Chapter Three - Victory On Our Knees!

Our GOD given theme for 2003 was "Victory On Our Knees!" Most certainly it was a year our family spent an abundance of time on our knees crying out to GOD for His wisdom, protection, provision, and power. It was a new experience for us, totally dependent on GOD for our every need.



Abby, Rachel, Kerisa, and Jo next to the bus

I received a call from a pastor in Connecticut who was emotionally moved by our “Nothing Is Impossible” CD that the Fowler Family had given him. He said something like, "I'm listening to your CD now and it is powerful. When can you folks come and minister at my church? We desperately need revival and I feel GOD's anointing all over your music. We also need to book you for a three-to-four-day crusade!” Wow, we all were greatly encouraged!

So with the dawn of the new year, we had a few ministry dates lined up and therefore, we needed to get the bus ready for a trip south. We made checklists of what needed to be done, even listing things that the whole family could help with. In our morning devotions we started talking about what we could do at the various churches we had been invited to. Suddenly, we saw our poverty of spirit and how incapable we were to do any of what we felt GOD had called us to do both spiritually and physically. On a very practical level, we had a bus sitting in the driveway that needed many repairs and much remodeling! Our goal was to “Venture Out With GOD” in early February which was less than twenty-five days away! We

needed to begin packing clothes for cold and warm environments, freezing meals for later use, making arrangements for house sitters to watch our animals, gather home-school materials to teach on the road. The list just went on and on and on. It was very overwhelming. But Nothing is Impossible with GOD! Right? We were reminded of the theme GOD had given us, "2003, Victory On Our Knees" and so we began putting it into practice praying until GOD's grace and peace enveloped us. Sometimes morning devotions would run well into the morning.

The children also had the confidence of GOD calling us and they were excited for the future. But leaving horses, dogs, cats, grandparents, and friends, as well as the security of our home, caused some anxiety and much sadness. Jasmine, our oldest, was fifteen, Josiah thirteen, Kerisa eleven, Abby nine, Rachel five, and little Bethany was just eighteen months old. We were involved in Awana Youth programs, 4H activities, church activities, home-school groups, sports, and music lessons. It was a lot of change at one time, but it was what we had been praying for over the years. We lived down the driveway from Grandma and Papa, we were within a few miles of all the aunts and uncles including Grandma Jean and Papa Lyman. The kids would ride their bikes, or horses, up and down the driveway visiting Grandma and Papa and down the trails to visit cousins and Aunt Terry. GOD had provided a kind of sanctuary for our little family, and we realized the treasure of it all when we would come home from long journeys doing ministry over the next decade.



View From The Front Looking Back.

The preparations had begun. We needed a small freezer to fit in the cargo

bay of the bus, a refrigerator, an electric air compressor system that could do more than 120 pounds to bring the bus air pressure up so we wouldn't have to run the bus for fifteen minutes and smell up the area with diesel smoke and noise. We needed fuel money...The bus held 145 gallons of diesel and it was $1.50 per gallon (Miss those prices, uh?) This meant over $215.00 for a tank of fuel that would take us about seven hundred miles down the road. It looked like we would need $1,000 of repairs to secure an inspection sticker for the bus. There were so many details just to make the bus livable even in a primitive way. Bunks for the kids to sleep in was on the top priority and we had to insulate the walls and ceilings. We had roof leaks and would need to used a specialized caulking on every rivet on the roof. The bus heater system didn't work and needed to be repaired. We knew we had to create something for a functional kitchen and restroom. We planned on using a 12-volt system running off a bank of batteries so we could have lights and use other 12-volt accessories when the bus engine was off. Since the bus was 24 volts, we needed a heavy duty 12-volt inverter.

Wow...with these needs alone, we wondered if we should try to just sell it and take the van! But GOD had given us this bus and apparently, HE wanted us to have THIS bus for now. Our van wouldn't have been practical to take south and live in for a few months. So the bus was the best choice. It really encouraged our hearts when people asked us about giving monthly support, because it showed that GOD had moved on their hearts to give, in addition to prayer. They wanted to come along side of us and be a part of this ministry that GOD had called us to. We encouraged monthly supporters to already be involved in tithing to their local church and that commitment of monthly support to us should be over and above their normal tithes. For years GOD had told us to give 10% and HE had blessed us many times over! I'll never forget the first year we started giving more than 10% to our local church and designating an extra 1% to missions. Within six months my income had almost doubled! Then GOD prompted us to go to 12% and so on over the years. It all belongs to HIM anyway, right? And HE always blesses as people step out in faith! For months I've been studying the passage in Matthew 14:22-33 where Peter walked on the water. The Holy Spirit helped us discover some powerful truths for our lives in this passage!

