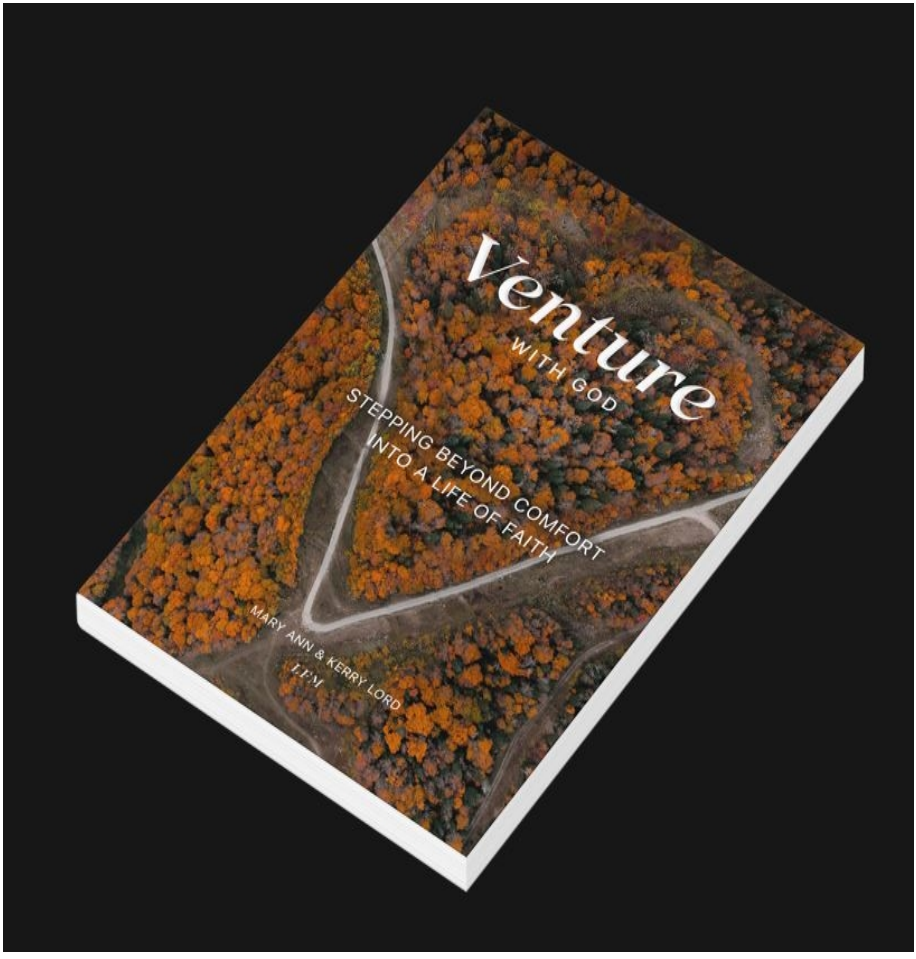

Venture
WITH GOD
STEPPING BEYOND COMFORT
INTO A LIFE OF FAITH
MARY ANN & KERRY LORD

The Venture begins

Society's comfort-first mentality has left many feeling empty and without purpose in their lives. This was true for Kerry and Mary Ann over twenty years ago when they obeyed GOD's call to step beyond comfort and into a life of faith.

Venture with GOD is the journey of the Lord Family encountering 'divine appointments'; life-changing stories spanning two decades of living by faith. Common threads that weave these stories together are obedience, humility, and courage; all required to manifest the beautiful work of GOD. These stories reveal GOD's desire to work through any who are willing to Venture beyond comfort and to live by faith.

All it takes is an eager heart and the guts to break away. The thirst for more than average everyday.

RACHEL LORD, *CHANGE YOUR LIFE*



KERRY & MARY ANN LORD

VENTUREWITHGOD.COM

Venture With GOD!

Mary Ann & Kerry Lord

Dedication

This book is dedicated to our phenomenal children:

Jasmine, Josiah, Kerisa, Abigail, Rachel, and Bethany

We all have one life to leave a legacy and we pray you will continue carrying the Light of CHRIST JESUS throughout your lives leaving an impact on many precious souls! THANK YOU precious children so very much for the privilege of being your parents and for your very special part in this ministry. We truly would NOT have had the impact on this “Venture With GOD” without YOU!

Many thanks to all those known and unknown people who helped us through the break downs, giving us meals, providing us a place to stay, blessing us with finances, and simply loving on us over the thousands of miles. One day we will know all the ways you gave! We honor you with this book and Thank YOU! I started making a list of names but soon realized that it would have filled many pages. Plus, I'd probably leave someone out!

Thank you Jo Lord for the awesome book cover and technical expertise! Thank you editors Megan and Barbara!

All glory to our Savior, LORD, and lover of our souls - JESUS CHRIST, the one and only Son of the Omni-All, Creator of the Universe! Without HIS supernatural power equipping us we would have given up long ago! May YOU, LORD, continue to work in the lives that we were privileged to touch through our music and ministry. All praise and glory belongs to YOU alone!

