

Taste

and see...

being a record of the
memorable moments
of the 'miller mob'

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tasteandsee

O taste and see that the Lord is good
David's advice in Psalm 34 : 8

write this down for the next generation
so that people not yet born will praise God
David Psalm 102 : 15 'The message'

preface

We've all got a story to tell inside of each of us is a book !

These are fragments of our past stories

Many of these stories have been told (and re-told on request) to the grandchildren as ' bedtime stories' when they were young and stayed overnight with us, and so were written down principally for their benefit in later years. To us and our family / whanau they are all a part of our 'heritage', realising that without recording such incidents they can simply slip into the 'abyss of time' and be lost forever, and the people involved simply become names on the family tree, or photos in the photo-albums.

After initially writing down these 'memorable moments' of our past they were passed to the grandchildren and digested with relish. So much so, that we wondered if there were other relatives and family friends, and even beyond, who may be interested in these events and biographical notes, and just what factors influenced our 'belief system'.

They are recorded simply and honestly, even transparently, as they actually happened, without any effort to embellish or glamorise them in any way.

So, these stories are 'for real', as they truly occurred to us over a span of many years and decades.

In my youth, I always enjoyed a good 'saga' , perhaps you will to ?

RHM

foreword

Have you ever been really hungry ? I mean really famished ?
And crept in to the kitchen to see what was cooking for the next meal ?
And put your finger in the pot, or taken a spoonful of what's being prepared ?
And relished the taste, and smacked your lips in keen anticipation of the meal ?

I think that that is exactly what God has in mind and encourages us to do
in the passage where the title of this book is taken from - taste and see
a hungry famished soul experiencing the delight of anticipating a nourishing
meal, clamouring for a meal that will really satisfy the deep hunger and
craving within.

Someone once said that within each of us is a vacuum - created by God
for God himself, which only he can fill.

Ah, to taste and experience his goodness in the many varied aspects of living ..
that is the theme of this little book.
To believe that He is, and that he intervenes in the ordinary details of life
and our living, often when we least expect it !

FORE-KNOWLEDGE
PRE-DESTINATION
ELECTION

All of these theological sounding words blur in to our own unique experiences
of his goodness, his mercy and his ever watchful love and care.

This is merely the honest record of 2 people's individual and then married
lives experiences.

To encourage you also to 'pant after him, as the deer pants for the cool
sweet water-brook'

To also TASTE and SEE how he satisfies !
RHM

index

| chapter | | page |
|---------|-----------------------|------|
| | RAY | |
| 1 | roots | 5 |
| 2 | new beginnings | 14 |
| 3 | sleepless in Roskill | 17 |
| | JAN | |
| 4 | the Aussie Girl | 20 |
| 5 | rescue | 24 |
| 6 | across 'the ditch' | 26 |
| 7 | healing | 28 |
| | TOGETHER | |
| 8 | marriage | 30 |
| 9 | honeymooning | 34 |
| 10 | a home | 39 |
| 11 | boots 'n all | 44 |
| 12 | stutter | 46 |
| 13 | erebus | 49 |
| 14 | the mob | 52 |
| 15 | Nana | 57 |
| 16 | Effie | 59 |
| 17 | Exodus | 66 |
| 18 | a rainbow day | 70 |
| 19 | lost and found | 76 |
| 20 | battle-cry | 77 |
| 21 | renting | 80 |
| 22 | bible-in-schools | 81 |
| 23 | prison (pareremoremo) | 86 |
| 24 | masseuse | 90 |
| 25 | Lord, luv a duck | 91 |
| 26 | of trailers | 96 |
| 27 | leadings | 100 |
| 28 | giving | 106 |
| 29 | summary | 107 |

Ray

roots

1

Of all the days to have as a birthday - 31 December, the last day of the year.

and in 1939 - the last day of the decade, just made it into the Thirties !
The year the Second World War started.

Third child of John Adamson Miller a third generation farmer, with an older brother Adie, and an older sister Greta

Born at Milton, a small rural town in South Otago, of about 3,000 population, at the centre of the fertile Tokomairiro plain.

A farming district, mainly dairying until the World War 2, then the farmers changed over to sheep or beef and their lesser demands.

Our 120 acre (50 hectares) farm, was between Tokoiti and Moneymore, about 5 kilometres to the East of Milton township, just under the foothills that surrounded the plains, but with the Tokomairiro river as its western boundary. Generally flat and low-lying, the river brought a recurring problem - flooding - the house being built on the highest area of ground and often the only area not covered by the flood-waters.

My brother Adie was 8 years older than me, so that meant that there were few things that we could do together - with personality differences it was virtually a generation gap - no opportunity for closeness or companionship. So I grew up not really understanding Adie or even sharing much time together with him. With the age difference, in fact my brother seemed like a stranger to me.

Another factor of some influence - both my sets of grand-parents had died before I was born, so as children we had no older generation to relate to in any way. Whenever I asked my Father about his Father, he would always and only say "what do you want to know that for?" Nothing was ever passed on, except that my father's father played the violin and was well known in the district for his rages.

I should also add that we were raised without any confirmation or praise of any description - if we did something well, all we ever got was a grunt from Father.

Likewise, there was never any outward expression of affection or endearment - the words "I Love you" were never heard in public (or to me in private). But that is the dour Southern way, probably to this very day - it just wasn't 'done' !

My earliest recollections of our family life could be spelt out in one word TROUBLE - Domestic Trouble and strife, Arguments, Violence, Visits from the Police, Religion - all led to my general unhappiness

Most of the arguments seemed to be over - money !

My mother used to tongue-lash my father, to which he responded by cutting her housekeeping and not paying her bills or accounts, which led to more arguments that ended in either violence or being thrown out of the house, and the door locked behind us. When that happened there was nothing else to do but to trek to my Aunties house about 4 kilometres away. Along a country back road in the middle of the night, in pitch darkness, it was absolutely frightening - sometimes we had to turn back to either sleep in the barn, or somehow get back inside the house through a window.

Mother often called the police - Milton had one solitary policeman and he must have got to know the road to our farm very well over the years. I would see his little car crawling along the back road as he drove out knowing full well what to expect yet again.

Or the 'oversight' of the local Brethren Church that my father attended would be so badgered by my mother until they reluctantly ventured out to help. But my father would deny everything to them, turn on the charm, and make out that mother was exaggerating and "just making it all up" for attention.

Such was life year by year. My, how they dragged, it seemed like a lifetime between each Christmas.

But on and on it went, everyone in the district knew about the 'trouble at the Miller's house'

As I grew up and got physically stronger, I tried to defend mother in the frequent times of violence. My father was a strong powerful man, and we had no chance when his anger took over, but in my teens as I grew physically stronger, 3 times I almost killed him

Once mother only just prevented me doing just that.

(And some where along the line, I made the discovery that one of the meanings of my name Raymond was 'protector')

My dreams were often about my defence in court, facing a murder charge, and what I would tell the jury, and how I would recount events and life at our house.

It was the only way I imagined it could all end - with his death !

On several occasions the guns came out, or a piece of timber, or a kettle full of boiling water, or whatever lay handy !

But what was instilled into me through those years was a repulsion for domestic violence. Men hitting women seems the ultimate act of bullying, and of cowardice !

On top of all this came yet another problem - I developed a stutter.

Up till about 7 years of age, I was away the best reader in my class.

But then a speech impediment turned my school and social life into a veritable HELL. Schooling became a scene of acute embarrassment and ridicule - some school-mates delighted in being hurtful and mocking any weakness. The teachers tried many remedies over the years, but all to no avail - I was stuck with it, or it with me !

The stutter became worse and worse, the giving of my name, answering the telephone, oral reading in class all became sheer and utter HELL.

All I could do was to develop a various array of tricks and excuses to avoid such situations and circumstances. Only a fellow sufferer knows the constant humiliation and endless inner torment and embarrassment that goes with stuttering.

(Please... NEVER .. Never mock a stutterer - trapped in his own private prison - how can you know anything about the torment endured !) For some 30 years it plagued me

Can you imagine me as a Regimental Sergeant Major with 1,000 cadets on a parade field transfixed at the mouth and not being able to relay a command?

Can you imagine not asking some girls to dance because you couldn't be sure of getting their names out?

Can you imagine the sheer terror of having to repeat the vows on your wedding day?

A bad stutter must be one of the worst, if not the worst, affliction possible for an adolescent boy !

I thought a lot about life and how to escape the unhappiness -- running away was often considered, but where to and how ?

Or suicide but I feared death and basically lacked the guts to do it !!

Often I would climb the foothills near the farm and look out over the plains.

What was life all about ??

What was the purpose to existence ??

Why was I born into this Miller family ??

Why was I born at all ??

How could I find some happiness ??

How to escape Why How Where ??

Give me some answers please someone !! It was virtually a prayer

Besides all these basic questions Who had created me ? and this fantastic natural world ? Was there really a God ?

Looking at the wonders of nature there had to be a Creator I reasoned.

If he did exist, I thought, wouldn't it be neat to talk with him for just a few minutes. Man, did I have some questions I wanted answers for !

Just to have a little chat with him, just a few minutes for some deep felt questions and answers !

But as I stayed up the hill for as long as I could stand, there seemed no answers for my deep inner loneliness, so back down the hill I slowly trudged, back to the arguments and the strife and all the rest of a small boy's troubled world

One escape that I did find, was in the wonderful world of books.

This was long before the advent of Television, and I was only allowed to stay up till 7.00 on school nights !

So, in books I found escape and relief, adventure and dreams.

It didn't matter what sort of books they were, although I got to love saga's the best - the story of families down through the generations, how life and lives changed and evolved fascinated me some I would read over and over, again and again.

Being sent to bed quite early was a problem but I soon found an answer - to sneak out to the scullery cupboard and nip a torch, then read on under the blankets, with the bedroom door almost closed !

A bit hard on the torch batteries. Mum twigged what was going on, and often pulled back the bed-clothes and there I was book and torch exposed.

But a book addict I became - in my early teens, I was usually the class library representative, and knew the School library thoroughly.

I reckon that I read every book in it at least once - I devoured them all. For years I would average one book a day - one book most every day of the week, 7 books every week of the year. Speed reading became a skill. Once I calculated that I could scan 1,000 words a minute on novels, certainly a page a minute was normal.

And so a life long love of books was born and developed from an early age, simply as an escape from the problems of life.

Then there was the farm-work and always plenty of it.

Holidays were a mixture of boredom (or tennis practise) and 'hard yacka' - the endless round of chores and seasonal jobs - feeding out hay, turnips, choulmouli to the animals, driving the tractor over frozen ruts of mud, the excitement of the occasional flood - all hands on deck then to try and save the sheep and other stock from drowning.

Then there was lambing, and feeding the many pet lambs morning and night, shearing and the busy shearing shed; hay-making from dawn to dusk, long full hours all through the school holidays, blistered hands, chapped out knees, crutching, drenching, yarding, dipping, branding, sheep, sheep, sheep silly, stupid, obstinate, perverse, stubborn sheep, what a way to expose impatience and frustrations.

Feeding the hens, ducks and the dogs, the pet lambs - what experiences and lessons that 'Townies' miss out on !

School was a mixture of learning and embarrassment - fortunately, I did quite well with most subjects except perhaps Maths, and generally tussled out the top placings in the class with 2 or 3 others.

At sport, I quickly found out that for foot speed and stamina, I was only average, and rugby although enjoyable, was too rugged for me - always coming home the worse for wear. A couple of near escapes from drowning in the river beside our farm brought a real fear of the water that took decades to overcome, and difficulty to learn to swim at all.

But racquet sports were a different matter - table tennis was the playtime scene, and eventually I fought to the top of the School Ladder, and the School team, the high-point of which was the Pupils versus Teachers night, when surprisingly I beat the top teacher and clinched the contest.

And tennis - another of my escapes ! On the farm, the back wall of the garage faced the cowshed across a wide expanse of concrete - a ready made practice wall, and practise I did - by the hour. The garage wall was made of brickwork, and the joints gave an irregular bounce that made you pay attention and learn to watch every deflection - a valuable skill. So, I practised hard, at all odd moments, year upon year.

The local tennis club coach took an interest in me too, and gave me some hard work-overs. Eventually, he encouraged me to enter the Provincial Secondary School's tournament in Dunedin. I practised intensely, and looked forward to it with much nervousness. Finally, the day arrived, the enormity of the occasion to a country boy was total.

But my first match was a shocker - I got well beaten first up by the finalist, and was devastated by my foray into wider competition.

But, I learned another fact that was to dog me virtually for life - nervousness, and the lack of big-match temperament - Oh well, it would have to be social tennis for me thereafter, and I've enjoyed it all the more ever since. It suited me absolutely, and still does. But, make no mistake, I found that it is a very psychological game, and requires mental toughness as much as talent and practice.

Later at secondary school there was Cadets - where youths imitated real soldiers. Somehow the military scene suited me also - parades, camps, mucking around with rifles, uniforms, and I quickly got promoted to Lance-Corporal. That was one of the proudest days of my life - taking

my single stripe home to Mum for her to sew on my sleeve - it meant so much to me and the recognition it brought. Then came further promotion, and eventually I ended up as Company Sergeant Major, in charge of the whole School. This meant being eligible for the camps over the holidays, at Duntroon up in Central Otago, for the whole 2 weeks of holidays - another escape from the unhappy home life, and what's more - we even got paid for instructing! There, I was eventually made the Regimental Sergeant Major, in charge of about 1,000 other cadets.

With the Cadets came another interest - rifle shooting
It was great, and tied in well with a farm opportunity - rabbit shooting. Rabbits were the plague of the district, and the locals tried every way possible to keep their numbers under control. I would 'borrow' Dad's 22 bore rifle, and stalk them as much as ammunition allowed.
One day I recall, just to say it could be done, I fired an entire packet of 50 rounds at a hillside of rabbits without moving my feet. As the saying goes - they were thick as rabbits !
And, with that much shooting practice, I often won the School's best shooter prize. But, as I got promoted, another problem emerged - a jealous and rather bitter subaltern, who took much delight in mocking my stutter, and spoiled any satisfaction possible. He would hound me unmercifully, in private and in public - how I could have cheerfully throttled him, but he was way bigger and stronger than me !

Along the way, during primary school years, came a discovery
If I was in a shop, and I didn't have the money, and there was not many other people around, certain items would 'jump' into my pocket ... or into my bag or up my jersey !

My shoplifting began, I recall, with fireworks - always too expensive to buy, and comparatively small and easy to 'lift'. But then the habit extended to records, stationery, books etc. I really don't know how many books I 'flogged', or how I got Mum to believe the stories of how I came by them. But the habit grew, and probably could be called habitual. It had an exciting element of danger, and was a challenge - my skill and daring against 'them'. The strange part is - that I never got caught, not even once, or even suspected !

Inside my mind, if I could stop to analyse it for a moment, was a child's strange logic. The world had dealt me an unhappy double deal - my home-life, and my stammer. My inner reaction to all this was - I'm going

to overcome my situation and my feeling of being trapped, by any means possible, I'm going to get to the 'top' where I imagined that the better and 'normal' people live, and if I have to lie or steal to do it, so what !

So the years crawled by, generally unhappy, never really knowing when arguments would erupt, ending in violence, and then usually the police got called.

And the stutter persisted unmercifully there seemed no escape from unhappiness and embarrassment. Only the world of books offered some respite, and the tennis practice wall, and jobs on the farm.

Through these years, my Father regularly attended the local Brethren Assembly on a Sunday, and even preached. To me, and to Mother, this was the absolute height of hypocrisy, violence through the week, then off he would go on Sunday, to tell others how to live how dare he !! And to make matters worse, after he came back on Sunday night, he was invariably worse just stay out of his way. Many, many, many, were the scenes on a Sunday night.

Mum would go occasionally, and once or twice I even went, just to see it all for myself. Just as I suspected - just plain boring it seemed to me. And yet my inner questions were somehow intensified, but there was not much hope of getting answers from that seemingly introverted and morbid bunch !

With my father withholding funds, Mother had to go to the Magistrate Court frequently to get money released. Eventually, she had 'enough', and filed for a divorce, which for some reason was heard in the Supreme Court. Divorce was not countenanced by the Brethren at all, so my father opposed the application and employed a top court Lawyer to defend it. I appeared as a witness for Mother, at age 17, but my evidence was expertly manipulated and discounted by Father's Lawyer. So, Mother didn't get her divorce and life went on as before.

However the nerve-racking experience of appearing in the witness stand of the Supreme Court was devastating to me, resulting in nightmares and sleepless nights for about 6 months afterwards.

What I did not realise at the time, was that I was being instilled from a child with a practical appreciation of the difference between 'religion'

and 'Christianity'. My father used to read his Bible each night, and even 'preached' on occasions at the Brethren assembly, and I was later told that he was known in those circles for his memorisation of scripture ! But as for putting it into practice at home- well that was the huge difference. (As I later heard someone rightly say - 'if it don't work at home, don't export it') While my mother continually displayed the outworking of the teachings of Jesus in kindness, hospitality, generosity - where the rubber meets the road - to me this was true Christianity in action.

With the situation at home, my one strong feeling was - to put distance between me and the farm. There was a deep inner realisation that I just had to get away from my Father's influence and dominating attitudes, to be able to 'breathe', to basically 'escape'.

But these things didn't seem to bother Adie so much, who seemed to like farm-work, and as the eldest son, stood to inherit it all in due course. He was prepared to put with the negatives, and the strong dis-agreements with our father.

My mother had a simple view of a man's working life - there was either labouring, or a 'trade' (carpentry, plumbing, mechanic, engineering and such like) or what she referred to as 'a collar and tie' job, in an office. She put out some feelers for me, and had negotiated an interview with a local Builder.

It was just about to happen, when the idea was broached "would you like to go to High School in Dunedin, to Otago Boys High School ?"

This would entail having to board at their boarding School called Campbell House. The idea of putting some distance between me and the farm was too good to be missed, and I grabbed it.

Away from Milton at last !

To Dunedin first, 2 years of Schooling, then a job as an Architectural draughtsman for 4 years, and then to University in Auckland.

At last, some water between me and Milton, called the Cook Strait

new beginnings

2

The question came from my eldest son

"As a reasonably intelligent professional man, how come you stayed at that Church for so long - even for 25 years ?" I thought about it - how would I begin to explain the various factors involved ?

But how had I got to go there in the first place - where did it all begin for me ?

Basically, I had to admit - like so many others, I was a young person, not long away from home, in a strange city, rather lonely, looking for 'something' out of life, idealistic to a degree I guess, but quite naive to the ways of the world and the inner agendas of the religious system establishment people. And another inner thought came to mind at that time - my social life was very lacking as I found myself in a strange new city in which the locals were quite 'cliquey' - I may meet a good young crowd at this Church and perhaps even a nice girl I remember thinking ! And there was another reason I was to find out - Gods timing and drawing, and I had no idea how much of an inner 'emptiness' or vacuum there was within me that needed filling.

