



Who Am I That You've Brought Me This Far?

By Gene Harmon
from "By the Word of Their Testimony"

We are continuing the theme of Being an Alternate Society with a series of personal testimonies of Full Covenant members of Alleluia taken from the book "By the Word of Their Testimony" published by the Alleluia Community in 1998 on the occasion of the community's 25th anniversary. Each issue in September will have a testimony taken from the book which will precede a testimony by a Full Covenant member of Alleluia who has signed covenant since that date.

My father once said, "Perhaps it is best that a man cannot see his own future, for if he could, he might not have the courage to face it." In my case he was right, except for the power of God's grace.

Having been raised in a strong Christian environment in Oklahoma, it was no surprise to anyone that I chose the ministry as my vocation. During the years of Bible College and Seminary, my wife Patty and I met, were married and began raising our family. It was in the seventh year of marriage, with two sons, Bob and Jim,

and a pregnant wife, that things turned sour.

I listened to a 'distant drummer,' whom I now realize was Satan himself, with his seductive cadence, convincing me that the grass really was greener on the other side. I thought I had to "find myself." Through absolutely *no* fault of Patty's, I left her and the boys. For the next five-and-a-half years, I wandered through a life that had I known what it would be like, probably 'would not have had the courage to face it.'

During those years, I remarried and had a son, Brian, by my second wife. But things were not to go well 'in the new grass.' My second wife was killed in a tragic automobile accident, and Brian and I were left to fend for ourselves. The approach of Christmas 1972 found me at perhaps the lowest ebb in my life. I decided to take my three-year-old and go to my parents' house in Oklahoma City. Perhaps there I could escape the terrible loneliness I dreaded.

Patty and I had an unspoken agreement. She and the boys would spend Christmas with my folks, and



my new family and I would spend New Year's. To say the least, Patty was less than joyous about my coming at Christmas that year, but being the gracious person she is, did not make a scene about it. We even ended up sitting side-by-side at Christmas dinner. The hostility from Patty, which I expected, was never present. I will always believe that God set some things in motion at dinner that day.

Over the next few days, the desire grew in me to do something to see if there might be anything left between Patty and me. Getting my courage up, I called her. "Patty, you have every right to tell me to go straight to hell, but could I pick you up and take you to dinner New Year's Eve?"

Her affirmative answer, I believe, set the stage for God to begin the reconciliation of our marriage. He then poured upon us all the grace we would need to embrace the repen-

God Used My Disability to Grant Me the Desire of My Heart

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tance, forgiveness, change and healing necessary to restore our marriage. At a small family ceremony in March of 1973, we were remarried. Shortly after that, the restoration of the family culminated in Patty's legal adoption of Brian.

Patty had again become my "princess," but there was still a good bit of "frog" left in me, a prideful workaholic who had really bought into the world during my time apart from her.

I had become an Episcopalian during my desert wanderings. Patty tried the Episcopal Church, but was uncomfortable with the liturgy. So we sort of "vegetated" in the denomination where we had spent most of our lives. Our love was strong, but something was missing. There had to be something we were missing—something more—something we didn't have.

We heard about a new priest at the Episcopal church in the town where we lived. (Just happened to be The Reverend Lou Lindsey, now an Alleluia brother.) We decided to attend a weeknight prayer meeting led by this Spirit-filled, tongues-speaking rector...whatever that meant. We were about to find out.

Look out! Crash course! From being devoutly opposed to tongues and all the other 'Holy Roller' stuff, I slammed up against the wall of the Holy Spirit. He went to work on me with a "wire brush." More repentance! Forgiveness! Inner Healing! More Forgiveness! Renouncing independence! Forgiveness! Realization of the desire for a personal encounter with Jesus. Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Desire for tongues! (Me?) Thank you Lord for bringing Patty and me through all this together. Thank you

Fr. Lou for *hugging* me when I needed it; correcting me when I *didn't* think I needed it but likely did. Most of all thank you and Jeanne both for loving us into a Kingdom we'd never known.

The time came when Patty and I were both ready to hear God's call to Alleluia and embrace it with everything we had. After our visit in the early summer of 1976, Oklahoma began to invade Georgia...us with a Ryder truck pulling a decommissioned ambulance (*Unit 24*) which I used to drive...followed soon by the Lindsey family in their big red school bus.

More than anything else, I had a really strong desire to work full-time for Alleluia. Well, I started out spending most of two years under Faith Village houses fixing plumbing and crawling through the muck of broken sewers. Then I got a promotion. I became head of the Motor Pool... responsible for the maintenance of about 45 "in common" cars, most of which could have honestly worn a bumper sticker saying, "My other car is a piece of junk too!" But somehow, God's grace kept us all rolling—at least most of the time.

Those three years began what is now a 22-year 'total immersion' into Alleluia Community. I cannot imagine having raised five boys without the committed love and support of the brothers and sisters. So many ways my life has been changed for the good. As I look back over the years, I see God's hand mightily at work in our family.

With the kids grown, Patty and I have entered what the world calls the "empty nest syndrome." Fear it, or be anxious about it? Heavens no! With four of the five sons choosing to live

in the Augusta area, there's no "empty nest." Just an "accordion house" that contentedly breathes in and out as the grown sons, daughter-in-laws and grandkids frequently find something to their liking in the "fridge."

