

Chapter 9

Winning souls with Tommy Barnett in Arizona

We notified the landlords of our house and shop in Michigan and told them that we did not want to renew our leases which ran out next month, November of 1980. I bought a bus from the Clio school district for \$300. I overhauled the engine and took out all the seats but 2 and piled them up in the back of the bus. We had a yard sale and sold and gave away every thing except our personal belongs and our clothes and loaded them in the bus and left Flint on Monday November 10th of 1980 Jane's birthday. Jane was pregnant with our little Susie. We stayed in KOA camp grounds every 500 miles and arrived in Phoenix 5 days later on a Friday afternoon. We unloaded our tools in a two car garage next to the church parsonage. It had a car port. We soon learned that people worked out side on vehicles because the weather was so good. In Phoenix. So the great out doors became our bus repair garage.



Phoenix 1st Assembly of God on 3rd street in 1980

The next morning we went to the Saturday soul winning meeting at Phoenix 1st Assembly of God church. There were a couple hundred people at the meeting including Pastor Barnett and several deacons who had bus routes and were involved in Saturday soul winning. After breakfast they had a small message and asked me to give a testimony of why we had come to Phoenix. After the meeting was over the bus workers would go out and visit their bus routes like they do every Saturday and are still doing 30 years later. The other folks would go out on Saturday visitation and soul winning. When visitors came to church they could fill out a card and put it in the offering basket. At Pastor's alter calls visitors cards were filled out by altar workers and all these cards were forwarded to the Saturday soul winning society. The soul winners were given the cards and sent out 2 X 2. Deacon Clyde Gambo was assigned to take me with him and Jane went with a lady from the church. I got my first hands on church led mass soul winning by it's members. Pastor Barnett taught that "every member is a minister". Every one was a soul

winner WOW WOW WOW! Later on pastor Barnett wrote his famous Saturday Soul Winning Society manual that is still used today all over the world. This was kool.

Back at the church, one bus had the engine out of it laying on the garage floor. It was the Prime Time bus being used by senior members. Keith Buchanan was the head of the Prime Timers Keith later became the media ministry leader. He directed church programs like the singing Christmas tree, living flag, living cross and many other huge events. The annual Living Christmas Tree pageant brings in over 100 thousand people per year during its 14 performances. Wow we were winning souls like spreading wild fire.



Dale Lane , left was the bus director and my boss as I was employed as Phoenix 1st Assembly of God's 1st bus mechanic. Dale was the best boss I every had. I was hired there in 1980.

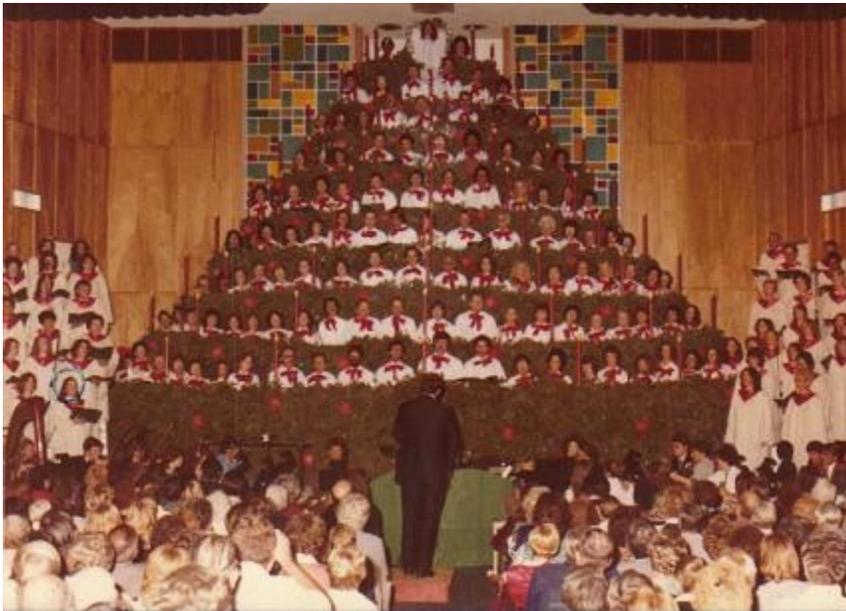
had been delayed on the way by a blown up motor in one of the buses he was bringing to Phoenix.

That Saturday evening we went back to the KOA campground in Deer Valley where we were planning on living in the bus and sleeping on air mattresses, until God gave us a

After soul winning meeting on that first Saturday I went back to the Bus garage to work on all the broken down buses. The man who would be the new bus director and children church leader was Dale Lane. He was on the way to Phoenix from Iowa where he had quit his job at the John Deere factory. His wife Lynn had already arrived in Phoenix to be Pastor's personal secretary and still is today. Remember Lynn was pastor's personal secretary in Davenport Iowa at West Side Assembly of God? Dale

place to rent. The next morning Pastor Barnett introduced us to the congregation and told me to see him after church. Here he said as he handed me the keys to a beautiful apartment with a pool and all paid utilities. He said a lady in the church is giving this to you until you get a paying job.

