

Jericho Walls



#1

Kid Missions On The Move

An Eduventure

by
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Introduction

It was brutally clear that something had to be done and very soon. The church's youth attendance was continuing to shrink and no good answers were found at any of the Pastor, Youth, or Missions Conferences. It seemed the youth had begun speaking a new language, almost created a 'technology' neighborhood of fun and challenge that the church, and especially the silver-haired generation didn't know how to enter.

Is it just possible the youth's burden for friends to be saved, have found a way to make the churches across the land become their mission; teaching them the language of tech trash evangelism?

'Hard-Case Hannah' Simms and her bone-deep burden for the souls of the youth found new vitality applying her warship-building skills to build for Jesus, the much needed bridge between several generations.

The church was to see new ways to reach lost and discouraged souls with the old fashioned Gospel of Salvation for hearts that become as little children...

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#1 – Train Wreck

School Bus

T*HE FOUR WERE BOUNCING SO HARD IN THEIR SEATS* they figured old Mrs. McKreedy must have made a left turn down some railroad tracks with the loudest school bus in the fleet. It was a good thing they were on their way home from school because some school books and some papers avalanched onto the floor and hid themselves under some nearby seats. All that bouncing must have been what jarred some brain cobwebs loose starting the whole kid-flavored junkyard discussions.

Over the next few days in McKreedy's bus the discussions increased beyond trivial. Barb, Jake, Judy, and Nate were becoming more concerned about the numbers of kids in their church youth group shrinking. While most kids are increasingly addicted to computers, cell phones, game boxes, and blogging, these four were wise enough to see this technology livin' was really a stampede toward a techhead train wreck.

So many of the other bus riders just talked about the 'latest this' and the 'fastest that'. Their conversations never indicated they gave a nanosecond's thought to where it was all leading. There were even some sketchy rumors that some of the students were using techy tools to cheat on school tests. Judy overheard some of the girls in her Biology class swapping Internet locations to look at sexual pictures and stories.

Church Bus

The discussions of the four continued Wed eve on the church bus headed for their youth group they had such a burden for. In a semi-serious tone Jake told the other three he wished there was some way that God could redirect McKreedy's school bus to the front of the youth group door and all the school kids that were otherwise stampeding toward a train wreck would learn of real lasting joy.

Without much feeling Barb just blurted out, "well maybe there is. My dad told me more than once the old sayings of the skeptics, 'You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink'. Another one was 'it's harder than eating peas with a knife'. Dad said both of these are not true at all. To get a horse to drink water you simply put salt in his food, and to eat peas with a knife you can very easily squash them a little and then eat them like mashed potatoes." Barb got one of those looks that said, "not very often, but sometimes dad comes up with some doozies."

Dean Thomas, the youth pastor, spent some very serious moments teaching all the youth that Satan is working overtime to destroy the church, rain on it's spirit, and change it to only teach milk principles and no spiritual back-strengthening meat. He taught the dozen or so youth the church is just like a family that must have everyone using their skills and interests in serving the others in the church family.

Pastor Dean's eye caught the box of hand bells sitting in the corner. He picked up two that were different colors and used them to illustrate to the teens that even little preschoolers need to do their part, need to shake their colored bell when the bell choir leader held up their color of bell. He said, "I ask this very simple but crucial question; what if the red bells decided it was the leader's job to make the music or that no one would miss the red bells? But more than that, what would you think if there were not enough children coming to church to use the red bells? Now my last question;

who do you know that lives close to you that might come and ring the bells if you fervently prayed and then invited them?”

Judy pulled out a tissue and wiped her nose as she visualized a little visitor ringing a bell that in the future would never be in a techhead train wreck. But more than that was the thought that the little bell ringer would hear over and over how deeply God loves that little heart just the way they are, and where they are. This was proved on the Cross that Jesus died on.

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#2 – Gramps and the Cow Bell

Jake, Barb, and Nate knocked on the back door of the old farm house, hoping their favorite ‘grandfather’ was home to talk a bit. “Gramps” as he preferred to be called, wasn’t anybody’s real grandpa, that they knew of, but he had God’s ears to be sure. He could be fixing the old tractor, building a new rabbit hutch, picking corn, or anything else. But it all came to a dead stop when young people would show up needing someone to just listen.

You need to know that Gramps is a super listener but is a man of few words. He uses words like a telegram; very few ones and only important ones at that. Today this was exactly what the three needed. . . This whole youth attendance thing was really sticking in their minds each day.

When Gramps’ wife answered the door, she told the three that Gramps was out beyond the barn someplace. Their best bet would be to go ring the bell. This was the first time Jake had visited the farm so the barn bell ringing didn’t make much sense, though he would soon find out.

