

A Jewish Love Story

Andrew Sleight

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DEDICATION

To Mallory and Ben

May you never forget the
Love that brought us together.

CONTENTS

Choices	5
“Falling in ...”	13
S, D & Rock ‘n’ Roll	27
A Rude Awakening	41
Second Chances	53
A Stranger in the Land	63
Alternate Plans	77
Memories	87
Lifting the Veil	95
The Message	103
Just In Time	111
A Strong Impression	119
An All-Nighter	127
High Tea	135
New Beginnings	141
The Crazy People Next Door	151
Words	157
A Room with a View	161
Unexpected Meeting	165
Moving the Heart	173

Choices

A beautiful sunset embraced Kansas City on an unusually warm mid-October evening. Westport, the ever-popular gathering place for the bar crowd in the midtown area, was filling up fast with Friday night partygoers. The pungent smell of cigarette smoke pervaded the sidewalk as Kansas Citians spilled over outside of the bars. I was walking down 43rd Street trying to decide which establishment I'd check out. I didn't have to be at work 'til 11:00 P.M., so at least I could get a few hours of Friday night in before clocking in at my job at the railroad yard in the Armourdale area of Kansas City, Kansas.

I was in pretty good spirits, even before I had my first beer. I had finally gotten to where I had wanted to be for so long. Living the "single life" again, I was now living in an apartment in midtown Kansas City, ready to enjoy the life as a carefree bachelor. I had just landed a good-paying job as an Engineer Trainee on the Rock Island Railroad and now I'd even be able to pay off my college loans.

I still couldn't believe that I was going to get to "drive" trains. When I was a kid I loved to play with electric train sets, and one of my earliest memories was the first time I ever set foot on a train engine. I should have known by my reaction to the air horn that my future would include a stint on the railroad (I wet my pants).

I'd visited Westport enough to know most of the popular places, but on this particular night I decided to hit a place I'd never tried. "The New Stanley" looked like an interesting spot to try out. When I walked in I immediately felt just a little out of place. Looking around at the other people, it was painfully apparent that I really didn't fit in very well. The guys were well-dressed professional-looking types, most of them with sport coats or suits, ties slightly undone adorning their button down white shirts. The

ladies were varied in age, but they all immediately struck me as being way out of my league. Of course the fact that I was dressed in overalls, a blue work shirt, and tennis shoes didn't add to my confidence level. Then again, I hadn't really expected to come in and meet anyone that night. With just about two hours before I was due at the round house, I just wanted to "scope out the ladies" a little before going to work for the night.

The bartender finally got around to passing me a Heineken, and I turned around to take a better look at the place when I found myself face-to-face with a guy in a three-piece suit. He gently grabbed me by the arm and leaned over to whisper loudly above the din. "Hey, buddy," he started, "there are some ladies over here that want to meet you."

I was flabbergasted. *Who*, I thought to myself, *could possibly be interested in meeting me in this outfit? It must be a joke*, I thought. *He's going to bring me over to some 68-year-old women who will pat me on the head and tell me how cute I look in my "train suit."*

"Really?" I asked. Before I knew it Mr. Matchmaker had me standing in front of three women holding drinks, and all of them were grinning from ear to ear.

"What's your name?" the guy asked.

"Andy, Andy Sleight."

"This is Becky," he explained pointing to the first one.

"Hi Becky."

"This is Kim," he continued, pointing to contestant number two.

"Hi Kim!"

"And this ..." There seemed to be a long dramatic pause. "Is Iris."

As if on cue, everyone else began to fade into the distance. The scene resembled an incredibly well-choreographed play with all the actors deftly moving to their pre-determined places off-stage.

Later I would find out what had really precipitated the "setup." Just as I was, Iris was also coming off a recent divorce; only in her case she was terribly depressed. Her friends had pushed her to join them on their Friday night foray, and after a lot of coercing, she had finally relented. Once inside the New Stanley, she had been kvetching to them that it was just too hard to meet anyone interesting in a bar. Just then, I had walked in and as fate would have it, she immediately picked me out.

“Look,” she had told her friends, “now there’s a guy I’d like to meet.” Her friend Mike Kitzsteiner immediately jumped into action, and now I found myself face-to-face with Iris Stoudenmire.

We had precious little in common. Iris was a highly paid, well-known, self-confident Advertising Exec at the number one Top 40 station in Kansas City. She had moved out to Kansas City in the early seventies from Maryland. Contrast that with a typical New Age influenced, gentile hippie, without any direction, and what you came up with was a blueprint for an unlikely date.

I remember thinking that it was no wonder this woman was so successful. She listened to me with an intensity that made me feel like I was the most important person in the world. As we shared our backgrounds and a beer, we laughed a lot, and I got a real kick out of the exclamations of “Oy vey!” as I described my life to Iris. Her gestures and expressions were a warm reminder of my Jewish friends back in upstate New York. We had been the only gentile family in our neighborhood, and most of my friends in junior high and high school had been Jewish.

Around 10:30 P.M. I explained that I had to get to work. Iris gave me her phone number, and I told her I’d call her on Saturday. I had already decided that she was worth getting to know, although I figured she might turn out to be pretty intense. That expectation would turn out to be a bit of an understatement.

I got to the round house at the railroad yard just before 11:00 P.M. and clocked in. I checked in with the supervisor, and he said to hang loose for a few minutes. The guy that was training me would be in soon, and we were supposed to put together a couple of trains due to go out in early morning.

Since I was a trainee, I was assigned to “hostling.” The term, a holdover from the Old West, meant that we were to move engines around the yard and assemble “consists” or a group of engines. Once the engines were ready we would take them out to the main line and couple up to a waiting train, which usually had over one hundred cars. We’d attach the air hoses, and set the air so that pressure would build up in the brake system. Once we were done, we go back to the round house for our next assignment.

I’d been hostling for just a couple of weeks now, and while I had learned the basics of handling an engine around the yard, I still wasn’t ready to “go out on the road.”

The trainmaster that had hired me had explained that with any luck, I'd move into that phase around Christmas.

I walked over to the break table to drink a Coke while I waited for my partner to show up. Usually, the table had a multitude of magazines and newspapers lying all over. That night it was perfectly clean except for one single book. I picked it up and read the cover: *The Late Great Planet Earth*, by Hal Lindsey. I sat down and started reading.

In between moving trains that night, I read the whole book. I was fascinated by the book's look into Bible prophecy and its relation to present-day events. It was hard to fault the points that the author made, especially about Israel and the other nations in the Middle East. When I read how the Bible's prophecies concerning the future were coming true, I began to get a very uneasy feeling.

You see, my experience with "religion" was like a lot of kids' during this time. My mother was Episcopalian, and my father didn't really care about God or religion. He would go to church sometimes, but it was usually my mom and sister that went on Sunday. I had been baptized as a baby, and when it was time for me to go through "confirmation," I dutifully took the classes and memorized the right prayers and answers to the test questions. After I completed confirmation, I took communion for the first time.

Sadly, and typically, it meant nothing to me except an empty ritual that I was fulfilling to make my mother happy. I would repeat the Apostle's Creed, but I really didn't believe it. It was hard for me to envision a loving God because both my parents were alcoholics, and their lives were a complete mess. My mother would go to church in the morning, and by four in the afternoon, she would be in a drunken stupor. My dad was drunk almost all the time, though he was a little better at hiding it.

It is a miracle that *any of us* survived our childhood.

Predictably, I developed a pretty cynical view of life. I remember that the priests at our church smoked and drank just like my parents. I saw nothing in any of their lives that testified to the reality of a life-changing, much less miracle-working, God. The culture at this time was beginning to infer that God didn't exist at all. I wasn't sure about that, but I figured that if He was anything like my parents, He wasn't worth serving.

But I was searching desperately for something. I didn't know what or who it was, but down deep inside I felt like there must be some answer to what life was really about.

As I moved through my teens, I became a voracious reader. I read a lot of science fiction, philosophy, psychology, and political science. *Somebody*, I thought, *must have something that provides a reason to live*; something or some knowledge that would fill the void, the emptiness that filled my heart and my soul. And the more I looked, the more the emptiness grew.

I ended up marrying my high school sweetheart after joining the Army in 1971. I had really thought that this would help “settle” me down and give me the peace I was looking for, but like so many who get married for the *wrong* reason, I was terribly *wrong*. After three years in the Army, I returned to college at the State University of New York and majored in Psychology. I was still trying to figure out who I was and what would make me happy. The more I learned, the more my emptiness and frustration grew, and now it was fueled by something that would only make it worse.

When I was in the Army, I began to smoke marijuana, and it wasn’t long before I was getting high all the time. Eventually, I tried LSD, peyote, Quaaludes and speed. With each passing day, I was more despondent and restless. In my senior year of college I went to see a psychologist who had been recommended by one of my professors. After listening to me for thirty-five minutes, she told me that I “had a wild side,” and charged me \$75. *Wow, what a revelation*, I remember thinking. *Is this the best psychology has to offer?* I never went back, but shortly after this I heard about something that I thought just might be what I’d been looking for.

A classmate of mine told me about a unique course he’d taken in New York City called “EST,” Erhard Seminars Training. He claimed it was a life-changing experience for him and that it was the best thing that he’d ever experienced. I was shocked to hear that it cost \$250 per person, but I talked about it to my wife, Joyce, and she was willing to give it a try. We registered for the course and several weeks later we went down to New York City for the first weekend of the “training.”

The course was a series of lectures and guided imagery exercises that were designed to break down any belief systems the participants had so that they would get “it.” There was a not-so-subtle suggestion that at the end of the course something of incredible power and meaning would be revealed ... this realization was the “it” that everyone wanted to get.

Now for the searching person like me, this was heady stuff. I felt like David Bowman in *2001: A Space Odyssey* hurtling through space and time toward the destination I'd dreamed of for years. The meaning of life was just around the corner. All during the following week, the anticipation grew. When we got back down to the city and started the training on Friday night, everyone was "dying" to find out what "it" was all about. So by the time evening rolled around, you could have cut the anticipation in the room with a knife.

One of our trainers finally got around to sharing what "it" was. "It" turned out to be: nothing; literally, nothing. Werner Erhard's great revelation was that there was nothing to get. Life was just the way it was; you just choose how to experience it, so each person was totally responsible for whatever happened to him or her. What a brilliantly contrived, convenient way to escape responsibility. As soon as the first howls of "you charged me \$250 for this!" came out, the mantra-like response came out in return. "If that's your experience, it's o.k. I get it." In this case, when the trainers said they "got it," it just meant that they understood what you were saying. So when the next person called them a nasty name, they'd just smile and say, "I get that that is your experience."

The next several hours passed by with everyone sharing what they "got." At first I was totally disappointed. No meaning to life? Was this all there was to "it?" Man, I felt ripped off, and then I realized how brilliant Werner's system was. After you've told all your friends about this mysterious course you're taking in New York, you feel too stupid to tell them that you paid \$250 to find out that there was nothing to "get." So everyone responded by talking about the "profound truth" they had gotten; and additionally, they told you not to tell anyone what went on in the course. (Yes, Werner, I just broke my agreement with you.) So everyone usually ended up getting several friends curious enough to enroll in the course.

But this wasn't everything there was to getting "it." The other part of the revelation that the trainer shared was a bit more radical. "You are God," he announced matter-of-factly. This is all there is – each person is in charge of his or her own universe. All of the sudden, this "it" seemed a lot better than I first thought. Suddenly, any vestiges of conscience I'd had before seemed kind of silly to hold onto. If I was only accountable to myself ultimately, then I could do anything I wanted.

Now, to be fair, the trainers did make the point that there are consequences of making decisions in our physical reality. In other words, if you jump out of a window on the tenth floor, you can dismiss gravity all you want, but you will still splatter on the sidewalk. And if you broke society's law, they explained, the reality of the consequences of breaking your agreement to follow these norms could have severe consequences. But I didn't want to murder anyone or jump out of a window; I just wanted to live a wild life without feeling guilty about it.

That night as we drove home, I experienced something similar to the bizarre euphoria I'm sure Eve felt when faced with temptation in the garden. "I'm God in my Universe – I can do anything I want." Just like Eve and Adam, I had swallowed the lie hook, line, and sinker.

It wasn't long before "God" decided that he really didn't need to feel guilty about wanting out of being married. Several months after taking the training, Joyce and I were separated. I explained to her that I wasn't happy and that it had nothing to do with her.

Joyce was a wonderful woman, and any rational man would have known how blessed he was. But I was anything but rational.

I really thought that once I experienced real freedom, then I'd be happy. Amazingly during this time, I don't remember one person or family member suggesting that we get any counseling or seek spiritual help. This was the new age of the "amicable divorce," and no one tried to stop us.

I finished my last semester at S.U.N.Y., New Paltz and graduated in May of 1977 with a B.A. in Psychology. I started a graduate program at Washington University in St. Louis the following September, but I only lasted a few months. I was tired of going to school, and deep down inside, I knew that the prospect of me actually helping anyone else with their psychological problems was pretty slim. I dropped out of the program and started driving west to Phoenix.

I worked in Arizona for several months, but I was injured in a work-related accident and returned to New York to spend Christmas at home. In January I headed out to Kansas City where my sister Peg was living. She let me stay with her a while, and I

went through a variety of short-lived jobs, looking for something that would pay well enough for me to live the good life. Finally in mid-summer of '78, I landed the job with Rock Island which brings us back to the night I met Iris and picked up *The Late Great Planet Earth*.

Hal Lindsey's explanation of the Bible was clear. For the first time I intellectually understood what the Bible said about Jesus and why He had died on the cross. I was fascinated and scared by his carefully researched references to the future events in the Bible. But, knowing how weak I was, I didn't believe it was possible for me to be a Christian.

That night, two paths were offered to me. Turn my life over to the Messiah, or continue in my present direction.

I chose to remain on the throne of my life.

It would prove to be a very costly decision.

CHAPTER TWO

“*Falling in . . .*”

The Sunday afternoon following our chance encounter, I found myself pulling up to Iris’s house in Lenexa, Kansas, a suburb in the affluent Johnson County area of the Kansas City metroplex. I had called her on Saturday and asked her about going out to dinner Sunday night. She had seemed genuinely surprised and excited to hear from me.

Walking up to her door, I felt a little bit out of place all over again. I had gone out with a number of ladies since I’d been separated, but this one didn’t really fit into my prior experience. She was obviously a very successful woman with a strong personality. *Why she’s interested in me*, I thought to myself, *is a total mystery*. In my sober moments, I felt like a real loser. I still hadn’t found the peace and happiness I’d been searching for, and the economic divide between us was substantial to say the least. Although I finally had a decent job that would eventually pay \$50,000 or so a year, I was living from paycheck to paycheck, and had she known the truth, I had about \$78 in the bank. I didn’t know exactly how much she was making, but from her clothes, her house, and her friends, she was several successful years and tax brackets ahead of me.

We exchanged the usual pleasantries, and I walked her to my slightly rusting ‘72 Chevy van. I was desperately trying to think of someplace where we could eat that I could afford. I didn’t even own a credit card so I’d have to make it with what I had in my pocket. I asked her if she liked seafood, and she said that was great for her. From the look of approval on her face, it was apparent that she thought I was going to take her to one of the better restaurants on the Plaza; not exactly. Ten minutes later we pulled up to Arthur Treacher’s Fish & Chips. To her credit, she didn’t bat an eye, and we ended up having a great time together in spite of the meager dinner. In between our bites of fish & chips, I began to learn the story behind Iris Stoudenmire.

Iris's maiden name was Finkelstein, and she was originally from Annapolis, Maryland. Her parents had owned a little grocery store in town, and they had been one of the few poor Jewish families in the community. But as Iris told me about her family, and especially about her mom, it was obvious that while they may have lacked financially, they were definitely rich in some much more important areas. These were the same qualities that I'd come to admire and envy in the homes of my Jewish friends back in New York. When you got past the accents and colorful expressions, what really mattered was the openly expressed unconditional love, support, and loyalty; no matter what, these families would stick together through thick and thin.

As Iris described her early childhood, she took on an almost childish innocence. She described the warmth and security of an extended family that was always looking out for each other. But suddenly, her story took a tragic turn. She told me about a night when she was 13 years old and her father had promised to bring her some ice cream after he closed up their store. She had waited at the front door of their house patiently for her dad. But instead of seeing his car drive up, she heard the sound of sirens off in the distance, and that would be the beginning of a horrible nightmare for her and her family. Two men outside their store had attacked her father, and he died later that night after attempted brain surgery despite the effort to save him.

The Jewish community had rallied around them and helped them through the mourning period, but life became very difficult without her dad. Iris and her older brother David had to go to work at a young age to help support the family, and her mother had suffered a series of illnesses including surgery and a heart attack. But through it all, Iris had been drawn closer to her mother than ever before. "My mother is really something special," she told me with a special gleam in her eye. "You would love her."

We finished our meal and Iris suggested that we return to her house. I had to be back at work again at 11:00 P.M., so I didn't argue with her. We got back to her house, and she invited me in to meet her roommates. Both Harry and Kathy worked at Q104, and we all sat around watching a taped episode of *Saturday Night Live* on a Betamax video recorder. While that doesn't sound too interesting now, at that time in the late '70s, the technology was still novel. We all smoked some marijuana, and when the tape was over, she gave me a tour of the house including a look at her baby grand piano. She was

really proud of this beautiful piece, and she played a few tunes for me. I remember thinking how impressed I was at her musical ability.

But the surprises weren't over. We sat down on the carpet of her living room and she pulled out a mirror and started cutting up some cocaine with a razor blade. I had done a lot of different drugs before, but never any real cocaine. I had tried something that was purportedly cocaine at a party once, but it hadn't really done anything for me.

But this time it was different. We snorted a few lines, and within a few minutes I felt like Superman. The sense of self-doubt and condemnation was gone, and I felt like I could take on the world.

It was getting late, and I didn't really feel like going to work. But I forced myself to get up and get ready to go. As I headed toward the door, Iris asked if we could get together again later that week. I kissed her and assured her I'd call her the next day. She told me as I was leaving, "You really need to find a different job," referring to the hours that required me to work all night.

I got into my van and collected my thoughts. Carefully, I backed out of her driveway, and headed toward the interstate.

I was higher than I'd ever been, and I was in love ... with a white powder from South America.

The next few months were a blur. Iris and I began seeing each other as often as we could. My training schedule had changed so I was usually off on the weekends. We would begin partying on Friday night and end up spending most of the weekend drinking and doing drugs. Then I'd go back to work during the weeknights, crashing during the day trying to make up for the hours I spent on the weekend staying up all night.

During this time, I learned a lot more about Iris and her past. She had met her ex-husband when she was in high school and he was a disc jockey at a local station in Annapolis. They had dated for several years during her early years at the University of Maryland and then had gotten married shortly before moving out to Kansas City in the early seventies. Bob had landed a job at Q104, one of the hot new Top 40 stations in

Kansas City. He eventually became the program director, and the station was really beginning to take off.

Iris wanted to get involved in the station herself. She had no interest in just sitting at home and being a housewife. The woman was a natural-born salesperson. She had worked all through her teen years at the neighborhood drugstore and then at a family friend's establishment. Everyone who came in contact with her knew that she was something special. "She's got the gift of gab," her relatives would say. "She's just like Bea."

Iris *was* just like her mother; everyone loved her, and she had the phenomenal ability of getting people excited about things. People would come into the drugstore to buy ice cream, and they'd walk out with a watch, happy as could be with their purchase.

All this pent-up energy had to go somewhere, so she turned to the thing she knew and loved best, radio. One morning she went in to see the owner of Q104 and asked for a sales job. "You don't have any experience, we don't have a list for you, and we can't pay you a salary." One after another, the owner threw up objection after objection. But Iris would not back down. Instead she countered with a brilliant proposal that they couldn't refuse.

"You don't have to pay me anything," she proposed. "Just give me the fifteen percent of anything I sell." The sales manager and the owner finally relented, and she had her job.

They had no idea what was about to happen. Within a couple weeks Iris was bringing in new accounts. She had the uncanny ability of putting together promotional ideas that would tie in several businesses who would invest significant advertising dollars. Soon she was top salesperson in the station, and her reputation in the Kansas City market began to grow.

One of Iris's most notable accomplishments was her development of the record business on the station. She developed great relationships with the major labels and promoters, developing significant new business in this unique niche. The seventies and early eighties had seen an explosion of new music, and the labels were spending a lot of money to promote both new and established artists. Soon, Iris found herself backstage

with some of the most famous artists in rock 'n' roll, partying with the radio and record crowd, and the money and drugs began pouring in.

But there was another disaster on the horizon. Her husband had begun an affair with one of the secretaries at the station, and when Iris finally found out, she went straight to the owner. By this time, Iris had become a critically important part of the station, bringing in significant dollars for the business. The secretary was fired, but the damage was done. A short time later, Bob asked her for a divorce, and it wasn't long after this that I met Iris in The New Stanley.

We continued to "date" for the next several months until I took a short vacation from my railroad job to head back to New York for the holidays. I was about ready to graduate from my yard apprenticeship so I was given a week off. My brother Chris accompanied me on a road trip back to our home in Kingston, a small town on the Hudson River about ninety miles north of New York City. Before we left, Iris gave me some cocaine to take along, and we took off from Kansas City, reaching cruising altitude not too far out of the city limits.

Fourteen hours later, we were in northern Ohio about two miles inside Akron's city limits when I first noticed we were being followed. The black Ford sedan was shadowing my van about five car lengths back, weaving in and out of traffic, carefully staying back at exactly the same distance. I'd always had a keen interest in cars, and I knew an unmarked State Police car when I saw one. I looked over at my brother who was snorting up a huge line of cocaine off a small mirror.

"Chris, don't turn around – whatever you do, don't look out the back window – get rid of that stuff as fast as possible, we are being tailed by a cop car."

He broke out in a sweat literally before my eyes. His hands were already wet with nervous perspiration, so he just rubbed his hand against the mirror, effectively wiping away any visible form of the drugs.

Just as I began to hope that I was wrong, four other cars, two of them black and white, came up behind and on each side of the original black unmarked unit. My heart sunk. I knew, I just knew they were coming after us.

“Chris, is there anything else that is visible?” He looked around the area between our seats, fighting the urge to look backwards. I was gripping the wheel trying to stay relaxed and not panic. We both rolled down our windows hoping that any leftover smell from the pot we’d smoked an hour ago was long gone.

Had someone seen us doing drugs? Had I been speeding and not known it? I’d always told myself that if I were careful, I wouldn’t end up getting arrested. Only stupid people got arrested, right?

Horrid images of prison life filled my mind as we continued further into Akron at exactly fifty-five miles an hour. I had never liked cramped places. How in the world would I take being kept in a cage like an animal for years upon years? Pot possession was one thing; a first-time offense could be as little as probation. But we were carrying cocaine, a third of an ounce of HARD drugs. Who knew what kind of sentence the State of Ohio gave you for possession and intent to sell? If it was anything like New York, we would be put away for a long time.

Suddenly the black unmarked unit accelerated and pulled up alongside but slightly behind our van. His siren came along with the lights that were camouflaged neatly in the grille of the car.

“Chris, keep your cool. They can’t search us unless they have probable cause. Just relax and stay in the van.”

I was trying my best to follow my own advice, but it was a losing battle. My throat was bone dry, and I was filled with abject fear. I immediately put on my directional blinker and started pulling over to the side. I decided that the best thing to do was to get out of the van and hopefully keep the officer from sticking his head inside. As soon as the van stopped, I slammed it in park, opened the door, and slid out as casually as I could. By the time I was near the back of the van, the officer was out and standing next to his door with his hand on his gun. I stopped dead in my tracks.

“Sir, pull out your license slowly.” I reached into my back pocket and pulled out my wallet. I pulled out my Kansas license and offered it to him, hoping that he would take his hand off his gun. He didn’t.

“Put the license on the ground in front of you and then step back to the front of your vehicle please.”

Just then five other police cars came to a sliding stop on the other side of the interstate. Officers were now coming towards us from three different directions, and my head was beginning to spin. Within about thirty seconds there were six officers walking around our van, looking in the windows.

As more police cars pulled up, I got up the nerve to speak to one of them who was looking through the front window.

“Sir,” I stammered, “what’s going on?”

“You’ll see,” was all he said.

I looked back at the car where the officer who had taken my license was. He was talking into his radio, reading the number off my license. Any second I expected them to ask me if they could look inside the van. My mind was reeling. Should I say yes and hope against hope that nothing would be visible? The only other option was to say no and then they’d really smell a rat. My poor brother was sitting in the front passenger seat doing his best to stay composed. Unfortunately, beads of sweat were forming on his forehead which was slightly disconcerting since it was twelve degrees outside.

“Oh God, what am I going to do?”

It wasn’t a conscious prayer, just the human instinct that came out in a moment of complete terror.

I sensed movement to my right, and I turned back to see the original officer standing in front of me. His hand was outstretched, and he gave me back my license. I hesitated for a moment, and then forced myself to “casually” take it back.

“Sorry for the inconvenience, sir,” the state policeman said.

He began walking me back to the front door of my van, obviously wanting to bring closure.

“IT’S ALRIGHT GUYS; THESE AREN’T THE PEOPLE WE’RE LOOKING FOR!” He yelled over the din of passing traffic.

One policeman was still looking into the window as if he saw something, but then mercifully he turned slowly away and headed off to his car.

I wasn’t even going to ask why they had pulled me over, but the officer must have felt he owed us an explanation.

“There was a bank robbery this morning, and your van fit the description. Sorry if we scared you.”

“No problem officer, I hope you catch them,” I answered, opening my door ever so slightly, still fearful that the smell of marijuana would be present.

The policeman began walking back to his car.

“Don’t worry,” he yelled. “We will.”

Once we were back on the road, I told Chris what had happened, and we both began laughing hysterically; not because anything was particularly funny, it was just a visceral reaction to coming so close to prison.

“That’s it,” Chris said, “I’m not going to do any more drugs as long as we are in this van.”

“You’re right, man,” I yelled, agreeing with his new-found determination.

Twenty miles later, our feeble attempt at self-help came to an end. By the time we got to New York, we were more smashed than ever.

Somehow, we returned safely to Kansas City just after Christmas.

When I returned I was glad to see Iris. She seemed to accept me just the way I was, even my blatant assertion that I would date other women whenever I wanted and that there was no way I’d get married again. Of course, I should have known that my resistance only proved to embolden her determination to close the sale.

Our reunion after Christmas was short-lived, since I was scheduled to take my first road trip for the Rock Island. Before I left, Iris challenged me to make it back in time for her New Year’s Eve party that she claimed was one of the “events of the year.” She really wanted her friends to meet me, and I told her I’d be there if I possibly could. I left on the afternoon of the 29th and drove across the Kansas plains to the little town of Herrington, Kansas. The town was a waypoint for the Rock Island, and my orders were to work with an engineer who lived there. The trainmaster had explained that I’d be running between Herrington, south past Wichita all the way down to Caldwell right on the Oklahoma line and from Herrington east to Kansas City. It didn’t sound like I’d be

visiting many exotic places, but I was looking forward to the experience of handling a train on my own.

I got into town around 3:30 P.M. and found the trainyard without much difficulty. I parked the van, grabbed my thermos of coffee and walked into the yard office. The clerk looked up my name and without even looking at me, pointed out to the tracks.

“Your train’s on track three, it’s got a three engine consist and you’ll be working with Danny Dix.”

I ambled out to the track and began walking down towards the engines, which were humming loudly. Suddenly I was really scared. *What happened?* I thought to myself. What am I doing in this little Kansas town getting on a huge freight train that’s on an eight-hour trip to an even smaller town? A little voice in my head was quick to respond, “You got what you wanted, you’re on your own, so quit complaining.”

I got to the front of the train and climbed up the ladder. She was an SD-40, one of the more powerful units that were running on the Rock Island. Her new baby blue paint job belied the fact that the railroad was close to bankruptcy. Looking around the side I saw what seemed to be an endless line of cars strung out behind the three engines. I opened the door to the cab, and walked inside. Mr. Dix wasn’t in there yet, so I sat down on the left side of the engine to wait for him. The inside of the engine had the characteristic smell of diesel and steel. Out the little sliding window the rolling hills stretched as far as I could see. The late December sky was beginning to gray up as if it were going to snow, and the sun was hanging low on the horizon. I heard footsteps on the stairs and the door opened.

“What are you doing sitting there?”

All I could answer was, “Uh ...”

“Get over there. You’re going to take this train out.”

I got up quickly and moved over to the engineer’s seat.

“I’m Danny Dix.” He extended his hand and I shook it. Danny didn’t strike me as being very old, probably in his early thirties, but he had a kind of weathered look and a steely gaze that seemed to look right through me. He wore jeans and a denim jacket that seemed way too light for the cold prairie wind blowing outside.

In the midst of our introduction, a switchman climbed aboard, and the conductor signaled from the back that we were ready to go. Danny gave me step-by-step instructions on pulling the train out of the yard. Within a couple of minutes we were a few miles outside Herrington, heading south towards Wichita. Bumping along at fifty to sixty miles per hour, I was somewhere between terror and sheer delight. The Rock Island wasn't known for the quality of its track, so the ride was pretty rough. Snow flurries were starting to swirl as the sun set, and every couple of miles we would see deer crossing the rails ahead of us. When each junction came up, I'd reach over and pull the air horn; two long, one short, and one long.

In between instructions, Danny and his switchman checked me out. It was obvious that I didn't fit the usual "trainee" stereotype they were used to, and I wondered for a while if I would be accepted. But as the trip wore on, Danny warmed up and I found out that below the rough exterior, he was really a pretty nice guy.

The trip seemed to be taking forever and for the first time, I began to wonder if this railroad idea was so hot after all. The money was good, but the boredom of going mile after mile seemed overwhelming. I was amazed that these guys could do this day after day, week after week. Of course they probably weren't used to getting high everyday and laying around with their girlfriends listening to music.

Ten hours after we began, we arrived in Caldwell, a sleepy little town of maybe several hundred. I grabbed my small bag and we walked over to the railroad's bunkhouse where I immediately crashed. It was a good thing because eight hours later, almost to the minute, Danny pounded on the door and announced that we had to take a train back to Herrington. I threw some cold water on my face, grabbed some sludge that was supposed to be coffee and walked out to the train. The temperature was dropping fast, and it felt like some heavier snow was in the offing. Danny and our brakeman were already in the cab. I sat down in the engineer's seat before he had a chance to yell at me, and he just grinned. The brakeman radioed back to the conductor in the caboose, and he gave us the o.k. to "get 'em rolling."

During the next few hours, Danny explained more about terrain, the effect of the cold on the brake system, and the vital importance of always being safety conscious.

After a few hours he gave me a break. I stepped down into the bathroom, which was a small room down a couple of steps into the nose of the engine. I remember sitting there in that freezing, rocking outhouse, thinking that in the unlikely event that we ran into something, say like a gasoline supply truck, it would be my rear end leading the way.

Following my “break,” I asked Danny about his life apart from the railroad. He told me that in his past were many years of living a wild life filled with lots of drinking. I asked him what had changed, fully expecting that he’d say “A.A.” Since I had seen my dad get dry through the program, I figured that was his way out, too. But I was wrong. After a long silence, he looked at me and smiled.

“Jesus changed me.”

I was dumbstruck. The memory of my recent discovery of *The Late Great Planet Earth* brought up a wave of unsettled feelings. What on earth was going on? First I was dumb enough to read that book that talked about the need to be born again, and now I was stuck on a train hurtling through the Kansas prairie with a Jesus freak. But as much as I wanted to convince myself that Danny was some kind of fool, he sure didn’t come across as one. I frankly can’t remember many of the words he spoke, but I do remember that everything he said seemed so genuine, so honest, and most of all *so real*. Here was a man who talked unabashedly about a Jesus that was as real as Danny Dix was to me at that moment. He didn’t talk about his religion or his denomination. Danny talked about Jesus and how Jesus had saved him from his old life and given him a new life.

Two other qualities came across that really blew my mind ... first of all, it was obvious that Danny Dix loved the Jesus of the Bible. I’d heard many people over the years talk about a Jesus that they believed in. Usually their Jesus was one that seemed to reflect their personal qualities and beliefs. But when Danny Dix talked about Jesus, he talked about the Jesus of the Bible. He would quote verses about what Jesus said and how it applied to real life.

The other thing that was so different about this man was very difficult for me to describe. He seemed to see right through me. It was like he knew exactly who I really was: a depressed, self-centered, twenty-something kid who had never really grown up.