Jane who is a beautiful singer joined the choir big and pregnant with Susie. She wanted to sing in the 1st singing Christmas Tree but pastor Barnett thought it would be dangerous for her to be climbing up into that 50 foot tall tree. So they built small mini trees at the side of the tree and Jane sang in the angle choir as they called it. Pastor Barnett's daughter Christi at the age of about 10 was the angel on top of the tree. Christi is now the director of the Wednesday Fusion program at the church..It is a combination church service and small group gathering.



Jane, in the circle, singing in the first singing Christmas tree in 1980. Pastor Barnett was concerned that she was going to have the baby right there on the stage during the performance.



Jane, front row right with big belly, singing in the Singing Christmas tree 1980.

Our baby Susie who is now 30 was born in that apartment on 28th street and Indian school road. I remember Bobby who was now 16 was baby sitting the other boys in the front room. After a few hours I came out of the bedroom with Susie in my arms. Abe and Wes asked how did you do that dad? How did you get that baby out of mommy's tummy.?

I was volunteering as a bus mechanic and repairing cars and buying and selling some on the side for a living. New years eve the deacons had a meeting with pastor Barnett. . They offered me a full time job as bus mechanic and I grabbed it like a mouse grabbing cheese.



This 1936 GMC was our service and parts chasing vehicle at the church

over 100,000 people at the Worlds Largest Easter egg Hunt at that time in the late 80s. We held the hunts at several locations through out the city.

In addition to repairing the buses I filled in as a bus driver when drivers wanted time off or didn't show up. They sent me out to buy new buses to add to the 4 buses they had when I got there in 1980. We would take 11 drivers in one bus and go to Michigan and pick up 11 used school buses and drive them back to Phoenix. That was an adventure in itself. We built up the fleet to 50 buses that ran 2 times per week. We were bringing in about 1500 riders per week. We set the Guinness book of records for having

We converted 5 buses to wheel chair buses with lifts and latches to hold the wheel chairs to the floor. One bus was involved in a roll over crash and all the latches held the wheel chairs and riders in position as it came to rest on its side.



Ralph Buckles in the suit and me standing in the door of the bus on one of our Phoenix bus route



We won the giant pop corn ball contest on our bus route. Susie is holding it up oh yah . Wes is looking on.

After we got all the 50 buses running and painted I got my own bus route, hired 2 mechanics to take my place and quit the church as an employee. We continued to work in the bus ministry as volunteers for the next 15 years. The church grew from 200 to several thousand almost over night. The church sold the original location on 3rd street and rented local schools until the new church was built on 70 acres on cave Creek road.



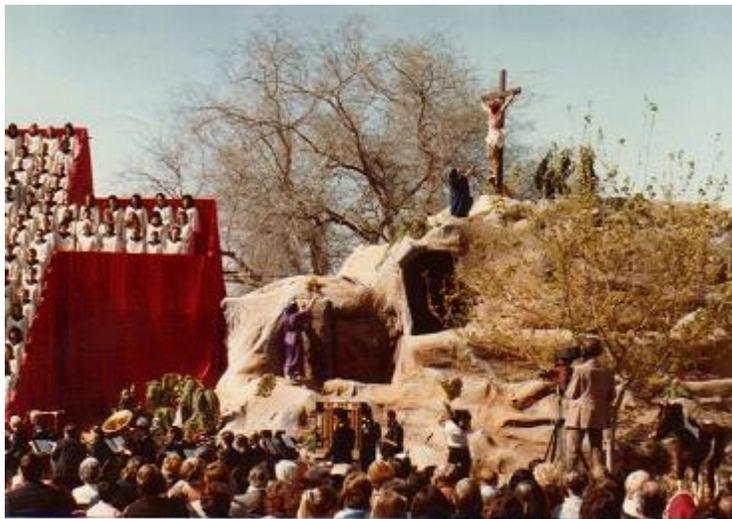
Church on the Street

A man named Walt Ratray had started coming to Phoenix 1st Assembly some time in 1982 as I remember. He had been preaching on the street corners with a bull horn. He was winning many souls to Christ and bringing them to church. Many were drunks, addicts, bums and every other kind of sinner imaginable. Walt would go down to the city parks and preach and give out blankets, food or what ever he could get his hands on. He approached pastor Barnett about bringing some of these guys to Church. Another man named Dick Bomar was also working with the homeless men down town too. At about this same time I saw a large utility van for sale. I bought that van and one of our car lot customers and I converted it to a church on wheels. The entire side of the van drops out and on the inside its a pulpit, P.A. System with microphones and an organ. We had a generator we used for electricity. As the men got saved they had a desire to get off the street and get back into society as a productive citizen. Bomar started bringing men to his house which led to him buying a bigger house on Central avenue and then a bigger house and then the church bought several houses. They had men in some and women in others. Today the Church has bought out the Prestigious Embassy Suites motel on Grand Avenue which has 300 rooms a pool, skyline view open elevator and all the goodies of a high class joint.

