

## **Chapter 2**

### **Preparations, Fund Raising, and Off We Went**

#### **Nonprofit Formed**

My limited understanding of how to become a missionary was to have an organization so people could donate money; and you would not have to work and could do the Lord's business full-time. John's father was a lawyer, and my brother was a CPA, so we founded a nonprofit Christian organization with their help.

Our Peace Corps commitment ended and we headed back to the States to raise our support, planning to return as soon as we did, so we could start our lives as missionaries. We had also learned from some missionaries in Guatemala that you raise support by visiting congregations. That you go, share your vision, and then the fellowship would take up a collection and/or commit to supporting you on a regular basis. Every two years or so, you return to tell about all the wonderful things that had happened, and they would commit to continue or increasing their support. The whole process reminded me of the excitement I felt when I went to Las Vegas after graduation. The anticipation of maybe striking it rich at any given moment was exhilarating and motivating.

After arriving home, I sent out my one-page testimony letter to at least two hundred churches in my home town, expressing my desire to speak to them. As I anxiously waited for all the invitations to start rolling in, I pulled out the dents from the trees that caught the flying Opel, changed the head gasket so I would not have water in my oil any longer, and made some meager advances toward getting the brakes fixed. I had some very close calls because of them.

A month later, I realized that Plan A for fundraising wasn't going to work. I did not receive one letter or phone call, so I needed a Plan B. I was ready to go, but only had just enough money to get there and stay a short while.

#### **Fund Raising, Plan B**

I was a bit discouraged until I remembered that when I was eight, my uncle gave me a baseball that had been autographed by many famous players, including Mickey Mantle, Whitey Ford, and Ted Williams in an All-Star Game that had taken place in Kansas City, in the summer of 1960. Maybe I could turn that baseball into some much needed cash. I had already made plans

to go to New York to learn how rescue missions there were reaching out to street people.

So in January 1987, I got into my car, said goodbye to my large family with whom I had shared Jesus, and headed to baseball's Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. I slept in my car, ate large amounts of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and fantasized about the thousands of dollars I would receive for the ball. At one point, I was up to one hundred thousand dollars.

I am sure God was smiling as I was getting rid of my last, and what I considered my most valuable, possession. I mean He did say to the young rich ruler, "Sell your possessions, give to the poor, and then come follow Me." After living in a developing country for three years, I knew most of the world would have considered me filthy rich. I was positive God would finance my trip with my prized baseball. My fantasies were converted to harsh reality when I entered a memorabilia store and learned the ball was worth maybe one hundred dollars.

Refusing to take so little for something so valuable to me, I decided to donate it to the Hall of Fame. To this day I want to become invisible when in the company of my family the topic of the baseball surfaces. Surely it would have made it to at least one of my fantasized thousand dollars by now almost 55 years after it was signed. I will probably never know its earthly value, but I believe that when I get to heaven and the Lord is reading that page of my story, He will pause, smile, and offer some precious words from His heart for the gift.

### **Rescue Mission in New York City**

I left Cooperstown and headed for the Big Apple. The second night I was there, I stayed in one of the oldest and most established rescue missions in our nation. The staff suggested that I become like one of the street people and experience it first-hand, so I did. I listened to great message in chapel before eating supper and heading off to a sleeping area. I stripped down naked, showered, was given hospital type pajamas, and my clothes were placed in an enclosed locker system that killed lice. All night long, I heard snoring, farting, sneezing, coughing, and laughing men of all races and ethnicities in my barracks-like room. For the most part, all were extremely happy to have a hot meal and warm bed on a cold January night.

The next morning the staff woke us early, returned our de-lice-d clothes, and fed us another meal. After breakfast I followed the masses to the exit. As I walked out into the cold, my mind was full of questions. Something did not register with my new heart in Christ. I know the poor existed in Jesus' day and they often sought him for a meal, especially after hearing about the delicious fish and fresh-baked bread that the four and five thousand enjoyed, but how did this routine-like system for reaching out to the poor and hungry ever come about?

You may say at this point I have no right or basis to criticize something I have never done. As you will find out in a few pages, John and I would eventually walk down this very path. I am in no way challenging any Christian ministry, but simply sharing what an eight-month-old believer was discerning.

### **A Funny New York City Story**

One of my sister's friends, Jackie (not her real name), had become a believer and she offered some food and lodging as I visited rescue missions in New York City. She was part Jewish which impressed me and had a special love for Jesus. I knew I shouldn't stay in Jackie's house overnight since she was single and had no roommates, so after sharing a wonderful dinner and many hours of conversations about Jesus, I retired to my car. It was a box-shaped, two-door mini-station wagon with glass all around, in case you have never seen an Opel Kadett. The back seat folded down and I had a cooler, food, a very small chest of drawers for clothes and spare parts, and all the tools I needed to meet the constant demand for repairs.

So, there I was, parked on the street in front of her apartment. I crawled into a sleeping bag and covered myself with another sleeping bag to keep warm in the sub-freezing temperatures. From the street my car looked like a kleptomaniacs' storage vault. Sometime in the wee hours of the morning I awoke to a noise just outside my car. The chest of drawers was between me and the sidewalk so nobody could see me from that side of the car. My heart pounded as I peeked around the chest to see a man's body plastered to the glass. He was sliding a tool into the door.

"Hey man, what are doing?" I hadn't even considered how he might react.

He stopped, momentarily. He caged to his left, and then to his right, trying to identify the source of the words he had just heard. Unable to do so, he picked up where he left off.

"Hey man, what are you doing?" I positioned myself so my face was within inches of the

glass where his hands were frantically trying to open the door.

When he finally realized the voice was coming from inside the car, he bent over and was now face to face with a startled but angry man. I am positive his heart rate instantaneously matched mine as he jumped back almost 5 feet in one leap. He raised his hands as if I were pointing a gun at him. The whites of his eyes bulged from his dark skin.

