Wayne's World

By Rachel Ferguson

Mr. Caldwell's first name is Wayne, but you won't need to use it. Mr. Wayne E. Caldwell is not a man you call by his first name. Maybe it's the way his shirts are always buttoned to the neck, always tucked in; or the way his white hair is parted precisely on the left and combed over the ear, even when he's just doing yard work.

There's something old-fashioned about Mr. Caldwell, something that demands formality. And it's not that he's stern. On the contrary—his face is perpetually settled in a smile, exposing the gaps where teeth were pulled long ago. Mr. Caldwell is all pleasantness of the sort most of us think is extinct. He knows the names of all his neighbors and invites them to hymn sings around the piano in his living room, or brings homemade ice cream to the doorstep in leftover margarine containers. When he wants to contact you, he sends a letter, even if your address is directly across the street. Most days, he makes a trip down his short driveway to place a stack of letters in the mailbox, flipping up the metal flag to let the mailman know to stop… as if he would ever miss it.

Mr. Caldwell lives with his wife, Mrs. Joan Caldwell, in a ranch-style house in a quiet neighborhood north of Indianapolis. Life is routine these days: breakfast at 6:30am, devotionals for an hour beginning at 7:00, then Mr. Caldwell takes to his study and Mrs. Caldwell her sewing room. If they need anything from each other, they send an email. After 67 years of marriage, there's no use shouting, even if it is just across the house.

When you're 90 years old, as Mr. Caldwell is, a quiet, ordinary life can be a blessing, particularly after a life as un-ordinary as his.

I've lived across the street from Mr. and Mrs. Caldwell for nearly seven years—their neat white house the view from my front window—but it wasn't until I asked to write a story about him that I ever visited their home.

I knock on the Caldwell's door at 2:30 on a Tuesday afternoon and it is Mrs. Caldwell who answers, dressed, nicely as always, in a blouse and a skirt that falls modestly below the knee, her white hair brushed softly from her face.

"I'll go get him," she says, and motions for me to have a seat in the living room. Their home is as tidy on the inside as it is outside. The white sofas and white carpet are so well kept I am compelled to remove my shoes. A piano in the corner doubles as a display for family photos—kids and grandkids and great-grandkids. Next to it, an oak grandfather clock tick-tocks and chimes a low melody on the half-hour. Concerned at the idea that I would have to take notes in my lap, Mrs. Caldwell has set up a card table and two chairs in the center of the room.

I hear Mr. Caldwell coming down the hall and he greets me with a hearty, "Hello neighbor!" when he enters the room. He is a slim, tall man—in his younger days he stood a full six feet, and though he may had lost an inch or two over the years, he still gives the impression of tallness. He is dressed sharply in black trousers, a white button-up, and a bright red sweater vest that, minus a bowtie, almost makes him look like he's in a barbershop quintet.

Mr. Caldwell is a little slow to talk about himself; he is so unfailingly interested in others—a habit likely left over from 20 years as a pastor. He asks about my studies, about the nature and due date of my assignments, and I am reminded that he was also a professor for more than 40 years, teaching religion and theology at Indiana Wesleyan University. When he leans forward to rest his folded hands on his knee, I see that pocket is lined with six silver pens.

Mr. Caldwell has held many titles in his life. He was drafted into the army when he was just 19 years old, fresh out of high school and working a construction job in the small city of Salina, Kansas. "I got a letter that I should report for physical examination," he recalls, "because I would be needed in the war." The year was 1942 and the letter, signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, would earn Mr. Caldwell a place in one of the greatest wars ever fought: World War

Mr. Caldwell's army portrait, taken circa 1944.

Two, or, as Mr. Caldwell calls it, "W-W-Two. The Big One."

Mr. Caldwell spent more than a year and a half in Florida, training in Long Range Navigation, homing and rendezvous flying, high-altimeter navigation and, in his free time, Morse code. They were difficult courses and new technology that only a handful of soldiers were able to master. In a letter home, Mr. Caldwell wrote that, in his class of nine, six men had to retake exams. "I do not remember ever having to retake an exam," he adds, though, "so the material could not have been that difficult."

