

The Wisconsin Christian Newspaper Story



Rob Pue

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 our town, 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 300 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, ours is one of about 12 still publishing).

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 also tune in to "Crosstalk" on the VCY America radio network, hosted by Vic Eliason, whenever possible. "Crosstalk" was one of my favorite shows because they would discuss serious news and information from a Christian perspective – things that were never covered in the mainstream media – or 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. I did develop a few things related to outreach ministry at my photography studio. Since we worked with a lot of newlyweds for wedding photography, and lot of parents for childrens' portraits, I built a Christian lending library with books and videos on parenting and marriage issues, and invited our studio clients to make use of the resources. We also started putting our own Scripture tracts into each of our clients' orders. Yes, I did get some criticism for doing this, and more than one family informed me they were offended by our Christian witness, but we continued

on anyway.

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.

So I presented God with a challenge... I told Him, *"Ok Lord, if You want me to do this newspaper, then You will have to help me sell the photography studio. If that is Your will, then sell the studio for me, and I will do as You say and start the newspaper."* Of course, I didn't really believe anyone would be interested in buying my business. It's not easy to sell such a specialized business, especially in a small town like ours. I decided I would advertise it for a couple weeks and if no one responded to the ads, I'd be "off the hook." Surely God would understand.

But to my amazement, the first person to come look at the studio bought it, at the price I was asking. 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 paper, 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 paper, and now I had virtually zero support from ANY source. Churches wouldn't support us if it wasn't THEIR specific denomination; most Christian bookstores wouldn't even allow us to distribute the paper there because it was given away for free – and I was 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 about to begin our 21st 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 is 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 at a time in their lives when they needed it most. Even this is God's will, because if we had received support from churches in the beginning, I might have been content just distributing the paper there, thus merely preaching to the choir. Instead, I was forced to take the Word to the streets, where we're reaching many people who would have never gotten the message in a church, because they'd never go there!

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 weekly commentary on VCY America, which also airs on several 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 Wednesday, which can be found on our Facebook pages, on YouTube and at WCNTV.net .

We have more readership than ever before, 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 deal with the REAL, hard issues that the mainstream press – and most of the churches today – do not want to touch. And we tell the TRUTH, that so many hunger for.

But that has come with a price. Today, while we have more readership than we've ever had before, we've also now seen a sharp decline in financial support. Several years ago, we had to turn to donations from individuals to keep the paper going, because the advertising income was no longer even coming close to covering our expenses. But just over the last year, we've seen a huge 45% decline in support from even those donors, while our costs to publish continue to rise.

It's been a long and often painful journey. Along the way I've witnessed firsthand MANY miracles the Lord has done in my life and the lives of so many others...too many to mention here. And I'm so thankful to our Lord and Savior for His patience with me, and for the opportunity to be used for His work.

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 impact THOUSANDS of people every month – OUTSIDE the four walls of a church building, yes OUT THERE among the WOLVES – we are not a large

ministry. Literally, it's just ME and a handful of faithful volunteers. And honestly, we NEED your help now more than ever before. God DOES provide, and He IS faithful. But He provides through HIS PEOPLE. I come to you today, in all humility, to let you know of the need. If this ministry is to continue during these dark days, then His Remnant Believers WILL need to come forward and begin supporting the work. Because the churches won't; nor will most businesses. And with our nation so divided 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 Lord knows that the truth we provide is needed DESPERATELY now. I am 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.

Audio CDs and transcripts of this message are available when you call me at Wisconsin Christian News, (715) 486-8066. Or email Rob@WisconsinChristianNews.com and ask for message number 282.

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