> *Immediately, JESUS made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of HIM to the other side, while HE dismissed the crowd. (22)*
>
> *After HE had dismissed them, HE went up on a mountainside by HIMself to pray. When evening came, HE was there alone, (23)*
>
> *But the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. (24)*

During the fourth watch of the night JESUS went out to them, walking on the lake.(25)

When the disciples saw HIM walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. (26)

But JESUS immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." (27)

Peter replied, “LORD, if it's YOU, tell me to come to YOU on the water." (28)

JESUS said, "Come," Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward JESUS. (29)

But when Peter saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "LORD, save me!" (30)

Immediately JESUS reached out HIS hand and caught him and said, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" (31)

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. (32)

Then those who were in the boat worshiped JESUS, saying, "Truly YOU are the Son of GOD." (33)

We discovered these seven steps in knowing GOD's clear direction:

1. *Like Peter, we ask the Master of The Universe for clear direction about something we believe we should do. (Verse28)*
2. *Then we wait for JESUS to answer. (Verse 29a)*
3. *After hearing from JESUS, Peter then stepped out in faith KNOWING that the impossible would be possible and so we step out in faith when we hear from JESUS.(Verse 29b)*
4. *Peter kept his eyes on JESUS, so we keep our eyes on JESUS and not the impossibility of it all! (Verse 30)*
5. *When/If we lose focus, JESUS is there to rescue us as HE did Peter! (Verse 31a)*
6. *We adjust our faith, align our worldview with HIM! (V31b)*
7. *We worship JESUS for all that HE has done! (Verse 33)*

There were other guys in the boat that night but only Peter found out that a miracle does NOT happen until you step out of your comfort zone and are totally dependent on the Living GOD to come through! It truly is a sink or swim moment! GOD taught our family this principle and it proved life-changing and lifesaving so many times in our future. Realize that with each

step on the water, Peter received one confirmation after another if he kept his eyes on JESUS and not the impossibility of it all. GOD has taught us to do the same. GOD has not changed since that night on the Sea of Galilee, and HE lovingly desires people to seek HIM to do the impossible!

As we discovered, this is not a one-time adventure. On the contrary, GOD desires for us to get ready to step out in faith all over again! Each time we do, we'll have a greater measure of faith and trust in CREATOR and a deeper intimacy with ABBA! This indeed is the essence of our "Venture With GOD!"

We could clearly see that this ministry was one great opportunity to respond to GOD's call and live out what we believed. As we began tackling all the lists of things to accomplish before our departure, I started thinking about the actual voyage and how we would be staying in rest areas and possibly campgrounds. I wanted to have a way to share the gospel in these settings. So, I put out a newsletter and asked people to donate boxes of tracts and compact Bibles that we could hand out. We had several people respond and we created a sticker to place on the back of the Bibles explaining how to receive salvation and our contact info if they were in need of prayer. We have many stories of divine appointments where we used these Bibles as well as our CD, "Nothing Is Impossible", to share the good news with people along the highways and byways.



We found most of these "Divine Appointments" came when our bus broke down and brought our attention to these precious ones, GOD was drawing to HIMself. But that comes later in this story! We were receiving some very encouraging testimonies from people who had heard the CD, "Nothing is Impossible!" It's an extraordinary thought to realize that at any moment of the day or night, GOD could be ministering to someone through this CD! It is like an extension of our ministry! PRAISE GOD! Over the months and years of laboring on this project we prayed that GOD would anoint the songs on the CD to be used mightily by HIM to accomplish HIS will in each listener's life. Here are some testimonies that we received which really touched our hearts...

> *I have a three-year-old who doesn't talk well and we are concerned. A few days shortly after we got your CD, "Nothing Is Impossible!" I was playing the last song, "I Love You Night-Night Song" when one of the kids switched it to their favorite song, "Nothing Is Impossible!". When the chorus came on our little three-year-old started singing right along just as if she had been talking for months! Praise GOD!*
>
> *Each song chipped away at my heart and in the end I was totally open to receive from GOD.*

So it seemed as if GOD had already gone before us and was bringing Himself glory before we even left our driveway and in spite of our limitations. This is exactly how HE works! We just had to become willing vessels.

However, the bus preparations were challenging our resources, time and skills! We didn't have time to plumb the kitchen sink yet, so we decided to drain it into a five-gallon bucket. We planned on carrying 5-gallon water jugs, filling them up along the way as we didn't have any water storage tanks. We left the two front rows of seats in the bus since they were located over the steps and converting this area would be problematic. We mounted seat belts onto the seat frames for the children and especially for Rachel's and Bethany's car seats. The bus heat was still a problem that hadn't been solved. The heating system seemed to only deliver a little bit of warm air to the front of the bus. We discovered that the hot water relay motor wasn't working which pushes the hot water further along the forty-foot-long two-inch water pipes from the radiator in the rear. It was bitterly cold working on the bus. My hands sometimes just wouldn't cooperate they were so frozen. At one point, Mary Ann's brother, Michael told me I could put the bus in his heated garage that he had for his construction business. Since it was the weekend, they wouldn't need it until Monday. I was thrilled with this opportunity to not only work inside the bus but outside. When I went to start up the bus, it would not start. It was too cold, even with a block heater in

the engine! Try as I might it wouldn't start... Then I prayed and asked GOD what was up? I reminded HIM that this was a perfect window of opportunity to paint the bus and work on so many things. As if HE didn't know! I felt GOD saying, “Forget the bus and get ready for Sunday Morning ministry.” I ignored that still small voice and headed down to the auto parts store to get some stuff. On the way out of our long driveway, I got the van stuck! OK, LORD, I get the hint. After getting the van out, we started getting ready for Sunday morning!