Lest I sound too idyllic, I hasten to say it has not all been Camelot. In the late eighties, a congenital neuromuscular disease became markedly progressive. Hip replacement surgery and some complication came in 1990. Since that time, I have been more and more dependent on my wheel chair or scooter to navigate. Following open heart surgery in 1994, it was necessary for me to retire disabled. Rather than a debilitating thing, God used it to grant me the desire of my heart—working for Alleluia virtually full-time running the communications office. In my wildest imagination I could never have created the scenario which has brought about the most fulfilling time in my life.

When King David was assured by God that his son would build the temple and the Messiah would be of his lineage he proclaimed, "Who am I and what is my family that You have brought us this far?" I cannot but ask the same question.

The late Gene Harmon, a retired ordained minister in the Christian Church, was Communications Director responsible for all publications of the Alleluia Community, a Support Group Head, and served on the Ecumenical Council. He had also served as the Community's photographer and developed the video/sound team and ran the audio tape ministry. He and his wife, Patty, signed Covenant with Alleluia Community in 1977. They have five sons and seven grandchildren. Gene passed away in 2004 after a long illness.

I'll do Whatever You Tell Me

By Nicole Maniccia

"What do You want me to do, Lord? I'll do whatever You tell me." This short prayer is constantly on my mind, in my heart and on my lips. God has used it powerfully in my life, and eventually it led me to answer a call for me to join Alleluia Community. Here is my testimony to that happening.

My parents, Leo and Teresa Maniccia, joined Alleluia Community when I was three years old. I was blessed to learn about love early on in life. I learned how to give it, how to receive it, how to see it, how to use it, how to show it, and how to be changed by it. Despite this, when I was 13, I remember having a serious lack of faith and deciding that perhaps my parents, teachers, aunts and uncles, siblings and classmates had it all wrong. As immature as this sounds even as I type it, I just simply stopped believing in God. The idea of a big man in the sky who "loved" me didn't seem to fit.

Later that year, I was blessed to be invited to a Youth 2000 Retreat and had a profound and miraculous encounter with God during a Eucharistic procession. I'll describe that experience here very simply. In an instant, I knew God loved me. It was an intense, passionate, wild, and absolutely believable kind of Love. For me, that was it.

Over the years I have often reflected on that moment. It has given me peace in times of distress, hope in times of doubt, and belief when there is unbelief. After college, I began to pray, "What do You want me to do Lord? I'll do whatever You tell me." I started seriously discerning a call to religious life while always having a

distinct feeling that I was called "here" (Alleluia) to build "this" life.

While visiting different covenant communities and praying with a spiritual director, I could never find that "peace" people talk about when they find the center of God's will for them. I went on an Underway Retreat during those years and left so discouraged! The talks were boring, the music was bad, and I felt totally uninspired.

During my prayer time the day after the retreat, when I was telling the Lord about how lame that retreat was, how boring a life in Alleluia would be, and how terribly predictable it would be to just settle here, I heard the Lord speak very seriously to me. He said, "Nicki, you won't be able to do it without them." I received a very humbling but truly beautiful call that day.

I need the support of my brothers and sisters, I need a rule of life, I need to live in committed relationships with other Christians. Perhaps there are people who don't... I'm not one of them. I was invited to sign Covenant in 2009 with GREAT joy and peace in my heart knowing that this is truly where God has called me.

There are many missions, retreats, trips, youth groups, jobs and ministries that God has called me to on this journey, but in the end these are just road signs letting me know I'm going in the right direction. I firmly believe the road I'm walking on is Alleluia, and it's paved with the support, friendship, wisdom, and most importantly, the love of my brothers and sisters. These are the types of brothers and sisters who would encourage me in my faith in Jesus Christ, even



to the point of martyrdom.

When Barry Forde died, I took some time to pray at St. Joseph Church after his wake. I had been Barry's secondary on prayer watch for a few years and suddenly realized that with him gone, I would need to step in and take over our hour on the watch. In that moment of prayer, I had a vision of Barry taking my hand and simply saying, "Nicki, I pass you the watch in solemn trust and pray God's blessing on your time with Him on our behalf." Of course I responded, "I receive the watch ready and able to fulfill my responsibility. May God return to you 10-fold blessing for the time and energy you've invested on your watch, Barry." I very much felt a passing on of this Alleluia life, from him to me, and I am blessed to be called to such an extraordinary life in Alleluia! I see the love of God communicated on a daily basis in Alleluia and, through this call, I am given life and am able to freely respond to Jesus, "I'll do whatever you tell me."

Nicole Maniccia is a 2003 graduate of the Alleluia Community School and a second-generation member of Alleluia Community. She graduated from the Medical College of Georgia in 2007, and is currently working as hospice nurse. She signed Covenant in 2009 and has served as a Young Adult Minister (YAM) in Alleluia since 2003. She lives in Augusta and attends St. Joseph Catholic Church.

Alleluia School Begins 34th Year

By Barbara Harshman

Lots of smiles, giggles and laughter were present in the ACS Courtyard as students gathered for the opening assembly of the 2014-15 school year. Anticipation ran high in both students and teachers as well as parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles who came to see that the first day of school was a great success.

After a summer full of renovations in the school, the students returned to see many changes. The elementary school has a new roof. The high school has air conditioners/ heaters in each classroom, new raised sinks in the girls' bathroom, a large refurbished auditorium in place of the library. The middle school floors were stripped and waxed. Painting was done in the high school and music building and floors were stripped and waxed.

The annual full community work party in August provided workers to clean all the windows, nooks and crannies, unpack books and materials and neatly arrange shelves and closets. Bright bulletin boards, shiny windows and floors and smiling teachers greeted students as they arrived. The pictures tell the story.



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