

DREAMS, COVENANTS & SECONDHAND BUSES

*The bus my family bought
broke down in every state
between New York and Utah.
But we refused to let that deter us
from getting to the temple.*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY PAUL MANN



By Tom Gandolph Jr.

I grew up in the small town of Manorville, Long Island, New York, USA. My parents, eight siblings, and I were baptized in 1969, when I was 15. As happy as we were the day we made that first covenant with the Lord, we realized that it was just the first step. Being sealed in the temple was our next goal.

At the time, the nearest temple was in Salt Lake City, Utah—some 2,200 miles (3,500 km) away. The Washington D.C. Temple had just been announced but wouldn't be completed for another five years. We began planning a trip to Utah.

We did not have the money to make the trip. Over the course of three years we sold candy to earn the funds we needed. Our good friends, the Krugers, who had introduced us to the Church, decided to make the trip with us so their family could also be sealed.

In 1973, during my freshman year at Brigham Young University, we finally earned enough to make our dream a reality. We purchased a secondhand bus for \$600 to

transport both large families—19 people in all. And in April of that year, the group embarked on the trip to Utah. Inscribed on the side of the bus were the words “Temple Express—from here to eternity.” The group traveled simply: they slept on the bus, and they ate meals at parks and rest stops along the route. The semester at BYU was wrapping up, and I waited eagerly in Provo for them to arrive.

These days, you can drive to Utah from New York in as little as two days. But it took our group nine. The reason: the bus broke down in every single state on the way.

The first issues were relatively minor: they replaced a fan belt, then a blown tire, and then a piece of the gas line. But 30 miles (48 km) outside of Chicago, Illinois, the worst setback occurred. It was raining as the bus crawled along the highway. The engine started smoking, and then there was a loud noise.

Mechanics determined the engine would have to be replaced. But there was simply no money for it. The



families started talking about turning back and offered a prayer.

Then the oldest daughters in each family, Jacqui Kruger and my sister Sharon, offered their first year's college tuition savings to cover the cost of a new engine. With such a generous sacrifice, how could the families do anything *but* continue?

While Dad and Brother Kruger started shopping for an engine, local Church members came to the families' aid, housing and feeding the group. My family saw in them a dedication to the Savior's admonition: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). On Easter Sunday they attended church in the Chicago Heights Ward, where there were about 350 members—something incredible to us since our branch's weekly attendance was about 50.

Meanwhile, our branch president from New York was in Utah and had learned from friends back home of the group's setbacks. He called to find out how he could help and shared with my parents his phone card number so that they could make necessary calls. (This was a tremendous blessing; in those days, long-distance calling was extremely expensive. Because of our branch president's generous offer, both sets of parents were able to contact their employers and arrange for additional time off.) The branch president also offered to stay in Utah to give me a ride back to New York if the families didn't make it.

A missionary serving in the Chicago area was given special permission to assist us in rebuilding a used engine my dad and Brother Kruger found for \$100. The missionary had spent the summer before his mission



rebuilding the same type of engine with his dad; in fact, it was the only engine he had ever rebuilt. The engine was put in place, but it froze. Work on the engine continued—at one point there were nine men working full-time on the bus—but everyone's optimism was fading. Trying to muster their spirits, the group sang "Come, Come, Ye Saints" (*Hymns*, no. 30). We learned that members of our branch in New York were praying and fasting for us. We definitely felt those prayers. Finally, two days later the engine was running, and the group was on its way.

We felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude for being worthy of temple recommends and for having the opportunity to participate in this sacred ordinance.

During the next three days, the group would replace the fan belt twice more, use a coat hanger to hold a generator bracket in place, and jump a dead battery. There were mishaps all along the way, but finally, and much to my relief, they arrived in Utah on Saturday, April 28, 1973.

We spent the next two days with old friends, including the first missionaries who taught our family, Michael Burbage and Scott Christianson, and the missionaries who baptized our family, Rick Perry and Gary Shiner. On Monday we were able to sightsee around BYU and Temple Square.

Then on Tuesday we awoke at 5:00 a.m. and put on our Sunday best. Everyone cried as we offered family prayer that morning. We felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude for being worthy of temple recommends and for having the opportunity to participate in this sacred ordinance. We felt even more grateful at the sight of friends who joined us in the temple.

My family was sealed first. In the sealing room, there was a feeling of total peace as all 11 of us knelt around the altar. Of our sealing, my youngest brother, Scott, who was five at the time, later recorded: "It was beautiful and very spiritual. My mother felt like a new bride. [We were] joined together forever."

Then it was the Kruger family's turn. Our whole family was permitted to stay in the sealing room to observe their sealing, just as they had been able to observe ours. The Gandolph family's journey into the gospel had happened because of the Krugers, and now, on this monumental day, our lifelong friendship was secured.

The next day we headed back to New York, our bus packed with lots of food from

members in Utah. Less than four days later and with only minor mechanical issues, we were home in Long Island, where we were greeted by a sheet hanging in front of our house that read, "Welcome home, pioneers." We also found letters for each individual from members of our branch.

In the end we sold the bus and recouped our expenses for the trip, minus \$200. Moreover, Jacqui and Sharon, who had sacrificed college savings to purchase the new bus engine, received scholarships for their first year at BYU that more than covered what they had given up. It was a tremendous blessing.

I am so thankful for the sacrifices the girls made as well as the generous aid we received from others. If I were to enumerate all of the people who helped in both small and large ways, I could fill volumes. Suffice it to say, we received blessings daily and even hourly. We felt the hand of the Lord and the love of other people throughout our experience.

Our journey was fraught with challenges. We learned that doing what is right does not mean the road will be easier, but it does mean you will be happier along the way. Our journey took faith, devotion, and perseverance.

The temple has endured as a symbol of discipleship through multiple generations of both families. Today my parents' descendants number over 100. There have been dozens of temple marriages. The effects of temple covenants have been similar for the Kruger family.

My mother's journal summarizes our experience perfectly: "If we were shown on one hand all of the mishaps and trials and on the other hand being in the temple with our family all dressed in white, we'd pack up tomorrow and head out again." ■

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