Barb led the way to the corner of the barn and stopped. She lifted the old cow bell off the ledge and rang it like you’d

thought her favorite ball team had just scored a touchdown. In about a minute a man stepped out from the apple trees in bib overalls and a straw hat that looked like it had just lost a fight with a cranky cat. Gramps shouted, “COME ON BACK!” as he waved a welcome to them.

The three looked at Gramps as they walked toward him and then followed into the middle of the apple trees that seemed to shut out the world of sight and sound. They found it rather ironic that in this communication craze of email, cell phones, beepers, and everything else, they were instantly put at ease with a silver haired friend with none of these, but a beat-up straw hat and a log just right for sittin’ and sortin’ one’s thoughts.

A wrinkled hand with a good deal of arthritis motioned the three to take a seat on the log. He then pulled three apples off the nearest tree. They looked more perfect than the wax fake ones. Gramps pulled a fourth apple down for himself. With the tired fingers of both hands he split his apple in two halves and took a juicy bite. As his eyes looked into those of his young visitors’ eyes they said as always, “It just thrills this old heart when you care enough about me to visit.” So often we think that silver hair says to young people to stay away, when the opposite is especially true.

Gramps still didn’t speak a word but let his gaze reach up into the cool apple tree branches with promises of homemade applesauce, candy apples, apple-cinnamon cookies, and apple cobbler hot out of oven, tasty enough to make you shout. It became crystal clear to Jake that Gramps could say more with his calm silence than many folks could say in a book.

Gramps spoke the first few words, “Ain’t God good to us? Youngin’s, look around you and tell me one thing that you deserve from God.” There was more silence. The old gentleman could tell there was something very heavy on the

hearts of the three on the log. He got to his feet and broke off three small twigs with apple leaves still on them. He placed one twig in a hand of each of the three youths. He then broke off a rotted portion of the log they were sitting on. He then shredded off a small amount of the rotted log piece and placed some in the other hand of each of the heavy hearted youth.

He sat down and looked at Jake and then at Barb, and last at Nate. He told them, “Now look at the rotten log pieces in your one hand. Take a good look, it’s important. Now look at the twig with the green leaves in your other hand. This is serious. Do it ‘cuz I ask.” They did as they were told, but really confused. “Now I want you each to choose one of the two, twig or trunk and drop the one you don’t want, to the ground, so you’re still holding your preference.”

Not knowing where this was leading, each of the three dropped the shredded trunk and held onto the green leaves and twig. Gramps explained that they had just taken a test. They chose life and growth instead of death. They chose the growing apple twig that produces fruit for the enjoyment of others rather than the rottenness of decaying trees full of worms and not good for much of anything.

About that time Gramps picked up his apple core and picked out a single seed. He handed the core to his young visitors and gestured them to pick out a seed also. They did. He then got down on his knees and stuck a finger in the ground and dropped the little seed in the finger hole and gently covered the seed with earth. He directed them to do the same.

While everyone was still on their knees Gramps spoke out loud, “Precious God our great provider. Thank you for this good earth you’ve given us and bodies to enjoy it and praise you. We thank You for the privilege You’ve given us to humbly plant a small seed that only You can make grow.

Help me and these children be faithful and plant where and how you want. We trust your wise leading. Amen.”

When the three helped Gramps to his feet, he noticed the heart-smiles they now displayed. Before he could ask the three what was on their mind, they each hugged the old seed planter for speaking to their heart. Gramps had planted more than apple seeds that day.

As the three grabbed their bikes to head for home, Nate said, “It seems to me there are a couple verses in the Bible about where and how to plant seeds.” Jake said, “I’m gonna see if I can find the verse about the Mustard seed.” (The verses they found were Matthew 17:20 and Luke 8:8-15)

Barb yelled over her shoulder, “Hey this seed plantin’ is gonna be fun, for sure!” That night before bed, she realized the twig test Gramps gave proved there is no half way about planting, Either you do and don’t turn back, or hold onto the rottenness of decay in this old world. She thought somebody ought to make Gramps a professor. But I think he felt privileged enough to just be a seed planter of bell ringers. [~]

#3 – Junior Jericho

The news reporters still haven’t gotten all the events of the last 4 weeks sorted out. What has come to light though, certainly has created quite a stir. It all centers around an old building that was purchased by the church next door mostly just for the expansion potential. You know, extra parking for busses etc. For now, let’s just call the old building, “Jericho”.

The names haven’t been nailed down yet, but about 4 wks ago close to a dozen teens showed up at Jericho and started pulling weeds and picking up glass and trash. It

seemed at first to be strickly low key. During the next few days that had sunny weather, the teens were seen arriving on their bikes after school. They continued the same cleanup process.