For Bible Versions we use NIV, NLT, TPT, CEV, KJV (Permission Granted). Keep in mind, GOD’s Word will **NOT** return void. If you think you aren't using an adequate version of the Bible then find something that you can understand, memorize, and quote. ***Your faith*** in GOD’s Word is ***paramount*** so **YOU** can be a useful tool in **HIS** hands. At times we reference passages in the Bible using a colon like this, John 3:16, which means to find the book of John in the Bible using the index in the front. Then go to Chapter 3 in the book of John. The very first sentence has the number 1 next to it. Now look for a sentence beginning with a “16”. This is what's called Verse 16. Hence, John 3:16

There's a PDF version $7 VentureWithGOD.com

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This book is in the first person of me, Kerry, telling the story so it flows better for you, the reader. But please know that Mary Ann has also contributed hugely to the writing. Many stories have been left out and would have taken a few more years to write of the wondrous things GOD did in so many lives!

Scan the QR codes for bonus material like songs, deeper content, and more!

Prologue

"Children!! Come to the front of the bus NOW!
If we're gonna die, we'll die together!!!"

That was my beloved wife, Mary Ann, the Mom, as we were desperately trying to get our bus out of the Grand Canyon steep parking area. We were in a 60 foot articulated bus and the back of the bus was just spitting distance from a two hundred foot drop-off with no guardrail! There were other legitimate reasons to fear for our lives during our "Venture With GOD!" like rubbing the guardrails on a steep narrow bending road, trying to get safely down from Rock City in Tennessee. Mary Ann had every reason to be fearful from a time when our first bus while parked on an incline in Hedgesville, West Virginia, the brakes suddenly let go! She was with Bethany in the back of a moving bus backing out into a busy street! Then there's the construction flagman in Maine who was standing in the middle of our lane holding a stop sign who didn't see our bus frantically trying to stop! Mary Ann sprang from the front seat and banged on the window yelling for the man to move!

Mary Ann writes this...

There are times when you just know that GOD has called you to do something even though it doesn't make sense, and that knowledge rises up a faith and trust in GOD that makes obedience the safest place on the planet. Never would we purposely have gotten ourselves into any of these life-threatening situations. But sometimes the unthinkable happens and we see GOD honor our obedience and protect us in our ignorance. Here we are two decades later...we all survived...and we all have a legacy of faith to pass onto the next generation of passionate followers of CHRIST marching to the beat of a "different drum". To no one's "fault"...we always seem to have "walked to the beat of a different drum".

I think I first heard the "drum" when I realized there was more to being a Christian than accepting JESUS as my LORD and Savior...not that this is irrelevant! It is the prerequisite for life eternal! I was living my life thinking that I had done all that I needed to do to please GOD and spend eternity with HIM. In a sense, I was correct.. I had been redeemed by grace and become a child of the Living GOD. But over time I came to see that this was just the beginning! I was being equipped for the unique calling GOD had placed on my life. Joining my life with Kerry's life was not a coincidence. It was GOD-ordained and we both wanted to cooperate with GOD in all the plans HE had for us. Our early years of marriage were filled with dreams of traveling and doing ministry with music as our means of

touching lives with the love of CHRIST. Nothing was going to stop us. We were driven to pursue what GOD had placed in our hearts to do. Although had we known what we know now, we would've done things differently. The heart's desire to follow GOD and do whatever HE leads us to do hasn't changed a bit. It was almost twenty years, and six children later, before that vision of traveling and doing ministry with music came to pass. But it DID come to pass...it definitely was a vision given to us by GOD. The years in between the birth of the vision and the actual living it were not wasted... they were the years that GOD taught us about faith, about love, and obedience; and about HIMself! We fell in love with the ONE we called LORD because we experienced HIS provision in times of poverty; HIS compassion in times of sorrow, with the loss of four children to miscarriage; HIS healing when I had a serious health issue; HIS faithfulness when HE sold our house just in time after listing it for two years. (Yes, our GOD is a "Just-In-Time" type of GOD!) HIS mercy when we made decisions without seeking HIM for guidance; and HIS great and amazing love over and over and over again! There were many other things we learned during this time of "waiting"...too many to list. Let's just say, GOD knows what HE's doing! Not to say that when the time came we were all equipped and ready for everything we were about to go through. I'm sure that it was an act of GOD's mercy that we weren't aware of the many trials and circumstances that lay ahead of us! But GOD had given us an unshakable foundation to stand on! Now the Lord Family was ready to live a "Venture With GOD" to the beat of HIS drum! (Yes, our last name really is Lord!)

Over the years, as we have followed GOD's calling on our lives, we have received wisdom from godly people who had their own "Ventures with GOD" that encouraged and inspired us. Some we read about in biographies such as George Mueller and Gladys Aylward. There were also people we knew and respected who shared their experiences with us to help us along the way. We found that <u>above all,</u> turning to prayer first and <u>pushing through was and is always the key!</u> Our hope is that we could pass on some of our own stories, as crazy as they may seem to you, in an attempt to open your eyes to see that NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE with GOD! If HE has called you to go on a "Venture With GOD", HE will be with you and that is all you need.

And so it begins... our ***"Venture With GOD!"***

Chapter One – In The Beginning

In looking back we now see that the twenty plus years we call the "Preparation Years" were paramount for the twelve plus "Performing Years". Dear reader, please know that “A Venture With GOD” is like the tides that ebb and flow in our growing closer to our out-of-this-world CREATOR. And so we share with you our “Venture With GOD!” Not that we boast in ourselves for we are nothing without CHRIST, but as the Bible says in 1 Corinthians, Chapter 1, Verse 3...

“Let him who boasts, boast in the LORD!”

May GOD use this book not only to increase your faith in HIM, but also to move you into new levels of action for HIM, so that HIS Kingdom might come and HIS will be done for HIS glory, now and forever. AMEN!

