

NOT NOW, GOD!

by Mary Ann Roth

In quiet moments of reflection it is easy to realize that we are simply the sum of all that has happened to us. As the years on the calendar slip away, I have often dwelt on the tremendous changes that occurred in my life as a result of a major event during my childhood. It was not until my middle years that an entirely new perspective shook me to the core.

Like most cities in America, Cleveland was hot and sweltering the summer of 1941. There was little relief for families because they were afraid to let their children swim in polluted Lake Erie. There were no backyard swimming pools in those days. Suddenly, a new menace, polio, alarmed parents everywhere.

I had been moping around for a couple of days. Finally, my family suspected it was more than the heat. My mother offered to make my very favorite, spaghetti. My older brother, Rich, said he'd run to the drug store and buy me a new comic book. Neither worked. Eventually, my mother used a neighbor's phone to call my dad at the shop where he worked as a machinist. He told her she better get in touch with the doctor. The doctor told her to take me directly to the Emergency Room at City Hospital and not bother coming into the office.

We left as soon as dad got home from work. We parked our car near the Emergency entrance at the rear of the hospital. As we approached the door, a cart which contained the covered body of a little girl that had just died of polio was wheeled past us.

After the examination, I was asked to drink a horrible tasting medication. I did try, but was unsuccessful in getting it to go down or stay there. Eventually the nurses gave up and a doctor took over. It was then that I made my first bribe. I told the doctor he could have the nickel in my white purse with the gold chain that was at home if I didn't have to take that medicine anymore. It didn't work.

The doctor's diagnosis was polio, perhaps only a mild case. They placed me in a room with a baby that cried almost continuously. My parents were only permitted to see me twice per week and they entered my room wearing gowns and face masks.

After some time, I must have improved because the doctors wanted to get my legs working again. One day I found I had to learn to walk all over again. Two nurses supported me so I could sit up and they massaged my

legs. They put very long special elastic stockings on my legs and eased me to the floor. The floor came up to meet me very fast. My head was swimming and I was very dizzy and unbalanced. As my toes touched the floor, I experienced tremendous tingling sensations in my legs. They held me tight and patiently moved my legs. My legs did move and wondrously I could walk without falling as long as I held onto their arms.

Soon I was moved to a room with other children in various stages of polio. As I improved, I was moved to a very large ward where the rehabilitation work would begin. I was now able to walk without becoming dizzy or falling. We were encouraged to walk up and down a large portable wood platform with a flat section in the center with steps extending off each end and hand rails on both sides.

Nurses and doctors helped stabilize me on my first attempt as I held onto the railings for all I was worth. Progress was slow but consistent. My first victory was walking up the steps in an upright position holding onto the rails by myself. In time I could do it with my hands at my side. The final test was to do it with a book balanced on my head without holding the railing. Doctors continually monitored my overall leg coordination and corrected for proper positioning of my feet.

The public was demanding a cure for this horrible disease. The paralysis and incapacitation of polio struck the young with particular vengeance, although it certainly was not a respecter of age. The first step obviously was to establish a cause. Interns were relentlessly involved in epidemiology studies. I was questioned several times on foods and activities. A few I remember quite well because they were asked so often. Did I eat fresh corn and did my mother wash our fruits and vegetables? Did I swim in Lake Erie?

The big day finally arrived when I could go home. Rich couldn't wait to teach me a new card game, "Old Maid." Then there was school. What a shock to find on my first day back that the blackboard was full of cursive writing. Rather than hold me back a year, the teacher decided to tutor me before and after school. When I wasn't home by the time my dad got home from work, he came looking for me. Actually, it took a couple of years to catch up.

The doctor told my Dad that I needed lots of fresh air. He borrowed money from my grandpa and bought some land and began to build in the country. We were able to move in by November. By April, my dad had died of Hodgkin's Disease.

My story now shifts to the events that made those early years of victory over polio significant.

There I was in my car crossing town to bid farewell to a special friend that was moving away the summer of 1986. I was a leader of an Intercessory Prayer Group on the eastern part of Ann Arbor, and Miriam had a similar group on the west side. This was to be such a special time. I was singing and praying as I progressed across town. The Lord interjected something that he had brought to my attention at least 4-5 times before. My response again was “Not now, Lord.”

The activities began soon after I arrived. There was to be a time of praise, worship and a time of individual sharing of what Susan Blair meant to each of us, closing with prayer for her. In the middle of the worship, Miriam said, “Stop, someone has a word from the Lord.” Long pause. “We are not going on because I know this is from the Lord.” All this time I was attempting to ignore the tugging of the Holy Spirit. Miriam went through this scenario a few more times. The silences became unbearable. You know how it is, if you say it, you have to do it. I blurted out something like, “OK, it’s me. The Lord asked me to walk out the city and claim it for His righteousness.”

Once the words were out, the actions had to follow. Some of those present wanted to be included in the walk. I later shared about the walk at a Woman’s Aglow meeting and our Intercessory Prayer Group, even including it in our monthly newsletter.