It wasn't long before extra teens on their bikes were seen 'reporting for duty'. Maybe that's when things started looking a bit strange. The kids were all pretty happy working around Jericho. It kind-of put you in mind of the people that rebuilt the wall around a Bible city... *it said they had a mind to work.*

Saturday started out to be just like the other work days until a couple silver-haired folks showed up with their lawn chairs. They positioned them back far enough to not get 'caught up' in all the work. One of the teen boys showed up pulling his gas lawnmower behind his bike. When his bike hit some loose gravel you wanted to hide your eyes, but God blessed with safety; that's the business He's in.

But then...

But then Granny Simms pulled her old Hudson into the parking lot and got out. The silver-haired spectators kept their eyes riveted on Granny to see what would happen next.

You need to know that Granny in her prime was the leader of a team of women riveters on war ships. If Granny thought you were a slacker, she'd flip you a hot rivet – at least that's what all her team thought.

No one ever had to invite Granny Simms to be the boss of a project. She invited herself. And heaven help the person that said NO to her. She'd turn those bullet steel colored eyes on you and make you shake like your nose was stuck in the wrong end of a cannon.

Well, without saying a word or making any gesture Granny slowly walked around the whole Jericho project. Then with enthusiasm she got back in her old Hudson and drove away almost spinning in that pesky gravel. The

spectators still had the uneasy feeling they hadn't seen the last of Granny that day. The hair on the back of your neck would bristle up not knowing if Granny the riveter would be coming back with the police or potato chips.

Their fears were answered about 45 minutes later when they saw that old bright yellow-green Hudson with the busted headlight coming over the hill. Some folks kidded that the headlight was smashed against a pedestrian stupid enough to get in the way of a rivet team leader on a mission. But that's just hear-say and nothing ever showed up in the newspaper police reports.

The dust in the parking lot hadn't begun to settle when Granny Simms got out and started setting the 3 gallon jugs of lemonaid on the large box that was sitting in the front of the Jericho site. Another trip to the car brought back a big sack of ice and a bag of plastic cups. She took a large stone and banged it against the bumper of the old Hudson to get the attention of the teens. She then pointed at the cool lemonaid and made sure all the teens obeyed. As hot as that Saturday was, the hardworking kids didn't want to miss out on the cool drink or dodge a flying rivet.

What happened next should have been made a photograph and should've been front page. Granny went back to the car and pulled out a lawn chair and set it up somewhat between the road and the teenage workers. But she really surprised everyone by facing the chair away from the project and toward the road. One more trip to the car and back she came with four pairs of work gloves and laid them down beside her lawn chair. She sat down in that chair with the watchful determination of a jumbo-size bear trap.

She made sure if anyone was going to show up and voice some criticism against the teens cleaning up Jericho she was going to slap a pair of gloves on 'em and they'd be working before they took their second breath. My my could

Nehemiah ever have made good use of Granny Simms when they were rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem.

One of the pictures that did appear in the paper showed everyone working hard with Granny at her post. Most of the spectator chairs were empty because the seniors were pitching in. You had to look at the photo real close to see something very special. Almost chopped off the picture by the editor you could see a tough looking teen in something of a leather motorcycle jacket on his knees toward the back of the building. He was poking his trigger finger in the ground as directed by an old gentleman in a beat-up straw hat and old bib overalls. From a distance you could only guess they were planting seeds. Do you suppose they were planting apple seeds or seeds of promise?

The next work day at Jericho the teens brought wash rags and paint scrapers that all got a lot of use that day. The youth had been so dilligent for so many days that Mr. Jenkins, the groundskeeper at the church next door, came over just before the youth left on their bikes for supper one day. He told them he'd be glad to unlock the tractor building each day they were working if they'd just ask.

Two of the church trustees and a deacon called the pastor to find out who had voted to begin working on the old building that had once been a dealership for farm tractors. This all seemed to be a surprising answer to prayer in seeing all the youth working hard and even the silver-haired forgotten generation chiming in too. I think if anyone found fault with it, Pastor would sic Granny onto them.

Because the roof on the back half of the building leaked, the teens stacked boxes and some boards across the entryway back to that area. This was to be a strictly up-front project.

Two of the facts the newspaper reporters never learned was when the marching began or it it was done every day the

youth were there working. The youth would walk slowly single file around the building carefully dragging a hand against the wall all the way around. The reporters did learn they made the complete round trip at least 3 times during each march. One of the reporters considered himself fortunate to have snapped a shot of all the teens in a semicircle in close to the entrance door. Their mission must have something to do with that door and what's inside, what could be inside someday.

The receptionist at the newspaper was ready to walk off the job because she couldn't handle all the questioning calls about the front page article the editor titled, "JUNIOR JERICHO". It wasn't hard to imagine the determined teens were marching around their Jericho; their building they were to conquer for reaching youth in the name of the loving Jesus Christ.