“***For Nothing Is Impossible With GOD!”***
Luke 1:37

I, Kerry, was born in Greeley, Colorado in 1957 where my Dad was taking night courses while coaching and teaching at Mead High School. Around eighteen months old I fell out of a moving car! My Mom, one-year old sister, and I used to ride around and visit friends while Dad was in class. One evening, while a friend stood outside talking to my Mom through the car window, I climbed into the front seat and started playing with the passenger's door. When we drove away Mom let me stand beside her because it wasn't far to the next friend's house. This was long before seat belts and car seats! As we took a turn, I lost my balance and rolled towards the passenger's door. Mom tried to grab in vain. I hit the door, which popped open, and I rolled right out of the moving car! Apparently I must have unlatched the door back at the other house. My mother says she heard a thump and thought she had rolled over me! Within seconds she brought the car to a stop, and mustering all her courage, got out and looked behind the car, positive that she had driven over me! As she rounded the back of the car her eyes fell upon me standing there with my blanket in one hand and pillow in the other, perfectly fine and not even crying! Even though I was wearing thin clothing, I didn't appear to be hurt! Frantically, my Mom rushed me into the neighbor's house. The ladies examined me and couldn't find even a scratch! I told them I was hungry and so they gave me milk and cookies! They called the doctor, as this was way before the days of dialing 911! He assured them that I must be fine since I was eating and there were no outward injuries. That night, my mother slept by me and woke up with every sound that I made. The next day I acted normal, just like nothing had happened. (Although some of you would argue otherwise!) Praise GOD! One might think it very odd that I didn't show any signs of injury and was still holding onto my blanket and pillow. What was that

thump Mom heard? I believe the LORD certainly protected me! Perhaps she ran over my guardian angel's foot as he was catching me from hitting the ground! At any rate, I thank GOD for HIS protection!

It was a cold winter on the coast of Maine in January of 1961 when Mary Ann Astbury was born. Even before her mom could embrace this precious baby, the medical staff had to rush the little six pound Mary Ann off to another hospital an hour away because she needed a life-saving blood transfusion. The next few days were critical as Mary Ann underwent three blood transfusions! Her mother, having complications from the birth, was not able to go with Mary Ann! A week later her Mom was finally reunited and held this tiny newborn who they said could fit inside a shoe box!

Though Mary Ann and I were born many states apart, GOD would bring us together in a very unique way. Thankfully we were raised in Christian homes and each of us started writing songs at a young age. As a youth, I would wake up in the morning singing a song in my head that I'd never heard. Mary Ann learned to play piano studying with, now world-renown, Masanobu Ikemiya. I learned to play trumpet and practiced in my attic for hours while, unbeknownst to me, the whole neighborhood could hear! Occasionally people would come up to each of us saying something like, "The Lord has a call upon your life." We just didn't know what that meant in practical terms.

One Sunday morning at age eleven in Mary Ann's home church, GOD moved on her heart to walk down front in response to her Pastor's altar call and make JESUS CHRIST her Savior. She remembers after going down to the altar "skipping" over to the chapel building to help with nursery and feeling light hearted and free!

I was raised in the Reorganized Latter Day Saint (RLDS) Denomination since my mother's maiden name was Smith having ties to the founder of that movement. You may know, the RLDS is an offshoot of Mormonism, but is more aligned to Biblical Doctrines. I came to believe that GOD has given each person a measure of faith as stated in Romans 12:3. So early in my childhood I took to heart what I was taught about the GOD of the Bible and HIS Son, JESUS. My experience has been that if people are hungry for GOD then HE will meet them where they are at in spite of denominations and upbringing. I know GOD did that with me! As a youth I had some sort of relationship with GOD, but if pressed for a distinct point of salvation, then I would pick a time in 1972 when I was in eighth grade. My family had moved from Colorado to Western Maine to be closer to my Dad's aging parents. I was home alone flipping between the only two working channels on the TV set, when I saw a preacher named Billy Graham give an altar call inviting even those watching to come and surrender their lives to JESUS. That night in front of the TV, I knelt and prayed, asking forgiveness and was born

again! I learned much from my Grandparents (pictured later) who taught me knots, daily devotions, painting, cleaning, carpentry, gardening, swimming, boat handling, how to live without TV, and much about life that I would use repeatedly in years to come.

During our college years, it is really crazy how GOD brought Mary Ann and I together! In 1977, I attended the University of Maine at Orono and was visiting a classmate from high school when her roommate, Karen Astbury walked in. After introductions were made, Karen noticed me staring at a picture of a beautiful, long-haired girl.



She said, "That's my sister, Mary Ann. But forget it, she's taken!" It would be three more years before I would finally meet Mary Ann and at a Special Needs Camp of all places!

It was the summer of 1980, Mary Ann had just finished her freshman year in Paxton, Massachusetts at Anna Maria College. She was studying Music Therapy and had been asked to do a music program for Camp Winni, a week-long county sponsored event for Special Needs Youth. I had just gotten back into the State of Maine from doing a Special Needs Camp in Missouri. "***Somehow***" I heard about Camp Winni so I volunteered as a counselor. The day before the campers were due to arrive, there was a mandatory staff meeting. I, being my usual tardy self, walked into the meeting late! There my eyes fell upon a beautiful, long-haired gal who looked vaguely familiar! I didn't know it yet, but it was the same Mary Ann whose picture I had seen three years earlier!

