

The Wilderness Experience

By Rob Pue



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I think I was about 8 years old when I wrote my first “Bible commentary” for a school assignment. I received an “F” on that assignment, by the way, because the teacher said the subject matter was “inappropriate” for school.” When I was ten years old, I developed – seemingly out of nowhere – an interest in writing and publishing. I acquired a mimeograph machine and began publishing a small newsletter magazine of my own. I mailed copies to family, teachers and friends – even sending copies to relatives overseas in Ireland and England, and north, up to Canada. This was strange, because I really had no experience with any of this. Yet, for some reason, it seemed to come naturally to me.

It was then that my parents told me of our family history: the Pue family had the first printing press in Ireland, and published the first newspaper there, starting in the 1600s. After researching our family history more deeply, I discovered that there has always been at least one person in every generation involved in newspaper publishing, and at least one person in every generation involved in Christian ministry. I find it interesting that now, I seem to have combined both vocations into one.

But my publishing days as a youth were numbered as I began working, doing lawn and garden work as a pre-teen and young teenager, building up enough customers to fill a full week’s

schedule. When I turned 16 and was old enough for a “real job,” I was hired at the local Holiday Inn as a dishwasher; within six weeks I received a promotion, and continued to earn my way to higher and higher levels of responsibility at the hotel complex. It was a wonderful learning experience. After graduating high school, I attended college and had several other jobs, including as a radio host at a secular station, and then as a graphic designer at a weekly newspaper.

Meanwhile, I was also studying the art of photography on my own. I did wedding photography as an advanced amateur on the weekends. All this led to my ultimate goal at the time, of starting my own photography studio, and in 1989 I opened that studio on the main street of my hometown, at the age of 24.

My wife and I were married in 1990 and then in 1992, Lisa and I were blessed with our first child, our son Robbie. I remember spending precious evenings together with him on my lap, reading Bible stories, and then when HE began to read, he would read Bible stories to US – and to his baby sister Jennifer, born in 1994. We prayed as a family, then, for “Baby Alex in Mama’s tummy” – our youngest daughter, “Alley,” who was born on Mother’s Day, 1996. It’s hard to believe but our “baby” is now married and she and her husband are working in full time ministry themselves. Looking back, I could not have been more blessed by God. He had given me the desires of my heart: a wonderful, Christian wife, a God-honoring home, great kids and my own photography studio business.

The studio continued, and grew. Eventually we had a booming business with hundreds regular, loyal clients for whom I did engagement portraits, wedding photography, childrens’ portraits, high school senior portraits and more. I also developed a unique program in which we did portraits for people with a mobile studio. At the peak of my business, we had four photographers on the road, working in nine states, while still maintaining our regular studio work at home.

Traveling frequently for work, I would tune in to various Christian radio stations while driving. I'd also stop at the local Christian bookstores in various cities, where I discovered Christian newspapers. At that time, there were about 120 Christian newspapers throughout North America. Today, there are less than a dozen left.

Whenever I would page through one of these papers, I thought to myself, *"This is a great idea, but it could be done so much better!"* They seemed to be filled with a lot of "fluff" – concert listings, crossword puzzles, poetry, recipes... but no real "substance." While on the road, I would listen to conservative talk radio and Christian talk radio – things that were never covered in the mainstream media – and certainly not in church. And I thought to myself, *"This is great. But it should really be put into newspaper format, so more people could get this information."*

Then God spoke to me. *"YOU should start a Christian newspaper for Wisconsin, Rob."* I dismissed this idea immediately, because there was no way I could handle more work with my busy schedule, and I knew that while a Christian newspaper for Wisconsin was a worthy idea, surely there were OTHER people much more capable than me to do it.

I continued on doing my studio work, raising my family, and helping out at church. Business at the studio was good. But God kept asking me the same question: *"When are you going to start that Christian newspaper, Rob?"* I kept fighting Him. *"You have the WRONG guy, God, SOMEONE ELSE needs to do that."* I really couldn't see how such a thing could ever be possible.

As time went on, the Holy Spirit continued to bring the subject up and I continued to fight the idea. Then, for no apparent reason, I suddenly began to dislike my photography work. I had no reason to be discontented. The business was doing very well, and I was at the peak of my creativity in the studio. Yet, for some reason, with each passing day, I became

more and more unhappy. I got to the point where I dreaded going to work, and eventually the Holy Spirit spoke to me again, asking, "*Rob, when are you going to start that Christian newspaper?*"

Finally, I understood. I could run but I could not hide. God had been calling me to start a Christian newspaper for Wisconsin, and I had stubbornly refused to give up what I believed I had built: my photography studio business. In reality, I was only doing the work. It was God who built my business to supply my needs for a time, and now it was time to let go, move on and follow His calling.

