

## **Life Sketch of Samuele Bacchiocchi**

Samuele Bacchiocchi, or as he preferred to be known, "brother Sam," was born on January 29, 1938, in Rome, Italy, a stone's throw from the Vatican.

The oldest of 5 siblings, Sam grew up in a humble and religious household where his father, Gino, and mother, Evelina, worked hard to bring up their children in the love and fear of the Lord.

A year before Sam was born, his father, who worked as a mason and had only a 3rd grade education, received a Bible from a Waldensian acquaintance. Upon studying it he became convinced that the Sabbath was the true day of worship. From that point on, the family independently kept the Sabbath, which meant that, among other things, Sam did not attend school on Sabbath.

Because of his convictions, Sam was derisively called "il judeo" or "the jew" and was mercilessly ridiculed and rejected by both classmates and teachers. Eventually, one of Sam's teachers said that unless he managed to produce a note from a doctor excusing his absences, he would fail his courses. Quite resourcefully, his mother was able to procure a medical note from a doctor which stated that "Samuele Bacchiocchi's mind was incapacitated on the Sabbath." (Little did his teacher...or anyone... suspect that years later, it would be precisely on the Sabbath that Sam's mind would be the most inspired as he spoke to thousands around the world.)

In addition to the harassment and emotional bombs Sam had to contend with at school, this was World War II, and there were plenty of real-live bombs that threatened their safety. During the many air raids, Sam and his family were forced to take refuge in caves for days at a time.

Indeed Sam's childhood was a difficult one. He often recalled how he never celebrated a birthday nor received presents. His most treasured childhood "toy" was one earned by his own sweat and ingenuity. Sam would accompany his father to his construction sites and hunt for used nails and straighten them out. After

finding and straightening several buckets of nails, he sold them and earned enough money to buy himself an old rusty bicycle.

This tenacity for hard work continued into his teen years where, in order to pay for his schooling, he took up colporteur along the Adriatic coast. Often he was chased out of town by the Catholic priests. However, when he had a good day, he would reward himself with pastries or ice cream, knowing he would work it off during his rounds the next day.

Apparently he had many good days because he was able to earn the tuition for himself and his sister, Maria, to attend Villa Aurora, the Adventist academy in Florence. After high school graduation, he attended Newbold College in England, once again canvassing to earn not only his tuition, but also that of his sister, Maria, his brother, Paolo, and eventually his fiancée, Anna Gandin.

One downside of the colporteur was that the weight of the books caused a painful back injury for which Sam was required to have a cast put on his torso. Long before the cast was to come off, Sam, during a game of volleyball, developed an unbearable itch and taking matters into his own hands, resourcefully sawed the cast off himself!

In 1960, at the age of 22, Sam earned his Bachelor of Arts from Newbold College and came to Andrews University to work on two masters, one in Church History and another in Divinity.

While at Andrews, Sam continued to colporteur to earn his way through school. Amidst his work and studies, one of his few diversions was playing volleyball for which his team won an intramural volleyball championship.

An even greater victory came in the middle of his second year of studies, when on December 21, 1961, he walked his sweet heart, Anna Gandin, down the aisle of the Seminary chapel.

In February 1964, after completing his studies at Andrews University, Sam and Anna left for Kuyera, Ethiopia, where Sam had accepted a call to teach Bible and history at the Seventh-Day Adventist Junior College. Sam and Anna served the Lord there as missionaries for five and a half years. During their first year in

Ethiopia, they were blessed by God with a precious little girl, Loretta. Not being acquainted with many newborn physiques, Sam's aesthetic eye became concerned with his baby's flat nose. Immediately he began to inquire of the doctors if there was a plastic surgeon in the area who could straighten it out. Fortunately, they dissuaded him of the futility of this, and assured him that his baby's nose would soon straighten out, which it, of course, did.

Early on in Kuyera, Sam became concerned because many of the students were unable to pay for their tuition. One day he noted a peculiar straw growing in the field and was told it was broom grass. Many years earlier it had been used to make brooms, but now nobody knew or remembered how this was done, so the broom grass would just sit there, unused, year after year. Now, Sam had never made a broom before, but he was determined that the school would make brooms again. He went into town, purchased a broom, took it apart and figured how to reassemble it. He taught this to the eager students who now had a way to earn money for their tuition!

Besides this successful broom making-business for the college, Sam studied how to make desks and chairs from wood and metal piping. After preparing a prototype, he obtained his first order and thus began the college's desk-and-chair factory, which eventually necessitated a missionary to be brought to Ethiopia to run the business. Who would have imagined that these businesses, begun by a Bible worker, would enable the college in Kuyera to be debt free and allow many students to afford their tuition!

After two years in Ethiopia, Anna became pregnant with their second child, Daniel, which required the addition of another room to their home. This Sam took upon himself with his usual can-do spirit. Since the college did not have a carpenter's level to ensure that the walls would be straight, a plumb line was needed. Sam, practical as ever, scavenged until he found what appeared to be a plumb-bob which was missing a hook. Sam immediately had the idea to weld on a hook. During the welding, this "plumb-bob" revealed that it was actually a World War II mortar shell as

it exploded in his hand! Immediately it severed his right index finger and greatly damaged his right thumb, right middle finger, and various parts of his body. Miraculously, God saved Sam from the blast and preserved him during the harrowing 2-hour trip to the nearest hospital.

The physician wanted to amputate the damaged fingers, but Sam, not willing to give up, persuaded the doctors to do their best to keep the remaining fingers even though he was warned that gangrene would most likely set in, requiring the amputation of his entire arm. At this time Sam prayed to God saying that if He saved his right hand, he would use it to glorify the Lord through his writing. God chose to perform the miracle and Sam renewed his dedication of service to the Lord, which became his tireless passion to the end.