And so I had gone to some of the meetings, and to a scrumptious meal afterwards at the home of the person who invited me. I found it quite a good mix - a good clean bunch of young people, (including some cute girls), a good feed afterwards, kindness and friendship, and something within me agreeing with the message presented.

At this time a new film was released - the Cecil Be De Mills blockbuster called BEN HUR, a 'must see' epic. I went with my flatmate DM, and was mightily moved upon by the inherent message of the Bible. I would have accepted Jesus as Saviour there and then, had the opportunity been given.

But when I asked DM for his response, he simply said "just a good film"
Isn't it amazing the differing effects that a message can have on various people - I was astounded at his lack of any response at all !
But it had a deep and lasting effect on my hungry and empty soul.

Life meandered on for a while, and may have gone no further except for a strange incident.

On a trip back to Milton , I and my powerful motorbike at speed, ended up in a ditch on the side of a road in South Canterbury, and I could easily have been killed.

It was scary, but not as much as the inner realization that I may have indeed 'bought it' and be out into eternity as I remember the preacher mentioning - for which event I was certainly not either ready nor prepared !

And the cars that whizzed by without stopping for the crazy motor cyclist in the ditch - who really cared about me in this whole wide world I wanted to know ?

But - God cares - I recall having heard somewhere, some time.

On the spot I determined to absolutely find out for sure one way or the other - was there indeed a God ? If there was I would serve him, but if not, I would never darken a Church door again in my life !

It was 'Put Up' or 'Shut Up' time for me.

So, I waited on the side of the road until my heart resumed its normal pulse, somehow pulled the bike out of the ditch, patched it up, got it going again, and trundled back to Auckland

Another invitation to the Church, but this time I wanted some real answers - was there a God, and if so, how to do business with him?

The next Tuesday night they showed a film called 'God of the Universe' at the Church, and I realized for probably the first time how very small this planet is compared with space and the cosmos, and that I was only one of 6 billion crawling around on it. The realization and this perspective to me was totally awesome., and one which I had never considered.

Somewhere in my belongings, I found a Bible that my mother had given me, and then within it somehow I found the 10 commandments.

I went through them one by one - broken that one, and that one, Yes and that one My finger followed the list to the end.

I was thunderstruck - I had broken every one except *Thou shall not Kill*, and I had come within an ace of doing just that on several occasions growing up in our at times violent home.

Could God do anything with me I pondered, and the next Sunday evening found myself answering an appeal at the Church to receive Christ as Saviour and Lord

I surely was 'born again', and the change to my mates was apparent. Another dimension opened up to me - so that was why this and that person did that particular thing I found myself realizing. How could I have not seen it before - but now I have 'sight' - spiritual insight. There was indeed a spiritual world, Over the previous years, whenever I had opened the Bible, I just couldn't fathom it at all - what did people see in it I had thought several times, but now it became an 'open book' - I could understand it for the first time, and I devoured it and other Christian writings. I vividly recall the first time that I experienced the 'quickening' of the Holy Spirit on a verse *'but seek you first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you'* *Matthew 6 : 33* And this re-prioritising changed my whole outlook on life - and Architecture !

And so the time passed - and I saw the same change happen to many of my friends and acquaintances. Life was personally fulfilling as I learned to overcome various personal problems, temptations, and attitudes, and life got quite busy as I became increasingly involved in the activities of this local Church.

sleepless in roskill 3

Personally testifying to the grace of God is a natural expression in any young Christian's life, and mine was no exception.

I guess that many of my acquaintances became aware that something was different with me, and there were opportunities to answer their questions and chat about what had happened. Quite a few had come along to the local Church I then went to.

One Sunday night, after the evening Church service, I went home, popped into bed and started to read a little book by Dawson Trotman, founder of Navigators, exponents of a well-known scripture memory course.

His experience was special and remarkable.

He had been born-again after a Sunday School lady had got him to memorise some verses of the Bible. He also had a great passion and zeal for sharing his faith with others, (and had lost his life trying to save another person from drowning - typical of him !)

His story moved me greatly - who had I influenced similarly I pondered ? Sure, I had answered my mates questions as they came up, plus those of many other people along the way.

But few had been really born again to my observation.

My heart was stirred as I read this little book and this mans experience

I got out of bed and got dressed.

I wanted something of what this man had experienced - a real move of God in other people.. Where were they all ?

Surely there were those around who had a hunger for reality and the things of God ?

I got into the car and pointed it in the direction of Titirangi, and the bush clad hills of the Scenic Drive

It was past midnight, but no matter - I would spend however long it took to get some prayers answered and get my heart-cry heard.

So, I found a quiet spot, way up in the bush-clad hills far away from

Auckland.

The road was deserted, and quite dark, as I recall, even scary
I parked up and poured my heart out to God for a long time through those
early morning hours

The thing was that I was quite tired of my own efforts to reach people -
from now on it would be different - if God wanted to touch anyone
through me, he must do the entire job. My own efforts were over -
finished. Trying to do Gods work for him is never fruitful I had already
found

"So, God, if you want to move in someone's life - if your want to use me in
your service, in this or any way then you're going to have to do the whole
job, and bring them right to me - I ain't going to initiate nor interfere,
not in the slightest - bring them right to me, or there's nothing doing on
my part !"

So, there it was - my earnest heart cry from frustrated self-effort
It was to be God and his doing - solely and utterly.
No way was I wearying myself out any further.

The hours passed, my heart had been spilled out, emptied !.
Soul winning had been returned to become God's problem and mission -
no longer mine !

Some time before sunrise, I turned the car back to home, crawled back
into bed, and slept.

The days passed, as they do, uneventful, ordinary.
But my prayer and heart-cry of that night was tucked away in the back of
my consciousness

The little bed-sitter room that I rented was at the front of a house on a
typical suburban street - Marsden Avenue, in Mt Eden. It was a big
bedroom, with a kitchenette added on, and with quite large windows that
faced the street.

Access was through the main house, occupied by the owner and his family
who were Seventh Day Adventists, but my room was separated from the
rest of the house by the main entrance.

Imagine my surprise, when one morning, there was a knock on the door of

my inside room

Not the outside front door, but the very door of my inner room !

Answering the door, I opened it to find the woman of the house, and a stranger.

"Someone to see you" the house owner woman said "he came to the front door, and I let him in"

The chap spoke "I'm an Architectural student, living further up the same street, and going past, I saw your drawings of buildings on the walls, so I thought to pop in and introduce myself"

"Glad you did" I burred, and we chatted on about Architecture, University etc

It turned out that he was into Scientology, and had been influenced by their programmes, but not for his betterment.

And the money it was all costing him was huge - up front and weekly - they were bleeding him dry !

We chatted on, he was very open to the things of God, and a very earnest young man at that.

So a friendship was formed, and he eventually came along to the local Church I then attended, received the Lord as Saviour, and was truly born-again in April 1963, then baptized on 8.08.63

Later on he met and married a young Dutch lady, raised a family, and has continued on in the Christian way.

So, God really does hear and answer desperate cries from the heart
But in his own way and time, and without our self efforts impeding Him

Oh, the fulfillment of a sleepless night in Roskill, many decades ago !

And how that God brought him to knock on not just the house front door, but the very door of my bedroom - amazing !

What an remarkable answer to a young mans one night of earnest prayer, and Gods faithfulness

But while all of this was going on in New Zealand, across the Tasman Sea, in Australia, another story was unfolding
them Aussies were up to something

Jan / Nan

the Aussie girl

4

Janice Osbourne McDonald (no relation to them of the 'golden arches' unfortunately)

With a younger brother Stuart Ross

Born in Sydney Australia, and schooling there.

My father Ozzie McDonald was of Irish and Scottish descent, from a large Roman Catholic family who were sheep drovers by occupation. He loved, and even lived for boxing, and had success in winning several State titles in the bantam and light middleweight divisions. After retirement from boxing, Ozzie's drinking increased noticeably.

About my mother Effie Babington, refer the chapter EFFIE

After marrying Effie, Ozzie's family wielded their influence, and Effie felt herself being ostracized by them all. Eventually, with my Father's womanizing, at age 7, my parents split up. When my mother informed me quite out of the blue, that Dad was not coming back and would never live with us again, my 7 year old heart was broken, and I was totally devastated. Why had he left me? I loved him dearly, and it was incomprehensible that he could live without us !

To add to all of this rejection and betrayal trauma, I was sent to live with my Grand-parents for 3 years while Mum was sorting out her affairs.

My Grandmother was less than understanding and often ridiculed me when she found me crying for my Mum. She had precious little sympathy for girls and I felt that I was not really wanted there either !

So, fear and rejection became my constant companions.

But for the counterbalance of my kind Grandfather and Auntie who lived next door, it would have been totally intolerable

My mother had a long time friend, Harry, from years before her marriage, and after the split up with my father she went into business with Harry running a boarding house. Harry was, to me, a pompous Englishman, bombastic and domineering, who had lived in India with servants, and was divorced. My mother never ever married Harry, choosing instead to change her name to his by deed poll for 'business reasons'. Whenever I asked her about it, mother just wouldn't talk about it at all.

At age 8, staying with my Grand-parents at Ulladulla, I went to the local Sunday School, where I responded to an appeal and 'gave my heart to Jesus'. From a child, I knew that God really loved me, and I was aware of his presence with me. It was an early sense of God's nearness, and quite an experience for me as a young girl.

From age 12 to 14, I went to several High Schools in Sydney as my family moved around the suburbs.

But then at age 14, a remarkable incident occurred

I was up in the Blue Mountains with the family, and walked into a tourist souvenir shop. On the wall were 2 photographs of New Zealand landscape scenes. I stood transfixed in front of these, with a deep conviction that somehow this unknown land was going to be a part of my future. I was rooted to the spot in front of these scenes - the effect of them on me was so deep and real. Oddly, my family had had absolutely no contact with New Zealand of any sort whatsoever. But the conviction was so very deep within me, that I never forgot it.

But inwardly, there was rejection and fear - they were my constant bedfellows. By today's medical standards I would have been called 'clinically depressed'

Leaving school at age 16 I started working in a German importing company, where I met a co-worker called N. He was in effect a professional punter, studying the form, breeding and pedigree of the race-horses. He often took me to the races, and paid for me to place my bets on whatever horse I fancied. Knowing nothing of horses, I bet only on NZ horses, and much to his disgust, these horses just won, and kept on winning ! He let me keep my winnings, which I banked and eventually I saved up enough money for the trip across the Tasman. (odd how God works his will out in our lives - do you think ?)

N was much more keen on me, than I was on him, and he proposed marriage more than once.

It seemed like everything was about to happen at that time !
A local talent quest was on at the Sydney Town hall, as a promotion for the introduction of Television to Australia, and I was sponsored to appear in it. In spite of being extremely nervous, I did really well, didn't win it, but to most observers came a close second. My mother was very keen for me to get into Television and the phone started ringing for training and appearing in advertisements etc.

Living at Nana's boarding house was not very satisfactory at all, and I ended up sleeping in the lounge, and eventually I left to live in a Baptist Youth Hostel, where my life took another vital turn.

It was there while sharing the same dormitory, that I met BL who was over in Sydney for a 'working holiday'. We 'clicked' and a lasting friendship was formed. BL had come from a Christian (Baptist) home, her father was a Funeral Director (and an excellent one at that).

The Billy Graham crusade team was about to come to Australasia and Sydney in 1958, but I had never even heard of him.

Some local churches showed the Billy Graham film 'Souls in Conflict' as a pre-Crusade 'interest stirrer', and BL and I went along to see it.

Then, BL suggested to go along and hear this world renowned Evangelist for ourselves. So we went - and I was very moved upon and responded to the appeal on the very first night. For me it was effectively a re-dedication, but spiritual understanding came, and I knew that my life was inwardly and effectively changed for ever.

That night, returning back to the Hostel after my response to the appeal, I couldn't sleep, and looked out of the window. To my absolute surprise there was a sign of a cross suspended in the sky, and as I looked out, it seemed to become brighter and brighter. I called to BL, and together we stared at it - thunderstruck, stunned.

We watched it for a while, and went to different windows to see if it was some sort of reflection, but nothing of that sort was evident. Whatever could it be ?

Eventually, we took it as some sort of confirmation of the previous events of that night, for a 'baby Christian' to be reassured.
But it never reappeared at that window ever again !

Together we returned to the stadium for each and every single night of the entire month of the Crusade !

I broke my news about what had happened at the Crusade to Mum who was not at all impressed at all, to say the very least. And then to N, who was so furious and livid that he made me make a choice - him or Christ ! He had previously given me an expensive watch as a 'token of our engagement', and he wanted it back if I decided otherwise !

To get some answers to a few questions that needed answering, I phoned the woman who had 'counselled' me when I had responded to the appeal at the Crusade. I had to take a train to the woman's place, arriving late at about midnight. On hearing my questions, the woman replied " Oh, I can't help you, my husband could though, but he's in New Guinea !"

Maybe she was just tired, but I was so disappointed.

rescue

5

I constantly had the feeling from childhood, as though God's hand was on me, and that his love and care were keeping me safe.

As I grew up, as a teenage girl, there were many instances of where my life was in danger, even under threat, where people could have done me harm. But always there seemed like some type of intervention from one quarter or another, and I was always 'rescued'.

As a child, my father often took me with him on his visits to the pubs, and just left me to fend for myself while he drank with his mates.

Once I was chased by an immigrant from a bus-stop, and had to run hard, then jump a fence to escape.

Sometimes as a teenager, naive and confident, as teenagers are, I took risks, going out with complete strangers, etc

But one incident stands out at age 16

In Sydney, I lived in a spot that was next to a particularly dangerous beach - Bungan Beach, with a notoriously bad rip, unmarked and unpatrolled, but well known as too dangerous to be used as other surf and swimming beaches were.

Like many Aussies living on the coasts, I was very used to the surf and had swam from an early age, and so had water confidence..

And so I often swam at this nearby beach, just in a normal swim suit. But then one day I ventured out too far, got caught in a rip, and was carried out beyond the breakers - so far that I couldn't see the shore any more, and kept being swept out further and further.

With my strength gone, depleted, tired and weakened - there was no way out of this serious situation, and I realised that I was going to drown. I panicked, and as many do when in a spot - PRAYED
"Oh God, PLEASE SAVE ME, I can't get to shore. IF YOU SAVE ME, I'LL SERVE YOU THE REST OF MY LIFE"

(Strange how one knows how to pray when backed up into a corner !)

As soon as I had finished uttering these words, OUT OF NO WHERE, I felt lifted up by a wave or a swell that picked me up and carried me back almost to the shore, and dumped me into such boiling ferocious surf that it seemed like a washing machine. It was so powerful and I was tossed around so much that my swimsuit was torn into shreds. Now I was in danger of drowning in the boiling surf !

As all of this was happening, I somehow spied a woman on the shore with her hand out. Desperately I reached out for the woman's hand, and the woman also reached out and grabbed my hand, and pulled me out of the water onto the beach, and safety.

Exhausted, I just lay there on the beach, recovering.

Eventually, I tried to look up and thank the woman, but when I opened my eyes, I saw that the beach was in fact EMPTY, absolutely DESERTED ! There was no woman to be seen SHE HAD GONE !

Where to ?

How and why had she just vanished ?

Who was she ? Where had she come from ?

What was she doing there ?

Was she a real woman or an ANGEL ? (Angels showing up as women are rare aren't they ?)

All that I knew was that she was in the right place, at the right time, and had done the right thing for me.

Who would know, but I owe my life to her,
And to a desperate prayer that was answered so remarkably

WOW

'across the ditch' 6

The pressure was telling on me - decisions, choices and stress.

BL had returned to NZ soon after the Crusade was ended, and to simply 'get some space', I decided to visit New Zealand for 6 weeks, and stay with BL and her folks there.

The race winnings went towards the cost of the fare on a ship - a trans Tasman boat called the Wanganella. The 3.5 day voyage was to arrive in Auckland on 13 October 1959 - Black Friday, and few passengers had consequently not booked because of that. But Bullen's Circus on tour didn't mind, so the boat was dominated by the Circus people and their animals.

In Auckland, I stayed with BL's parent's, and went to a local Valley Road Baptist Church, which we were not very impressed with.

Then - sickness - I was stuck down with a disease called Quinzy, and was bed ridden for a while, soon used up all my funds on medical bills, and had to stay on in NZ, and get a job - events that became life directing yet again. So, work was secured at Screens Advertising.

Then BL heard about another local Church, and a deeper Christian experience called 'the baptism of the Holy Spirit' that people there were finding. So, along we went, to see for ourselves. This Church had obviously more spiritual life, but after 6 months there I had a few misgivings about how things were done.

Then, another boy-friend - a musician RS.

So, decisions to be made, but being away from N it was best to write and call the whole thing off with him. A terrible letter came back, plus another shocking letter from his mother !

So that particular era was over and done with, but its impact was very significant and effectively brought me to 'the crossroads'

Eventually I left BL parent's and went to a boarding house.
Then, then another bomb-shell RS dumped me !
I was heart-broken. Away from home, lonely, having lost 2 boyfriends.
I had dumped N, and in turn, I had been dumped by RS !
The thought was that - my first 20 years had not been so great, and if the next 20 are to be much the same - why bother living at all ? and I seriously considered suicide.
Another CRISIS had developed.
And then I became aware of the unmistakable voice of God within ...
'There are 2 roads and you are on the wrong one - you are at the CROSSROADS'

I rang BL, "I want to go back to Church, and experience God's forgiveness - again"

And so several years passed at that Church, where I eventually met Ray

But that's another story or Chapter in itself ... refer 'marriage'

My mother was very diffident about the change in my lifestyle and my Church attendance, and did most everything she knew to talk me out of it. My mother was an educated business woman, well read, including Voltaire and other current atheistic authors. But she traveled over to visit with us and her grandchildren in Auckland time and again, and even came along to the Church services and films. She even got quite friendly with one of the women from Church, but that's another Chapter in itself - refer EFFIE later.

healing

7

At the age of 3, I had contracted double pneumonia, and got so sick that I was hospitalised for about 3 weeks. It was so bad that I nearly died, and was totally afraid of being away from home, in a strange building, and those strange nurse people. In hospital, I became so fearful and afraid, that my internal organs 'seized up' and were injured during a major prolapse.

That was the start of continual watching and taking medicine daily, with weekly visits back to the hospital. Vile medicine, suppositories, evacuation, piles - yuk, it was agony each and every day from age 3 on . This situation continued through childhood, schooling, teenage years, to going to NZ and for 3 years of attending that Church - almost 20 years all told. If I was ever away overnight, I had to plan for medicine and toilet arrangements etc , and be very every careful about it all.

Indeed, before I travelled to New Zealand, my doctor had told me that my intestines were so delicate, that here was a major risk of perforation, and with such internal problems that I wouldn't live past 25 years of age ! He strongly tried to dissuade me not to travel at all. It was like a death sentence !