It was September and enough people had expressed an interest in participating that we made plans to walk once per week so we could finish before the weather turned cold. We left some cars at the finishing point and the rest at the starting point so that when we finished we would have transportation to get to our vehicles.

I received a phone call from Virginia Perry, whom I hadn’t seen or talked to for a couple of years. She said she had been overwhelmed in her prayer times regarding the ungodly plight of our city. In her desperation she pleaded before God to tell her what to do. He told her to call me. She couldn’t believe that we had plans underway to begin walking the next week. She was the only person besides myself to walk every time.

The Lord gave me specific instructions on how the walk was to be conducted. Chit chat was out. We sought God’s protection and the guidance of the Holy Spirit before we set out. We progressed from praise to worship songs as we walked along. Spontaneous praises to God came next. The main purpose of the walk was intercession and spiritual warfare.

The city of Ann Arbor is in the shape of a dove that rests in the very center of a rectangular shaped county. Our commissioning service was held in the center of the dove which just happened to be the site of a University of Michigan chapel. From two to eight of us walked each time beginning due

north walking the boundaries of the city. With a different mix of people on each excursion, every walk took on a slightly different flavor and an increasing concentration on the purpose for these walks.

Each intersection, road separation and overpass was the focus of specific prayers. With hands raised, in Christ's name and authority we bound spirits of war, famine, pestilence, etc. and loosed the power of the Word going forth with signs and wonders following; the name of Jesus lifted up so there would be great salvation through repentance of sins; that Jesus as Lord would be our Baptizer, Deliverer, Healer and Provider; and that the Holy Spirit would be sent forth to convict men of sin, the righteousness of Christ and the judgment to come.

The intersection at Washtenaw and Carpenter became my Waterloo. Side streets were one thing, but a major thoroughfare was another matter. I told God I didn't think I had it in me to do it. Everyone else was walking toward the curb as if there weren't a thing wrong. As I reached the edge of the curb facing literally hundreds of cars passing by, I made a plea to escape this moment. That failing, I quickly sounded an emergency cry for help. Unbelievably my arms shot up and I could hear my voice above the thunderous pounding in my heart. After that experience, all the other busy streets were a piece of cake.

Then there were the maps! While studying a map on the hood of my car on one of the walks, a truck driver stopped to help. When I showed him the map and where I needed to be, he shook his head and said, "You'll never get there, that map is wrong." Throughout the walks we discovered three map errors.

It happened when I was returning from exchanging maps at City Hall for the second time. Driving on Washtenaw Avenue just before Stadium Boulevard is Tuomey Drive. For some reason there was an instant identification with a Dr. Toomey from my polio days. There was that quick flashback of all that had happened and I found myself telling God I wished I could just thank Dr. Toomey for all that he had done for me. If he could just see that I am not only healed and walking but that I can also run and dance... I said, "Oh, Lord, thank You for healing my legs."

In silence, I slowed the car down as I approached the red light. Then God said, "This is the reason I healed your legs!" Stunned by this revelation, tears welled in my eyes and ran down my cheeks. The implications were staggering. If I had not recovered at all from polio or had been on crutches or in a wheelchair, it would have been foolishness to consider walking out the city. The words bore deeper than the issue of my legs alone; it meant that

I was unknowingly being prepared for this special assignment for over 40 years.

A few people in our Intercessory Prayer Group said it was well and good to walk out the city but what about those in the periphery areas? No answer came at first, but nothing is too hard for God. He told me to get out the map, and then in a flash I knew what God meant us to do – drive out the rectangular shaped county beginning at the most northerly point and stopping for prayer at the eight directional points.

We had fasted for all the walks and planned to do the same for this final drive. Surprisingly, what we expected to take about four hours soon became seven. We stopped at a restaurant at the end of the ride to reflect on our individual experiences as well as nourish our bodies.

Each individual took a turn sharing what this meant to them personally and how walking and praying over a city and driving out a county had given them a new perspective on spiritual warfare and the importance of living our daily lives in ways that advance God's Kingdom. It was fascinating to listen to their new insights and the privilege they felt was theirs in being able to participate in this adventure.

Finally, my turn came. I thanked God and everyone for their patience and cooperation that made it possible to complete this goal. It was now time to share the special miracle. I wanted everyone else to share first to be sure that if they had experienced what I did or something similar they would have the opportunity to tell everyone. I reminded my fellow walkers that our last two walks were five and seven miles long. For several seconds on the last two walks I saw angels go before us as we walked. There appeared to be a column of angels on both the left and right-hand sides of the road, with the lead angel on each side darting forward followed in rapid succession by the other angels in line. They were like a band of angels rushing off to fulfill God's assignment.

In sum, can you begin to imagine how foolish I was, literally kicking and screaming on the inside saying over and over, "No, not now, Lord"? I had come within a hair's breadth of missing out on one of the most dramatic and rewarding events in my life, events that unlocked new understandings and purpose for my life. We all believe we are guided by God's hands. What a revelation to discover that even painful parts of our early years have potential to significantly impact what God can do through us now.

And at the end of it all, the angels were the confirmation that we were indeed walking the King's highway.