Men like Mr. Caldwell, who showed a proficiency in navigation and aeronautic skills, were being groomed to serve in the South West Pacific Theater, where American forces were staving off the advancement of the Japanese army. Sure enough, on November 19, 1944, Mr. Caldwell, along with 5,000 other soldiers, boarded the U.S.S. Monterey in San Francisco. His destination: Hollandia Air Base in New Guinea. The Monterey departed at 8:00 on a Sunday morning. The sun was just coming up over the mountains, reflecting rainbows in the spray around the ship as it cut through the bay. Mr. Caldwell recalls the thrill of passing under the Golden Gate Bridge, constructed less than a decade before, and the quiet that fell over the ship as the bridge and the bay—and all the good things they represented—faded into the distance.

"Around me I saw more than a few tearstained faces and blood-shot eyes," Mr. Caldwell wrote a few months later. "Some faces had an expression of wonder and bewilderment at the vastness of the sea about us, and the seeming minuteness of our expedition."

The trip took nearly a month. They traveled through New Calendonia, Australia, and finally arrived in New Guinea on December 14, 1944, where Mr. Caldwell was stationed with the 262nd Replacement Squadron. Just three months later, he was transferred again to Clark Air Base in the Philippine Islands, where he would remain until the end of the war in September 1945.

In his memoirs, he writes about his time overseas in almost banal terms—describing the flower and vegetable garden he planted outside his tent, or excursions with his buddies to procure coconuts from the jungle, but the truth was that danger was all around. The Japanese army had occupied the Philippines since early 1941, and their soldiers were still embedded in the jungles. Mr. Caldwell recalls how Japanese soldiers would sneak into American camps to steal food and supplies, or fly overhead at night, dropping bombs on any pinprick of light they spotted. Once, two young boys, members of the Filipino guerrilla resistance, snuck into Mr. Caldwell's tent as he was about to go to bed. The younger one pulled a live grenade from his pocket as evidence of the Japanese soldiers he had killed. Alarmed, Mr. Caldwell warned the boy that it could explode. The boy shrugged. It didn't matter, he said, because his life was just one, but he had killed many enemies.

Like most soldiers, Mr. Caldwell will tell you that the war changed him, but his story is different than most. Rather than traumatic stories of battle, friends and innocence lost, Mr. Caldwell's is a story of finding faith. "But I won't go into detail as to how that came about," he says.

Mrs. Caldwell slips into the room and sits in the corner on the piano bench. Mr. Caldwell, his back turned to her, doesn't notice and continues talking. "It's a long, long story," he leans back and folds his hands in his lap. "And of course, you probably know that ministers sometimes use hyperbole… that they tell the truth, but also…"

"Embellish," Mrs. Caldwell interrupts.

"Oh! I didn't know you were back there," Mr. Caldwell says, straightening up in his chair and smiling. "Have you been here this whole time?"

"No, no, I just came up," says Mrs. Caldwell.

"Oh, well… if you were, I was going to say, did I say everything right?"

Mrs. Caldwell smiles and shrugs a little.

"Oh, well, I don't ever remember that I used much hyperbole," says Mr. Caldwell. "But she says I do. But I tell stories. You have to use adjectives and adverbs and all kinds of descriptive things to make it interesting."

"Well," Mrs. Caldwell says, "You didn't add anything to that story about when you were on that plane and it went down."

"No, no I didn't," Mr. Caldwell says, and he suddenly appears a little subdued. "That's what led to my conversion."

It was Friday, December 29th, 1944, just two days after Mr. Caldwell had taken his very first plane ride at Hollandia Air Base—a thrilling flight over the jungles and the bay that left him all at once terrified and excited to fly again.

It was early in the morning when twelve A-20s lined up on the tarmac preparing to take off for formation training. Mr. Caldwell and his friend Ed Dill, an energetic young man from Michigan, ran out to the nearest plane and to ask for a fly-along.

