well documented, while other information has been passed on verbally from generation to generation. This has been an integral part of black culture for many years in both Africa and America. Such passing on of information is referred to as “hand-me-down history.” It is generally accepted as fact because we, as a people group, were not known for our writings. Therefore, we have every reason to believe that the undocumented, hand-me-down history of the Hunter family, as well as the documented history, is true.

We are of African, American Indian, German, and English stock, but I do not hold up one group of ancestors above others. They are equally important and equally a part of me. That is also how God views humanity.

All people have sinned and come short of God’s glory, but He declares us as one Body with no partition between us after we accept His Son, Jesus Christ, as our personal Savior and Lord.

We know little about my grandparents on my father’s side before they left Kentucky. We do know that Grandma and Grandpa Hunter crossed the Ohio River from Paris, Kentucky, and entered Ohio sometime between 1864 and 1867. They arrived with two children. Nine more were born to them

in Ohio. They moved from Kentucky to Ohio sometime after the birth of their second child in 1864 and before the birth of their third in 1867. My grandparents were said to have left Paris, Kentucky, to escape slavery. Since those were Civil War years, that is most likely true. But why did they flee Kentucky, a Union state?

It is perhaps not well-known (or remembered) that the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 did not abolish slavery in the four Union slave states: Missouri, Maryland, Delaware, and Kentucky. Those states remained in the Union, but maintained slavery. It wasn't until 1865 and the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution that slavery was finally outlawed everywhere in the United States of America.

Soon after crossing into Ohio, my grandparents discovered that slavery had ended, and they didn't move any farther north. The Hunters crossed the Ohio River with just twenty-five cents, a bag of meal, and a few items of clothing other than what they were wearing. Grandpa set Grandma and the two children on a huge rock near the river and told them to remain there while he scouted a place to settle.

Grandfather eventually chose a spot near Point Pleasant, Ohio, very close to where they had crossed the river. This was just a mile from the birthplace of General Ulysses S. Grant. My grandparents later moved to a farm near New Richmond, Ohio, where they spent the rest of their lives. They first appeared in the U.S. Census records of Clermont County, Ohio, in 1870. My father was born in 1878 and was included in the 1880 census. In 1870, the census classified my grandparents as mulattoes. "Mulatto" denotes a person with one white parent and one black parent or a person who has both black ancestry and white ancestry. In 1880, they were listed as blacks.

My grandmother was said to be the daughter of a beautiful Negro slave girl and her white owner, who came to her cabin at night. At first, my great-grandmother refused her owner's advances and would be flogged in the field the following day. After a great number of beatings, this young woman eventually let her owner have his way with her. My grandmother was born of this forced union.

This story carries unanswered questions shared by many slave families. My grandmother's four brothers and four sisters shared the same last name.

Did my grandmother have the name of a man her mother married? Or was this cruel slave owner the father of all my great-grandmother's children? We don't know the answers. Slave owners surely kept records of their "property," but, except when they were bought and sold, individual slaves were rarely mentioned in public documents.

I am a descendant of a young slave maiden and the brutish slave owner who raped her. No matter what the heritage, everyone has shady—or worse—characters in his or her family tree. But God is sovereign, and though He doesn't cause people to sin, He does work through their sin to do His will.

God detests slavery of any kind. It is wrong for someone of one people group to steal members of another people from their homeland and sell them into slavery. Even when this great wickedness has been done, God, Who is all-knowing and plenteous in grace and mercy, works His will according to His divine plan.

Consider the life of Joseph. In this well-known story from the Bible, Joseph was sold into slavery by his wicked brothers and later became a high official in Egypt. When his brothers later traveled to Egypt—needing food—Joseph recognized them and said, "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life" (Genesis 45:5). Joseph later told his brothers, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Genesis 50:20).

God used the wickedness of Joseph's brothers to carry out His sovereign will.

We have been able to trace my mother's ancestors (who resided in Ohio) as far back as seven and eight generations through six different family branches. Most were farmers who reportedly came from Maryland, Virginia, and Tennessee. We believe they came to Ohio as free colored people and

never knew slavery, because during the years that my mother's people came to Ohio, runaway slaves were not allowed to settle in that state.