But instead of condemning me, he seemed to really care about me. I didn't know what it was at the time, but I do now. It was the love of God.

I remember feeling a curious mixture of fear and trust. Physically and emotionally, it was almost painful to be around him. But something else seemed to be drawing me in, gently wooing me to listen to him.

The rest of the trip was pretty uneventful except for the four or five stops where we'd have to pick up or leave cars. It was pretty scary the first time I backed up a long train, watching for the hand signals from the switchman. He would signal with his light to tell how fast to back up and when to stop so we could safely couple or uncouple a car. I knew from previous runs how difficult this could be and with a heavy snow coming down and the prairie wind kicking up, it was really nerve-racking.

Intellectually, I knew that it was critical that everybody on the train work as a team, watching out for one another. But after the last stop we made on this particular run, Danny made sure to provide an illustration that would burn the need for constant vigilance into me forever. He told me about a Rock Island switchman that had been on the end of a train one night and had been positioned in between two box cars to open the knuckles. Somehow the engineer had misread his signals and backed the train up, pinning the switchman in between the couplers of the two trains. Fighting the pain and shock of having his thin body compressed into the small space between the couplers, he used his remaining strength to throw his signal light out the side where one of the other crew saw it flying through the air. Everyone ran back to where he was trapped, and one of them made a frantic call to the trainmaster and the man's family.

The switchman knew that being coupled was the equivalent of a death sentence because once they unhitched the cars, massive internal bleeding would take place and he would be dead within minutes. His family was rushed over, and with sobs and prayers he said his last good-byes to his family.

Listening to the story, I was trying my best to pay attention to driving the train, but his story was so engrossing that it was like I was standing there next to his family. I was also beginning to have the urge just to get away from the railroad. The thought that kept going through my mind was that sooner or later I was going to kill someone because I'd be too high to know what I was doing. I had enough of a conscience left that the

thought of continuing to do drugs and work on the railroad was becoming unacceptable. Of course the thought of stopping the drugs didn't even enter my mind. The only real option was getting out of the railroad.

Danny finished the story but the ending wasn't what I expected. When they finally uncoupled the switchman, he collapsed on top of the rails and lost consciousness.

"But," Danny interjected as almost an afterthought, "God did a miracle; he lived." He smiled at me and waited for my reply.

"Wow," was all I could muster. My mind quickly came up with a half dozen explanations for the "miracle." I had rejected the God of the Bible already back in the round house, and now to hear more about Him only made me feel more uneasy.

Mercifully, our trip finally came to an end minutes later as we pulled back into Herrington. I jumped into my van and began the two-hour trip back to Kansas City, glad to have escaped the clutches of my born-again railroad instructor. I also had hopes of getting back to Iris's house for her famous New Year's Eve party. It was one of the highlights of the holiday season for all of her friends in the radio world; music, booze, drugs and of course the special moment when Iris would do her yearly lip-sync of Diana Ross. Diana had goddess-like status for Iris, and she had even gone out to Las Vegas to see her perform several times. On one such trip, Ms. Ross made the mistake of inviting several people to come up on stage with her to sing and dance. Somehow Iris successfully bolted up on stage and began to "perform" with Diana. At one point, Iris had become so enthusiastic in her performance, that Diana had leaned over and whispered loudly, "Honey, can you give me a little room?"

I went back to my apartment in North Kansas City, quickly changed, and got over to Iris's house. The party was in full swing, and I finally got to meet a lot of her friends that I'd heard about for several months. Some of the most prominent DJ's in the Midwest were there, along with a lot of record people from Columbia, Warner Brothers, and Arista. The rest were sales and promotional staff people from Iris's station, Q104. I had the odd feeling that I was being interviewed, but all in all, her friends went out of their way to accept me. It was pretty obvious that they really cared for Iris, and after watching her husband cheat on her, I think they were hoping that I would be different.

After midnight, I checked back with the yard to see if I would be going out in the morning, and luckily I wasn't scheduled again until the following night. We stayed up into the early morning before giving in to the need for sleep. Shortly before dozing off, Iris commented that I really needed to get away from life on the railroad and get a real job. After a dozen beers and a gram of cocaine, I was too blitzed to pay much attention, but had I known the truth, she already had plans for my next career.

S, D & Rock 'n' Roll

The month of January was filled with six more trips out on the road. I had been assigned another engineer trainer, so I was relieved that I wouldn't have to deal with Danny's gentle but persistent discussions about Jesus. I was as good as anybody at coming up with the standard objections to the Bible, but my lifestyle of constant partying made being around Danny increasingly uncomfortable.

Most of my trips were on the Herrington south run that I had started with, but near the end of the month, I got called out to take a train from Topeka west to Manhattan, and then up to little Belleview, Kansas. The crew on this particular train had "gone dead," meaning they had reached the twelve-hour limit for working set by the government. So our crew was driven from Kansas City to a place out in the boonies west of Topeka where the train had stopped. On the way, a furious snowstorm began raging, and by the time we got started, there were at least five inches of snow with huge drifts. It was freezing cold, and one of the engines was acting up. Every hour or so, we'd have to go out on the side of the speeding train and reset an obstinate circuit breaker. There was only a single rail separating me from falling off the side, and I couldn't help but think that if I did fall off, they'd never find me until spring.

We eventually made it through the blizzard and stayed over until around 2:00 A.M. when we were called to take a train back to Kansas City. I had filled my thermos with fresh coffee and climbed up into the engine to find that the crew was already "celebrating" the big snowstorm. Both the engineer and the switchmen were drinking little flasks of scotch, and we were hardly out of the train yard before they were three sheets to the wind. The engineer gave me the train orders and told me to wake him if I

had any questions. With that he and the switchman lay down on the floor and were out cold.

I started laughing uncontrollably, half from fear and half from the sheer irony of the situation. The two alcoholic trainmen had entrusted hundreds of tons of train to the novice hoghead who was a cocaine abuser. I held the train orders and map in hand and watched for landmarks as best I could, hoping that the weather had reduced the number of trains out that night. Since the route we were on had no automatic signals, the only way I'd know if a train was stopped in front of me was if a signal flare was left on the tracks. This was what trainmen knew as "dark railroad."

The scenery was incredibly beautiful that night, a blanket of pristine snow covering the rolling prairie of northern Kansas, lit with a bright, full moon. The sky was almost completely cloudless, and there were about a billion stars in the sky. I was amazed by nature's beauty, and like so many people in the world, I loved the creation, but not the Creator.

Since the railroad was in pretty bad shape, I dared not go very fast. But once in a while I would have to build up speed for an upcoming hill and the engine would hit a big drift sending a huge plume of snow thirty feet into the air. Every half hour or so, I'd open the window in the cab to blow the frigid air on my face to help keep me awake. I was tempted to try and wake my drunken friends on the floor, but they seemed so out of it, I figured it was a lost cause.

A couple of hours later, we were approaching the outskirts of Manhattan, Kansas, just as the sun was coming up. I really didn't want to go through town without some kind of direction, so I leaned over and began shaking the engineer's lifeless body. He stirred slightly, and much to my surprise, without opening his eyes he yelled out, "What do you see outside?"

I looked outside, read off a mile-marker, and described a grain bin on a siding. He hesitated for a second and yelled back, "Drop her down two notches, and begin breaking after the next hill." I followed his direction, and began decelerating the train. We crested the hill, and I began applying some brake. Up ahead, the track curved into a residential section of town, but I couldn't make much out because the rising sun was right in my face. The brakes began to catch hold as we hit the apex of the turn, and the train began

decelerating. I looked down at my inebriated instructor, and he still had his eyes closed. I was about to ask what next when he abruptly yelled out again.

“Drop her all the way down, and bring her to a stop.” I moved the throttle lever all the way down and applied more brake. Up ahead about a hundred yards I could see a clearing where there were stores and an intersection. The train slowed more and finally came to a stop near a cluster of retail buildings. As if on cue, the engineer and switchman got up off of the floor and bounded towards the door.

“What kind of donuts do you want, kid?” he yelled on the way out.

“Two jelly and a coffee,” I said, throwing a five-dollar bill out the window.

I watched them walk across the tracks in front of the train and amble over to the donut shop that stood a scant thirty yards away. Even though I knew that these guys had probably been this way hundreds of times, I was still amazed at how well they knew every inch of the route. I was also horrified that they had entrusted the train to me for over five hours. These guys reminded me so much of my dad. They knew their job really well, and they were both raging alcoholics. *How much longer before they wreck a train or hit a school bus*, I thought to myself.

How much longer before you are just like them? A little voice asked in my mind.

Ten minutes later we started out again, everyone scarfing down their donuts and sipping scalding hot coffee in an effort to wake up. I had just about decided that it was time to look for other employment. I was tired and completely frazzled, and I just wanted to get home and go to bed. *Home*. I had to stop and think about where I was living now. I had been in and out of so many apartments and houses that the word “home” seemed almost meaningless now.

Once we got out of Manhattan, we picked up speed and finally began making some steady progress back towards Herrington. My spirits picked up a little bit knowing I’d be off for at least two days, and Iris and I would have a lot of time to party down. We hit a steep hill that dragged our speed down to around twenty miles per hour, and I increased power to keep the train from hitting the “critical speed” of about seventeen miles per hour. You’d think that this is so slow that nothing dangerous could possibly happen, but it is at this speed that a rocking oscillation builds up that can cause derailments on less-than-ideal track. Unfortunately, most of Rock Island’s track wasn’t

even close to “less-than-ideal,” and the stretch of track we were hitting could have best been described as “an accident waiting to happen.”

I didn't have to wait long. Even though most of the train was now going downhill, I noticed that we were slowing down. I began to apply more power thinking that the brakes were hanging a little, but then every instinct began yelling at me that we were in trouble. I flipped the throttle all the way down and threw the brake lever to emergency stop. The engineer yelled over, “What's the matter?” and he and I looked out the window to the rear at the same time. We could see snow and debris flying up in the air at about the halfway point of the train. He began yelling expletives that I hadn't even heard of in the Army and picked up the radio.

I knew that I wasn't the first one to have this happen. Derailments were beginning to be commonplace all over the “Rock.” It was all that was needed to finalize my decision to leave. Oh, I'd stick around long enough to get another job, but mentally, I'd already quit. After all, quitting was a whole lot easier than sticking it out, and I'd really gotten good at quitting when things didn't turn out like I thought they would.

Four hours later I got back to Kansas City and immediately headed over to Iris's for the night. She met me at the door with a huge mirror that had “I love you” spelled out with lines of cocaine. We drank and did drugs for hours while she told me all about the deals she was working on at the station. I didn't go into any details about my “day” at work, but I told her for the first time that I was thinking about doing something else. She smiled and responded, “You don't belong on the railroad, Andy. You are a salesman.”

A salesman? It was the last thing I expected to hear from her. But Iris hadn't been the first to see a glimmer of some career promise. My oldest brother, Bill, had been a very successful medical salesman in Kansas City and St. Louis. During my college years he had commented that sooner or later I'd end up in sales. I had laughed out loud because, like so many people, I had bought the lie that “selling” was a less-than-honorable profession. But now I was beginning to question a lot of my preconceptions. Short of a few doctors and lawyers I'd known, Iris was the most successful person I'd ever met, and everyone who knew her loved and respected her.

We were high most of the weekend, and fortunately, I didn't have to be back to work until Monday night. Iris went to work around 9:00 A.M. Monday morning and told me to hang out around her house. While most everyone else was expected to be at work dutifully at 8:00 A.M., the owner of the station gave Iris a special dispensation because of the kind of business she was producing.

I was lying around her family room smoking some pot when the phone rang. I picked it up figuring it was Iris. When I answered, it turned out to be the Sales Manager of the Kansas City Office of Warner/Elektra/Atlantic records, better known as WEA in the record industry. Jim McAuliff introduced himself and explained that he heard that I was considering a job change. He wondered if I'd be interested in interviewing for an open sales position in the Kansas City office. I stammered that yes I'd be interested and Jim suggested that I come in for an interview later that week. I racked my drugged-out mind to remember what day I'd be in town, and finally arrived at Thursday. I thanked him for the opportunity, and he said that he was looking forward to meeting me. I almost replied, "Are you sure you're talking to the right person?"

After I got off the phone, I just stood there in shock. The chance to work for a record company! I loved music, and it was one of the few things that I knew a whole bunch about. I had grown up on every kind of rock 'n' roll, and practically listened to AOR radio twenty-four hours a day. From AC/DC to Led Zeppelin to the Beatles and the Doobie Brothers, I was wired for sound.

I excitedly picked up the phone and called Iris. Halfway into blurting out the news, I finally had the brilliant realization that Jim McAuliff hadn't called me because of my resume being posted in *Billboard Magazine*. Iris had no doubt done one of her full-court presses, and thanks to her support, I was going to get a shot at a great job. But she dismissed my inquiries, instead concentrating on my preparations for the interview.

"What do you have to wear to the interview?" she pressed like a good Jewish mother. Thankfully, amidst all my cutoff jeans, overalls, and hippie paraphernalia, I did own one suit. I drove over to my apartment and tried it on to make sure it still fit. It was a little loose because I had shed a few pounds due to my lousy diet and late nights, but it would do fine. I dropped the suit at the cleaners on my way out to the rail yard and arranged to pick up the suit on Wednesday morning before my interview.

I could hardly contain myself as I walked into the round house. I was dying to tell someone about the interview, but I knew that if I didn't get the job, I still needed a railroad paycheck.

The next two days crawled by, but after a trip out to Herrington and back, it was finally Wednesday morning. I drove back to my apartment, my freshly cleaned suit in tow. I bounded into my apartment and showered quickly, rehearsing some of the questions I would ask in the interview. Looking at my watch, I reassured myself that I had plenty of time. I wasn't supposed to meet with Jim for another two hours, so I would make it with time to spare. Filled with renewed confidence, I put on a white button-down shirt and gingerly stepped into my three-piece, green corduroy suit. It had been years since I'd worn a suit, and it never occurred to me that the style was not exactly up-to-date. In this case, ignorance was bliss. I put on a matching striped tie, and I was all ready to go except for one minor problem. I suddenly realized that I had no dress shoes!

Somehow I knew that my railroad boots or dirty Converse sneakers probably wouldn't quite make the grade. "My kingdom for a pair of dress shoes," I screamed, hoping to calm my frayed nerves with a frail attempt at humor.

There was only one thing to do: call Iris. I caught her at her office on the plaza, and within five minutes she called me back with directions to Mike and Dina Scrivani's house.

Mike was one of the most popular DJs in Kansas City, and he had graciously volunteered to lend me some shoes. I made it over to their house in Shawnee and picked up the shoes. They resembled the short boots that the Dave Clark Five used to wear; only instead of black, these babies were light brown, so they really helped to set off my forest green suit. They were also about two sizes too big for me, so I had the strangest feeling that my feet had grown to a hideous size. But there wasn't any time for a visit to a shoe store. It was "show time," brown shoes and all.

I made it down to the WEA office on the plaza with about five minutes to spare. I had actually slept a little the night before so I was feeling reasonably well. The secretary ushered me into Jim's office where I was met by Jim and the three promotion guys from Warner/Elektra/Atlantic. Jim had one of those personalities that made you feel immediately at ease. I was amazed to see that everyone was dressed pretty casually. In

fact, a couple of the promotion guys looked like they had slept in their clothes. Jim asked me to talk about my work experience and my ability to relate to people. Eventually we transitioned to the music world, and I did my best to demonstrate my knowledge about the various artists that were distributed by WEA.

After about an hour, Jim was talking to me like I was already on the team. I was so excited I could hardly sit still. The salary wasn't very good, but the thought of working in the music world more than made up for the pay cut I'd take with the job.

Just then I remembered that Iris had cautioned me not to leave the room assuming anything. "You've got to ask him for the job," She had insisted. "He will look to see if you have the guts to ask for the order."

As if on cue, Jim asked me if there were any more questions I had. I hesitated, and with all the courage I could muster, I went for it.

"Just one. When can I start?"

Jim smiled and hesitated. I had the urge to say something else, but I remembered another lesson from Iris's play book. "Once you ask for the order," she had drilled into me, "shut up." I followed her advice, and the seconds went by painfully slow. Finally, mercifully, Jim spoke.

"You can have the job on one condition."

Before I could ask what it was, Jim blurted it out.

"Just don't ever wear that suit again."

A week later I was on the job, properly dressed in jeans, sneakers, and a T-shirt that read, "Sex, drugs, and Rock & Roll." My main responsibility was to make sure there was adequate product in retail and distributor outlets throughout my territory, and to build enthusiasm for new releases with store personnel. The territory encompassed the Kansas City Metro area, Topeka, and Wichita, so there wasn't too much travel involved.

Iris was happy that I finally had a "real" job, and initially we had moderated our partying a bit so that I could have enough sleep to work every day. The respite was short-lived, however, since I had developed a voracious craving for cocaine. And since my salary was a paltry \$28,000, she was usually the one who could afford to buy the drugs.

But if the job lacked in the financial area, its “loose” nature certainly afforded me the opportunity to live out my “wild side.” Each day, Iris would meet me in the afternoon for a “coke” break where we would furtively snort some lines of cocaine inside the back of my van. That would usually keep me going until dinnertime when I’d come over to her house in Lenexa, and we’d drink, smoke marijuana and do cocaine into the early morning.

I still had my apartment, but I would only go there long enough to shower and change clothes. I rationalized that somehow because I was maintaining my space from Iris I wasn’t “living” with her. To any sane person, the distinction would have been laughable. Unfortunately, I could not be included in this group of people.

Another “benefit” of my new position was the opportunity to meet and hang out with the “stars.” At least once a month, there would be a concert in Kansas City by an artist on one of our labels, and we’d end up back stage hanging out with the band. In fact, Iris first did cocaine at a Paul McCartney concert. (No, Paul wasn’t present.)

During this time I had the opportunity to meet many of the most famous bands of that time. The Cars, Robert Palmer, Jackson Browne, and Fleetwood Mac were some of the most noteworthy ones I remember. But what really blew my mind about the whole experience was the utter emptiness of the people I came in contact with. Here were people who were making comparatively huge amounts of money, were adored by millions of fans, and by most people’s definition, had “made it.” Yet they seemed no happier than I was. They all seemed as directionless as I was, and it was almost as if, as one songwriter had put it, there were “tombstones in their eyes.”

But there was one overridingly powerful attraction for me when it came to this job. It was, as a friend of mine observed, one of the most potent of all girl magnets. All I had to do was mention that I worked for a record company and the rest was incredibly easy. I entered a period of time when I was intoxicated not only by drugs, but also with a constant stream of one-night stands that I would juggle in between my consistent “relationship” with Iris.

Iris was also dating other guys, but she was constantly “selling me” on how great it would be if we got married. In return I was totally open with my refusal. There was no way that I’d get married again. I was the first one to point out that I’d been a terrible

husband, not because I'd been mean or abusive, but because I had broken my commitment. Besides, the thought of being confined in a marriage again was a totally repulsive thought. But down deep a small crack was beginning to appear. I had never met anyone, man or woman, like Iris before. Her loyalty to her friends, and her pit bull-like determination to succeed was something that I really admired in her. She was the kind of person that if you were in a war, you would want on your side because she would fight to the death for you and the cause.

Even through the haze of all the drugs I was doing, I was still lucid enough to see what was happening. I figured that sooner or later I would have to make a break with Iris, and the thought of hurting her was getting increasingly painful. So I kept telling Iris about how fantastic the EST training had been, and that it was the most amazing thing that I'd ever been through. My hope was that she'd take the training so that when I broke off from her, she would be able to accept my decision. To my surprise, she actually enrolled in the course scheduled for Denver. As the weekend came closer, I foolishly kept thinking that my plan would actually work.

When Iris returned from the course the following weekend, it was clear that the Werner Erhard's crack trainers had been totally defeated on the human potential battlefield. The high point of the training for Iris had been her ability to sneak food into the training with impunity and to laugh at the trainers' attempts to verbally browbeat everyone into submission. Instead of achieving some Zen sense of "things are just the way they are," Iris was now more convinced than ever that we belonged together. In typical 20/20 hindsight, I suddenly realized that Iris didn't need anyone to tell her that she was in control of her life. She already knew that; she knew exactly what she wanted. All I had done was reinforce her determination to achieve her goals. The bull's-eye on my heart was now brighter than ever.

A couple of months later, I attended a national sales meeting for our company in Chicago. In between meetings, we were wined and dined and built up for the coming set of new releases from the labels. One of the more interesting high points of the meeting was a dinner where John Belushi burst into the room, hand-sprung his way all the way up

to the stage, and sang a blues number for us. I watched this star with fascination, jealous of the adoration being poured out on him. Movies, hit songs, live television, and worldwide fame were all his.

I'd been with Warner/Elektra/Atlantic about a year now and although all the perks were great, I was starting to get frustrated because of the dim prospects for making any serious money in the business. I had become so dependent on Iris for drugs that after paying my rent and car payment, I'd basically turn everything else over to her. After all, she was spending thousands of dollars per month on cocaine for us, so it was the very least I could do. But even she didn't have unlimited funds, and after about a year and a half of partying, she decided to sell her house. She claimed that the house had too many bad memories from her first marriage, but I knew that the real reason was that we needed the equity to keep partying. She even sold her beloved baby grand piano and many of the household items she'd accumulated over the years.

I began to check out some ads in the paper and after a few dull prospects, I interviewed with the local cable system for a sales job. The sales manager painted an incredible opportunity for me. "Unlimited potential," he said pointing to his own success. He drove a Porsche and did seem to be on the level. There were some guys in the department who claimed to be making fifty to sixty grand a year, so I took the leap. The people in the music business I knew were stunned that I wanted to leave the lights of the music industry, but they didn't understand the underlying reason for the move. I hoped that I could find something that would help me escape from my dependence on Iris and make a name for myself. And since I had to work in the early evening, I hoped that if it didn't work out I'd have the mornings to look for a different job.

Not surprisingly, I didn't last long in the cable business. Although I did pretty well saleswise, I just wasn't aggressive enough to close the sales I'd need to get ahead. I ended up making about the same amount of money I had before, so after a month or two I began looking again. Rather than becoming more independent, I was now more dependent on Iris than ever before.

Iris had switched jobs a few times as well, and was now working for KCMO, the big news talk station in Kansas City. She was still making great money – seventy-five to eighty grand a year, which at that time was incredible, especially for a woman. She was

way ahead of her time and had developed quite a reputation in the marketplace. Not everyone liked her because she was so aggressive, but they all had terrific respect for her. She had an unusual ability to think three-dimensionally when it came to customers and promotion. While other sales people would be trying to sell someone on buying their station, Iris would come up with a promotional idea that would tie in multiple businesses. It was a win for everyone and her billing would increase across the board. I was amazed by her focus and passion. She really enjoyed what she did, and the result was that she was always working on something inside that mind of hers. We would sit around getting high, and while I'd be daydreaming about nonsense, she would be scribbling down a note to call someone about a deal she was working on.

She just loved to sell, and she was the consummate artist at it. She didn't always have the best ratings, or the best rate, but she had a way of getting people so caught up in her emotion and enthusiasm that features and benefits just didn't matter. She sold the "sizzle," as she put it, and she was very successful at doing it. She didn't sell the station as much as she sold people on her passion for what they did. Iris made people believe in themselves, and they would go out of their way to help her.

Iris was always selling something. Sales wasn't a job for her, it was a way of life. She was one of the first to buy the new Honda Accord when it came out, and she loved that car. Everyone who came across her path heard about her Honda. Before long, she had referred nearly fifty people to the dealership where she bought the car, and they were selling them like hotcakes. (Yes, she had arranged for a referral fee.)

Watching her succeed in sales, I was more determined than ever. I came upon an ad in the paper for a sales job for a video chain in Overland Park's Oak View Mall, and after a couple of interviews I got the job. This was when big screens and VCRs were really beginning to get popular, and it was fun to sell the newest technology.

Within a month or two, I was the top-selling salesperson in the district, and soon I was promoted to Assistant Manager.

My employment situation had improved, but about this time I received some disheartening news. My father called to tell me he had been diagnosed with cancer. It was inoperable, so they would be implanting a radiation source in his neck in hopes of slowing it down. Dad had survived a heart attack in the seventies, and he always seemed

too ornery to die. But this time I could tell things were different. He didn't come out and say it, but I sensed that the doctor had told him that he didn't have to long to live.

Only a month or two after becoming an assistant manager, the district manager walked into the store one afternoon and took me aside. He congratulated me on my performance and asked me if I'd like to have my own store. Sure, I replied, when an opportunity came up I'd be very interested. He laughed and told me to meet him at 9:00 that night at the company's other mall store in North Kansas City. That night he walked into the store with me in tow. He unceremoniously fired the store manager and assistant manager and handed me the keys. "Turn this store around," he said. "Do what you need to do."

For the next two months, I practically lived at that mall. Iris was now working at the big AOR station, KY-102, and when she was off work, she would come up to the store to help out. The place was a mess, so we began by making it spotless and redoing all the displays. I did my best to encourage the sales people that stayed on. I found that they'd had precious little positive reinforcement, so I began by making a big deal out of everything they accomplished. The results were immediate. Soon the store was vying for the top spot in the region in sales.

Given my success on the job, you would think that I would have felt better, but my sense of emptiness continued to build. Iris and I were continuing to get drunk and do cocaine almost every night, but all the drugs only dulled my pain and depression. Down deep inside, I was more of a mess than ever, and it seemed like I was in a deep hole that just kept getting deeper. I had completely forgotten about Danny Dix, the railroad, and *The Late Great Planet Earth*.

Christmas was quickly approaching, and I decided to take a couple of days off to visit Dad back in New York. I left on Christmas Eve and got home early Christmas morning. It was pretty obvious that Dad wasn't doing very well. He was in the anger stage by now, and we weren't getting along. Of course, the fact that my brother Chris and I were drunk all the time was especially hard on him. He had been a recovering alcoholic for over fifteen years by then, and to him A.A. had become his whole life. He was passionate about the need for sobriety, and he didn't even try to hide his disgust for our life of drugs. Yet, he would openly boast to us about the affairs he was having with

women in the program. As demented as I was, I still experienced a bizarre moral repulsion to what I saw in his life. At least I'm honest about my life, I would console myself.

Dad's name was "Bevier," a Dutch name that people rarely called him. His nickname, Pappy, was what everyone called him. He had been bald for as long as I could remember, and he had a shaved head way before it became the "in" thing to do. In his serious moments, he would tell me that one of the steps to becoming sober was to reach out to a "higher power." My brother and I would laugh to ourselves since the "higher power" that he talked about didn't seem to care about anything other than being sober. When I thought about being sober or straight, all that came up for me was the inevitability of more pain and depression than I already had. At least I could dream about "making it" and being happy when I was stoned.

On my flight back to Kansas City on the day after Christmas, I spent a lot of time thinking about my relationship with my dad. In spite of all my derision for my father's lifestyle, I began to realize over this visit home that I had always been yearning for my father's approval. In hindsight, I looked back on many of the accomplishments in my life, and it seemed that they were never enough. It wasn't that he had set some unattainable goals for my life; it was more that he didn't really seem to care much about my future or my impact on the world.

Intellectually, I told myself that he loved me, but it certainly didn't seem real to me. On that trip home I forced myself to go back and think about the best memories I could about my dad. At first not much came up, but then to my surprise a memory came up that was so real I virtually relived it that night.

I was about ten years old at the time, and we were living outside of Radford, Virginia. My dad and I were walking down the main street of town when suddenly he did something that caught me completely off guard. He wrapped his arm around me as we walked down that street. It wasn't one of those cursory hugs that we're all guilty of occasionally. It was a strong, loving hug of a proud father that was saying to the world, "This is my son!"

The vividness of this cherished memory shocked me. I realized that no matter how weak our relationship was, I still loved my dad. I also knew deep inside that I had

been as remiss at expressing my love as he had. I was going to have to come to terms with the fact that he was dying. I didn't have any hope that his condition would improve. All I could see ahead was deterioration and the inevitability of losing any hope of getting the approval I so desperately sought from my dad.

As the plane got closer to Kansas City, I ordered another drink and tried to make the pain go away.

A Rude Awakening

Early the next morning I opened the store and began preparing for the post-Christmas return rush at the mall. Amidst the chaos of the day, I received a call from my district manager informing me of a new company policy. We got these updates from time to time, so I wasn't expecting anything earthshaking, but this announcement would rock my world. Drug testing and polygraph testing would begin in February, he said. "Of course," he assured me, "you have nothing to worry about. You're doing a great job."

The news hit me like a two-by-four. Lie detectors and drug tests; I'd probably break both machines. I immediately called a couple of the other managers who I knew weren't exactly straight arrows. A couple of them occasionally got high, and they lamented that they'd have to "clean up their act." But I couldn't even conceive of not doing drugs. It had become the center of my life, and I didn't even consider stopping as an option.

Don Dodd, the manager who had originally hired me, had talked in the past about possibly starting his own business. We met later that day, and he said that he was ready to go into the advertising business selling a new phone book cover with ads on the front of it for quick reference. He was planning on resigning in the next month or two, and he asked me if I wanted to help him out. I explained that I was seriously considering going back to New York to spend some more time with my dad. Don was fine with that. "Just help me get the business off the ground," he asked.

We had to work in our stores a few more weeks to make sure we got some commissions due us, and during that time they scheduled our "tests." I actually stopped doing any drugs or alcohol for a few days before the tests. Now that I was going to

resign, I wasn't as concerned as before, although I was still worried that a future employer might check my references and get the results of my tests.

The day came for my drug and polygraph tests, and I lied, lied, and lied. About the only question I answered honestly was, "Have you ever tried marijuana?" I figured that there weren't many people in the U.S. my age that hadn't smoked grass, so I was pretty safe in admitting that. But when the interviewer asked if I'd ever tried any hard drugs like heroin, I said no. In my convoluted mind, I was telling the truth.

The day that Don and I resigned, we all went out to dinner on the Plaza to celebrate our new business opportunity. But I had already decided to go back home to be with my father. I also looked at this as an opportunity to get away from Iris for a while and maybe escape her marriage designs. Although she didn't want me to go, she didn't argue; since she had such a strong relationship with her mom, she respected my decision.

I worked with Don for about a month, and then packed up my belongings and flew back to New York. I rented an apartment just down the road from my parents' house in Port Ewen, a little town right next door to Kingston. This was the town where my dad had been born and brought up and the town where I had lived with my ex-wife, Joyce, during my years in college. Coming back was terribly uncomfortable. Everywhere I went was a reminder of my failed life. But I was driven to spend some time with Dad before he died.

At first, Dad was happy to see me, and I spent a few days just being with him. We'd drive around to see some of his old friends or shop at hardware stores where he loved to tinker around, but at night he'd always be going to an A.A. meeting in one of the towns along the Hudson Valley. My mom, on the other hand, was drunk by noon every day, and she would spend the afternoon stumbling around the house slamming doors and muttering about "that man."

Literally decades of anger and resentment seemed to be building up as each day went by. I had always been closer to my mom than my dad. She had passed along her love of politics to me, as well as her compassion for the downtrodden in life. But I was repulsed by her inability to show any compassion for Dad as he neared death's door. I knew from comments that they had both made that there were many things in their past that had destroyed their relationship. "There are lots of things you don't know," they'd

both say to us. I didn't want to know what had happened, but like so many little kids who hurt when their parents fight, I just wanted them to get along.

Iris and I talked almost every night. She told me how much she missed and loved me, and though I hated to admit it, I missed her too. But it was hard to differentiate my feelings for her from my craving for drugs. She would send little care packages of cocaine to me occasionally in the mail; nothing very substantial, as if to remind me that I'd be rewarded if I came back to her.

Ironically, this was probably one of the straightest times in my life. I couldn't afford to buy drugs, and I was too busy helping Dad to work full-time. And without regular cocaine to keep me up, I didn't want to drink; it only made me tired and more depressed. You would have thought that I would have felt better as the amount of drugs and alcohol in my system began to wear off, but the reality I saw around me was a lot more painful than the illusion I was living when I was high.

Predictably, I didn't stay back home very long. Ironically, though, it wasn't my idea to leave; it was my dad's. One day I was carrying some groceries into the house for him, and he turned to me abruptly and said, "I want you to leave now. I appreciate that you want to help, but I'm going to be just fine."

I wasn't sure what to say at first. Dad just went on as if he hadn't said anything about it. My initial reaction was disbelief and anger. I was actually trying to do something decent for a change, and I felt like I was failing at that, too. But later as I sat in my apartment thinking about it, I saw things from a different perspective. It was almost like my presence was infringing on his belief that he'd actually beat the cancer the way he had survived a heart attack a decade earlier.