"Sure" the captain responded, "Hop in boys." But no sooner had Mr. Caldwell and Ed boarded the plane than two gunners came running across the tarmac, arms waving. They needed flight hours, so Mr. Caldwell and Ed got the boot.

Undeterred, the boys tried the next plane, and then the next, until, a few planes down, Captain Moorefield, the best pilot in Hollandia, agreed to take them along. Mr. Caldwell sat in the front with a full view through the plane's cockpit. One by one, the planes took off from the apron, climbing high above Hollandia bay. Mr. Caldwell watched the water flash and sparkle below them and the mountains become miniatures of themselves. They flew in tight formation, with breathtaking accuracy—a thrill for the young men.

They had been flying for nearly 15 minutes and were eight miles out to sea when they were called back to base. Mr. Caldwell was disappointed that the ride had to end so soon. Below him, he could see the planes peeling out of formation and turning toward home. But then something was wrong. Captain Moorefield lunged for the radio so violently that their plane lurched. Below them, one of the planes had turned, but didn't level off. It was spiraling in tighter and tighter circles, nose pointed straight downward. Captain Moorefield shouted into the radio, but there was no response.

"I can see the stricken pilot yet as he must have frantically fought those controls," Mr. Caldwell wrote a few months later. "I could feel the cold sweat swelling up in my hands. Every fiber, every muscle in my body was tensed." There was nothing he could do but watch, helpless, as the plane, with its pilot and two passengers, plunged into the ocean.

It was over in just a few seconds; and when Captain Moorefield flew over the spot of the crash a moment later, not a single remnant of the plane remained—not a scrap of metal or a piece of fuselage, just a dissipating white spot where the craft disappeared into the deep.

After several fruitless fly-overs, Captain Moorefield, Ed, and Mr. Caldwell returned to the base. When they landed on the tarmac, Captain Moorefield shut off the engine and sat for a moment, stunned. "Well," he said after a moment. "Another one made the run today."

It wasn't until the rest of the planes returned that they discovered which plane had gone down. It was the very plane Mr. Caldwell and Ed had been sitting in just minutes earlier—the one that would have taken them as passengers if it weren't for those two gunners who needed their flight hours.

The army would later call it a mechanical failure. Talking about it nearly 70 years later, Mr. Caldwell is still somber. "That's what awakened me to the fact that I needed… I needed to do business with the Lord."

For days after the crash, Mr. Caldwell couldn't eat or sleep. All he could think about was that plane, the boys inside, and how easily it could have been him. He made a list of all the close calls he'd had in his short life and counted eight times he could have died by accident or injury, but somehow survived. He felt miserable, small and, for the first time, even though he'd been a church-going boy most of his life, he felt far from God. Late one night, when all the other men were snoring soundly around him, Mr. Caldwell pulled the covers over his head and, by the dim glow of his penlight, began reading the New Testament his mother had given him. It was the first time he'd read the Bible on his own. In the small hours of the morning, he found the answer he was looking for—John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

That passage changed his life. For the remaining weeks and months of his enlistment, Mr. Caldwell threw himself into bible study and prayer with new fervor. He read and memorized entire Psalms and passages from the New and Old Testaments. He even prayed one night that God would clean up the foul mouth he'd acquired in the military and swears that, the very next morning, he woke up without a single curse word in his head; and he hasn't used one since.

In August 1945, the United States dropped two bombs on Japan. By September, the war was over, and Mr. Caldwell was on his way home.

It was December 24th—Christmas Eve—when he, along with 1,800 other servicemen, finally caught sight of the Golden Gate Bridge again. Even through the fog and drizzle, it was "beautiful." When they sailed under it on Christmas Day, Mr. Caldwell isn't too proud to admit that, "it would not have been hard to cry tears of joy." At the dock in San Francisco, thousands of family members waited, anxious to catch a glimpse of sons, brothers, fathers—all the dear ones who had been away for so long. With his own family still far away in Kansas, Mr. Caldwell lingered on the top deck, watching with bittersweet joy the hugs, tears, and laughter below.

