

MY PHOTOGRAPHY LIFE

A New Life Part 5

My Conversion to Christianity

It was halfway through September of 1982 I realized that I would not be able to make it through the winter as a freelance photographer. I had no money in the bank. I had to start looking for a job again. I was depressed. I knew my photography career would be over. I might as well be dead. I have always identified myself as a photographer, now I was a nobody. I needed to calm my nerves. I would spend the evening relaxing watching a Nova science program on television. Maybe they had a program on space tonight. How depressing my hour of need and I could not find anything good on educational television. I certainly did not want to watch a brain numbing sitcom. I started to surf through the channels to find a nonfiction program. Up pops a Billy Graham Crusade. Well, that's got to be better than a sitcom, so I thought I would watch the program to see if there was anything I could agree with this preacher on. After all I was a confirmed member of the United Methodist Church. I was going to Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church here in Minneapolis.

I don't really remember all the details in his sermon, but he talked about having peace with God. Towards the end of his speech, he turned to the TV cameras and said if anyone was interested in how they could have peace with God, call the number on the screen.

I remember in the past all these zealous eccentric people that were sharing their view of who Jesus was to me. Some might have been crazy, but some were good friends of mine. Some were just so nice to me. I just wanted to know if my thoughts on God were correct. Why were there some people who were so zealous about God? Was I lacking anything? I was a member of the United Methodist Church all my life. I was confirmed, sometimes I prayed and read the Bible. Did I need anything more? I would call that number on the screen and find out if I was okay with God.

I called the number on the screen. I got a young counselor on the phone. I had all these questions I was asking. The counselor answered some of my questions. But I had more questions, and it seemed the counselor was getting nervous. His voice seemed very agitated. I heard him talking with other people around him. I heard someone say, "Get Wilson, get Wilson." There was a brief silence and then I heard this voice from an older man.

That older man shared the gospel with me. I was told things about Jesus I never heard in church growing up, but he pointed out that it was all in the Bible. He told me I could believe in what was in the Bible. He said all people even Christians are sinful, and the only hope is to trust in Jesus who died on the cross to take away our sins. No matter how many good works we do in life it will not help to bring us one step closer to heaven. It is only through the blood of Jesus. Jesus proved all this by rising from the dead physically. No one has ever done that in history.

Even though I was a member of the Methodist Church I don't remember any minister or teacher telling me these things that this older man was telling me. I never knew exactly how Jesus being God's son fit in the picture. I just knew he died, and his soul went to heaven. I didn't know he

died as a substitute for us, and he could forgive our sins because he was God in the flesh and he rose from the grave physically.



A New Creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Out with the old—in with the new. From now on my life certainly will not be the same. Everything that I would do in my life now would be under the Lordship of Christ and to glorify God and that would include my photography. There were two Christians in my apartment building. The very night in September when I became a born-again Christian, I knocked on the door of my next-door neighbor to tell him the news. He would often share his faith with me. He was excited to hear what happened to me. He told me about another Christian on the third floor I should meet. That Christian on the third floor was Jay Gilchrist and we started meeting for a Bible study and I started going to his church. The church was called New Creation Bible Church. I also met a couple of single guys at the church who were talking about renting a large apartment together. I decided to join them.

These other guys were Mike and Bruce. They came over to my apartment. They saw all my photographic equipment that took up the entire living room. They asked me where I was going to put that if I moved in with them. They said there wouldn't be room. I thought about it and eventually I decided to sell most of it. After all my photography career is done for now. I would keep my 35mm camera equipment, a tripod, and one flash. The sale would help me get some money for moving, which I needed more than I needed this photography equipment. I could always buy any needed photo equipment later.

To sell the equipment I posted sheets of paper listing what I had for sale on a bulletin board at two professional photographic labs that I often used. I set up tables in my living room displaying what I had and what I couldn't fit on the tables I put on the floor. I took all my equipment out of bags, cases, shelves, and drawers to display it. It didn't take long for me to get customers. A girl who lived in the apartment building who used to visit me occasionally, came in when I had all my equipment out and a few photographers were also looking at my stuff. She said, "Oh, you're

starting a camera store.” I told her no; I’m just selling some of my old gear. I sold almost everything I wanted to sell. It helped to pay the rent on my future apartment.