Just weeks before, Mary Ann had decided not to date anymore, asking GOD to show her clearly the man she was supposed to marry. When she saw me, she vividly knew GOD was speaking something to her spirit in answer to this prayer. After camp started, Mary Ann mentioned to the director, Larry Poulin, that she could use some help in her music class as some of the older special needs folks were quite disruptive. ***"Somehow"*** I

heard about the need and volunteered! Later that week, Mary Ann knew what GOD was saying and that she had met the man she would marry!

It took me about a month to realize that she was the ONE, but that's because I'm always late on the uptake! Later that week Mary Ann had her folks stop by to visit the camp and to meet this mystery man and check him out! At the end of camp Mary Ann invited me over to her home to meet the rest of her family. Since her home in Blue Hill was on the way, I loaded my guitar, sleeping bag, and suitcase all on the back of my 350 Honda motorcycle and roared into the Astbury driveway, sporting a beard and long curly hair! Not a good first impression!



On our first date, Mary Ann took me to an old converted barn that used to be a hen house to a Bible Study! I know most “normal” couples go to the movies or out to eat! But remember we weren't “normal” as in hearing a different drum! The barn was in South Blue Hill and across the street from the home of Noel Paul Stookey who had converted it into a recording studio. Yes, the Paul from “Peter, Paul, and Mary”. Mary Ann knew Paul along with other very talented people in the music industry some of whom we met that night.

It was during our college years that our music started turning towards Christian themes as we grew in our relationship with GOD. Each summer we would volunteer at Camp Winni, and this particular summer of 1982, I cunningly hid an engagement ring inside a box of Cracker Jack's, which was our favorite snack! We had often joked about finding a ring in a Cracker Jack Box!

While Mary Ann was finishing up her degree in Music Therapy near Worcester, Massachusetts, I moved to the Boston area to be closer. My first job was with a moving company! Here I learned many valuable lessons

about packing and moving. The phrase, "If it's tight - it's right!" rang true in packing boxes tightly in layers called tiers. These skills would prove invaluable years later! In June of 1983, Mary Ann and I were married and had our reception on the beautiful grounds of "Camp Winni"!



Kerry's Grandparents

Early on as newlyweds, we felt called to minister using our music and so we started buying equipment with credit cards and "pushing" this vision. Some opportunities happened but the doors never really opened wide. Yet, whenever we did minister, GOD always moved. We became involved in Mary Ann's home church and helped with Sunday School and Youth Group, taking young people to Christian concerts and festivals, exposing them to something other than a traditional Sunday morning service. We built a recording studio and started an outreach called Dayspring Studios where we networked with like-minded folks who had a passion for using music to minister. GOD brought some pretty amazing people into our lives who we could see had something different. At the time we didn't realize it, but we were ahead of GOD's timing for HE needed to mature us and refine us in so many ways. Little did we know that GOD's **plan** included the rest of **our clan**... six children and twenty years later!

As GOD grew us in the faith, we realized that our plan was an Ishmael, as in Abraham not waiting for GOD to birth HIS promise. We were convicted to get out of debt and so we sold most of the music equipment, and put the ministry dream on the "back burner". Mary Ann recalls that day of the yard sale where a piece of her heart broke seeing each piece of music gear get carried off. We then focused on making GOD number one and LORD over everything in our lives, including our dream. After five years of marriage, children started coming along! In January of 1988, Jasmine was born! It

was during these early months that GOD moved on Mary Ann and myself to seek out a church that would challenge us in our walk. Since I was raised in the RLDS Denomination, I had some baggage to work through. GOD, in HIS loving way, so tenderly helped me work through this over a period of about five years. If you have love ones involved in pseudo-Christian cults, be patient with them. Don't hit them over the head with a Bible! Love on them, get to know them, to earn their trust so you can plant seeds by asking questions and not demanding answers, thus allowing GOD to work HIS way in them. It takes many months, even years, to deal with baggage that one was raised with. I suspect we all have baggage from living life and forming various opinions and prejudices.

I have placed my testimony about this denomination here. In the years to come we would minister in many denominations and see GOD do some pretty glorious things in people's lives including leadership. We would encounter many souls who had been "wounded by leadership" and would eventually see some of our children in that category. But GOD! But GOD would not have us throw the "baby out with the bathwater". GOD has a plan for those who have been deeply "wounded by leadership" as well as justice to those representing HIS Name. We've placed this helpful link early on in this book for those precious ones who have been "Wounded By Leadership."

Mary Ann and I started going to a church in another town where some of our music friends who "marched to a different drum" attended. They introduced us to Pastor Burt and Sharon who would become mentors and challenge us to great heights with GOD. We started going to the Sunday evening services and found a new joy to worship GOD in a freedom we'd not experienced before. We started meeting in our home during the week, singing and digging into The Word with passionate Believers from several area churches. During this time GOD brought us a core group of people to disciple us.



Singing And Holding Baby Jasmine

We started listening to Christian radio where we could hear quality teaching from Focus On The Family and many other ministries. It was at this time we prayerfully researched allowing Mary Ann to be a stay-at-home Mom. We ran the financial numbers and saw that it was close. We felt GOD say to trust HIM and so we knew we had the “JESUS Factor” of blessing our decision of unity. Mary Ann would continue giving piano lessons at home and leave her career in music therapy. GOD also convicted us to disconnect the TV antenna as it was constantly pouring anti-GOD content into our home. Instead we started watching wholesome videos.