But the question so many were asking without resolve was, "What makes these youth so determined in conquering this jr. Jericho... this old mostly worthless building? Why are they working so hard?"

The answer appeared on the inside of one of the large plate glass windows. One of the youth had used some kind of window cleaner and wrote in monster sized letters for all the drivebys to see, "JUNIOR JERICHO".

But the actual answer was printed on a regular sized piece of paper taped on the inside of the window as well. It had a picture of a nail at the top of the page that might have suggested the nail that Martin Luther drove his famous declaration that started the Reformation. Under the nail image the words declared the youth's crusade to reach their fellow students and friends because time is fast running out. The other stated surprise was that they were going to use junk... computer junk, actually.

The youth had had enough. They wanted to show the church that the Gospel of Salvation could be far more effective with a computer flavoring. Since the computer stuff was just junk, the silver-haired generation loved the idea.

Tell me, is it all that difficult to begin a quest for souls by doing little more than sticking a finger in the ground or making some lemonaid? Your Jericho may be a city, or a building, a neighborhood, or even just a family that's crying out for hope.

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#4 – ‘Hard Case’ Hannah

Dean Thomas, that's the youth pastor right? He'd invited all the youth that were present at the last workday, to a discussion of sorts, in the church's teen youth room. The visitors were included also. Next to him in the front of the group of about two dozen teens was a large white board with a few dry erase markers at the ready. He hadn't gotten more than 5 words out of his mouth when the door opened rather noisily and in walked a tough looking teen with the same looking leather jacket that we think was planting apple seeds in the back of Jericho with Gramps the other day.

He reached back outside the door and pulled in another rough looking teen a little younger than himself. The younger teen had orange hair and rings in both eyebrows. The larger of the two pointed at an empty chair toward the back and made sure the younger wasted no time in parking himself in it. This type of decipleship is not well understood by most of the church goers, but the fact remains, there they sat. The

older gave the obvious gesture to the younger that he was not to disturb anything or the younger may be limping home.

Pastor Dean decided he shouldn't take any time now to think about orange hair or where jewelry should be worn. He clearly wrote his name on the top of the marker board and promised they'd hear no preaching from him tonight. He made good eye contact with each of the youth and explained that he needed their help to make a list of famous walls on the planet.

Penny started the list of important walls by suggesting the Great Wall of China, "My science teacher says the astronauts can see it from space." Dean added, "You're right Penny, it's something like 6,000 miles long. I guess a lot of it had fallen down because of erosion. Who else can think of an important wall?"

Jimmy Paine spoke right up with, "The Berlin Wall, that divided the city in half." There was a pause and then the bigger tough fella spoke in a rather sturn tone asking, "Well how about the Vietnam Memorial Wall? My uncle Dave's name is on it. I think there's almost 60,000 names in the list." That changed the mood of the group to a more serious one. Pastor Dean said, "I'll add another famous wall near Jerusalem called the 'Wailing Wall'".

In the next few minutes a couple more walls were added to the list, like the walls around the Bible town of Jericho. Then Dean spoke with great emphasis to the teens in saying, "There are actually some other walls bigger and more powerful than the ones we've got listed here. One thing that makes them more powerful is that they can't be described with a measuring stick, or lasers and such."

While the discussion about walls was going on, Lanny one of the custodians walked past the door of the teen room. Sitting across the hallway from the door was Granny Simms, of all people. The difference though, was that her eyes didn't

have that bullet steel stare, but were red like she had been weeping. Her weeping was that bone-deep kind, that you couldn't switch on or off if someone looked at you.

Granny could hear most of what was being said in the discussion and wanted to add a big wall she knew about. She was well familiar with her wall because she had built it all by herself. The wall within her was called INDIFFERENCE. She was brutally honest admitting she hid behind her wall and stayed in her comfort zone. But the youth in that room had brought her to the place near Nehemiah's state of mind causing he and her to weep over the condition of walls that are so important to God and His children.

Long long ago Nehemiah was emotionally crushed to see the amount of repair needed to God's property and people. Granny Simms asked herself, as Nehemiah surely did, "How can people say they love God, His house, and His family, and sit behind their wall of tradition and stubbornness and see it crumble in the eyes of the whole world? Surely God can provide the tools and materials to rebuild that which He loves so dearly; even if it involves leather jackets and orange hair."

Granny slowly walked out to her Hudson wiping her nose again, asking God how she could help build teenage soldiers in God's army with the same resolve as war ships that never say 'I can't' or 'wait-till-later.'