Winning souls at Barnett's pageants

One of Pastor Barnetts famous sermons was his Easter pageants. He would spread the Easter season out with 3 consecutive Sunday services he called the trilogy. The last of the would reenact the Crucifixion of Jesus. My sons and I played in those pageants for many years. I let my hair and beard grow out my boys and I played shepherds. We went to a local

farm and bought sheep and had live animals in the pageant. One time one of the sheep had some lambs just before the beginning of the first performance. The made for a real live nativity scene.



It was at an Easter pegeant at Phoenix 1st Assembly of God that the thief on the cross got saved in real life

Mrs. Barnett (Maria) was in charge of make up and costumes. At one performance we were in a room getting dressed when a guy from the Church on the Street ministry came in looking for Pastor Walt Ratray. One of the make up ladies thought he was an actor and told him to get dressed for the Crucifixion scene. One of the thieves on the cross had not shown up and she asked him if he would fill in. “Sure no problem” he said. He stripped down to his undershorts and wrapped a torn sheet around his waist and they made him up to be the thief on the cross. When the curtain oenid up for that scene there was Jesus Christ crucified and bleeding hanging on the old rugged cross. On either side were the two thieves. During his last hours Jesus talked to his heavenly father and told him asked :my God my God why hast thous forsaken me”? One thief heard this and said “remember me when you come into your kingdom”. Jesus then said “today you shall be with me in paradise.”

Later on Pastor Barnett was preaching on a Sunday evening sermon and he was reporting on the success of the 14 or so Easter services we had just had. He said “ Oh by the way the thief on the cross was an actual real live sinner out of the Park in down town Phoenix. He accepted the real Jesus Christ as his savior right there on that cross during that play.”

Winning souls at our business

While working full time at the Church I had been buying and selling used cars on the side and it grew into a full time job. After a year, I hired 2 mechanics to take my place fixing the church buses and opened up a used car lot.. God blessed the car business and we had several used car lots. One lot was given to our oldest son Chuck IV who still has a dealership to this day in Michigan where he moved his Phoenix business from. Remember

the prophesy that was given to me by the pastor on Red Arrow road 3 years previously? It had come true and we had our own private twin engine plane. We used the plane to go to auctions and bid on used cars and pick them up with our own car carrier. How did you get an airplane ? Glad you asked.

While still keeping our bus routes as volunteers our car business grew. We were selling cars on contracts where the customer would make payments to us each week. Jane was our best salesperson and soul winner. She was winning as many customers to the Lord as she was selling cars. At this time she was also taking care of 3 kids. Many times she could be seen writing up a contract with baby Susie strapped on her back or front in a child carrier. The boys were watched by me or some of the other adults at the car lots.



Our first aiplane was a Cessna 320 turbo prop twin engine here are me and Jane

Some of customers would not pay for their cars and would leave town with them heading for Mexico and other places many miles away. We would get notes from the U.S. Border patrol that a vehicle that we had lien on was being held at a border patrol lot. We were told to come and get them. We learned that if the cars were not picked up they would be sold at auction. I decided to get an airplane and fly drivers to the storage lots to pick up the cars and attended the auctions and buy cars to sell at our lots In Phoenix. So we bought our first airplane and I learned to fly it.

We also bought a car carrier to haul the cars back from the auctions.. We would fly to the auctions and bid on the cars and then send the car carrier after them..We could attend a sale, buy the cars and be back in Phoenix about noon. We flew back to Michigan for Christmas where I was asked to speak at the Full Gospel Business Men's meeting. Of course I had an altar call and invited the men to get saved..

From cars to mining gold and turquoise

By this time in 1985 I saw an add in the Phoenix paper for gold mining claims for sale or trade. We traded a Mercedes car we had for 120 acres of land in Prescott Arizona. We used to fly up to the mining property during the week and fly back to Phoenix for church on Wednesday and Sunday bus route. That venture showed us how to make one ton of

money in the gold mining business. How do you do it ? Start out with 2 tons of money.

One of our customers that was making weekly car payments was an Indian that I lived on the reservation nearby. He wore lots of Turquoise jewelery. He wanted to trade us some of it for his car payments. I had faintly heard of the turquoise craze just hitting America. I said where do you get this stuff? He said they have it at mines all over Arizona. We flew down to Morenci Arizona where we met a sheriffs deputy named Richard Kerr parked near the air port. Kerr told us about Turquoise being mined at the Morenci copper mine. A guy name Jimmy Billingsley had a contract with Phelps Dodge to mine turquoise in their Huge open pit mine there. We started buying turquoise from him and eventually bough the contract to mine it our selves. We used to fly back and forth form Morenci to Phoenix for church. We left our car lot in charge of our boys, Chuck and Bobby.