I called Iris, and she was ecstatic. She offered to fly back to help me drive since I had my two cats to contend with on the eleven-hundred-mile trip back to Kansas City. I accepted, and a couple of days later we stopped by my parents' old farmhouse to say good-bye. As usual, Dad got busy checking my oil and giving us instructions on what route to take out of New York. I waited until he was done, and then before he could say anything else, I hugged him and looked him straight in the eyes. I told him that I loved

him, and that he could rely on me. I was fighting back tears with everything I had. I didn't want him to think that I was sure he'd lose his battle. He turned around waving, but above the din of the cars passing by on Route 9W, I heard him tell me that he loved me too.

It had not been a fairy tale visit, but I was glad that I'd made the trip. It would not be until later in my life that I'd find out how important it was that I had gone back home.

A few days after returning to Kansas City, I began perusing the want ads and called a few headhunters hoping to find another job. Iris and I were living together in a house in North Kansas City along with an old friend who'd worked for me at the store. She was now working at ZZ-99, a new station that was owned by the couple who had given Iris her original job in radio sales years before. ZZ-99 was designed to take on their old station Q-104 that they'd sold years before for a hefty profit. After waiting five years to comply with a non-compete contract, the owners were anxious to get back into the Kansas City market. One of their first decisions was to hire Iris to spearhead the sales team.

I was glad to be back in Kansas City after my depressing stay back home, and I was actually looking forward to getting back to work. After a week of two of prospecting, I got an interview with Allergan, an ophthalmic pharmaceutical company. The interview process was challenging, but I had learned a lot from Iris on how to close a sale. I survived three interviews and was offered a sales position in the Kansas City territory. Although I was happy to get the offer, I was concerned that, given my lie detector performance, the offer might be short-lived once my references were checked. But amazingly, nothing was mentioned, and I started with the company in the late summer of 1981.

Like so many times before, I had promised myself that I'd begin getting some sleep and cut back on getting high. But the first day on the job, I found myself hung over again with only a few hours of sleep. Joe, the manager who had hired me, took me out to begin my training, and it was a rude awakening. This guy was a working machine. He picked me up around 6:30 or 7:00 A.M. and started by quizzing me on the ingredients of

the drugs and over-the-counter contact lens products we sold. We would begin hitting the doctors' offices about 8:30 A.M. in an attempt to get past the vaunted receptionist so that I could pitch whatever the "drugs of the month" were. But that wasn't the worst part of it. After each sales call, we'd go back to the car, and we would laboriously review every hideous part of my sales call, meticulously analyzing what I'd done well and not so well. Joe would even go so far as rating each thing by numerical value, from one to ten. By about 10:00 in the morning, I was convinced that I had fallen into some kind of cult.

But I was determined to stick with my new job. I was still wrestling with what to do about Iris's incessant wedding proposals, and I knew that one way or the other, I had to become self-sufficient. I also realized that if I was going to survive in this job, I'd have to be relatively straight or I wouldn't stand a chance. So I actually began cutting back on my drug and alcohol use, although by most people's standards, we were still pretty wild.

Several weeks after I started on the job, the company sent me to California for formalized training. After the first few hours I found out that Joe hadn't invented the "number ranking game," he had just been programmed like everyone else at the home office. At the end of the day, all the trainers would literally rank the trainees and post their scores on the wall from first to last depending on how well they performed during the day.

Then they would call each of us in and "debrief" us on the day. During these sessions, the trainers would usually tell me that I was intelligent and that I had a lot of "potential," but they'd quickly add that I didn't seem to be excited or interested in what we were doing.

This continued for two weeks while we were inundated with clinical information related to various diseases of the eye and the latest sales techniques. I had pushed myself to try to get psyched about the work, but compared to most of the salespeople there, I just wasn't committed. I was more interested in seducing some of the young college recruits than I was in memorizing drug contraindications.

Once the training was over, I returned to Kansas City, relieved that I'd passed the training, but with a definite sense of foreboding. It was pretty clear that Allergan wasn't going to be the place to work a nine-to-five job and then head out to "Miller Time" until the next day. The successful people in this job were always studying, playing golf with a

customer, or doing paperwork on their “off hours.” Contrast that with *my* off hours where I was really off; off drinking and snorting cocaine. It was so frustrating to me that I just didn’t experience the same passion I saw in others for the job. In fact, I couldn’t even imagine being that “up” for any job, much less one where the focus was getting thirty seconds of conversation with an ophthalmologist.

“What is wrong with me?” I’d wonder aloud. The only thing that really interested me was fulfilling my every pleasurable desire. Why couldn’t I be just like everyone else and enjoy working and being consumed by a career? A sense of failure and self-loathing was getting more and more intense every day. I would try to deal with it by attracting women who would build up my imaginary ego, and then pushing them away before they found out who I really was.

Iris was the only one who really knew me, warts and all. She had put up with my wild side thinking that sooner or later she would wear me down. But I sensed that even she was getting tired of putting up with me. And though I had never lied to her, I was beginning to feel guilty about how I was treating her.

I felt more trapped than ever before. I just wanted to get away, but a terrifying reality made that all but impossible.

I realized that no matter where I ran, I couldn’t get away from myself.

October came, and with it, my father’s death. My brother called me to tell me that he’d been rushed to the hospital, and later that morning he had lost his battle. I was sad but relieved that his pain was over. I returned home for his funeral, and it was one of the first times in many years that all four kids were together in one place. My older brother, Brouck, who lived in Wisconsin, flew in along with my sister, Peg, who still lived in Kansas City.

Standing at the grave I was torn by a flood of emotions. I was disappointed that I’d never had the kind of relationship with Dad that I’d always wanted. Amplifying the sadness was the cold reality of death I was experiencing, and I was forced to stare at my own mortality. The emptiness that I had known for so long began to be swallowed up into hopelessness.

We all tried to talk about Dad's colorful expressions and some of the funny moments we could remember from our childhood. But it was so strange to me – none of us openly cried. No one in my family had ever been expressive with their emotions. We'd all learned to stuff things inside, and this occasion would be no different.

I don't honestly know what my siblings were thinking, but I know what was going through my mind. As the casket was being lowered into the ground, I couldn't help but wonder where my father was now.

After returning from Dad's funeral, I told Iris that I needed some "space" to make some decisions about our relationship. She wasn't happy about it, but I was stubborn enough that she knew it was counterproductive to argue with me. We moved out of the house we were sharing, and we both got apartments several miles from each other.

The next six months were a blur; I was seeing four or five women in and out of town during the time I wasn't with Iris. I think I knew that I was losing the battle to stay single, and that I'd better get the "wildness" out of my system. I continued working for Allergan, struggling just to stay up with my sales manager's expectations, which wasn't easy considering I wasn't getting my sleep. My sales put me in the middle of the company's standings, but I knew that you didn't survive long if you were just average. I figured that I had another six months or so before I'd either improve or get fired.

The end finally came in the early summer of 1983. I remember driving back from a trip to Western Nebraska, severely hung over from partying in some little town the night before. I remember looking at the mirror in my company car and muttering, "I can't live like this anymore." *Maybe, just maybe*, I thought, *if I give in and marry her, things will fall into place*. It was just too exhausting trying to live two different lives; one with Iris and one without. Besides, I consoled myself, Iris was the most loyal friend I'd ever had. She had fought for me more than anyone I'd ever known. And in my twisted, self-centered mind, that made a big difference.

I got back to Kansas City that night and drove over to Iris's apartment to pop the big question. I couldn't wait to see the look on her face when I proposed; I thought she would probably go crazy! After all, it had been five long years working on the greatest sale of her career.

When I finally asked her to marry me later that night, her response was not exactly what I had anticipated.

“I’ll think about it,” was her response. On the outside, she exhibited all the excitement of someone who had been offered a stale turkey sandwich.

Idiot that I was, it had never occurred to me that after putting up with my lack of marital enthusiasm for five years, she was going to at least give me a taste of my own medicine.

Three days later, Iris announced that she would accept my offer. I was relieved, not because I really thought she’d say no, but because the agony of my indecision was over. Add to that the fact that everyone close to Iris was so thrilled; I was given hero-like status. Compared to the guilt of abusing her love for years and years, the experience was a welcome change. I still had some doubts about giving up my freedom, but down deep inside I reassured myself with the knowledge that if it didn’t work I could always bail out.

Iris immediately threw herself into preparations for our marriage. We decided on October 15 for the date and got busy inviting friends and family from around the country. Although it was increasingly difficult for Bea to travel, she and David were going to come out for the big event. Even Iris’s relatives from Chicago were anxious to come out.

Iris was ecstatic; I had never seen her so happy. She was especially excited that her mom and her relatives were coming out. And of course, she had her “victory” to celebrate. One of her friends captured her emotion the best in a card that she sent to Iris. It showed a beautiful bride in a boxing ring, her arm raised in victory, standing triumphantly over a knocked-out groom.

Like everything else Iris promoted, she did an outstanding job with the wedding preparations. We were the talk of the town, and everyone we knew wanted to come for the wedding. Fortunately, the owners of the station, Connie and Mark Wodlinger, graciously offered to have our wedding in their mansion in Mission Hills, a beautiful well-to-do neighborhood just inside the Kansas line in Kansas City. Everything was going to be done top-drawer; from the food to the champagne greeting at the door. It was going to be quite an event.

The one hitch was finding a Rabbi to marry us. I didn't really care who officiated at the wedding. In fact, I can only vaguely remember even discussing it, but for Iris it was a critical item. Since I was goyim (gentile), we would have to find a "liberal" rabbi. After a little searching, she did find one, but we still had to promise to raise our children Jewish. We readily agreed since, A: We had no interest in children, and B: We didn't think a thing about lying to get what we wanted.

As the big day approached, I began to get cold feet, and I dealt with it the way I always had. When the going got tough, I retreated into drugs and alcohol. I didn't say anything to Iris; I couldn't even be honest with myself. I was drunk or high most of the time in the weeks leading up to October 15, so much so that I can't remember much about that time. Iris thought we were just partying like we always had, but I was desperately trying to escape reality.

I somewhat sobered up when her relatives came out the day before the wedding. We hosted a party for them at the house we had rented in Overland Park that would be our new home. Iris half pleaded, half threatened me not to embarrass her in front of her mom by getting high when she was around. Iris was really paranoid about her mom finding out about our lifestyle. In fact, for years she would always call her mom on the phone before we did drugs so there was little chance of her calling once we got started.

I made it through the party without incident, but the next morning, I was dying to snort some cocaine. Since I'd returned to Kansas City, we had been partying more than ever. It was nothing for us to do three or four grams each night, costing us around \$350 a night. After over four years of the drug, I had become totally dependent on "the devil's toenails." I began drinking and drugging by mid-morning. Iris had decided to stay with a friend for the day in order to prepare herself as a bride. She had given me a package and made me promise that I wouldn't get so blown away that I couldn't make it.

I kept my word ... sort of.

Dutifully, I got into the shower around 5:00 P.M. and worked my way towards my tuxedo. Thanks to a mix of marijuana, cocaine, beer, and scotch, things were kind of moving in slow motion by now, and it took me a while to do a complicated thing like getting dressed. My emotions were oscillating moment by moment between severe depression and a drug-induced euphoria.

Finally, around 7:10 P.M. I got myself in to the car, and drove methodically over to Mission Hills. About a mile away from the Wodlinger's mansion, a police car pulled out from behind me on Mission Road. Had I been speeding? Did I forget my directional? Had I run over somebody and didn't even know it? When he turned off a block or two down the road I began to laugh hysterically. "There went my last chance to get out of this thing," I muttered.

When I pulled up to the house, there were cars and limousines everywhere. I pulled in and began walking up the stairs. I left the car in the driveway knowing that I was cutting things just a little close. As I got to the doorway at 7:28 P.M., there were a dozen people receiving their champagne, many of whom I didn't know. I had the bizarre sensation that I was a stranger at my own wedding. Just as I was reaching over to grab my own glass, my brother and best man, Brouck, gently "escorted" me away from the champagne and upstairs where the Rabbi was impatiently waiting for me to sign our wedding certificate.

I was then whisked downstairs where the guests were being seated in a huge great room. We assembled at the front and before I knew it, the music was playing, and Iris was escorted down the aisle by her brother, David.

I don't remember much about what the Rabbi said, except he kept quoting somebody named Harry Cohen; I'm sure it was most impressive. My main concern was focusing all of my being on successfully smashing the glass with my foot. I was suddenly petrified that I'd miss the whole darn thing and have to try again looking like some drunken sailor at a Tennessee hoedown. I really wasn't sure what this glass thing was about, but I knew it was important to Iris. And that's why, I kept thinking, I was getting married.

The Rabbi finally stopped rambling and told me I could kiss the bride. For a second I couldn't remember if I was supposed to kiss her first or smash the stupid glass. I figured I had a fifty-fifty chance. The Jewish attendees all yelled "Mazel Tov!" I kissed her, and the crowd went wild. Then I raised my foot and miraculously hit the vaunted glass dead on. More applause. In spite of my inebriated condition, we had made it through the ceremony without serious injury. I turned to our guests and told them, "Let

the festivities begin!” I’m not really sure why; I think I heard it in an Errol Flynn movie once.

And begin they did. We ate, we drank, we ate some more, and we danced and danced like there was no tomorrow. We even got my gentile family and friends to dance Hava Nagila with my new Jewish family. Bea even told me that she was impressed with my dancing. “I didn’t know you had it in you,” she said proudly. I suddenly realized that I was actually having fun. Maybe this marriage wouldn’t be so bad after all.

Hours later the guests started to stumble their way to the door. Bea and the family got ready to leave, and that’s when things started to go south. Iris began to cry because her mother was leaving. Even after we got in the limousine and headed to the airport to spend the night at the Marriott before our flight to Florida, she was a wreck. All she could talk about was her mom and how much she missed her.

She sobbed herself to sleep, while I lay there dreading the rest of my life.

Second Chances

The next day we flew to Naples, Florida for our honeymoon. Thanks to Mark & Connie's generosity, we got the chance to stay in their beautiful beachfront mansion and toiled around in their white Lincoln convertible. My high point was being high every day, and Iris's was the New York Pizza joint we found in town. Unfortunately, the drugs ran out before the pizza did, so after a few days I wasn't a very happy camper.

We finished our trip driving north to see Cape Kennedy and the Expo Center. With my background in missiles while in the Army, I'd always wanted to see the huge NASA complex, but by the time we got there I couldn't have cared less. All I wanted to do was get home and get more drugs.

The following week we were both back to work, and it didn't take long for me to realize that the days of Iris killing herself to serve me were over. She still wanted to get high, but the days of staying up all night practically every night were gone. Now most normal people would have agreed that a "lifestyle change" was a logical thing. You get married, and it's time to settle down into a routine, save some money, and have a family. Poor Iris was exhausted after our five-year party. She had NO interest in kids, but she definitely wanted to settle down into a more normal routine. It amazed me, how she could get high one night, and then just go to bed the next night like it was no big deal. I was on the other end of the spectrum. I was driven to snort more and more cocaine. It was all I thought about doing. And as soon as the highs began to wear off, I began to descend into hellish depression, filled with painful memories of failure, guilt, and depravity.

I was working less and less. Oh, I'd go out for the day, but I wasn't getting anything done. I'd go through the motions, and I spent a lot of my time inventing calls for

our weekly paperwork. Some offices I'd avoid because I'd been seeing a receptionist or nurse, and I was afraid I'd end up succumbing to an advance from an old girlfriend. But most of all, I just had no desire to work. No vision, no goals, nothing that excited me except getting enough money to buy another gram of cocaine. I had a strong instinct that my boss was getting ready to fire me, and as bad off as I was, the thought of being fired was really repugnant to me. I called a couple of recruiters and within a week I had an offer from a surgical blade company.

I'd always heard that reps who called on the operating room made a lot more money, and the way the manager had pitched the deal, it sounded like an awesome "six figure" opportunity. I took the job in December and flew to Boston for a week of training. We watched films of various surgeries and learned the features and benefits of the company's blades. The next weekend I returned home, determined to do better on this job.

Of course, Iris and I had to celebrate my new job, so we got pretty loaded over the weekend. But Monday, I drug myself out of bed and began to call on some of the local hospitals and doctors' offices. I'd heard that getting to the doctors would be easier in the O.R. than in their office, but it was quickly apparent that this new world presented a whole new set of challenges. Most of the department heads wouldn't let reps in without their permission, so I was immediately rebuffed when I'd call for appointments. It was obvious that the company had never had much of a presence in the marketplace. The territory included Kansas City, Des Moines and St. Louis, and everywhere I went it seemed like pulling teeth to get in. But my manager wanted immediate results, and within just a few weeks, I was getting ominous messages from him. After a particularly nasty message he sent me about my tardiness with an expense report, I just headed home to get polluted again.

Christmas of 1983 came and went that month, and it is the one holiday season in my life that I literally cannot remember. Between depression and drugging, I was beginning to lose contact with reality. But just after the New Year, I got a call from a recruiter who wanted me to interview for another surgical company. I knew that if I did get the offer, there was precious little chance that Allergan would give me a good recommendation. I know I wouldn't have if I'd been in their shoes. But I was so

miserable, I decided to give it a shot anyway. The manager of this company was completely different. He told me the truth. The territory had been left in lousy shape by the previous rep, and the money to start out with wouldn't be that good. But I was so turned off by the threats of my present manager that I would have probably gone to work for a chimpanzee if I'd had the chance. As usual, I interviewed well, and two weeks later he offered me the job.

I started with Xomed, "The Microsurgery Company," a week later, and flew down to Jacksonville, Florida for one week of training. I was relieved to have escaped from the pressure of the old company, but it was apparent that I had a great challenge before me. The product line of the company was quite broad, and we had to quickly come up to speed in otolaryngology, otology, and head and neck surgery. Once again, I was determined to make a fresh start and get myself together, but within a couple of days I was getting high each night and staying up late partying at the hotel. I prided myself on being able to party late but still do well in the classes, but I was dreading going out into the field. Regurgitating information is one thing, but I knew that to be able to successfully sell to physicians and hospitals was quite another.

I returned home in January around the time of the Super Bowl. Iris was glad to get me home again, although in her heart of hearts I think she was getting impatient with my job-hopping. She was doing well in a job at ZZ-99, but by now we had built up some serious debt, over \$20,000 worth on our credit cards, as well thousands more to one of our dealers. Iris still wanted to get high, but in her "straighter" moments she would complain that we (I) were using up too much money doing drugs. She never suggested that we should quit, but just moderate a little better. It was too painful for me to even think about "moderating" because the moment I did I knew I'd start to think about the complete wreck of a life I'd created.

Iris went shopping on Saturday, which next to eating was her favorite thing to do. We were out of cocaine, so I spent the day smoking lots of pot, trying to stay as numbed up as possible so as not to think about my next week of work. By the time Sunday came around, we were both dying to do coke again, so we called some friends who wanted a gram. We pooled the money and cut the coke so that we would end up with extra that we didn't have to pay for. When the evening rolled around, we had an "eightball" or an

eighth of an ounce to party with. We drank and smoked pot, and later that night Iris took some Quaaludes, a strong downer. Usually the coke would keep her going, but on this particular night, she crashed before three in the morning. Not to be deterred, I stayed up the rest of the night watching movies. I would doze off once in a while, but then I'd just do a couple more lines and start the cycle over again.

Around nine in the morning I heard Iris getting in the shower. I hated the thought of her coming out into the living room and yelling at me for staying up all night. I quickly put away the drugs, lay down on the couch and pretended to be asleep. I didn't have to pretend very hard. I actually fell asleep quickly, and when I woke an hour or so later I was alone in the house. I knew that I should get up and go to work, but I had no will power at all. I got out the cocaine and started up where I'd left off. After a few lines and more beer and pot, I was wired for sound.

I looked around to make sure that all the shades in the house were closed shut. I never took any chance that a boss or a dealer that we owed money to could look inside and see that I was home. I'd never answer the phone unless the call was coded. Iris had a certain number of rings she'd use to let me know it was her, and only then would I consider picking it up on her second call.

There wasn't anything interesting on HBO, so I decided to watch a porno tape that one of my friends had lent me. I grabbed the tape and picked up the remote control so I could set up channel 3 for the video recorder. I kept pushing on the down channel button, and the channels were showing one by one on the big screen: sports, news, cooking, yada, yada, yada. I could have cared less. All I wanted to do was lose myself inside the tape in the machine.

Suddenly I hit a channel and a man's face filled the screen. His finger was pointing out at me, and before I could hit the button again, I heard him say, "HEY MAN, ARE YOU HAPPY?" I just froze.

That wasn't a difficult question to answer.

The man began speaking again. "I know you know all about Jesus, but you don't KNOW Him."

It was as if I had been snapped into another world in a microsecond. The realization was instantaneous. *God is talking to me through this man*, I thought to myself. *He's right; I do know about Jesus, but I don't know Him.*

I heard another voice, one that wasn't audible, but one in my mind that I'd heard before. *This isn't for you, this Jesus stuff is for losers, now turn the channel and let's get crazy.*

I felt a titanic struggle going on inside of me. In one part of my consciousness, I knew that God had arranged for this man to speak to me at this exact moment. I knew that he was trying to get my attention. Yet I was convinced that I didn't have the strength to straighten myself up and become a follower of Jesus.

You can't change.

You can't change.

You can't change.

You can't change.

The thought just kept droning in my head. My finger started to push down on the button. But then the man said something that proved to me that God was doing everything he could to reach me.

"You can't change yourself," he said.

He had such compassion, such love in his voice. There was no condemnation, no mocking voice, only an outpouring of unconditional love.

"But there is someone who can change you ... His name is Jesus. He wants to make you a WHOLE NEW PERSON. He will make you a new creation, a new man. He died for you. He is ready to save you and start you on a whole new life. Pray with me, right now, pray out loud"

I knew that God was literally extending His hand to me. His arms were outstretched, and for the first time in my life, I was going to run to Him and not away.

Dear Jesus, I began, praying after the man.

"I confess to you that I have sinned against you."

I confess to you that I have sinned against you.

"Please forgive me."

Please forgive me.

“I repent of my sin; from now on I will follow you and obey you.”

I repent of my sin; from now on I will follow you and obey you.

“I believe that you died for me on the cross, and that you rose again.”

I believe that you died for me on the cross, and that you rose again.

“Wash my sin away with your precious blood.”

Wash my sin away with your precious blood.

“Change me now; make me a new creation – a whole new person.”

Change me now; make me a new creation – a whole new person.

“In Jesus’ name,”

In Jesus’ name,

“Amen and amen.”

Amen and amen.

I didn’t see any angels, and there were no bolts of lightning, but something was missing. I knew it right away. It had been there for over thirty years, and now it was gone. The emptiness in my heart, it was gone! I felt so complete, so whole, and it was as if a thousand pounds of weight had been lifted off of me. Every bit of guilt, shame, anger, resentment, fear, despair and anxiety was gone!

In its place was something I had never ever experienced. I sat still for a moment, not even listening to the television any more. I was somewhere I had never been before, and the sensation was indescribable. Human words don’t even come close to doing it justice. I sat still, immersed in the love of God, and a perfect peace poured over me.

I don’t know how long I sat there, but when I finally moved I looked down at the cocaine and the pot and the beer and pills, and I began to weep.

I didn’t want to do drugs anymore. It was as if the old Andy had died, and now I was in his place. I picked up all the junk and threw it in the toilet without any hesitation.

I was free.

I caught the tail end of the program and got a phone number to call. I wanted so much to tell someone what Jesus had done for me. I picked up the phone and dialed the number, and within three rings someone answered. I told them how I had prayed and how

God had set me free from drug addiction. I'm sure that I was talking a mile a minute, but this dear lady was almost as excited as I was. I told her that I wanted to donate something to the ministry. She said that wasn't necessary, but that if I wanted to, it would certainly be appreciated. She took my name and number, and then she prayed for me. I don't honestly remember what it was, but I remember thinking how beautiful and spontaneous her prayer was. Finally, I begged her to thank the man on the television for me. She said that she would get word to him, but that to never forget, it was JESUS that had saved me, not the man.

I hung up the phone and looked around. I don't mean I just looked around the house. It was as if the whole world was opened up to me. I didn't know what I wanted to do first. So many possibilities, so many adventures, the excitement to be alive was just fantastic!

I went around the house and pulled open the shades. It was a cold, blustery February day, but it looked so good to me! I began picking up the house, cleaning up one mess after another. Suddenly the phone rang, and then another miracle took place; I picked it up! I never picked up the phone for fear it was my boss or a drug dealer looking for his money. But this time I did.

It was a volunteer from The 700 Club right in Kansas City. She told me that she had heard about my phone call and was calling to find out if I had a church home. I laughed and said no; it had been years since I'd been in a church. She asked me if she could pray for me, and I said sure! It was incredible, I kept thinking, how Christians pray for each other.

When she was done, she said, "Andrew, I feel like the Lord is telling me that you belong at Full Faith Church of Love. It is a wonderful church in Shawnee." I replied that that was really far away, and wasn't there anything closer? Yes, she said, there were some Bible-believing churches nearby, but she said that she was sure that God was directing me there. I said I'd give it some thought. "It is very important that you read the Bible now, and begin going to a Bible-believing church. You are a new believer, and your spirit needs to be fed so that you will grow." It all sounded a little strange to me, but she was such a sweet old lady, I didn't mind her emphatic recommendation. I thanked her again and hung up.

I looked at my watch, thinking I should make some hospital appointments for the rest of the week. It was 2:00 P.M. by now, which meant I had about three hours before Iris came home.

Oh yeah, Iris. I had been so caught up in my experience that I'd forgotten about my Jewish Princess. *What will she think about what has happened to me?*

I was curious to find out, but I was amazed that I wasn't scared. I don't think we had ever discussed anything about God in the five years I'd known her. Sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll had been the only things we'd had in common. What would happen now that I was a Christian? I started laughing, thinking about how it would truly take the power of God to handle Iris Finkelstein Sleight. She was about as hard-headed as they come. Yes, this would be an interesting clash. But if He could reach me, I knew He could reach her.

I prayed a simple prayer asking Him to help me say the right things to Iris. I was amazed how easy it was to talk to Jesus now that I'd been "born again."

I spent the rest of the afternoon in my office downstairs making appointments. Around 5:00 P.M., I heard Iris open the front door upstairs. I prayed again, and walked upstairs. She was in the kitchen unpacking some groceries and a six-pack of beer.

"What a rough day," she said, "Let's eat some dinner and then party."

I waited for a second and took a deep breath.

"Iris, I don't want to do drugs anymore. I asked Jesus to be my Lord and Savior today, and He took away my desire to do drugs."

She looked at me like I was a cross between a deranged madman and the stupidest person you could ever conceive of. She started screaming obscenities at me, but the gist of the message was, "I don't know what you're talking about, I don't want to know what you're talking about, and where are the drugs?" I told her that I'd thrown them away – that God didn't want me to

"You threw the cocaine away, where?"

"In the toilet, it's gone."

Iris looked like her brain was going to overload. For once she seemed to be totally speechless. She turned and walked away muttering something about "gentiles."

We ate dinner in near silence, punctuated by a bunch of her phone calls to clients and sales people about a promotion the station was doing. Usually this kind of interruption really irritated me, but tonight it was different. I was still mulling over the day's events, ecstatic about what God had done for me. Life now seemed to be teeming with possibilities. What would happen next?

That night, I pressed my dress shirt, polished my shoes, and prepared my call bag for the next day. Suddenly I realized that I was actually looking forward to going to work the next day. I could only think of one other time I was excited about working, and that was when I worked at a motorcycle shop during my transition time out of the Army. Had I forgotten, I was in a new job in a bad territory, in a specialty I was just beginning to learn? Somehow, I knew that in spite of all those things, God would help me make it. I knew that there were some challenging times ahead, but I was at peace, complete peace.

By the time 10:00 P.M. rolled around, Iris was still pretty hot, but she had stopped yelling at me. She figured that this was just another one of my weird dimes, and that after a day or two, I'd return to normal.

We got into bed and turned out the light. A curt "good night" was all she said. We lay there in silence, Iris tossing and turning, and me lying in bed relaxed and grinning from ear to ear. I fell asleep within moments and slept like a baby.

For the first time for as long as I could remember, the emptiness in my heart was gone, replaced by a joy and a love that was beyond description.

I didn't have to worry anymore.

I'd come home, and My Dad was watching over me.

A Stranger in the Land

Tuesday came, and I woke up around 6:30 A.M. I lay in bed with a very real sense that today was the first day of the rest of my life. I got up, fixed a cup of coffee and got into the shower. Mentally I planned out my day. Usually by now I would have been coming up with excuses not to go out, but this time I couldn't wait. I tiptoed past a still-sleeping Iris and carried my gear out to the car. A minute later I was cruising down I-35 to my first appointment at Children's Mercy Hospital. I turned on the radio and some hard rock came blaring out. I must have looked like a little dog who'd heard some strange sound, cocking his head to the side. Suddenly, the music I had been listening to for twenty years sounded alien, almost repugnant to me. I turned down the sound for a moment, and then it hit me. I was a new person, just like the guy had prayed the day before. And it made perfect sense to me. God had inspired me to repent, to turn away from sinful living, so why would I want to listen to songs about drugs and immorality now that I had been set free from it?

I switched to the AM band thinking I'd listen to the news on KCMO. Hitting the "seek" button I came across a station and heard a man reading from the Bible. It turned out to be a Christian station, KCCV in Kansas City, and starting that day, Christian radio began to be a constant companion for me during my drives between sales calls. I just soaked up what I heard like someone who had been starving for real food. It wasn't until later that I found out that Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

On the way in, I stopped by my favorite of all donut places in the world, Lamar's, a tiny hole-in-the-wall of a place in midtown Kansas City, and ordered two dozen donuts. *Since this is my first visit to this O.R., a little food probably won't hurt*, I thought to myself. Of course I had to check one myself to make sure that they were fresh and warm, and as usual Lamar had not let me down! Donuts in tow, I continued down Main Street heading towards the hospital. Looking around me, it was as if the world had come alive. Suddenly, I had so much compassion for the people that I passed on the street. I'd lived in this city for six years, but it wasn't until this moment that I felt connected to all the people I saw around me. And just as I experienced these feelings, I'd start laughing, just laughing out loud. It was so good to be alive!

I dutifully checked into the purchasing department to get my badge and clearance to go to the O.R. I held my breath a little when they called upstairs, since it wasn't unusual for a supervisor to get busy and have to change your appointment. But there was no problem today, and a few minutes later I was upstairs sitting in the break room getting to know the nurses and handing out donuts. It was unreal. They were all so glad to see me.

"What does your company sell?" they asked. I was so blown away by the warm reception I was getting that I actually had to stop for a second and remind myself who I worked with now. I pulled out the catalog and read off some of the main items, and they all started talking about what the doctors would like. It was like I was at some frenzied Tupperware party and everyone wanted to buy something. I started taking careful notes of the doctors' names and their specialties, which was something I had always been lax about doing before. An hour or so later when I left, I had a dozen leads and a bunch of new friends. I walked back to Purchasing to return my badge, amazed at how different things were now. I had been given so much favor that morning. I was so thankful to God for what he was doing for me.

Now some of you may be thinking, big deal, Andy, a successful sales call. You really don't think God cared about your sales call, do you? Yes, that's exactly what I'm saying; he did care about my sales call. It would be just the first of many times in my life when his love and care for me would be so obvious. And it wasn't in just the good times that I would see Him watch over and guide me.

The next month passed by quickly. My job was going well and I was really enjoying working for Xomed. In the span of thirty days, I had seen my territory move from last place in the company up ten spaces. Gone was the constant fear and guilt of my previous jobs. But when it came to the “home” front, things weren’t looking good. Iris was angry at me all the time. She would get into my car and find the Christian radio on, and she’d go ballistic. At night I wouldn’t watch *Dynasty* or *Knot’s Landing* anymore. Instead, I’d sit up and read the Bible for hours. It didn’t take long for there to be a real strain on the marriage that had been based on all the wrong things.

She would swear at me and speak to me condescendingly as if I were some kind of idiot. I didn’t even like being around her, and I’m sure she felt the same way about me. At first I just tried not to pay any attention to her. I was so glad to just be alive; I hadn’t even reached the point of thinking about how our marriage would work now that we were in two completely different worlds.

