

The Private Life

The Graham children learn to take care of each other. There are few other youngsters in neighborhood.



THE ONLY MEMBER of the Billy Graham family in Montreat, N. C., who doesn't study the Bible regularly is an awe-inspiring animal named Belshazzar, who frequently strains the spiritual atmosphere of the Graham household with his inability to distinguish friend from foe.

Shortly before the Grahams moved into their new home in the heart of the Carolina hill country, Ruth Graham received a terse note from a neighbor:

"I would like you to know that last night I barely made my front door before your beast tried to take the seat out of my trousers."

Not the least of the reasons why the Grahams were glad to get into their new home was the restricted field it offers Belshazzar—a 140 pound, pure white dog of the rare Great Pyrenean breed—for making unsocial contacts. There were other reasons, too. The Grahams, who now have five children, had long since outgrown their old quarters adjacent to the Presbyterian conference grounds in Montreat. And the old Graham home, exposed to public view as it was, had turned into a mecca for curious motorists, celebrity-conscious hitchhikers and bus loads of sight-seers.

Evangelist Billy Graham doesn't get to spend much time at home because of the demands of his work. When he's there, he likes to enjoy his family and pursue his theological studies in peace and quiet. This was increasingly difficult when, every time Billy raised a window shade or opened the front door, he found himself face-to-face with a passel of tourists or an indignant trespasser who had just tangled with Belshazzar.

So two years ago, the Grahams moved into a new home, paid for by hundreds of well-wishers sensi-

tive to the needs of Billy and his family. Reached only by a tortuous mile-and-a-half of unimproved road, it provides a cloistered contrast to the carnival surroundings of the Graham crusades.

A visitor to Montreat has difficulty getting directions to the home of its most eminent citizen. "The townspeople," says Jim Moore, Graham's secretary, chauffeur, and general aide-de-camp, "really protect Billy. They feel he deserves some privacy for the few months he's at home, and they give it to him."

There's nothing cloistered about the Graham family, though. Seen outside his evangelistic trappings, Billy Graham might be taken as the highly successful vice-president for sales of a large corporation. He is imposing, standing six-foot-two; he is handsome in a curly-haired, boyish sort of way; he has tremendous charm and amiability; and he has the happy facility of being completely self-possessed and at ease in any surroundings, encouraging these same qualities in anyone he meets. Only his eyes belie this picture of easy amiability; they are deeply blue, intense, almost fanatical, and they burn with a zeal which isn't always reflected in the light-hearted conversation he makes so well.

The rest of the Graham family also operate on the theory that God never intended His children to be dour or straight-lipped about their daily living. The Graham home is run strictly on the Biblical principles which Billy Graham preaches so earnestly; but the Grahams have fun at it.

RUTH DOESN'T conform to the popular prototype of the ascetic wife of an evangelist. She's decidedly attractive, wears clothes well and smartly (although she makes most of them herself),

Evangelist Billy Graham and wife, Ruth.



The nation's leading evangelist doesn't get to spend much time with his family; but when he does, they command his full attention.



The old Graham home (background) attracted too many sight-seers. Billy points out site of their new home to (l to r) Anne, Mrs. Graham, Ruth, Virginia, and Franklin.

of Billy Graham

by Joseph N. Bell

Belshazzar is only unfriendly member of household.



is lucid, well-educated and doesn't always agree with her husband on points of theology. She's never been baptized—which offends Billy's Baptist sensibilities so much that he has a standing offer of \$100 to any minister able to convince her she should take this step. The chances are remote that Billy will ever have to pay off.

When Ruth accompanied Billy to England a few years back, he suggested that the more conservative church people in England might object to her wearing lipstick. Ruth replied: "It doesn't seem to me to be a credit to Christ to be drab. And it's not fair to the people who have to look at you."

In the Graham home, the Bible stays open in the kitchen all day long, every day. Whenever she has a spare moment, Ruth can be found reading it. She is equal to most problems which come up at home in Billy's absence, but occasionally she hits a crisis which requires a masculine hand.

Last year, for example, the Grahams adopted a German police dog to keep Belshazzar company. Belshazzar was outraged, and after a few honest attempts to make friends, the police dog ignored him. Relations deteriorated steadily until the inevitable clash. When it came, it was bloody, and Ruth had to watch helplessly while the two mastodons almost killed each other. Happily, both dogs survived, and Ruth regretfully had to send the police dog to greener pastures.

