
Chapter Ten
DOWN ON FROG ALLEY

The single men slept in the barn until a dormitory-like addition could be built. Single women and married couples divided the four bedrooms, study, front porch, living room and whatever other space they could find. Eventually, a second house was secured a half-mile south on Fortney Road to accommodate the needs of families. Another good idea turned slowly sour, it eventually became viewed as second-class housing because Larry never wanted to put any money into the building. Hand crafted, tongue and groove cherry paneling in his living room and broken windows with drafty, dingy rooms for those he would rather not deal with.

We accumulated a herd of dairy goats that we might have milk and meat from animals that could forage, hidden in the woods. We developed a breeding and training program for horses because, when the war came, there would be no other means of transportation. Morgan Horses were selected as the primary breed as they could double as saddle horses and draft animals pulling plows or wagons. We had sheep and a few of the women learned to spin wool for clothing. We learned how to tan animal hides to create usable leather products and to make cheese and butter from milk. We had colonies of bees for honey. We tried our hand at Homing Pigeons for carrying messages but ended up with a flock of birds living in the top of the silo, circling the property and adding a certain park-like quality to the entire affair. We grew huge vegetable

gardens and, on occasion, made arrangements with commercial producers of vegetables to collect the excess produce from their fields. Sandy worked stooped over, picking from rows of potatoes, until the day before our son, Jonathon was born. The women canned thousands of jars of food over the years. Along with that we learned to dry foods and preserve meats. Treadle sowing machines were collected and all the women learned to sew, making clothes "from scratch."

At night we dug underground tunnels near high vantage points along the Grand River. Complete with battery powered lighting systems they were designed to hide people and materials. A small group of us would get dropped off in different, remote locations each night around midnight. The driver would turn off the headlights to hide his activities from local residents. We would then follow paths and game trails through the woods until we arrived at the site of that night's work. Lookouts were set up and a password system was established to challenge anyone approaching. Finishing the work we camouflaged the tunnels so they wouldn't be seen by anyone during the day and silently marched through the woods to a designated pickup area. Getting home with just enough time to get a few hours sleep before we went to our day jobs, we continued night after night.

Through one winter we spent bone-numbing nights cutting timber from wooded lots inaccessible to vehicles. Carrying huge logs on our shoulders we stockpiled them along the high cliffs of the Grand River until spring rains caused the water level to rise. Building a sluice down to the swollen water we tied ropes around the logs and towed them by hand, upstream, to the nearest place a truck might be backed to the water's edge. Some of the logs were taken to local sawmills where they were turned into lumber for building projects but most were stockpiled and never used.

Larry would spot abandoned homes in the country and, at night, teams were sent in to see if anything salvageable had been left behind. He also obtained permission from the Harpersfield Trustees to tear down the old, schoolhouse. Using hammers, cold chisels and pry bars we began to dismantle the building to salvage the bricks. We were going to clean and use them in our new church building. Thirty-five years later

those bricks are still piled on the church property, exactly where we left them.

Other than Larry, no one in the group was privy to everything the entire group was doing. Each of us saw but pieces of the whole. Unknown to most of us, we also bought cases of Italian Army rifles. It would've been unknown to me had I not walked in on Danny R. removing the packing and de-greasing the weapons in one wooden case. Danny served two tours with a machine gun unit of the 173rd Airborne in the mountainous, central highlands of Tou Hoa in Vietnam. He was generally deemed our "sergeant at arms" and eventually carried a holstered pistol on security checks of the property.

Hard times call for hardened people and hard times were coming. We were preparing to survive something more than revolution or war. God was preparing to clean house and when His hammer falls, only anvils survive. Armed conflict was not so far fetched to us. In the very early '70's, revolution was in the air. We knew those planning it and felt we escaped its opening bell in Chicago in 1968. Black Panthers, Students for a Democratic Society, the Weathermen and a laundry list of lesser known radicals all believed war in America imminent. Their collective problem was who to place on the throne when the smoke cleared. Ours was an "otherworld" lunacy. We believed chaos in the streets would open the door to invasion and our personal survival was superceded by the survival of the Church in America. The war would purge the "dross" from the Church and survivors would help rebuild the nation. We felt fortunate to have a prophet at our helm. Though deceived and misled we bled and died for what we believed was a vision, a plan from God, supported by miracles and prophetic insights. We honestly believed our lives were not our own and that we were serving a greater good. We were to naiveté what Stone Henge is to a rock. The prophet said, "Without a vision, the people perish." Sometimes the vision itself will kill you.