A couple days later Granny Simms was purchasing a screen door spring at Lennard's Hardware and then turned to leave. She spied a teen in a leather jacket looking at the paint-ball guns with a casual interest. Granny walked toward the young fella and recognized him as the older of the pair that attended Thurday's discussion Pastor Dean had. She greeted him with, "Hi. Good to see you again. I've never introduced myself to you before. I'm Hannah Simms, some have called

me ‘Hard-case Hannah’ but most everyone calls me Granny. What do you like to be called?” “Drake” was the teen’s unfriendly response.

“I thought it was a great thing for you to bring your young friend to the discussion,” she said in an easy tone. “Well, Bennett isn’t my friend exactly. He kind-of follows me around ‘cuz his folks have all but disowned him. I s’pose most everybody needs someone to hang out with...” His words hit Granny like an icy cold ship’s anchor.

“Um... Drake. Somebody has set up a picnic table at the side of Jericho. I got a couple weird ideas I’d like to bounce off you if you could meet me there... say...about 10:00 tomorrow morning. Could you do that?” He said, “Oh... I guess I might make it. This better not cost me anything.” “Nope. Not at all. All I want is your opinion... Good. I’ll see you around 10 at the picnic table. And don’t forget I’m called Granny,” she exclaimed over her shoulder while leaving with her screen door spring.

The next day Granny’s old Hudson pulled in the parking lot. She pulled the emergency brake on as the engine wheezed to a stop like an old horse. Drake was already there and throwing some sizeable clods of dirt to the ground. Granny walked toward the table while trying to understand what the teen was doing. The old table creaked as Hannah sat down, placing the brown sack in front of her. Drake clapped his hands to remove dirt and dust then walked to the table and took a seat opposite Granny.

She never was too much for small talk so she quietly removed from the sack a couple napkins she spread on the not-so-clean table in front of them both. Continuing to empty the sack she told Drake, “I’ve baked something new that I’d like you to taste-test for me.” She set a homemade apple turnover on the napkin in front of them both. It was easy to

see the brown-sugar glaze on the top and his nose told him this was going to be finger-lickin' good.

She sat a small container of milk in front of each of them. Granny split open the pour spout of her container and started drinking directly from the container. It surprised Drake since he'd only seen fellas drink like this. Evidently trivial etiquette just gets in the way of important tasks like building war ships and planting seeds.

Drake saw Granny glance at the cluster of busted clods he had been working on when she arrived. With some apple turnover still in his mouth he kind of mumbled that it's a way to get his pent-up feelings out and over with. He said it's a bit like his mom and dad often fighting with each other where neither ever wins. Granny's heart told her the questions on Drake's mind, "Why can't grownups decide they are different and work around the differences? Do grownups spend all their time trying to find things to fight with each other about?"

While the tasty turnovers proved their worth by disappearing in spite of conversation, Hannah asked, "You look pretty strong. How hard can you throw a tennis ball? I have an idea for youth to really put their muscles and tension to work in a fun way. You finish your turnover and I'm going to test you with a tennis ball I just happened to have in 'ol Gerdy" (her Hudson). She returned with the ball and an old blanket that looked like it had tangled with the same cranky cat that mutilates straw hats.

Drake polished off his turnover and milk watching Granny make a circle with the blanket on the sidewalk about 5 feet out from a Jericho wall that had no windows. It was positioned so that you had to bounce the ball in the circle where the sidewalk shown through. She drew a line with her foot, in the dirt about 8 feet away from the circle facing the wall.

The idea was that if your throw hit the blanket instead of the sidewalk circle, the ball would just stop. The ball had to hit the circle and ricochet onto the wall and bounce back to about where the ball was thrown from; something like a two-rail pool shot.

Hannah said, “Drake, our pastor likes to ask every new person he meets the question, ‘If you died tonight, do you know if you’d go to heaven?’ S’pose he asked you that, what would you tell him?” In a bit of a sorrowful tone Drake said, “No Granny, I know I wouldn’t go to heaven ‘cuz God don’t want the likes of me with Him up there.” Hannah moved her gaze up to the clouds to keep back the tears. Her heart asked heaven for the right words to show this young man that he is exactly the kind of youth God wants to bless with His free simple salvation.

Granny slowly quoted John 3:16 to Drake, showing him that he could put his name right where the word ‘whosoever’ is. They talked a bit longer before each departed for home.

Jericho Wall Discipleship

Two days later Granny Simms drove past the church and Junior Jericho on her way to a shut-in friend with her weekly groceries and some week-old newspapers. Not really expecting to see any outside activity, she was surprised to see two leather jacket youths and one had orange hair. Both youth were throwing the tennis ball so hard she wondered if the wall of Jericho would come tumbling down. “It wouldn’t dare! She proclaimed to the steering wheel. “God’s building some bridges here. My friends and I mean to put in the rivets! They don’t call me ‘Hard-Case Hannah for nothin’!”