We did a service at the Chocolate Church in South Penobscot about fifteen minutes away; Jasmine led the worship service. There was such a sweet Spirit of GOD present. After a potluck dinner we all went to the nursing home and led in some hymns and worship songs. Then the pastor gave a short salvation message. The children were always well received when we went to nursing homes. They had so much love radiating from them, and they hugged everyone!

When we got home, I went out to the bus to try and start it up. Guess what?



It started right up! No surprise, huh? I smiled at GOD and thanked HIM. Then I headed down and put the bus in the nice warm shop! I finished caulking the rivets on the roof around 8:30 PM. I was wondering what to do next. I knew the bus had to be out of the shop by 6:30 the next morning so the crew could work. I took a step of faith and started painting the outside of the bus realizing it would take a small miracle of GOD to dry the paint in less than ten hours! After 10 PM it was snowing outside as I took a break to pick up the kids at a super-bowl party (that I was missing). But GOD is so first-class! I saw the last two minutes and as many of you know it was the most exciting part of the game with Tampa Bay scoring two touchdowns! GOD has such a sense of humor! I got back to painting around 11 PM and finally finished at 2:30 Monday morning. At 6:30 AM it was still snowing as I

went back down to the shop to move the bus out. The paint was still tacky; I thought, “Well GOD, YOU didn't dry the paint, so now it's going to get wet with all this snow. But hopefully LORD YOU won't let the paint peel off when I take it out into the cold.”

A few minutes later Mary Ann's brother, Michael, showed up and told me to leave the bus in the shop for the day! He said due to the snowstorm his crew wouldn't be working in the shop, because they'd be out plowing.

PRAISE THE LORD!! Isn't GOD good?!

Michael went on to say that if one of the plow trucks broke down, then we'd have to move the bus out. We prayed for NO breakdowns! Yep, you guessed it, sure enough they had none! Later that morning, three brothers in the LORD came by to help work on the bus! One, named Ted, was a demolitions expert. In a few hours, Ted had taken out around 500 pounds of the old air conditioning unit, which was rusted, broken, and we were told would never work. This not only lightened up the bus, but also provided a perfect place for a generator. GOD is SO GOOD sending not just help, but the right kind of help to come our way when we have committed everything into HIS hands! I hope this testimony will encourage you to put everything you have into GOD's hands and let HIM have full control over your life!

So many people helped us with the last-minute conversion and repairs on the bus the few weeks before we left. At one point, we discovered a coffee can filled with coins under a pile of coats on the bus! About $131 worth of coins!! Someone had secretly hidden it there for us to find and didn't want us to know who gave the blessing! Since we had so many visitors stopping by to see the bus, we weren't sure who it was, but GOD knows! We also were loaned a generator for the trip by our brother-in-law "Uncle Ron". The gas toilet idea didn't work out, so I was going to mount a toilet seat on a five-gallon bucket. But thank GOD, Pastor Burt and Sharon thought it a better idea to purchase a regular portable camp toilet! My family was SO thankful that my idea didn't come to pass (pun intended)!

We had no running water yet, and the gas stove was not connected to propane tanks. But praise GOD, we knew it would be a big convenience when it all worked! We put in a heavy duty extension cord that ran up through a hole into the master bedroom area in the back of the bus and then made its way down the side where eventually we would connect various items like TV/VCR, lights, kitchen appliances, etc. The other end of the cord that plugged into “shore power” was curled up in a five-gallon bucket near the radiator. Not bad for a poor-man's conversion, huh? Some bus conversions use heat sensing devices to determine where the bus needs more insulation, but here in Maine in 10-degree weather, you can easily see where the bus needs more insulation cause of the frost forming

inside the bus! We went through a LOT of foam in a can insulating areas!

We planned to hit the road early morning on February 5th, which became known as “D-Day” or Departure Day. As the days ticked down, we had lists for every day to keep us organized and we tried not to get overwhelmed with all that needed to be done. We always started the day with family devotions and time on our knees!

But finally, the day came all too soon.



Departure Day – Loading Up The Bus

Packing on D-Day could NOT have been completed without the help from our dear friends, the Randall Family, who had the knack of seeing a need and then taking care of it! We had to pack music gear including a full sound system, tools to repair the bus, tools and wood to continue converting the bus, home-school books and supplies, clothes for warm and cold weather, plus dress clothes for ministry. We had food and kitchen supplies including water jugs. Think about all you would need to go camping for two months with eight people and then try to stuff it all in a rig 40 feet by 8 feet! Thank GOD we had cargo bays underneath! We had a few puppets given to us from some dear friends Dave & Audrey. Even though we didn't have a puppet stage yet, Kerisa and Abby used the puppets to dramatically lip-sing to some powerful songs.

It was very hard to say good-bye to friends and loved ones and embark on what many thought was an uncertain future. Mary Ann records this in the

family photo album about that day...

> *"It was the most difficult day of my life, but I realized it would be even more difficult not to obey when GOD makes HIS way clear. HIS Grace truly was sufficient, and HE demonstrated that in a big way on this day. Saying goodbye to Mom and Dad was the worst. Mama is my soul mate, best friend, and confident."*

Years later in 2021, when Mary Ann was editing this chapter she wanted to share some precious insights...

