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Afterward Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days. Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches. One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him and knew how long he had been ill, he asked him, “Would you like to get well?”

“I can’t, sir,” the sick man said, “for I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred up.”

Jesus told him, “Stand up, pick up your sleeping mat, and walk!” (John 5:1-7a, 8a, NLT).



Chapter One

Rise and Crash

It's a sixty-mile trek one way from our little house in the big woods east of Hinckley, Minnesota, to the elementary school parking lot in front of the Milaca Elementary School in Milaca, Minnesota. For five years, without missing one day, I had made the daily journey without incident. I was always on time as a bus driver for the 6:50 A.M. route beginning in Bock, Minnesota, and ending at the elementary school in Milaca for the 8:05 A.M. start of my day as a teacher.

My daily teaching schedule started at 8:30 A.M. in the Spanish classroom. Every student from first

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grade through sixth grade would come to my room for a half-hour Spanish class twice a week.

On the morning of October 16, 2001, my little alarm clock didn't look the same at 4 A.M. when I woke up. I couldn't see the hands on the face; at least, I couldn't tell where they were pointing. I had a slight headache; I just didn't feel quite right. My wife, Imogene, urged me to get going because breakfast was ready. But I wasn't.

When I did appear at the kitchen table at 4:15 A.M., I had my T-shirt on backwards and inside out. Imogene suggested I go back and start over. I could walk and talk fine, so I had no warning anything was seriously wrong with me. I had taken my shower, found two aspirin, and took my prescribed blood pressure pills. I waited a few minutes for the headache to pass, but the clock kept ticking. I needed to be on the road at 5:30 A.M. sharp. By 6:00 A.M. I'm normally at Hinckley, twenty miles away, and by 6:40 A.M. I'm rolling out the "Flower Bus" (number 61) for the pre-trip inspection at Sue's Bus Company in Bock.

My wife had turned the Buick Park Avenue around for me and had pointed it down the driveway. I headed out. I thought the cool, fresh October air would wake me up. The first twenty miles on my daily trip are on State Highway 48, heading west toward Hinckley. It turns out, I was on the road to disaster, and later, a miracle.

Only later, after my accident, I was informed that I had been driving on the wrong side of the highway with drivers coming toward me, heading

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for the ditch to the left of me. I had gone past three churches and five bridges, but I don't remember going by anything. Apparently someone had alerted the state patrol because they were waiting for me in Hinckley, but I never arrived.

Just prior to the accident, I do remember a school bus heading toward me. I can still see the clip lights, three of them, above the windshield and one on each side. The bus had its headlights on. All of a sudden the bus was right in front of me. The crash was loud. There was a loud burst in my car, the airbag exploding like a shotgun blast.

I remember seeing the driver of the bus take a bounce. Fortunately, there were no children on the bus. And no one was riding with me. The state patrol arrived quickly with their lights flashing. I do remember the fire truck, but not a fire. I started yelling. I also remember comforting voices. I knew one voice was that of Skip, a man from my church. (He has been with the fire department for many years). The other familiar voice was a Hinckley High School teacher.

I was trapped inside my car. I still don't know which fireman actually worked the Jaws of Life extractor-cutting machine. They proceeded to cut the doorpost off at the roof level (by my left ear) and tried to get the door open. They ended up cutting off the car door. All this time I was yelling. I knew I would be late for school.

I told the state patrol officer to call my wife and the Milaca district office. The elementary school office needed to know what had happened. I rattled

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off the phone numbers. They also needed to call the bus garage in Bock. Not knowing how seriously I was injured, I thought I would be late for work or perhaps need a substitute. (The sub folder was on my desk).

The emergency crew somehow got a wide, smooth board under me from the right side and got me out of the car. My chest and upper body really hurt. I still don't know how I found so much air for all of this talking and yelling! I did not know until months later that many of my ribs were broken and my lungs had collapsed and had been punctured. I also was unaware at the time that I was bleeding internally. The state patrol report would later reveal that the pavement was dry at the time of the accident. There were no skid marks. Apparently I did not even apply the brakes before I hit the bus head-on.