Granny Simms was spending so much time and heartbeats at Jericho, the church trustees gladly gave her a

Jericho building key for her to keep. At home she sat at the kitchen table with the key laying in front of her. Her eyes slowly traced the shape and lettering on the key. Her stare parked on the jagged edge of the key as her heart asked God for the combination, the key, His permission for her to participate in the unlocking of young hearts to His glory.

Her finger carressed the key as she boldly asked her Lord and Master to bless her efforts to involve the ‘Super Sixties’ group of silver-haired folks in the church. More than once they’d tried to find a really good project they could provide their helpin’ ‘n huggin’ in.

Friday, Hannah answered her phone and heard gray-headed Max Tanner introduce himself. She knew something of him as working many years in a steel foundry making pot-belly stoves. She’d thought his heart was as hard as any of the stoves he’d made. Max explained to her that he’d seen the boys doing the ball throwing ‘therapy’ a couple days earlier and he’d like to be involved.

He went on to briefly describe an idea for a Jericho Wall Ball Tournament that could easily attract more youth. “The owner of Lennard’s Hardware store owes me a favor and I figure I can get him to donate a can of tennis balls, when he knows what they’re for.” Hannah’s voice cracked when she tried to say, “Sounds good to me! Can you keep the balls in the old milk can behind the building so’s the youngins can play any time they want?” An excited “Sure” was heard. Granny ended the call with, “I know God will greatly use your efforts, Max. Go for it!”

The next day Max put 4 brand new tennis balls in the milk can wondering what all God might do because of them. He had a strange feeling putting the balls in the can and adding the metal lid was something like planting seeds. The old foundry worker shook his head as he walked toward the car wondering how God can use fuzzy rubber tennis balls as

seeds. His mind tried to recall the words to a verse that said something like “Eyes has not seen what God has prepared for anybody that loves Him and wants to work for Him.”

Max wasn't home two minutes before he told Marti, his wife of 47 years, about the Jericho Wall Ball Tournament idea. He asked her to help him think out the milk can seed planting thoughts he'd had.

Monday before lunch, Max took Marti over to Jericho and showed her the milkcan storage place for the balls. To his dismay only one ball was there instead of all 4. Discussing the disappearance with Marti brought another surprise. “Max let's go over to Lennard's and buy some more balls to put in the can. Seeds don't cost that much do they?” she said with a grin.

Her husband decided in his heart there were lots of old folks that want to love youth. All that's needed is a chance and some seeds for God's garden of hearts.

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#5 – Lookouts 'n Lifesavers

It was a pleasant surprise to see the size of the youth group half-again larger than the previous youth meeting led by Dean Thomas, the youth pastor. Not only that, but Bennett came in of his own accord, not having to be drug in by Drake.

In large red letters Dean wrote on the large marker board, “THE ENEMY IS COMING!” The room got real quiet with everyone looking around, expecting some gang to burst through the door at any minute. Mark smiled to himself, ‘... not to fear, Granny Simms is guarding the door as she so often does, while God is dealing with young hearts.’

Pastor spoke, “God dearly loves to see people working hard building things that glorify Him. He notices every nail driven, block laid, email sent, and letter written. He really does; every single one. The problem is that so does Satan. What do you think? Do you s’pose Satan is going to let all this continue without some kind of opposition? Let me tell you about some boys and girls just like yourself that had a mighty important building project. They were building a wall. More than that, it was a wall around the most beloved city on God’s planet Earth, Jerusalem.”

“It was a sweet project too. They had plenty of supplies, each person was assigned a particular part of the wall and everything should have been hunky-dory. But then along comes Satan or at least his troublemakers. They were led by the gang leader named Sanballet. Now I need a show of hands people. How many of you boys and girls think this was a surprise to God? Raise your hands if God didn’t know anything about Sanballet and his bunch.”

No one raised their hand. Pastor Dean continued, “Good! Everyone here believes neither Satan nor Sanballet can sneak up on God. That’s great. Well does that mean that God likes to cause us trouble; to make things super hard for people that are working for His cause?” Most shook their heads no or said, “NO WAY MAN!”

The youth pastor made good eye contact with each of the teens and then said, “We all know that fire can burn up old newspapers, weeds, and wood. That would make us think badly about fire. But each of us also knows that fire purifies metal to make it stronger and last longer. God in His infinite wisdom allows enemies into our projects to see if we’ll run to Him for safety and leadership. The fire of adversity should make us stronger, cleaner, and stay close to Him.”