During this time we experienced our first miscarriage. Our society sweeps this topic under the rug, but how could we? Our hearts were devastated. We knew we needed healing and we had to talk about this little one who was now in the arms of our FATHER. I wrote a song titled, “It's OK” to help express my heart.

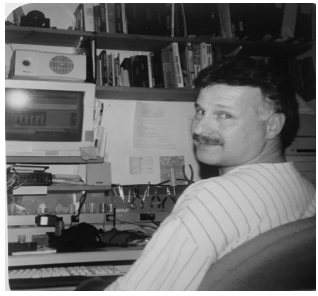


In 1990 on Christmas Eve, little Josiah was born making a quick and grand entrance, even surprising the doctor! Josiah, today known as "Jo", had to spend a few days in the hospital under the lights because of jaundice. Maybe this is why even today he loves working with lighting! In 1992, easy going Kerisa came along, nineteen days overdue! She apparently felt no need to rush out like her brother! Our family was growing and we felt led to make another radical decision and that was to home-school our children. Mary Ann had a college degree and already was 'instructing' our children. Needless to say, deciding to home-school brought us much criticism from many fronts including well-educated family members and friends. This was not a popular choice at the time. In looking back, had we not held college degrees we may have been talked out of doing what we knew in our hearts GOD was instructing us to do. But our faith was not unfounded; "obedience always reaps a harvest", and not just for us, but for our children. They learned the valuable skill of self-discipline, which benefited them years later on the road. There were many other societal customs that we decided to “march to the beat of a different drum”, and not celebrating Halloween was one of those stances that brought much criticism. We also committed to telling our children the truth about Santa from day one, because we didn't want to mislead them and have them confused when it came to a real person you can't see named JESUS. Agree or not, it proved to be a wise decision for our family.

Towards the end of 1992, I sensed the LORD directing us to ask GOD for a theme for the coming year - something that would challenge us throughout the year. So Mary Ann and I began praying about this theme and agreed upon **“1993 - Year To Be Free"**. During the year we worked on getting out of debt except for our home loan, and I asked GOD to free me from some business pressures as I was running my own computer consulting company. That summer of '93, we thought GOD was opening the doors to

start singing and ministering in other churches! Our church sensed the calling of GOD on us and blessed us to go out to minister. But like before, things just did not seem to click, yielding only a few open doors. The Bible talks about GOD being able to open doors and keep doors closed in regards to directing our steps. (Proverbs 3:5-6, 1 Corinthians 16:6-10) This is NOT fatalism, when a person has FULLY committed ALL their ways to the LORD.

As our children grew, we seemed to spend more time in the church nursery because of the wiggles. We decided to start a children's church so we could be together as a family and meet a need in our fellowship of new believers with wiggly children! Mary Ann had learned a different technique of playing the piano using just chords, rather than notes, allowing her to improvise and lead in worship. This too, proved to be a skill she would use in years to come, and also teach our children. While on the worship team, we shared original songs and hymns of praise. I managed the church's sound system and started learning from people that worked in recording studios. I found I had a knack for electrical things, another handy skill that was paramount in the years to come. These formative years proved to be very valuable as GOD molded us into a tight-knit family. HE showed us how to minister to children using Mary Ann’s training in music therapy and my training in education along with a natural gift for story telling. The LORD showed us how to effectively hold a child's attention and therefore, minister to all ages. We made the commitment to regularly do devotions as a family teaching our children the ways of the LORD. I would leave "Daddy Story Time" cassettes (remember those?) that I recorded the day before while traveling to and from work, so I could be 'present' for devotions.



In 1994, GOD gave us the theme **"94 - Year Of Open Doors"**. Wow, what a year! In looking back we could see GOD's Theme indeed spoke to the future. We were learning to trust in HIS Word to lead us! In February, Abigail was born at home! Since we didn't have insurance and our pastor's wife had a home birth, we prayed asking GOD if this was something HE would have us do. HE moved on our hearts to trust HIM. It was a HUGE step of faith and once again brought many concerns from friends and family. We found a sweet mid-wife, Cindy, who was a firm Believer that

GOD had been delivering babies for thousands of years and HE was still in the delivery business IF people would trust HIM to do so!

On the night that Abigail was born, I hesitated to call Cindy as she lived an hour away. Mary Ann knew it was time! But when I finally made the phone call, Abigail was well on her way! Cindy had prepared us for this. And that night Mary Ann and I truly had to put all our faith in GOD to deliver Abigail. And HE did! Mary Ann was so courageous! All I did was receive little Abigail into my hands as GOD delivered! I laid this precious “Song Bird” into her mother's arms while we waited for Cindy to arrive. I'll never forget that very sweet surreal time with Mary Ann, with GOD, and with little Abigail. It was life-changing and HIS peaceful presence was SO real! Again, this unfettered trusting of our LORD would prove yet another skill that our growing family would use thousands of times in the years to come.

Later that year we sold our tiny two bedroom home in East Orland, Maine and “set our face” towards moving to Blue Hill, a small coastal community where Mary Ann had grown up. We were convinced the LORD had directed us from Ezekiel 20:46, “Set our face toward the south” where Blue Hill was located! We paid off more debt and also sold some land that Mary Ann's parents had given her. This emboldened us to make a ridiculously low offer on a modular home that had been sitting on a lot for a few years. The home had been a special order by a military family who later was relocated and didn't need the home. It came with some extras that only GOD knew our family would need like a fireplace that could burn wood, cathedral ceilings for inside winter sports, four bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a large laundry room! GOD moved on the owner to accept the low offer if we moved it ourselves! So on August 17th, we moved a double-wide home onto a piece of land behind Mary Ann's parents homestead. The lot had a beautiful view of Blue Hill Mountain and sat well off the main road!