In January 1804, the Ohio General Assembly passed a law requiring all free black and mulatto persons to be registered before they could legally enter the state and settle. This registration had to include certification by the clerk of the county from which the free blacks came. Among other things, certification required two white men to confirm that the black or mulatto person was, indeed, free before leaving his or her native state.

The 1804 Ohio law was expanded in 1807 to require that free black and mulatto persons pay a \$500 bond when they registered. It also required them to give the names of two white men who would serve as their sureties.

Family historians only recently learned of these 1804 and 1807 laws. They have begun searching Ohio county records for free-black ancestors who were registered before settling in Ohio. This is a tedious task, as many early records have been lost or destroyed. However, our researchers recently discovered documents for a man named George Redmon, who, having met all the requirements under the 1804 and 1807 laws, settled in Ohio in 1822. Having been born to a "free woman," as it was certified in Culpeper County, Virginia, George Redmon registered to settle in Pickaway County, Ohio. His certification document reads as follows:

The bearer hereof, a mulatto man by the name of George Redmon, about twenty-three years of age, five feet five and a quarter inches high, this day produced and filed in my office the following certificate.

I, John Strother of Culpeper County do hereby certify that the bearer, George Redmon, is the son of a free woman, and that he lived with, and served me from the time he was about two years of age until he arrived to the age of twenty-one years, since which time he has been generally employed by me, and is now twenty-three years of age. He has uniformly conducted himself well. Given upon my hand the 24th day of February 1808. John Strother, Teste, William Allen & John Stone.

We, James Green, Jr., and Jeremiah Strother, magistrates for the county of Culpeper (Virginia), do certify that we have been acquainted with the above named George Redmon, and the foregoing certificate

we believe to contain the truth. Given under our hands this 24th day of February 1808. Jeremiah Strother, James Green, Jr.

I have, therefore, in pursuance of the act of the General Assembly of this Commonwealth in such cases made and provided, registered the said certificate and granted him, the said George Redmon, this copy. In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the seal of the said county the 25th day of February 1808 in the 32nd year of the commonwealth. John Jameson.

—Recorded October 2, 1822, in Pickaway County, Ohio

George Redmon is the brother of my great-great-great-grandfather, Moses Redmon. Since George was born of a free woman, his brother Moses must have been also. By law, both would have registered, but we have not found documents for Moses. We believe that my mother's Ohio ancestors were all free blacks, as they settled in Ohio before the 1804 and 1807 certification and registration laws were abolished in 1848.

Many of my mother's relatives were included in the 1820 Ohio census record, and others in the 1830 and 1840 records. In 1840, they were listed on census records as free colored people. When U.S. census forms were changed in 1850, they were listed as mulattoes.

Census categories change over time. On the early forms, whites were registered as "white" with their country of origin listed by their names. Blacks were first listed as "free colored," then became either "black" or "mulatto." Other terminology evolved to further define Americans of African ancestry as "quadroon" (1/4 black), "octoroon" (1/8 black), to the present-day name of African American.

We have not been able to trace earlier than when our ancestors arrived in Ohio. Some old letters and hand-me-down stories, however, provide clues. A letter to my mother from one of her cousins tells of an English nobleman who fathered a son by his housemaid, a fifteen-year-old girl of African and Native American descent. It is not known whether this nobleman ever knew or visited his son, who grew up to be a leading citizen of Rumley, Ohio. This intelligent, ambitious young man first tried farming, later became a stonemason, and assisted in building the Shelby County Courthouse in Sidney, Ohio. The English nobleman was my great-great-great-grandfather.

My maternal ancestors first settled in Ohio towns such as Zanesville and Chillicothe before moving to Shelby County. Some arrived there in 1830, and others followed shortly afterward. A few in our family ancestry came with land grants signed by presidents of the United States. One of my cousins had possession of two such land grants given to my great-great-grandfather, Solomon Lett, dated April 21, 1835, and signed by President Andrew Jackson. My grandmother once possessed a land grant document for 120 acres signed in March 1837 by President Martin Van Buren.