“I’m telling you all this as a warning, as a prediction. As you work on Junior Jericho there’ll be enemy-minded

people that will discourage and distract you from what God has called you boys and girls to do. Just for reference, I'll turn to the old testament book called, Nehemiah and show you some of the enemy's tricks." Dean listed on the marker board the tricks the enemy uses, as follows:

1. They made fun of the builders of the wall – Neh. 4:1-6
2. The enemy collected others to help hinder the project – Neh. 4:7-8
3. Disruption in money and food supplies – Neh. 5:1-10
4. The enemy will try to get you to compromise your goals – Neh. 6:1-4
5. Trick you by deceit and lies – Neh. 6:10-14

Pastor Dean said, "Now... I want to list for you three things that Nehemiah did that allowed the wall project to be finished to the glory of God."

1. Nehemiah began and continued the project with prayer and confidence that God was leading and protecting.
2. He set up men and women to watch and protect God's workers.
3. An alarm system was clearly established so that everyone acted and reacted together.

"Young people, I want you to think very seriously how God means for you to stay very close to Him in seeking His will as you launch out in any endeavor, large or small," said the youth pastor.

He continued, "Before we have a closing prayer, I want all you young ladies to take one of the flyers on the back table home with you. That Girls Only get-together will be next Sunday afternoon is going to be led by a woman that trained long and hard to become an astronaut. She'll be

teaching you about lady lifesavers that's just out of this world!"

Pastor told the girls, "To add to the excitement... you ladies will be having that bang-up get-together in the front room of Junior Jericho! To honor our guest speaker it would really be great for you girls to paint the inside of the showroom glass windows, you know, rocket ships, moons, aliens and neat stuff like that. The church will provide the paint and brushes at least by Friday afternoon. Granny Simms said she'd like to try out her apple 'pop-ins' on you so it should be a blast."

Most all day Saturday the girls worked hard on the decorations and things. There were no chairs or benches but Gramps brought in about 10 bales of straw to sit on. If you asked him about it he'd tell you for sure that straw bales and paint brushes are great for planting seeds so long as you bathe them all in fervent prayer.

Sunday afternoon was a real surprise to most everyone this side of heaven. Besides the regular group of girls of 6 or 7, were about 5 more girls no one had seen before. One of the newcomers wore army combat boots about 2 sizes to big for her, and a foam neck brace made for neck injuries, though she had no injuries. A thin small chain went from her right ear lobe to the right side of her pierced nose. I have, and maybe you too, said to ourselves, 'God died on Calvary for the likes of that?' The thought of John 3:16 came back with the word 'whosoever' spoken to my heart.

The Lady Lifesavers meeting was opened with prayers of thanksgiving to God for Junior Jericho and the visiting girls that had come. All the girls introduced themselves and everyone took their bale of straw seat. Out from one of the dingy Junior Jericho back rooms came Jenny Laughton in her astronaut training utility suit. It had colorful NASA patches on the shoulders and her name embroidered above a chest

pocket. Her black shoes were polished to a high gloss. In a word – she was sharp. Everyone had great respect for her even before her first word was spoken.

“Thanks ladies for inviting me. I’ve got some really exciting things to tell you, so let’s get started. I want first to begin with a story that might be somewhat like your world. Jenny began the story:

Sewing Machine Lifesaver

I’m trapped! I’m in a cage and can’t get out Lois sat in front of her machine in high school sewing class. For two weeks now, she and her class were learning to sew pockets on pants, dresses, and shirts. They learned to use all types of thread and material taking careful note which was best for what kinds of uses. But she thought she would go mad.

Lois ached within herself to do something important. Though her hands would position the material, and carefully guide it through the sewing machine, she felt so useless, so insignificant. Her mind would continually place her at important jobs like writing speeches for famous people, helping a scientist invent a new medicine, or create a gown to be worn by some movie star.

But the last couple nights were worse yet. After bedtime prayer she had cried hoping to get some relief from the feelings of “I’m a nobody that can sew pockets.” On Saturday, at her mom’s request, Lois took her younger brother Timmy to the science museum to see some new exhibits he needed to look at for a school report.

The most popular exhibit was a person wearing one of the actual space suits worn on one of the Apollo moon landings. His helper explained the purpose of all the many hoses,

fixtures, and valves to the children as Lois stood back and watched all the attention. The children got down on their knees to better see something the helper was describing about the suit that was below the backpack. Lois moved in closer to listen.

The helper said, “See that little pocket? It isn’t used for anything anymore but it is still attached to every new suit that is crafted. And children, know what? If that pocket isn’t sewn on with the greatest of care, the suit will lose pressure during a space walk and kill the astronaut. That astronaut’s life depends on the best efforts of someone with a sewing machine he or she has never seen, or the work that was done.” Lois pulled out a handkerchief and headed for a dark corner before anyone saw her tears. In sewing class could she ever have imagined that a pocket could save a life?