Everyone was so excited that day the house was delivered that we spent our first night in the home with both pieces of the house still separated by three feet! The kids all slept in our room where we could shut the door and not see open sky! Since our home was a quarter of a mile from the main road, we couldn't afford to put in electric power lines. That would come three months later! So starting that August, we would run a borrowed generator for a few hours every day. Mary Ann would gather the kids in front of the TV watching a video while she madly vacuumed and used anything "electrical”. This again, proved to be a good skill to learn, because living on a bus without electricity forces one to be efficient! Then, on November 8th, we finally got power connected! What a celebration was had! That date became a very special day in the life of our growing Family!

Later that fall of 1994, we had a brush with death. Thank GOD, HIS SON conquered death and the grave! Our church blessed us with a work day at

our home. A dozen or more people including children showed up to bank up our home for the winter and to move some things inside. We had a washer, dryer, and freezer sitting outside in a clearing. I had stored the freezer with the door roped shut and blocked in by the washer and dryer. That day a crew moved the washer and dryer into the house leaving the freezer exposed and untied. When people started to leave, Mary Ann noticed that two and half year old Kerisa was missing. The kids had been playing 'Hide N Seek' and now no one could find her! We live near a brook with a swamp and had taught our children not to play near the water without an adult. So instantly, Mary Ann thinks about this possibility. Then GOD gently spoke to her heart and said, "Do you trust me with your children?" In those few moments, Mary Ann made a life-changing decision and said **yes to GOD!** She then ran outside and yelled to me that Kerisa was missing. I recalled that I had seen her earlier playing in the back of someone's truck that had a cap over the back. I looked for the truck and realized that it had left minutes before! I was about to jump in a car and chase after the vehicle when a thought interrupted all my thoughts and it said, "Check the freezer." I dismissed that thought thinking the freezer was still tied up, but again, the thought loudly came, "CHECK THE FREEZER!" I ran across the lawn into the clearing and saw that the freezer was exposed. Then I remembered that the work crew had moved the washer and dryer into the house. I whipped open the freezer door and there inside laying in a fetal position was little Kerisa! Her skin was clammy and she was lethargic. I immediately grabbed her up into my arms, praying to JESUS while running with her back to the house. Mary Ann through tears held her and prayed over her. Within minutes we realized she was going to be OK! Thank YOU, LORD and thank you Holy Spirit which is that still small voice of the living GOD that dwells inside every Believer!

Just now, as I write this some two decades later, I recall that the theme GOD gave us way back in January "94 - Open Doors" would prove to be literally true ten months later on that October day! GOD preserved Kerisa's life through a literal opening of the freezer door! For days afterward we all had sobering thoughts at realizing what could have been. All we could do was thank GOD for letting her remain with us. Now looking back we can see so many times that GOD used Kerisa's precious life to minister so deeply in song, in testimony, in just being herself to encourage so many.



You may ask the hard question, "Why did GOD allow Kerisa to live, when so many precious children die?" To which, I can not truthfully answer. But I know this... that had she not lived, GOD still would have carried us through as we will soon see in years to come through the miscarriage of precious loved ones. We don't know what paths our story would have taken, but we know GOD is big enough to comfort and carry those who have lost dear loved ones to this life. Our goal on this earth is not to live here forever in this fallen state, yet so many are trying to achieve that end. Our goal is to live forever with GOD in HIS Kingdom where there is no pain, no sorrow, and no death. So please be encouraged if you have lost a loved one at an early age, or any age. GOD so loves us all, regardless of our thoughts about HIM. But for those who have surrendered to HIM, HE can and will see them through.

Our lives became so involved with raising a godly family that I began to question if the vision of going into full-time music evangelism was from GOD. So we laid the vision on the altar of GOD and left it to die or to be resurrected. As the children starting growing, Mary Ann would lead worship during devotions with them and found that they could spontaneously harmonize with one another! Often we would delay school and just worship together as we felt the Spirit of GOD so near and tangible. When times were tough, financially, the children would join us on our knees calling out to GOD for provision. They then would witness for themselves when 'The JESUS Factor' kicked in and GOD supernaturally made our resources multiply. HE taught us to live within our means and go without when we didn't have the funds, which again was another skill we would use in years to come.

At the beginning of 1995, we felt the LORD give us the Theme **"95-Year To Be Alive!"** We weren't sure what HE meant by this but we didn't doubt it since the previous year's theme had been true to HIS word. As the year progressed we were able to put our home on a split-level foundation so we could have a walk-in basement and put in windows all around allowing us to finish off the basement as needed for our growing family. I started to run a computer business full-time and things went very well!

In 1996 we felt GOD say, **"The Year that GOD fixed!"** And sure enough by years' end we saw GOD fix some business issues, fix our high interest building loan and get us into a low interest home loan. HE also brought us some hope for our future ministry in June by way of a Promise Keepers Event in Syracuse, New York. At the conference during the early morning prayer time, we were instructed to huddle up with two or three other men, preferably someone we didn't know. I didn't feel comfortable doing that so I turned to huddle up with some of the guys I came with, but they were already praying! I then turned back around and there facing me were two men with hands outstretched motioning me to join them. I had never met

them before but soon after getting started I knew GOD was speaking. These men spoke specifically about our family ministry though they knew nothing about us! It was a powerful testimony of GOD's love with specific words for the calling on our lives, saying things like, “As we sing praises to the LORD, the clouds will be lifted, marriages will be helped, and the hurting will be healed!” I left that prayer huddle in tears of joy thanking GOD for HIS affirmation. I thought now is the time! Yet once again, the doors just didn't open up.