His own reunion came almost two weeks later when his train bore him back to Abilene, Kansas on January 8, 1946. His family met him at the station with all the hugs and kisses he'd missed in San Francisco.

It had been three years since Mr. Caldwell had seen his home. For a young man, three years felt like an eternity. "I was afraid I had lost some of the best years of my youth," he recalls.

So Mr. Caldwell threw himself back into life in Kansas, determined to catch up on lost time. He began his very first Sunday home, by asking a pretty young girl on a date.

Mr. and Mrs. Caldwell have known each other since they were small children.

"Daddy took us to church and there she was," Mr. Caldwell says.

He was just seven and she was two the first time they met and, in their small Kansas

farm town, their families knew each other well. They saw each other each Sunday at church and events in between. She says he used to throw songbooks at her during service. He doesn't remember, but says if he did, it was just because he thought she was an obnoxious kid. She was young, just 14 years old, when Mr. Caldwell was drafted. When he returned three years later, though, "I couldn't believe it, what had happened to a kid," he says.

The daughter of a German father and an English mother, Joan Wiese was a slender, sweet-faced farm girl with high cheekbones and honey-brown hair that curled around her ears. She was shy, with a tender disposition—the kind of girl who would go with the younger children to the outhouse when they were afraid of the spiders, or hold her younger sister's hand throughout the church service to keep her quiet. The first Sunday home, Mr. Caldwell spotted her across the pews, floored that the young girl he left had become such a lovely young lady.

After the service, "I sidled up to my wife-to-be," he recalls. "And I said, 'may I have the pleasure of escorting you to church this evening?" He pauses and looks back at Mrs. Caldwell. "Did you go and ask your mother?"

"Noooooo" Mrs. Caldwell shakes her head.

Mr. Caldwell smiles like it's an old joke. "She was just out of high school…so…"

"I was *still* in high school," Mrs. Caldwell says.

"So that was my first date. I went and…I took her to church"

"That was where we had dates in those days," Mrs. Caldwell explains. "You know, you didn't go to a lot of things. You just went to church."

"Oh, we'd go to town and maybe have something to eat…" Mr. Caldwell says.

Mr. and Mrs. Caldwell on their wedding day, June 6, 1946.

"Or maybe school ball games, something like that," Mrs. Caldwell says. "There just wasn't a lot of activities. Really, the activities were in the church. The church was the social life."

Joan and Mr. Caldwell dated for several months, attending church revivals and other events together. Since she was still in high school, he was sure to return her home early whenever they went out, so she would have plenty of time for homework. They ended each date in prayer next to her living room sofa.

On March 10th, as they ended another evening in prayer, Mr. Caldwell asked her to marry him.

"Yes, I will," Joan beamed. "The Lord knows I will."

Graduation was still a few months away, but in those post-war years, it wasn't unusual for a girl to be engaged in high school. A few of Mrs.

Caldwell's classmates were already wearing engagement rings. On June 6, 1946, shortly after she received her diploma, Mr. and Mrs. Caldwell were married in a small ceremony at her parent's home, surrounded by close friends and family. Mr. Caldwell wore a suit and his bride wore a pastel button-front dress. When the reverend pronounced them man and wife and declared, as was the tradition, "you may greet your bride," Mr. Caldwell shook his new wife's hand. "I didn't even know that I should have given her a kiss," he recalls. "Oh well. I caught up with that later."

Mr. Caldwell might have been a little naïve about romance. After all, before Mrs. Caldwell, he'd never had a girlfriend. Even in the service, when all the men around him were "jumping at anything that had two legs," he steered clear of temptation.

"I said, 'that's not for me,'" he insists. "If I ever have children, I want them to be well born."

Mr. Caldwell uses that phrase often in reference to children: *well born.* And what he means is this: that his children would have a stable home with two loving parents to guide them. He wanted to be sure that no child of his would ever be young and fatherless, as he once was.