Then, one Thursday night, in 1962, I didn't go to the regular fellowship meeting at the Church, but stayed home. (I was told later that Ray had been asked up to give his testimony that same night !)
Late that night, I thought the prayer - "if I am a Christian, why am I so sick all the time ?".
Then the verse of scripture came to me "I AM THE GOD THAT HEALS YOU"

So, I decided not to take the medicine, and went off to sleep -
WITHOUT TAKING ANY MEDICINE FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE I
WAS 3 YEARS OLD ! Some 20 years !

I woke up next morning, EVERYTHING WAS FINE, and I haven't taken
any of that vile medicine since !!

Previously FEAR had ruled my life.
(I had also had a bad scare as a child when a bird came down a chimney in
a storm all bloodied and injured, and landed right on top of me)

But, it was not a total healing !
I had to use wisdom as to diet and health matters, and watch out for
stress, tension situations , etc

But - THE MEDICINE TAKING HAD INDEED BEEN STOPPED !

From that time on, I have only taken natural remedies.

In practical terms, it has meant a total change of life style - not having
to worry about facilities, medicines or the bad consequences.

Although, I must say that there have been occasional recurring bouts of
the problem from time to time, but nothing like before that Thursday
night in 1962.

Together with what happened that night, the peace of mind of the
Christian way of life, and the overcoming of rejection and fear has
enabled me to live virtually a 'normal' lifestyle and experience a good
married life.

So "I AM THE GOD THAT HEALS YOU" is still valid today, as it
was in those Bible days.

together !

marriage

8

Well, the events leading up to our marriage would have to be rather different than the usual.

We found out, by observation, that the minister of this Church had a private hobby - matchmaking ! He was a master manipulator as we eventually discovered, and really enjoyed being involved in getting the young people paired off and married.

But to start at the beginning (from Rays perspective)

The very first time I went to this Church, I recall walking down the slope to the front door, and seeing a group of young girls enter just in front of me. (Jan had started going there about 18 months before me).

As I watched them my mind turned over - 1 or 2 of them were as 'worldly' as any teenagers anywhere, but the others - there was something about them that I instantly took in. I thought 'why, they are somehow so clean and pure, that I don't feel worthy enough to lick their shoes'.

Now I was just a normal youth, up on some of the ways of the world, and what a correct perception this in time turned out to be !

And Jan was one of those 'somehow clean girls' that caught my eye on that my first visit there.

Anyways, in due course, I was truly 'born again' there, and the years of attendance rolled on.

With University study, and not much social life, I inwardly resolved ... 'there's 2 vital choices to make in this life - one is about personal salvation, and where to spend eternity - the other, who to marry, and spend the rest of this earthly life with'.

I thought, 'Well I've made the first choice right, now for the second one - but I'm not going to do anything about it until I know absolutely that 'she's the one', and that will just about take her name written in fluorescent across the sky - its such an important choice, that I'm taking no chances on it being the wrong one, not after what I had seen with some of my friends, and their domestic troubles.

But one Sunday afternoon, I was surprisingly early for the afternoon 'Happy Hour' youth service, and I sat in a row about 1/3 from the back. Jan was also early, and I watched her walk down the aisle towards the front seats. As clear as anything, as my eyes followed her, I mused - 'why, that's the type of girl you should marry', (Years later, I mused again - why, I just got one word of that wrong - 'that's THE (actual) GIRL you should marry !')

Time passed, and then another girl caught my eye. She worked close by where I did, and eventually I summoned up whatever courage I had, and determined to speak to her, and start chatting, the very next time that I saw her. Well, that time soon came. I was trying to say 'Hello' and start talking, but try as I would - the words just WOULD NOT COME OUT. And several such opportunities passed, with me tongue-tied, and not able to utter even a one word of greeting - one time when my speech impediment actually worked for me, instead of against me !

But then I found out that Jan also worked quite nearby, and soon the opportunity of a pretext came up with some typing to be done. I visited her at her workplace several times, but it was just kept business-like.

Then, one Thursday night in 1964 it all happened ...

I was at the regular Thursday night 'fellowship' service, and the match-making Pastor was on the platform, when suddenly, he passed the service over to someone else to handle, and went off through a side door.

The next thing I knew was a tap on the shoulder, and a voice saying "Pastor wants to see you in his office"

My immediate thought was - what have I done, what trouble am I in ?

Entering his office. I could see that he was ill at ease, even stressed. After the pleasantries, he spoke. "I've asked you here for a reason" 'Well, here it comes, I'm in some sort of trouble' and my mind raced as to what it could be.

"There's a young woman here, that has been approached by 2 young men who have expressed an interest in her, and she has refused both ! She has said that she only has an interest in YOU. Now, what do you say, I won't tell you her name, but what I want to know, is there any young woman here that you may have an interest in ?"

I was absolutely thunderstruck, dumbfounded, speechless, and it showed.

"Why, that's my own personal business" I eventually blurted out. "I realise that, but I must know, - what do I have to tell these 2 other young men, and this woman, you must tell me - I must ask you again, is there any young woman here that you may have an interest in ?"

I was somehow cornered, and my mind slowly got into focus. There seemed no way out, so after more protestations, I eventually blurted out - "well there is just one , and that's Jan McDonald" He exclaimed the biggest sigh of relief that I have ever heard ! "YES, SHE's THE ONE, its Jan McDonald." he gasped out.

And so it was all on, but in the way of that particular Church, or rather the Pastor's own methods.

A meeting was arranged for a Saturday morning - AT THE CHURCH ! of all places. And what a un-natural stressful time that was, as we started 'dialogue'.

Then there was a few dates and meals out at restaurants in the city, all very hush-hush, we both agreed to tell no-one else - this was OUR business from this point on !

And eventually a trip down south for Ray and the 'home' chapter, and secrecy until the engagement ring, - and then the publicity. Some folk at the Church were quite miffed that they hadn't know about it, to gossip etc.

Later on, the Pastor remarked to us, that in all his years, and his scores of match-making deals, that he had "never seen anything like it", and how that "God was in it" in an amazing way.

So, eventually the marriage was arranged, and happened.

But afterwards, we found out, that with virtually no normal courtship to speak of, that we didn't really know each other, and that first year was so rouggggggggh at times, and really quite hard on us both.

But one thing we did know for sure - That GOD had ABSOLUTELY BROUGHT US TOGETHER, that fact was bed-rock, and that consequently, He would help us make it work.

And now its coming up to our 43 rd wedding anniversary

Yet again

Thank you Lord, for bringing us together in the first place,
and for keeping us together in the second place.

honeymooning

9

What ever to do for a honeymoon - something a bit different perhaps ?
I know - how about a caravan trip / tour !
A modest and cheap holiday for a not long graduated student and his new bride. (Whatever was I thinking - or not thinking, more like it)

So, I hired a caravan, a solid type of its day.
The plan was to go Northwards from Auckland, and circumvent Northland, taking in the scenic spots - sort of a scenic tour - take it up the East coast, cross over and come back down the West coast over a 2 week period. (well, maybe do it some other time, but why on ones honeymoon? When most sane people would simply go to some quiet place and recover from a stressful wedding day and occasion)

So, the day after the wedding, we set off, from Auckland, to one camping ground, and then the next. But we soon found that the Van had a bad tyre - first one puncture, then another, and yet another - why had they let us go with a bald tyre, which we eventually had to pay to replace.

And then I had another (misguided) thought - Jan couldn't drive, so why not use the time to teach her - sort of kill 2 birds with one stone !
So in between spots and places, whenever we were just touring around, she would take the wheel, of my trusty (and by this time - rusty) Holden and she was learning quite well, albeit on quite a heavy machine for her.

On our way down the West Coast, we stopped at a place called Rawene on the Hokianga Harbour, where I found something else about my new bride - her love for bits of fluff called kittens. There was a woman in a house on the camping ground with a cat and a litter of new born kittens- half wild at that, but completely irresistible to Jan - so we ended up with 2 of them - in a Caravan, on tour, on our honeymoon !

They played in the car as we drove along, and often ended up under the pedal when braking - amid squeals and squawks.

In due course we arrived at quite a nice Camping Ground, at Dargaville, on the West coast.

The next morning, I washed the car of its travel grime, and looked at it closer. Rust was starting to appear in many spots, and its age was becoming very evident. Basically, the time to replace it was approaching, - or had now arrived ! But I was broke, with a new bride, and an old car. Just how to do that, and what with - was the poser.

As I walked around the car, and pondered my problem, as clear as a bell came the thought, or rather a verse, to my mind *'be anxious for nothing, but in everything with prayer and thankfulness, let your requests be made known to God (Phillipians 4 : 6)*

Inwardly, I was so thankful for how my Mother had years before seen my need of a vehicle in Auckland, and had given me the money for it. But now time and rust had done their effect, and what was I to do? I could never replace it adequately with its now much diminished market value.

So that was my prayer in immediate response to this inward prompting.

Then a Traffic Cop appeared. He was just moseying around the local area, and paused for a chat.

"Where are you from? where are your going?"

"From Auckland, just cruising around, know any good scenic spots around here?"

"Oh, you should go to Bayleys Beach, just a short trip to the coast, and a good spot for toheroas" he suggested.

It sounded OK, so we thanked him, left the Van at the camp and headed for Bayleys Beach. On the way I stopped the car to let Jan continue her driving skills at the wheel.

Well, we never quite made it to Bayleys Beach !!

You see - there was this right hand bend, with the camber of the road the wrong way, a heavy wheel for Jan's slim wrists, a steep bank to the open side, and the next thing I knew we were going through the air, my one arm still over the back of the bench front seat, and the longggggggg sound of breaking glass - then silence !

We had gone off the road, down the bank, rolled in the process, doing a complete flip, demolished a fence at the bottom, and landed right way up, sitting in a car full of glass fragments from the smashed windscreen !

Jan's immediate thought was that she had killed me "Are you OK?"

"Yeah"

"I'm sorry, so sorry !"

Some people from a nearby house appeared. "Another accident - this is such a dangerous corner, we've been on to them for so long about it" as they helped us out of the car

They phoned for assistance, and we waited for 'the cavalry'.

The first person to arrive on the scene was the photographer for the local newspaper, wanting a photo and names - not blooming likely, not of our honeymoon !

Then, a tow truck eventually arrived, who winched us up the bank, then carted us and the car back to Dargaville.

Finding the local Insurance agent's office, I filled out the necessary insurance claim forms. The office was right next to the police station, and the next thing I knew, the Traffic Officer I had been talking with earlier that same morning appeared. "What on earth happened to you" he asked absolutely stunned and with his mouth gaping.. "So much for your advice" I replied "we never did quite make it to your Bayleys Beach"

Well, later the car wreck was put on a railway truck and shipped back to Auckland. Later, the insurance company assessed it as total loss, and paid out the full insured value, well above the market or retail value, and I was able to replace the car for value.

So, *'Let your requests be made known with thanksgiving'* had been absolutely answered and fulfilled that day in Dargaville !

But surely not how we would have ever thought or expected !

But, as they say, there's more

So, now we were stuck in Dargaville, with a Caravan, but no car to tow it !
How to get us and the Van back to Auckland ?

Eventually, we phoned a friend in Auckland with a car who travelled up and got us the next day, and we started back to Auckland, complete with the 2 kittens. About an hour into the journey, I suddenly discovered,- I had left my wallet back in the Van ! Reluctantly, he stopped, turned the

car around, went back to Dargaville, got the wallet, then started off again for Auckland - most of it in stony silence - he was not at all amused that late at night !

The next day, I borrowed another friends car - a Ford Zephyr, with a tow bar, went back up to Dargaville, hitched up the Van and motored back to Auckland.

Now, in those days, Auckland had a short cut link between Great North Road, and New North Road, called King Street (now bisected by the NW motorway) Unfortunately, it was also the steepest street in Auckland ! Without thinking, I took this 'short-cut' on this day, got halfway down the steep slope, and suddenly remembered that this time I had a heavy caravan on the back ! I then made the additional discovery that Ford Zephyr's were known for having a high first gear, and not the greatest clutch.

So, after reaching the bottom of this very steep street, the car didn't have the necessary grunt to make it up the other side, and smoke streamed from the overloaded clutch. It eventually stopped half way up the steep hill and I ran the van wheel back into the kerb to help the brakes.

Now, what to do ? I was trapped - not enough power or clutch to get to the top of the hill. If I tried, and failed, maybe the brakes wouldn't hold it and I would go backwards down the hill, maybe turn the whole unit over sideways - I was in a real predicament. Again I prayed - with thanksgiving and sat there pondering - just what to do !

Time passed, and I considered all of the various scenarios - but there seemed no way out. Even with another vehicle - how could I get the van transferred over to it on this horrendous grade of hill.

Then, from the bottom of the hill came one of those big Power Board trucks full of men and equipment, slowly thumping up in first gear. I hailed them, they stopped and chuckled at my dilemma - could they help me ?

After some talk we all decided - use a tow rope for their truck to tow my car, and the van behind it. But all we had was my one thin feeble car tow rope. However, there was nothing else for it, so we connected up.

Off we went - an inch at a time, as slow as you like, clutch streaming smoke - and that rope looked like the thinnest piece of string ever in this world !

And so we reached the top of that blessed hill - a short-cut indeed - not this time !

And we returned the Van to a bemused hirer

And so the 'honeymoon' was over, and married life had begun !

But two words of advice if I may

Resist the urge to take your bride on a caravan tour, and

DONT TEACH YOUR BRIDE HOW TO DRIVE on your honeymoon
either, or even ever for that matter - the strain / stress factor is just
not worth it - believe you me !

Happy Honeymooning !

a home

10

Now that I'm thinking of getting married, where will I live ? was my poser

I had been 'born again' 4 years previously, while at Auckland University studying Architecture.

As most people will know, funds are not easy to come by while at Varsity, and survival was the name of the game in those days, long before student loans from the government were ever envisaged.

After all those years of bachelorhood, things had moved rapidly, and now marriage was on the horizon. But as a recently graduated student, with only a few months of employment, no savings at all, just how was I to contemplate starting a marriage, and getting somewhere to live or even exist. Jan, my intended bride, had no savings either, basically just possessing the clothes on her back, but with a reasonable job.

And there was another matter

Years before, in my murky past, before my conversion, I had been quite 'light-fingered', as they used to call it in those days. I had found shoplifting very easy, and had pilfered quite a number of books, records, and various items from poorly supervised shops. But these past petty thefts had gnawed at my conscience, and I had covenanted with God to repay and make restitution when I could afford it. As time passed, with busyness I would tend to forget about that vow, until there it was again an inward reminder, or a word in a film that triggered the memory, and I had to remember and renew that vow, and get the restitution over and done with. Certainly, before I got married I thought. I certainly didn't want to go into marriage with such a shadow and a debt hanging over my head and off-loading onto my new wife. I wasn't going to lumber my new bride with my guilty past by any means - the very thought of it was definitely not on at all.

But how to get some funds, firstly for my restitution, then for some accommodation - preferably a house or home of our own. Quite a poser for a penniless student to try and answer.

First to tackle the restitution situation. But how many shops were there again, and how much money was involved ? It was frequently on my mind, but with the passage of time some of the details were getting hazy. I know what to do, I decided, I will take half an hour somewhere quiet, with a piece of paper, and write down whatever I can honestly remember in that half hour - all of the shop names and the items I can recall, and that will be it - for ever ! And that is what I did - after half an hour of memory digging and writing down I had my list ! But some were in Dunedin, as well as in Auckland ! And fares cost money also. I would tackle the Auckland ones first I decided.

But how to get the funds to do this was my next poser ? So I sold what ever I could of my possessions - books, tapes, student gear, whatever was able to be turned into cash.

And off I went, visiting shop by shop around Auckland's streets. And what an exercise in character study that turned out to be - the differing responses were quite illuminating. Most people showed appreciation that someone had changed sufficiently to do such a thing.

But then there was one person who wanted to call the police on the spot and lock me up there and then ! He finally went to see his boss, who dissuaded him from that, and I was able to walk out !

Then there was one chap who refused to believe what I had done, and wouldn't even look at my envelope with the restitution cash in it.

"Take it away, don't leave it here" he demanded

"No, No, this is yours, the stuff was taken from this very shop"

"No, it couldn't have been, take it away, get out of here, please, take it with you"

"No, I'm here to tell you about it and leave it with you"

He still refused to even look at the envelope !

What's with this fellow I thought ? Why has my presence and action here today, caused a reaction from his own conscience ?

Has he got his 'fingers in the till' himself ? I wondered. Is he doing the very same thing, but as an employee ?

He was adamant that I leave and take it with me.

But in the end, I left the envelope on the counter and backed away out the door saying "its yours now, not mine any longer" and I left him there shaking his head in almost anguish, wishing that all of this had never happened. I had ruined his day it looked like !
Strange how peoples consciences react differently, and became a character study in itself.

Next there was Dunedin, and a thought - I can combine this restitution trip with a visit to my parents to tell them the news of my impending marriage. So, an air face to Dunedin, and a visit round all of those shops with again varied responses.

That night, after such a day, before visiting my parents, I lodged in a Hotel room for the night.

I was quite tired, but I opened the Bible I carried for a short read
It opened at Mark, and the story of Jesus feeding the multitude.
But this was not the more well known story account of him feeding 5,000 with a boys lunch of 5 loaves and 2 fishes, but another different account of a second time that he did such a thing.

In this account, he fed about 4,000 people with 7 loaves.

My mind turned to my own situation. I had 2 pounds on me (this was before decimal currency was introduced - it was pounds, shillings and pence in those days) and 5 pounds in my bank account - a total of just 7 pounds.

What a coincidence I thought !

Jesus had made 7 loaves into a meal for about 4,000 people

Any-ways, the next day I travelled south to Milton and my parent's farm, for a few days stay.

The news was conveyed to my parents and received with surprise and lots of questions about my intended bride. Just before I left, my father took me aside and gave me a cheque for 100 pounds (about several thousand dollars in today's terms) Why, I could buy an engagement ring I thought, plus a bit left over.

I returned to Dunedin and deposited the cheque in the bank to be transferred to my account in Auckland.

Arriving back in Auckland, we went shopping for a ring. Now, all my debts

from a murky past had been settled, and I actually had some cash in the bank ! We found a ring, announced our engagement, and started making arrangements for the wedding.

But as for a place to live - what should we do ?

Where could we get a mortgage ? These were difficult to obtain in those days, especially for destitute graduates such as I.

Then I remembered - a Northern Building Society salesman had come door-to-door selling several years earlier, and for some reason I had listened to him, and had even gone as far as to take out some shares in the Society, They never had enough funds for everyone, so they balloted the applicants each month, but mine had never come up.

However, after you had been in for some years, they guaranteed a loan from other sources. My time for this was still some way off. How / where could I get bridging finance until it came through ?

Perhaps the bank would oblige, but they always stressed that they were definitely not into residential mortgages.

Then, one Sunday morning early, the phone rang.

It was the local branch manager of my Bank on the line.

My account was seriously overdrawn and they had been bouncing my latest cheques, including the one for the engagement ring ! Would I care to visit them - immediately !

The next day I went in to see him.