What is "vision," after all? Is it not the conviction that I can **be** more than I presently am or **do** more than I presently can? Vision is an energy source that moves me to execute a belief. The belief need not be rooted in righteous fact or truth. Energizing beliefs may be rooted in nothing more substantive than a fantasy from the shadowland of Fond Dreams.

Vision is a benign unrest that gently gnaws at the root of regimented thinking. It's the inexplicable longing to "shape the invisible." Vision is the notion that nothing is beyond our reach *if* we'll just put one foot in front of the other and proceed as if the limits of our abilities do not exist. Vision forces us to deal with our limitations, flaws and besetting sins just to get the job done. *That* is vision and *that* is what drove us. Vision involves elements of humility, sacrifice, faith, pain and patience. I have since learned it should also involve the element of joy.

But there was precious little joy at the Church of the Risen Christ Farm. To be certain, there was laughter but very little joy. Early in 1972 I couldn't take any more and I "ran away," leaving empty-handed in the middle of the night. For four months I wandered around, tending bar at a Geneva-on-the-Lake nightclub and selling marijuana to get by. But the fourth of July was coming, Shannon's birthday. I had to see my daughter. I returned during early morning chore time on the Fourth. Sandy, God and I reconciled but we could no longer stay at the farm. We were too much trouble. Finding an apartment in Windsor about two miles away, we walked back and forth to church activities. We were now viewed as second-class citizens.

I arrived at the farm one evening to discover a small group getting ready to leave for a rock festival in Bull Island, Illinois. They were off to do what we always did: witness and live off the land. Packing thousands of pieces of literature in the Chevy Blazer there was room for one more if I wanted to go. Declining, the spot was taken at the last minute by Tom Miller. Randy sat in the passenger side front seat, "shotgun," and Tom sat right behind him. With a deserved reputation as a zealot my brother was the clear leader of this group. He was, in the words of fundamentalists, "Completely sold out to Jesus," and his peers admired him for it. His all-time hero, the biblical prophet Elijah, was the mold into which he would've poured himself had opportunity allowed. The closest he could come was to bestow the name on his son.

Sitting in the driveway, Randy rolled down his window and I squatted beside the car as we all prayed together. A matter of cultivated habit we wouldn't think of starting any trip without prayer. When every last thing is packed and everyone is in, heads are bowed and hats are removed to demonstrate humility in the presence of God. The most senior member

on the trip would call out someone's name to lead in prayer. With "Amen," and "yes, Jesus," from the others we always asked God to keep us as we traveled, to watch over our families in our absence and to grant us a rich harvest of souls. With a unison "Amen," lingering in the air they waved their arms out the windows and turned up the gravel road, kicking up stone and dust as they went. With taillights shrinking to fuzzy pinpoints in the dark and the cacophonous sounds of life filling the night air, five bone-weary conquerors were headed for a location not found on any map. I headed toward the goat barn for a final check.

Country nights in the summer are an entertainment value. With no city lights to contaminate the sky the stars seem intent on outdoing one another. Moths, mosquitoes and other swarming annoyances were drawn to the false promise of a light bulb above the barn door. My last chore: check the goats and barn. "Everybody good?" It was late. So what else is new? Heading up the same road that swallowed the Blazer, I noticed lightning playing tag with the earth off to the west. The drainage ditches, running parallel on both sides of the road, were filled with frogs intent on protesting my passing. As I lifted my nostrils to search for traces of rain on the western wind the partial moon was chased behind the clouds by all the little dogs barking at it that night. It was one of those classic nights that lent itself to musings and fellowship with the God whose cause we championed.