

DRIVEN BY HIS WIND

Go Jump Off a Cliff!

a *Conversations with an Angel* “web extra”

by Randy Schuneman

The cliff divers of Mexico are quite a sight to see! These courageous, young men have trained for this moment for most of their life. They stand with their toes dangling over the edge of a treacherous drop where peril just waits. If the wind carries them back to the rugged side of the cliff, they could easily die! If they do not judge the tides correctly, they could be crushed by the numerous large rocks they are trying to avoid. Still, the diver reads the tide. When he believes the water will be deep enough, he leaps head first into the waters below. He literally throws himself off a cliff! The beauty is found in watching this sleek form cut through the water below barely making a ripple in the water. He triumphantly waves to any onlookers when he comes out of the water.

Skydivers intentionally are taken to 10,000 feet or more above the earth. When the correct altitude and location are reached, the skydiver throws himself out of the plane as he watches the ground coming closer and closer. At just the right time, he or she pulls the ripcord and deploys the first parachute and floats gently to the ground.



Expert divers can land within inches of their target. They even have a *backup* chute in case the main chute does not open.

I saw the movie *Transformers: The Dark Side of the Moon* with my nephew, Michael. This installment was in 3-D. With our 3-D glasses in place, we watched the *Decepticons* battle the *Autobots* for control of the city of Chicago, Illinois. The goal was to use the resources of Chicago (and planet earth) to draw their home planet into Earth's atmosphere and bring it back to life.

Toward the end of the movie, the youngest General I have ever seen in the United States military (he could not have been 27 at the oldest) gathers his best special ops soldiers into a plane to parachute into the action. They have those cool *web suits* that make them drop to Earth even faster! With the *Decepticons* filling the air with all sorts of missiles and artillery and our military forces fighting back with AK-7s, these brave men fly in a formation that would make the *Blue Angels* proud. Throughout the *flight*, the teenage General calls out commands like, "Right!" when he wants his men to zip past a skyscraper that is crumbling from enemy fire. The city is falling apart around them...skyscrapers are being demolished and crashing to the ground...burned-out cars fill the streets...carnage is everywhere (although you never see anyone dead, except the machines). In the midst of all the chaos, the child General lands all of his men safely on the ledge they had targeted. They victoriously watch the *Autobots* come to their rescue and celebrate the victory.

These two groups have something in common for me. If I was standing beside that young man who is about to throw himself off a cliff or right next to that baby General about to jump out of the plane to the battle below, I would tell them both the same thing, I would scream at the top of my voice, "***Don't do that!***" If I had enough

time, I would add things like, “***Are you crazy?***” or “***Do you not understand what you are doing?***” and “***If you fall flat on your face, it is really going to hurt...it may even kill you.***”

I could not dive off a cliff, because I am terrified of water! I could never jump out of a plane at 10,000 feet, because I am terrified of heights! However, five months after Jennie died; Bonnie and I jumped off a cliff of our own.

Bonnie and I had stayed an extra day at the district Pastor and Spouse Retreat in Branson, Missouri, U.S.A. Some time that day, I looked at Bonnie and said a simple phrase, “It’s time!” Those words began a whirlwind of epic proportion! Bonnie knew that I meant it was time to resign the church. The last six months had been the hardest of our lives, both in our personal life and at church. I did not have any energy to help a grieving church move forward any longer. We made it to November, but I dreaded the thought of trying to heal while there was stress all around me.

When we arrived home on Thursday, Bonnie immediately went to her computer to start *shopping* for a new home. By Friday afternoon, Bonnie had found the *dream house* she wanted. She requested that we get in the car and go look at it, *Now!*. Now the house was in Edmond, Oklahoma, about two hours and fifteen minutes away. I begged out of going, because I needed to prepare for Sunday. On Saturday morning, Bonnie and her Dad got in a car and headed to Edmond to look at houses with Bonnie’s sister and Jenarold’s real estate agent, Kathy. I had been thinking more along the line of finishing out the church year (the end of April).

A little later in the day, I received a phone call from Bonnie. With great excitement in her voice, she exclaimed, “***We bought a house!***” I woke up about two hours later from the coma that was caused from me passing out and hitting my head on

the nightstand! Actually, I responded, “That is gggrrreeat, sweetheart!” Then, I passed out, hit my head on the nightstand and went into a coma!