It turned out that my fathers cheque deposited in Dunedin had not been transferred at all, and all my recent cheques issued against it had been declined - bounced. I told him all this but he smarmingly insisted that the bank never made such an error - did I have proof ?

I showed him my records, and he quickly changed his attitude.

Just recently there had been a case in the paper of a Bank really mucking up a persons account, and the Bank had lost a court case about it. He was very shame faced, and apologized profusely. He reached for his phone and in front of me phoned the company of each bounced cheque and explained - that it was the banks error, not Mr Millers !

"What are you going to do about this ?" he asked me "Are you going to take this further, you realize that you could sue us for this"

"Oh, that's all right" I said "its been a nuisance but we all make mistakes"

He was so grateful, and appreciative.

Later I thought, it may be worth a try to ask my bank for a bridging loan until the Building Society loan comes through. Back I went to this same Manager chap with my request "Absolutely not", he replied, "its against the Banks policy. But I will ask for you anyway" he said, and phoned upstairs to the top management person. The immediate answer was the same - against the banks policy. Then "Hang on a minute - is that the Mr Miller whose account we mucked up ?"

"Yes indeed" was the reply.

"Let him have the money" came the voice, "for as long as he wants"

Wow indeed !

So we started searching for a house with a friendly Christian Real Estate Agent. And we found a place on lease-hold land, that reduced the selling price substantially, to 3,950 pounds - about 4,000 !

My 7 pounds in the bank had become *about 4,000* just as in the Bible story of Jesus miracle - how about that ?

And that is how a penniless couple starting out in marriage, obtained a house and home.

God still works his miracles amongst our individual circumstances in this day and age

His care for our total welfare is awesome to experience, and a great encouragement to starting out in our marriage, knowing that His hand was guiding and providing along life's way.

boots 'n all

11

We had been married for a few short years, before I made a surprising discovery - my wife Jan had cold feet. Cold feet indeed - they could easily have passed for chunks of ice !

Something about poor circulation to the extremities, they were 'cold as' and caused much pain and discomfort to her.

Most winter nights, the request came, "could you just give my feet a little rub to get them warm", and it became a nightly ritual.

In fact, I felt sure that it was one of the reasons that Jan had sought a husband - to rub her feet (just joking !)

To help with the cold feet problem, Jan wished for a pair of boots. She searched the shops, but she just could not find anything close to the right type. She preferred long ones of course for warmth, without a zip that let in draughts, size 7 and preferably a dark brown colour, and at the right price, because we were struggling financially. Her shop searching was in vain, and winter was upon us. So she continued bootless, with me giving her frozen feet the nightly rub.

I worked in an Architects office in the city, on the ground floor, in an office with a window that looked out over the pavement.

One day about midday, I glanced out the window, and to my surprise, in the middle of the pavement saw something that looked like a folded up banknote. I hurried outside, to a deserted footpath, and picked it up. It was a 5 pound note and a 1 pound note, neatly folded, a total of 6 pounds which equals \$12 in today's terms. That was a substantial sum in those days, about 2 days pay for me. I looked up and down the street, no one around at all. Whose was it I wondered ? Someone had dropped it who perhaps could ill afford it. I asked around those that I knew in the building, and put a notice up in the vestibule - anyone dropped some cash ? could they tell me how much etc. The days went past without any

claimants, so I kept it in my upper pocket.

Next day or so, I went down Queen Street during lunch hour on some errand, and was walking past a certain shop, when something caught my eye. There in the window, was a pair of boots, long high ones, no zips, dark brown, and labeled 5 pounds 19 and sixpence. They fitted Jan's exact description exactly - they were just perfect.

But the price - 2 days pay, how could I afford them for her ?? Then it hit me - there was the money I had found, in my other pocket - 6 pounds exactly, with just 6 pence change. But what if someone claimed the money that I had advertised - I would be in dire straits then, having to replace it for them. I digested the situation - the boots surely were just what Jan had been searching for, and I had the cash all-be-it someone else's ! What to do ?

Well, I'll just have to take the chance on the money not being claimed I decided, and if it is, then too bad, Jan at least will have her boots. So I checked the size again, bought them, had them wrapped up, went on home, and presented them to Jan.

She was so surprised to see them, and absolutely ecstatic about them - they were the right size, the right length, even the right colour - just perfect.

And no one ever did claim the 6 pounds from me

And Jan survived the winter with her precious boots to help keep her feet warm

And I never will know for sure, but the whole story had the unmistakable mark of God about it and his gracious provision for our need - either spoken or unspoken.

He sees each sparrow fall, and is always watching out for our need - praise Him alone.

stutter

12

Its impossible of course for those who haven't this affliction, to know just what a person with a stutter goes through ! Lets just say that you die a thousand deaths a day !

The mental anguish that happens each and every time, just before you open your mouth to speak the most innocent remark even. The constant mental re-arranging of a sentence to avoid difficult sounds and consonants, and then the slightly embarrassed glance of the hearer, as they become aware - 'Hey this person has a speech impediment - how awful' and their demeanour changes before your very eyes, as they decide whether to look sorry, or pitiful, or to just look away.

But the worst moments are those that you can't avoid - when what you must say has been pre-determined, like when you have to INTRODUCE YOURSELF - you're stuck with your own name ! as others are when YOU HAVE TO INTRODUCE THEM. And when you have to answer the phone, and give your name or the name of the Company that you work for - sheer and utter HELL.

For me this problem started at about 7 years of age. Children can be tolerant, but they can also be very CRUEL. Some delight in mocking you, and imitating you - which is the ULTIMATE EMBARRASSMENT. Oral reading in turn in class was a nightmare - one teacher tried to get me to read out loud with another person - which was a total failure, and with more acute embarrassment felt, particularly from watching the girls reactions as you got older.

Its surprising how one problem can so affect your total life, and well being, your self image, etc etc. Evidently it is far more common in males than for females !

Attending the Mt Roskill Church, and being such an avid reader, I heard and read about many instances and testimonies of divine healing.

"Wow", I thought, "just what I need - is this for me?"

I read and listened more, tried to exercise what faith I had and prayed earnestly about my problem. Several times I thought that it had happened, and that I had 'a touch' but later became despondent when the problem reappeared and persisted.

And then one day, I read in the Old Book a passage that did it for me - it was *Exodus 23 : 30* where God was saying how Israel would inhabit and occupy the promised land

By little and little I will drive them (the previous inhabitants / occupiers, our 'baggage of previous problems' etc) out from before you, until you be increased, and inherit the land.

So my twenties passed, and eventually marriage loomed.

The wedding and an impending marriage was all very well - but how about having to say and repeat the Marriage Vows - the thought absolutely scared me stiff. To have this ordeal in front of a crowd of family, relatives and friends, was mind-boggling.

So much so, that eventually I absolutely panicked and phoned Jan to tell her the whole thing was off - I couldn't go through with it - and this was just a few weeks before the event, with the invitations sent out, and all arrangements made - consternation all round !

Eventually, the minister and an elder that I really respected, paid me a visit, and I told them the problem, and my fears.

Somehow, they convinced me to 'get back on the horse' as they say, and that God would work it all out in His own way and time !

So, the wedding was back on !

When the wedding day eventually came, somehow I remained standing at the altar, and with a sweating Minister in front of me - I don't know which of us lost the most sweat that day - somehow I managed to get the words out, all be it quieter than usual. But afterwards, in the side room, signing the register etc, he let out the most relieved exhalation of air I have ever heard !

And somehow I got through the reception speeches also - to my and everyone else's huge relief !

And eventually as time passed, that is what happened - little by little my problem improved. With the increase of inner peace, and life experiences I guess, as I became more and more settled in life style, even learning to breathe slower, deeper, and perhaps even caring less about people's reactions, and practicing oral reading at family devotional times with the children - all of these factors together - the problem slowly - *little by little* - diminished. And eventually, having to speak in public more and more, and with Bible-in-School classes, all helped.

Well, I guess that most of us 'walk with a limp' don't we ?

Some people experience their own personal miracles of instant healing, as Jan had - refer that Chapter - 'healing', but for me it was a lifestyle thing, but I must say just as effective ultimately.
Praise Him again.

He has so many and varied ways of doing things, for each person uniquely.

erebus

13

25 years ago it all happened - the anniversary of a momentous event has just ticked over

25 years of life and living on this planet that with one different action at a moment in time I may not have even had to live

It was one night in November 1979 that could well have decided my future - forever !

I had been working for a Design Build company called Davison Construction for about 8 years.

One of the chaps there, Alister McCook the Construction Manager, had been on a trip the previous year to Antarctica that Air NZ were running. A plane would take-off from Christchurch, fly to the South Pole, McMurdo Sound, and all around Antarctica. All of this with great meals and plenty of 'liquid' for those inclined. Down, around and back in the one marvellous day of scenic wonderland.

He was very enthused about the trip, and knowing my interest in 8mm movie filming he really encouraged me to go "As the trip of a lifetime, you really shouldn't miss it" he kept saying, "It's a photographers dream trip"

I had left Davison's, and was running my own business when the next series of these flights came around. There was only a short season or window of opportunity for them to happen each year, and they were widely advertised in the papers. I cut out the advert, had it on my desk, and would look at it occasionally Alister's words kept ringing on my ears as I glanced at it "It's the trip of a lifetime, don't miss it" I could hear him say enthusiastically.

The early flights of the season had already happened, and the deadline for the last flight was fast approaching. I kept looking at the advert "should I or shouldn't I do it?" I pondered.

Then, one night working late downstairs in my studio, I looked at it again - it was now or leave it for another year. My hand reached for the phone - maybe I would just ring up and see if there were any seats left.

My hand was on the phone handset, and I was about to lift it and start dialing, when I paused !

I know me, I thought - if I ask 'is there a seat left', and the answer is yes, then I will then say "Book it" and that will be that. So, decide now before you dial the number - are you going to go or aren't you ?

I considered the work and projects that I had on, and the fact that I had only been solo for 6 months. Sadly I decided that I really shouldn't take the day off for the flight, and so reluctantly and slowly I took my hand off the handset / receiver.

The days passed and eventually the day of the flight came along

Wednesday 28 November 1979

I remember thinking about the trip that I had missed through the day as I worked.

Evening came, then after dinner I went back downstairs to my studio. After hours I would have the radio on, and I listened to my usual station. Then, a news bulletin came on - they had had no contact from the Air NZ Antarctic flight for some time, and their fuel supply would be getting low. Other news bulletins - and eventually they said that the fuel supply would now have run out - the plane must be down somewhere - probably somewhere over the sea on the way back to Christchurch.

The bulletins kept coming - friends of the passengers were waiting at Christchurch airport, worried and anxious.

The evening hours kept passing, and the bulletins and conjectures kept coming - it must be down somewhere - relatives and friends at the airport were getting distraught !

And then at about Midnight - the Prime Minister of the time, came on the air - articulating everyone's worst fears - that the plane had far exceeded its fuel supply and air time, without any contact, and must be down somewhere. He tried to comfort the anxious relatives as best he could, but there was no escaping reality - there had been no contact from the plane for hours.

Either the radio had packed up, which was most unlikely, or the plane was down, and quite possibly had gone in to the icy waters of the ocean. Eventually I went to bed - that was 'the trip of a lifetime' that I was so nearly on, I mused.

What had gone wrong with the flight ?

The next day the media was full of speculations about the flight. The speculations and theories continued until the fateful discovery of the remains of the plane.

It had crashed into the side of Mt Erebus, a mountain of Antarctica, killing all 257 people on board, passengers and crew. Debris and bodies of passengers and their belongings were strewn over the side of the mountain.

Eventually the garbled truth came out - the plane had been programmed with wrong co-ordinates which led it straight into the side of the mountain. In polar white-out conditions they had no chance. The flight had been doomed without visibility and visual observation of the ground.

My mind kept racing - so close had I been to being in that flight - my hand had been on the very handset. Just one thought away from a fateful decision that would have ended my life.

Just one thought that spared my life that evening in the office.
If I had made that call there would have been 258 dead on that mountain.
A close call indeed.

The steps of a good person are ordered by the Lord, and he delights in his way
Psalm 37 : 23 - a long-time favourite of mine

And made more so by the events of that time.
Thank you Lord, my rock and my shelter, and my salvation !

the mob'

14

Late one Monday morning, at work during a typically busy day, a phone call came that was to change my life, and that of my family - forever !

My wife Jan was on the phone. She had just received a phone call from a lady L, who was desperate. Her oldest boy D was severely depressed and suicidal, and in fact he hadn't left the house for several weeks. Her husband, 'Big D' they called him, was on a psychiatric benefit, with a drinking problem, and in and out of Carrington Psych Unit. Her daughter was having trouble at School and was staying home. The woman was at her wits end, and was trying to decide who to call for help.

There was one woman, a medium, that she knew and had been to for help, but she wasn't so sure about calling her again this time.

Then she spied a book that Jan had lent her sister M recently.

The book was called 'God Can Do Miracles' and was the story of some of the people that had been to the Katherine Khulman healing meetings in the USA and had received mighty individual experiences of healing.

On the inside page of books we lent out, we would usually ink-pad our address and phone number, and this caught her eye.

Not long before this day, her sister M who had a chronic drinking problem, had been invited to our Church film service, where she had responded to the evangelistic invitation, been introduced to my Jan, and later that night received Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Jan had kept in contact with her in the succeeding weeks, and eventually got to meet her sister L. We then invited the family to our place for a meal, and to the Church and the Sunday evening film service. And so, the book had been passed on from M to her sister L, and was handy on that fateful day, with our phone number inside it.

L decided to call Jan instead of the medium, explained the desperate situation, and asked for help.

Jan then phoned me, but knowing I was invariably busy, suggested that my partner W may be able to call around and see the family. As she relayed the situation, I felt inwardly that this situation was not for W, or indeed for any one else - it was for me to respond to. I got into the car, and headed for Avondale and the family home.

When I arrived, Jan was already there, and D was in his room as always. Actually, he hadn't left the house for several weeks, and spent most of his time in his room, depressed and suicidal. I went in to see him, and enquired what the matter was. He poured it all out, his depression, his problems and his feelings.

Now, we were always encouraged to bring any who had needs along to the Church service on a Sunday night, where they could hear the gospel message and hopefully respond to it. But there was no time for that I thought - this chap needs answers right here and now, he may not survive until next Sunday !

I spoke to him for about 15 minutes, then asked him if he wanted the real answer to his problems - a personal encounter with God, to be born-again, and all that went with it. "Sure thing" he responded. "OK, then just pray a prayer like this" and I led him in a simple prayer. What an instant change he experienced, (He told me later that praying that prayer was the turning point of his life) and he was truly born-again before my very eyes. We went out of the room and joined Jan, L and her daughter A in the lounge, and explained what had happened, - as if it wasn't evident to see on D's face. "I need that too", said daughter A, so she prayed a simple prayer also, and the same thing happened within her. "Me too" said L watching and hearing all of these things happening to her children before her very eyes, whereupon she also prayed and also had the same life changing experience. It was amazing - within a couple of hours, this family had their lives turned inside out, - transformed, and they surely needed it.

We eventually left after leaving some other books with them, including a Bible. Jan kept in contact with them during the week, and we arranged for them to come over to the Church service on the next Sunday evening.

Now, during that week another event was to occur.

We had a station wagon for the use of the family, and we often used it for trips and family journeys. But it was proving too small on such occasions - we needed a bigger vehicle, or even a Van possibly !

Occasionally I would scan the Vans for Sale in the paper, but they were mostly private sellers scattered all over the city. There was one yard over on the shore that had several vans though, and it was this very week that I managed to combine a visit to their yard with a site visit. They did indeed have a good range of vans of all types, and I slowly scanned the line-up. There was one van that seemed to stand out differently, but it had seats in the rear. "What would I do with seats ? " I recall thinking,

But they were just bolt fixed, so I could take them out if I wanted to, I mused. This van seemed to have some sort of appeal, and eventually I struck a deal, and arranged to pick it up on the Friday after L's phone call. This I did - but would I ever be able to use all of those seats, I kept wondering.

The next Sunday came, and Jan arranged to pick up the family and bring them over to the Church evening service. But how would we fit them all in, I suddenly anxiously thought - the car would be too small, I would have to arrange someone else to assist. But there's the Van I suddenly remembered - and it's got those jolly seats in it - they will come in handy after all.

So, off we went to pick them up. There was all of the family plus some of their friends, and they all got into the Van. Off I drove, and it was half way over to the Church that the 'penny dropped' as they say - I turned round in the seat, looked and gasped - every one of the seats was taken - 12 seats, 12 people Isn't God amazing I inwardly marveled - the timing and the events absolutely interlocked - the phone call, the families responses, the VAN AND IT'S 12 SEATS, and them all coming over - it was all fitting together. (After all, He who numbers all of the stars in space, can surely count the number of seats on a bus !)

That night, the 3 of the family answered the evangelistic appeal, plus some of their friends.

And over the next weeks, similar events unfolded.

It turned out that the family house was the meeting place for many of the teenagers of the district. L's second son was into everything going, as were his mates. There was always local kids and mates hanging around their house, which had become the local drop-in meeting pad, and L was sort of 'Mother' of the Mob. They were into break dancing, smoking, glue sniffing, car conversions, and petty theft, plus whatever alcohol was

available. Attending school was not a high priority, and there was a lot of truancy occurring.

The family coming to Church was revolutionary to this group - whatever was the attraction ? So these kids and mates came along to find out. Week by week the word spread, and more and more of their mates jumped in the Van each Sunday. It became a regular event, and I became known as the 'Man with the Van' Most Sundays the van was full and other cars were needed. When they all came and sat together we would take an entire row of seats. (We even got the ushers to keep us a row each night). And they responded to the appeal one by one. One night there were 9 of them met God at a film service meeting - it was wonderful to see God at work in their hearts and lives

And they knew it also - they all made 'contact' with the Almighty, and started reading the Bible, but in picture form for those with little schooling.

But I must tell you more about C who like others, had wagged so much schooling that his literary skills were minimal. One day while browsing in the Church bookshop, I noticed a pictorial Bible, basically done in comic format - words in 'bubbles' . I had never seen one like this before, and my first reaction was that it was 'cheapening' scripture. But then I thought ' just a minute, this may be good for C.' So I bought it, and duly gave it to C.

The next Sunday night, about midnight, the phone rang !

It was C's mother ... "Listen, I know that its late, bit I just want to tell you that C has been looking at that pictorial Bible that you gave us, and has just yelled out "Mum, listen to this, I CAN READ"

And he has gone on reading it and loves it.

So over a period of about 4 months between 50 and 60 of these kids came to a service, answered an appeal, found and met God for real, and were born-again. It was truly awesome to see God's hand and Spirit at work - it was a mini revival in action.