I decided that I had to do my best to tell her about Jesus. After all, she was intelligent; maybe if I could just explain to her about Jesus, she would understand. So one night, I asked Iris for a few minutes to talk. I chose a time when I knew none of her favorite shows were on. She agreed, but I could tell she saw it coming a mile away. It only took the first mention of Jesus’ name, and she went crazy.

“I’m Jewish, we don’t believe in Him, and I NEVER WILL believe in Him. LEAVE ME ALONE!! Why can’t it be just the way it used to be?”

I didn’t say anything else. I hadn’t read the whole Bible yet, but I already knew that some people rejected Him. Iris was so vociferous, I couldn’t conceive of how she would ever change her mind.

Suddenly that night, a wave of depression and regret hit me like a tidal wave. All I could think about were all the wrong choices I’d made in my life. It was as if I were confronted with every sin I’d ever committed. And then piled on top was the realization of how far the damage had gone. I had divorced a sweet girl who had been a wonderful wife. Then I became addicted to cocaine and married another woman who now hated my guts. For hours and hours I was beating myself up about it. I wasn’t mad at Iris. She was the same person she’d always been. It was me that had changed, and all I could think

about was spending the rest of my life in perpetual depression over the consequences of my sinful choices.

Early the next morning I got up and went down to the office to have quiet time. I had learned from one of my radio teachers how important it was to start each day reading the Bible and listening to the Lord. Up to this time things had gone smoothly, at least as far as I was concerned. My morning quiet times had been peaceful and filled with wonder and thanksgiving as I read the Bible and learned more and more about Jesus.

But now I was confronted with my first major trial, and my quiet time was anything but quiet. I poured out my feelings to God. I asked Him to forgive me again for all of the terrible things I'd done. *Thankfully*, I thought to myself between diatribes, *there is a way out. It will be messy, but there's only one thing I can do. I'll divorce Iris and go back to see if I can convince Joyce to remarry me.* After all, it sure didn't look like there was any chance that Iris would ever accept Jesus as her Savior, and I should have never divorced Joyce in the first place.

I absentmindedly opened my Bible without looking at what chapter I had turned to. I looked down on the page, and the first words I saw were these:

“Each one should remain in the situation he was in when God called him” (1 Corinthians 7:20 NIV).

As I stared at that verse, I heard the Lord speak to me, and it was so real that I was startled. I don't mean that I audibly heard His voice, but it was as if I could hear his words distinctly in my mind.

No Andrew, you are not to divorce Iris. You made a covenant with her and with Me, and you will keep it. I will take care of Iris; leave her in My hands. You must love her unconditionally the way I have loved you. I have forgiven you for your sins, but you can't change the past. When the enemy tries to remind you of your failures, turn to Me, and I will sustain you. Trust Me. My grace is sufficient for you.

I was stunned at the clarity of his voice and the incredible way He had pointed me to the exact scripture to confirm his command. Suddenly, all of the oppressive feelings hanging over me lifted. I didn't know what God was going to do, but I did know one thing. He had saved me, literally and spiritually, saved my life, and I was going to be obedient to Him even if it meant staying in what seemed like a hopeless situation. I

finished by thanking Jesus for speaking so clearly to me. I asked Him to help me to love Iris with His kind of love. I told Him again how much I loved Him.

He spoke to me again.

“I love you, my son.”

That day I changed my strategy. Every time that any negative thought started to come up about Iris or my situation, I would use it as a reminder to pray for Iris and to thank God that He was in control. I asked God to give me His kind of love for Iris, the kind that He loved me with. And when the hurt about my divorce came up, I would pray for Joyce and ask God to bless her with a wonderful, Christian husband. With God’s help, I turned the enemy’s attempt to depress me into a reminder to use the most potent weapons a Christian has, the Word of God and prayer. I couldn’t change the past, but I hoped that I could influence the future.

I also asked the Lord to help me know the right times to talk to Iris about Him. As I read more and more of the New Testament, I learned about the Jewish men and women who had placed their faith in Jesus as their Messiah. In fact, almost all the early Christians were Jewish! It was encouraging and exciting to read about their experiences, how God captured each of their hearts so that their lives were never the same.

I still read the Bible around Iris, but I didn’t harangue her about it. I would pray for her all day during my long drives between cities. I desperately wanted to go to church, but when I had brought it up before, she said I was lying to her. “Nobody but a dork would really want to go to church; you must be planning on meeting someone each Sunday morning for an affair.” Rather than push the issue, I concentrated on listening to as many teachers on the radio as I could and continued to work my way through the Bible.

Two months later, things had quieted down significantly. Though she wouldn’t say it, Iris was pretty amazed at the transformation she had seen in me. I was working hard and making more money, which was much more impressive than anything I could

say to her about the Bible. Most importantly, I was paying more attention to her than I ever had. The change in our lifestyle was also good for her physically. She was a lot more rested and seemed to be enjoying our time together much more than before.

But she was still strong-willed Iris.

One day I came home from work and before I could even say hello, she held up an envelope and started yelling at me. “There is no way on the (blankety-blank) earth that I’m going to send money to some money-grubbing TV preacher.”

It was a monthly statement that had come from The 700 Club, the program I had been watching when I had been born again. I had pledged fifteen dollars per month to the ministry; I would have donated thousands, given my gratitude for their service, but we had accumulated about \$20,000 in debt during our binge years, so I was trying to be judicious. She ranted and raved for a few minutes, but I wouldn’t back down. I didn’t yell in return, and I actually tried to calm her down gently, but to no avail. Finally after repeated attempts at reason, I brought out the only weapon I knew that would get her attention.

“If we don’t live up to this commitment Iris, it will lead to divorce.” Suddenly the tables turned. I felt bad about the threat; I was actually only bluffing, but it worked.

Later that night I saw her writing out the check with a scowl on her face.

“I believe God will bless us if we do this, Iris.” She just looked back at me with daggers darting from her eyes.

When Passover came several weeks later, I asked Iris if she wanted to read some of the prayers from her prayer book. We sat down in our family room, and she opened it and began reciting one of the passages in Hebrew. It was amazing to me that she remembered as much as she did. When she got done, I read the English portion. She talked wistfully about her childhood and the years she had to attend Hebrew school. She had been just shy of her bat mitzvah when her father had passed away, so that time of her life was truly bittersweet. When I asked her about the meaning of what she had recited and the prayers she had just read, she was speechless and irritated. The importance of it was the tradition, she explained. Meaning, what did I mean, meaning?

Slowly but surely, I was beginning to get at least some insight from Iris about the Jewish concept of God. She didn't seem to know much about Him, and she didn't seem interested in Him. It was like the idea of knowing God wasn't even seriously considered. The things that seemed to have emotional power were the memories of the traditions that her family had practiced together. Things like matzoh ball soup, or the search for the yeast in the household before Passover – this to Iris was the important stuff.

I had read through most of the Bible by now, both the Old and New Testaments, and it was clear that this had been the trap that had befallen many different peoples through history. I was beginning to see that it wasn't just Jewish people who focused on tradition. I remember the shock that came when I began to tell other people that I had been born again, and that Jesus had radically changed my life. People who were regular churchgoers were usually the most put off by my story. At first I didn't understand at all why they weren't excited about what Jesus had done. And why, why hadn't they told me about being born again, the very words Jesus used in the Bible?

As I talked to more and more “churchgoers,” I began to uncover a startling truth: The vast majority of people I talked to had never repented and been born again. Instead, they had been baptized in a church as babies, grown up in the church, gone through confirmation and now went to church on Sundays. Almost all of them that I met didn't take the Bible as the inspired Word of God, they didn't seem to have any interest in telling others about Jesus, and they seemed more interested in church tradition and attending church as a social club.

The corresponding attitude was one of condescension. “That's fine for you,” they'd say with a smile of pity, “Just don't try to force your beliefs on me.”

At first I was so stupefied that I couldn't even speak. My beliefs? What about what God said? I just couldn't fathom how people could call themselves Christians and then deny the Bible and its very plain teaching. Where did they think the truth about Jesus had come from, *The Saturday Evening Post*?

Tradition, that's where it had come from. Jesus had spoken vehemently against tradition during his time on earth. Most of the Jewish Pharisees and Sadducees had rejected Him because He had invited sinners to come directly to Him. They wanted

people to be bogged down with rules and laws, trying to please God with their good works and pious behavior. But Jesus had openly decried this kind of religion.

I realized that in the late twentieth century, it was no different. Church denominations had built up huge empires of wealth, ornate tradition, and an outward appearance of religiousness. But the people didn't know Jesus and obey Him. Most of them didn't even believe that He was who the Bible said He was. Their lives had never been radically changed by an encounter with Jesus. Just like our ancestors, they were practicing a pile of traditions, trying to work their way to heaven.

Now that I was working hard and perfectly straight, Iris had stopped regularly doing drugs. She would still smoke pot occasionally and drink a beer, but there were no more cocaine purchases. Now that she was getting more sober, the reality of our financial condition became more and more apparent. Our huge credit card debt was an albatross around our neck, and it looked like it would take years and years to pay it off. This was particularly frustrating for Iris, and it turned out to be an ideal situation for the Lord to intervene.

One day in early spring, we were sitting in the kitchen going through the mail. This was a particularly painful exercise because it was mostly bills that had excessive interest attached to them. I did my best to reassure Iris that we would get them paid off, but it always doubled her already sour mood.

In the midst of her paper ripping and kvetching, we received a phone call from an old friend of mine, John Salzmann, who was an attorney with the firm. John had been handling the legal work for my father's estate, which had been turned over to my mother. As John began to tell me the reason for his call, I couldn't help but grin ear-to-ear, almost ready to burst with childlike wonder at God's loving care.

John explained that Marie Taylor, an old friend of Dad's, had passed away, and that since she had no family to give her house to, she had left it to my father. Her will further stipulated that if my dad was no longer alive, it should go to his remaining children.

I asked John to review the will with me so I could make sure I was hearing him correctly. He assured me that I would in fact receive the proceeds from 25 percent of the sale of the house.

When I got off the phone, I explained the news to Iris. I rarely have seen her so at a loss for words. She would be the first to tell you that if you want to get her attention, do it with something about money.

Several months later the house was sold, and we received a check for almost \$15,000. Between this windfall and my increased earnings, the Lord had paid off our debt.

I was tempted to make a big deal about this “miracle,” but I knew I didn’t have to. The Lord’s actions were much louder than any words I could have spoken.

Sunday morning dawned, the sun shining brilliantly, which was only appropriate since it was Resurrection Day. Iris seemed to be in a pretty good mood, and I did my best to stay on her good side. (You know what I mean, guys.) I took out the garbage, helped with the dishes, and even picked up my clothes off of the closet floor. About mid-afternoon, Iris decided that she wanted to head over to the mall to shop for some clothes, and I tagged along. Dutifully I waited outside the dressing room, complimenting her on the clothes she tried on, and I even bought her some expensive clothes that she really liked.

When we got back, she put a prime rib in the oven, and I apologetically stammered, “Would it be o.k. if I read the Easter story with you?” She agreed, although it was with all the enthusiasm you’d associate with a child agreeing to go see the dentist. I got out my Bible, turned to the Book of John, and began to read, pausing in between verses to make sure I explained anything that I thought would be difficult for her to understand. I was doing all right, but when it came Jesus to hanging on the cross and saying, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do,” I began to lose it. A few tears ran down my face, and Iris was getting really uncomfortable and impatient. She didn’t understand that my tears were for her. I sensed the love that God had for her and it was almost too much to bear.

“It is finished.”

When she heard Jesus’ last words, Iris began to get up. “That was interesting; I had better get back to my roast.”

I followed her to the kitchen and tried my best to explain. “Iris, it is true that Jesus died on the cross. He died to pay the price for the sins that we’ve all committed, but that’s not the end of the story, HE rose”

Iris opened a huge bowl of salad and began tossing it and jabbing it. I should have picked up on the body language, but in my enthusiasm to tell her about the miracle that followed the cross, I forged on.

“See, Iris, the miracle was that Jesus didn’t stay dead, He”

In a blur of movement, Iris threw the salad, bowl and all, at me.

“JEWS DON’T BELIEVE IN JESUS!” she screamed at the top of her lungs. “I WILL NEVER BELIEVE IN HIM. JUST FORGET ABOUT IT!”

Not much actually hit me, but as it flew over the kitchen floor, my “plan” crashed along with the bowl.

“I understand.”

I did my best not to respond to her screams by getting mad.

She immediately launched into a fairly impressive guilt trip about how I had ruined her day, weekend, and life. How could I force my beliefs on her? This was stupid gentile stuff. Yada, yada, yada, ad nauseum.

I summoned all my patience, smiled, and replied, “I understand.”

Summer began to bloom in Kansas, and along with it, new opportunities. Between the surprise financial blessings we’d received and our increasing commissions, we were able to pay off our remaining debt. I was now in the top 25 percent of our company’s sales force, and Iris had been promoted to General Sales Manager at her station. With our increasing income, we decided it was all right to begin looking at some houses.

We arranged to spend a Saturday looking at houses and as usual, Iris attacked the project with everything in her. She had arranged with our realtor to look at over thirty houses, but when we came to the third house, I walked into the door, and I knew that this

was the house where we belonged. It wasn't the nicest house we saw all day, but I had learned enough about God's voice to know for sure that 7010 Richards Drive Court was where we belonged.

I knew better than to announce this to Iris, so I quietly prayed for the Lord to set it up. At the end of the day, we had seen thirty-two houses, and when we reviewed our favorites, Iris told me that the one she was most interested in was the one in the cul-de-sac, the exact house I'd been praying for. The price was a little higher than our limit, but after some negotiation, we closed the sale and moved in the following month.

The first weekend was full of typical moving-in craziness. Thankfully, we had some friends who helped move the big stuff, and by the time Sunday night rolled around, we were pretty much settled. I just loved the house. It was a tri-level with a huge family room complete with stone fireplace and a catwalk-type balcony. The back yard bordered a huge field where two friendly horses frolicked. Looking out the back window was like viewing a beautiful postcard.

Monday morning came around, and I was a little tired from the move. It was still dark when I sat down in the kitchen with a cup of coffee and opened my Bible for my first quiet time in our new home. I was so filled with awe and thanksgiving for what God had done for us. Even though Iris didn't know it yet, I knew that He was watching over us and guiding us. I felt prompted to bless the house so I quietly walked through the house that day, praying for Jesus' blessing over every room in that house.

I finished my quiet time and crept past all the moving boxes in the garage to the samples I would need for the day ahead of me. I was scheduled to call on the O.R. in Lawrence, the college town where I was born. Since we were now on the west side of the metro area, I wasn't sure what would be the best way to get there so I asked one of my new neighbors, and he explained how to take a few side streets out to K-10, the state highway that I needed.

I followed his directions for about a mile, and off in the distance I could see the highway getting closer. I had just one last hill before I reached the interchange, and as I came over the top I saw a huge building off to the left and across the street. I stopped at the intersection and read the sign, *Full Faith Church of Love*.

My mouth must have been wide enough for a bird to fly into. There it was, the exact church that that kind lady had told me about when I'd called for prayer months before. I was starting to get it. Once again I was amazed by the Lord's guiding hand in the details of my life. I was so anxious to worship God with other believers. I stared over at the building for several minutes. I was tempted to change my appointment and just walk in the door, but decided against it. Instead, I decided I would definitely go to church the next Sunday no matter what Iris said.

The days seemed to drag on the rest of the week. When Sunday morning came I felt like a kid on Christmas morning. My heightened sense of anticipation was hard for me understand. I didn't know anyone who attended a service there, so I didn't have any real information to go on. But somehow down deep inside, I just knew that I was supposed to go to this church.

I had gently announced to Iris earlier in the week that I was going to start going to church, going to great pains to explain to her that I loved her and that she didn't have to be threatened. She didn't like it, but with my change in character, it was hard for her to put up a big stink. She was still sleeping like a baby when I left the house and began the scant two-mile drive to Full Faith.

When I arrived around 8:55 A.M., the lot was pretty full, and I walked fast from the back of the lot to make sure I wasn't late. At the entrance I was met by a couple who welcomed me warmly and directed me to the sanctuary. Everywhere I looked I saw families taking their kids to Sunday school and people of every stripe were milling about talking, hugging, and laughing. There was such energy in the building; I'd never been in a church like it. All I had to compare it to were my memories of the sleepy Episcopal churches our mom had taken us to, where everyone had seemed old and stiff.

As I got closer to the entrance of the sanctuary, music started up, and I rushed to get inside. The place was packed, but I found a seat close to the rear. The "band" or worship team, as they were properly called, were playing something that sounded almost like a Jewish folk song, but the words were all about Jesus. Up at the front, two huge screens displayed the words. All around me people were singing loudly, some beautifully, some off-key, but they were pouring out their song, and within about thirty seconds I joined in. Suddenly it was as if time slowed down, and I was carried away to a

place of such incredible peace and joy it is difficult to put it into human terms. The presence of God was in this place, and his love was so overpowering that I didn't even try to hold back my emotions. I began to weep, singing praises to the one who delivered me from drug addiction, from jail, from countless accidents and attacks, and from death and hell.

That morning I found out another wondrous fact about how He had designed me. I was made to worship Him, to love and adore Him. When I was born again, His Spirit within me had set me free to pour out my worship and praise to Him. I had known for months that there was something just outside my reach that I desperately needed to do, and now it was so obvious. I had read a verse a month ago: The Lord inhabits the praises of his people. I had also read in 2 Chronicles 7 that when the people were worshiping, God's glory filled the temple. When I had been born again, my body had become a temple for God, so when I worshiped Him, His presence was so real to me.

I returned home with a new hope. The power and love of God were more real to me, now more than ever before. Any doubt that Jesus could change Iris's heart the way He had changed mine was gone. One of the things that the pastor had preached about was that we shouldn't focus on the circumstances that surround the problems we're faced with. Instead we focus on Jesus, who He is, and what His promises are. "Without faith," he had yelled, "it is impossible to please God."

After what He had done for me, I wanted to please Him, and I chose to believe that He was going to do great things.

The Lord had led me to a group of people at Full Faith who passionately loved Him. They came in all shapes, colors, social standings and socioeconomic classes. The people at Full Faith were completely different than anyone I'd ever met in a church before. I wasn't sure at first what it was that set them apart. Then one day I was reading my Bible and Jesus was teaching His disciples about the kind of people He wanted them to be. He had showed them a little child and told them, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."

That was it. These folks were childlike. They trusted God just like a little child trusts his parents.

It sure was wonderful to be a kid again.

Alternate Plans

The summer months went by quickly, and things were for the most part going well. I continued to move upward in my company's standings, and we were very happy with our new home and neighborhood. Iris was having a banner year at ZZ-99, and she was even promoted to a new General Sales Manager position.

One Sunday afternoon after returning from church, I was in the kitchen with Iris, and I decided to try again to tell her about Messiah Jesus. She was working on kneading a meatloaf for our dinner, and I figured that since she was preoccupied and in a relatively good mood, it might be a good time to open a dialogue.

I sat down on the stool next to where my lovely wife was working and took a quiet, deep breath.

"We had a really interesting sermon today in church," I began. "Pastor Ernie talked about...."

Out of the corner of my eye, I caught a blur of movement that turned out to be a high-velocity meatloaf, launched with pinpoint accuracy at my forehead. Iris exploded into a rage that seemed greater than ever.

"I TOLD YOU, I'M JEWISH! JEWS DON'T BELIEVE IN JESUS, AND I WILL NEVER BELIEVE IN JESUS!"

I began picking the meatloaf off my face and regretting that I'd started the whole thing. Now all I wanted to do was calm things down, but it got worse. Iris took off into the family room, and before I knew what was happening, she grabbed the paper back

“Good News” Bible off our coffee table and ran to the front door. The fact that she was running was particularly alarming; Iris never ran anywhere. She grabbed the door and flung it open, screaming obscenities about “the stupid Bible.” Once outside, she threw the Bible as hard as she could into the bushes and came back inside, pausing just long enough to yell at me some more before finally, mercifully, going upstairs.

Once I was sure she was gone, I went outside quietly and retrieved the Bible, hiding it inside one of the desk drawers in my office. Amazingly, I wasn’t mad at her for her reaction, and I was more determined than ever not to give up. But one thing was for sure; my present strategy didn’t seem to be working.

I was continuing to pray for Iris, and I did my best not to agitate her any further. Since my experience with her had taught me that a “frontal assault” to try and share my faith was probably hopeless, I began to concentrate on praying for her.

By now I had read the majority of the Bible, and there was example after example of prayer preceding great break-throughs. In addition, I heard about many answers to prayer during my times at church. If I couldn’t talk directly to Iris, at least I could invest my time interceding for her and asking Jesus for a miracle. Since I didn’t want to “scare her” by praying in front of her, I decided to find someplace that wasn’t in her face. Eventually, I decided on a closet in one of the bedrooms I used upstairs for an office.

Most wives would have wondered why I spent so much time upstairs, but Iris was so busy talking on the phone that she would rarely notice I was gone. She was always talking with someone, closing a deal or sharing a success story; the phone was her constant companion. Every once in a while when she would come upstairs I would hear her coming and I’d open the closet door as if I were arranging my supplies.

The summer ended with a bang, literally; a Korean airliner, KAL 007, was blown out of the sky by a Russian fighter plane on September 1, and the world was once again poised for a superpower showdown. President Reagan had begun touting America’s planned new “Star Wars” defense program, and he seemed determined to defeat the Soviet Union in military preparedness.

These events were even more interesting to me now that I was reading about the future events prophesied about in the Bible. I was amazed to uncover the incredible detail that the Lord used in describing the nations and conflicts that were to take place before the second coming of Christ. Most interesting to me was a reference in the book of Ezekiel that described a confederation of nations led by “Meshech,” the Biblical name for the people who lived in the land that eventually became Russia. The Bible described a battle in which a group of nations would attack Israel, and the battle description read like a vivid description of thermo-nuclear warfare.

I wasn’t overly worried, but since I had worked around “special weapons,” the military’s jargon for atomic warheads, I knew about the effects of nuclear war. Ultimately, I knew that even if a global war broke out and we were incinerated in a nuclear holocaust, I’d be going to heaven, not because of the great person I was, but because I’d repented and placed my trust in the Messiah. Everywhere I looked in the world, I could see events that verified the Bible’s accuracy, and my faith continued to grow stronger.

But I did worry about Iris. If a war did start, there was a very real possibility that she’d die without knowing the Lord. Kansas City was a prime target area given its proximity to the missile fields in Whiteman Air Force Base. And while others could sleep in blissful ignorance, I knew the awful truth about a thermo-nuclear exchange with the Russians. Each major American city wouldn’t be targeted with just one weapon, but probably with as many as five or six multi-megaton bombs.

Then one afternoon on a drive back from Springfield, Missouri, I was praying, and I got a wild idea. Until the day that Iris came to know Jesus, I would do my best to protect her. I’d build a bomb shelter! I knew that she would think I was crazy, but it would only serve to show Iris how much I loved her and

Suddenly I realized what had happened. I loved Iris! I had fallen in love with my wife! I couldn’t wait to see her. Jesus had done just what He said He’d do if I would honor my commitment. Now the burden to protect and watch over her was incredibly powerful. I spent the next hour praising God in the car on the way home, rejoicing in his presence. When I got home, I went inside and hugged Iris, and when I told her I loved her and that I’d missed her, for the first time I meant it!!

That night I went to the library and began my research. At first I considered building a shelter in the basement, but because of our proximity to the city, I was afraid that the house would burn and cover over the ventilation shaft. One of the books I found that night confirmed my concerns. *Nuclear War Survival Skills* had been written by a nuclear scientist and provided practical ways to build expedient shelters using a minimum of tools and expertise. And that's exactly what I had, a minimum of tools and expertise. Since Iris was still making more money than I was, I knew that she'd fight me when it came to spending a lot of money, so I had to attack the problem on a shoestring.

I spent the rest of the week reading the book and considering the options. Our backyard was relatively flat, and it didn't have any major trees in the way, so I figured I'd be able to dig without much problem. By now it was mid October, and so I knew that I probably wouldn't complete the digging before the ground froze, but at least I could get a good start and finish it in the spring.

Over dinner that week, I explained to Iris how concerned I was about the worsening condition in the world and that I had to do something to protect her. Since it was possible that I would be taken up in the Rapture (the catching away of believers the Bible describes), I had to prepare her for the worst. When I told her I was going to dig a bomb shelter in the backyard, she just nodded as if I told her I was going to fix coffee and a danish.

"That's nice," I think was her exact reply. She had no idea what I was talking about. It wouldn't take long for me to get her attention.

The following Saturday I got up early, went out to the back yard, and carefully laid out the dimensions for the "hole." Once my lines and stakes were in place, I tuned my portable radio to the local Christian station and began to tear up the sod. It wasn't easy work, but once I got the sod up, I began to dig in earnest. Unfortunately, the fill for our house was filled with rocks so things went slowly, but I didn't really mind. I loved working outside, and I could listen to all my favorite Bible teachers without Iris yelling at me.

About 10:00 A.M. Iris appeared in the kitchen window looking down on the backyard. I wish I'd taken a picture of her face as she looked down on the gaping hole now being formed in our backyard. The sliding door to the deck flew open, and she stomped outside yelling, "What the (blank) are you doing?"

I dropped my shovel and headed upstairs to get a drink of water and try to explain. I had barely uttered three words when she went ballistic.

"You are a *meshuganah*," (Yiddish for crazy person). "You're tearing up our grass like an idiot. What are the neighbors going to think?"

"I don't care what they think, Iris, I've got to protect you"

For a second she was thrown off. My desire to protect her was difficult for her to shrug off, even if it did seem crazy.

"I don't see anybody else building a shelter. Couldn't you be wrong about this war?"

A question ... now we we're getting somewhere.

"I could be wrong, but the Bible isn't wrong. It clearly says that there will be a war after Israel returns to its homeland, and that happened in 1948."

"All right, whatever," she yelled, "but please don't make the hole too big."

"Oh don't worry," I replied. Iris rolled her eyes and headed off to the shower.

"Have fun digging, I'm going shopping!"

I returned to my labor more excited than ever.

Two weeks later I had one seriously big hole in the back yard. My plans called for it to be about ten feet wide, thirty feet long and about eight feet deep. I was now about six feet down and had almost completed the whole outside perimeter. The mounds of dirt I had thrown up were now all over the backyard, and it looked like a play area for the Army Corps of Engineers. Iris couldn't even look at the backyard, but our neighbors were certainly taking a gander.

We didn't know them well, but it only took about three days for our neighbors on the right to let their curiosity get the best of them. At first they thought I was digging for

a pool, since they had one in their yard. But I quickly explained that I was working on a bomb shelter and

The guy didn't even try to hide his absolute conviction that I was a certified nut case. He just shook his head, turned around, and walked away. I consoled myself with the thought that if we ever did need the shelter, he would probably be the first one to knock down the door. On the other side was a Mormon couple who asked me about my work later that week. My explanation seemed less bizarre to them. It wasn't until later that I found out that Mormons are encouraged to store extra food and supplies for emergencies. Unfortunately, I also found out that they believe in many gods and that their theology is completely different from that of Biblical Christianity. So, I added them to my prayer list.

I was making good progress on the hole, but I had yet to figure out where I was going to get the wood for framing the shelter. I knew from reading the plans that I would need a significant amount of two by sixes and two by fours, but the chances of me getting Iris's support for spending a thousand dollars on the shelter were exactly two: slim and none. It seemed like an irreconcilable problem until one warm October afternoon when I stopped to take a break on our back porch. I wiped the sweat off my brow and laid down staring up at the cumulus clouds moving lazily across the sky. There just above me was the answer, and it had been there all along. Our back deck had one of those partial ceilings comprised of fourteen parallel two by sixes! I'd always hated the things; what a ridiculous design! You couldn't sunbathe effectively because of them, and they didn't provide cover from the rain. They had to come down!

I called one of my old friends from my drug days, Bobby Kline. He was pretty adept with tools, and he'd been on my heart for a while. I hadn't really ever told him about my new life; now would be a perfect opportunity.

The next day, Bobby showed up with all of his implements of destruction. When I told him what I was doing he laughed out loud. "You're crazy," he said, "but it will be a lot of fun tearing your house apart." I stressed the importance of leaving the majority of the house intact, and we set off to work. Occasionally, he would stop and smoke some marijuana, offering me some every time. I politely declined and between hammer strokes and prying with our bars, I told him how Jesus had changed my life.

“That’s great for you,” he said, “just don’t try and stuff it down my throat.” With that he changed the subject, and we finished bringing down the remaining boards. I piled them neatly inside our walkout basement door just in time for Iris to show up at the back door.

“What the ...”

Bobby excused himself quickly, fighting back the urge to laugh out loud. I knew that he figured that I had totally lost my mind, but it didn’t bother me in the least. In fact, I felt a terrific burden for him. He was so much like I had been. All the partying and wildness in his life were desperate attempts to fill the void that engulfed him, just like it had me.

In between her screaming, I explained to Iris that the boards had saved her nearly a thousand dollars, and that I’d make sure to paint over the bare spots on the back porch.

“I must protect you,” I kept telling her. “I love you; I may not be here when the war starts.”

Finally, mercifully, the screaming stopped, and she looked up at the now unencumbered sky over our deck. And in a way I could never understand, she turned on a dime. One second she was ready to kill, and the next she turned a complete 180.

“You know,” she said, “maybe I like it better this way.”

Unfortunately, the cold weather put a damper on my digging in November, and I decided to focus my efforts on other facets of preparation. I began buying extra canned goods and setting aside two-liter bottles for water. Iris didn’t pay much attention to my food preparation until one day when she began perusing some of the cans I had set aside in the basement. I was doing all right at first; there was plenty of chicken soup, which of course can treat everything from the common cold all the way to radiation sickness. There was also a variety of vegetables and fruit, as well as a host of vitamins and assorted over-the-counter medicines. But just when things were going well, Iris picked up a can of Spam, and that sent her over the edge.

“I would rather die than eat this stuff! What’s the matter with you? Do expect me to eat this? What were you thinking?”

“I, I ...” I tried in vain to come up with a plausible explanation as to why I had been stupid enough to buy Spam for my Jewish wife. But it was too late. Iris launched into one of her scathing denunciations, topped off by two of the worst insults she could think of; I was a jerk and a “gentile.” The jerk part of it denoted someone who had really offended her; the gentile part meant that I was really ignorant.

The best thing to do at this point was to agree with her, and I confessed that I was guilty on both charges. After a few more minutes of berating me, she finally relented and stomped upstairs, slamming doors on the way.

At times like this I had to remind myself that she really didn’t understand that I was doing all of this to protect her. The old Andy wanted to get mad, hurt, offended, and resentful. But that same morning, I had heard a great teaching on not letting “the sun go down on your wrath.” I knew that the Lord commanded us to forgive or we in turn couldn’t be forgiven. So I asked the Lord to help me forgive her.

I figured that it was best to give my project a rest; for the next several months we occupied ourselves with the usual holiday fanfare. Although Iris gave no hint of an interest in Jesus, she really threw herself into Thanksgiving and Christmas shopping. This certainly shouldn’t have surprised me, given the world’s attitude towards Christmas. Everyone I’d ever known had some form of Christmas tradition, but the vast majority of people didn’t have any interest in the Jesus of the Bible. Teyvia, the colorful Jewish papa in *Fiddler on the Roof*, had put it perfectly: Tradition. Everyone was into tradition.

I continued to attend church as often as I could, and I longed for the day when Iris would come with me. I had heard numerous teachings on the verse, “repent, and ... be baptized,” and I was very eager for the day when I would be baptized according to the Bible. I, like millions of kids, had been sprinkled as a baby, but I was shocked to find out that there was nothing in the Bible to support infant baptism. To the contrary, the only people who were baptized in the Bible were those who were old enough to repent and place their faith in the Messiah.

I yearned to go deeper into my relationship with the Lord, and I sensed that I had just touched an infinitesimal tip of his presence. I continued to pray that somehow, He

would break through and save the little Jewish girl who had no idea who He was or what He had done for her almost 2,000 years ago.

Memories

January of 1985 began on a high note. Our company had their National Sales meeting in Florida, and for the first time I went to a meeting actually looking forward to the awards banquet. Thanks to the Lord, I had gone from dead last in my company to number three, enough to get an award and a nice bonus. My regional manager and the national sales manager were very complimentary, and they had already begun talking to me about a possible promotion to a marketing manager position. I stood up to receive my award that night, and everyone gave me a great ovation. I was blown away all over again by God's faithfulness and his blessing. After all the handshakes and congratulations, I walked out on the beach and thanked Jesus for what He'd done for me.

