

The Life of Dick Patty

In April of 1926, Richard Dwight Patty, known as Dick Patty, was born to William and Grace Patty in a chicken coop on a farm just outside of Amity, Oregon. He was the first-born of three children. With his younger brother, Aner, and sister, Lucy Anne, his early years were typical of those who lived on rural family farms in that era – caring for farm animals, cultivating fields, fixing fences, harvesting.

His ancestors had crossed the great prairie and Rocky Mountains on a wagon train in 1852 and established the family homestead five generations before he was born. Since then, the valley southeast of Amity had been farmed, to a large extent, by family members – cousins, aunts and uncles, and grandparents. In his early years, he made his way straight down Bethel Road and left on Patty Lane to attend Patty School, a small, one-roomed, wood-heated schoolhouse tucked into the tall firs. He would later talk about how he learned ahead by listening to lessons given to the older kids. He was an able learner and absorbed ideas quickly, so quickly that he often grew bored and skipped out back to the farm. Dick took to farming with eagerness, aptitude, and an extraordinary sense of responsibility. Even as a child, he had a curiously strong work ethic.

The farm consumed the Patty family during his childhood. But on the rare moments when they could get away, they would follow the winding road to the coast and walk the dunes of Cape Kiwanda or fish the tidal waters of the Siletz. At times, they would head down the gorge to the east and up over the Blue Mountains to visit his maternal grandparents in LaGrande. When he was 9 years old, his mother kept him and the other two children in LaGrande while his father returned to Amity to work the farm. After a year of living apart, she took the kids for a drive down a little road, paused at a quiet passing, and told them she was leaving their father. At the end of that summer's visit to the farm, when she was packing the kids and their belongings for home, she asked, "Dick, where are your things?" "I'm staying here with Dad," he said. He was 10 years old. His family would never again be together.

Dick and his father lived as bachelors for a year and a half before his father remarried. In the remaining years of his youth, they became close partners as they worked the farm together. He grew in his abilities and soon shouldered a grown man's responsibility. He built barns, repaired equipment, harvested by moonlight, shucked hay, milked cows, sheared sheep, and, while other farms were rapidly modernizing, proudly disced his fields with an eight-horse team. He enjoyed making the soil productive. In fact, he would say later that he loved the soil so much he kept a little under his fingernails for company. But it was not simply the work of the farm that held his interest; it was the strategy of the farm. He loved to think about how to make it more productive, how to solve its problems, and how to expand it in the future. Even early on, he was a visionary.

When Dick was 17, he joined the Navy. World War II was underway. Like many young men his age, Dick was drawn to service. The only problem was that he had too few credits to graduate from high school. There had been plenty of work to do at the farm, and he had fallen into a pattern of spending more weeks in the fields than at school. He would ride his horse down to the high school in Amity, but only when he could break away from the farm and typically only in time to take exams, which he still scored mostly with As. The headmaster, knowing he needed a diploma, said something about him likely learning enough good things in the Navy and authorized his graduation. Diploma in hand, he enlisted. After scoring exceptionally high on an IQ test at the Navy intake, he began training as an electrical engineer.

While out walking one evening during a naval assignment in Chicago, he spotted a sign posted on the door of a Christian Servicemen's Center that read, "Free Food." Not one to pass up a free meal, he stepped inside. A sailor at his table shared the plan of salvation with him, explaining how he could know for certain he was

going to heaven. The gospel message was clear. In his heart, Dick responded and accepted a new life with Jesus. This decision would affect the course of his life forever. He was too shy to tell the sailor he had placed his faith in Christ. He simply left after the meal. He would later say how much he was looking forward to finding that sailor in heaven and thanking him.

Dick had always expected to come home and run the family farm after the war, but he sensed God's call on his life for ministry. He wanted to know God's Word and introduce others to Christ. He returned to Oregon. But instead of settling back at the farm, he enrolled in a three-year course of Bible training at Multnomah School of the Bible in Portland. On weekends and during the summers, he hitchhiked throughout Oregon and California, leading Bible programs for children and teaching at country churches whenever he had the chance. He continued his studies at Westmont College in Santa Barbara for another three-year course in theology, Biblical Greek, and liberal arts. He was a capable student, insatiably curious. He found he studied best through deep discussions and thoughtful debates with other students right after class sessions. He also discovered he had an aptitude for leading. He was unwittingly elected president of the Westmont student body without ever running for the position. Someone had submitted his name.