Brooding about this, Billy said of Belshazzar: "I guess he's strictly a one-dog dog."

Belshazzar also gave the intrepid Ed Murrow a hard time when the Grahams were the subject of one of his "Person-to-Person" shows. Throughout the rehearsals, the ubiquitous Belshazzar thrashed

among the cables and cameras, wagging his tail furiously and knocking helter-skelter all kinds of sensitive apparatus. The technicians appealed to Murrow for help, and Ed reluctantly banished Belshazzar as too unpredictable for live television.

Billy Graham almost always has part of his family with him during his crusades. But they are never thrust forward. When Ruth is along, the children at home are looked after by Ruth's parents, who live close by in Montreat.

The Grahams are very close as a family. ("I never preach a sermon," says Billy, "without discussing it first with Ruth.") Because Montreat is small and populated mainly by retired missionaries, the children have few neighborhood friends their own age. They are also rather isolated in their mountain retreat, except during the Summer months when the hills are full of children attending the religious conference held in the area. As a result, the Graham children have become self-sufficient and do many things together as a family unit—especially when Billy is home.

"He really has fun with his kids," one of his staff members told me.

The newest Graham child, Nelson, was born early this year. Because of the baby, Ruth was unable to be with Billy on his California crusade—the first one she has missed completely. Virginia (Gigi), 12; Anne, 9; Ruth (Bunny), 7; and Franklin, 5, are the other Graham children. All except young Franklin have accompanied their father on one of his crusades. Franklin will get his turn next year when Billy expects to take him to Australia.

The Grahams have disciplinary problems, just like any other parents.

"But," says Billy, "Ruth takes care of most of the discipline. I'm gone so much that I hate to come home just as a disciplinarian."

"That may be so," said Virginia, who was listening, "but he gets in on it pretty often, too."

"We try to make the discipline fit the child," Billy explained. "They can't all be handled the same way. But there are three things we don't tolerate with any of them: talking back to their parents; deliberate disobedience; and not telling the truth."

Although they have television in their home, it is supervised and rationed for the children. On school nights (the girls go to a private school in Asheville), each Graham child is allowed one half-hour program. On week ends and during the Summer, this is extended to two programs per evening, provided they are on the Graham "approved list."

The Grahams also have some definite ideas on

how to bring up teen-agers—ideas they plan to practice on their own children.

"Except for group parties," says Billy, "I think that 16 is young enough for children to start dating. And I don't think they should get involved with going steady before they're 20, at least. Going steady is caused by insecurity and lack of parental affection. College is soon enough for a serious love affair."

BILLY GRAHAM is no do-it-yourselfer around home. "The only job like that for which I have any facility," he told me, "is milking cows, and there isn't much demand for that around our house. Besides, Ruth is so good at odd jobs, I don't need to know how."

This is no rationalization on Billy's part. The astounding Ruth Graham is an accomplished electrician, plumber, and painter—in addition to handling a sewing machine like a professional. For several years before the Grahams built their new home, Ruth clomped about the nearby hills—using her Jeep where she could and walking where the Jeep wouldn't go—searching out abandoned log cabins. She bought several of these relics for almost nothing and used the logs to make up the façade of the new Graham residence.

The interior carries along this early American motif—perhaps even carries it too far, Billy says.

"I still don't think there's a really comfortable chair in the place," he says stubbornly, "but I like it much better now than I did at first. One thing I insisted on from the beginning: I gave Ruth her way in the rest of the house as long as she fixed up my study comfortably."

The interior floors are of rough-hewn boards, the walls wood-paneled, and the furnishings mainly early American discards which Ruth rescued from all over the country, repaired, refinished, and put to use in the Graham home. Even the rail fence around the house was resurrected from an old Carolina cabin which Ruth purchased for \$50.

The Graham family finances are handled entirely by Ruth. Billy's salary of \$15,000 per year—paid by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Assn. of Minneapolis—goes directly to Ruth for the operation of the Graham household. Billy carries only \$100 or so in pocket money with him. All his expenses are paid on the road, either by the association or the local group sponsoring the crusade. Money that Billy makes from such outside activities as magazine writing is contributed to the association or to some favorite charity or religious activity.