Later that week between some of our meetings, one of the other salesmen from another city took me aside and asked me if I'd mind if he asked me a question. I expected him to ask me about a product strategy or something I was doing in my territory.

"I couldn't help but notice last night," he said almost whispering, "that you only drink Coke ... are you in A.A. or something?"

"No," I replied, "I'm not in A.A. Until last year I was heavy-duty into the drug scene – in fact, I was addicted to cocaine."

His eyes were as big as saucers.

I went on to tell him how I had been born again and how God had set me free from drug addiction.

"So, like, your church won't let you drink?"

"I can drink if I want to, but here's the thing" I leaned up closer to him like I was going to tell him an incredible secret.

“I can’t be very effective in telling people about Jesus Christ if I have a beer or a scotch in my hand.”

“Oh, I get it now.”

I was amazed how over the next couple of months I got an opportunity to share my story with a lot of the people in the company who would ask me about it. I fully expected that once the word got out about me, that my superiors would write me off as some kind of weirdo. But by February, I had been selected as a regional trainer for new sales people. Although there wasn’t a pay increase for the extra duties, it was common knowledge that this was a precursor to a promotion in marketing or sales management,

I was so excited and thankful to see how the Lord was opening doors for me in my career. Unfortunately, I didn’t see any movement on Iris’s part, and I began to wonder if I would spend the rest of my life in a “split” marriage. But I continued to pray, knowing that the Bible said not to give up – to “pray without ceasing.”

Several weeks later I was driving into Kansas City, and I was listening to some music when I began to get a strong impression that I should pray for Iris. Normally I would pray that she would come to know Jesus as her Lord and Savior, but on this particular day, something else seemed to be tugging at my heart. I couldn’t tell what it was, but I sensed an urgency about the need to pray for her. Before I got out of the car to go into the hospital, I asked the Lord to protect Iris, to surround her with his angels and to protect her from the enemy.

As usual I had to check into Purchasing, so I dutifully headed down to the basement and walked into the office to get a visitor’s badge. As soon as I opened the door the receptionist called my name right away and told me that Iris’s office was looking for me. The fact that her office was looking for me was definitely a red flag. I got to a pay phone, called the station, and asked for Iris. Her secretary came on the line and gave me the news. Bea Finkelstein had died just an hour before, after suffering a massive heart attack.

“You’ve got to come right away, Andy. Iris is hysterical.”

I hurriedly cancelled my appointments and got over to the station as quickly as I could. Iris was sobbing in the fetal position on her sofa in the office. I touched her head gently, and she just rocked back and forth crying for her mother. I wanted so much to say or do something that would take away her pain, but I knew that was impossible. I stroked her hair and held her, and she cried and cried and cried. I'd never seen anyone in such anguish and pain. Now I knew why I'd been sensing the need to pray for her.

I called our family doctor, and he prescribed a sedative. It took me forever to get Iris out to the car; she could hardly walk. We got home a few minutes later, and I immediately called to make airline reservations so we could fly home for the funeral. As I talked to the agent, I could hear Iris crying in the bedroom. Just as I got off the phone, the pharmacy delivered her prescription, and within a few minutes she had fallen asleep.

I sat outside the room and prayed for wisdom and help. I felt so helpless; since she didn't know the Lord, His comfort wasn't a reality for her. Now I began to understand the hopelessness that the world faces without the certainty of Jesus' loving hand on them.

I opened my Bible and turned to Proverbs, chapter three. My fingers ran down the page until I found the fifth verse. I had heard one of the radio ministries preaching on it earlier in the week.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”

“That's what I need Jesus. Please direct my paths.”

I will, my son.

Three days later, we found ourselves standing in a Jewish cemetery in Annapolis, Maryland. It was raining torrentially, and we were surrounded by over one hundred mourners standing around an open gravesite where Bea was to be buried. Iris was convulsing in tears as I held onto her, desperately trying to keep her from falling down.

The rabbi said a prayer from his prayer book, but I really couldn't understand anything he was saying. I was praying myself, not only for Iris, but also for all of the Jewish people who stood near. I just wanted it to be over. It was as if I were sensing the

pain and suffering of all these precious souls around me who were filled with such dread and fear. Each of their faces seemed to say the same thing. “This is how I will end up some day, stone cold dead to spend an unconscious eternity.” None of them had any concept of an afterlife – no heaven – no hell – just dead.

Mercifully, it finally ended, and we headed back to David’s house where we sat Shiva. Tables full of food filled the dining room, and friends and family ate and talked, reminiscing about Bea and the lives she had touched. Everyone who spoke would tell some story about her kindness and how she looked out for everyone. I remember thinking how this remarkable woman had seen right into me; how she had made me promise that I would take good care of her little girl.

There was heaviness in that room that I will never forget. It reminded me of an amazing Bible passage I had read just a few weeks before in the book of John, chapter eleven.

A Jewish man named Lazarus, a friend of Jesus, had taken sick and died while Jesus was in another town outside of Jerusalem. When Jesus returned He found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days

Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Now Martha said to Jesus,

“Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.”

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, "The Teacher has come and is calling for you." As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came to Him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him.

Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, "She is going to the tomb to weep there."

Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."

Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, "Where have you laid him?"

They said to Him, "Lord, come and see."

Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!"

And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?"

Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone."

Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days."

Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go" (John 11:18-44).

Surrounded by the broken hearts of Bea's grieving family and friends, God poured out on me His compassion for all the precious Jewish people in that room. I began to understand how he must have felt that day when He saw the pain and anguish that death had caused in Lazarus' family. I had always felt like the gentile kid, stuck on the outside of the family, but not anymore. This was my family now, and my heart was breaking just like theirs were.

Suddenly, in the depth of my grief, God reminded me how Iris had complained that Bea had been watching The 700 Club, "that dumb gentile show," as she put it. Bea had told her that she liked to listen to the music on the show, but I knew better. I had watched the show probably a hundred times and rarely was there any music. Instead the show was full of testimonies, stories of how the Messiah miraculously touched people's lives. You couldn't watch one show without hearing about Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross and his offer to be your Savior so that you too could go to heaven.

God promises us in the Bible that, one day, He will call out the names of those who have trusted Him as the Messiah, and we will be raised up just like Lazarus.

I believe one of the first people I'll see in heaven is Bea Finkelstein.

We returned home but not to life as normal. Poor Iris was just devastated. She spent most of the day in a daze, and most of the night crying. I would hold her on the sofa, pray for her and reassure her that she would see her mother again some day. Of course, it seemed totally ridiculous to her.

Iris tried to throw herself back into her work, but even her passion for selling advertising couldn't overcome her grief. She would sit in her office during the day half in a daze, and then burst into tears. Within a couple of months, she was having difficulty driving at night or during inclement weather. Then driving all together became so difficult for her that her staff began picking her up and bringing her home.

Her physician had prescribed a myriad of antidepressants, but they weren't doing any good. I had seen cases of severe depression during my work at a mental hospital in my senior year of college, but it's always different when it is someone that you know and love. Iris's pain and loss was so debilitating that I knew it was going to take a miracle, so

I continued to pray. And I also began trying to think of anything that might take her mind off her mom.

One day in the spring, we were looking out on our neighbor's backyard. They were doing their yearly cleanup around their pool in preparation for the hot summer months ahead. Iris looked at their pristine backyard, and then over at the huge hole gracing our backyard along with the mounds of dirt surrounding it.

"Maybe if we built a pool, maybe that would help me get over my mom," she sobbed.

I had become so preoccupied with caring for Iris that I hadn't done anything more on our bomb shelter. The only thing we had so far was a "bomb hole." I hated the thought of giving up my grand scheme; it had become a wacky diversion from the insults that Iris regularly flung my way. But I knew right away that it was the best thing to do. I had no illusions; the pool wouldn't solve Iris's problem, but it just might help her see that a "thing" was not the answer for the pain she was enduring. Besides, Bea had left some money that we could use.

The word "yes" was barely out of my mouth, and Iris was on the phone with our next door neighbor getting the name of the pool builder. I don't know who was more excited about the project, the pool builder or our neighbor who had long since decided that I was completely out of my mind. Iris threw herself into the project with wild abandon, and within several weeks, the builder came over to begin digging the hole for the pool. When he showed up, he looked at the hole in the back yard and began chuckling. It turned out that he didn't have to dig very much. In fact in most places he had to fill in because the hole I'd dug was too deep. But the most amazing thing was that the builder turned out to be a born again Christian. As I told him about my shelter project he understood completely. So even though I was losing my project, I had finally run into someone who didn't think I was completely wacky – maybe just a little bit wacky.

But Gary agreed to pray for Iris, along with my other friends at Full Faith.

The whole project took several months, but during this time Iris seemed to enjoy being on a new "dime" as my dad used to say. We picked out furniture and pool supplies, and we looked forward with great anticipation to "opening day." But when night came or there were pauses between phases in the project, Iris would immediately sink back into

the darkness. I continued to hold her at night, sharing with her when I could that God loved her, but I knew down deep that as soon as the pool dime was over, it would probably be worse than ever.

One night I was working upstairs in a bedroom that I had converted into an office. My desk was next to the door from which I could look down on our family room below. Iris was lying on the sofa, channel surfing when she hit a channel with a thirty-something guy with a beard, moving his arms demonstratively around. She stopped at the channel and began to listen. She listened for a few minutes, and I strained my ears to hear what was being said. To my amazement I heard this guy talking about the Messiah. I began to pray that God would open Iris's eyes just the way He'd opened mine. After about fifteen minutes, the program was over, and Iris turned the channel. I waited a few minutes, and then I went downstairs, succumbing to the urge to ask her what she'd been watching. In typical Iris fashion, she had an answer all ready to go.

"O.K. I have to admit, there is one Jew who says he believes in Jesus. But I'm not going to be the second one!" With that she stormed out of the room, and I was left staring at the screen.

At first I was tempted to run after her yelling, "Iris, all the disciples were Jewish, there were hundreds of thousands of Jews who believed in Jesus. It wasn't until later that gentiles began to become part of his plan. The guy you saw on TV isn't the first, he is just the"

But the Lord knew better; He calmed me down, and I knew that even though nothing on the outside of my wife looked different, powerful seeds had been planted.

Keep praying, don't give up.

Lifting the Veil

September came with the first hint of autumn, and Iris's depression began to worsen. I kept thinking that even without knowing Jesus, people usually work their way out of grief and despair, but my poor wife seemed to be getting worse each day.

I would find her looking through Bea's old recipe books, sorting through pictures, whimpering like a child for her mommy. She would dial her mom's old phone number and convulse in tears when she was only greeted with, "That number has been disconnected." I hadn't given up completely, but I had begun to wonder if Iris would ever get better.

Then one weekend, something startling happened. I asked Iris if she wanted to go to church with me, and to my amazement she said yes! I forced myself not to jump up and down, but inside I was rejoicing. Of course the very next second I began to worry about she would think about such a "gentile" place. Full Faith was a pretty expressive church, probably not what Iris was expecting. She'd told me about visiting a Catholic Church when she was a kid.

"Is it anything like that, with Him hanging on the wall?" she asked.

"Him" was Jesus. I was still amazed by the unwritten code in Jewish families that Jesus' name was not to be mentioned, except when it was used as an expletive if you hit your finger with a hammer or yelled at your kids.

No, I explained, this is very different from a Catholic church. I changed the subject quickly, afraid that she would change her mind.

We walked into Full Faith on Sunday morning for the 10:45 service.

It was amazing. Almost everybody we saw would turn and smile and greet us like we were the most important people that had ever walked in the door.

Entering the sanctuary, I could tell that Iris was fascinated. It was much larger than the synagogue she had grown up in. While we sat waiting for the service to begin, she told me how different this was. She was used to seeing the men and women sit separately. But thankfully, she didn't seem uncomfortable sitting in the church.

Our worship pastor, David Duell, came out and began the first praise song. It sounded very Jewish in its melody, and people all over the church began to sing and clap their hands. I sang too, not as loud as I normally would, but inside I was praising and thanking my Messiah for the miracle of seeing my wife in church.

When the worship ended, we sat down for a second and one of the pastors made the announcements. Then the senior pastor got up, Bible in hand and made his way over to the pulpit. Pastor Ernie began preaching and for the next thirty-five minutes, he read Bible passages and explained what salvation really was and what it meant to be "born again." I was following along in the Bible, gently pointing to each passage for Iris to read so she could follow along. She wasn't saying anything, and I kept praying that God would touch her like He'd touched me.

When the sermon was over, Pastor Ernie gave an altar call, asking if there was anyone who wanted to come forward and pray the prayer of salvation. During the time he was extending the "invitation," I prayed that Iris would go forward, but she didn't. At first I was tempted to be really disappointed, but then I reminded myself how amazing it was that she had even come to church.

We left the church, and I waited until we were down the road a ways before asking her what she thought. She hesitated for a moment, which was really unusual for Iris. She looked out the window and commented.

"It wasn't bad ... The singing was nice."

My heart soared within me. She liked the music! It wasn't bad! Maybe she would even come back again.

"I do have one question though,"

"What's that, honey?" I responded, waiting to quickly provide my awesome spiritual wisdom.

“Why did he keep talking about STARVATION?” The word came out of her mouth with a combination of sarcasm and wonder.

“He wasn’t talking about starvation,” I began, “the word is SALvation, and it means”

“Oh just drop it, and don’t pressure me – if I want to come back I’ll tell you!”

“O.K.” I answered. “Thank you for coming.” I prayed that the seeds that had been planted that morning would blossom inside of Iris’s heart, but I feared that I had gotten my big shot, and that I’d failed.

When Monday rolled around, it was as if nothing had changed. It was so frustrating knowing that the only one who could ultimately help Iris was the only one she didn’t want to turn to.

But there was someone else that Iris thought might just have the answer. She had heard about a psychiatrist from one of her friends, and she announced to me that she was “going to get some help.” Having spent some time in the mental health field, I had no confidence whatsoever that any psychiatrist was the answer to what Iris was going through. Oh, she would be glad to listen for hours on end for an expensive fee, but fill the void that Iris had in her heart? No way.

There was someone with the answer. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had long ago described what was missing in Iris’s life. In the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, the Lord explains that He has placed “eternity in [our] hearts.” Because sin has separated us from Him (Isaiah 59:2), we have a void in our hearts, an emptiness that can only be filled by Him. He designed us so that we would be incomplete until our sin is atoned for. We all try to fill this void the best we can. Some use chemicals like I did, others in adventure or career, and others, like Iris, put everything into a human relationship.

I had been where she was. I knew what it was like to hurt so badly that hopelessness was the only thing that seemed real. But then, in a moment when I least expected it, the Jewish Messiah had touched my heart. I knew, I just knew deep down that Jeshua was the only one who could give Iris the miracle she so desperately needed.

But I learned that HE never forces himself on anyone. He woos us and gently draws us, but the final decision is left up to us.

I couldn't see what was going on inside Iris, but I just kept praying that the Lord was at work.

A couple of days later Iris came home and told me about her first "visit." She told me that she really thought the psychiatrist would be able to help her. This doctor, she explained, had some advanced techniques that could just be exactly what she needed.

Iris had explained to the doctor that her husband was a Christian. "I really don't want to believe in this Jesus," Iris had explained, "but is there a way that we could 'use' Him in the treatment?"

The doctor had seized this like a dog on a raw piece of meat. She explained that she was a "mystical Christian" and that Iris's treatment could definitely "use" Jesus.

First, of course, Iris needed to block out months of \$75 weekly visits. "It will take time," she explained, "to work through these things." But Iris explained that she needed help right now so that she could at least live somewhat normally. "I'm so filled with anxiety," she explained, "I can't even drive a car."

"All you have to do is walk around the car three times and chant, 'Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,' then," the doctor explained, "you will be able to drive."

"But what about all my sadness?" Iris asked.

"Just buy some candles, and when you get sad, light one and blow your cares away to Jesus," the doctor instructed her.

When Iris told me about her visit, I had a hard time restraining myself. I'd been around enough occult and new age teaching to know where the "doctor" was coming from.

"Iris, I know this all sounds good to you," I explained, "but trust me when I tell you that this kind of approach is based in witchcraft, and God doesn't want us to dabble in any kind of darkness. He specifically forbids this kind of thing in Exodus 18 and"

"But, it's my only hope," she protested, "I've got to go back, I already signed up for all of these appointments."

If there was ever a red flag, this was a huge one. My Iris could return anything. I had seen her return clothes that she'd bought a year ago, and not even flinch at the

protests of a store manager. And now, she seemed to be scared to cancel some appointments.

“I don’t care, this is not the answer; in fact it’s dangerous, and the only real answer is”

She started screaming at me, accusing me of holding her back from the very help she needed. She went on and on and on and on and on

I’d seen it before, and it really wasn’t new. Iris had told me once about a time she had announced to her parents one night just before bed that she wanted some french fries from Dairy Queen. At first they calmly explained that it was too late, and it was time to go to bed. She began to throw a major fit, throwing shoes down the stairs and screaming at them for all she was worth. Unfortunately, they gave in. That little girl, now an adult, could still be one stubborn woman. In fact, she could be downright intimidating, and she was used to overpowering her opponents.

But not this time.

Once Iris stopped long enough to take a breath, I told her that it would mean a divorce if she went back to that woman. She stopped dead in her tracks. She must have seen how serious I was because she just gave up. No more arguing or convincing, she just turned and walked away. Just above her breath though, I heard the dreaded insult. Most people would never have considered it a serious put down, but I knew better. To Iris, this word was only spoken when someone had gone way over the line.

“Jerk.”

A week later, the only thing that had changed was that Iris was worse than ever. The owner of the radio station was really worried about her. Iris was only a shell of the bubbly irrepressible woman she’d been before. She was trying to go through the motions at work, but she was failing miserably.

I picked her up in the afternoon, and she collapsed into the seat of the car, whimpering like a child. We drove home, and she lay down on the couch while I fed our cat menagerie. I was too tired to cook, so I told her that we’d go out to dinner. I had to literally pull her off of the sofa and into the car. It was warm for an October afternoon.

Kids were outside everywhere playing in the yards, and people drove past us with their convertible tops down.

I drove down the street looking for someplace different to try. We'd become so used to eating out that it was getting tough to find anything new. Fortunately, we didn't have to drive far before spying a new restaurant in a strip center about a mile from our development. We turned and found a seat over by one of the windows. Iris stared at the menu, and I looked out the window, dreading the night ahead of me. We both ordered steaks, and Iris ordered a Kahlua and crème. The television over by the bar was showing the nightly news, and the anchorman was droning on about the newest AIDS statistics.

I wasn't paying attention, but the words weren't lost on Iris.

"Andy?" There was a long pause. "What if I lose you too?"

I finally got the connection. AIDS, sickness, accidents, heart attacks, the sadness of life, the certainty of death ... My poor wife was utterly hopeless.

I answered her the same way I had a hundred times before. I didn't even try to be convincing or persuasive. No boldness, no mountain-moving faith, instead just a tired statement of something that I knew because I'd been through it myself.

"Iris, I will die someday, we all will. But Jesus will never leave you, He will never forsake you. He wants you to trust Him so He can love you and take care of you forever."

The waitress suddenly dropped the plates in front of us, and I thanked her and asked for another Coke. I hadn't even turned back to see Iris yet when I heard her speak again.

"I'm ready ... I want to pray that prayer."

It was like being in a dream. Time began to slow down and suddenly I realized what Iris was saying.

I couldn't contain myself; tears of joy began streaming down my face.

"Do you want to eat first?" I forced the question out, hoping that Iris wouldn't change her mind.

"No, I want to go home and pray that prayer."

Now I knew that Iris was serious. She would be the first to tell you that being Jewish made food a very important matter.

I quickly paid the bill, and we got back into the car to drive home. I was scared to say much of anything for fear I'd only mess things up. I don't think I'd ever been with Iris when we were both so quiet.

We got back to the house and sat down on the sofa. We held hands, and I prayed and then asked Iris to pray with me.

“Dear Jesus,”

“Dear ... Jesus,” Iris repeated. When she said the Lord's name, it was as if a huge wall had been broken.

“I confess that I am a sinner, and I ask You to forgive me. I repent of my sins – I don't want to live that way anymore. I believe that You died on the cross for me and that you rose again from the dead. Please come into my heart now and be my Savior and Lord. In Jesus' name, Amen.”

We hugged each other, and I was completely overcome with awe to see that God had done what seemed to be so completely impossible. It had only been a year and half before when He had miraculously delivered me from drug addiction, so His power and His love should have come as no surprise. But to see that He had changed Iris's heart so completely was beyond my capacity to comprehend. It was then that I remembered a verse that I'd just read several days before. The Bible explains in Luke 15:7 that something incredible takes place in heaven every time a sinner repents; the angels burst forth in song.

High above Kansas City that night, I believe there was quite a celebration going on!

The Message

Iris's countenance had been completely transformed. One moment she was in a bottomless pit of depression, the next she was smiling, laughing, and jumping around like Tigger in Winnie the Pooh. She kept telling me how much she wanted to tell someone what God had done for her. "I've got to tell someone, who can I call?"

"Call Dena," I told her, "I think she may be a Christian also." Dena and Mike Scrivani had moved out to Kansas City before Iris had years ago. They had known her for years, so when she called that night, they were going to be in for a real surprise.

It's a good thing that they answered the phone because I think Iris would have gone outside and grabbed the first neighbor she could find.

"Dena," Iris began yelling, "I've been reborn!"

As I listened to Iris tell the story of how Jesus had saved her, I couldn't help but think about the other people in the Bible that Jesus had miraculously touched around Him. Whenever Jesus had changed someone's life, they became powerful witnesses for the Lord. Considering that my wife's outgoing personality was an eleven on the scale from one to ten, I should have known that the Lord was going to do something special with Iris Finkelstein-Sleight.

Monday morning Iris was filled with anticipation and excitement. She drove into work a new woman in a new world. In hindsight I wish I'd been able to be there in the radio station when she came in the door. All of her salespeople and secretaries had seen her retreat into a living hell over the last seven months, so when she came into the door a new creation of God, it must have been quite a sight.

That morning, Iris assembled everyone for their sales meeting and herded them into the conference room. Usually she would start off with an expletive-filled tirade about their lack of performance or the new promotion they were doing with a Las Vegas casino. But today she began the meeting with a slightly different approach.

“Have any of you,” Iris asked excitedly, “ever heard of Jesus?”

At first they thought she was putting them on. But when she began to tell them about how incredible He was, and what He had done for her, laughter and giggles began to fill the room. It didn't deter Iris one bit.

That room was filled with people who had grown up around religion. Many of them had been baptized as babies, or gone through confirmation. But if you'd asked them if they'd been born again by the Spirit of God through a life-changing encounter with the REAL MESSIAH of the Bible, none of them would have stepped forward. Iris was finding out the same thing I had; most people know about Jesus, but not many KNOW HIM.

But there was one person at the station who wasn't laughing. Todd Chase was the Program Director at ZZ-99, and he was fascinated by Iris's story. Todd and his wife Mickie lived just two doors down from us in a quiet suburb of Kansas City called Shawnee. Over the weeks after Iris's transformation, he began asking me questions about the Bible, and it wasn't long after that we had the joy of praying with Todd and Mickie in our living room. Todd had always had a perfect radio personality, warm and humorous, but after he was born again, he joined with Iris in openly telling others in the station and the marketplace about the Lord. In fact, it wasn't long before they became known as the “God Squad.”

Meanwhile we were attending Full Faith regularly, and the people in the church just fell in love with Iris. Her unique personality and her Jewish “chutzpah” drew them in, and soon we had a host of new friends. One of the passions we shared with many in the church was the burden to tell others about Jesus. We heard that there was a home group ministry in the church that would give us an opportunity to invite people into our home for friendship and Bible study. We prayed about it and decided to begin the training course for Home Group leaders.

The pastor in charge of this ministry was one of the wisest men I have ever met. Pastor John Arnold came across as being quiet and unassuming, yet his counsel and inspiration were crucial in our early days as “baby” Christians. He took Iris and me under his wing and began to funnel our passion for evangelism into home group ministry. We weren’t nearly as learned as many of those in the church, but we did have a burning desire to share our story in hopes that God would show others that they too could know Jesus personally, not just as a historical figure, but as the true living God that lives today and has answers for our most difficult problems.

There were several milestones during this training phase that were to leave an indelible impression on us for the rest of our lives. During one of the first classes we took, one of the pastors at the church was teaching on the financial principles in the Bible. I was astounded to find out how much of the Bible had to do with money and how we as Christians were supposed to relate to it. But Iris was in for a real shock when the subject of tithing came up. Tithing refers to God’s directive in Malachi to give the first 10 percent of our income to the “storehouse” or church. When the pastor explained that this is what the Bible said, I thought we were going to have to get out some smelling salts for my wife. She was used to working hard and making a lot of money, but to give away 10 percent ... it seemed so alien to her. But then we read the rest of the verse, and the Lord promised to pour out his blessing so much so that we wouldn’t be able to contain it. Iris was finally coming back from her near fainting experience. But the next week, she began to relapse when the Pastor explained that it was 10 percent of the gross, not of the net.

“Oy Vey,” she exclaimed, “Are you sure, the GROSS?”

“Yes,” the pastor explained, “was that too much to ask from the One who had given us life?”

Iris enjoyed her moment of dramatic shock, but she jumped into a lifestyle of giving like a duck into water. For both of us, everything had changed. The bottom line wasn’t the bottom line anymore; what kind of price tag could you put on what Jesus had done for us? Let’s see, He lived a perfect life, died a substitutionary death for us so we wouldn’t have to face judgment and hell, delivered me from drug addiction and her from depression, saved our marriage, and on and on and on. It seemed laughable to even think

about the exchange that had been made. I had given Jesus one completely destroyed life, and He gave me back everything.

Not long after writing our first tithe check, we found the verse, “God loves a cheerful giver.” From that day on, Iris has always put a smiley face on our tithe and offering checks. We still do to this day.

Not long after Iris was born again, I explained to her that I really wanted to be baptized. Jesus specifically tells us to repent and be baptized in the book of John. I had a yearning to be baptized since my first day as a Christian, but I hadn’t pushed it in hopes that someday we would be able to be baptized together. Iris didn’t say no, but she was honest about her reservations.

“It seems so gentile,” she explained. “It just seems so weird, and what will I wear – will it cover me all up – will the water be so cold I won’t be able to stand it, and”

I didn’t argue with her, but I did explain what the Bible said. She agreed that it was obviously something that Jesus commanded us to do. I reminded her that if God could deliver her from her depression, He could ease her fears about baptism. I also shared with Iris that in my quiet time with the Lord, He had spoken to me clearly about our need to trust Him.

“I’ve never heard Him speak like you have,” Iris wistfully explained. “I’d like to hear from Him. In fact, why can’t He just send me a telegram or something?”

“I don’t know about telegrams,” I said, “but I’m sure that He will make His presence known to you.” In the end, we prayed and asked the Lord to help Iris get over the barriers, whatever they were.

A couple of weeks later, Iris was watching a local Christian television program on Channel 50 out of Kansas City. The name of the program was “Something Beautiful,” and the host of the program was Marilyn Lewis. On this particular program Marilyn was telling the viewers about a unique new ministry called the Light House. The Light House was a new home for unwed mothers, housed in a converted convent. The idea was to reach out to women in crisis and give them a safe place to have their child. If they wanted to keep the child, that was fine, or if they wanted to put their baby up for adoption, the Light House would facilitate the adoption.

Iris was really drawn by Marilyn's passion to help young girls, and she wanted to make a contribution, so she called up the ministry office. She and Marilyn hit it off immediately and in the course of the conversation, Iris shared her testimony and her concern with getting baptized. Marilyn spent an hour on the phone with her reassuring her and explaining that rather than a "burden," Iris's baptism would be a wonderful experience. We ended up making a donation to the Light House, and God used Marilyn and one of her friends, Kathy Morse, to overcome Iris's trepidation. We signed up for the next baptism class and set the date.

When the big day came, Iris was a little nervous, but she was determined to follow through on her commitment to the Lord. We got to the church about thirty minutes early and prayed with other believers and the pastor who would be doing the baptism. I was so excited I could hardly contain myself. Finally the day had come when I could follow through on my promise to act out what had been done in my life when I had been born again! We had learned in the Bible that baptism was a public demonstration of dying with Christ, and then being raised up again to a brand new life.

A few minutes before the service, the men and women separated so we could go into dressing rooms and put on overgarments to wear into the baptismal. I hugged Iris and reassured her that everything would be fine. As I changed in the room along with a couple of other men, the music began playing in the sanctuary, and we hurried over to a set of stairs that led up to the baptismal.

When it was my turn, I slipped into the water with the pastor and leaned over to the microphone that faced the people in the service.

"What is your name?" the pastor asked.

"Andrew Sleight."

"Have you placed your faith in Jesus Christ?"

Once again waves of God's love washed over me just like the day I had first met Him.

"Yes," I answered, "He is my Lord and Savior."

The pastor gently supported me as he lowered me in to the water.

“Because of your profession of faith, I baptize you in the name of the FATHER, THE SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT, AND THE NAME ABOVE EVERY OTHER NAME, THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

BURIED IN BAPTISM, AND RAISED TO NEWNESS OF LIFE.”

Everyone clapped, and no one could see my tears because of the wonderful drenching I had.

Then Iris came down the stairs next to me, and the pastor introduced her, explaining that she was a Jewish believer in Jesus. There were oohs and ahhs all over the sanctuary, and the church broke into spontaneous applause.

Now you may be puzzled by this reaction, but it really makes perfect sense when you think about it. The initial disciples of Jesus had been Jewish with the exception of a few gentiles. But after the persecution that broke out against His followers, God said that He would reach out to gentiles until a certain time in the future when His attention would be redirected back to Jewish people (Romans 11:25). The result was that by the end of the twentieth century, the vast majority of those people in the world who had been born again were gentiles from around the world.

But one of the greatest known promises in the Bible is that Israel would one day turn to the Messiah they had rejected before the destruction of the temple. So when Christians see the miracle of a Jewish person who has placed his or her faith in Jesus, it is an exciting, God-glorifying, Bible-confirming miracle.

The pastor asked Iris about her commitment to the Lord and in turn, gently lowered her into the tank. She came up bubblier than ever! I can't imagine anyone more joyful than she was that night, but the blessing wasn't over yet.

Afterwards, we returned to our dressing rooms, and I exchanged experiences with the other men who had been baptized. When I was almost finished getting dressed, there was a knock at the door. A man stuck his head in and asked me if he could give me something. I stepped into the hallway, and he handed me a church program with some writing on the back.

“The Lord gave me a prophetic word for your wife, but I wanted to make sure first that it was approved by you.”

I had read in the Bible that among certain gifts or abilities that God gave believers was an ability to provide special words of knowledge or revelation. The Bible was also very clear that not everything that presented itself as revelation is authentic. So I carefully looked at the statement, my first priority being to protect my wife. But by the time I got to the third sentence, I was totally convinced that it was authentic. Just for good measure, I sought out one of the pastors and asked him what he thought. He knew our story, but he also knew that we were virtually unknown in the church. He shook his head in amazement.

“I believe this word is about authentic as any I’ve ever seen.”

A minute later she came out the door jumping up and down.

“Wasn’t it fantastic? How AWESOME is the Lord!!”

I held up my hand trying my best to get a word in edgewise which isn’t always so easy with Iris.

“You don’t know how awesome He is,” I said. “This is a prophetic word that someone in the service had concerning you.”

I could see the puzzled look on her face reminding me that she hadn’t read through the whole Bible yet.

“Sometimes,” I explained, “the Lord gives words of encouragement, exhortation, or correction to someone who then shares it with another believer. Sometimes it happens in a service, and they speak it out loud, this time it was written down and delivered to me to give to you.”

Iris looked at the program and began reading the words. As she did, a childlike wonder came over her.

And though there would be a curse over you, yet I have removed it says the Lord. For no longer shall you be as one weeping over sorrow for I shall pour over you My oil of gladness, and as you go forth and out to the world, I will have My glory on you that you should be a testimony of Me to your people. Come to Me, says the Lord and I will grant you wisdom on how to open your mouth and speak from My Spirit that you may be as a light even as I am! Rejoice, my daughter, for I am glad that you are in My kingdom, and I will use you! I love you says the Lord, and I rejoice with great glory that you belong to Me!

Tears were running down her cheeks, and she hugged me, holding the program to her breast.

“I asked Him for a telegram, and that’s exactly what I got.”

Amen.