> *I am writing this chapter while sitting in a comfy chair looking out the window of an adorable cabin, a stone's throw from the ocean on Popham Beach in Phippsburg, Maine. This is our favorite family vacation spot and has been for many years. In fact, the cabin we are staying in is one we used to have my parents stay in when we came with our little family here over the years. Every window delivers a breath-taking ocean view that can be seen from wherever you are in the cabin. Even from the bed! We've come here this last weekend in October 2021, to work on this book together without interruptions and also to reconnect and heal through some of life's storms we've been walking through recently. As I've stared out at the ocean and walked on the beach, just soaking up the smell of the salty air and the feel of the wind in my hair I've been in awe of our CREATOR who orchestrated all this. I feel so small and insignificant in all my triumphs and troubles in comparison...and rightly so. Working on this chapter where we take our first trip, I am reminded of how I was feeling at the time. I was completely convinced that this was what GOD called us to do and was ready for the step of faith... but I also was grieved in my heart of hearts leaving my home, my siblings, and my mom and dad. I felt so guilty that I was taking away my parent's youngest grandchildren, who lived in their backyard and spent time with them every day. I remember walking into my parent's home during the weeks leading up to our departure more than one time, to find my mom in tears trying to hide her heartache from me. I wrestled with GOD over this for many hours trying to reconcile that what He was calling us to, was going to cause someone very dear to me much pain. I don't know if anyone can relate to this...maybe I was just super close to my parents and it's not relevant to most people. But the truth is, I find myself currently experiencing the very same scenario with my oldest daughter, Jasmine, and her husband Andrew and my four precious grandchildren. They have recently been called to move from MY backyard to Kentucky to join a church plant there. Now I know what you're thinking... leave and cleave … I know. But GOD created us to be intimate with one*

another and there is a bond in family that just grows deeper and deeper as we mature in CHRIST. So, like it or not, I've found myself in tears more often than not over the past several months grieving this loss.

Looking back at 2003, I see in hindsight that GOD had a plan for my parents that may never have been realized had we not been obedient to GOD's calling. They ended up traveling with us going all over the United States, meeting people, deepening their faith as they walked through trials with us and witnessed GOD's miraculous provision and intervention. They were faithful believers and had seen GOD move in their lives, but GOD gave them opportunity to be challenged on a deeper level as they prayed for "angels to push the bus up hills"... and for GOD to provide enough money to fill our tank with fuel when we only had $50.00, as well as countless other situations. So today, as I write this, I am encouraged that GOD has not forgotten this "grandma" either. HIS plan is always good and I am trusting HE has this heartache of mine in HIS hands. If you can relate in any way to these thoughts, I pray you would be encouraged as well. HE is good and HE is faithful!

Back to 2003, Departure Day. Kerry continues.. I felt terrible for causing my family, friends, and loved ones so much pain by ripping my family out of their world. But through the tears my inner spirit quietly knew that we were doing the right thing. In looking back, I'm so thankful GOD confirmed HIS will for us to do this ministry over and over again. Because when the moments of doubt rose up like a flood, we could still move forward in HIS confidence even though it wasn't easy.



Very Sad Good-Byes

We left our home around noon (so much for the 7 AM departure time!). Then, several cars followed us up the road a few miles amidst many tears. Some probably wondering if the bus would even get that far! It was cold out and since the bus heating system wasn't working very well, we were so very thankful for the propane gas wall heater unit that would work going down the road to take the chill off! We didn't have to worry about fumes from the heater as the bus was well ventilated at least up in the front area!

We were about two hours from home when we encountered our first “bus problem”. We had just pulled back onto the interstate after a pit stop when we couldn’t get from 3rd to 4th gear, which is the difference from 40 mph to 65 mph! We pulled over and looked over the shift linkages, but all looked fine (As if I really knew what I was looking at!). Then we started praying and finally, it went into 4th gear! Almost every time after, we had to pray to get the bus into 4th and let me tell you, that was a faith booster for all of us!

We stopped in New Hampshire to see my parents and had a great visit with them. They blessed us with a full tank of fuel and some ‘sendoff’ presents for the kids! Not long after we got on the road again, we realized it would be too late to make Connecticut, which was our scheduled stop for the night. I knew our bus alternator wasn’t working right and so we couldn’t use the headlights very long. Plus, the young ones were getting fussy. So, we pulled off at a rest area for the night. I went to start the generator and I broke a motor mount that holds the engine to the frame. No problem I thought, I will just hold the engine down with my foot. Then I broke the pull cord off the generator! Now we had no way of getting electricity! “No problem,” I told the family, “We have flashlights and a propane heater, so I’ll just plug in our LP/gas alarm detector, and we’ll be safe, warm, and snug.” I plugged the detector in and it went wild saying error on the little read out. I dug out the manual and it informed me that when we see 'error' we need to take it back to the store we purchased it from, because it has a problem!

“OK, LORD”, I said, “Since we have made you LORD over everything we own, and since we have asked in faith for YOU to direct our steps, then it seems clear that we can’t 'safely' spend the night in the bus!”