I followed God's call and sold my business. Then, on December 31, 1999, I was unemployed for the first time in my life. The studio was sold; I had no job to go to the next day. A very odd feeling.

I began with many preconceived ideas about the newspaper. Among them, the idea that all the churches would be supportive, that they would "line up" to sponsor and support the new ministry, which God would bless and which would be a wonderful outreach tool for all of Wisconsin. And not just the churches. I thought we would have support from many places within the Christian world... Christian radio stations, bookstores, and other ministries and businesses. I couldn't have been more naive.

Our first edition came out in April of 2000. I had spent all the money from the sale of our photography studio to pay bills and get the needed equipment to start the newspaper, and now I now I found myself with zero support from ANY source. Churches wouldn't support us; Christian bookstores told they couldn't spare valuable space in their store for something they didn't make any money on. Christian radio stations told me they viewed us as "competing media." Things were bleak.

I remember more than once sitting down to a very humble dinner

with my wife and three small children and eating our "last meal," because truly, I had NO IDEA where we would get the money for the next one.

I was able to get one edition of the new *Wisconsin Christian News* printed and out, but there was little hope for a second one. It appeared as if God had led me out into the wilderness, that I had followed Him in faith, and now He was about to leave me there to suffer and starve...and my family would starve along with me, and it would be all my fault. Perhaps I had misunderstood God. Maybe He hadn't called me to this ministry after all. Maybe it was all a horrible mistake. What had I done?!

We had virtually NO support – and no income for my family. Here I was, having given up everything I had worked for; believing – even KNOWING in my heart God had called me to this work – and yet we were flat broke... and broken. Thus began my wilderness experience.

I have since come to understand that God often uses the Wilderness Experience to prepare His servants for His work. In the wilderness, there is a character cleansing, a faith building and time of testing and perfecting. It's a terribly painful and emotional process, but in the end, you learn who God is, and you learn to not question and not to doubt.

As I write this message, by the grace of God, we are praising Him as we begin our 23rd year of publication. On paper, and by human effort, there's no way we should still be here. On paper and by human effort, it's clearly impossible. We still receive almost no support from churches, but the Lord told me long ago to take our newspaper OUTSIDE the four walls of the churches to the PEOPLE who need it directly. So we distribute in public places like grocery stores, restaurants, hotels, truck stops and other high traffic areas. We distribute in jails and prisons, and we receive a great many amazing testimonies from those who have come to know the Lord for the

first time – or returned to Him after many years away – by coming across our paper in a public place, at a time in their lives when they needed it most.

Today, our newspaper is distributed not just in Wisconsin, but nationwide. Our website contains literally thousands of excellent resources and is used by people worldwide. I've been blessed to have been given the opportunity to do a twice-weekly commentary on the VCY America radio network and many other independent radio stations across the country. I write for about 35 other publications and Christian websites, and I also host a weekly internet TV program every Tuesday, which can be found at WCNTV.net.

We have more readership than I ever could have imagined, and God has brought to us some of the best writers in the entire country. We provide information, education and inspiration that you cannot find anywhere else. And we are not "politically correct." We tell the truth about the REAL, hard issues that the mainstream media censors – and that most of the churches today won't touch with a ten-foot pole. In our pages, people find the TRUTH, that so many hunger for.

But that has come with a price. Today, while we have more readership than ever, we've also had to turn to donations from individuals to keep the paper going, because the advertising income is no longer even coming close to covering our expenses. We're now almost entirely reader-supported, and without those individuals who believe in our work joining with us in ministry, we definitely wouldn't still be here.

If you're not familiar with our newspaper, I'll be happy to send you a complimentary copy. I'd also ask that you prayerfully consider supporting this ministry work financially on a regular, monthly basis. While we reach thousands of people every month – OUTSIDE the four walls of a church building – yes out there among the wolves, we're not a large ministry. Literally, it's just ME and a handful of faithful

volunteers and supporters. So we do need more help and more support as our cost to publish have risen drastically, especially since the start of this year. God DOES provide, but He provides through His people. So I come to you today, in all humility, to let you know of the need. If we are to continue, we need your help in supporting the work. The churches will not help, nor will most businesses. And with so much DISinformation and MISinformation – so much demonic deception going on – more than we've seen in my lifetime... so many hurting, confused and lost souls out there... the truth we provide is needed DESPERATELY now. There's a real famine of God's Word and truth in the land. I'm in the midst of a continuing walk of faith, and it would be a great encouragement to me to know you're willing to walk with me as I follow where our Savior leads.

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