Just In Time

Soon after we were baptized, we began to host a fellowship group that met every Friday night in our home in Shawnee. Iris and I were amazed by what began to happen. Every week, we would open our home, and more and more people would come. We had initially invited Todd and Mickie and a few other friends we'd met at church, but within a few months we had over twenty-five people.

It wasn't like we were doing anything revolutionary. In fact, we were relying on a method that was almost 2,000 years old. When Jesus had begun his ministry, He'd meet one particular person like a Matthew or an Andrew, and then they would invite their friends to come over for a meal at their home to meet Jesus. People have always yearned for relationship, no matter what age they've lived in. Everyone needs family, support, and love. But the relationship that they need more than any other is one with the Creator of the Universe.

Every week we would gather together at 7:00 P.M. and spend fifteen or twenty minutes with a cup of coffee or soda, just getting up-to-date on the latest news. Eventually we would work our way into the family room where we would start off with fifteen minutes of worship, nothing very sophisticated; just me or someone on the guitar and everyone singing. But with everyone singing, from three-year-olds to sixty-year-olds, it was an awesome time.

Next I would teach for fifteen or twenty minutes, using a series of verses that addressed a particular subject in the Bible. Sometimes it would be a practical subject like marriage or financial wisdom, while other times we would study Bible prophecy and the world events that were unfolding in front of us on the world scene. But whatever the

subject was, we would always tie it into the need for every person to repent and place their faith in the Messiah. Then we would share our prayer requests and spend fifteen minutes to a half an hour praying for each other.

Every month our little group continued to grow. Soon we had quite a diverse group including a dozen teenagers who had recently been born again. I think they felt at home with us because we were wildly enthusiastic about Jesus just like they were. Since we didn't have any kids, we didn't come across as being too parental, but we did our best to encourage them to live for Jesus and to pray for their friends.

I was beginning to think more and more about being a dad, but Iris had no interest whatsoever in having children. She had grown very attached to the cats that I'd had for years. Benjamin and Riley, as they were known, were more than enough for her. They didn't require any diapers, and I had always assumed responsibilities for the dreaded cat box change.

But while Iris didn't seem interested in a promotion to motherhood, it was obvious to me that she was eminently qualified. She had learned from the best, and every precious quality from Bea was now coming out in Iris. When there was a need, everyone knew whom to call. Now that she was filled with the love of God, she was more amazing than ever. When we would get together with our friends, Iris would move through the house like a mother hen with her chicks, making sure that the children were loved and fawned over. When it came to discipline or rules, of course, she left that to me since that wasn't something that made you particularly popular. But more than anything else, the teenagers and kids that came into our home received unconditional love, support and encouragement.

Our experience with baptism had instilled in us a desire to obey God's Word (the Bible) to direct our lives, and it was incredibly exciting to see what would happen when we did just that. We began to find out that Jesus still does awesome things in people's lives just like He did when He walked the earth 2,000 years ago.

The difference is that today, many of the things He does are through the hands, feet, heart, and pocketbooks of people who love Him.

During one particular quarter of the year, my sales had gone into a slump. My job wasn't in jeopardy or anything, but I'd grown accustomed to working hard and seeing things go well. I asked Iris to be praying for my sales, and she began to pray every day.

One day soon after this, I was on a business trip, working in some hospitals in Wichita. Iris stopped for lunch at a fast food place and took along her Bible. Like many new Christians she was so excited to read the Bible – it was like every word was a huge drop of rain falling on dry, but fertile, soil. And for Iris, to be interested in reading any book was amazing stuff. She always bragged that she'd only read about three books in her life. (A quick disclaimer: if you are a student – don't follow in her footsteps.)

After praying, she began to munch on her Long John Silver's chicken strips and opened the Bible to the book of Proverbs, the fourteenth chapter.

When she hit the twenty-first verse, the words jumped off the page at her.

“He who despises his neighbor sins; but he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he.”

If you have never had the experience, it is difficult to explain how powerful it is to read the Word of God and have his Word impact you so strongly, that you KNOW He is speaking directly to you. For Iris, this was definitely one of those times.

Across the parking lot from where she was seated was a Safeway supermarket. Iris immediately got up, drove over to the store, and went inside. She began to fill her shopping cart with everything she could imagine a poor family could need. At first she was picking out utilitarian items like canned vegetables, fruit, bread, and other staples. But then she decided that she really wanted to bless the needy. She picked a variety of KC strip steaks and other specialty meats and then added to her basket cake mixes, cookies and other more fun items. By the time she got to the counter she was so excited that her next challenge hadn't even hit her yet. About the time she was pushing the packed, overweight cart out the door, she realized that she had no idea who to give the blessing to!

No problem, she thought, I'll call the church, and they can direct me.

Cell phones were still a few years out, so she picked up a pay phone and called our friend May at the church office. May was everything you could ask for in a church receptionist: kind, enthusiastic, efficient, and understanding. But even she was a little

thrown off when Iris called and asked her if she knew any “poor” people. At first she didn’t quite know what to do with Iris’s request. The church was a mix of blue-collar laborers and professionals, and while we weren’t rich, most of the families seemed to be getting along fine.

“Iris, I don’t know what to tell you.” she said.

“May, we’ve got to think of something. The ice cream is going to melt, and if I have to, I’m just going to head for the ghetto myself.”

“Just a minute,” May responded. “Let me get you to one of the pastors.”

A few seconds later, one of the pastors picked up the phone, and Iris began to explain her predicament. After about thirty seconds, Pastor Jim began praising God.

Seated across from him was a single mom who had just come in, her family in dire straights. They were broke, had little food left, and the electricity was being turned off that day.

Iris drove over, barely able to contain herself. God was so wonderful! The woman had been volunteering in the nursery that morning during the Ladies’ Bible Study. All of us would never forget how God had met her need exactly when she needed it.

I feel prompted at this point in our story to make one thing clear. We share these things with you to glorify Jesus, to share how He has done amazing things. None, I repeat NONE of this had anything to do with us. We just happened to be in the area when He demonstrated his love. In fact, the more we began to depend on Him and not on ourselves, the more we began to see Him move!

Within a year, our group had grown to over fifty people. But not everything was so rosy in American Christian circles. The reports began to come out about the PTL scandal, and many people seized on Jim Bakker’s fall to begin taking potshots at anything that had to do with “born agains.” Iris and I were disappointed like many in the Christian church, but our biggest upset was the reaction we would hear when we witnessed. (To witness means to tell others about Jesus and their need to repent and be born again.) Sadly, many we would talk to would try to rationalize the sin in their lives by looking at the failures of others like Jim Bakker or Jimmy Swaggart. But anyone who

would take the time to read what God really says would immediately see that on Judgment Day there will be no “grading on a curve.” The Bible is clear; every person will be judged individually, and *there is no way out except for one*.

But I digress, more on that in the last chapter of the book.

In the middle of the media frenzy with the PTL scandal, we received a phone call from the local NBC affiliate in Kansas City. Their lead anchor asked if she could do a story on us as part of a series she was doing on the state of the Christian church in America.

“We heard that you have a church in your home,”

Yes, in a way, that’s exactly what we had. She asked if she could come out, film our group, and then interview us. At first we weren’t quite sure what to do, so we called Pastor John Arnold and asked for his counsel. The book of Proverbs says, “In the multitude of counselors there is safety.”

Our concern was that the news crew would come out with the intention of making us look like a bunch of mindless, religious idiots. We’d both seen how so many quotes are taken out of context, and we didn’t want to do anything that would bring disrepute to the name of Jesus. But after we prayed about it, we had peace. Additionally, several of the pastors had prayed, and they said that they too thought that we should open up our home and just be ourselves.

When the night came, we had an awesome turnout; our family room was packed, and we had people sitting everywhere. The camera guy from TV4 filmed the entire worship and prayer time. Several of the kids and the adults prayed that God would touch their hearts and that they would be saved that night. I thought at first that we would probably make them feel uncomfortable, but it didn’t seem to faze them. *Not a good sign*, I thought; *they probably think that we are some bizarre cult*.

After the worship and prayer time, I taught on the connection between Passover and Easter and explained God’s plan of salvation in the simplest terms I could. We wrapped things up and then broke out the refreshments. While everyone else mingled, Sue sat down with us across our dining room table, and the camera guy got busy wiring us. It was my first time being interviewed by the media, and I noticed that as soon as we were wired, the small talk transitioned into questions. At first it was pretty much softball

stuff, but then she posed a question about the supernatural miracles in the Bible. “You don’t really believe those stories, do you?”

I responded as honestly as I could. “We believe the whole Bible is the Word of God,” I responded. “We don’t think you can just pick and choose the parts you want to believe.”

She lobbed a few more softball questions, and then she listed all the terrible things that had been done by the fallen Christian leaders, including adultery and misuse of donations. “Are you still going to follow them?” she asked.

Leading up to that moment, we had asked hundreds of people to pray for us, that God would give us just the right words and that He would be glorified. We knew that even as this question was being asked, our friends were praying for us in the next room.

Iris spoke, and her response was so on target, so perfectly clear, that we just knew it was evidence of all the prayers being offered up for us.

“We don’t put our faith in men,” she explained. “Our faith is in Jesus. If you place your faith in a man, you will always be disappointed, but if you place your faith in Jesus, you will never be disappointed.”

Amazingly, the reporter used Iris’s response as the final statement on one of the segments entitled, “Gospel of the Profits.” The spin on the time she spent with us was incredibly positive, even complimentary. We were so thankful for God’s grace, and we prayed that amidst all the bad press, God would use our witness to reach people in the area.

There was another event that night that we will never forget as long as we live

After all our friends had left, the cameraman began to pack up his things, and Sue thanked us for opening up our home. We both told her what a blessing it had been to have her and that she was always welcome. The presence of God was so real to us at that moment. Both Iris and I sensed that we could not let her out the door without asking her the most important question in all of eternity.

“How about you, Sue? Would you like to pray and make a commitment to Jesus, to trust in Him alone for your salvation?”

After a long pause, Sue responded hesitantly. “No, I’m a Catholic.”

“The invitation is open to everyone,” we responded, “even Catholics.”

Sue smiled sadly, and turned to walk away. “I don’t think I’m ready for that.”

Both Iris and I continued to pray for Sue, but six months later we received some horrible news. Sue had died while shooting a story in China. She had come down with an infection and had died in her hotel room.

It has always been a terrible irony that the “religious” people on earth are usually the most resistant to placing their faith in Jesus. During His ministry on earth, it was the Jewish Pharisees and Sadducees, the most religious leaders in Jerusalem, who by in large rejected Jesus as the Messiah. The people that chose to follow Him, to openly worship Him, to go into the world to openly preach the Gospel, were not the “religious establishment.”

Instead, the establishment decided to rely on “tradition.”

We see the same thing today. So many people we talk to are trusting in a set of traditions to somehow receive the approval of God. But the requirement is the same today as it was 2,000 years ago, when Jesus first spoke to the people in Israel. “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

He didn’t say, “Get sprinkled as a baby, get confirmed, go to church, take communion,” or any other set of rules and traditions. Instead, He talked about undergoing a spiritual change that comes from repentance and faith in Him alone (Luke 13:3, John 14:6).

If you sense that God is tugging on your heart, and you don’t know that you know that you KNOW you are going to heaven when you die, then please, skip ahead to the last chapter.

Sue didn’t know how many days on earth she had; none of us do. That’s why God says, “Today is the day of salvation.”

Today is the only day we all have left for sure.

Don’t wait another minute.

A Strong Impression

My career was beginning to really take off in a way I would have never have dreamed possible. I had climbed up the ranks in my company's sales force and was actually starting to make some pretty good money. My company began interviewing me for a regional manager's position, and I was excited about the opportunity to advance. I had never been jealous of Iris's success, but I was anxious to prove that I could rise up through the ranks like she had.

Unfortunately for Iris, things weren't as positive in her career. At first, her miraculous experience had been positive for everyone at the station because when her depression lifted, Iris got back to work. In fact, she was better than ever since God had toned down some of the rough edges. She no longer screamed at her sales people all the time, and a more kind and gentle Iris began to emerge. But as much as the salespeople liked the new Iris, she began to be a real pain for her superiors.

In her enthusiasm to share what God had done in her life, Iris was unashamedly outspoken about her experience. Whether she was visiting an ad agency or doing a review with a salesperson, somehow the conversation always got around to Jesus. Many people warmly welcomed the "new Iris," and there were numerous instances where she made a terrific difference in the lives of those around her. Several of her sales people prayed with us to be born again, and one of them decided against aborting her baby after Iris and I shared from the Bible God's view of sacrificing a child for the sake of convenience.

But not everyone was so happy, and for understandable reasons. The owners of the station had seen their fireball Iris fall apart for a year and then turn into a "religious

fanatic.” In a world where your station’s revenue came from a spectrum of clients from record companies to bars and nightclubs, having an outspoken Christian as a sales manager wasn’t exactly the hot ticket. It wasn’t too long before the inevitable conversation took place. The phone call came one day as Iris sat in her office, and the law was laid down.

“Look Iris, Jesus doesn’t work in rock ‘n’ roll radio.” Her boss explained. “You’ve got to stop going around talking about this stuff.”

In all fairness to the owners, they were partly right. New Christians have a tendency to be “in your face” with their new faith, and that can definitely turn some people off. Furthermore, Iris was on the station’s time, and Christians shouldn’t spend their working hours on something other than their job, even if it is talking about the Lord.

There was also *some* truth in the statement that “Jesus doesn’t work in rock ‘n’ roll radio.” Please don’t jump up and down until you understand the full context of this assertion.

One of the dramatic things that occur after you have a personal encounter with the Jesus of the Bible is that He begins to transform you as a person. The things you liked before aren’t the same because the Holy Spirit of God is now living inside of you. If you had asked Iris if it was all right to go out drinking or watch a movie filled with expletives and nudity BEFORE she was saved, she would have said, “Of course.” But once God had radically touched her life, her *heart* changed. It wasn’t that she had to try and obey God; now she wanted to do the right thing, that is to live the way Jesus commands us to in the Bible.

Consequently, Iris no longer wanted to come up with promotions designed to bring teenage boys out to wet t-shirt contests or advertise concerts for bands that wore satanic symbols, or do anything else that would grieve God and draw other people away from Jesus.

But in another way, Jesus DOES work in rock ‘n’ roll radio.

Jesus didn’t come to earth to save perfect people, or “I’m better than you are” white on the outside, but dirty on the inside hypocrites.

He said Himself that He came to rescue sinners, and guess where the sinners are. In rock ‘n’ roll radio, in bars, in casinos; they are everywhere. And that is exactly why

Jesus amazingly reaches inside such a place and changes someone's heart. *And when He does, all of a sudden, He has someone on the inside that tells the others there about Him.*

This is the same thing He did during his thirty-year ministry on earth. One day He met a Jewish man named Matthew who worked for the Romans as a tax collector.

"Follow me," He told him, and Matthew got up and followed Him.

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with Him and his disciples.

When the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Matthew 9:11-13).

This is an area of stark contrast between the rules of a religion and the transformation of someone who has a *relationship* with Jesus. There are many religions that have rules that tell their followers what they should and shouldn't do. Even the Ten Commandments can't change people's hearts. What they do show us is that we are all utterly incapable of following them. Unfortunately, many people get caught up in religion's attempt to please God by following these rules as best they can.

But the Bible is clear in James 2:10 that "whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all." In other words, none of us can please God by doing the best we can and trying to obey the Ten Commandments.

After she hung up the phone with her boss, she closed the door and prayed a simple prayer. "Lord Jesus, I've told everybody I know about you, and now it is time for me to get another job. I don't know what to do – will you please show me? In Jesus' name, Amen."

Sometimes it takes years of prayer to see a breakthrough, even though the Lord is at work all the time orchestrating events and changing the hearts of people. Iris wasn't sure how long it would take, but she had faith that the Lord was definitely in control.

About three hours later her secretary buzzed in to let her know that Rick Miller was in, waiting to see her. Iris didn't remember setting any appointment with him, but since he owned his own ad agency and regularly bought radio time, she decided to see him.

After they exchanged the usual pleasantries, Iris asked him if he had come by because of the Las Vegas promotion the station was running. Before she had been saved, she had gone out to Vegas several times and had spent a lot of money at the craps tables. Now she didn't want to gamble anymore since everything we owned belonged to the Lord, but until she found another job, she would still have to provide the trip to those who qualified for it.

"No," Rick answered, "I'm not interested in a trip to Vegas, I'm a Christian, and I don't gamble."

"I'm now a Christian too!" Iris exclaimed. "Then, why did you come to see me?"

"You know, I'm not sure," Rick explained. "It was the weirdest thing. I was driving down Johnson Drive, and it was like my car just turned to come in to the station."

"Do you want to give me a job? I need to find a new one."

"I don't know," Rick responded. "But I know the Lord brought me to see you for a reason. I'll pray about it."

That night we prayed about the job. With the limitation that Iris now had in her current position, it seemed like the logical thing to do. Still, it was a big move for Iris. She had been working in radio for a long time. Now she would have to learn about buying television and all the complexities that went with the advertising agency business. She would also have to take a pay cut, and the benefits wouldn't be quite so good.

There were many unknowns, and it meant entering uncharted waters for Iris. Rick's agency was on the smaller side, and Iris wasn't sure that his business could support her. But with every passing moment, I had more peace about it. Iris wondered out loud if this was what the Lord wanted her to do.

"How can we know for sure?" she asked.

I explained that the Lord doesn't send a telegram every time, but in every case He leads us to pray, and He gives us signs when we need them. As long as they line up with Scripture, we can believe that they came from the Lord.

“You prayed, Iris, and the Lord literally brought Rick to your office. Don’t you think that we can trust Him?”

Two weeks later, Iris was working at Rick’s agency, N&N Advertising, Marketing and Public Relations.

You’ve probably figured out by now that my wife is one awfully sharp businessperson. Predictably, she took to the agency business quickly. Soon she had helped Rick bring more accounts in, and he was very pleased with her performance. It was also incredibly liberating for her to be able to express her relationship with Jesus openly. Iris and I had become more and more aware of the number of people around us that didn’t know the Lord. He had done so much for us, and we looked for ways that we could share with people, both Jewish and gentile, about the Messiah.

This burden to tell others about Jeshua (the Jewish way to say Jesus) continued to grow with our love for the Lord. We enrolled in an evangelism course at Full Faith. The concept behind the course was to learn to discern the Lord’s direction so that He could use us effectively to reach people at just the right time. We would constantly look for opportunities, but sometimes God would startle us with his clear direction.

One day as I was praying, I got a strong impression that I was to go out and play golf with my old friend Bobby. I had hardly seen him since he’d helped me tear down my back porch, but I knew he was still doing drugs. He had never expressed any interest in talking about Jesus, but suddenly I just *knew* that I had to get a chance to share with him.

I called him, and to my surprise he accepted my offer. The next week I met him at a golf course north of Kansas City, and we headed out to the first tee. I wasn’t sure what I was going to say, but I had an overwhelming desire to tell him that the Lord could do for him what He’d done for me.

Bobby teed off, and then it was my turn. I hadn’t played golf for a while, and I figured I’d be pretty rusty, but I wasn’t prepared for what was about to happen. As I hit the ball, I felt something move in my back, and with it came excruciating pain. My first instinct was to yell out, but in the microseconds that followed, I sensed the presence of

God, and the pain subsided. I knew He would make a way for me to play those eighteen holes, pain and all.

That afternoon I didn't make many good golf shots, but every time I got into that golf cart with Bobby, I got the chance to talk about Jesus. Miraculously, he didn't push me away. Oh, he kept telling me that it was fine for me and not for him, but then he'd ask me another question, and then another, and then another.

My back had become really stiff and almost numb, but somehow I kept going. Bobby noticed that I was in some pain, and he offered me some marijuana to take the edge off. I politely refused, doing my best not to come off as "holier than thou." My heart was breaking for him. I had been there; I knew his pain, and I knew that the answer was just one prayer away, but the Lord will force no one to make that decision. No parent, or grandparent, priest or pastor can do it for you; it has to come from you. And at the end of the day, Bobby said, "It's not for me."

He dropped me off at my house around dinnertime, and I waited until he was down the block when I dropped to my knees in my front yard. Unable to stand up without excruciating pain, I had to literally crawl to the front door.

But as much as my back hurt, I felt completely at peace about Bobby.

I was so thankful that the Lord had given me the chance to share with him about the Messiah and how he could know Him as well. I wasn't sure how bad my back was, but no matter what the outcome, I knew that I'd do it all again if it meant that someone might hear about God's love.

Iris helped me to bed, and later that night she took me to a chiropractor that a friend referred us to. My older brother Brouck was a Doctor of Chiropractic with a thriving practice in Wisconsin. I'd always been skeptical about the validity of the science, but I decided that it might be a good time to give it a try since the thought of surgery wasn't a very pleasant one.

Iris drove me out to Dr. Miller's office in Olathe, a suburb of Overland Park, and for the next hour he X-rayed me and adjusted me. I had barely been able to crawl into his office, but that night I walked out. Dr. Miller also told me that due to this injury, one of my discs would probably bother me for the rest of my life and that I'd have to be careful.

I decided that every time my back hurt, it would be a reminder to pray for Bobby and all of the others that didn't yet know Him, love Him, and trust Him.

Several months later, we received some shocking news that put our golf game into perspective. Bobby had been the victim of a drive-by shooting at a crack house and had died on the way to the hospital. Suddenly, the incredible burden I'd felt to tell him about Jesus all made complete sense. The Lord, in His awesome love and mercy had made it possible for Bobby to hear the Truth before he died.

I won't know until I'm in heaven what Bobby decided in the last few moments of his life, but I do know this: if you are reading this book, you still have time to make the most important decision of all time.

An All-Nighter

Sometimes God moves when you least expect it. He had been so good to Iris and me that if He'd never done another thing, I would have still needed eternity to thank Him for his incredible generosity and mercy. I thought I had begun to have some understanding of his loving kindness, but I wasn't prepared for what was to come next.

Iris and I came to church on a Sunday morning in the spring, and the sanctuary was nearly full. The recent Easter production had been a great success, and there were many more new visitors now attending the church. As usual, Pastor Ernie got up after worship to dismiss the children so that they could go to Sunday school. On this particular day, he said the same thing he usually did, something like, "The kids can now go to their classes."

And as usual, all the kids began to funnel into the aisles and make their way out to the Sunday school wing. I hadn't ever paid much attention to this part of the service since we weren't parents, and it really didn't involve us. I was looking down at my Bible, when suddenly Iris said something so bizarre that at first I was sure I was hallucinating.

"Aren't they adorable?" she said pointing at the little kids running down the aisle. "We could have one, you know"

"You ... you want to have a baby?" I asked cautiously, resisting the urge to jump up and down. This was coming from a woman who had never expressed the least desire to have kids.

"Yeah," Iris responded softly, her eyes still following the children. "I'm ready to be a momma."

Iris was pregnant within several months, but she miscarried about two weeks into the pregnancy. We were both disappointed, but the doctor explained that around 40 percent of all first-time pregnancies are lost prematurely. The thing that concerned us the most was that our wild lifestyle might have permanently hurt our chance at having healthy kids. But we had seen so many incredible things happen that we continued to pray, asking the Lord to bless Iris's womb.

During this "trying" time, (sorry I couldn't resist) another answer to prayer came that would turn out to be a mixed blessing. I had been praying for several years that I would be promoted to Regional Manager, and in mid-summer of '87, it finally happened. But instead of being offered a manager's job in my Midwest region, I was promoted in the Western Region. My company gave us the option of moving to one of the main Western Cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, Phoenix, or San Diego. None of these places particularly excited us, but we decided to take a look at each one over a series of long weekends.

I began flying out every Sunday night or early Monday morning and not returning until Thursday or Friday night. In my old position, I would be away overnight maybe one night a week, so this was a real shock to us. We were both disappointed since we'd always thought that being a "manager" would be a great career move and allow me to become the primary breadwinner. But ironically, I wasn't going to make as much money as I did in sales, and I'd hardly ever be home. And being home was now going to be more important than ever.

We got the news in the late fall that Iris was pregnant again, and we were more excited than ever. The reality of having a little one on the way made my extended time away from home more uncomfortable every day. So after praying about it, I decided to look for a new job. I got an offer almost immediately from a company that specialized in cardiac pressure monitoring. Their products were sold in various departments of the hospital including intensive care and the catheterization lab. The job wouldn't be in management, and I'd have to take a cut in pay, but there was good upside potential. Most importantly, I had complete confidence that it was the job the Lord wanted me to take.

Iris was so relieved, and we were both ecstatic that we could return to a “normal” life. We made it past the first critical twelve-week period, and Iris was really doing great.

Our friends were amazing. They all encouraged Iris and helped her deal with all her anxieties about the baby’s development and delivery. Almost every week at our home group, they would pray for “Baby Sleight.” We had debated about whether or not to find out whether we were going to have a boy or a girl, but we decided against it.

Iris kept saying that it would be fun to have a little girl, but that she also wanted to have a boy, so what did it matter? I didn’t care one way or the other; I was overjoyed that we were going to have children, period. I was still in shock that she had changed her mind about kids. I kept asking the Lord to get her through the delivery safely and to protect our child.

In the months that followed, we prepared the nest. Being the natural Jewish Mom that she was, Iris thought of every conceivable danger in the house. She was way ahead of her time when it came to this baby-proofing trend. She even convinced my brother Chris to come up with a way to develop something that would keep Mallory or Ben (the names we’d come up with) from hurting herself or himself on the fireplace. Chris was the one in our family who was ingenious when it came to building things. Iris walked him around the house and pointed out all the dangerous areas, and Chris made notes. Over the next several months he tackled each area, including the fireplace; he laboriously covered the stone with foam and soft material. So by the time August rolled around, our house looked like something designed by the Underwriters Laboratories and the Insurance Institute of America.

We had completed the Lamaze training, and I’m sure that the staff would never forget their encounter with Iris Sleight. We had scarcely been in the class for ten minutes when the Instructor foolishly asked, “Does anyone have any questions?” Iris raised her hand, and I thought to myself, *Uh oh, this will be good.*

“When will we be discussing drugs?”

The whole place blew up, and as usual Iris had successfully broken the ice in a room packed with rookie moms filled with trepidation. The instructor gained her composure and explained that we would be covering that information in the latter part of the course. “Hopefully you won’t need any drugs.”

Iris just smiled politely, and out of the corner of her mouth she whispered, “Yeah, right, who is she kidding?”

We both laughed, since the chances of Iris going through a natural childbirth without any painkillers was somewhere on the order of a billion to one.

The next few months flew by, and we were really excited. My new position was going well, and my sales were skyrocketing. And though Iris was moving a little slower, she was prospering in her position at N&N Advertising. Rick had offered to let her work from home, and he was even amenable to her going out on her own if she wanted after our baby arrived.

Iris was amazed at how great she felt, even with the added weight and the difficulty in sleeping. We both sensed that we were on the verge of an amazing experience. We had both been so immature for so long that it was hard for us to imagine that we would soon be parents.

I planned on taking the week off since I figured Iris would be exhausted after the delivery. Even under normal circumstances, she had continually struggled with being overweight and out of shape, so after the baby arrived, I knew that she would need a lot of help around the house. In addition, I was concerned over the fact that she’d been a “career girl” for as long as I had known her. How would she take to being a stay-at-home mom now with diapers and baby food instead of suits and conference calls? Iris claimed she was looking forward to the change, but I wasn’t so sure.

August 29 arrived, and it was a typical, hot, steaming summer day in Kansas City. We were within days of Iris’s due date, and she spent most of the morning on the couch. By mid afternoon, I came home to check in on her, and I was surprised to find her up and around. In fact, she was cleaning the house as if her life depended on it.

“I feel great!” she kept saying as pushed the vacuum cleaner around the house. She even began attacking some closets that I don’t think we had opened since moving in.

I wasn’t too concerned until she began to mop the kitchen floor after dinner. That’s when I told her, “Enough – don’t over do it. You’ve got to make sure you are rested up for the big day.” At first she blew off my “suggestion” and assured me she was

almost done. But a few minutes later I came back in the room, and she was collapsed on the sofa.

“I’ve had it – I am totally exhausted.”

“Well let’s get you into bed then, honey,” I said, attempting to pull her up off the sofa. I figured she’d fight me since Iris is such a night owl. I’ve always been the morning person, but she has stayed up late since she was a nine-year-old furtively watching Johnny Carson on a black & white TV in her room.

“I think I may need something for an upset stomach,” she replied, not moving at all, “my stomach kind of hurts.”

It took a few seconds for me to realize what was happening.

“Do you think it could be labor?” I asked, hoping that it wasn’t since my wife had just worked the equivalent of two twelve-hour shifts.

“Oh I don’t think so,” she replied, “it feels more like gas pains.” I resisted the temptation to burst out laughing. Since Iris had never been in labor before, how COULD she know what the pain felt like? A couple of minutes later she said she felt better, and now she just wanted to get her shoes off. But the “gas pains” hit again. In fact, the darn things began to occur about every nine minutes almost to the second.

I called the doctor, and he said it would probably be a good idea to come the hospital. Most OBs would have said to wait until the labor pains got closer, but he knew what a nervous Nellie Iris was and decided it was best to play it safe. We grabbed our “ready bags” and began the twenty-minute drive to St. Luke’s on the Plaza. On the way down we kept laughing about the “gas pains” until they’d start, and then poor Iris would grab my hand and squeeze it for all it was worth.

By the time we got to the admitting desk it was around 11:00 P.M. We got Iris checked in, and they brought us to a small room that looked more like an old room from the ‘60s that was waiting to be renovated. I protested. Where was the deluxe, well-appointed with every convenience, state-of-the-art maternity room they advertised on television and billboards?

“Oh that’s for women who are further along in their labor,” the nurse replied. I’m sure we’ve suffered greater insults in our day, but boy, what a low blow! I tried to make

Iris as comfortable as possible in our “closet” and then lay down on the adjoining bed. Man was I tired, and I hadn’t even gone through any labor.

I was asleep for about one minute when Iris woke me up to give me a full report on how bad she felt. This went on for a couple of hours – a few minutes of sleep punctuated by poor Iris’s moans. Around 4:00 A.M., we both decided it was time for action.

I went out to the nurses’ station and asked the nurse for something to help with the pain. At first she resisted, but I eventually wore her down. She came in a few minutes later and gave Iris a light sedative.

Within a few minutes the sedative began to take effect, but it actually made matters worse. I had rarely seen Iris act goofy in all of our years doing illegal drugs. Of course, I hadn’t been in the best condition to observe much of anything at the time, but now Iris began laughing and giggling and was blabbing a mile a minute. So now I couldn’t even get the few precious minutes of sleep between contractions! Ironically when the contractions would start again, Iris was more emotive than ever. Around 5:00 A.M., she announced that she just *had* to go to the bathroom, but, she insisted, there was no way she would be able to make it off the bed.

“I’ve fallen and I can’t get up!” She began repeating the lines to the old commercial on TV, laughing hysterically at her own humor. Dutifully I went out to get a bedpan from one of the nurses and asked her to help me. When we came back in, Iris was still laughing. The nurse looked at me and just grinned. We did our best to get the pan into position, but Iris began yelling, “This isn’t going to work, the bedpan is a deadpan.” Then of course she laughed harder, which made things all that more difficult. I was beginning to think that I had been sucked up into a Steve Martin movie.

Eventually, the sedative began to wear off, and Iris’s contractions got stronger, but she was hardly dilated at all. After a few more hours, my poor wife was getting very discouraged and upset because of the lack of progress. The doctor came in again, and we pled with him to go ahead and give Iris an epidural. He finally agreed, and within an hour Iris was resting much more comfortably.

I took breaks occasionally while some of our friends sat with Iris. I’d step outside to get some fresh air, and I’d pray and ask the Lord to give Iris strength and a safe

delivery. I was punchy from having no sleep, but I wasn't discouraged or worried. I had complete peace, and I knew that God was in control.

Five o'clock P.M. rolled around and still no progress. I called the doctor, and he said that he thought we would have to go ahead and do a C-section. I resisted the temptation to say something like, "What a brilliant idea!"

But just about the time I thought things were looking better, an emergency occurred down the hall, and another woman ended up in the delivery room ahead of us. Iris was really upset by now, and I did my best to encourage her. We prayed and asked the Lord to sustain her and to get things moving!

Finally, around 7:00 P.M., they began to prep Iris. I got scrubs on and went into the O.R. with the doctor. I had observed probably a hundred surgeries in my job, but this time it was completely different. This was my wife and child, and I knew from that day on, I would have a brand new appreciation for what families go through during a surgery. I sat on a stool right next to Iris holding her hand, doing my best to reassure her. Having never seen a Caesarian section before, I wasn't sure how long it would take to deliver our baby, but I kept praying it would go quickly and easily.

