

## A Pear Truck Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving 1975 was not far away. Normally Mary and I would be preparing for a special family time with turkey and the trimmings at our little white house on 34<sup>th</sup> street. Instead we were packing to go to fruit pickers barracks outside of Bridgeport, Washington to spend 4-6 weeks in prayer with fasting. During the day we planned to work in the orchard pruning pear trees. At 6 AM Buck's van pulled up outside of our house and the loading began. By the time 8 AM rolled around, we had managed to pack half of what we owned in and on top of the Ford Econoline van.

Soon we were traveling down Interstate 84 heading for *The Bridge of the gods*. As we rolled along, my mind went back to another Thanksgiving 15 years earlier when I was traveling from New Jersey back to Maryland on a train. I was broke and had one pack of cigarettes to my name. I would light up and imagine each cigarette was a part of the turkey I was unable to eat. I felt a deep loneliness as my parents were overseas and my friends were far away. It reminded me of the song *You can hear the whistle blowing a hundred miles*. I was so thankful as I looked over at Buck and looked in the back of the van at Jeannie, Mary, and my wonderful family that I was not alone anymore.

At 9:30 AM we stopped for breakfast at a 24 hour restaurant. The food and fellowship were particularly sweet that morning with my friends, and I only subliminally took note of the dark clouds beginning to form as I glanced out the restaurant window. As we walked toward the van after breakfast, I was able to reflect on the great difference between the peace I felt as a Christian and the emptiness both physically and spiritually I lived through on that train trip so many years before. Back on the highway again we headed over the *Bridge of the gods* on Rt 97 under darkening skies. There were seven of us packed into the van along with our belongings. Our three children were all five and under and having a lively time as the snow began to fall. With coffee cups steaming Buck and I were discussing the upcoming time of fasting and prayer and the possible results of gathering so many dedicated people together to seek God. Mary and Jeannie chatted in the back while the children played. As the snow increased, we hardly noticed that we had entered the mountains and were coming up on Satus pass famous for its steep downgrade. We had thought to bring chains, but we had not put them on the van as we were traveling along nicely. Now, as we crested the top of the pass, three inches of snow were already on the road. It suddenly looked like we were on top of a monster roller coaster slick with ice and there would be no stopping once the ride began. Buck and I were astonished.

Our momentum carried us over the top and we began inching our way down the steep incline. The children noticed none of this, but Buck and I became increasingly aware that this was not going to work as we were in imminent danger of sliding out of control off the road and over the cliff. About a third of the way down the

mountain, Buck was able to bring the van to a stop. He realized that the van must have chains to make it down the mountain. However, we were parked in the middle of the highway halfway down one of the most dangerous passes in the state of Washington.

Buck decided to climb up to the top of the hill, where a number of people had pulled over for help. The snow was still coming down and our wives were occupied with the children in the back of the van. I got out to make sure cars were able to steer clear of us in our precarious state. We were on a 45-degree incline and it was extremely cold. As I watched Buck reach the top of the mountain, I saw the pear truck cresting the hill. I didn't realize at first that it was a pear truck until everything flipped into slow motion. The truck began to turn sideways as if on skids and thousands of pears were exposed to my sight. From 150 yards away, frame-by-frame the jackknifing truck advanced toward me. Inside the van, I could hear the children singing. Jeannie was becoming increasingly anxious that something was dreadfully wrong. Why weren't Buck back and what were we doing parked in the middle of an icy road on a steep mountain pass? As I tried to open the door to get our wives and children out, I discovered it was locked. The sound of *O Rejoice not against me O my enemy, when I fall I shall arise* accompanied by hand clapping resounded inside the van. Meanwhile the pear truck grew to ever-immense proportions in my sight. My wife, unaware of any of this, was leading the singing as if you always stopped in the middle of an icy road on a slippery mountain to praise the Lord. I can hardly remember more enthusiastic praise in a church meeting.

My baby son had messed his pants and he was taking an unusually long time to finish his business. I had mentioned to my wife that I would be back to get them out if it became necessary. As time began running out, I began banging on the window yelling "GET OUT." My peripheral vision was picking up the truck and I now realized I was not going to get our families out. All that was left was instant prayer. I could not move, only pray. As I turned toward the truck, I could see the driver spinning the wheel. He was making the choice to take his truck over the side of the cliff rather than run over our families trapped in the van. I could see his face clearly now and all those pears like a moving green orchard advancing upon us. I cried out to God and awaited the imminent collision.

Everything went on pause as a moment became eternity. The face of the driver, the pears, the snow, the singing all blended into one miraculous moment as the angel of the Lord somehow stood between the van and the pear truck. It passed by in the incoming traffic lane, with just enough room to spare for Jeannie, who had hopped out of the driver's side door into the path of the truck. Buck came running and sliding down the hill.

"We've got to get out of here."

Two small trucks were behind him.

"Quick, get the women and children into the trucks."

Jeannie, Mary, and the children were hustled into two waiting pickups and Buck and I got in the van fronted by another truck so that, if we slid, the truck in front would keep us from sliding off the mountain.

At the bottom of the mountain still shaking, Buck and I thanked God for being alive. We gathered our families, thanked the drivers, and headed down the road. Five minutes later we saw the pear truck rumbling slowly in the right lane. As we passed him in the left lane I had a moment to look the driver in the eyes and thank him for his willingness to die to save us. And then, thumbs up we drove on to our mutual destinations. The thankfulness I experienced was for more than the truck driver. Who had put it into his heart to risk his life to save ours? What unseen factors had caused him to miss us when it seemed impossible for us to avoid death? I was thankful for *the angel of the Lord who encamps about those who fear Him and delivers them* (Ps 34:7) and I was grateful for friends who would take time out of their lives to transport us to distant places. Unlike that Thanksgiving of old, I was lonely no more.