Buying a home is usually a major decision, but when you already own a home in one city and buy a house in a different city, it is a LITTLE more nerve-racking! Kind of hard to answer the question, “So what is new with you?” Strangely enough, I felt at peace about the decision. In fact, I did not see the inside of the house until the day we closed on it December 31, 2010. I trust my wife’s judgment that much. Baba and Robb moved to Edmond in January 2011.

Although I fully agreed with the choice, it did leave the potential for a few *awkward moments like*: when people ask about the whereabouts of Robb or Mr. Mullins or “What are your plans for the holidays?” “Oh, we bought this house in Edmond so...” Of course, there were also things like not being able to tell my insurance agent and close friend that I needed insurance on the new house. We had to use a local agent. Probably the hardest thing was to keep Bonnie from smiling too big!

A few weeks before, I had been sitting at my office computer *Instant Messaging* with Robb. Oh, by the way, I was also crying my eyes out. Robb kept writing words of encouragement to me. As I poured my heart out to him, he responded back, “Dad, are you crying because you know you need to leave the pastorate?” Hardly able to see the screen, I answered, “Yes, I think so.” Ever since I was called to preach at sixteen, the only thing I could think about was pastoring for forty years! Now, I was not sure I could make it forty days!

The day we closed on the house, we met the wonderful Christian couple who were the sellers. They had not expected the house to sell so quickly. Neither had I! However,

when Bonnie called to ask some question about the house of a real estate agent, the woman said, “We have had so many calls about that house yesterday and today! I am sorry to tell you, but someone already has a contract on it.

Bonnie responded, “I know. I am the one who has the contract!”

After we had bought the house, but before the sign had been taken down, we found a couple *snooping* around the backyard. They thought the sign meant that the contract had fallen through. We even had one family ring our doorbell to ask if the house was for sale. My wife is so smart! We waited patiently for December 31, 2010 to come. We were going to be able to pay for the house in full! We would not have a house payment, the property had its own well so there would be no water bill and there was an acre backyard with trees and a neighborhood zoo of wild turkeys, squirrels, an owl, enough cardinals to elect a new Pope and hummingbirds.

Bonnie and I faced just a few small problems before this next step could be taken. The main concern was a job! I had no desire to start another pastorate. At my age, most churches were very willing to oblige me by not calling me either. I thought about the possibility of being a hospice chaplain, however, I was not ready to walk with people who were dying on a daily basis. Hospice chaplains have a special gift for comforting the dying. I just was not that tough.

I started to focus on the possibility of becoming a hospital chaplain. Surely, I could visit the sick on a daily basis. I started looking for openings available in the Oklahoma City area. I even signed up for a website called Jobs Indeed and honed my choices down to hospital chaplain. Surprisingly, there were some jobs available.

The VA hospital had an opening, but you had to send a stack of forms to the Main Office in Washington, D.C. When an opening came available, John Batten from D.C.

would give the list out to the chaplain in charge at the local VA hospital. When John emailed the forms, I got discouraged. There were forms of every kind. What if I filled something out wrong and the government arrested me? So I filled out some of the forms and left the others on my desk for a month or so. When I called the Oklahoma City VA hospital, the chaplain on duty encouraged me by saying, “Chaplain jobs are hard to find. We have to go without pay for the next few weeks, because the Hospital is short on money.” Not so great!

Another was at Mercy Hospital in Oklahoma City. Mercy was only a short drive from our house. Easy access...perfect schedule of Monday through Friday morning...perfect responsibility of meeting with families before and after their loved one’s surgery. I even had some people who knew some people who knew some people. I updated my resume and completed the application process. Both of these items reached the Human Resource office with plenty of time! What a great God we serve! He had provided a perfect job at just the right time!

I waited...and waited...and waited...nothing! I got the name of the man who would be making the decision. When I finally reached him, he was driving somewhere. I introduced myself and told him of my concern that I had not heard about **my** job at Mercy. He tried to pronounce my name (not a good sign) and then asked, “How many CPE units do you have?”

I had no idea what a CPE unit was so I calmly replied, “None.” The HR man said, “Oh that explains why I don’t recognize your name. I looked through all the resumes to see if they had four CPE units. If not, I just threw the resume away.” I knew I needed to find out what a CPE is and how to get four of them. Piece of cake! If this second job popped up so quickly, surely there were others.

I had earlier talked to the person who oversees chaplains in our region and our denomination. I remember he kept asking how many CPEs I had. My District Superintendent even mentioned the phrase. Have you ever been in a conversation where everybody understands the terminology, except you? I hated sounding uneducated, so I started Googling “CPE.” I found out that CPE stands for Clinical Pastoral Education. Even today, I could not tell you for sure what that means. As I did more research, I found out that whatever a CPE is, I needed four of them. Piece of cake! I had a doctorate. How hard could getting a CPE be?