Only a few minutes had gone by when the nurse leaned over and said, "We can see her"

Iris seized upon the word "her," and suddenly her countenance changed. One second she had been groggy and semiconscious, the next perfectly lucid. The nurse quickly caught herself.

"I'm sorry; we can't tell yet whether it's a boy or a girl ... just one minute" Suddenly, I realized how much Iris was yearning for a little girl. I prayed in my mind that it would be a girl, but that no matter what, Iris would be joyful whether it was a boy or a girl.

In the seconds that followed, I was caught away, completely in awe of how far the Lord had brought Iris. She had been completely lost and alone, a little girl in an adult's body, cast adrift without her mommy. But when all had seemed hopeless, Jesus had transformed her broken heart. Now it all made so much sense! Through His unfathomable love and miraculous intervention, Iris would now become a mother, and all the beautiful qualities of Bea Finkelstein would be born all over again!

Suddenly the quiet of the O.R. was broken by the sound of the nurse who seemed almost as excited as we were.

“It is a girl!” she exclaimed.

Iris began to cry.

“I was so hoping it would be a little girl,” Iris whispered to me.

The nurse whisked the Lord’s precious gift over to a table, suctioned her throat, and wiped her off gently but quickly. I stood up and the nurse placed her in my arms. She was so beautiful, so perfect. I was speechless. Cautiously, I lowered her down next to Iris, and she reached over with her hand and touched her face. We both cried and cried, and in between sobs, we thanked the Lord for our daughter, Mallory Brooke Sleight.

Over the next several hours, our Pastor and about a dozen friends came into the recovery room to visit. On her third wind now, Iris called everyone she knew in the world, and we all celebrated Mallory’s birth. With Iris in good hands, I excused myself and went outside to get some fresh air. I stepped out the door, and I was startled by what I saw. The same trees lined the street, the hospital sign was still there, and my car was still parked out in the lot. But now that I was father; the world looked completely different. It was as if I had stepped into a brand new universe.

My life would never be the same.

High Tea

One of my father's favorite expressions had always been, "You're in for a rude awakening"

In our bumpy transition to parenthood, dad's warning had finally come true. After Iris had been transferred to a regular room, our new nurse delivered Mallory around 11:00 P.M. – about five minutes after I'd fallen asleep on the floor. During the next twenty-four hours, we went through a crash course on breastfeeding, diapers, and burping 101. Ironically, the Lamaze class had turned out to be totally irrelevant for our experience. We would have been much better off spending time cleaning up messy diapers and learning the "football" hold.

The nurses on our floor were fanatical about taking Iris's temperature, even if she had just fallen asleep after feeding Mallory. I kept thinking to myself that there had to be a better way of doing things, since Iris was now totally exhausted. I did my best to hold Mallory as much as possible until her feeding time, and during this time, the nurses would instruct me on the finer points of fatherhood. I became quite adept at positioning Mallory for breastfeeding so that Iris would hardly have to move. This was especially helpful since she was so sore from the C-section that she didn't want to move!

After a couple days of relative security in the hospital, we were sent home to fend for ourselves. It was about a hundred degrees outside when we got home, and Iris fell into bed almost immediately. The next several days were hard for us, but we seemed to be surviving them with the help of our church friends who brought over much-appreciated meals. But then suddenly things began to deteriorate.

Mallory began to cry almost non-stop, and she couldn't sleep for more than an hour or two. Iris had never been very flexible, and now what little patience she had was quickly wearing out. We took Mallory in for her first pediatric visit, and the doctor explained that she had a bad case of colic. I'd heard the word before, but I had no idea what it could mean. The doctor prescribed some medicine, but she told us that it was one of those mystery maladies that science hadn't solved as of yet.

"Eventually it will go away," he said trying to encourage us. "Just hold on."

The only thing that seemed to help was if I held Mallory on my shoulder and walked her around, jiggling her up and down gently. I wasn't sure what I was doing, but it did seem to make a difference. Iris said I looked like I was doing some kind of bunny hop. Whatever it was, it seemed to work better than just about anything else. Of course I was getting tired too, but I had learned to subsist on little sleep in college and in the Army, so I was much better suited for the duty than Iris.

Just about the time I thought we had seen the worst, Iris was hit by a major case of postpartum depression. Now I didn't know who was crying more, Mallory or Iris. The poor thing was so exhausted that it was really hard to recover from everything that had hit her. I took Iris to the doctor and after an hour or so, he called me in. Much to my surprise, he told me not to leave Mallory alone with Iris. I laughed at first, but he was really emphatic.

"I've seen women do crazy things," he cautioned. "Don't take any chances." He sent us out the door with a prescription, and I drove home with Iris and Mallory wailing in the car. I just prayed silently and asked the Lord to sustain me through this difficult phase. I'd been so busy playing dad and mom that I hadn't had much of a chance to have my morning quiet times. But that afternoon, I sensed the Lord's presence, and I knew that we'd make it through alright.

That night, Mallory had slept for about an hour when she began to cry hard again. I got out of bed, changed her diaper, and then picked her up so I could walk her around to comfort her. She seemed to be really uncomfortable, and I figured that it was going to be a long night. I walked over to the television and turned it on. Below the TV was a tape of

a recent showing of the mini-series; “Jesus of Nazareth.” I had taped the show, but had never had a chance to watch it.

I started the tape and continued to walk around the room jiggling Mal up and down. As the movie played, I began to whisper prayers and praises to the Lord for my little girl. Watching the miracles that Jesus did reminded me all over again of what He had done for me. I told Jesus how much I loved Him, and I prayed for Mallory, that God would heal her. But most of all, I prayed that she would be saved at a young age, and that she would serve the Lord all the days of her life.

Over the next several nights, Mallory and I watched the whole series.

I know, you’re laughing at the thought of a newborn watching television – obviously she wasn’t “watching” the movie. But I was holding her, loving her, and praying for her, and she was hearing the Word of God coming from that television. And the room we were in had been where our Home Group had met and praised God every week for the last three years. This was Holy ground. All the while, even in the most difficult hours, I sensed the Lord’s powerful, loving presence. He reassured me that this trial would indeed pass.

And it did. Oh, it was no cakewalk; even after the worst was over, Mallory was no marathon sleeper, but at least we could begin to get four or five hours at a stretch, and the postpartum depression went away as fast as it had appeared. Life actually began to take on a form of normalcy again.

Since Mallory turned out to be such a “high need” baby, it was a good thing that we had decided for Iris to not return to the agency. My salary and commission was just enough for us to make it by if we were careful, and so we prayed that I would make more money so we wouldn’t have to live month to month.

As the months passed, we began to see the fruit of our labor. Mallory was beginning to crawl and explore, grin and giggle, and make colossal messes. And she was definitely cut from the same cloth as her mom; she had a strong will, and I just knew that she was going to be one special kid.

One day I came home from work, and I found Iris standing in the kitchen, holding Mallory and talking a mile a minute on the phone. Our church had called about an Easter production and wanted Iris’s help to get the word out.

After she got off the phone, we sat down to eat, and Iris told me about the church's request. "If it's alright with you," she said, "I'd like to start making a few buys from home. There's no reason I shouldn't use my talent to make a few extra bucks for us."

I knew she was already getting a little stir crazy between diapers, bottles, and *Barney*, so I supported the idea 100 percent.

She was so excited; it didn't take long before her idea came to fruition. Within a week or so, Iris had created a fax sheet and her first television order for our church.

"Sleight Advertising" had been born.

The next two years brought a new season of firsts for all of us in the Sleight family. Mallory tried her first baby food, had her first crawl, took her first step, spoke her first words, and continued to solidify our belief that God had gifted us with the most adorable child in the universe. She still wasn't the soundest sleeper, so we had adopted some serious sound-dampening measures around the house. Phones were turned down, the dryer signal was unhooked, and pity the poor foolish person who ignored the oversized signs at the front door NOT to ring the doorbell. Slowly but surely, life was beginning to take on a somewhat normal routine.

My career in Medical Sales was more successful than ever, and for the first time, I was the primary breadwinner in the family. Like a lot of men who had married successful, professional women, this was a significant milestone in our relationship. I still hadn't quite reached the monetary level that Iris had a few years before, but I was doing really well. And it was a good thing, since I had no idea how much money you could spend on one child.

I had won several new awards, and once again my company was talking to me about becoming a manager. After our previous experience, we knew that management wasn't necessarily the answer. But I did want to continue to make more money because Iris and I had learned how wonderful it was to give it away. Sure, we enjoyed buying new things, but the most exciting thing we'd ever done was to invest in the Kingdom of God. So, I just prayed that the Lord would continue to guide me to just the right opportunities.

Iris's fledging ad agency was also taking some baby steps of its own. After a few initial spots to advertise a special event for our church, Iris convinced the owner of the local baby furniture store that she should do some television ads. She had seen during her time with Rick's agency just how powerful a well-negotiated TV spot could be. As luck would have it, we even knew about an adorable little girl who was willing to be one of the kids in the spots. So Mallory began her career on television, and even I was "persuaded" to pitch the "Stork Stop" for one of the thirty-second spots that aired in the Kansas City Market.

Iris was really enjoying her new role as mother and part-time entrepreneur. She adored Mallory and fawned over her like any good Jewish mom. And during Mallory's naps, she would make her phone calls and earn some extra dollars for clothes or furniture. She also was learning more and more about how the media world worked and was making some good contacts in both Christian and secular television.

I did my best to give Iris some breaks during the week. Sometimes I would start work really early in the morning, around five or six, and then take off a few hours in the afternoon so Mallory and I could spend some father/daughter time together. One of our favorite things we did was go to the mall to ride the merry-go-round several times. Of course afterwards, we had to stop and get a cookie and have an impromptu tea party while Mallory asked me a million things about the world. I came to really look forward to this time with her. I am so grateful that God impressed upon me that I would have just a short window of opportunity to pour myself into my daughter during those formative years. Besides, after her experience with her first pregnancy, Iris didn't seem to have any interest in another child. So if I had just one chance to be a parent, I decided that I, with the Lord's help, I was going to be the best one I could be.

We took Mallory to church every week, and we read the Bible with her during "teachable moments." We celebrated Christian and Jewish holidays, and as she grew we taught her about her Jewish heritage including her Hebrew name, "Basha." She was naturally curious about spiritual things, and we continually prayed that God would draw our daughter to turn to the Messiah just like He had with us.

We couldn't wait to see what incredible plan God had for this precious little girl.

New Beginnings

In the late spring of 1991, I got a phone call from a recruiter who had been pursuing me regularly for a couple of years. He had never had anything that interested me before, but on this particular day, he told me about an opening that made my mouth water: Advanced Cardiovascular Systems. ACS, as it was known in the industry, was one of the fastest growing companies in one of the hottest segments of the medical field. They were a premier provider of angioplasty devices, and everyone and their mothers wanted to work for them.

At first I didn't have much confidence since I didn't have any direct experience in the cath lab where their products were used, but the recruiter said that with my reputation I stood as good a chance as anyone. Iris was really excited when she heard about the six figure income and all of the benefits that were provided by the company. I tried to minimize her expectations, knowing that the best of the best would be interviewing, but she quickly reminded me of a minor mitigating factor.

"We serve a mighty God," Iris told me before my first interview. "If He wants you to have this job, then nothing will be able to stop you!" I had never heard her so fired up about my career before. But then again, I had never had an opportunity like this before, and she was all ready to go out and spend that money!

By the time I walked into the Embassy Suites in Overland Park, I was really pumped, and I knew that Iris and our friends were praying for me at that very moment. The interview seemed to go well, and I made sure to close the manager for a second interview. He smiled and said that he'd have to review all of the candidates, but that he

liked what he saw. I closed him again, and he laughing replied, “Well, you certainly aren’t afraid to ask for the order.”

The recruiter called later that week and told me that I’d made the cut.

The next interview would be down to four or five people, and then they would send someone to the home office for a final interview. Iris and I were so excited I thought we were going to burst. When the day came, I walked in, and this time the interview was more challenging. The manager threw up objection after objection to see how I’d react, but I handled them fairly well and when I was done, I asked him for the job. He hesitated and then asked me question.

“Would you be willing to move?”

I did my best not look surprised, but it was the last thing I was expecting. The job had been advertised for the Kansas City market so we hadn’t even talked about the possibility of moving. I prayed one of the fastest, silent James 1:5 prayers in history, and asked the Lord for his direction.

A second later I gave the man an answer to his question.

“Yes, to have the opportunity to work for ACS, we will move.”

I didn’t find out until later, but the manager was actually looking for two people, one for Kansas City and one for another city. He had narrowed his choice down to me and one other guy, and he’d asked us both the same question about moving. The other candidate said he didn’t want to leave Kansas City. As it turned out, he got Kansas City, and we would be sent to Des Moines, Iowa.

It was a bittersweet experience to leave our friends and home in Kansas City. We had seen so much happen and experienced a lifetime of blessings in our years at Full Faith, but Iris and I had prayed, and we were in agreement. A door of opportunity had been opened, and we believed the Lord was leading us into a “new land.”

Our friends in our Home Group gave us a wonderful going away party and near the end, Iris came out with a suggestion that seemed to resonate with everyone.

“If we don’t get to see you again here on earth,” she announced, “Let’s all get together in heaven. Just remember to turn right just inside the gate, and we’ll meet you there.”

I started my career with ACS in September of 1991, and we moved to Iowa during a horrendous blizzard on Halloween. Being stuck in a hotel room with Iris, Mallory, and the three whining cats during a snow emergency was bad enough, but then our furniture ended up in Omaha, Nebraska, by mistake. And then to make matters worse, I had to go for two weeks of training in California while Iris unpacked our stuff inside of a dingy rental house without any help.

It was an inauspicious beginning, but we both believed that if we could make it through the first couple of months, everything after that would be smooth sailing.

The training was rigorous, and I worked hard at learning the anatomy, the products, and all of the complexities involved in a coronary angioplasty. We were trained by seasoned clinical representatives who had worked in cath labs and assisted in thousands of angioplasties. Each of us was constantly tested, and we were told that it was critical that we learn to “talk the talk” and reach a level of technical expertise where we could be an asset to the cardiologist in the cath lab.

When my training was over, I was really glad to get back to Iris and Mal, but the challenge was really only beginning. The company had created an expansion strategy that called for adding a third person to the usual team that was made up of a Clinical Representative and a Salesman. By adding a new person in each territory, a new “triad” was created allowing for more coverage of each territory. I’m sure that the company who was consulting ACS thought that it really looked like a great idea on paper, but in reality, and especially in Des Moines, Iowa, things didn’t go so smoothly. Hadn’t they ever heard that two’s a couple, but three’s a crowd?

It was immediately obvious to me that I had walked into a “challenging” environment. The Clinical Representative in the territory had wanted my position so he was not happy with me from the get-go. The other partner was his close personal friend, and he was even less happy with me. Both of them could hardly disguise their disgust with my addition to the “triad,” and almost immediately they were doing everything they could to discourage me from staying on board. The day I met them, they gave me an application to a fast food restaurant, “just in case this doesn’t work out.”

Things would have seemed really dismal had it not been for our new church home in Des Moines. We began attending First Assembly of God, and immediately we made some great new friends. The senior pastor at the church, John Palmer, had heard about our “unique” background and invited us to share our story at a Sunday morning service. We got to see a number of people make commitments to Jesus that morning, and we could see that Pastor Palmer had a passion for evangelism.

But once the joy of Sunday was over, I would reenter the not-so-pleasant world of my new career. I had never been in a job where I’d met this kind of hostile environment. If you’ve ever been in a situation where you felt you were being set up for failure, then you know what I mean. What made it worse was that our territory wasn’t meeting its sales goals. This wasn’t surprising given that the previous year there had been very little competitive pressure, but now there was a new product out that was far superior to ours. And to their credit, most cardiologists will always default to the best product for the patient, no matter what kind of contract you have with them.

I did my best to work with my team, but no matter what I did or said, it was usually met with rolling eyes or open disgust from my “partners.” I had the strongest gut feeling that they were doing everything they could to undermine my job with my superiors. To make matters worse, we had a brand new manager who was new to the business, so he really couldn’t judge accurately how well I was coming along in the job, but I could tell from his questions that he was getting an earful about me.

Iris and I had prayed a lot about the situation, but I hadn’t told her how upset I really was about the whole thing. I was getting close to just giving up; even six figures didn’t mean anything if I had to live life like this. It just wasn’t worth it. I’d rather dig ditches than go to work every day hating my job; however, I’d learned a valuable lesson from the Lord that kept me from doing anything without first seeking his will. “In the multitude of counselors there is safety,” as it says in the book of Proverbs. I made an appointment with Pastor Palmer, and Iris and I met with them one Wednesday night after services.

I gave Pastor Palmer a brief overview of the situation, casting it in a more serious light than I ever had before with Iris. Inside I was ready to give up, and now I was hoping that he would give me the “permission” to follow through with my plan.

During our time with Pastor Palmer I also threw in a question that every young Christian usually confronts. Since the most exciting and satisfying things I'd ever experienced always had to do with the Lord, should I consider going into full-time ministry and forget about a career in the secular world?

Pastor Palmer listened carefully and when I was all done, he asked me if I believed that God had opened the door for this job. I answered that yes, we had prayed and against big odds I'd gotten the job.

“Andrew, I believe that you will be vindicated in this job. You are running into a lot of resistance, but if you will press on, I am sure that things will turn around. As far as evangelism, you and Iris have a gift, and I believe the Lord wants you both to be taking his love in to the world. Church ministry is important, but our job is to empower believers to reach where we can't, and that means being engaged in the marketplace.”

Pastor Palmer prayed with us about the situation, but the main focus of his prayer was for the Lord to use Iris and me to reach the “lost,” the Bible's description for those people who have never repented and met the Lord personally.

I was encouraged, but I was still dreading going to work the next day.

A week or so later, I was driving on Interstate 80 on my way to a cath lab in Sioux City, Iowa. The last few days had been worse than ever, and I was tempted to “get sick” for the day just to have a break. I drove on though, knowing that being home wouldn't help matters at all. A few more miles down the road, I pulled over at a rest stop and prayed, asking the Lord for some kind of visible breakthrough, something that would help me see that there would be a change for the better. After praying, I had a new peace, and finished my drive to Sioux City.

I'd been in this lab once or twice before, but I'd never met the key cardiologist. My partners always talked about him as being especially hard to work with, and we didn't have much business in the lab, so I walked in not expecting too much from the call. I was hardly inside the door when I met Dr. Steve Zumbrun in the hall. I introduced myself, and after a minute of conversation at the scrub sink, I asked him if he minded me observing his next case.

“Sure,” he responded. “Do you have anything new you’d like me to try?”

I was so shocked I had to force myself to answer the question. It wasn’t too often you heard a doctor ask to try something new. In fact, it was almost unheard of. But that wasn’t the best thing that happened that day.

During pauses in the procedure that followed, Dr. Zumbrun told me about his family, including a daughter of his that went to a Christian college. It turned out that his whole family was Christian, and we shared our testimonies with each other about how the Lord had changed our lives. Without going into all the details, I told Dr. Zumbrun what a blessing and encouragement he had been to me.

I felt like a huge dam had been broken. Some people would have said that it was no big deal, but I knew better. I had asked the Lord for a sign, something that would encourage me, and He had given me an unmistakable one. Yes, there would still be challenges ahead, but for the first time I knew that I was going to make it.

Rejoicing on the way home, the Lord reminded me of a verse I’d read earlier in the week during the darkest time of my trial. At the time, it hadn’t seemed so real to me, but now it was lit up in my spirit like a neon light: “If God is for us, who can be against us?”

March 4, 1992 dawned like many other Saturdays in West Des Moines. It was still cold, but there was just beginning to be a hint of spring in the air. As usual, we planned on doing our weekend shopping, but on this particular day, Iris decided to stay home to get some cleaning work done, so just Mallory and I went to the store.

Miss Mallory was now three and a half going on six. She had a tremendous vocabulary, and you could see more of Iris in her everyday. Just like her mom, she could be strong-willed, which made for some interesting battles of will between mother and daughter. I joked quite often that it was difficult to see much of me in her, but I did see a quality beginning to emerge that I’d like to think had something to do with Dad.

Mallory was very curious about Jesus and our faith in Him. We had been very careful not to push her in any way, but we hoped she would see who Jesus was in the way we loved her and others. When I would read her Bible stories at night, she would ask

incredibly incisive questions. And we continued to ask the Lord to protect her and reveal Himself to her.

On this particular shopping trip we went to Hy-Vee so Mal could push her own little mini-cart up and down the aisles. Like any responsible toddler, she picked out the more nutritionally sound things for the family to eat: chocolate chips, ice cream, and of course, bagels. It took a little longer to do it this way, but I loved seeing the look of sheer delight as Mallory pushed the cart, just like a “big girl.”

We checked out, pushed our cart back to our car, and I packed the groceries in the trunk. I noticed that Mallory was quieter than usual, and I was wondering what was going on in her little mind.

As I pulled out on to the highway, Mallory made an announcement that I will never forget as long as I live.

“Daddy, I want to ask Jesus in my heart today!”

Words can’t describe what it felt like to hear those words. I tried to hide the tears of joy filling my eyes, and I prayed that the Lord would give me just the right words, just like He had with another little girl eight years before. But I didn’t have to worry; God had already touched this precious little heart, and all we had to do was open the door.

We got home, and I matter-of-factly told Iris that Mallory wanted to pray. She did her best to contain her emotion, but I could tell she was blown away like I was. We sat down with a Bible to make sure she understood what it meant to “ask Jesus into her heart.” We put it in kid terms and went out of our way not to pressure her whatsoever. After just a couple of minutes, I suggested that she go upstairs and think about if she was really ready because this was such an important decision. She smiled and said, “Okay, Daddy,” and ran upstairs.

About ten minutes went by, and she appeared in the kitchen.

“Well, Mallory have you decided what you want to do?” I asked as nonchalantly as possible.

“Yes, I already did.”

“You already did what?” I asked, assuming that she meant she had already “thought” about things.

“I already asked Jesus to come into my heart ... I asked Him to forgive me”

Iris and I looked at each other dumbfounded. It was pretty obvious that the Lord was drawing our little girl in, just as we prayed He would.

We sat down with her, and while Iris unobtrusively turned on the video camera, Mallory prayed the salvation prayer with us. When we were done we got out the Bible that had been given to her as a baby, and we wrote down the date of her new birth: March 4, 1992.

“Daddy,” Mallory said with a big smile, “can I have some ice cream now?”

In fact, we all had some Blue Bunny Vanilla Ice Cream, and I remember thinking that it was about the best I’d ever had.

Up to this time, our stay in the Hawkeye State hadn’t been a very pleasant one, but after this day, I looked at things a whole lot differently.

I’m convinced; miracles do happen in Iowa.

Interestingly enough, we only ended up living in Des Moines for about a year. I had submitted a memo suggesting that our territory would be better served by having one of us in its western end (Omaha, Nebraska). I was completely amazed when my manager called me up and said the company agreed with my assessment, and that they were going to pay for my transfer. Before we moved though, Iris began a new project with our church that would later explain why I believe we had really been “sent” to Iowa, and why I had run into such resistance on my job.

Pastor Palmer had assembled a terrific team of people who had caught his vision to see hundreds of thousands of lost souls in the Des Moines area touched by the love of Jesus Christ. One of the most passionate members of his staff was the Church Administrator, Dick Hardy.

Dick is an incredible visionary who is always looking for innovative ways to introduce people to Jesus. Iris approached Dick with the idea that had captured her imagination. Why not use thirty-second spots featuring Pastor Palmer on the local broadcast channels to invite people to church? She’d seen the power of television bring people to stores and events, why not invite them to what could be the most important visit of their lifetime?

The church decided to give it a try, and Iris went to work negotiating some incredible rates and times for their new outreach. The first couple of spots were produced by one of the local stations, and soon everyone was talking about “that pastor on television.” Within six months, the number of people visiting the church increased dramatically, and people were being reached all over the area. Pastor Palmer was so impressed with the results that he recommended the approach to another Assembly of God Church that also began to work with Iris.

After our move was completed to Omaha, Iris continued to work with First Assembly of God in Des Moines, but it was only the beginning. Within several years, Sleight Advertising was the ad agency for a dozen churches and businesses in the Midwest. Iris hired her first employee in 1994, and we created an office for the agency in our basement. She had developed a reputation in the marketplace as a skilled negotiator with phenomenal integrity who worked incredibly hard to help her clients.

On my side, things were going amazingly well with ACS. After the first rocky year, my business was thriving, and I had grown to thoroughly enjoy my work in the cath labs. After our move to Omaha, ACS had become part of a new medical corporation, *Guidant, Inc.* It was one of the fastest growing companies in the U.S., and I was tremendously blessed with wonderful clients in hospitals across the area. Not a day went by that I didn’t get to see phenomenal interventions by some of the finest cardiologists in the world.

Once in Omaha, I got my own territory, and eventually my old partners went in different directions. One left the company to “pursue other interests.” The other actually ended up apologizing to me, and he eventually got the sales job he’d been hoping for.

Pastor Palmer’s prophetic encouragement to Iris and me had been spot on.

And it was only the beginning.

The Crazy People Next Door

The fall of 1993 was beautiful in eastern Nebraska. The leaves were turning at just the perfect rate, and the weather was the ideal combination of warmth in the daytime, and a cool, but not too cold, crispness in the evening. Big Red Football season was in full swing, and you are hard-pressed to find any people in the nation who are more up for the season than Nebraska Cornhusker football fans.

Unfortunately, Nebraska isn't a great place for a Kansas Jayhawk to be during football season. I usually spend October dreading the usual beating that we will get from the Cornhuskers; but some big news this fall changed my usual mindset.

Among the many things that transpired in our move to Des Moines was the startling, completely unexpected announcement by my lovely wife that she wanted to have another child. I'd figured that with all the trouble she'd experienced in Mallory's delivery, she'd probably never want another child. But, as the saying goes, time heals all wounds. And so we found ourselves sitting in an OB's office in Omaha waiting for an ultrasound. Iris had tested positive for pregnancy test earlier in the month, and now we were in to take a "look-see." She had actually gotten pregnant while we were still in Des Moines, but had miscarried early on in the twelfth week. Though disappointed, we were so thankful to have Mallory, we didn't despair; we just prayed that we'd be able to have one more healthy child.

The roles are reversed now, I thought to myself as we sat in the exam room. I was the one hoping this time, though I didn't make a big deal about it to Iris. Besides, I'd had such a magnificent relationship with Mallory that another little girl would have been just fine with me.

After the expectant wait, the tech came in and did the usual prepping on Iris's tummy and started the machine. Right away she gave us the report we were most interested in.

"The heart is beating strong, and everything looks good."

We both looked at each other, and we squeezed each other's hand. We were both thankful. If nothing else would have been said, it would have been enough; we were already spilling over with joy.

The tech looked around a little bit more, and she grinned.

"Well, do you guys want to know?"

"How sure are you?" I asked, concerned that we may get an inaccurate report.

She laughed, "Oh I'm really sure. So sure, I'd bet my job on it!"

I held my breath and looked at Iris; she gave me an affirmative nod.

"Go ahead."

"You're going to have a boy."

I don't remember much after that except that I felt like I was going to burst open. While Iris got dressed, I made her next appointment, paid the bill, and sat in a daze. She finally got done, and we headed outside so we could get back to the car. We were both running a little late; Iris had a conference call with a church, and I had a procedure to get to, but we stopped to hug each other and thank the Lord for all that He'd done for us.

It was then that I just knew I had to do it. I jumped up in the air and let it rip.

"HEY WORLD," I yelled at the top of my lungs, "I'M GOING TO HAVE A SON!"

Benjamin Andrew Sleight arrived on June 24, 1994, and this time things went much more smoothly for all involved. Since it was a planned C-section, we were much more relaxed, and Iris didn't go through the same kind of pain and depression that she did with Mallory. Right from the get-go, Ben seemed to sleep better, and we were thankful that he didn't have to go through the same colicky period that Mallory had endured.

Ben's birth seemed to also mark a new stage in Sleight Advertising's growth as well. By now Iris had hired a full-time assistant, and she had acquired new businesses

and churches. Each new account she worked for brought a new host of relationships with media outlets in cities across the United States.

Since Iris was now getting busier with her new clients, we decided that it would be prudent to look for someone who could help out with the children and housework during the day. Iris would still be working in the home, but it would free her up to talk on the phone without being interrupted by a diaper or a need for a naptime. On the other hand, like most parents we were very leery of hiring just anybody to work in our home. We prayed and talked to a lot of people in hopes of finding the ideal: an honest, loving, Christian woman that would protect our children like they were her own. All in all a pretty tall order in a day where personal lack of integrity and betrayal seems to be the rule and not the exception

We prayed and asked the Lord to send just the right person. Within a couple of weeks, we heard about a woman who had worked in our church's nursery for years and was open to full-time employment. Patty came over and interviewed with us, and we were both impressed by her character and the strong recommendation she had from the church.

We prayed some more, and we were in agreement that Patty was the one. This was probably one of the most important decisions we would make in our lifetime, and if we couldn't be in agreement, we would not proceed. The Lord had impressed us over the years to never move ahead unless we both had peace.

Of course, this meant another salary at a time when the business had created other new needs as well. A computer, fax machine, insurance, and all the things that small businesses need were required investments on our part. But this is where my job became especially helpful. God had so blessed us in my job that we could afford to invest money into the additional help and infrastructure for Sleight Advertising. Iris and I both attribute this blessing to the Lord's promise concerning our tithing back in the days when things weren't so prosperous. In the Old Testament book of Malachi, He promises that He will pour out blessing on those who tithe, and that's exactly what He had done. Thanks to His generosity and faithfulness, tithing had been the best investment we'd ever made.

Patty hadn't worked for us for very long when we realized what a gift God had given us. She was a tireless servant who always seemed to know what we needed before

we even asked. And in those times when we would be tired and impatient, Patty was a rock of peace and grace. Like all other parents, I'm sure there were times when we did some really stupid things, but Patty never criticized or adopted a parental attitude with us. And she never tried to usurp our position in the household.

Iris and I were amazed at the growth of my territory and her business in the advertising world, but it was still the miraculous intervention of God in people's lives that was most precious to us. We had been living in Omaha just a short while when Mallory became good pals with two adorable little girls who lived right next door to us. Lindsay and Natalie Bingham would come over to the house almost every day, and they were soon just like part of the family. As a family, we began to pray for the Bingham, and we asked the Lord to reveal himself to them, just like He had with us.

One day, it seemed like the whole neighborhood was over at our house, and it was bedlam. Amidst all the fun, one of the girls had somehow lost one of her shoes. Everyone looked and looked, but to no avail. Mallory reported the crisis to Iris, and without any hesitation, Iris told the girls, "Let's pray and ask the Lord to show us where the shoe is. The Sleights are famous for losing things, but the Lord always seems to help us find them."

Predictably, finding a shoe wasn't a huge problem for the Creator of the Universe. The shoe was found, and that was the end of the story, at least that's what we thought. We found out later that Lindsay and Natalie had gone home and dutifully told their mother that "the Sleights prayed to God when one of us lost a shoe."

That was a bit too strange for Tracy Bingham, and she told the girls that they weren't allowed to come over to our house for a while.

But the Lord had other things in mind. One day when the girls were playing outside, Mallory began to tell them about Jesus. I'd give a million dollars to know what exactly was said; I'm sure that at 6 years old, Mallory's preaching wasn't too polished. But it sure was effective, because that day, next to the swing set, she prayed with her friends so that they too could know Jesus.

In the next year, Iris had the opportunity to share the good news about Jesus with Tracy, and I had the opportunity to go to a Promise Keepers meeting with her husband Andy, where he heard about being born again. Both of them made commitments to Christ, and the Lord has been at work in their lives ever since. The Lord has blessed us tremendously with their friendship.

We had settled into a nice routine in Omaha. I'm sure you know what I mean: school, diapers, church services, small groups, dinners, sunsets, scraped knees, baths, Christmas shopping, returns, birthdays, tryouts, day in and day out.

Life. It was good to just live.

But there was something I sensed on the horizon; not something necessarily good or bad, just something.

God was beginning to stir my heart.

Words

One day I was sitting at my desk going through some old papers when I came across the first chapter of a book I had started to write back in 1991. I hadn't done much with it because I had just started my job with ACS, and between my career and the kids, there had just been no time. I hadn't forgotten about it completely, and I'd always dreamed that someday it would get published.