Mr. Caldwell was born on November 2, 1923 in Culver, Kansas, a dusty little farm town 60 miles west of Junction City. He was the last of three children, born at home with the help of his mother's sister. "Back in the time that I was born, there weren't any classes in midwifery that I'm aware of," he says. "Women just helped each other. Usually a sister or a mother or somebody." By the time the doctor arrived, mother and son were both resting easily.

Mr. Caldwell was still a tiny baby when his father, a sharecropper, abandoned his family. He has no recollection of the day, but his brother, Elmo, who was 5 years older, shared the story. "My brother said that one day he told them, my older brother and sister, that he was leaving," Mr. Caldwell remembers. "And my brother saw him drive away in a Model T car, and that was the last that we saw him."

He calls it the moment that ended their lives. Unable to afford their home, they moved away from Culver to a ramshackle house, barely large enough to hold the four of them. His mother and sister, Doris, slept in the one small bedroom and the boys slept on the floor in the other room. Their mother took in washing and ironing to try to eek out a meager existence, but life was hard—harder still after the stock market crashed five years later and the poor became even poorer. "I was a barefoot boy, no hope, no future," Mr. Caldwell says. "Nothing on the horizon."

When Mr. Caldwell was seven, a man started coming around to visit—their beloved Uncle John who lived nearby on a large farm. Aunt Lena, Mr. Caldwell's aunt, had died of the flu many years before, leaving John a widower.

The kids didn't know why Uncle John visited so often. "We thought he had just been interested in us kids because he paid so much attention to us," Mr. Caldwell says. He would bring them candy and play games with them, but that wasn't his main intention. Uncle John was quietly courting their mother and, after a few months, she agreed to marry him. She didn't tell the children until the day before the wedding. She knew they would be too excited. So, in one afternoon, they moved from their tiny shack to the big, white farmhouse that would be their new home.

"There were so many animals, interesting things on that farm," Mr. Caldwell recalls. "I was

just overcome—really elated that we were going to be moving in with that uncle. That he was going to be our dad."

Early the next morning after they moved in, before the sun had come up, Mr. Caldwell heard Uncle John downstairs preparing for the morning chores and decided to get up to help him.

"He heard me come downstairs," Mr. Caldwell says. "And he turned around and saw me and said, 'good morning, son.' And that was the first time…"

Mr. Caldwell's voice breaks. He pauses and pulls a handkerchief from his pocket to wipe away the tears collecting in the corners of his eyes. "That was the first time anybody had ever called me son. At least a man." He shakes his head and smiles a little. "There we were on the very first morning, and now I had a dad, too, like everybody else."

Uncle John was a gentle Christian man, unfailingly kind to humans and animals alike. He brought the family to church every Sunday and taught the boys how to work the farm, how to coax crops from the ground, and calm skittish horses with soft words. Living on the farm changed young Mr. Caldwell's life.

"You might say it was a marriage of convenience," he says, but adds that it was also a marriage of consideration and compassion "for three fatherless children with no possibilities," he says. "My mother and him made a beautiful, beautiful home for us."

As newlyweds in 1946, Mr. and Mrs. Caldwell were "Poor as Job's turkeys." But they set up a comfortable home nonetheless. They furnished their entire small apartment for less than $500, purchasing a washing machine, a refrigerator, a bed and cabinet, and even a little dinette. Before long, Mrs. Caldwell began feeling ill, particularly in the mornings. 10 months after they were married, they welcomed their first child, Joy, into the world. They had both been attending the local Christian University, where Mr. Caldwell was preparing to be a pastor and Mrs. Caldwell was studying music, but Mrs. Caldwell dropped out of school when she began showing. "Pregnant girls at that time were not very public in their gestation months," Mr. Caldwell explains. "Just like Mary, the Mother of Jesus."

Mr. Caldwell received his Bachelor of Divinity from Nazarene University in 1953. By that time, the Caldwells had added two more children to their family—another daughter, Eunice, and a son, Phil. Mr. Caldwell was also leading a small congregation that was kind enough to let him continue his studies in between his duties as pastor. He went on to earn a Masters degree, and then, after they moved to Colorado, a Doctorate in Theology.