So, we put all the kids back in their seat belts and went to start the bus up. But it didn’t start! No problem, I said, we have a booster pack and a spare battery that I can hook up. But the bus still didn’t start! Then we started to pray! (Should have done that first!) I adjusted the cables on the spare battery, got back on the bus, and we continued to pray. I tried it again and it started! PRAISE GOD! We got back on the interstate and started looking for a motel. We pulled off after seeing signs for a Holiday Inn, because we knew they'd allow a large family to all sleep in one room. We followed the signs up a narrow street to the motel parking lot, which had no room to park the bus let alone turn it around! We then had to back out of the driveway.

So Josiah got outside with a walkie-talkie and started directing us. We got down the street to a traffic light and the bus stalled! So now we were blocking the road with a huge bus, praying for GOD to start it up! I got out the cell phone and started to call our road-side service when the bus started! We pulled into a gas station and while I sat with the bus in first gear and the clutch pressed in so we wouldn't stall, Mary Ann ran in and asked for some recommendations on motels with BIG parking areas. She found one up at the next exit. We called to make sure they had availability and room for a bus.



Then we headed up the interstate once again with dim headlights due to low batteries. We pulled into the motel and drove around looking for the best place to park near a room. This way, we could plug our engine block heater in because the temperature was in the teens, and we needed to charge our batteries. We got a room near the parking area, hoping to run our extension cord out the window to the bus. But when I went to open the window, I found out that it didn't open! This was after parking the bus and turning it off! I asked GOD to provide some way and then I noticed the swimming pool nearby and walked over to it. Viola! I found an outlet at the pool pump house! Thank you, LORD!

Looking back, I now see GOD's hand in leading us to stay at a motel so we could recharge our bus batteries and be able to start the bus the next day. Plus, it was very cold out and a motel room was in everyone's comfort zone as we had done it so many times before in recent years through my job. Dear reader, please know that even though GOD has called someone, it doesn't mean it will be easy. Just ask the saints in China or many other countries. At times being in ministry is down right harder than nails! But

remember this passage from Romans 5:3-5...

> *We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly GOD loves us, because HE has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with HIS love.*

The word “disappointment” can derail our GOD-given destiny. We need to change the “D” to “H” and focus on the new word, “HISappointment”. One letter but a huge difference. The choice is ours as well as the outcome!

The next day, we returned the gas detector and got one that we knew was working properly. Thankfully, Mary Ann's sisters sent along some goodie boxes for the kids and these were quite a blessing keeping them busy for hours!

Bethany, at 18-months old, was showing signs of being homesick and not content riding in her car seat all day. She kept pointing to the bus door as if she wanted to go inside the house. But there was no place else to go. It broke Mary Ann's heart to see her so upset. GOD helped us through it and after a few days we were all settled in our home away from home.

After we went through Hartford, Connecticut, a trucker passed us and honked his horn making circular motions with his hand. I immediately looked in my mirrors but didn’t see anything.



Earlier Mary Ann had heard a noise in the back of the bus, but I thought that was something moving around in the cargo bays. A while later I noticed

pieces of rubber coming off our bus! We pulled off the next exit and parked at a Home Depot store just over the New York line. I looked at the tires and found the rear inside tire was flat and totally chewed up. Thank GOD we were safely off the interstate! We made our first call to Good Sam's, our road-side service, and they said they would have a person onsite to change our tire within two hours. So, while we were waiting, I started repairing the generator and took off the "pull cord thingy" (like my technical term?). Since we were at Home Depot, I took the part in to see if they had a replacement part and talked to someone who recommended gorilla glue to fix the motor mount. The road-side service man was there in less than thirty minutes and put our spare tire on! He mentioned the area was expecting three to five inches of snow and suggested we head on down the road. So we did, even though darkness was setting in, and we made it as far as Port Jervis, New York on the Pennsylvania line when I felt the lights were too dim to travel safely. Since the generator still wasn't fixed, we pulled off looking for a motel when I noticed an Assembly of GOD church nearby. I felt led to pull up this long driveway to the church located on a small hill. It so happened that the worship team was there practicing! They welcomed us and let us use their facility giving us permission to park for the night. They dropped us an extension cord out the window so we could plug in! As we got ready for bed, we discovered that we were missing two pillows (Kerry and Mary Ann's.) We somehow had left them back in the motel room in Massachusetts!

We spent our first night in the bus and I got up early to start the propane heater, as it was a cold 20 degrees outside! When I looked outside, I could see lots of snow everywhere! The snowstorm dropped about five inches, and we decided to wait until we were plowed out rather than risk sliding off the steep driveway into the ditch! It was good that we waited because we later found out from a brother that plows the church parking lot that the interstate was closed due to an accident.



Church In Jervis Bethany Not Happy.