In 1997 the theme was, **"97 - Blessings From Heaven!”** Some hard times hit that year in the form of baby miscarriages. All the while GOD was comforting us and still showing us areas of our lives that HE wasn't in control of. Early that year, Mary Ann and her sisters began a singing group called 'UnDivided Heart'.



(Lynette Woods, Terry Mattson, Karen Doten, & Mary Ann)

Sometimes we would use our children to sing a few songs and it was during these times that GOD spoke through several people confirming the call on our family ministry. That year, I sold my computer business and totally cleared up all debt except our home loan. During the summer our family was able to go on a real vacation to Canada taking grandparents along for an extraordinary week on Grand Manan Island. GOD really did send blessings from Heaven!

Some might ask, "How could the miscarriages be a blessing?" Well, they sure weren't at the time and it was horrific for Mary Ann who was also faced with some health issues. GOD quietly spoke in her anguish and said...

> *When you made ME LORD over your life, you gave up the right to ask why...you can trust ME.*

HIS Grace was sufficient for the time, though it was very hard to go through. So many times in the years to come, Mary Ann would be able to share her testimony with families who have lost little ones in the womb and be a springboard to allow GOD to sooth their hurting hearts. In looking back we now realize that since Mary Ann has such a mother's heart for children, quite possibly her loving CREATOR knew she would always have an eternal longing to hold little ones. Now, she has four "Blessings" waiting for her in Heaven!

In 1998, we felt GOD speak the Theme **"98 - Open The Gates!"** Again, we were coming off another miscarriage and discovered Mary Ann was pregnant. This time we hesitated to tell anyone for fear of losing this precious little one. Then one night at church while Mary Ann was playing the piano during a time of prayer around the altar, the guest speaker, Ron George from North Carolina, went over to the piano to lay hands on Mary Ann while she played, and said, "Sister, GOD knows your pain. But this time you will embrace!" What a Word that only GOD knew! Because we had indeed kept the news secret. In our spirits we BELIEVED that GOD would indeed 'open the gates' and pour out HIS richest blessings to safely bring this little one into our arms.

Throughout the pregnancy we clung to this prophetic word and prayed like never before, declaring Truth from GOD's Word over our child. We learned how to do spiritual warfare over the womb.



Faithful to GOD's Word, on September 11th, 1998, a healthy Rachel Mary-Faith was born at home! We felt she deserved two middle names! In Hebrew, Mary means "Wished For Child"! It was a true journey of FAITH for this "wished for child" as her name implies. GOD did deliver on HIS Word! 1999 rolled in with our Theme, **"99 - Fullness Of Time!"** We weren't sure what this theme was all about, but hoped it meant time for our ministry to begin. That August, at another Promise Keepers conference in Connecticut, I "miraculously" met up with one of the men, named Steve, who had previously prayed over me back in 1996 at the Syracuse Promise Keeper's Event in New York. Steve assured me it was the Holy Spirit that had spoken and he encouraged me to abandon all to pursue this vision that GOD had given us. Faith rose up in my heart at the thought of going into full-time ministry! But weeks afterward, we had many questions like - How will we support ourselves? What will we do? Will GOD take care of a big family living by faith? Soon, doubts entered from all fronts and once again the vision drifted into the background.

The year 2000, or Y2K as many called it, came upon us and the Theme seem to fit, **"Y2K A New Day!"** I had been frantically working at the bank getting their computers all set for the new millennium, a project that took most of the previous year. I, along with other techs, had worked into New

Years Eve monitoring the internet in Australia as their clocks turned over first. It basically was a non-event which is what we had found during our many trial runs by turning the computer clocks ahead. The Y2K hysteria produced world-wide fear and for many it sowed seeds of distrust regarding governments.



Kerisa & Abby Play Accordion With Their Feet!

Our family began to focus on what GOD's plan might be should we go full-time on the road. We started talking to other full-time ministries. The children joined in praying for GOD to supply a bus that we could convert and use for a ministry vehicle. A bus seemed like the best logical choice since it had storage space underneath and could be custom converted for our large family. It was indeed a 'New Day'. We had been praying for years for a home-based business to support our family.

"2001 - Our Time Has Come!" What a Theme we believed GOD gave us that January of 2001 and it proved to be spot on! I sensed GOD moving me on at the bank and so I left my job with a decent severance package. During that time I kept a prayer journal. It's critical to keep a prayer journal which can document not just our needs but how GOD answers those prayers with dates next to them, for our GOD does indeed answer prayer!

For years I had been marking in my Bible dates and underlining GOD's direction for specific needs or questions. Over the years, we have found that our prayers can be hindered as stated in 1 Peter 3:7...

> *Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life,**so that nothing will hinder your prayers**.*

Also in Psalm 66:18...