The whole matter of insignificance was reinforced two weeks later when Lois’ youth pastor shared a message from Matthew 25. The message included the parable of the talents. The weight in Lois’ heart was lifted when she heard the pastor read, “thou has been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”

Two verses later, the same statement was made to another faithful steward. Even at that moment she thanked God for the comfort that comes from knowing she is saved and from scripture showing us how we can have everlasting joy.

Just after bedtime prayer that night, she pictured herself sewing a pocket on the robe of her Savior, Jesus Christ. How important that would be. Serving God with her talents. But

she knew the job was not finished. In this picture, Lois took her heart and placed it in the pocket of the Lord's robe.
(end of story)

Jenny paused for a couple quiet moments to let the moral of the story sink in.

The girls in the group expected Jenny the astronaut to pull out some scientific tools used in space exploration, but she surprised everyone by opening a well worn bible in front of them. She told the girls about two actual lady lifesavers listed in scripture. One was a chilling spy adventure where God's men were smuggled out of town by a woman named Rahab. (The whole account is spelled out in Joshua chapter 2.)

The other account is about a woman that put her very life on the line to save the whole nation of God's people, the Jews. Her name was Queen Esther. The whole truth of treachery and greed is detailed in the Old Testament book of Esther.

Jenny said, "Girls, I want to make it very clear to you that many people think that computer work is really a man thing; it's pretty much for boys and certainly not for girls. Well God doesn't see it that way at all. Let me give you a little computer trivia.

- The first computer program was conceived and created by Ada Byron Lovelace
- The first computer language was created by Navy Admiral Grace Hopper.
- Computing Ergonomics owes much to the pioneering research of Joan Winters and her human factors and software appraisal tools.

- Our telephone computerized switching equipment, we can't live without was invented by Erma Schneider Hoover.
- The African-American Evelyn Boyd Granville developed the computer programs to analyze the trajectories of the Mercury capsule (1st US manned space program) and Apollo that landed man on the moon.
- Adele Goldstine authored the manual for the world's 1st electronic digital computer, ENIAC, (17,480 vacuum tubes) right down to the resistors.
- The Graphical Calculator (computer) used in solving electrical power line problems was patented by Edith Clark.

Jenny continued giving the young ladies some of their roots that were imbedded in technology. "I tell you all this to make you wise in the range of opportunities to serve Jesus Christ. I ask you,

- who made the stars?
- Who made the earth in 6 days and rested?
- Who do we have to thank for our Bibles in our own language?
- Who loves us more than words can tell?
- Who had to SHOW us what real love is?"

Jenny Laughton's questions continued to lead the thinking of the young ladies

- She then asked, "Well...ok...Who gave us computers, rockets, and technology?"

In John chapter 1 this precious book I hold here tells us more than once exactly Who that is.

- Was it just to gather moon rocks?
- Who is THE ROCK the Bible speaks of? She turned a few pages and read:

In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. Psalms 62:7

Let me read it again. *In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. Psalms 62:7*

Girls this verse starts and ends with the very same three words, ‘in, God, and is.’ These three words are just like two loving hands of a parent that hold you and care about every part of your growing. Look what’s between those hands, in this verse:

- Refuge – is a hiding place in times we feel afraid or confused.
- Strength – the power to get things done for Him
- Glory – We are commanded often to brag about Him above all else.
- Salvation – He has adopted us away from an eternal future in the pits of hell with Satan and his angels.

Ladies. Whether God calls you to reach into the stars or greater yet, reach into the hearts of those nearest to you, launch out only with God’s leading that we so often learn from His precious word each day.

Jenny's finger quickly found the bookmark she had turned to so many times. As she opened to John 3:16. she said, "As Pastor Dean comes to the front and stands with me, I want to read this powerful verse to you right now." She read,

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Jenny asked, "Do you hear that word 'whosoever'? That word means you can substitute your name in place of it. It means that if you were the only person on the face of this planet or any other, Jesus still would have left heaven to shed His blood on the cross like a sacrificial lamb for your sins. The reason is that God loves you more than you can describe. He loves you just as you are. Right now is a perfect time for you to show Him that you want Him to be your rock and let Him be your leader and Lord."

The invitation to the young ladies right there in Junior Jericho continued. The girls bowed their heads as Pastor Dean explained a bit more about sin and its consequences.

Avery moved toward Pastor Dean and put her head against his chest and began to cry. And why not? It's not every day you learn that Someone loves you; I mean REALLY loves you and wants to treat you as very special in His life. Granny Simms was standing in the back of the room and softly walked toward Avery and led her to kneel at one of the straw bales...

How about you? As you read these words, have you made Him your Rock of Salvation, strength, glory, and refuge? [~]

[Continue on to book 2]