I began reading the story, and it all started coming back; the original idea, the plot, the characters, everything. *Maybe I could finish the book now*, I thought. *Who knows where it could lead?* After all, I didn't want to be in medical sales the rest of my life. It had been a great career, but I was beginning to get tired of driving hundreds of miles a week calling on hospitals. Maybe, just maybe, the Lord would open the door for me to be a writer.

I began to make notes whenever I had an idea about the plot or an interesting character development. Between my job, Iris, and the kids, I didn't have much time, but whenever I had a minute I'd write a paragraph or two. I told Iris about my desire to finish the book, and her reaction was similar to if I'd told her I was going to change Ben's diaper.

"Really?" she responded. "How are your sales this month?" In other words, "Get your head out of the clouds, let's get back to reality."

I wasn't too surprised by her reaction, since reading to her was the equivalent of a root canal. Nonetheless, it was frustrating since I wanted some encouragement to finish the book. It seemed like such an impossible task.

My brother and I used to joke in our old lives, “When the going gets tough, the Sleights get drunk.” I had changed that strategic plan over the years. Now when the going got tough, the Sleights prayed.

This mountain seemed bigger to me, but I knew that to the one who created the heavens, it was laughable. I asked Jesus to help me, to encourage me, and to use whatever I wrote to help people see that they can know Him personally.

The next year passed like it was a weekend. I remember sitting down for my quiet time on a spring morning and realizing that I’d written all of three chapters during the last 365 days. At the rate I was going, I’d get the book done by the time the kids graduated from college!

“Maybe, it isn’t meant to be,” I whispered, hoping that the Lord would scream, back at me. *No, Andy, You will finish the book, and you will be famous, and adored by millions!*

But my quiet time was just that – really quiet. In fact, I think it was the quietest it had ever been. I began to resign myself to life just the way it was. After all, compared to most people, I was incredibly blessed. So what if THIS dream didn’t come true? After all, the Lord didn’t owe me anything. He’d already done so much. I felt guilty that I was frustrated and angry that this dream just didn’t seem to want to go away.

A couple of Sundays later, as usual we went to Trinity for the 10:45 A.M. service. The worship was great as usual, but nothing seemed out of the ordinary. Our Senior Pastor, Les Beauchamp (pronounced Beechum), got up to make announcements and then introduced a special speaker for the day. We didn’t have guest preachers very often, so I was curious about whom it could be. Iris and I were both surprised to find that it was going to be a woman speaker.

From the moment Florence Litauer began to speak that morning, I knew that she was a remarkable woman. She was a unique combination of ladylike sophistication, polished speaking, wonderful humor, and an unusual humility all wrapped into one. I was captivated by her stories, so much so that I found myself forgetting all the rambling in my mind about my “discontent.”

That morning Florence told a story entitled “Silver Boxes.” She recounted speaking to a group of children at a church and talked about the words we use with people. Florence was doing her best to teach the kids that our words have immense power with the people around us, especially the ones we are closest to. In the middle of her teaching, Florence recounted how a little girl raised her hand and said, “You mean our words should be like a present, like a silver box!”

The story had a profound effect on me. I was totally convicted about all the times I had ever become impatient or angry with my kids. Just that morning I had raised my voice over some insignificant thing my daughter had done, and my reaction had been way out of proportion. I thanked the Lord for using Florence to show me where I could improve as a parent and asked Him to help me to be more careful with my words.

But I wasn’t the only one God touched that morning. I turned to see tears streaming down Iris’s face, and her countenance was lower than I’d seen in a long time. She wiped the tears from her cheeks and leaned over to me.

“Please forgive me,” she whispered. “I know you are supposed to write your book, and I’ve never given you one word of encouragement. From now on, you will have at least one hour every night. Will you forgive me?”

“Yes,” I said. “I forgive you.” I hugged her and silently thanked the Lord for touching her heart in only the way HE could.

Iris was true to her word. Every night she would encourage me to go downstairs and write. And within six months, I had completed my first book, a prophetic novel entitled *Harvest of Fire*. I experienced a terrific sense of accomplishment in finishing the book and seeing it in its published form. Since we published it ourselves, it had limited distribution, but it did sell well in our area. Iris used her contacts in the local media to get a thirty second ad produced, and in December of 1997, I saw *Harvest of Fire* advertised on television in Nebraska.

The most remarkable thing that came out of the experience, however, was what the Lord taught us about the power of words, and how important it is to encourage each other to fulfill our dreams.

A Room with a View

In the summer of 1997, we traveled to Pensacola, Florida, to attend some services at Brownsville Assembly of God. We had some friends that had visited in the previous year, and they told stories of amazing things that God was doing at this church.

We flew down with a group of people from our church for three days of worship, teaching, and prayer. I could write a separate book about our experiences there, but one thing happened that would be especially important to us as a family.

Every afternoon, the church would conduct a special prayer time to prepare for that night's service. The room provided only limited space, so only a specific number of people from all the visiting churches were allowed in each day. Iris and I weren't scheduled to go until the next day, but I thought we'd ask if there was any more room.

The woman in charge of the prayer meeting said that the room was full, and she promptly closed the door. I was disappointed and turned to walk away. Suddenly the door was thrust open again, and I heard her yell, "Hey you!" At first I thought she must be talking to someone else, but then I remembered I'd heard "hey you" one other time when God was preparing to do something awesome in my life. I turned back, and the woman spoke again.

"The Lord says you ARE supposed to be in here." She opened the door for me, and I walked in wondering what was going to happen next.

The prayer time started with a time of worship, and I sensed God's presence in that room much like the first day He rescued me. I closed my eyes as I sang to the Lord, and I praised Him and thanked Him for his love and care for me and my family. Then, in the midst of my worship, I began to see in my mind a vivid picture, a panorama of

children on the horizon. There was a long line of them; they stretched out as far as the eye could see in the distance. They were of different ages, of all different colors, and I was fascinated because many of them were little, even toddler age. They were all holding the hands of grownups. I looked, and then I saw where they were going. These children, these little ones, were leading the adults to Jesus.

Then I heard in my mind, *You must reach the children, Andrew.*

After the prayer meeting I ran over to the sanctuary where my family was holding a seat for me. I made it just as worship was starting, and we all began to sing. I was so eager to tell Iris what had happened, although I still wasn't sure what it all meant.

Halfway through the worship time, there was a lull, and Iris leaned over and said, "I know this sounds crazy, but I think you are supposed to do some kind of children's ministry."

No matter how many times I've seen God do this sort of thing, I'm always amazed at his unique way of confirming his will. Later I told Iris what had happened, and she was just blown away. I had no idea what was going to happen next, but whatever it was I knew it would be exciting!

We returned from Pensacola, and I made an appointment to see Pastor Les, the Senior Pastor at our home church. We had been praying, and I sensed the Lord was directing me to volunteer to help organize a new service for kids at our church. The Children's Sunday School wasn't very well-organized, and it was dreadfully short of volunteers. The Lord had given me an idea for a new service where the kids would be active participants in the worship, drama, prayer, and Bible Study.

Pastor Les and the leadership team supported the idea, and we began to pray and organize "Kids' Power & Light Company." We can't take credit for the name; our friends in Des Moines at Berean Assembly actually let us borrow it from them. Volunteers began to flow in, and it was amazing to see how God provided all the expertise and gifting we needed. Our first service was in September of 1998, and we were off and running.

This Ministry was the most rewarding, demanding and exciting experience I'd ever had. Every week, we would see the Lord touch the hearts of kids in profound ways.

We would see kids come forward every week to make commitments to Jesus, and then they would bring their friends to the service as well. We would pray with kids and have kids pray for adults in the church.

The kids that worked with us on the KPLC team were precious and incredibly gifted. They were so enthusiastic, and it was such a joy to see them develop in their love for the Lord. Many of those kids are now in high school, and it is so exciting to see God's hand on their lives.

One of these kids was our daughter Mallory. She was very involved in the development of our worship and drama teams. Every week she would help me get things organized, and her enthusiasm was infectious to the kids around her. It was also a powerful time of character building for Mallory who was just beginning to enter the critical "peer pressure age."

When we look back someday on the wonderful fruit that comes out of Mallory's life, I believe that her relationship with her heavenly Father and her dad here on earth were powerfully solidified during this formative time.

During this season of our life, the Lord brought us a financial blessing that we will never forget. Thanks to a timely approval of a new coronary stent that Guidant introduced in the last quarter of 1997, I received a sizable bonus that gave us the opportunity to build a new house.

We had been discussing the possibility of building since Iris and her assistant, Melanie, needed a bigger basement for an office, and I was hoping for a bigger back yard. We prayed, looked over lots in Western Omaha for several months, and eventually found an area that was ideally located not far from our church and the kids' Christian school.

We labored over the design of the house and how big it should be. Since I was getting increasingly anxious to resign my position and take on a new challenge, preferably in full-time ministry, we didn't want to overtax ourselves with too big a mortgage. Iris wasn't too excited about the prospect of me taking a gigantic pay cut, but thanks to the increasing success of Sleight Advertising, it was beginning to look like we could survive even if I was making only a pastor's salary.

It all sounded a little crazy to Iris, but she knew that serving the Lord had turned out to be the most satisfying and exciting thing I'd ever experienced. The last thing either one of us wanted was to look back on our life someday and realize that we hadn't gone after the dreams God had given us.

So we both continued to pray over the time I was working with the kids in KPLC. I wasn't sure what would happen next. Maybe the Lord would send me to Bible School, or seminary, or who knows where.

Whatever it turned out to be, I had the feeling it would be an adventure.

Unexpected Meeting

It was beautiful October afternoon, and I was anxious to get my play clothes on, go outside and take a walk with the kids and our golden retriever. We had just come back from church and another Kids' Power & Light Company service. I was in our bathroom upstairs putting on my tennis shoes when I stopped to just thank the Lord for His love and mercy. It was one of those moments when I was just overwhelmed by everything God had done for us. He had given us a beautiful new home, the kids were healthy and happy, and Sleight Advertising was growing by leaps and bounds. In the two years since we'd moved, Iris had hired three new employees and more business was coming in every month.

I closed my eyes to express my thanksgiving, but before I could say anything, the Lord spoke to me, and what I heard got my attention. He said it was time to resign from children's ministry and begin a time of prayer in preparation for the new assignment He would give me. He didn't tell me what it was going to be, but I sensed that it wouldn't be long before it would come up.

At first I was kind of surprised and disappointed by what I had heard. I had been thinking that my position in kids' ministry would probably lead to some kind of pastoral position. We've all learned that it's always a lot easier to get a job when you have a job. But I was sure that the Lord was directing me to resign and to wait on Him. I told Iris what I'd heard and after praying together, I waited for a day or so to see if I had peace. Both Iris and I did have peace about this direction, and I notified the Director of Children's Ministry that I would be resigning within a couple of weeks.

I continued to pray and seek the Lord's will, and I didn't have to wait long before something happened. In November, I got call from our pastor inviting me to meet him for breakfast. Iris and I both wondered if this could possibly be the new door that would open. I was so pumped up; I just couldn't wait to see what was going to happen next! I had been working in medical sales for over eighteen years, and now it looked like my dream of ministry was finally going to come true!

Finally the day came for us to meet, and Pastor Les talked to me about the possibility of coming on staff as the Director of Evangelism. Of course, it made so much sense! My greatest desire was to see people come to know Jesus as their Messiah, and now I would be able to help my church reach them full-time. We both agreed to pray about it and reconnect within a couple of weeks.

When I called Iris that morning to talk about what had transpired, she was ambivalent but supportive. Amazingly, it wasn't the pay cut that so concerned her. She was more worried that working in the church would mean that I'd spend more time dealing with bureaucracy instead of with people. We had been frustrated at times that it was so hard to implement an idea in the church sometimes. Iris especially is a "now" person, and isn't known for her abundance of patience. Fortunately, I do have more patience, and I reassured her that I could work within the system and still get things done.

Iris also told me that she thought it would be great if I could come on board at Sleight Advertising. In a way, I already had been working there part-time for years. At night, I'd often help Iris strategize on how to close new business, or how to solve a difficult customer or vendor issue. I'd also become fairly adept at computer maintenance and had set up the network for her office so that her employees could work together effectively.

I was glad to hear that my wife thought enough about my skills that she actually wanted me to work with her, but, it just didn't seem to make much sense to me. I was more interested in doing full-time ministry and everyone knows how few husbands and wives can work together without it becoming a serious detriment to their marriage. Besides, I knew enough about advertising to make me dangerous, and the last thing I wanted to do is mess up something that my wife had already put together. No, ministry was where I belonged, and into ministry I would go.

All of discussions eventually led to one bottom line; Iris assured me that she supported me, and if God wanted me to be the Director of Evangelism, or anything else for that matter, she was all for it.

Now it was time to pray and ask the Lord to reveal his will.

Several weeks had gone by, and Christmas was on the horizon. The family was in its “holiday” craziness mode: kids’ plays, decorating, shopping, and sending out cards and gifts to our clients. Amidst the activity, I had been praying and seeking the Lord’s will about the job at church. I was getting frustrated because, so far, I really hadn’t heard anything clearly one way or the other. I had been spending almost every morning having a quiet time, but with all the busyness of the season, it was hard for me to concentrate. This lack of clear direction had begun to frustrate me. In fact, while everyone else was joyfully getting into the festivities, I was getting downright irritated. I had no peace at all.

My sales group had a regional meeting scheduled in Dallas during the second week of December, but I was really tempted to find some excuse to not go. What difference would it make, anyway, since I had already decided to leave the company in the next couple of months? I carefully ran down a list of possible excuses ranging from family madness (Iris does get pretty crazy celebrating both Chanukah and Christmas) all the way to the cold that I felt just “might” be coming on. But amazingly, the one thing I did hear from the Lord in my quiet time that week was that I was supposed to go to the meeting. Down deep, I knew that God didn’t want me to lie to my company and that I should do my very best for them right up to the last day of my employment.

Dutifully, I got on the plane that week and headed for another company meeting. I was getting close to ten years with Guidant, and I’d been to a lot of these meetings. Once in a while they were noteworthy because of some new revolutionary product or company reorganization, but this one was going to be just another end-of-the-year, “let’s make those numbers” strategy session. I got in around 8:00 P.M. and got a shuttle over to the hotel where we would be meeting. I was hoping that I wouldn’t run into any of my compatriots when I checked in, since the last thing in the world I felt like doing was socializing. All the frustration and concern about the evangelism position had me pretty

frazzled, and I just wanted to go to bed. I think I was asleep ten seconds after my head hit that crisply-ironed Marriott pillowcase.

It was so peaceful.

I had no idea where I was. I wasn't sure if I was dreaming or just in that in-between state of being still half asleep, just barely on the edge of consciousness. I don't think I've ever been in a quieter, safer-feeling place.

The Lord began to speak to me, and as He did, I realized what He had done. He had taken me away from all the noise, all the bustle, the cats and dogs laying on me in bed, the honey do's, the computers, and the multiple telephones ringing in different quarters of the house.

He had taken me away to just be with Him.

Being in his presence was so wonderful. No wonder the disciples yearned to be with Him so much; nothing else even remotely comes close to intimacy with the Lord.

His voice was so clear and so reassuring. It is very hard to describe his voice if you have never heard it, but the Bible says it beautifully and accurately when it refers to it as "a still, small voice." It isn't audible like our voices; it resonates in my spirit, and it is usually just barely discernible in my mind. But on this December morning, I could hear Him ever so clearly.

Andrew, I want you to come alongside Iris in Sleight Advertising. I AM calling you into a full-time ministry. It is just different than what you expected. You are going to reach millions of people, and you will have the opportunity to go to many places to testify about what I have done in your life. Trust me, my hand is upon you.

I lay still for a few more minutes, half wondering and half hoping there was more. But by then the sun's light was coming into the hotel room, and I was wide awake. It wasn't exactly what I'd been expecting. All right, I admit, it wasn't even close to what I expected. Yet I wasn't disappointed at all; in fact I felt like a huge weight had been lifted off me. I wasn't sure at all how this would all pan out. *How would it work? What job would I do? How would God use me in this way? **How had Iris pulled this one off?***

Yes, I had a few dozen questions, but there were two things that I was sure of: the Lord had clearly told me what to do, and already I had a solid confirmation that this was exactly what I was supposed to do.

I had peace.

On March 1, 2001, I officially came on board at Sleight Advertising as CEO. Iris had been really excited to hear about the Lord speaking to me that morning. The agency had grown substantially, but now she was facing challenges that she was ill-equipped to handle. Hiring new people, finding the right media software, developing benefit policies, creating new marketing materials, devising a strategic plan for growth, and a host of other areas all demanded attention. It was, as we used to say in the military, a “target-rich environment.” Suddenly, I had a whole bunch of opportunities on my plate.

I wish I could tell you that the transition was completely smooth and problem-free, but I would then have to repent for lying. There were some bumps along the way, but with the Lord’s help, we worked through them. (I have another book planned that will include some of the lessons we’ve learned through working together.)

All in all, it has been an amazing, challenging, and exhilarating experience. In the last two years, Sleight Advertising has tripled in sales, moved into an office building, and now works with over one hundred clients all over the United States. Our staff has learned to use media expertise, hard work, and passionate dedication to help businesses of all sizes attain phenomenal results with their advertising budgets. I have never worked with a company that is more passionate about serving its customers and making a difference in the lives of the people it serves.

“But, Andrew,” you ask, “what about your dream to be in ministry?”

I guess I was wondering the same thing the first day I came on board, but now that I’m a little ways down the road, I can tell you that the Lord did exactly what He said He would do.

I am in full-time ministry. Oh, I don’t have a pastoral title, and I don’t preach every week, but when I look and see what is happening around me, I can see a plan unfolding that is, as my kids would say, SO more than what I had ever imagined. Over

sixty-five of our clients are churches and ministries who are reaching literally millions of people with the truth about the Messiah every year. Every month we hear awesome testimonies of how the media programming we have negotiated and facilitated is touching the lives of people all over the world.

As one man, even in a large church, I could only reach a certain number of people, but by serving Christian churches all over the world, I can help hundreds of churches accomplish the most important mission of all time: to introduce everyone man, woman, and child to the Messiah.

And I believe it is only the beginning of what is to come.

Last year the Lord spoke to me and told me that Sleight Advertising would help build an orphanage. I shared the news with our staff, and they looked at me like I was just a little bit crazy. I don't blame them; they are all going a million miles an hour every day negotiating media time, coordinating creative ideas, orchestrating press coverage, and a myriad of details for all of our clients. I'm sure that all of it sounded pretty off the wall.

Six months later, Iris and I were in a worship service at our home church, Trinity Interdenominational. In the middle of one of the songs, the Lord told me that it was time to start the orphanage. He gave me the exact amount of money we should donate to get it started. I excitedly wrote down what I'd heard and gave the note to Iris. Her eyes got as big as saucers, and at the end of the service, she asked the logical question.

"So who do we give this money to, and where is the orphanage supposed to be built?"

"I don't know, but I'm sure that the Lord will show us," I answered.

The next forty-eight hours were both trying and comical. As I told before, Iris is a NOW person with a capital N. She wanted to get going on this orphanage, and she was really impatient to hear what was coming next. I did my best to reassure her that the Lord would show us, but by Tuesday afternoon, I have to admit, I was getting kind of anxious myself. Over dinner we began to think of different things we could do with the money that might help an orphanage, but none of our ideas seemed to make any sense.

"I really want to make a difference somewhere," Iris said. "I don't want to give to some huge ministry where something is already finished. I feel like we are supposed to START something."

Once again, I tried to reassure her, and we prayed again that the Lord would show us.

Around eight o'clock that night, Iris reminded me that I had to pick up Mallory from a play practice, so I grabbed my keys and ran out the door. About five seconds after I was gone, the phone rang. Iris picked it up, and it was a representative from The Jesus Project. This is a unique ministry that sends teams all over the world equipped with projectors, DVDs, and VCRs so that they can show indigenous people a movie that tells the story about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in *their own language*. We have supported this ministry for a number of years, and every so often they call to thank us and ask for prayer requests.

Iris usually doesn't talk to them, and on this particular night she especially wasn't in the mood to talk. In fact, all she wanted to do was get off the phone. After a minute or two of pleasantries, Iris told our representative, Diane, that I wasn't home, but she could call later. They'd almost hung up when Diane changed the subject completely. She told Iris about a remarkable man she had met from Zimbabwe by the name of Pastor Charles.

"That's nice," Iris responded, increasingly impatient and thinking of anything she could say to get off the phone.

"I thought I had mentioned this to Andrew before," Diane continued. "You see, Pastor Charles wants to build an orphanage"

I wish I could have been there to see the look on Iris's face.

"I don't know if you are interested, but I know that Pastor Charles would appreciate any kind of donation you could make," Diane continued, not understanding yet what was happening.

By now tears were streaming down Iris's cheeks. She was completely overcome by the presence of God, and she told Diane everything that had happened.

In the next twenty-four hours we had the opportunity to send an e-mail to Pastor Charles and share with him what God had instructed us to do. We heard back from him almost instantaneously, and it was so awesome to hear how he rejoiced with us over God's generosity and the amazing way He moves people's hearts.

God has given this precious pastor in Zimbabwe an incredible vision to save the abandoned children of Africa, but providing shelter, food, and medicine is only the

beginning. He wants to provide a place of safe, loving care where each child will learn about the Messiah. And these children will be some of those that God has chosen to bring the news about Jesus to millions of the lost on the African continent and around the world.

Do you remember the vision that God gave me in the prayer meeting of little children bringing others to the Messiah?

Words can't describe how thankful I am to Jesus for what He is doing.

When you bought this book, you provided support for this effort. The Lord has directed us to use the majority of profits from its sales to help Pastor Charles and the other ministries around the world as they help save the children.

So what does this have to do with me, you ask?

Maybe you have a dream, a vision that has gripped you and won't let you go. There has been little or no encouragement given to you from those around you, and you are tempted to just forget about the whole thing.

Don't despair. If God has given you this dream, and you are doing it for his Glory, then don't give up, no matter what.

Maybe, on the other hand, you have no idea what God's plan is for your life. Maybe you are yearning to see your life really count for something that is of eternal value, something that will mean something long after your life on earth is over.

The Word of God says that the Lord is able to do "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think." He doesn't want us to dream small dreams. He wants us to dream BIG, awe-inspiring dreams that will bring glory to the Kingdom of God.

You have a purpose that was birthed in the heart of God before the creation of the World. You weren't designed to just live a boring, mundane life of getting up, working, watching TV, and going to bed. The Word of God puts it this way:

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Are you ready for the greatest adventure of all?

Then it's time you took the first step.

Moving the Heart

Sometimes, we can't see what is right in front of us.

One night I was returning from a business trip after being out on the road for five days. My plane didn't get in until about midnight, and it was snowing heavily. It took longer than usual to get my bags, and I was really getting impatient to get to my car in the long-term parking lot so I could get back to my warm bed and family.

When I'm going to be away for days at a time, I usually make some conscious note as to where my car is parked so I can find it among the throng when I return. On this particular occasion, I was glad to know that I knew exactly where my car was: Lot 1G. I had made a mental note to associate my parking place with something I enjoyed: golf. I remembered the number one for the fact that, with my swing, I was confident I'd never be the top player in the world.

The bus I boarded seemed to take forever. There were plenty of people in front of me who had to be dropped off at other parking lots, and everyone seemed to be moving in slow motion. But finally the door opened, and it was my turn out. I stepped outside, and the bus drove away as I got my bearings. I saw the sign for "1G" and started heading that way. Since it was so late, there was hardly any activity in the airport, and the quiet in that lot was absolutely deafening. I could hear my footsteps in the three-inch snow, and I was struck by how peaceful it was around me.

But it was cold, frost-biting cold. I paused long enough to reach inside my overcoat. My family always kids me about my practical side, but on this night as I put on my fur-lined, weatherproof gloves, I was glad that I'd been prepared for the snow.

Unfortunately, though, my suit trousers didn't have any fur lining so I hurried to make it over to 1G.

I got over to the sign and started looking for my car. I turned a couple of 360s, but I didn't see my car anywhere in the two rows I was standing between. Could I have been wrong about the section? No, I distinctly remembered section "1G" and the area looked very familiar right down to the glass-enclosed waiting area on the corner.

More cold and impatient than ever, I left my bag at the bus stop and ran up and down several rows nearby, hoping to solve the mystery of where I had parked the car. I went up and down the rows again carefully looking at each car, but my search proved fruitless.

"Oh my goodness," I thought aloud, "my car's been stolen!"

That must be it, I reasoned. It wasn't anywhere to be found. Someone took it, drove off, and now some other car is parked in its place.

By now I was completely frustrated and even getting angry. I just wanted to get home, and now I was going to have to call the police and make a report. But worse still, what if I was WRONG? What if my car really was in the lot somewhere, and I'd just forgotten where I really had put it? How embarrassing that would be!

I stood still for a second, and then it hit me. Or rather, then I saw it.

Sitting there, right in front of me was the car – my wife's car. The car I normally drove had been in the shop so I had driven Iris's station wagon to the airport.

It had been right in front of me the whole time, but it wasn't the car I'd been looking for, so I had missed it completely.

The reason I mention this experience is because the same thing can happen in our search for God. Our beliefs and preconceptions can hide the truth from us, just as I was blinded in that parking lot that night. Consequently, someone reading this book may react to our story with something like this: "I'm glad you found something that makes you happy, Andrew – that's fine for you – but it's not for me."

But before you close your mind, let me ask you a difficult question; have you ever been wrong about ANYTHING in your life?

Is it possible that what you believe, what you've been taught about Jesus, could be wrong?

Logically, there are two different possibilities when it comes to the truth about Him. The first possibility is that He truly IS the Messiah.

The other logical possibility is that He isn't. So how can we know what the truth is about Jesus?

There are millions of people who claim He is the Messiah; millions whose lives, like ours, have been miraculously touched. But what is the objective evidence for this claim?

There are hundreds of references in the Jewish Scriptures (the Tenach) that provide clues to the identity of the Messiah. The critical question is this: does Jesus fulfill these scriptures? I would like to share a few of them that I believe will be of great interest to you.

Speaking through the Prophet Micah, God told us where the Messiah would be born: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2).

The scripture is clear that this "One" is eternal, so that it can't possibly mean a regular ruler in Israel's history. Interestingly enough, today Bethlehem is a completely Arab town and is being turned over to the Palestinian Authority.

Luke 2:4-7 in the New Testament describes Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. The word Bethlehem means "house of bread," and Jesus referred to himself as the "bread of life" in John 6:48.

Some of the Messianic references in the Hebrew Scriptures focus on miracles. Isaiah 35:5-6 gave clues to the Jewish people about the power of God that they would see in the future: "Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy."

Matthew, one of the Jewish followers of Jesus, described what he saw happening around Jerusalem at that time: "Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people" (Matthew 9:35).

The Prophet Isaiah wrote many startling things about the Messiah, including graphic references of Him being beaten, wounded, bruised, pierced, and spit upon. “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). “I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting” (Isaiah 50:6).

The accounts of Jesus’ crucifixion in the New Testament vividly portray the fulfillment of these events that were foreseen by Israel’s prophets. “Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck Him with the palms of their hands ... And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him” (Matthew 26:67, Luke 23:33).

The Old Testament scriptures even indicated that this suffering Messiah would be rejected by his own people. “He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him” (Isaiah 53:3).

Once again the New Testament accounts line up perfectly with the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible. John 1:11 describes Jesus as one who “came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.”

These are just a few of the hundreds of prophecies that describe the Messiah in the Old Testament. I believe that anyone who will look objectively at the evidence will conclude that Jesus fulfills the Bible’s description of the Messiah.

“So what?” you say, “What if He is the Messiah foretold in the Old Testament, what does that have to do with me?”

Two thousand years ago, another Jewish person, a Rabbi by the name of Nicodemus, wondered the same thing. Nicodemus came to Jesus at night and said:

“Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”

Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?”

Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:2-8).

Nicodemus was really confused now. Jesus was telling him that he would have to go through another birth, a spiritual birth to see the Kingdom of God.

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”

Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*” (John 3:9-15 italics mine).

The Old Testament passage that Jesus was referring to provides a startling revelation about his identity. In the Book of Numbers in the Hebrew Bible, chapter 21 explains how the Jewish people had sinned against God, and His resulting judgment took the form of venomous snakes. When the people realized what they had done, they came to Moses and admitted their sin (Numbers 21:6). The Lord then instructed Moses to make a bronze snake and *put it up on a pole*. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.

It wasn’t the snake that was healing the people; it was the Lord. They received their deliverance from Him by admitting their sin, expressing their faith in God, and being obedient to his instruction.

Now what, you may be asking, does this have to do with us today?

According to God’s Word, we have all been bitten by the curse of sin. All of us “have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Psalm 14:3, Romans 3:23). Most people

are willing to admit they aren't perfect, but they have been misled into thinking that God will forgive their sins if they do enough good things in their lives.

This kind of "good works" thinking appeals to our human nature, but it is in direct opposition to the plan for our redemption that God has provided. In the Old Testament book of Isaiah, God says that human righteousness, the very best we can offer, is like "filthy rags" compared to the Holiness of God (Isaiah 64:6).

The Bible is clear; we shouldn't compare ourselves to other humans. God's standard is the law, and if we break just one law, it is as if we have broken the whole law (James 2:10).

But God does reveal His plan for our redemption or "salvation" as He first called it in the Hebrew Bible. When we admit to God that we are sinners, He tells us to repent. (2 Corinthians 7:10). To repent means to turn away from sin and decide to be obedient to God.

The second step is turning to the Messiah and placing your faith in Him as your atonement for sin. **And just as the snake was lifted up on the pole, Jesus was lifted up on the cross so that all of the world could have the chance to turn to Him.** All who turn to Him will be saved from their sin!

God provides other amazing glimpses of his plan throughout the Old Testament. Every Jewish family is taught the Passover Story, how the Lord commanded that a Passover Lamb would be sacrificed, so that the Angel of Death would "pass over" the households where the lamb's blood was applied to the doorposts.

Years later during another Passover, God provided his own Son, as the "Lamb of God" who would be a sin sacrifice for all who would turn to Him.

The Lord explains what He did in the most famous of all Bible verses: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

This is the love that Iris and I pray you will see in our story; the Love of the Jewish Messiah who offers Jew and gentile alike what no one else can: forgiveness, healing, purpose, hope, and eternal life. He wants to do a miracle in your life just like He has in ours.

It was the Jewish Messiah, Jesus, who saved this pathetic, drug-addicted gentile man that had broken every one of God's laws.

It was this same Jewish Messiah that saved my precious Jewish wife when she was lost in depression, hopelessness, and despair.

And it was this Jewish Messiah that did a miracle in our marriage.

Maybe you have been searching for God in your life, but just like me on that cold January night looking for the wrong car, you have been searching in vain, looking for the wrong answer, while Jesus has been right in front of you all the time. But you never recognized Him as the Messiah because you have been looking for something or someone else.

Wherever you are right now, He is waiting for you to turn to Him.

You were on His mind those hours that He hung on the cross. He could have turned back, but He didn't. He knew that without His sacrifice, there was no hope for humankind. He endured those hours of torture and humiliation, spurred on by his love for you and for me. And then, just before His last breath, He proclaimed, "It is finished!" He had paid our debt in full, and three days later, just as He had promised, He rose again from the dead, victorious over sin and death.

If you are ready to repent of your sin and trust Jesus as your Messiah and Lord, I invite you to pray the prayer that Iris prayed almost eighteen years ago. Please understand, it is not the words of this prayer that move the Heart of God, it is the change in your heart that the words represent.

Dear Jesus, I confess that I am a sinner, and I ask you to forgive me. I repent of my sins – I don't want to live that way anymore. I believe that You died on the cross for me and that You rose again from the dead. Please come into my heart now and be my Savior and Lord. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Now in your own words, just thank Him and share with Him whatever is on your heart. If you have a born again friend, call and share what the Lord has done for you. And if you don't have a Bible, get one and begin reading the book of John as a start. Pray and

ask Jesus to direct you to a place of worship where you can grow in your relationship with Him.

Please write or e-mail us and let us know about your commitment so that we can rejoice with you. We would like to do anything we can to help you get started in your new life.

Hopefully, we will get to meet you in person some day soon here on earth. But if we miss meeting you here, just remember; turn right just inside of Heaven's Gate, and we will meet you there.

And what a wonderful day that will be!