“I’m sorry man. I didn’t know you were in there.”

I still wonder if he was sorry about trying to rob me, or sorry he had picked the wrong car. Hopefully he repented and we can laugh together in heaven over our brief encounter.

### **A Washington D.C. Snowstorm**

My visit to New York accomplished much. I had seen the way two of the oldest and most established rescue missions reached out to those who lived on the streets. I set my course for Illinois to visit John and his family so we could make our final preparations to drive to Guatemala to begin our lives as missionaries.

A few donations had come in from family and friends, but it felt like a pyramid-like scheme. Those who are closest to you always feel obligated to buy something. I knew we hadn’t raised enough to stay in Guatemala long, but I was ready to go anyway. On my way to John’s house, I thought I might stop in the D.C. Peace Corps headquarters to see if one of my close friends who had moved up in the ranks was there.

She was not, but before I could leave, a major blizzard moved in. Snow was falling at the rate of a couple of inches per hour. I knew my car would not fare well in deep snow, so I headed out of town immediately. The snow was over a foot deep when the Opel began to spit and sputter. Barely able to pull to the side of the interstate, I popped the hood, got out my tools, and began to investigate. Although there was practically no traffic, nobody stopped to help. Unable to find the problem, I realized I was stranded. We didn’t have cellphones in those days and I was miles from the nearest exit. I wasn’t sure what to do, so I crawled back inside my immobile house/car, made a PB & J sandwich, and bundled up in one of my sleeping bags.

A few hours passed, and the snow was approaching eighteen inches. I tried to start my car several more times, to no avail. Several adventurous semi-tractor trailers had come way too close

for my comfort. A snowplow had also passed and buried my car. As the late afternoon sun began to go down, I wondered if I had the faith to sleep there, not knowing if I would be playing bumper cars with some vehicle. *If I am going to start walking, I better get to it.* I bundled up well, crossed over the median, and began to walk back to D.C. I could not remember how far the last exit was, but it would not matter. After a few minutes, some brave soul pulled over and offered me a ride. He dropped me off at the nearest phone booth.

The tow truck I called dropped me off in a Walmart parking lot, which was located in front of a mechanic's garage. By then, darkness had set in and temperatures began to drop. I burrowed into my two sleeping bags in the back my car and was extremely glad to be off the interstate, and out of harm's way.

The next morning, after the garage opened, the mechanic offered free of charge his diagnosis and was sure it was just a bad set of spark plug wires. He probably took one look at me and my beater car and realized I didn't have much money. I found a set at Walmart, replaced the old ones, and sure enough, the old Opel was purring again. I thanked the mechanic and went rolling down the highway toward Illinois with my newfound faith bolstered by God's provision.

### **Our Mission Funds Supplied**

A day or so later, I found my way to John's house. Although his mom and dad didn't say anything, I am sure they were just as concerned as my family about why we wanted to be missionaries.

John surprised me when he revealed that his grandfather had left him a substantial amount of money when he died. So substantial that half the interest would subsidize what would eventually become a rather large ministry in Guatemala. I was hurt that he hadn't told me about this before, but on the other hand, he had plenty to support both of us. Looking back, I am honored to have witnessed John's faith and generosity. For more than three years, he gave half of his income to the Lord. What an example!

We stopped at my parent's home in Missouri before heading to Guatemala. We hitched the Opel to the back of an Isuzu pickup that John had purchased. We picked up a friend who was still in the Peace Corps and on vacation in Dallas, and off we went to the adventure of our lives. We were not sure what waited for us, but we had heard from many missionaries about the corruption, dangerous road conditions, and gasoline station attendants who would try to rob us.

Before we crossed the border, we prayed and asked God to help and protect us. We made a decision to not pay any bribes.

We did not know that the route we chose was extremely mountainous. We just chose the shortest looking route on the map. It also took us directly through the second largest city in the world, and the capital of Mexico: Mexico City (often referred to as D.F., which stands for *distrito federal*, or federal district). I am sure we were quite a sight. Three gringos in the front seat of a compact pickup towing a box-shaped primer-blotched, rusted mini-station-wagon, loaded with everything we thought we might need to set up our lives.

### **Taken to Police Headquarters**

Shortly after dark on our second night in Mexico, we were pulled over as we entered a small town. We were told we were breaking the law by towing a vehicle. The officers were clearly looking for a bribe. They were not only after gringos, but anyone with a U.S. license plate. I had heard of women being raped, and others murdered. Many missionaries had told us of the bribes they paid, but in my heart of hearts, I knew Jesus would stand up to this injustice, and so we must also.

Because they were not successful in extracting any U.S. dollars from us, they took us to the police station. My Spanish was acceptable, but I didn't understand everything they said. The atmosphere was tense, and they still clearly wanted money. Although I was not completely sure of their interpretation of the towing law, I was almost certain they were lying. Our Peace Corps friend was back in the car praying fervently as John and I continued to resist the bribe attempts. Eventually, John asked the police if we could just unhook the Opel and drive separately.

They must have concluded that we were not going to give in, so they allowed us to leave. We disconnected the Opel and drove away into the darkness. A short time later, we found a hotel to spend the night and rest our emotions. Over the years, I have been threatened many times and in many ways, even with guns drawn and with jail, for not paying bribes while on mission trips. But in the ten plus trips I have made crossing Mexico, and the hundred plus of times I have been detained, I have never paid one. The Lord not only has supported my decision, but has shown me how to be on my way almost

every time within minutes of being stopped.

It took us four days to weave through the mountainous route we had chosen, but we made it. The car filled with joy when we saw the Guatemalan border. We had arrived to our mission field, and we were ready to preach the good news.