The Pine County ambulance from Hinckley headed for Mora, Minnesota, at my request. I don't remember much about that twenty miles, but I



Bernie's car after the accident

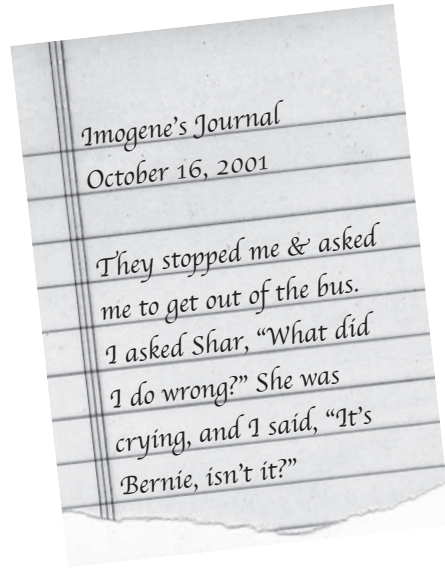
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did ask Skip, the attendant, if we had gone past Quamba, Minnesota, yet. I knew every crossroad and curve on State Highway 23.

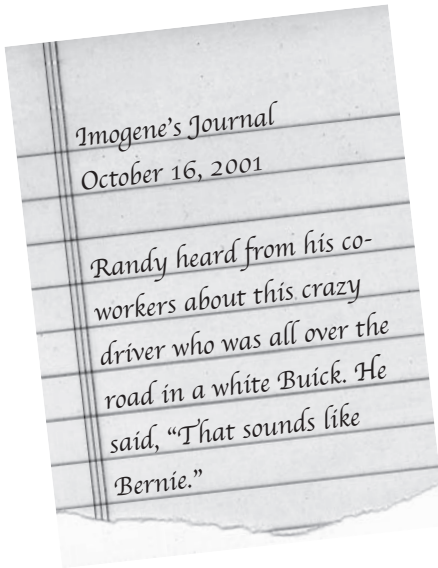
That morning, my wife, Imogene, had been driving her regular school bus route. Her friends, Shar, Randy and Jack, were at the Fleming Logging Road waiting for her as she arrived with the school bus. They stopped her and asked Imogene to get out of the bus. Mr. Almos confirmed there had been an accident.

Randy took my wife to Mora to meet the ambulance. Randy is a road construction worker who was staying with us while he was working nearby. He got permission from his boss to go find Imogene on the bus route and later came upon the accident.

In Mora, a Life Link chopper was waiting on the pad and, with a quick transfer, I was bound for North Memorial Trauma Center in Minneapolis. My next thirty days are blank. I was unconscious for about a month. My wife, Imogene, kept a journal of those days while I was "out of it." Apparently a flurry of phone calls and bleak reports triggered



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friends and family to visit me at intensive care at North Memorial.

My brothers Bill and J.B. drove from Michigan to see me. One of them told the other that he wouldn't lay down a "plug nickel" to ever see me up and around again. They listened to the doctor in charge, gave Imogene a hug and went out the door,

shaking their heads.

The doctor did his best to prepare Imogene for the tough reality of my situation. I had internal bleeding, a punctured lung, a bruised heart, a broken right leg above the ankle, and my left hand had apparently hit the windshield pretty hard. I was given two pints of blood because of my internal bleeding. I did eventually see the hospital bill for severing the last remaining tendon on my left pointer finger. What was a finger is now a stub. It would be a month later before I would even know it was missing. Yellow jaundice, pneumonia and a stomach ulcer were later added to my list of woes. My doctor said perhaps the amount of medicine I was given may have triggered some of my problems.

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The first time I remember seeing my left hand, it was full of ugly black stitches and red, orange, yellow, blue, purple, and green skin. I was unable to move my hand until Imogene spent a few days and nights working it over, doing the “milk-the-cow” routine. Slowly the natural color came back to my hand. A nurse had asked Imogene if she had ever milked a cow before. A dumb question. At a farm in Tillamook, Oregon, she milked 400 Holsteins before 7:00 A.M. in the milking parlor with a Mexican helper. She sat by my bed day and night squeezing and rubbing from my fingertips through my palm and towards my elbow.

Even a month into my slow recovery, my problems persisted and new ones developed. For example, my nervous system could not handle noise. I had watched just twenty minutes of a professional football game one Sunday afternoon while every TV on the hospital floor was on full blast. This really got to me, so I rarely watched any television at all. I slowly adjusted to my new situation.

