

Chasing God's glory

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(Photo: Torin Halsey/Times Record News, AP)

I am frequently asked, “How did someone like you get involved in jail ministry?” Well, it is God who has worked things together in my life to bring me to this point. My parents were always interested in the poor, the downtrodden. We even had a few of those types we called relatives, but then I guess every family does.

As a young mother I wanted our family to share in the experience of a mission trip, but it wasn’t till our kids were college age that we all agreed on where we would go. Our adventure took us to the darkest part of our country, Indian reservations across the US and Canada with Ron Hutchcraft Ministries and a team called On Eagles’ Wings. A wise person once said, “The first way to love someone is to be intrigued by them.” Right away we were captivated by the young Native Americans on our team who were trained to evangelize their people.

The “white man’s gospel” would not be embraced in Indian country. But the same message could be carried by young native believers, and their peers would listen. To travel with the team we had to be behind the scenes as support personnel, so we served as cooks, and we got to witness the hopelessness of reservation life and hear team members speak about something unmentionable — their lives of abuse, abandonment and addiction —

and how Jesus gave them new hope. *The power of God was unleashed* as the team members shared their testimonies, and those living in darkness were offered new life.

We committed originally to do the trip only once, but we returned each summer for years just to catch another glimpse of *His glory*. From New Mexico to Minnesota, Wyoming to New York and up into Canada, the team was activated for a month each July and changed location every three days. Purchasing and preparing food for 50-100 people was rigorous, especially in a *moving* kitchen! We would frantically try to keep up with the team itinerary, dragging pots and pans behind us, charting every Wal-Mart and Sam’s Club along the way. It was an incredible adventure with God. And as the team members grew to trust us, they would come into our kitchens and share their stories. We formed strong bonds with prostitutes, alcoholics, drug addicts and convicted felons.

I recruited and supervised cooks, and my husband, the former CEO of a NYSE company, functioned as the chief dish washer and trash collector, looking for dumpsters across the nation where he could illegally dump 15-20 huge bags of trash daily. We chased God’s glory across the country many times cooking with On Eagles’ Wings.

The trip was intense, and as we aged out I prayed, “God, give me *my own* On Eagles’ Wings in Wichita Falls.” I had seen people with backpacks walking aimlessly, going through trash cans, sleeping on porches of abandoned houses and standing in front of the Mission. I wanted to hear their stories, but *I was scared to approach them*. Once I stopped my car near a nightclub where strippers worked and prayed we could somehow connect.

I asked a friend to volunteer at Faith Mission with me, but she wasn’t one bit interested. However, she gave me a copy of a book titled *Same Kind of Different As Me* and insisted I read it because it was written about me. So I did. And it was. The book urged me on.

I found out that the Gideons and their wives did jail ministry, so I looked at my husband and said, “You would make a great Gideon!” So he became one. For me. And I went, and finally I connected with those I longed to reach.

Today I do church services and individual visits with inmates several times a week at the county jail and annex. They tell me their stories and listen intently as I share that same life-giving message of Jesus. *I see His glory — their faces begin to glow* as the seed of faith takes root and flourishes. I also serve on the board of Faith Mission/Faith Refuge. Many of their clients know me, but what’s important is that I know them. I have heard their stories and understand why they ended up where they are. I would have, too.

God put it in my heart to love these people. And my story continues to be written.

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