But there was the practical side also - "now that we are Christians, what do we do, how do we live, play, dress, work" etc Some of them wanted to visit with us, and so night by night, and day by day over the holiday period, they would appear at our place, or wait to be picked up. We canceled our other holiday plans and somehow coped with the invasion of bodies and hungry appetites. We would take them to the local beaches,

and have sports on the sand, or teach them to water ski behind the boat that we then had - the rapturous look on their faces when they eventually could stand up on water skis was wondrous to behold. Fish & Chips on the beach, and usually back to the house for a swim or spa - one night there was 20 kids in our one tiny spa pool, - and not much water at that. We learned as we went with them, and tried to get Church people to assist, but it was annual holiday time, so not much aid was forthcoming in all reality. And the phone calls to arrange this was so time consuming and tiring to say the least.

So we did what we could with them - it was mighty, but tiring and draining - both physically and financially, but oh so somehow satisfying within. And they became affectionately referred to by us as 'the mob'

Then one of them - G - had to shift out from home, and needed a place to stay - so he came for a while - and stayed for 5 years. And E, who came for a weekend and stayed 7 years, becoming as one of the family.

Others came from time to time for all sorts of reasons. At one stage we had 4 plus our own family = 9 in the house. Jan especially was being mother to 7 teenagers, which meant an endless round of meals, washing cleaning, counseling, taxi-ing - you get the picture ?

But one thing we knew throughout all of these times - God was absolutely in it. He had brought them our way, and we and they were in his hands - come what may. We could leave their future and what ever consequences arose entirely in his hands.

We keep in contact with those who live locally, others we may see from time to time, others we occasionally hear about from friends. Some have married and settled down with families of their own, others have moved away from Auckland. Their individual freedom and choices have led them in all different ways, directions and places.

But one thing they each one will probably never forget - that there was a time when God intervened in their lives, and that they made contact with Him - personally and really.

And for the enrichment that they brought to our lives - we thank them and Him, ... *whom to know is life eternal.*

Nana

15

Nana Emily Babbington was a character as they say - a one off, unique character.

My first contact with her was when she came over from Australia to stay for 2 or 3 weeks - just a short visit.

She was Jan's maternal grandmother, about 70 years old. Her husband who everyone called Pop, had died some time before. At this time, our children Kerri was 5, Shaan 2, and we still had the 2 cats from our honeymoon.

She was only with us for a few days, when the subject of Christianity came up. To my absolute amazement, she professed to know virtually nothing about the subject, and had thought about it even less. To my questions about had she even heard the 'Gospel' - the good news of salvation, she indicated no knowledge of it at all. Where had she been all her life ? I wondered, Had she been living in a Western civilisation, or on some desert island ? Not to have heard even something of the topic was quite incredible to me. But no, absolutely nothing, not an inkling.

Well, to cut the story short, when asked, she readily accepted Jesus as Saviour and Lord. There and then, on the spot, in our lounge, on our dilapidated lounge settee. It was as simple as that, she was so open to the message of the Bible. So much so that I wondered if she had really understood what we were saying, or what had just happened.

But the next day ... what a change in Nana. She had been really and truly 'born again' - at 70 years age ! She started reading the Bible, came to the Church meetings, and seemed to love it all.

But what so amazed me was her simple faith.

So many times she mentioned aches and pains before she went to bed. But when asked how she was the next morning, she replied, "Oh it's good now, you see I prayed about it last night, and Jesus has healed me - it's just fine !" And so it was.

And that happened time and time again, over and over it was repeated. She had such a simple faith (should we be surprised, as we all should have) But at such an age, to see it happen, was remarkable.

Nana was a truly amazing woman in more ways than one.

She had this great affinity with nature, and animals, and all things natural, She took over our vegetable garden, and got most everything and anything to grow, and was for ever it seemed getting some sick animal or injured bird back to health. She even trained our 2 cats to sit exactly where and how, and to eat when directed !

But, alas, Nana retained the memories of the bad experiences of her childhood and past, usually in minute detail. When prompted she could animatedly recite each and every one of the incidents, but sadly, seemed to find it so difficult to reach back and forgive the people involved.

Nana stayed with us for some 4 years, then went into her own rented flat, and eventually after 7 years returned to her Australia, where she died a few years later.

So again, a 2 or 3 week visit had extended to 7 years, after God had intervened in such a neat way.

But for a simple faith, and God's goodness Wow

Effie

16

Effie Muriel May RICHARDS was her name

Her family and maiden name was Babbington, before she married Ossie MacDonald and had 2 children, a boy Stuart Ross and a daughter Janice, whom I eventually married - so Effie became my Mother in Law

Her marriage to Ossie MacDonald eventually ended in divorce, after which she became the 'partner' of Harry Richards. For her own reasons, she chose never to marry Harry, but instead changed her surname by deed poll to his surname, so she became legally Effie Richards. But she was always Mum (in-Law) to me

Why am I relating all of this detail - well it has some bearing later on as you will see

Effie came into my life when I proposed to her daughter. Effie then lived in Sydney Australia, and came over to Auckland for our wedding. During the following years she came over periodically to visit with us and see her grandchildren, and would stay with us for several weeks on these occasions.

She came along to the Church we attended, and got to know P - a woman at the Church - reasonably well during the course of her visits and times spent with us. She wasn't very keen on Jan having become a Christian and joining this big local Church, but she came along to the Christian films that the Church put on each Sunday evening and to the Children's programmes etc. She gradually came to accept our way of life, but she never really accepted the Christian message, from what we could detect.

Effie was a very capable business woman, handled her own tax affairs, and was very well read and educated. . She had read much of Voltaire and similar atheists and had basically a humanistic viewpoint to life.

But all of Effie's relatives and those who knew her well, all came to know one thing about Effie - she had a great fear of death. Each of those who got to know her well knew this great inward unpreparedness and fear that she carried.

As she got older, Effie became afflicted with Alzheimer's, and increasingly had problems with her speech. After Harry died, she eventually she went to live in a retirement home south of Sydney.

Jan got increasingly concerned about her welfare and one day in May 1983, felt a strong inward urgency to go over and see her. The day that she had this prompting was the week before I was going to shift my office and my 6 staff from the basement of my house to a suburban office building.

It was not the news that I wanted to hear just then - it was going to be a hectic time of rearrangement and disturbance. Jan was quite sure about her inward prompting, but because I was so busy, she decided to ask a long-time family friend to accompany her for the trip over to see her mother. So, Jan and her friend Shirley caught a flight to Australia, leaving me to bach with the boxes.

I duly shifted the office, then one night the phone rang - it was Jan "Ray, sit down. I want to ask you something, Mum is OK, but failing, - I want to bring her back to NZ with me - is it OK ?"

I caught my breath, to have my Mother-in-Law to live with us indeed ! But immediately I felt an inward peace and almost a feeling of confirmation and assurance "Sure, That's fine with me - bring her over" I surprisingly, yet confidently, heard myself answering..

What had happened was that Jan and Shirley had gone to see Mum, and found her really failing and not very happy. But Jan's brother had gone to a lot of trouble to get her into this home and he definitely wouldn't be happy to see her leave, and go to another country! And Effie wasn't at all coherent to be able to say what she wanted. After discussing it with the Home Matron, the Matron decided to ask Effie directly what she wanted to do and if she wanted to go to New Zealand. For one surprising occasion, Effie became coherent, and remarkably answered for herself - "I want to go to New Zealand with my daughter" Now that was really quite amazing, - that she became lucid and coherent for that precise short while and answered so positively. "Are you quite sure ?" She certainly was.

And then the fun started.

To get a quick emigration clearance for Effie before the time of Jan's return and previously booked flight was well nigh impossible - her name change by deed poll threw the officials and all sorts of red tape eventuated. Jan visited the customs daily and over many long hours, and met obstacle after obstacle - to the eventual point on one day after an absolute stonewall, she burst into tears and shouted out to the officials "what more can I do for this poor old sick woman - are all of you here so absolutely heartless ?"

This so shocked the officials and stirred them that they very soon found a way around the red tape, and so Effie was able to join Jan on the plane flight back to Auckland.

As the weeks passed and Effie living with us, I often looked at her - she was with us physically, but mentally and conversation wise she may well have been any-place else ! With her ailment a conversation with her was virtually impossible. However she did make the effort to get out of bed and listen in while we had a short family devotion time and Bible reading with the children each evening. She would sit there quietly listening with a half smile, but she couldn't contribute at all, just soak in the atmosphere I would think to myself. And she did get her own big print Bible and had started reading it - amazing !. And P from the Church would visit her whenever she could, which Effie seemed to enjoy.

So the weeks passed by and so the winter season arrived.

Then one morning, I left the house to take the children to School as usual, but this morning something different happened. Effie got to the front door before me, and opened it with a wide happy smile - anyone would think that this was her house and that she was bidding me Goodbye I remember thinking - she had never done that before. As I passed her at the door, I stopped and had the impulse to give her a kiss and a hug - but this wasn't quite my norm, nor my usual gesture, so I just squeezed her arm instead, and told the children to "say Goodbye to Nana please".

She smiled back quite radiantly for her and closed the door after us - quite odd I thought, what ever was in her mind ?

At work, about 11.00am the phone rang. It was Jan - Effie had just had a heart attack and Jan had called the Doctor who was on his way. What should I do ? I had a meeting appointment, so I would go back home as

soon as it was over I decided.

I arrived home and Jan met me at the door - it was too late, Effie had just died, and the Doctor had also arrived too late, pronounced her dead and had just left.

I went inside and heard the whole story of that mornings events.

Effie had a heart attack, Jan had called the Doctor, but he was so very slow in coming. Jan then rang Marg, a Church friend who lived nearby, who quickly popped around. Effie had another attack and was obviously in some pain - she was lying back gasping

Then, amazingly, she raised herself up, and started jabbering out loud (with her false teeth out), but Jan and Marg couldn't quite make out what she was saying. She seemed to be looking upwards as though she could hear and see something or someone in the room. She looked peaceful, but also kept on jabbering out loud. She seemed convinced there was something she could hear and see high up in the room.

Then she sank back down and looked to have yet another heart attack.

Then, surprisingly, she raised her arm and hand as though she was reaching for something - or someone ! and kept on jabbering.

Then - she was gone - peacefully in spite of her obvious heart pains.

We were saddened of course and yet wondered - just what had been going on in that room ? What had she seen and heard ? What had she been reaching her hand out for, or to who ?

The undertaker was called and the funeral arrangements made.

And then P popped in to pay her respects. After hearing the story, P responded "wasn't it just great what happened with Effie on Monday then" "What do you mean ?" I asked "I never heard about any happening on Monday"

And so P related what had happened 3 days previously to her passing

P had often popped in to visit Effie who had just started to read the

Bible for herself. She liked the part in Song of *Solomon 2 : 8 : 13* which reads

The voice of my beloved, behold he comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills

My beloved is like a roe or a young hart (deer): behold he stands behind our wall, he looks forth at the windows, showing himself through the lattice

'My beloved spoke, and said, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away'

On the previous Monday, Effie was fully lucid and coherent for P's entire visit - which was most remarkable indeed. They read her favourite passage, then P turned over to *John 3 : 16*, and read the verse to Effie, but instead of reading '*For God so loved the world*', she substituted Effie Richards for the words 'the world' so it read '*For God so loved Effie Richards that He gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life*'

Whereupon Effie started to cry.

"Would you like to receive this Son of God as your own personal Saviour" P gently asked her. "YES, I WOULD", Effie replied, and she did just that there and then.

And that had happened on the Monday 3 days previous to her death on the Thursday morning !

Isn't Gods timing so choice - after Effie's 73 years, the biggest decision of her life occurred just 3 days before her passing on.

And what a passing - all fear of death was gone - none was evident at all to Jan or Margaret who had witnessed it all..

We shall never know for sure just what was going on in that room, but one thing those 2 women present knew for sure - ALL FEAR OF DEATH HAD certainly GONE.

Obviously some pain was there, but so was something or rather someone

else - she saw and heard and tried to respond to some reality invisible to human eyes or ears, but so real to her as to cause her to sit up and reach out her hand.

I have my own thoughts as to who was there to attend her, to comfort her, and then to receive her in her final hours and minutes.
What do you think ?

And then other passages from the old book came to me
Oh Death - where is your sting ? Oh grave where is your Victory ?
The strength of death is sin, the strength of sin is the law
1 Corinthians 15 : 55 - 57
Our Saviour Jesus Christ who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel 2 Timothy 1 : 10

And I shall see 'Mum' again one day I sincerely believe.

Thank you God for your great care and love,
and for your immaculate timing with Effie Richards

Amazingly, as I have recounted these happenings at the passing away of Effie, I have been told repeatedly that Effie's experience is by no means unique. Somewhat similar happenings, of people hearing the sweetest music and singing, of seeing the room filled with angelic hosts, of having 'a visitation', and similar keen awareness of the spiritual domain, with personal peace and the absence of fear, are evidently quite common. Others have had somewhat similar experiences at the passing of Christian loved ones.

Praise God indeed for such visitations and glimpses beyond.

Truly Amazing !

But wait there's more

After her mother died, even though she had witnessed all the events, and heard P's account, Jan wanted some sort of personal confirmation that her mother was indeed with her God.

The night after the funeral, the thought persisted and became a prayer

The next morning, the phone rang. Shirley had had a dream that night,

and phoned Jan because it was so vivid to her.

In the dream, Shirley saw Mum in a rose garden. Mum was smiling and she saw a hand on her shoulder. Shirley followed the hand to the person's face, and saw that it was Jesus. She saw that Mum was smiling up at him.

But the most amazing part was that Shirley knew nothing of Mum's love of roses, and that her most favourite place was indeed a rose garden !

To Jan, the fact of her Mum being in a rose garden with Jesus, was the greatest possible confirmation of her Mums whereabouts.

What an amazing confirmation of the events preceding her death, and such a personal comfort to Jan at that time.

Exodus

17

The phone rang one day, and effectively completely changed our lives for evermore. It was a mother of 3 at her wits end concerning her children, and their friends.

Now that is a complete chapter in itself refer 'the mob', but sufficient to say that through this lady and her family and friends, we met between 50 and 60 young people, many with a story of street-life and adolescent experimentation.

As they individually came along to this local Church, dressed in just about the only clothes that they had, it seemed like a small revival had broken out - one by one they accepted Jesus as Saviour and Lord, and changes began within their worlds. They were for real and had a hunger for the things of God. We were effectively ran of our feet as we endeavoured to do what we could to answer their questions and keep up with their progress.

But some of their questions about the Church itself coming from their street savvy experiences raised unanswerable questions - they could pick up the inconsistencies like nothing else.

Eventually, one Sunday morning it happened - "these people are not our kind of people " was stated from the pulpit - and just to be sure that everyone had the message, it was repeated again. "That's us he's talking about " they cried out to us - "who does he think he is - they're supposed to be Christians" We were thunderstruck.

And then privately we were accused by the Church leadership of trying to start our own Church with this group ! What nonsense !

So much for being 'known' to the Church leadership - they had totally mis-read us - such a thought had never entered our minds - we were just following what God seemed to be doing !

And then our daughter stated one night - "Dad, I'm not going back there"

And as we and others have repeatedly seen - teenagers often see through Legalism easier and sooner than adults do.

These 2 bombshells stopped us in our tracks and demanded a response.

For a whole year I pondered and prayed about it all - God surely had lead me along there, but was there now a change of direction coming up ?

There would be many consequences to us, our family, our friends, my career - indeed to our whole lives. But I think the biggest single factor was when I considered our eldest son, and anticipated his reaction as he approached teenage years in that particular church.

So, one of the biggest decisions of my life had to be made - with its huge consequences. To leave attending there, to withdraw completely ? We knew how it would be viewed, and generally what to expect.

We had given 25 years of our life to fully supporting that place, but how to go about it. I certainly didn't want to just vanish, there would have to be some communication made, especially to our many close friends there. Finally I decided to write it all down as a letter, and personally deliver it to each of the elders and our close friends.

Late one night, I started to write, and it just flowed on to the paper - all of 'my heart' and the many reasons and factors involved.

But nothing would ever have prepared me or us for the trauma of personally giving that letter out to all the elders and our close friends. The phone would beat us as we visited them all, I thought, and sure enough that is what happened, as we personally visited the home of each elder and those we deemed to be our closest friends.

If ever there had been any doubt that we were doing the right thing was soon dispelled as we went from home to home with our letter - the condemnation and rejection was incredible.

How could we have gone from 'a faithful brother' to an 'enemy' in 1 day ?

And one amazing consequence happened for which we were not prepared.

After we had done the rounds of distributing our letter that day - the phone just stopped ringing. Usually at our house the phone would go rather frequently, with calls from church friends and all aspects of

Church life. But after we finished distributing that day, I paused and thought, has the phone been cut off ? Have we not paid the phone bill ? Is there a fault in the line ? It was silent !

And then 'the penny dropped' as they used to say - we were now 'persons no-grata' As far as the Church people were concerned we no longer existed, never to be contacted again ! The marks of a Cult perchance !

And there was more to come

At Christmas time we would send out probably about 40 - 50 cards to Church friends and relatives. We would put a string up in the lounge to hang the ones that we received back on.

The next Christmas we did the same send out of 40 - 50 cards, and put the string up as per usual. But instead of 40 - 50 cards coming back in, there was only about 3 or 4 from our ex Church friends. We were not only off the phone lists, but off the Christmas card lists as well ! Oh, well, - how you learn things about people and their Churches !

After leaving that Church. I had to face my business partner who was still there. There was an initial reaction and then adaptation had to take place for us both. Generally we avoided the subject, and he stayed with me for about 4 - 5 years longer.

It took a long time to adjust to not attending that particular Church. Fortunately we had a second house at Swann Beach, Whangaparaoa Peninsula, about 50 kms away, where we lived for a while and commuted to the city each day, while we tried to get our heads unscrambled.

Friends of ours, who had also left that particular Church, now attended another Church nearby, and the Minister there was marvelous to us. He visited us, and even came up to our bach at Whagaparoa, when he ended his visit with a prayer for all of our family, and prayed in a fashion that I had never heard the like of - breaking all kinds of spiritual 'strongholds' he could see having held and bound us.

Now I had lived with my own personal 'black cloud' that seemed to cover me continually. It was a sort of condemnation that hung over me that nothing I could ever do was ever good enough - I could never pray enough, read scripture enough, be 'holy' enough, and had been with me for most of my Christian life that I could remember.

The next morning, after this minister had prayed for our family, I woke up in bed, and nudged Jan beside me - "Its gone" I declared
"What's gone ?" she asked, puzzled
"The black cloud" I told her "It's absolutely gone from me"
Can you guess what she then said - "It's gone from me too "
The feeling of condemnation - of never 'being' or 'doing' enough - had indeed been broken.
That prayer had been answered. Those invisible but absolutely real, powers of legalism, had been exposed and broken - NEVER to return, from that day to this !
What an unexpected bonus for us both

It was much like a 'hospital' type Church, helping many religiously and Church battered and bruised people, while renting a School hall, and was just what we needed at that time.

So we attended there for about 5 years, and as they were into getting some religious 'qualifications' we both studied for a Diploma of Theology , which we duly passed and obtained.

Eventually they decided to move in to a rented Warehouse, and that wasn't all that seemed to change. Increasingly the accent was on - money - to pay the constant high rent each month.