The early post-war years saw a shift of U.S. military strategy. American military presence was now needed overseas to stabilize and rebuild the nations ravaged by war. Dick found a group of sailors attached to a construction battalion based in Port Hueneme near Oxnard and began teaching them the Bible. These were powerful days of ministry – Seabees sitting under Dick's teaching several times a week, often talking with him late into the evening about their lives and God's Word. At the time, sailors were rotating out and back from Port Hueneme to Subic Bay, a major naval station in the Philippines. "Dick," they would say, "We are glad you are teaching us here, but we need you out there. This center needs to be in Subic." God began to shape in Dick a vision for ministry with sailors far from home.

He was a young man, unmarried and living simply. The thought of teaching God's Word to sailors in the Philippines was exciting to him. Although shy with people, he never seemed shy to adventure. But about a wife? Most of his contemporaries, returning from the war, were settling down to jobs and families. In his Scripture reading one day, he found the words of Proverbs 24:27, "Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house." He believed the Lord was speaking to him, telling him to establish a ministry on the mission field first, and then build a family. In faith, he made plans for Subic.

Before shipping out to the Philippines, Dick was introduced to a young nurse named Margaret Olsen. Their paths had already crossed a few times – Multnomah, Glen Eyrie, and a Navigator's conference in California. They were just beginning to get acquainted as the scheduled time of his departure drew near. By the hand of God, his ship to the Philippines was delayed a day. He spent it with Margaret. And then his ship was delayed two days, and then three, and then an entire week. He and Margaret finally had time together, every day awaiting word of a sailing, each day growing closer to each other. Once Dick was in the Philippines, he and Margaret exchanged letters across the ocean for several months before he borrowed a reel-to-reel tape player and recorded his marriage proposal. They were engaged in May. In September, Margaret stepped aboard a Norwegian freighter and worked her way across the ocean to join him. They were married at the Manila Servicemen's Center on the only night of the week the local missionaries had off, Monday, October 31, 1955.

For the next ten years, Dick and Margaret ministered to sailors at the Subic Servicemen's Center. These were years of Bible studies, prayer meetings, meals together, and countless conversations with sailors far from home. As fitting 1 Thessalonians 2:8, Dick and Margaret "shared not only the gospel, but their lives as well." Their home was packed with sailors, some days over 100 at a time, eating waffles on Saturday

nights and learning to walk with God. Of all the years of Dick's life, he reflected that these were perhaps the most visibly fruitful. At Subic, he taught the Bible so frequently that his ability to handle the Scriptures and teach effectively was honed and sharpened. These were also the years that he and Margaret, along with three other couples, started a new mission organization for the military, Overseas Christian Servicemen's Centers (OCSC), now called Cadence International. They began a family of their own. Joyce was born first, and then David and Steven.

In 1967, as the number of ministry centers multiplied throughout Asia, Dick was asked by the board of directors to move his family to Denver and lead the mission from the home office. Their fourth child, William Joshua, was born there. For the next eleven years, Dick provided leadership for a burgeoning network of ministries throughout Asia and Europe. He would spend a good portion of each year abroad, shepherding the center directors. And every few years, he would take one of his children with him on an international work trip. He was fond of saying, "I'd rather fail as a mission director than a father because the mission can get another director, but my kids cannot get another dad."

To make sure his children embraced the work ethic he learned as a boy on the farm, he began gardening with them while they were still young. Never inclined to do things in a small way, he designed this garden more like an enterprise than a project. He arranged for the kids to raise vegetables on nearly every vacant lot surrounding their suburban home, which eventually grew into about five-acres under cultivation. He started raising bees (70 hives) and a few pigs (right in the city). He had his children set up a stand to sell produce to the neighbors. The money they raised financed their trips abroad with him. He wanted them to learn not only how to work, but how to be a part of his life's mission and calling.

It was the 70s. God spoke to him at the start of the decade during a Sunday morning sermon, convicting him that he needed goals for his family, the kind of goals worthy of their lives. He came home, took out a pad of paper, and wrote the ages of his children 10 years from that day. That was all he needed for clarity. He had the family run a vacation Bible school at a country church one summer. They sang in mountain churches while he preached. They planned and held spontaneous worship services in campgrounds while on vacation. His goal was for his children to learn ministry by doing it with him. Dick had no problem setting goals.