By early afternoon when we started out the interstate was mostly clear of

snow. It was bitterly cold outside, and the bus heater was not working much at all. Mary Ann bundled everyone up. She had Bethany in two layers of clothes and covered with lots of blankets. Every mile represented a mile closer to warmer weather, so we hoped! We began really depending on GOD right at the start of our trip. We decided to post-pone our planned visit to Valley Forge Christian College and head straight for Hedgesville, West Virginia where our first ministry was scheduled on Sunday. We stopped for fuel and could not get the bus started once again, because the batteries were low due to using the heater fan to keep the windshield clear. We hooked up our spares and finally got it going after much prayer! Again and again, we had to pull over to have one of the kids take a chair outside to stand on so they could scrape the front windshield clear while I sat in the driver's seat with the bus in gear and foot on the clutch so it wouldn't stall. As nightfall came upon us we found ourselves south of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and were forced to turn our lights on. We prayed that GOD would safely get us to Hedgesville, and HE did! We all gave a deep sigh of relief and PRAISED GOD when we pulled into the church yard with very dim lights and saw someone standing there! We pulled up alongside of the man and I opened the bus door. The chair that we had used to scrape the windshield went flying out, almost hitting the man who happen to be the Pastor! (How NOT to make a first good impression!) We all cringed and were dying inside, when Kerisa, who was sitting near the door, leaned over the railing laughing and said, “Have a seat?” Pastor Don laughed and greeted us warmly. He showed us where to hook up. Then, he ordered out for pizza and we sat around visiting getting to know he and his lovely wife, who the kids called Sister Honey, because she was so sweet! This was the best sort of welcome we could have imagined. We were all feeling so insecure and scared wondering if we had made a mistake in venturing out with this bus. The kids were superb, but we knew they felt homesick and needed some reassurance that it was going to be okay. Pastor Don and Sister Honey fit the part perfectly! They were so loving and kind, completely embracing our children just like they were their own. They played games with them and teased them which made a very traumatic trip feel like it was no big deal! This also was a huge relief to Mary Ann and I as we were recovering from the stress and trying to regroup ourselves.

The Saints at Hedgesville Church made us feel so welcomed by coming by the church to meet us. They provided meals for us each day we were there! People brought in treats and things for the children to play with, and they gave us a key to the church and the use of the church van so we could get groceries and do laundry!! A great bonus was that the church had a shower! It was the perfect introduction for us and to ministry on the road. We really had no idea what it might look like in a practical way. Things like, being able to teach school inside the church nursery while the little ones played, were huge answers to prayer!

Sunday morning everyone again made us feel so at home and welcomed from the moment Sunday school began. The Lussier Family, who had referred us for ministry there, was on the road with their own ministry, but before they left, they apparently had done a huge public relations campaign on our behalf! If you're not familiar with the Lussier Ministry, you need to visit their web site at Kidzturn.com. They are not only top notch and high tech but are used by GOD powerfully to minister not only to kids but teens and adults alike. They were instrumental in encouraging us with the call to evangelism and helped us by securing our first ministry booking, as well as an inspiration to us as we watched what GOD was doing through their family ministry.

Praise the LORD, Sunday morning HE moved through our ministry in some deep and personal ways! All glory to GOD! We shared about our trip there and some of the problems with the bus. After church, when I went out to the bus it was like a NASCAR pit crew with people all around, some wanting to work on the generator taking the pull-cord thingy home to fix it! Another guy, named Skip, was taking down the tire size and later telling me that he had one to give us! That's about a $200-300 value! Another person, named Bobby, was a diesel mechanic and looked at our alternator to see if he could fix our battery-charging problem!



He planned to come by the next evening to work on it! Several families told us they would bring meals! Someone bought a CD and handed one of the children a $50 bill and said to keep the change! GOD really heaped love on us through this marvelous fellowship. We were blown away! The pastor and his wife took us out to eat at a steak restaurant! While we were gone the youth group washed our bus in the chilly cold weather. It looked brand new! Sunday night we ministered again, and we felt the presence of GOD in a powerful way. Praise GOD! This was new to us...we had done some church services in the past using our music and preaching, but this was very different. We felt so inadequate for the calling...we were not professional, and we were so very needy. Looking back, this was exactly what GOD had in mind. Therefore, we could never boast in ourselves but only in GOD!!!

Mary Ann writes..

> *The next day I went to K-Mart to get the kids a little something for Valentine's Day. I made them each a special card, but I wanted to give them a small gift as well. When I went to pay for the items at K-Mart our debit card was declined. I then wrote out a check, but it also was declined! I was so embarrassed and terribly disappointed and ended up in tears leaving the cart behind with everything in it.*
>
> *Unknown to me, my thoughtful husband later went back and got every single thing that I had in the cart. The next morning, I walked into the ladies' room at the church to find two K-Mart bags! I just cried. GOD is so good...HE knows that we want to give good gifts to our children, and that's exactly how HE feels about giving HIS children good gifts. My husband is also so good to us! He's the love of my life, I am so very blessed!*



Breakfast On The Bus – Bethany In Highchair!

Monday afternoon a family brought us a feast of a supper with a love gift of money besides! Again, we were blown away! That evening the diesel mechanic, Bobby, showed up with another church member and they tested our alternator and found some dead diodes. They then took the 80-pound alternator off in the middle of a blizzard! Skip returned to take our flat tire and put on one that was almost new! Another huge gift from GOD! We had a sweet time of fellowship afterward.

Meanwhile, the family was adjusting to life on the bus. Simple things, like being able to give the children baths, and feeding Bethany without her running free, were now new challenges.

We were doing devotions in the nursery one morning when someone from

the church, John, came in to meet and welcome us. He had to work all night Saturday and couldn't be in church on Sunday. His wife, Mary had helped us the day before with laundry and had shown us how to get the most out of the machines! John spent the day with us, playing with the kids, and he even bought a filter for the bus transmission and put it on! He also got an opportunity for us to minister at a nursing home the following week.