Then we were asked to be elders, along with an Accountant couple, and later we were asked to be leaders of the Youth Group - and Battlecry !

Our daughter met a young Fijian man while there, who was over on a study course at the seminary they were running, and the attitude of the place seemed to change - into just what he had helped us out of - 'Legalism' again. We couldn't quite believe it - not 'control' again !

But that's what it was all right - Legalism, that is so very prevalent in New Zealand religious circles, from North Cape to Bluff, and keeps revealing and flexing its chilling tentacles.

So we decided to move on from there, as did the other Elder, but at least they were gracious enough with the farewells this time round.

And so another era of our lives had passed.

a rainbow day

18

July 12 1989

The day my Mother died.

It was a Wednesday afternoon and I went to the funeral service of a dear friend.

When I returned to the office after the funeral, there was a message to ring my brother in South Otago. The phone call was short and direct - at 1pm that afternoon my Mother had died.

She had a fall about 2 weeks earlier and had broken her hip, with the result that she would never walk again. Aged 83, she had been in a hospital / old people's home for 10 years, and had suffered from Parkinson's disease throughout this time. The drugs she was on had stabilised her, and she maintained reasonable health. Her heart was strong, and her grip was still like a vice, her pioneering spirit carrying her through many years. But this fall and broken hip really set her back and being confined to bed, she deteriorated. She would often lapse into semi-consciousness and then on this Wednesday, she just quietly and peacefully passed away.

My brother wasn't sure what day or time the funeral would be, it depended on the undertaker's timetable and my own travel arrangements to get down to South Otago. I suggested either the Friday afternoon, in which case I would travel down on the Friday morning, otherwise the Saturday. But I left it for them to organise and advise me.

Later that night my brother phoned and said that the Friday afternoon time suited the undertaker and the hospital staff best. So on the Thursday I arranged for a flight down on the Friday morning. I was of course aware that my Mother had died, but somehow the full impact of it hadn't quite hit home to me yet.

The only flight available with spare seats on the Friday morning was at 7am, which meant that we would have to leave the house at 6am, and therefore be out of bed around 5am. In spite of a previous late night, I found myself awake at 4am. It was just after I awoke that my thoughts

went back to my Mother and her life, and the memories, both good and bad flooded into my mind.

Her life had been quite hard after becoming a Christian and giving her heart to the Lord at 15 (as I was to be told the next day). In her teenage years after her conversion, she was very aware that she had the call to be a missionary overseas, and this impression never left her. But then about the age of 25 she met a man who proposed to her, whereupon she had to make the choice of either marriage or going to the mission field. She decided on the former, and married John Miller a farmer at Milton.

Their marriage became increasingly difficult, and it was around the time of my birth in 1940 that physical violence began. This increased to become commonplace, resulting in the police being called to the house on many occasions. Many separations were ordered as a result of judgements at the Magistrates Court in Dunedin. These culminated in a divorce case at the Supreme Court, which my Father opposed by employing the best criminal lawyer available at that time. Farm life entailed a lot of hard manual work through the war years, so Mother had a hard life and a difficult marriage to bear. And now she was gone !

So the memories, of both the good times and the traumatic bad times were recalled as I lay in bed at 4am on the day of her funeral. The point that really bothered me though, was that several times after I became a Christian, I had asked her how things were with her, and she indicated that her faith was faltering. Lying awake at this early hour, my thoughts recalled many of these events, and I wondered whether Mum's faith had endured to the end. As I pondered, I saddened, and then it really hit me - she was gone, and I would never see her on this earth again.

For 50 minutes I just wept non-stop as my thoughts roamed amongst all of the memories. The one nagging persistent thought was - had Mum held her faith to the end, and had she gone to be with our God ? It really bothered me.

As I lay there weeping, my wife of course awoke also, and proceeded to gently pray for that day, the funeral, for the people down south, for my family, for me, for all the circumstances involved. I was so upset and grieving that I just couldn't pray verbally, but my thoughts were prayers in themselves.

Instead I only blurted out a one sentence prayer "Oh God, show me a sign that she's with you" and then a few minutes later, again "OH GOD, SHOW ME A SIGN THAT SHE'S WITH YOU"

Eventually, I emptied myself of all my tears and still grieving, got myself ready and prepared for the journey South. As I got dressed I thought - what a silly prayer I had uttered ! Fancy expecting God to give me a sign to show me that. It was almost presumption to ask for such a thing, and how would God answer such a prayer anyway ? By giving me a visible sign, or somehow communicating a signal ? How ridiculous a prayer I mused. But the request had really come from my heart and I really desired to know the answer.

At the airport Jan and I were told that Christchurch airport where we had to stop-over was closed because of fog and that the plane, if it did take off and found Christchurch closed, would have to return to Auckland. We were scheduled to arrive at Dunedin at 9.30am, so if this happened it wouldn't leave much time to make the funeral service timed for 2.30pm. After take-off we experienced quite a lot of turbulence, and I just prayed that God would somehow open the airport at Christchurch. As we flew on, we were informed that Christchurch had indeed been opened and we did indeed land and went on to Dunedin.

It was a day with misty rain and the sun trying to get through. My brother and son were at the airport to meet us, and soon we were in their car going towards their home. Having passed through Milton, we took the road to Tokoiti where the cemetery is situated, and onwards to their farm. As this road led upwards to Tokoiti, leaving the township, and then our old family homestead came into view across the neighbouring farms. At this point I turned my head to see the old homestead in the distance.

As I did that I caught my breath, - a rainbow was poised over our farm with its base seeming to rise directly out of the old homestead itself. Wow, I was so surprised that I was speechless and so didn't check to see if the others in the car had seen it . This section of the road took a few minutes to pass along and I was spellbound at the sight which was truly quite awesome - the base of the rainbow sat directly upon the homestead house and ascended to the clouds - could it possibly be a sign and a visible answer to my cry that I had dared to ask God for ?

We turned the bends and eventually reached my brothers house. I got

unpacked and changed and then turned to look out the window towards the hills - and there was another rainbow just starting to form towards the hills. This was a day for rainbows surely enough ! But these were only my observations, I didn't discuss these private thoughts with Jan or anyone else. So, we had lunch and prepared for the funeral at 2.30pm. I noticed that the day had become slightly overcast with squalls of showers coming across the plains - a typical South Otago winter's day.

My thoughts went forward to the funeral service - Mum had left a note with my brother many years previously, saying that she didn't wish to have the usual Church service, just a simple graveside service. This was just like her - removing all the trappings of religion - just the bare essentials of Christianity - no fuss, no bother, just the simple and practical basics of her faith.

But my inner concern became the weather - was the rain going to come and spoil everything, and I thought, and half prayed, "God, if you are speaking to me through this sign of a rainbow, wouldn't it be neat for another rainbow to appear at the graveside so that I would know beyond a shadow of a doubt". Even as I had these thoughts / inner prayers, another thought came - wasn't this just adding more presumption to my earlier heart cry. But still another thought came "No, all things are possible with our God" It was He who had given the rainbow as a sign after the flood, reminding us forever of His covenant with mankind that He would no more judge the earth with a flood.

Time passed and eventually we left for the graveside.

It had become colder, about 3 degrees was my guess. Quite a lot of people turned up, about 100 I would say.

The cemetery is situated on the gently rising foothills on the outskirts of Milton at Tokoiti some 4 kilometres from our farm. The grave was at the back of the cemetery beside that of my father and a small valley fell away further to the east. The hearse arrived and we carried the coffin and placed it on the grave. A very gentle misty rain started to fall and the minister that Mum had requested went to the graveside and started to speak.

He commenced by reading several Bible passages and as he did so I noticed away in the distance, just the tip of another rainbow. Then he

started to speak about Mother herself, and what we saw next will never leave me as long as I live. The sun just barely increased sufficient to draw out and produce the most fantastic rainbow I have ever witnessed. It was absolutely perfect and seemed almost within arm's reach. From the position where we were standing, it seemed to have at its very centre the open grave and the casket.

Some rainbows that you see are 180 degrees, from horizon to horizon, but this one went beyond that - it went down the incline into the valley and to a full 270 degree arc, but its main feature was its exquisite perfection. It was as clear and as bright as the most vivid painting.

And it reached its brightest just as the minister said "and so shall she ever be with Lord". Standing beside me, my wife Jan dug me in the ribs and said, without any knowledge of the previous sightings, but only remembering my early morning prayer, said - "there's your sign" I nodded and the tears started to well again. I turned to Shaan, my son, standing on the other side of me, and saw that he was staring at the rainbow in amazement also. He said "Dad, look at that, isn't it fantastic".

Earlier on as we walked to the graveside, my thought had been to bring a camera with me, but then another thought came 'oh no, you couldn't do that, it wouldn't be right for a family member to take a camera to his mother's funeral' So, I had left it in the car. But Shaan had brought his, and he passed it to me to get a shot of this amazing sight. Still the rainbow hung there fantastic and brilliant - even glowing. I fumbled with his camera, and tried to sort out how to get it going, but I just couldn't, so I passed it back to Shaan for him to take. (But either he couldn't, or something happened to it so it never came out) The minister who had his back to the valley and so was completely oblivious of the rainbow, continued on and said again in the course of his words "and so shall she ever be with the Lord". All the while the rainbow just hung there brilliant and with its centre right over the open grave.

I knew from the assurance in my heart and the expression on the faces of those around me who were watching that this was indeed something orchestrated and timed by God himself.

As the misty rain increased, the people slowly drifted off or went back to my brothers house to refreshments and hot drinks. In due course I also returned, and went in to the room to change.

Then I glanced out of the window again - and there was another rainbow in the distance. It seemed as if God was saying "get the message"

Eventually all the visitors and friends departed. The evening soon came and I had a talk with my brother which went until 2am the next morning - I slept soundly until 9am.

After waking and reading a portion of the 'old book', I drew the curtains and looked out of the window - Wow, there was another rainbow ! "OK. OK, I get the message Lord" It seemed as if God was reinforcing what had happened previously, in fact He was having a chuckle about it as though I had been like Peter of little faith.

I couldn't help but think of that part in *James 1 : 17* where God is referred to as "the Father of lights" and again in Joshua where He turned back the sun upon the sundial for about a whole day - He can do just whatever He pleases, whenever He pleases.

This to me was one of the greatest natural or practical evidences of the power of our God that I have ever witnessed. His timing and creativity had been total perfection - to orchestrate all of those factors together to produce that sign for those 3 or 5 minutes of that service was absolutely incredible. The position of the cemetery, the position and location of the grave, where we were standing in relation to the grave, the weather on the day, the exact conditions necessary to produce a rainbow, and the incredible timing - how the rainbow came out only for the time the Minister was talking about Mother, and then how it seemed to glow when he used the words "and so she ever be with the Lord"

Truly AMAZING

MY MOTHER IS WITH THE LORD do you hear ?

MY MOTHER IS IN THE PRESENCE OF HER GOD AND HER SAVIOUR

Of that, I now have no doubt

Thank you dear God, for my Mother
'So shall she ever be with her GOD'

lost and found

19

Now, many if not most of us, are forever losing things right?
Now, where did I put that down?, what on earth did I do with that?.
Where oh where has that item gone?, did it grow legs and walk away?
And supposedly it gets worse with age !
Well, any one who knows me and my office, sees my desk surrounded by files - dozens of them, each project in a manilla folder with all of its correspondence and history - precious indeed to an office. Supposedly superseded by Emails and the computer - but there's nothing like a hard copy for me ! I actually live and function by these job files !

A decade ago, in my office, one day a file couldn't be found - nothing strange there, I 'm forever misplacing such files. But this one was especially vital, and the clients were soon to pay me a visit.
I searched the office, several times, asked all of the staff if they had seen it - no luck. Again I ransacked the office - thoroughly.
Then, and only then, I thought - 'now God knows where that file is', and I offered a silent prayer in my office. No sooner had this happened, than I left my office, went in to the main drawing office part, glanced down at the first desk, and THERE IT WAS, right on the corner, as though someone had just placed it there.
"OK - who found it ?" I asked everyone "Who found it and placed it there ? Own up !" But in spite of asking everyone as intently as possible, they all just looked at me blankly.
No-one professed any knowledge of it at all. Amazing !!

And the very next day, that whole scenario was REPEATED
Another file lost, searched for, turned the office upside down, asked everyone, no joy ... remembered to pray, went in to the drawing office, looked down, AND THERE IT WAS AGAIN.
Was is someone playing tricks on me? Is there a practical joker on the staff? I really don't think so, all I know is that that's what happened TWICE on successive days.

Battlecry

20

It was 1990, about 5 years after we had left the Church where we had met. We had been going to another local Church, which met in a leased commercial building down the lower end of the main street at Onehunga. After attending there for several years, we were asked to become elders, and in the absence of anyone else, asked to look after the Youth Group. Now, that was a mission in itself. There was about 20 or 30 in the group, the most raggle-taggle bunch that you could imagine. Mostly from the lower socio - economic strata as they say, underprivileged and some quite dysfunctional at that. Also, a group of 10 or 12 Fijian youth were being hosted by the Church, while they attended the Bible School based there.

But what to do with this group, it was all new to us, and how to cope with a full year of them was the task. Then, Jan had an idea to stage a musical drama involving all of them. The topic or theme would be to demonstrate spiritual warfare in script, song and dance, with the title of Battlecry, (and how apt that title eventually turned out to be)

We had a meeting to float the idea. All the group were quite keen on the idea, but dubious as to whether they could do it. It seemed as being rather beyond them, and doubts were aired as to their capabilities.

However, they decided to give it a go.

Practices were started, and the first hurdle reared its head - the 7.00 pm start. This was too much for most of them, 1 or 2 come at 7.00 pm, the rest ambled in over the next hour. And this pattern proved almost impossible to change or rectify.

Casting got underway, and the various parts were decided.

The key role was eventually given to a youth called Matthew, and scripts were written and handed out to be learned. Then, cold hard reality started to move in. Twice weekly practices were needed initially, then weekly, and a stage date was set. There was mild interest, but mostly

general scepticism and little motivation.

But, what about stage props - who to design and paint them ?

It was a huge task to contemplate?

Then - an idea - to use a rear projector to throw a picture on to a large screen which would form a back drop behind the actors. A search was made without success - proving far too expensive to hire.

But the idea itself was good and filming of the backdrop scenes started. R was the photographer, and from McDonalds in Queen Street to the flames of our open fire the camera rolled. Our daughter Kerri did the choreography, song selection, and the dance routine rehearsals.

But the underlying lack of conviction that we could actually pull it off continued to undermine our efforts. This attitude was echoed through the families of the Church. Many if not most all adults thought that we were being far too ambitious and that it was all quite beyond the capabilities of the youth involved. The group leader just couldn't be serious, and eventually he had to be replaced with T

And what to do for a stage was a massive problem in itself. But then came an almost miraculous answer. A timber container was found at the rear of the factory building the Church leased. On enquiry, no one seemed to own or to want it, so it was used to build a stage within the Church auditorium. Absolutely perfect as it turned out.

We all struggled on, but the pessimistic attitudes continued, and surprisingly emanated especially from the new Gang Leader and his key role ! Eventually, there had to be a show-down meeting, and the question was put. Do you want this to happen, or do we all call it off ? DECIDE NOW ! Some how, the majority voted for it to continue, but an improved attitude was necessary throughout the entire group, and in their parents likewise ! Costumes, script memorization, dance rehearsals, learning the songs off by heart, still the effort required to even turn up to the rehearsals on time ! Plus the Fijians with their natural abilities in song and dance scoffing at these nondescript young people struggling with the various aspects of trying to get it all together !

And then there was J - a special case in his own right - rather uncoordinated and dysfunctional, but determined that he should have had the Gang Leader role. Finally, to stem his pleading, Jan had a brainwave - give him his own special role of basically being himself - Bones - a lieutenant in the gang, with his mothers sole task to look after him and

get him there on time, etc !

Lighting was organized - another mission in itself, and the months went past. Tickets were prepared, distributed and sold. There was to be 3 performances on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings.

And then the last week arrived - would we make it - would it all actually happen ? Two last practices in this final week - on the Tuesday, and then the Thursday - the one and only full dress rehearsal - isn't that pushing it ? The Tuesday night one really crystallized the group - they now realized that they were looking straight down the barrel either pulling it off, or being a part of the most colossal FLOP !
It was the final moment of intense TRUTH !

Then Thursday came and the one and only full dress rehearsal
It began, and somehow, it continued, and with its ending for the first time the colossal realization hit them - THEY COULD DO IT -
THEY COULD ACTUALLY PULL IT OFF !

The realization was immense. A supper had been arranged, and the scene and atmosphere will live with each and every young person for ever - there was backslapping, tears of joy, exuberance, even jubilation what a HIGH - they were performers real live stage performers - they had proved it ! All of the trauma, discipline, and sheer hard effort were now all worth it ! The show would happen after all, and they would NOT BE DISGRACED !

Friday night - Opening night - came.
Could they repeat that awesome Thursday rehearsal ?

And off it went, albeit with a few falterings - this was their first real live show ! But the audience loved it - they clapped and cheered and stamped - it was a sweet SUCCESS
Some even asked J for his autograph - he was a star !

And so the other 2 performances - the audience was so impressed and appreciative. A raggle - taggle bunch of Onehunga youth had succeeded in putting on a successful 3 night live stage production of an original musical. Their lives and their memories would never be the same.
BATTLECRY had been aptly named - it had both a BATTLE and a CRY
But what an amazing episode in their lives

renting

21

Who would have believed it, after all those years of a family home.
The very thought **renting** indeed.

Bolton Street had been on the market for many months, but didn't move at all. Perhaps it was the Power pylons so close, just over the creek with their cables so close to the end of the house, and perhaps the cost was a factor - a heap of dollars in those tough times.

And then, quite unexpected, DR from Dunedin, wanting a peaceful sitting for Christian counselling type work, fell in love with it as we had, and he even said "you can feel the anointing here".

A valuation put the value quite harshly we thought, so after a bit of thought, and no other offers ... " Well, it's going to a good home, let it go." So the deal was signed right on Christmas 1993

But where should we go, what should we do ??

I had determined in my mind to do nothing until the contract was signed by both parties and final.

Now it was Christmas, how / where to start hunting.

We thought to cool our heels for a bit, see what would happen to the kids, and where and if they would settle, so how about renting for a while ?

But to get a place organised right on Christmas !! The very worst time of the year we thought.

Then, during my usual morning Bible read / quiet time, I flicked the pages and a verse seemed to leap out of the pages at me ...

John 14 : 6 . " I go to prepare a place for you "

Well, we certainly could do with 'a Place', but down here on earth now, not just in heaven eventually, I thought.

Was I getting it mixed up, or even perhaps was God telling me that my time was up, and my next shift would be vertical instead of horizontal ??

But again it seemed that God could use and give whatever context to scripture that he wanted to after all, it was His inspired Word, so He could use it as He liked, and quicken it exactly as He saw fit.

But Christmas time, to try and find a house that would suit us,
(It should have a large extra room for my studio ideally !)