Then I found out that you had to find a hospital that had a CPE program. There were four in the OKC area: the VA Hospital, University of Oklahoma Hospital, Deaconess Hospital and Integris Baptist Hospital. I called OU Medical center. The man was delighted to talk to me about the fact his program was free! It just required going to class on Monday and working Friday through Sunday for no pay. This left finding a job where you worked Tuesday through Thursday. The man asked, “How does that sound to you?”

I tried several other locations, but found that one CPE cost anywhere from \$450 to \$700 and required at least 30 weeks up to nearly a year. The longest possible time I had before I moved was fourteen weeks. It would take me up to four years to have four of these magical units. I could then take Social Security at 62 and beg on the streets for coffee money!

I did receive a call to interview at one the CPE hospitals for a resident chaplain position. It would take a year, but a person could earn four CPE units within that year. It would require sixty hours a week and the pay was not great, but I was glad to have any interview. I walked into the interview with five really kind chaplains. I enjoyed the

opening chit-chat. When the interview began, the first question was, “Why in the world would you want this job?” It went downhill from there. Several months later, I did get offered the job, but I realized the committee had talked me out of it.

My second choice was teaching. I had fifteen years of teaching experience on the college level. Of course, teaching at a junior high or high school level would require a Teaching Certificate. I applied at three Christian schools. I was even willing to teach Social Studies since I had a History minor. No response.

I tried a small Christian college. I sent in my resume and called for updates. I met the deadline and had what I thought was a *killer resume*. I even made an appointment to meet the HR person. The Theology and Missions faculty position sounded like something I would enjoy. I love working with college students. Unfortunately, the college had placed an internet ad and had received a *good response*. I still have not heard from them and school starts in three weeks. I probably did not get that one.

I talked to two District Superintendents and told them I did not want to pastor or do associate work, but I would be willing to serve as a short-term interim. Yes, whatever I do, I need to be in the Edmond-OKC area. I even told one of the D.S.s that I was proud of myself for being able to keep going to church, because if I did what I wanted to do, I would never go to church again! How do you rephrase that to make it a positive? I sat for about an hour shooting myself in the foot with my total honesty.

The four months after I announced my *retirement* from pastoral ministry, I felt confident and free. I knew that leaving the pastorate was the right decision. Surely, God would give me a job the day after Easter, right? I thoroughly enjoyed the freedom of preaching I had those twelve Sundays. When we first moved to Edmond, it was like being on a constant vacation. Bonnie, Baba, Robb and I could drink morning coffee on

the porch and enjoy nature. At night, we would sit out until the sun went down. Perfect! No job, but we all needed some time to relax after thirty-three years and the loss of Jennie.

The second month of retirement was a little harder than the first one. I was still enjoying the back porch, but I was starting to have an increase in guilt and a decrease in confidence. One interview and no job offer. What if God forgot to pack my parachute? What if the waves were going out instead of in? What if after jumping of the cliff, I was going to fall flat on my face? What if this wasn't faith, but foolishness? My life was turning into a bad episode of *Mr. Mom*.

I did not shave every day. I usually had no idea what day of the week it was, because I did not have any appointments.

To add to the situation, I know I was scaring my parents to death. They had a 58-year-old son who *retired* seven years too soon. Dad even invited Robb and I home for a weekend visit. As Mom and Dad shared their concerns for me and my family, Dad described what he was feeling. He said, "I watched you resign a good job before you had another job. I have not said anything, but if I could I would say, **"Don't do that!"**" I realized that our decisions did not make rational sense. I apologized for scaring two people that I love dearly.

From the very beginning of this process, Robb and Bonnie were my cheerleaders. Robb kept saying, "Dad, you are amazing! You have too many things to offer. Focus on finding something that you really want to do! Come on, Dad! You made the right decision to leave. Don't get discouraged. It is going to be okay!"

I appreciated the cheers, but to be honest, two and a half months into my *retirement*, I was ready to give up! There was nothing on the horizon. One of the two

job offers I had was for the job that the one Search Committee had desperately tried to discourage me from taking. The other job I accepted required me to do phone sales. I believed in the *product and the company*, but I am NOT a phone salesman. I am such an easy touch that I would most likely end up buying the product FOR the person on the phone.

Once again, God's silence seemed deafening. Satan started using his famous line, "**What if...?**" Then, I began to hear in the distance God's symphony begin to play!