After concluding his missionary service in Ethiopia, Sam was eager to continue his education. Although he had been accepted to Yale University to do his doctorate, an Italian Catholic priest Sam had befriended in Ethiopia convinced him to apply to the prestigious Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Italy. After an extensive interview process, Sam became the first non-Catholic to be admitted to the Pontifical Gregorian University in over 450 years of its history.

Beginning in 1969, Sam spent the next five years at the Gregoriana working toward a Doctoratus in Church History. During his many years of being taunted as "il judeo" for his Sabbath beliefs, Sam had developed an intense passion for defending Sabbath observance as the true biblical day of worship, honored by Jesus himself and the apostles after him. Now he had access to the rich history in the Catholic archives, and he poured his heart and soul into his research.

When Sam was admitted to the Gregoriana, he was told that under no condition was he to discuss his Adventist faith...unless asked. Because Sam dressed differently from his classmates, all of whom were priests of various Catholic orders, he was often asked, "of which order are you?" He would love to jokingly tell them that he was of the "Adventist order," which then led to many conversations about Sam's Adventist faith. Midway

through his studies in Rome, Sam's third child, Gianluca, was born. Since Sam had a growing family to support, in addition to the expense of his doctoral studies, he continued his entrepreneurial skills in Rome by developing and selling real estate.

His family often quipped that Sam had the "midas touch" where God blessed him so that everything he touched turned to "gold." In 1974 this became literally true as Sam's hard work and dedication to prove the veracity of the biblical seventh-day Sabbath won him a gold medal! Pope Paul VI awarded Sam a gold medal for attaining the academic distinction of *summa cum laude* for his class-work and his doctoral dissertation, which was translated into English and published in 1977 as, *From Sabbath to Sunday*. This would become his defining work.

At graduation, Sam offered to host the graduation celebration at his house since, as the only family man among a sea of celibate priests, he was the only student with a house. Considering this was Italy, and knowing they did not share the same health convictions, he informed everyone that alcohol would not be provided. His classmates responded that it would not be a problem. Little did Sam know that they would be bringing their own! Mamma Mia!!!

Sam accepted an invitation to teach at Andrews University, in Berrien Springs, Michigan. In 1974 he and his family arrived in the United States and were much delighted to be greeted with fanfare and fireworks. It was the 4th of July!

Sam served at Andrews for 26 years as Professor of Theology and Church History until his retirement from teaching in July 2000. Over the past 30 years, he contributed numerous articles to religious journals and magazines and authored 17 books, which have been favorably reviewed by many scholars of differing persuasions. In addition, he published over 200 Endtime Issues newsletters that circulated to nearly 40,000 readers. Sam also traveled extensively around the world, lecturing and giving seminars at universities, theological seminaries, professional meetings and churches...where he always reminded folks that "a week without the Sabbath is like spaghetti without the sauce."

Sam was a unique theologian, in his writing he left off the

usual jargon employed by the erudite and was able to present grand truths in plain and accessible language. In his speaking, Sam's humorous, down-to-earth style, seasoned with a charming Italian accent and expressions, captivated his listeners. That, combined with his ability to remember names and faces from years past, won the hearts of many.

In order to make sure that his books touched and changed as many lives as possible, Sam developed "Biblical Perspectives" as a means to publish and print his books. These books have been a spiritual storehouse not just to Seventh-Day Adventists, but also to many people of other denominations. In fact, after reading Sam's books, many non-Adventist congregations and church leaders have come to accept a number of biblical truths that Sam championed, among them, the state of the dead and the biblical Sabbath.

Needless to say, along with the limelight and renown that Sam's work brought, he also received his fair share of criticism and attacks. However, he was not one to hold a grudge. As a young boy, his father had taught him that he had to stand up for what he believed in, even amidst the jeers and taunts of those around him. Sam knew in Whom he believed and his unshakeable faith in God allowed him to press on, earning him the title of the "eternal optimist" among his family.

In February 2007, just one week after his 69th birthday, Sam was diagnosed with colon cancer, which had metastasized to his liver. At the time of diagnosis his liver had stage 4 cancer. Sam prayed for God to extend his life so that he could write his "legacy to the church," his last and greatest contribution. In between his microspheres treatments and chemotherapy, he immersed himself in researching and writing. In March 2008, he completed the book and held a moving dedication service, where he thanked God for allowing him the time and energy to write, "Popular Beliefs: Are They Biblical?"

Just 11 months ago, Sam celebrated his 70th birthday. His wife and children held a surprise birthday party in his honor. This was the first, and sadly the last birthday party Sam ever celebrated. Just three weeks ago, while giving a seminar in Eng

land, Sam took ill. Once back home, he grew progressively worse and was taken to the emergency room on Thursday, December 11. During his lucid moments, Sam would look at the doctors and nurses and give them a big smile, genuinely thanking them for their attentions. His oncologist remarked that in the nearly two years since his diagnosis of cancer, Sam had produced more than most people do in a lifetime.

During the early Sabbath hours of December 20, Sam passed away. He was surrounded by his faithful wife of nearly 47 years (the following day was their anniversary), and by his three children. Although thousands knew him as an unrelenting scholar and preacher, these four knew him as a loving and caring husband and father, a powerful force of integrity and optimism that they had learned to lean on. Though grieved, they each cling to the promise of Christ's soon return when they will see their dear husband and father once again. Until that day, they vow to carry his legacy, wholeheartedly devoting themselves to the Lord's work, eager to hasten his return. What a day of rejoicing that will be!