So, I determined not to panic, but to wait till the other side of Christmas Day, and then Boxing Day.

The next day, I grabbed the paper and very tentatively opened it and looked at the For Rent section for the very first time. There were about 3 or 4 places for rent that might suit, one in particular sort of stood out. "Jan, would you phone these up, and see what gives, please"

Jan did just that, then suggested that we see the one in Te Atatu South

When I saw it, my heart seemed to sing it had an added-on Studio type room, that even resembled Bolton Street, with wooden French doors opening onto a patio and swimming pool ideal. And a garage to house our unpacked boxes of extra items, 4 bedrooms, and a dining room that would take our large dining table perfect.

A quick meeting and haggle on cost, and the deal was done.

And that was all it took one flick through the paper, Jan's few phone calls, one visit, one discussion, and it was all settled effortless really.

A lease for a year, with another year right of renewal, shift in to exactly coincide with vacating Bolton Street amazingly prepared, with precision timing.

'Behold, I go to prepare a place for you '

It could hardly have been more made to order, or stress free.

Should we be so amazed ?

Our God makes the difficult seem so simple.

Bible-in-Schools

22

There are some defining moments in all of our lives aren't there ?
Apart from the usual career moulding ones, for me there have been 2.

The first one was that fateful day and a phone call - that changed our families life forever, and introduced us to Avondale people affectionately called 'the mob' - refer that chapter. Our lives would never be the same again, that's for sure !

The second life changing event was when we were attending a small Church in Onehunga.

But first I should explain

There is a programme instituted by some of the major Churches in New Zealand, to give 'religious education' to primary School children, called 'Bible in Schools' dependent totally on volunteers - mainly women.

With increasing secularisation, the days when most children attended Sunday School at a nearby Church have unfortunately long gone, and most children grow up in NZ with little if any Bible knowledge or input.

And with increased immigration, Schools particularly in Auckland are permeated with children from families of other beliefs and cultures.

The 'Bible in Schools' programme is a half hour slot (usually first thing on a selected weekday), when these volunteers come into the Schools and take a Bible lesson from a curriculum, the School being nominally 'closed' for that period. If any parents are not happy about their children having this 'instruction' then they go to a separate programme elsewhere in the School.

Jan had been such a volunteer for a local School, and eventually became a co-ordinator of the Bible-in-School teachers at that School. There is always a dearth of teachers, particularly with the increase in 'working wives' and constantly the plea goes out for more volunteers.

So, on this day, Jan spoke at our Church outlining the situation and volunteer shortage and ended with the words " there is a need for 500 more teachers TOMORROW"

Now, this woke me up - 500 volunteers needed tomorrow !

I looked around for the hands to go up in response - but there was only 1 or 2 from already busy women- not one man.

"Where are all the men ?" I thought "didn't they hear the woman ? 500 teachers tomorrow !"

Now, I had never had any involvement with any sort of children's programme either Sunday School, Bible Class or such - absolutely NONE "But there is a need - these kids are the leaders of tomorrow - where are all the men ?" I got annoyed, even angry - why had just a couple of women, and no men at all, responded. I then thought about my own situation ! But I was busy, running a full-on business, with family matters, very involved with people, 'the mob', Church affairs etc etc Surely there were other men who could do this ! But there was none willing evidently ! "Well, if there jolly well isn't anyone else, I guess that I will have to have a shot at it myself - it's only half an hour a week - surely I can fit that in somewhere" I thought.

And that was the inner thought process that changed my life completely that morning while shining a Church pew !

"Give me this curriculum - it can't be that hard to teach a bunch of kids" Not very 'spiritual' at all, for what was to become such a momentous decision. and even a 'CALL' of God to me.

But facing a classroom of primary School kids with a strange curriculum for the very first time in my life was another matter - at 50 years of age, with very little public speaking experience, still some stutter problems - just how could I do it. How I got through that first time, I will never know, But kids are sweet and very tolerant and forgiving - they can sense ones heart and motive.

And that's how it all started - 15 years ago.

15 years of up to 3 classes per week at various local Schools.

Jan did it for some 20 years before 'the system' and her other roles and activities meant that she had to re-prioritise her time and energy.

And then came a question from a little girl in that first class that also helped to change my life !

I had finished the set lesson early, whereupon I ventured to ask "Any one with a question?" One little miss in the front row, then looked straight up at me and asked "WHO IS GOD?"

"Who is God?" I echoed "Who is God?" How on earth can I answer a 9 year old child that question in a couple of minutes. Why it would take so long, how could I put it simply "Why, He's our Creator, but He's more than that, he wants us to know Him as our Heavenly father" I blurted out. She seemed satisfied with that answer, but the question got into me. That's a fair enough, question, and the child deserves a better answer.

So, each week at the end of the set lesson, I would tell her and the class some more about God Himself.

And then I started writing and expanding and even sketching down the answer, including the next questions that would surely follow next - What is The Bible? Who is Jesus? What about prayer? I kept writing and sketching, and telling the children a bit each week. Later that year at a volunteer Teacher get-together, someone asked me how the year had gone, and what I was teaching. Whereupon, I showed her my notes and sketches "Well, that's great, could I have a copy of those?" came the response. "Suppose so"

And that is how 'THE QUEST' was born.

I later teamed with Stu Duval who had been a Bible-in-Schools regional co-ordinator and is one of the most talented artists and communicators I have ever met, and we spent over a year preparing this New Zealand curriculum, then published it. (All the previous curriculum were overseas based, expensive, no-copyable, and rather difficult to use)

We sold so many of 'THE QUEST' curriculum that has become widely used in the upper North Island, being NZ based, with Biblical impact, able to be photo-copied, and consequently economic to buy and use.

Stu specialised at that time in teaching teachers at seminars, so we teamed up, with me as general organiser and dogs-body for these. He with me helping, did many of these Seminars with up to 100 people for a whole day, all around the top half of the North Island over many years, and met so many choice people with a heart for children and 'children's ministry'. These people, mainly women, largely un-known. un-recognised, un-

heralded, un-rewarded - but undoubtedly well known to God - gems each one.

One man at Thames that we met does 15 classes each week, and another couple there also do 32 classes between them ! At different Schools and different age classes - truly the salt of the earth, called and blessed.

And so, my life was radically changed - 500 volunteers required TOMORROW, and later a little girls question "Who is God ?"

Keeps you young too, relating to these children, and there's so many little stories that I could tell you about heart touching incidents and responses.

Its really like being a missionary in your own back-yard.

And in an increasingly multi-cultural society, one doesn't have to travel far to help spread the gospel these days !

prison (pareremoremo) 23

"So what do you get up to in your spare time ?" came the question from a business colleague as we chatted informally. "Oh, I play some tennis" I answered, "and also do some prison visiting at Pareremoremo. "You what" he exclaimed "now why would you want to do that?"

Why indeed ?, I asked myself, musing on his puzzled question. How would I start to explain the reason to someone to whom prison visiting was beyond his appreciation ?

I mused further

And why would a young woman in her early twenties, with all the possibilities open to her in this world, even want to do that on a regular weekly basis. And when asked much the same question by her workmates, answer "Why it's the highlight of my week, to visit the inmates at Pare !"

Such visiting is not everyone's 'cup of tea' as they say - absolutely not. But for me and my wife, and a few mates, and for this young woman (who had just a little while previously become a Christian), it was not a burdensome task, but a delight, even something to look forward to.

The weekly, or sometimes fortnightly, (and now recently bi-monthly) ritual of finishing work early, changing clothes, fighting busy homeward bound rush-hour traffic on the clogged North Western motorway for a half hour trip to Albany, in all weathers, seasons and conditions, not knowing what reception we would get from the guards (or even if we would be let in that night) year round for well over a decade.

Why indeed ? I mused,
Just why do I do it at all, how can I describe in words the inward satisfaction that we all derive ?

I well remember one of our first visits to Pare Maximum Unit, which is quite an experience in itself. After entry, you are taken down a flight of stairs into the bowels of a world where everything is either concrete or steel. Along endless echoing corridors with frequent steel doors that need unlocking, opening, closing behind, and then re-locking. (The thought then comes that if there is any trouble of any kind, a riot or a fire, there's no immediate way out, just a return trip through all those locked doors, and the guards got the only key !!)

Eventually the guard leads us to a Chapel, completely internal, where after going inside, these doors are in turn locked, and we are left locked inside with the inmates who have turned up. At this first visit, I asked for the door to be unlocked so that I could go into a hallway where some other inmates were waiting for some reason. I chatted to one of them briefly, and he looked me up and down. He was a Maori, younger than me, with many tattoos. Thoughts raced through my mind - we obviously had come from quite different backgrounds, cultures, upbringings, suburbs, with different attitudes to most subjects, yet here we were face to face. "Why are you here ?" he asked. Quite surprised, I replied simply "I care" He took it in thoughtfully, and for a few short minutes I outlined the story of my conversion and my 'born again' experience. For those few moments something clicked between us - we were touching spirit to spirit - this young troubled Maori and I - where else on this fair earth could this sort of thing happen between such two totally different people And that absolutely thrilled me inwardly - our differences meant for nothing in this place - race, skin colour, parentage, age, upbringing, education, careers, where we lived, the clothes we wore, the car we drove - all these outward things meant for nothing here, they were all left outside, they didn't really matter. All that mattered was, if you cared, if you had something (or someone) to share, if you had touched reality. As someone has said - 'the ground at the foot of the cross is level' - and nowhere on earth is that probably more evident than inside a Maximum Security Correction facility such as Pareremoremo

And from that time on, I was hooked on prison visiting - to touch other people of very different walks of life, mostly troubled, even disturbed, 'lost' in all manners of ways, but some ready to reach out to anyone who could offer a scrap of caring, hope, and reality.

And since that time - some of the choicest moments spent with other people on this earth have been within the confines of Pareremoremo prison.

We haven't been back much to the Maximum Security Unit - it's a really tough place and for those who have much time, patience, and even a specific calling to such.

Jan and I prefer going to Medium Wing, where there are less hardened criminals, and more freedom in various ways. The opportunity came for us to visit the Segregation Wing - where inmates are put for their own protection, (mostly sex offenders) away from 'main stream' and those who would mete out their own form of justice or punishment or retribution. But here, amongst the lowest of the low - the considered scum of society and even of the prison system, we surprisingly found a different attitude "We are at the bottom of the barrel" is their view, so there's nowhere to go but up. And some of them do just that - knowing what they are, and what others think of them - they are open to reach up and seize an opportunity for redemption. And oh, the times that we have spent there with them, down in their dining room area, sharing, singing sometimes, sometimes reading, but usually just chatting one to one. One year, there was such interest that a few of them had their own prayer / share meetings on the weeks we didn't come, and were ready and open for us, and the reality was quite awesome.

In fact, I thought, where will this stop? It could affect the guards, and the other wings.

But then came Christmas, and they were mostly scattered to other prisons (the Correction system has its own way of controlling 'things') But those inmates took what had happened there with them to the other prisons, some of which we also visited, so God has his own way of doing things.

And other experiences there - I well remember a Maori chap who was covered in tattoos with terrible marks around his throat and neck area. Eventually I enquired about the cause or reason for those marks, and he told me his story that would have to rank with one of the most remarkable testimonies I have ever heard on this planet - but that's for another time! And this chap started learning Hebrew and Greek inside, to better understand the original Bible script! Now imagine this - a semi-literate tattooed Maori inmate sex-offender prisoner learning Hebrew and Greek - isn't that something?

Another of our regulars had been released after serving one life term for murder, then did another after being 2 weeks out, and was now doing a second life term. He had spent 37 of his 56 years inside some form of correctional facility - now released and at last report doing well

To hear grown men share their stories poignantly from the heart - some having to come to such a place to truly face themselves and commence the rebuilding process.

To meet with these men across all that would define or separate us, to share, to make contact spirit to spirit, to impart, to be built up, to read and pray and sing and worship together, to feel somehow strangely 'purged' after leaving them - how would I convey all of that to the question about prison visiting

"Now why on earth would you want to do that for ?"

masseuse

24

One day in 1995, returning back from a business appointment, my car radio was on to Southern Star, when I heard that a woman from Australia was over here and offering courses in massage therapy.

My ears pricked up, and I jotted down the phone number. Giving it to Jan, she followed it up, met the woman, went on the course, and eventually bought a portable steam sauna from the woman.

And that is how it all started and now several courses, study and diplomas later, Jan has found her special niche

But amazingly, when Jan was at secondary school, a Vocational Guidance person visited the School, and spoke to all the students individually.

The meeting or interview only took a few minutes, when the Person said to Jan "you should consider becoming a massage therapist"

Strange how that comment was only fulfilled some 35 years later.

And it really suits Jan, it is her gifting, even a ministry in itself.

(I must say that when I look at Jan's wrists, I wonder at how she can do it and keep it up, but she tells me that its all in the technique and stance.)

Many other cultures people are apt to massage each other, from infants.

But the western culture maintains a 'personal space', and we have this hesitation in actually touching one another, and of course, the stigma of massage parlours and 'extras' has added to the denigration of what is such an important aspect of life. From a baby, personal contact is so important, and other cultures recognise such, and its benefits.

It is such a shame that the health benefits have been 'hijacked' by the New Age exponents, and we are the poorer for it.

To release stress, tension, and anxiety, there's nothing quite like it.

But there are some who like Jan, endeavour to put it into its correct balance, as a God given skill, and don't her many friends appreciate such.

Excuse me, I must be off for a sauna and a 'rub' down

Lord, Iuv a duck

25

Now this story's true, but not one that will hit any headlines.
But just to show Gods amazing care for us and indeed the whole of his creation

Virtually across the road from our Blockhouse Bay house, is a large park, with several sports playing fields, tennis courts, bowling clubs, sports pavilions etc, and children's playgrounds.

It also has a stream running through it, with footpaths meandering through the many trees, and several bridges crossing the stream. All very pleasant for the locals, and quite handy for us.
For decades now, I have been in the habit of taking an early morning walk around the nearest green area or golf course, and this park has been my regular walk area for the past 12 years.

The little stream in this park has attracted quite a few ducks, and chooks, and several locals have go in to the habit of feeding them.. So it's an ideal nesting area for the ducks and every year in the season they periodically appear each with a brood of little ducklings - up to about a dozen each, and the parent ducks proudly show them off and lead them all around.

But the park area is in a built up suburb, bordered by houses, and many of the locals walk their dogs around the park, off the leash, so for all the years I have been using the park, I have never seen one brood of ducklings ever make it to full size. Each brood seems to last a few weeks then they just vanish, presumably as snacks for the neighbourhood cats, or the many roaming dogs. Also the mother ducks don't seem to have much sense, as they constantly lead their broods across the neighbourhood roads, and afar. So the little ducklings don't really have much of a chance to get to maturity, in fact, as I said, I have never seen even one make it to full size.

This year again there have been about a dozen broods appear, and then vanish as per usual.

But a few months ago, I paused to watch one such cluster of ducklings down beside the stream, and for a strange reason felt moved to pray for their safety. "Just watch over them" I prayed rather earnestly and even audibly, "and let them get to full maturity"

(Hope no one was watching me pray for a bunch of little ducks, or they may call the funny farm !)

Several times over the succeeding weeks, I spotted them, and silently repeated the prayer.

For a few weeks there was no sign of them - they must have gone the same way as all the others over the years I thought.

Then, 2 weeks ago, during my walk, I turned the corner past the bridge, and there they all were - the whole brood intact, in a bunch on the grass, just as if they were waiting for me to appear.

I felt so good seeing them all there, they had survived so far, and were far bigger than any other chicks I had ever seen there, and I watched them happily feeding and then move off. Indeed, they seemed almost up to full size by this time.

Several days later, I came around the same corner again, and there they all were again, but this time, they were stretching out and flapping their wings, obviously getting ready for flight and lift off. And the group was bigger in number, they had joined with another bunch perhaps

I haven't seen them since, getting airborne would have seen them check out better feeding grounds perchance.

So how's that for Gods care over even the least of his creation, He who sees each sparrow fall, who counts the number of hairs on our head, and whose ear is open to our every prayer
And what an unexpected encouragement to my daily walk and faith

This incident was over, and ended I thought. Or at least relegated to my memory. But, each morning, as I would pass by the spot where the ducks nest, I would reflect and ponder

Why had this all happened ?? The incident somehow seemed to carry an unmistakable impression with it, as on other occasions when God had caused events and occasions to focus and to work together for good through the years of my life

Was there a lesson therein ?

Was there some meaning, or parable, or what ever in the incident ?

The weeks passed by, and I continued to ponder about it all
And then the thought slowly came and grew within !

Now, we have 4 grand-children, 3 girls and a boy. God knows that my most frequent and earnest prayer, even a continual cry of my heart each morning on my walk, is for these children.

My concern is for them, especially the 3 girls, as I watch them grow up into beautiful young women, and still having to pass through the teenage years that lie ahead, into adulthood.

College days and years with testing situations and peer pressure, society with all its many evils and dangers, some people without principles or morals, plus all the temptations and allures of city life. How would they fare ? Would they have the wisdom, fortitude and courage to get through those testing years ahead unscathed ?

To consider the gorgeous little ducklings - in 10 previous years not one had made it to maturity to my observation.

And perhaps how like the defenceless little ducklings are my precious grand-children.

But this season 2 broods of ducklings had indeed made it, and had survived intact, in spite of hungry cats and roaming dogs, to flap their wings and fly off to other places afar.

My thought is now simply this -- that if God can keep a brood of defenceless ducklings intact, then surely he can keep a trio of precious beautiful girls, (or rather young women) and grand-son, intact through the years that lie ahead and bring them all through to adulthood unscathed.

So, that is the lesson of the ducklings I sense, and with it comes a divine assurance that with God there is safety, and comfort, and shelter, and a safe journey through the teenage years into adulthood, and beyond

"Into your hands Oh Lord, do I entrust my grandchildren, as you watch and care for all the children of your wondrous creation"

Amen and Amen

Most mornings since the story above, I have continued my walks through the nearby park.

But over the year that has past since then, the number of ducks has decreased markedly, and the number of ducklings also. Some one told me that the ducks in this area got a disease, and that the local Council has been reducing their numbers because of the dangers of this disease spreading.

Anyways, the number of ducks has diminished. And I have only seen a few other broods of ducklings recently, and again only for a short time before they too have vanished. And I have not seen the little group of ducks mentioned above for the past year also.

Then last Monday what a surprise I got.

During my walk through the park, I crossed over the little bridge over the stream, heard a noise, stopped still and looked down at the stream that flowed under the bridge.

Imagine my surprise, when I saw a lot of ducks come out of the stream, waddling and flapping the water off them as they came towards me standing on the bridge, to virtually right underneath me beside the bridge structure. They were almost all of the same fully grown size, and slowly I could make out the 2 parents that seemed slightly bigger.

Amazed, I counted them - there was 15 in all - 2 parents and 13 ducks. Could these be the same ducklings from the last year, that I had prayed for I wondered ?