By the end of 1836, there were so many free black people in that part of Shelby County that they agreed to form a town. The village of Rumley was mapped out in 1837. By the 1840s, it was a flourishing place of about 500 people. The stagecoach made an overnight stop there, so a hotel and livery stable were built. The town boasted a water-powered gristmill and sawmill, a blacksmith shop, a brick factory, four general stores, four cafés, two private schools, a public school, and three churches. Fifty homes occupied by town dwellers and the many surrounding farms were home to the residents of this thriving Negro community.

At one time, the colored people around Rumley constituted half the population of Van Buren Township. A. B. C. Hitchcock's *History of Shelby County* says, "The Colored People of Van Buren Township are as prosperous as their white neighbors. Neither are they behind their white neighbors in religion, morals, or intelligence, having churches and schools of their own."

In 1833, slaves owned by the famous Virginia Congressman John Randolph were freed upon his death. These slaves, numbering 386, first headed for Mercer County, Ohio, but were unable to get along with their white neighbors. There was an attempt to "colonize" them with the Rumley free blacks, but the former slaves met the same fate as with the white residents of Mercer County. Of the 386, only two families remained to become part of the Rumley community. The others moved on to Sidney, Piqua, Dayton, and other cities in Ohio.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, people began leaving Rumley. It was said that the farmland was too flat and wet for good crops. Other modes of transportation made the stagecoach obsolete, so the

hotel and livery closed. The village of Rumley gradually became a ghost town. Only a handful of farmers stayed on, and just one building remained in use: a church. The village was eventually vacated and converted back to farmland, except for that church, which still stands today.

Attempts have been made to make the church in Rumley a historical landmark and tribute to this once-thriving African American village. For a while in the 1930s and 40s, descendants of old settlers and residents of Rumley returned each year for a reunion. They gathered in the churchyard and the surrounding farmland. Dinner, desserts, and soft drinks were sold, and a sermon was preached over loudspeakers to those who could not fit into the church. It was a time for rekindling old friendships and an opportunity for scattered family members to stay in touch. Mother was born near Rumley, so I attended these reunions with my parents on several occasions. They were wonderful gatherings.

My mother came to Lima, Ohio, in 1895 with her mother and father after they left their farm near Rumley. We do not know exactly when my father arrived in Lima, but he appeared in the Lima census in 1910. My father bought fruits and vegetables from the wholesale house and peddled them door-to-door. He met my mother when he stopped at her parents' house to sell his produce. She was in the kitchen making taffy when my father came to the door.

Mama often teased Daddy about their first meeting, saying he had said, "Lady, are you making ta-af-af-affy?" My father and mother were married on April 8, 1913, and remained husband and wife for forty-seven years, until my father's death on November 4, 1960.

I learned from my father that marriage is a lifetime commitment
(Genesis 2:23–25; Matthew 19:4–6).

What am I? Who and what are you? Throughout the years, the U.S. Census Bureau has used any number of labels and categories on its forms to help answer those questions about us all.

Romans 3:10 and 11 say, "There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God." This fact is

true, whether we are free-colored, mulatto, black, white, Native American, Asian, or whatever label is placed on us.

God loves every person who ever was or will be. He loved that little baby who became my grandmother, born after a slave owner forced himself on my powerless great-grandmother. God abhorred that act, but He loved that plantation owner along with those he caused to suffer such humiliation. This might seem incredible, even unfair, to our human minds. But this is a great, great love from a powerful, faithful, all-knowing God. He wants us to respond to this love by confessing our sins and receiving Christ, His Son, as our personal Savior. It is through this act that we become the children of God.

I wonder how many of my ancestors born into slavery responded to the loving call of God. Having worked so hard during their lives, will they greet me in Heaven, I wonder? I also wonder how many of my prosperous, free ancestors might have played the part of fools despite their good homes, land, bank accounts, wealth, or high positions. By not turning to Christ, they have lost the true treasure of God's love and eternal salvation.

Jesus told the parable of the farmer who had a bumper crop. His barns could not hold his harvest, so he tore them down and built bigger ones. When this was done, the farmer said to himself, "And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12:19, 20).

Whether we are beggars, slaves, thieves—or princes among men with power, wealth, and admirers, we are all equal in God's eyes. We are either His, or we are lost.

The promise given in the following Scripture comes from the heart of God and goes out to all people—male and female, rich or poor, of any age, race, or background. "But as many as received him [Jesus], to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).