

Miracle Highway 101...

...An Incredible Journey

Chapter One

Spare His Life God, Spare His Life!

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? Palm 8:3-4

Building a drainage ditch is a precision job. Once the scraper bit is set and the 250-horsepower diesel tractor plows forward, devouring the landscape, the operator should never look back. But for some reason, on this seemingly uneventful day, for a split second, I looked behind me to check it. What I saw changed my life forever.

I snapped my head back to the front. Sweat poured from my face as I realized the huge front wheel of the half-filled scraper weighing several ton had pinned my co-worker, Wesley, to the ground!

Oh, no! I thought. The scraper bit could fatally injure my friend.

I pressed my feet hard on the clutch and the brake at the same time. The tractor stopped abruptly. The monstrous front wheel of the half-filled scraper sat directly on top of his body, and thousands of pounds of dirt were pressing my friend into an untimely grave.

Two weeks earlier, around the first of October, I had resigned as pastor of the Assembly of God Church in Hettinger, North Dakota. Our family of four consisting of my wife, Sharon, our children, Steve and Robin and myself, had just moved into a 27-foot motor home and were preparing to set out on the most exciting journey of our ministry as traveling evangelists. We had committed ourselves to a ministry that would take us across America, Portugal, Canary Islands and the Azure Islands. Our first crusade was slated to begin in November, so I had some time to work. I called Jon Liechty, a businessman and close friend, to ask if he could use me for a month. He was building a drainage system on one of the farms he and his brothers own south of Jamestown, North Dakota, to gain a few more acres of crop

Page | 2

land. He said yes. I had operated heavy equipment for him in the past, leveling land for mobile home courts. And, right out of high school, at 19 years of age, I built stock water reservoirs and leveled crop land for irrigation for a long-time friend

operating a D-8 caterpillar while pulling a 21-yard scraper.

I had developed a love for this kind of work and I was looking forward to a few weeks as a heavy equipment operator again.

There were three of us working on the project that day -- Wesley Loven,

Jon's brother-in-law, and Kenis Loven, Wesley's son. Wesley was our rod man. His job was to read the depth of the cut area to prevent the ditch from going too deep. If cut too deep, the water would stand. If not deep enough, it would act like a dam and the water wouldn't flow.

Now Wesley was under that wheel, and the greatest crisis of my life was unfolding before my eyes. I grabbed the hydraulic lever to raise the scraper bit. If I lift the scraper, all the weight of the dirt will crush him for sure, I thought, my mind racing. Could I back the scraper up with the bit in the ground? I knew I must try. I shoved the gear into reverse and at full throttle, power transferred to the wheels. Black smoke billowed out of the exhaust pipe. The tractor began to bounce up and down under the strain, breaking the scraper bit loose from the earth as

we slowly moved backward. When it abruptly came to a halt, I leaped out of the tractor and ran back to where Wesley now lay motionless in the dirt. His legs were twisted in an unnatural position, which meant he was broken.

My training as a certified Emergency Medical Technician prepared me for a quick evaluation of the situation. The scene was all too familiar. His face was very white indicating a lack of circulation and possible severe internal bleeding. He was not breathing and there was no pulse.

I knew my friend was dead.

A year earlier, I lost two of my sisters in a fatal head-on crash near Popular Bluff, Missouri. All the emotion of that tragic loss once again invaded my emotions.

I knelt beside Wesley's motionless body, turned my face toward heaven, and in a loud and persistent voice, cried, "**Spare his life God, spare his life!**" I continued to repeat the short prayer until Kenis came running toward us from his tractor. "What happened?" he shouted as he fell at his father's side

"I just ran over your Dad! Go get the pickup!" I shouted. "Radio the office! Tell the secretary what happened and tell her to call the hospital."

As I propped up Wesley's head, a slight twitch appeared in one of his eye lids. Then I thought I heard a slight groan. I heard it again as I moved my ear close to his mouth. He was trying to open his eyes. Listening even closer, I thought, Wesley is trying to tell me something!

"Help me up..." He moaned.

He's alive! He's alive! God had answered my prayer. I had just witnessed a miracle.

"Help me up," he repeated, emphatically in a barely audible sound.

By this time Kenis had returned with the pickup.

Page | 3

"Your Dad wants to stand up," I told Kenis.

"If I can stand up, I know I will be okay," Wesley said faintly.

I couldn't believe he was alive, let alone talking and wanting to stand up.

I looked at Kenis and said, "Help me get him up."

We reached under his arms and lifted him to his feet. He let out a moan and collapsed to the ground. Picking him up in a sitting position, we quickly carried him to the pickup. I drove out of the field with Wesley pressed hard against the

passenger door, and kept glancing at him to see if he was still breathing. We were soon traveling about 70 miles an hour on a gravel road. I reached for the two-way radio microphone and called the office to fill them in on the details. When I finished, I thought I heard Wesley say something.

"What did you say?" I asked.

In a slow, raspy voice he mumbled, "Take me home."

I was sure I hadn't heard right. "Wesley, I just ran over you with the scraper," I explained. "You have internal injuries. You could be bleeding inside. We need to get to the hospital as soon as possible."

"Take me home," He insisted.

I was approaching a point of decision in the road. Straight ahead was the route to the hospital. The turn to the left was the road to Wesley's place. I made the decision quickly and decisively by turning to the left. It didn't make sense, but somehow it seemed like the right thing to do. After all we had just experienced a miracle!

By this time his wife, Judith, had received a phone call about the accident. She was getting ready to leave for the hospital when we pulled into the yard. Wesley was sitting up in the truck. Judith came running out of the house and to the passenger side of the pickup. Her husband rolled the window down and asked her to bring his walker.

Three years prior, he had slipped on some oil while servicing one of the tractors and broke his leg. He explained to us that the EMTs had cut his clothes off with scissors. "I was greasy from working on the tractor, which was embarrassing, and I don't want that to happen again," he informed us. He explained he was going to take a shower and put on clean clothes before going to the hospital.

Judith brought the walker and Wesley slowly made his way into the house without assistance. Here was a man who 30 minutes before lay pinned to the ground by an earth scraper half full of dirt. We were astonished when he emerged from his bedroom looking like a new man. At the hospital, a team of medics were waiting for us with a gurney. They quickly rushed him into the examination room. Judith and I sat in the waiting room for over an hour before the doctor appeared asking to see the person who had run over this man with an earth scraper. He wanted

to know exactly what had happened out in the field. I told him every detail. When I finished, he looked puzzled.

"I have examined and X-rayed this man for over an hour and I can't find anything wrong with him. I am going to keep him in the hospital for a few days for observation to make sure everything is all right."

Two weeks later, Wesley and Judith took an Amtrak train vacation from Jamestown, North Dakota, to Seattle, Washington, then down the Californian coast