The ducks stayed right at my feet, and 4 or 5 of them even sat down to rest, while the others stopped walking and flapping, and just stood there, most looking up at me. They were as tame as anything. No one else came along the path, and I just stood there watching this amazing group of ducks at my feet for quite some time. There was no fear in them at all, and they were quite happy just to stay there and rest at my feet

Well isn't that amazing - I had never seen any group of ducks survive and stay together in a 'family' group ever before in that park, especially not 15 of them. How they survived intact for that time in spite of disease and the Council culling them I could only wonder at and marvel.

Inwardly I was thrilled - it was as though God had kept them together intact for a whole year, and had brought them to me to demonstrate his amazing power and love for the least of his creatures.

Was I romanticizing perhaps, I thought, I didn't know for sure, but it all seemed to fit together.

Even though I had not seen them at all throughout the past year until today, God had been watching and keeping them safe it would seem.

And with the occasion came the same comforting thought as previously, that what God could do for a group of ducklings, he could do for our own dear grandchildren. He could watch over them also, and keep them through adolescence and teenage years into adulthood and then through their entire lives, even if Nan and I may not live to see it all happen.

The impression was that God had the whole of his creation under his watchful eye and care, and I need not worry about my children and grandchildren, even though Nan and I have always and still will continue to pray and remind our God about them as long as we are able.

To God alone be the glory

WoW, and Amen

of trailers

26

So what's with the Millers and trailers anyways ?

Well, at least one of our cars always had to have a tow-bar !

Just in case something had to be towed - a trailer or a Caravan, or a boat
Our honeymoon experience wasn't enough to put us off the idea entirely,
and eventually we bought our very own Caravan, and had many holidays in
it, including lugging it round the South Island. For many annual holidays
we ended up at Whangateau, about 1 Hour north of Auckland, where the
Bow family frequented.

One time, LSB, a friend who was a keen and expert yachtsman, wanted his
sail boat, his self crafted pride and joy, taken up to there from Auckland.
I hitched it on, and duly set off.

We had to pas through Orewa, approached by a narrow 2 way bridge at
the end of a downward slope and slight bend.

Cruising down this slope, and bend, and onto the bridge, I glanced out the
drivers window, and saw the trailer and precious boat **ALONG SIDE THE**
CAR, and about to overtake us, nose up slightly, on the wrong side of the
road off course - **PANIC !**

The trailer and boat had detached and now had a life and course of its
own. I waited - transfixed - for the inevitable crash as it headed into
the oncoming traffic. But, each and every oncoming car, as they whizzed
towards us, somehow had the presence of mind to swerve almost off the
road, to avoid it and to miss it entirely.

Slowly the trailer and boat passed us, and then cruised back to our side
of the road, and gently slowed, to eventually stop up against the kerb as
though perfectly parked there.

We stopped behind it, got out - examined it - it was absolutely intact !

The boat had been perfectly balanced on the trailer - by design Laurie
later told me !

So, we moved the car forward past the boat, hitched it on again, but this
time with the coupling and the safety chain **FASTENED ON**, and
continued on to Whanagteau.

LSB never fully realised the close escape his precious boat had had.

How had all of those oncoming cars and traffic dodged it while it had its maiden road voyage ???

In the due passage of time, we bought our first powered boat. It was a 4 metre fibreglass day boat with an out board motor, very easy to use and handle.

We had been up to Northland and were coming back South with the trailer and boat on the back, and were passing through Waipu, when it all suddenly happened.

As we approached a corner, suddenly we were aware that around this corner was coming a horse at full tilt, with a young girl on it - but absolutely out of control - it had bolted, and was heading straight for us ! My instant thought was - it's going to hit us full on, and end up through the windscreen, and in the front seat - this could be it for us ! On it came at full tilt, then the girl fell or was thrown off, and ended up on the side of the road in a heap. I braked, but with cars on the other side of the road, that was all I could do. On it still came towards us - this is it ! - there was absolutely nothing we could do about it.

The now rider-less horse then, right as it was almost on us, swerved ever so slightly, just missing the car, but to cannon into the trailer and boat on the back, whacking it with an almighty thud, then kept on going and vanished into the distance. We pulled to the road-side, shaken and white.

How was the girl rider ? We went along to her and helped get her to a nearby house. She had badly gashed and grazed knees and elbows and was in some shock. She told us that the horse had shied at some noise around the corner and had bolted from about a kilometre back, and she just wasn't strong enough to hold it or do anything about it. The house holder tended to her, then we took a look at the boat.

The force of the horse hitting it had pushed it half off the trailer, and smashed some of the fibreglass side, the windscreen etc. We got the boat back onto the trailer as best we could, and continued on to Auckland, and eventually to the boat repair shop.

The horse was eventually recovered we were told, and the girl was not unduly hurt. But, horses and boats do not go well together - at any time - I would venture to suggest. Then there was Christmas time, 2007

It was about the very first time that we had not spent Christmas day with the family at our place

Kerri and Tip had just moved into their own place at Helensville, about a 40 minute trip from our Blockhouse Bay, and had invited us up there for the day - great for Jan who would be relieved of some of the preparation and certainly the clean-up afterwards.

Our gift to them that year was an outdoor table and 6 chairs - a rather bulky set of furniture indeed. I had picked it all up from the shop, and hired a trailer for the short trip up the North Western motorway.

So, we loaded up the car, secured the load of table and 6 chairs onto the trailer, and set off.

We were just onto the 3 lane North Western motorway, when I glanced in the rear vision mirror, and to my dismay saw one package of 3 chairs fly off the trailer and bounce along the motorway lanes, coming to rest in the middle of the centre lane ! Very fortunately, there was a side shoulder to the motorway, and I quickly pulled off onto it.

I ran back to where the chairs were.

Fortunately also, as it was Christmas Day, there was not nose to tail traffic as at a usual peak hour, but there was still plenty of cars around. There was also a fair length of straight road, and a bit of visibility, but as I ran and watched, some cars had to brake, swerve and dodge the chairs that had come to rest plumb in the middle of the centre of the 3 motorway lanes.

My thoughts flashed - was I about to witness and have caused a car crash and pile up - and perhaps also - what was the penalty for having an unsafe load on a motorway in the first place ?

And then there was the next question - how on earth was I ever going to get them from off that centre lane with all those cars whizzing past ? I could get myself flattened or killed in the process !

Reaching the place opposite the chairs, I watched and pondered in dismay Just what to do ?

There seemed no way out of this predicament - just cars braking, dodging and swerving around the chairs. Maybe some car would smash into them and flatten them I wished - but how to then get the pieces off a busy 3 lane motorway ?

It seemed like an eternity as I watched and pondered

And then - it happened.

One car in the centre lane, saw the chairs and actually STOPPED JUST BEHIND THE CHAIRS, fortunately not causing a nose-to-tail pile up smash behind him either.

Then, another quick-witted motorist in the outer lane slowed and STOPPED RIGHT ALONGSIDE THE FIRST CAR in the centre lane, thus forming a 2 lane barrier and bringing the 2 lanes to a total stop. This outer lane motorist then motioned to me, to 'go get them chairs' and shielded by these 2 stopped cars, I calmly walked on to the motorway, to the centre lane, picked up the bundle and beat a hasty retreat to the shoulder and safety.

Without that chaps quick thinking, I was 'dead meat' with a biggggggggg problem. I waved my thanks to these 2 motorists.

Closing off a 3 lane motorway even temporarily is just not done very day.

And not a Traffic Cop in sight !!

I put the wayward chairs back onto the trailer, and made absolutely sure of the tie-down ropes this time, and cautiously proceeded on to Helensville and Christmas dinner at Kerri's and Tip's.

And the chairs being quite lightweight only had a few gouges on the corners, almost un-noticeable, and were well received as a gift.

Maybe next year, we will revert to having Christmas Day at our place again !

Wow, wow, Wheeeeeeeeeeeeeeee

What a day !

So, I say it again just what is it with the Millers and trailers ??

leadings

27

Now this story is as true and as factual as I can recall it - without any embellishments to enhance them. Just as it happened, to ordinary people !

It happened over a weekend in Wellington - 18 November 2006 to be precise. And a shocker of a weekend as far as weather was concerned. Blowing a gale, as only Wellington can turn it on - and rain with it - oh, so very wet and windy.

One of my wife's clients had offered us the use of his central Wellington apartment any time while he came back to Auckland for each weekend. We had flown down there on the Thursday night, after a normal²¹ full on working day. The next morning, after breakfast in the apartment, as we talked about what we should do, places we should go, etc, Jan mentioned "we could have caught up with your cousin Colin and his wife Pat while we were here, and even had dinner with them on Saturday night" for which time we had nothing planned.

As per usual for me I had been so busy getting packed and away, that I hadn't given anything else a thought, so had no addresses or contact information with me.

I should mention here that my cousin Colin was slightly older than me, and we had only minimal contact while growing up. His father, my Uncle Bill, had been a policeman, and as usual in those days, if a policeman wanted promotion, he had to be prepared to move around the country, and live in what ever city as directed. I was raised on a farm in South Otago, so, consequently visits of our families were few and far between. Eventually we had both married, raised our families, he in Wellington, us in Auckland. I figured out that that the second to last time I had caught up with him was 44 years ago, and that they had visited us once in Auckland some 25 years back. We did send Christmas cards to each other each year, that was all. I knew that he had left his BNZ bank job and now had a chauffeur driven limousine car business

And now we were in Wellington, had some spare time, but hadn't thought

to look up or bring our Christmas card address book.

I mused all of this quickly as Jan spoke. "Next time perhaps" came out of my mouth, and "how big is Wellington, we may just bump into him" Surprisingly, this thought persisted in my mind 'Hey, it would be good to catch up with him, and have dinner together on Saturday evening'.

Just how big is Wellington any how ? I must keep an eye out for him.

But I am not going to start the mission of trying to contact him by phone.

Where did he live again ? Wasn't it at Tawa, and wasn't that somewhere out of Wellington, further North ?

As I had these thoughts, I was conscious of a strange peace, even some kind of assurance, within, that we would in fact meet up. It could happen ! And so that day we did the 'tourist' thing, visited Parliament, and the Te Papa Museum.

The Friday passed, without event, and no Colin !

But, this strange sort of inner peace and assurance persisted - I would meet up with Colin somehow and where, and would have dinner with him, Saturday evening, I mused

The next day Saturday, was also wet and windy. We went up the cable car, had lunch at the cafe and from there a short walk to the Carter Observatory. There we watched the Planetarium, and a short film on the history of astronomy.

The Observatory was on the edge of the hugely spread-out Botanical Gardens, and Jan had seen a sign about the roses being out in bloom. We started along a path to walk there, but I thought - this place is so big, I had better check out the main sign as to how to get there.

I asked Jan to wait while I ran back to the main sign about a hundred metres away.

As I looked at the sign, I heard a group of tourists talking behind me, then one voice slightly above the others. As I listened I thought I recognised that voice - even after 25 or 44 years - it sounded like Colin !

I turned around, and looked at the group - it looked like him also, even after all those years.

But I could be mistaken - my mind could be playing tricks on me, auto-suggestion or the like, wanting to catch up with him and all that.

Then I heard him laugh, and that clinched it - that was him all right !

My inner assurance was being fulfilled before my very eyes and ears

He was busy talking to a group of tourists, so I walked away until I could see Jan and motioned her to come back to the sign. She eventually came, and I said to her "You're not going to believe this, but that chap over there, I'm pretty sure is my cousin Colin "

We both walked closer to him and the group, and waited for a pause in the conversation.

When it eventually happened, I called out to him "Colin ? Colin Miller ?"

"Yes" came the reply, as he did a double take of me, and surprisedly immediately said "Raymond ?",

Then he turned, espied Jan and said "Jan ?"

And so we chatted briefly, but he had to finish his tour group, I got his card, and made phone contact later, and in spite of our offering to take them both out for a meal to a restaurant somewhere, we ended up at his place for dinner a few hours later that evening

How about that - in a city of about 500,000 ?

To make contact like that !!

And to fulfil my inner assurance in such a fashion

Incredible !!

I just 'knew' inwardly that it would indeed happen, that we would meet and then have dinner at his place, without any effort required on my part at all

Amazing !.

Absolutely amazing !!

Was it just a colossal fluke, a coincidence, or perhaps more than that I wondered ? I believe from my inner experience - the absolute peace and assurance, that it could have been a work of the Holy Spirit Himself within - it seemed to have his fingerprints all over it

Perhaps to show me / us yet again that indeed 'our times are in his hand', that He can direct and order our steps, stops and starts, that He is aware of every detail of our everyday circumstances, and that He is still working out 'all things' in our lives for his own purposes, whenever, however, it pleases him, along life's journey.

Amazing

Truly amazing !

But wait, as they say there's more

This one happened in Japan in April 2005

Some background first

Jan and I have had a Japanese connection, ever since Hideo and Yoshi came to New Zealand in 1962, became Christians, then returned to Japan and birthed a large Church in Osaka, an enormous city of over 7 million people.

In about 1980, Hideo had brought a group of young Japanese school students to New Zealand, and we had billeted 2 of them - Shige and Katsua - in our home for the 3 weeks they were here, during which time we got to know them very well. Then in 1981 we got the opportunity to visit Japan and renew our acquaintance with them. Shige's parents owned 2 Chemist shops in Osaka, and we spent some time with them, and they took us to several historical places and temples etc at Nara and Kyoto, and a fleeting visit to his shops.

Since then, the boys have grown up pursued their respective careers, married, and started families. Hideo in his visits over here occasionally told us what he knew about them, and the several other Japanese boys and girls that had stayed with us over the years

In April 2005, we took up Hideo and Etsuko's invitation and travelled to Japan to spend 2 weeks with them at their house at Shima. During that time, we met up with some of the Japanese people we knew, particularly Noriko, and then went to Osaka for a few days.

While in Osaka, we met up with Katsua's parents, but he had now worked and lived in Tokyo. We spoke to him on the phone, but his work commitments just didn't allow us to connect with him during our time there. No one knew how to contact Shige., but it would have been so good to catch up with him we thought.

So we moved around Osaka city and did some shopping and browsing. Late one day, we were strolling down an underground shopping mall - 2 vast levels of underground streets of shops in criss-cross directions.. We were strolling along in a loose bunch, Jan and Etsuko window shopping just ahead of me. Jan had been trying to get some special perfumed lotion, but in spite of frequently asking, it was not popular in Japan.

Then I spied a chemist type shop, and went over to see if I could find this lotion that Jan wanted.

As I approached the shop, I paused and got a vague sense of recollection, a sort of a momentary flash-back from our visit 25 years previously - was this Shige's father's shop, could it be ?

I spoke to the woman assistant (who didn't speak much English) and just said "Shige ?"

Her face lit up, she grabbed her phone, dialled a number, then thrust it towards me.

"Shige - is that you ?? " It indeed was him on the other end of the phone !

Within 1 hour they came to the shop, and we had a delightful meal with them at a nearby restaurant, with his wife and 2 darling twin girls

What an incredible and wonderful surprise !

Osaka - an enormous city of over 7 million people, 35,000 eating places, countless streets of shops, arcades and malls - above and below ground level, businesses, offices, etc

In a foreign country, with little or virtually no knowledge of the local language, certainly lost as to finding our way around, totally dependent on a few English speaking locals for guidance and directions.

Yet we had walked to and stopped right outside Shige's fathers shop !

Amazing !

Truly amazing !

And yet I can still get lost sometimes trying to find my way around this fair city !

Funny that !

But, just in case you may think that life is full of such memorable moments, not so !

Mostly, there are the ordinary days of a daily routine, which entails waking early(ish)

before anything else - a walk around the park and exercise midway (for me that is)

a time for reading 'the Word', and meditation work, and being 'diligent in business'

The ordinary days, weeks, months, years and decades
that have taught us to

run the race with patience

persevere and endure through all that comes along

be grateful for each day, for life and health and strength

raise a family, and now help as possible with the grandchildren
of watching and waiting

of hospitality

of community involvement as possible

and then occasionally to watch with wonderment at some memorable
moments that have happened along the way.

And what I could call the 'minor miracles' that have happened along the
way, each one breathtaking - lost items that have just 'turned up',
'chance' meetings with people, amazing 'co-incidences', each one with a
divine finger-print on it - truly paper or disc could not record the
multitude of these, throughout our pilgrimage.

And one another thing

As previously mentioned, as a child I became an avid reader of books,
books and more books, which continued into my early Christian life.

So much so, that I was once referred to by a staff member of a Christian
Bookshop as 'their best customer'.

But as the decades have passed, Jan has become the reader of books,
referring me to the most interesting portions from them, while I just
mostly read the one Book - my beloved and well worn Bible. I find that
for life giving and 'quickenings' it is matchless, and its depths bottomless.

And my Scofield notation 'version' - published in 1905 - over 100 years
ago ! I must say that I appreciate his notes and insights the more as
the years pass.

giving

28

Such a worthy topic to end with

For it is more blessed to give than to receive *Acts 20 : 35*

Give and it shall be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together. and running over, shall men give to you. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back *Luke 6 : 38*

What do we have that we have not received *1 Chronicles 29 : 14*
All things come from God, and of these have we given back

Freely we have received, freely give *Matthew 10 : 8*

'Giving does not impoverish God, nor withholding enrich Him'
someone rightly said

At an early age I observed that there are really only 2 types of people on this planet - No, not male and female,
but GIVERS and TAKERS
I had to personally decide which attribute I would follow

Remembering that Southerners generally are widely known for their generosity, and hospitality. But it's also a personal choice
And that's how it was for me, for us

To be generous, with listening, with time, with funds
To be as hospitable as possible
To give according to need, not desserts
To give simply, without obligation, or strings attached -
'You're as free as a bird' with this gift
When thanked, to simply say .. remember to 'PASS IT ON'
To give simply because we have been so blessed ourselves by so many countless others, over a lifetime.

That, as often mentioned **WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER !!**

summary

29

To look back on ones life must surely bring a few thoughts.

To us, the one pervading thought is simply this

That God knows us and watches over us from conception and birth, and throughout our life span. Each and every detail of our lives is under His permission or direction or guidance amazing !

But strangely, some people are more conscious and aware of this than others ! Why is this ?

Search me, but that's just how it is !

Or rather how people are !

Predestination Election Foreknowledge Divine intervention

Big words and huge topics, with a chasm of appreciation locked into them. There's so much we can only surmise and wonder at right ??

Surely *our times are in His hands* Psalm 31 : 15

And there comes the realisation that

'for in Him we live, and move and have our being' Acts 17 : 28

Ohhhhhhh the wonder of it all,

*The steps of good people are directed
by the Lord.
He delights in every detail of their lives*

*It they fall it isn't fatal,
for the Lord holds them with his hand
David speaking in Psalm 37 : 23, 24
Living Bible & NLT*

*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God,
they are the sons of God
Romans 8 : 15*

*For in Him we live, and move, and have our being
Acts 17 : 28*

*For of Him, and through Him, and to Him
are all things: to whom be glory forever
Romans 11 : 36*

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