> *If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.*

In the Bible, in the Book of Genesis Chapter 37, we find the beautiful story about the life of Joseph, "The Dreamer". He knew from various dreams, that GOD had called him to lead. But because of his brother's strong disdain for him, Joseph was secretly sold as a slave to serve a high ranking official for the King of Egypt. Perhaps you know the story? Joseph did very well by this official before a scandal hit, and then Joseph finds himself in prison probably asking questions like, "Why me?" and/or "When, oh GOD of my fathers, are YOU going to do what my dreams have clearly laid out?" Joseph waited for 13 years! It was during this time of **our** waiting that I researched the life of Joseph and Moses and found that they too had a time of preparation. For Moses, it was a 40 year wilderness experience of waiting! During my quiet time, I often would play the guitar and worship the LORD. The beginning of this song was birthed on March 19, 2001, titled "Heart's Desire" which tells the story of Joseph, Moses, and then our family...



I believe GOD is fine with us comparing ourselves to the men and women of the Bible. I believe that is one of the reasons Holy Spirit inspired those stories to be told so that we could read about their failures, fears, and frustrations, to learn more about the GOD of the Bible and how HE interacts with HIS creation. We can also be encouraged by their faithfulness, fights, and fulfilling their GOD-given destinies! James 5:17 reminds us …

> *Elijah was as human as we are and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain!*

On March 20th, I heard an interview on the radio with Bruce Wilkerson about his book, "Prayer of Jabez" and how GOD can revolutionize someone who prays it fervently. Something inside my soul leapt when I read 1 Chronicles 4:9-10...

> *There was a man named Jabez who was more honorable than any of his brothers. His mother named him Jabez because his birth had been so painful. He was the one who prayed to the GOD of Israel, "Oh, that YOU would bless me and expand my territory! Please be with me in all that I do, and keep me from all trouble and pain!" And GOD granted him his request.*

Some in the Body of CHRIST have been critical about such things, but doesn't GOD use many things to grow us and mature us? My story of faith is this: I started praying that daily and even wrote it out on a place mat on

my table setting! I did it not as a good-luck sort of thing because if GOD is real than who needs good-luck when we have a good-Lord? You see, I had been a problem child and caused my parents pain so I could relate to Jabez. I came from a dysfunctional family, my parents separated when I was a Freshman in High School, and moved me to the other side of the State. I had to deal with making new friends, peer pressures, and internal family issues. I was finally forced to face the reality after many years of praying for my folks to get back together, that they weren't. They both remarried. So I don't blame a guy like me for praying a prayer like this...

> *"GOD of Heaven, Oh that YOU would bless me and my family and expand our territory! Please be with me in all that I do and keep me from all trouble and pain!"*

I thank GOD that HE looks at the heart. And you know what? GOD granted my request, because this book documents that fact! But it didn't all happen at once. The key is believing GOD honors prayer. In fact, three days later, my journal entry was this:

> *Abby sprains her ankle and possibly breaks it trying to get out of the horse corral when the horse turned on her. Our van breaks down. A client drops off a computer and after trying for many hours I can't fix it.*

That day I probably had thoughts of why bother praying that prayer, but guess what happened the day after that? A man in our church admonishes me to read the prayer of Jabez! A few days later, I was able to fix the client's computer! And the next day after that Mary Ann's Dad fixes his old car for us to use! Then on March 29th, the kids are given a free horse lesson! The next day Mary Ann and Jasmine are given free tickets to a Retreat! While there, Mary Ann saw the book, "Prayer of Jabez", and read it, later discussing it with others at the retreat. The car breaks down! We laugh about it and pray harder! I was able to get a part for the car and fix it!

During this time there were two words GOD had impressed upon our hearts: “Singing Evangelists”. I looked the phrase up on the Internet and was surprised to find that it was used back during the Welsh Revivals in England, and again later used during various great revivals here in the U.S.! We could envision ourselves using Spirit-led songs to break through to lives that were so consumed with today’s fast-paced world. Hopefully, the soil of many hearts would be ready to receive from GOD. Many people won’t come out to hear an evangelist, but some will come out to hear a singing group, hence wisdom by GOD calling us to be "Singing Evangelists.” So with another piece to the puzzle, the Lord Family then waited for GOD to open the doors so we could begin our “Venture With GOD”. But HE didn't.

The severance package came to an end, another job opened up, and so I took it. It was during this time the family learned to be flexible in all seasons. At various times, because of my work around the State of Maine, I would call home and say, "You all up for a road trip? Be ready to leave tonight!" The kids would have to pack light and learn to leave their home for days at at time. We would stay in a motel room, do school, eat in cramped spaces, and the children learned to entertain themselves as this was long before handheld devices. Again, these skills proved helpful in the years to come and we would soon realize that we were on a “Venture With GOD!” it was just a holding pattern.

Later that year in July, our sixth child, Bethany Joy was born! What a joy she is to this family of eight! GOD gave us the amazing and awe filled experience of having her at home with just the two of us present once again. Then 9/11 hit. This was Rachel's third Birthday. I always took a vacation day for family birthdays and we all celebrated it as a holiday! So plans had already been made to visit the local oceanarium. Early that morning I saw the news feed about the terrible events in New York City. We tried to make the best of Rachel's Birthday, but the world changed that day. Thankfully GOD doesn't change and this didn't take HIM by surprise.

Later that fall, the company I worked for was expanding into New Hampshire. I was asked to travel even more, but this time it would be a week or more not a day or two. I was already putting in many long hours so I started looking for a different job. In December, I landed the job of my dreams - as Chief Information Officer commanding, directing, and steering the future of a bank. Once again, GOD had shown us that HIS theme "2001 Our Time Has Come" would ring true even twelve months later!



Cousin Leah, Kerisa, Abby, Rachel & Jasmine singing at Christmas