Mary & John

We found out from Pastor Don that the alternator was beyond repair and had parts disintegrating inside! The shop said they found one for around $900 and the pastor mentioned this to someone who said they would help with $100 of it! Then someone else gave $50 toward the alternator! The church board decided to purchase the alternator for us and let us pay them back whenever! We made some beautiful friends in Hedgesville, in fact some life-long friendships! We were learning the true meaning of being in the family of GOD!

On Valentine's Day we met as a family in the church nursery to do family devotions and open up Valentine's Cards. It was a bitter-sweet time. The trip already had become a bonding experience for some of us as we are literally clinging to each other. Years ago, I read that a great way to help families bond together is to go on camping trips. Not that the camping was the bond, but the inevitable crisis that always occurs while camping, creates the bonding! When a crisis hits, families go though it together. The 'gluing' takes about two weeks before it 'sets up' but after that, families are closer! So, I did just that over the years by taking my family camping. But this bus trip on the road for over two months.... well let's just say we came close to the maximum level on the Family Crisis Gauge! So here we were on Valentine's Day in the cozy church nursery sitting on the carpet. We opened gifts the grandparents had sent and our cards from each other. We ate chocolate and cried. It was indeed a bitter-sweet time as we all ached to see our loved ones back home. The day wasn't totally sad as Kerisa and Abby made a romantic dinner with candles for Mary Ann and I. They waited on us like we were in a fancy restaurant!

On this first leg of our “Venture With GOD” some of the kids wrote in our newsletter expressing their personal experiences. Here are a few excerpts ...

Hey you guys! This is Jasmine (Age 15)

The past few days have been an experience! (To say the least!) But it’s all good—as long as we’re on GOD’s side! I have to admit I haven’t been as full of faith as I should have been. I’ve had my moments of doubt during trials when I ask myself, “I know we’re called, but are we called to do this? Now?” or ‘Is this just us or is it GOD?” Cause it sure doesn’t feel like GOD right now! But every time we’ve needed HIM – whether it’s been losing a tire, missing our first two destinations, or waiting for HIM to switch our bus into fourth gear, HE’s always come through. I have no doubt in my mind that we’re in HIS will. Yes, it’s been tough. I look back and D-Day (Departure Day) seems like a forever ago. So much has changed. We were so inexperienced! So naive! We really didn’t have a clue of what we were getting ourselves into. At least I didn’t! But GOD is merciful (thankfully) and HE’s helped us through everything. No, we don’t know it all yet, and yes, we still have a long journey ahead of us, but I know that this is what GOD wants us to do, and HE promises that when we’re following HIM and staying in HIS will, HE’ll take care of us and lead us on. I miss you all so much! I’d be lying if I said that I didn’t. I’ve had my share of tear-filled nights, along with sobbing in the WalMart parking lot (details later), and I’ve sent many prayers up for you all, knowing how it feels to be ‘left behind’ when someone you love goes on a mission and you get left at home. But that is what’s different this time. You’re not ‘left behind’. We didn’t set out on this trip on our own. We’re depending on you! Thinking about you, and thanking GOD for your prayers daily! There hasn’t been one day since we left that I haven’t thought of you all at least twenty times and smiled knowing that you’re supporting us and praying for us even when you might not know what to pray for. You guys are more then friends, you’re our sisters and brothers in CHRIST! We’re tied together in a bond that only GOD can make. When one of us (or in this case eight of us) leaves to fulfill the mission that GOD has set before us, the rest of the body needs to support and encourage that person, knowing that they are helping further the Kingdom. And you guys have done just that. We know that no matter how awful a day gets, or how small the bus is, or how long it’s been since I’ve taken a shower, you guys are lifting us up and supporting us! That means more to me then you all will ever know!

Love in CHRIST, Jasmine

Philippians. 1:6-8 "And I am certain that GOD, who began the good work within you, will continue HIS work until it is finally finished on the day when CHRIST JESUS returns. So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of GOD, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News. GOD knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of CHRIST JESUS.

Hey ya'll this is Josiah (Age13)

We're doing cool, or should I say, "getting warmer? Naw, we're in West Virginia, and I am sitting here watching the snowfall! Is that one foot or two?!!!! The men at the church say this is the snowiest winter in twenty years! I think we're bringing the snow with us! (Anything to make us feel at home!) We've been gone for six days, nineteen hours! Say hi to Fizz, our horse and give him a huge hug! We had a fire in the bus which was my pillow being too close to a light bulb! Just smoke and a burnt pillowcase. We had gears that won't shift properly. And we get to bed really late! Presently we are snowed in. We got 28 inches of snow in one storm! These folks are not used to that much snow. Everything is closed. The bus cargo bays won't even open up! We got one cargo bay opened up but couldn't get it closed all the way again. There was so much snow the plow trucks couldn't handle it all so the church brought in a farm tractor with a huge bucket for a plow! Last night around 12:30 AM there was an attempted robbery! One of the engine doors was not shut properly and the wind hit it hard and from inside the bus it sounded like someone was robbing us! We finally sent Dad out to check! We'd also brought our rubber raft to use when we get down south. Dad dug it out and inflated it up so we could use it as a sled on the hill behind the church! We had hours of fun with Pastor Don and his daughter!