In 1979, after surviving a bout with cancer a few years earlier, Dick stepped down from his role as executive director and moved his family to Germany where he would oversee the Europe field. During the next thirteen years of European ministry, his gifts of innovation, courage, and vision were on full display. Under his leadership, the number and reach of military ministries in Europe grew from three to over 30. Under his leadership, Malachi Ministries was established, reaching thousands of young people with the gospel in military communities across Germany. Under his leadership, annual Bible conferences in Beatenberg and Bible camps in Lauterbrunnen were started. Under his leadership, seeds were sown for a future ministry to Eastern Europe called Josiah Venture. In remembering the moment of the move to Germany, he said that he had one prayer, a prayer "that Europe would be different because of the steps of obedience we are taking today."

During his Europe years, the field office was run from his home in the little German town of St. Leon. Dick and Margaret rarely went a week without hosting people at their dinner table, an enduring expression of their commitment to hospitality. One Christmas, they packed 27 people (plus all their presents) into their home. Dick liked to hike and would disappear into the mountains during breaks at Bible conferences. When traveling, he often looked for opportunities to take a "short cut" (which was usually the longest, most scenic route). He had an explorer's spirit. He was a keen observer. He took great joy in helping others see what he had seen, and that went for anyone visiting the ministries in Europe and anyone needing insight for their lives from the Scriptures.

Dick's ability to help people see made him an extraordinary teacher. People would approach him decades after he gave a message at a chapel, conference, or church service and tell him exactly what he had said and how his words influenced their lives. He always seemed to be teaching. He would take you on a journey when he taught. And you rarely forgot the sights he helped you see.

Dick and Margaret returned to their home in Englewood in 1991 and, apart from serving two years as ministry leaders at the hospitality house in Darmstadt, Germany, settled back into their home in Englewood, a pale-yellow house nested on a slight rise, up a curved walk and partially hidden by a gregarious crab apple tree. This was the home where they had had so many previous adventures with the younger version of their family. Dick was fond of saying that life with God is a great adventure. The harder the path, the greater the adventure.

Even though his health wavered, and he and Margaret settled into a slower pace of ministry, Dick continued to be driven by an indefatigable trust in God's purpose and an unwavering vision for God's call on every day of his life. During these years, he sat on the board of Cadence, served as an elder in Bethany Church, visited those he used to lead, and blessed his friends and neighbors with his wisdom, his presence, his vision. People looked to him for guidance and stability. He was a patriarch for many. In every stage of his life, including this stage of gathering twilight, there was ample evidence that "God gave the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:6). It seemed God multiplied the influence of his life more broadly and profoundly during this time than perhaps any before, or at least it felt that way to those who were close to him.

Dick had been told that his heart was failing as he approached his 90s. He was healthy enough to undergo open heart surgery at 87 and recovered remarkably well, well enough to run a chainsaw through the logs of Oregon oak that warmed the house for Margaret, well enough to climb a 10-ft ladder to gather tomatoes from his garden, well enough to mentor a number of men weekly over breakfast, raise a magnificent vegetable garden, and be a sage and confidante and friend to his children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. A few months before his 94th birthday, the doctor gave notice that he had less than six months to live. True to form, Dick outlasted the doctor's prediction by a full year. The Lord gave an extra measure of time for people to enjoy him, learn from him, and know him.

Dick Patty lived to be 95. He had been married to Margaret for 65 years, 8 months, and 13 days, and he counted every one. It was very important to him for people to understand that his life was what it was because of the faithful, steady, and sacrificial love of Margaret.

His wife and four children were with him on his last day as he was gathered home peacefully to his father and the God of his father at 11:57 in the quiet of a July evening, 2021. The bells on all three clocks in his home rang their midnight chimes minutes after his last breath.

He is survived by his wife, Margaret; his children, Joyce Schroeder (David), Dave Patty (Connie), Steve Patty, and Josh Patty (Kristi); his eleven grandchildren; and his nine great-grandchildren.

During the years before his Homegoing, if you were to ask Dick how he was doing on any given day, you would have heard him say, "I'm going to live forever."

Because of his faith in Christ Jesus, we believe this to be true.