"Seminary just seemed to reach out and

The Caldwell family in 1953

grab him, everywhere we were," Mrs. Caldwell says. "Everywhere we went, there was a seminary, and he would pace the floor at home and say, 'oh, I think I should go and check it out,' you know… go and take a few classes."

Mr. Caldwell was still a pastor then, but the churches were always amenable to his classwork. "And anytime there was a conflict between school and the need of the church—a death or a sickness—that always took first," he says. "I made sure that the church understood that."

"Well, he didn't have any hobbies like golf or other things that took his time," Mrs. Caldwell adds. "He just loved to study."

He was good at studying, too. So good, in fact, that the year he graduated, his university called and offered him a teaching position.

"I got a call from the school where I had gotten my basic degree and they said, 'we'd like to have you come and teach.'" Mr. Caldwell laughs at the memory. "And I was just out of seminary. I said, call me back in 20 years. I'm not…I have no business teaching. I don't know enough. I'd just been through one seminary… call me back in 20 years."

"I think it was 15," Mrs. Caldwell says from the piano bench, but Mr. Caldwell doesn't hear her.

"Well, time went on and I was enjoying my pastoral work and being with people and visitations," Mr. Caldwell continues. "I was in my office one day and my telephone rang and here was the voice… it was the same man that had called me 20 years before. He said, 'it's 20 years now, today, since I called you the first time… and we'd like to have you come and teach.'" Mr. Caldwell shakes his head and smiles "I said call me back in 20 years and here was this *same* guy who called me back."

"I think it was 15 years, wasn't it?" Mrs. Caldwell says, a little louder this time. "Because it was '53 to '68"

"Oh, was it?" Mr. Caldwell rolls his eyes up at his forehead, as if reaching for a memory way back in his brain. "I thought it was 20. Well, that's part of my hyperbole. Well, any rate, I was a pastor for 20 years. Started in '48 to '68. So we packed up and thought, well, if it's that important for me to teach…at least I had something practical that I could teach the guys preparing for ministry."

Mr. Caldwell, it turned out, had many things to teach the young students at the Wesleyan University. In his 40 years as a professor, he taught more than 25 religion courses—everything from Theology and Ethics to Old Testament survey and Philosophy classes. He has a hard time picking a favorite course. He loved them all.

"I don't know. When I got into a class with people, I enjoyed it," he says. "It wasn't so much the subject as the people I got acquainted with." He thinks for a moment, and then concedes. "But the subject, of course, did entice me also. I loved, for example, the New Testament, the synoptic gospels, the Johannine, Paul's earlier epistles, or Paul's later epistles, New Testament Church… all of those. I loved all of them."

He was such a dedicated teacher that he once taught for a year almost completely blind—the long-delayed side effect of being hit in the face with a baseball as a kid. "He walked around with a walking stick and greeted trees," Mrs. Caldwell remembers.

"It wasn't a cane, it was a gentleman's walking stick," Mr. Caldwell adds, with emphasis.

"Well, my son and I, we would fill him up the night before," Mrs. Caldwell says. "We'd

read him all the literature he had to cover that day, and he has a fantastic memory, so we'd fill him up and he'd go teach the next day. He taught Greek doing that!"

Sabbaticals from teaching and Mr. Caldwell's eight years as the editor of the Wesleyan Church's publishing company afforded the Caldwells many opportunities for travel. They've visited all 50 states and more than 30 countries. The returned to all the places Mr. Caldwell was stationed during the war, and then a great many more—Russia, Nigeria, Brazil, Jamaica, just to name a few.

"And we've been to every continent except Antarctica," Mr. Caldwell says proudly. "I'd still like to go there, but my wife…I don't think she would."

Mrs. Caldwell wrinkles her nose and shakes her head. "Too cold," she says.

If you sit with him a while, you begin to get the impression that Mr. Caldwell's brain doesn't quite work like everyone else's. He's the first to notice things other people might miss—like the precise type and color of a flower on the side of the road, or how many students in his class are left-handed. He remembers things in vivid detail, and can recall small bits of trivia about you weeks or months after you've mentioned it.