Pastor Don managed to get us into two churches for Sunday, February 16, but due to the snowstorm, everything was canceled! We kept warm, had some fun sledding, playing games in the church, practicing songs, and getting to know people. Praise The LORD, we were able to fix the alternator so our bus batteries would charge up. However, after it was installed our mechanic friends discovered that the voltage regulator was nowhere to be found! As some of you may know the voltage regulator keeps the voltage at a certain level so it can run important things on the bus. The former owners had apparently taken this part off and neglected to inform us when they gave the bus to us! Thankfully we got one and installed it, and we had no more problems starting the bus and running fans, lights, etc.! PRAISE THE LORD!

Looking back if the snowstorm hadn't of hit, we most likely would have moved on down the road. Hence, some of the bus repairs might not have happened and certainly our relationships would not have grown as much!



Saying Good-byes to Pastor Don!

We left Hedgesville Church, Tuesday, February 18th around noon, heading south and found Interstate 81 to be clear of snow. We came through the Blue Ridge Mountains down onto the North Carolina plains and spent the night at a campground in Booneville, NC, finding the weather pretty mild

compared to what we had seen. Wednesday, February 19th was Abby's Birthday, and she celebrated it in two states (North and South Carolina). It's hard having a birthday without your friends, but we tried to make it a special day for Abigail. First, we did our tradition of hiding small gifts all around the bus and then played "Hot N Cold" giving Abby hints as to where she could find the presents! Mary Ann made this entry in the family photo album...

> *Happy 9th Birthday Abby! You are such a treasure and a blessing to us! You are a bundle of all joy from GOD. May GOD Bless you abundantly this year!*



We were in South Carolina and while fueling up, the kids went wild at seeing palm trees! We headed for the southern part of the state to visit our Associate Pastor from our home church, Pastor Joe, who was visiting his fiance', Trish, a true southern bell! As we were traveling on back roads to her house, we missed a turn. We then proceeded down the road to find a place big enough to pull the bus over, let cars by, and turn the bus around. The bus was 40 feet long and had a wheelbase of 33 feet. That means the distance between the front and back wheels is 33 feet and that's quite a distance for a vehicle. Most roads are crowned and the one we were on was not very wide. So, in turning the bus around and backing it over the crown of the road we bottomed out! Try as I might the wheels on the bus just went round and round not getting any traction and there the bus sat! (Sounds like a song I know!) Once again blocking traffic!



Well after trying to jack the bus up, we finally had to call good ole “Good Sam RV Road Service” to pull us out! But in the process a man stopped to help. Come to think of it, everyone had to stop since the bus was once again blocking the road! When we finally got unstuck, I thanked him and gave him our CD “Nothing Is Impossible”. He said that he was a Christian and that GOD had been dealing with him about singing more in public. He confessed that he wasn’t comfortable up in front of people and had been shying away from singing. We encouraged him to step out in faith if he knew that GOD had indeed called him to sing and like Moses, let GOD take care of the shyness. So once again, GOD turned an incident into a HIM-cident! HE also turned a mistake into a good lesson for me, and hopefully a milestone for the man we met.

Since we were only a few miles from Trish's house, Pastor Joe came over to try and help. We were grateful that he could lead us to our home for the night! They gave us a down-home southern welcome with plenty of food and swell hospitality! The kids played with their horses and baby grand piano. What a great time was had by all!



The Lord Family with Pastor Jo & Trish

We stayed with Pastor Joe and Trish for a couple of days and left on a beautiful warm sunny day, heading west towards Southeast Atlanta to a suburb called Ellenwood. Once we left the interstate, we started having bus problems with the clutch. After going through a stop sign or traffic light the bus seem to have shifting issues. We had all we could do to maneuver the bus and park the thing upon arriving at Ellenwood First Baptist Church. We were warmly greeted by the Saints, and one even volunteered to take and wash five loads of laundry for us! What a huge benefit that was! The pastor gave us access to the church bathrooms, phones, and even the church van!

The next day I awoke, discouraged about the bus, thinking every time we pull into a church it seems the bus has problems. I called around the South Atlanta area hoping to find an old bus like ours to get parts off of but found nothing. During devotions I read aloud to the family midst tears this powerful passage from 2 Corinthians 4:1-12. I don't think it was by accident that GOD led us to this scripture!

> *Therefore, since through GOD's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways. We do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of GOD. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of GOD. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of CHRIST, who is the image of GOD. For we do not preach ourselves, but JESUS CHRIST as LORD, and ourselves as your servants for JESUS' sake. For GOD, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made HIS light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of GOD in the face of CHRIST.*
> *But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from GOD and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of JESUS, so that the life of JESUS may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for JESUS' sake, so that HIS life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.*

Once again, GOD told us from HIS word, that HE would take care of us and provide for our needs. Mary Ann began leading us as a family to memorize this section of scripture. It was a bedrock for us through the years as trials never cease to challenge GOD's children. Back in 1996, Mary Ann was first challenged to memorize portions of scripture as well as individual verses.

It's so powerful to recite the Word of GOD. She decided to put **Psalm 63** into a song as she was memorizing it. It has become a beautiful encouraging hymn.



So, we prayed through, and by noon, I was feeling myself again.