Mr. Caldwell collects information like other people collect coins or stamps, compiling long lists, for example, of every car he has owned since 1941, the number of miles he put on it, and the total cost per mile once repairs were factored in. He also has a list of every pair of running shoes he purchased since 1979 and the number of miles he walked or ran in each. When he walks—and he still walks as often as possible, three miles on every excursion—he counts his footsteps.

Mr. Caldwell enjoys collecting unusual things, like the gallstones he had removed in 1984.

"So I know that 1,000 steps on my right foot, I've gone a mile," he says. "Because I know how wide my footstep is."

He has lists of every course he ever taught in 40 years, every book he read in the army, and every morning devotional he and Mrs. Caldwell have done in the past 20 years. He has notes and accounts of all the places he and Mrs. Caldwell have lived or visited, and even a record of the furniture in their first apartment. Sure, it's a time-consuming endeavor to capture all these little details, but after years in school, and then years a pastor, a teacher, and an editor, writing things down is an old habit for Mr. Caldwell. And besides, he explains, there's a delight in looking at that information years later, the lists of all the places and things their memories couldn't possibly hold.

"Sometimes my wife and I will say, 'well what happened? What was this? What was that?'" he says. But looking at those notes and lists, "Over many, many years to see, *these* are the things that have been a part of my life."

"To me, it's beautiful to live that way," he says.

Mr. Caldwell also gets a special kick out of collecting oddities, a few of which he displays for me the second Tuesday I go to visit. He

wanted to show me a piece of cartilage that was removed from his nose after the baseball accident that caused his eye problems, but after 66 years, it's nothing but a small bit of dust in a prescription bottle. From another bottle labeled "gallstones, 1984," he empties two gray moonrock-looking stones, a little larger than marbles. A third bottle contains a handful of teeth, broken and yellowed, some decaying at the edges.

"I have all the teeth that have been pulled except the ones that were pulled in the service," he tells me. "They did not have dentists in the service that did fillings. If a person got a… anything wrong with their tooth…. if it had to be filled, whatever it was, they pulled it out. They didn't want to have any more trouble. So we lost teeth. I don't know. Two or three, I can't remember for sure. But… I don't have those. I have all the rest of them, though."

He thinks it's funny to entertain people with things like this, but he also understands the limits of his collection. "I've told my wife, I said, 'now, at my demise you can lay those in the casket if you'd like, because nobody else will want them.'"

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Mr. Caldwell is that, even after 90 years, the world hasn't lost its sparkle for him.

"The world is a great, wonderful place isn't it?" he says.

He speaks with reverence and enthusiasm about everything—the young man he met at a basketball game the night before, his trips to the local senior living community where he is a visiting pastor, his wife's beautiful rose bushes outside their front door, or volunteering as a tutor at the local elementary school. He still writes every day, too, adding to his lists and records and memoirs.

"I got my hair cut today," he tells me. "Of course, I know every time, exactly when and how much."

He relishes every moment, every experience, as if it was his first, or his last.

Mr. Caldwell says he doesn't have much in the way of a Bucket List. "The things in my bucket are what my wife puts in there," he jokes "Jobs that I need to get done."

In all seriousness, though, Mr. Caldwell says that, these days, he takes life as it comes and listens for God's direction. "I don't have anything that is so urgent that if I don't get it done I'm going to, you know, feel like a failure," he says. His goals are simple: "to keep well, keep as strong as I can, be helpful to as many as I can be."

When it comes to being helpful, he humbly offers some advice to young people: "Remember, ethically, morally, right is always right, even if you're the only one doing it," he says. "Wrong is always wrong, even if everyone else is doing it."

On a more practical note, he advises everyone to buy a dictionary. "An English dictionary. Unabridged," he says, and adds that it should be updated frequently. "If you don't keep up with the parlance of your culture and of your generation, you're going lose out, at least on some very interesting things."

Mr. Caldwell, it seems, has not missed out on many interesting things; And he has the big beautiful life to show for years of taking his own advice, to "live at the highest level you can live."