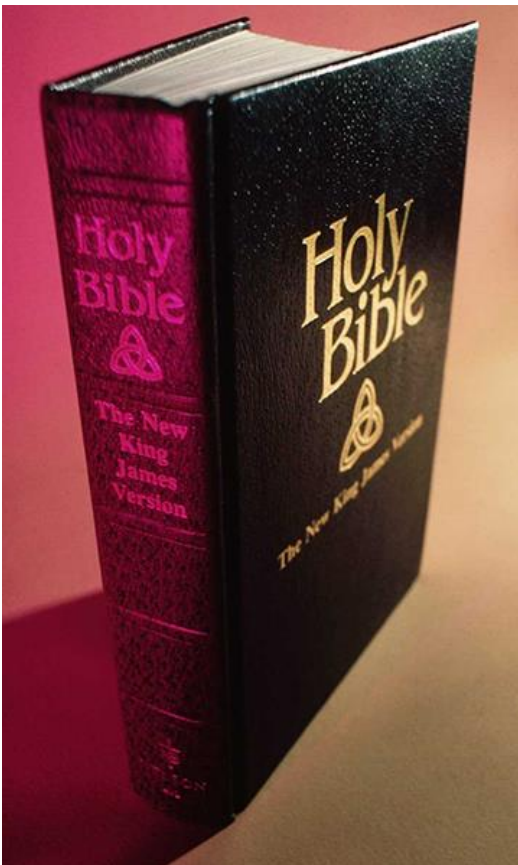
New Apartment: 2400 Harriet Avenue S

I moved in with these Christians to 2400 Harriet Avenue S in Minneapolis. It was a large apartment. When I say large, I mean large. I have never lived in such a big apartment. I set up an office in the corner of the large living room. On the wall I taped some beige five-foot seamless paper on the wall and taped some of my photo tear sheets on the paper. I also wrote on the paper with flair pen details or captions.

We would invite some church members over for a Bible study and they got a chance to look at my tear sheets. Wednesday nights sometimes our care group would meet here. For work I signed up for various light industrial temp employment agencies. I would get various work assignments. I always kept up to date what was happening in photography by reading photography magazines. I was going to do photography for the church. The senior pastor used to call me “Flash.” I always had a 35mm SLR around my neck with a flash.



Bible Photo



In 1982 a new Bible translation came out called the New King James Version (NKJV). I decided to buy the new Bible. I wanted a dynamic photo of this Bible. One that would draw attention to it. The NKJV has become my favorite Bible version and I still use it today; however, I no longer have this specific NKJV Bible anymore that I photographed. Today I have many Bible translations and many NKJV study Bibles. I do all my scripture memory in the NKJV.

What makes this photo of the Bible jump out at you? To draw attention to the Bible I photographed the Bible from a low angle with a wide-angle lens close to the subject. I stood the Bible up on a table with a five-foot beige seamless paper background. I used two electronic flash units that were slaved optically. One flash which was the main light was above the subject and in back on a boom stand. Notice in the picture the shadow is falling forward not back, because the main light was placed from the back. I used a second flash unit mounted with an acetate magenta black-and-white darkroom Kodak Polycontrast filter of 3 ½ contrast grade over the flash to create this magenta color. I thought the magenta color would give more of a reverent symbolism. The flash with the filter

was placed on the left side of the Bible in front. The camera was my Nikkormat FTN 35mm SLR with a 28mm f/2.8 wide-angle prime lens. The film was Kodak Kodachrome 25 which of course had an ISO of 25.

New Age Movement Slide Presentation

The New Age Movement was a religious movement that linked western Christianity with eastern mystic religions. It even dealt with the occult. Our church wanted to warn our members of the deception and abomination of this religion.

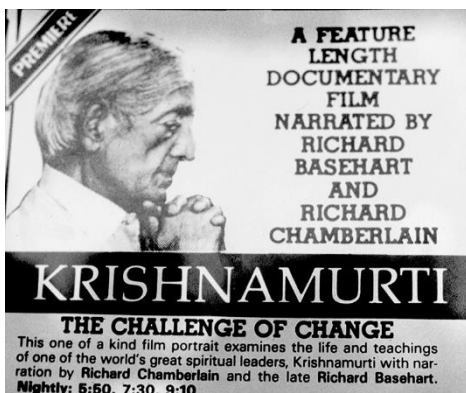


Just because some who practice this religion talk about Jesus as being a good teacher, we should stay clear from it. The Bible warns us from following other religions. Our trinitarian GOD the Father and the LORD Jesus Christ who came to Earth in the flesh along with our Helper the Holy Spirit is jealous of other gods.

My roommate Michael Bee got the idea of doing a slide presentation to the church on the new age movement. The new age movement was becoming very popular in the 1980s and he wanted the people in the church to be aware of it so they wouldn't get sucked into it. The new age movement is a syncretistic religious cult that joins the eastern religions with the western religions along with the occult. The Uptown area in Minneapolis which included south Hennepin Avenue heavily promotes the new age movement with bookstores, hand bills posted of new age events, and yoga classes.

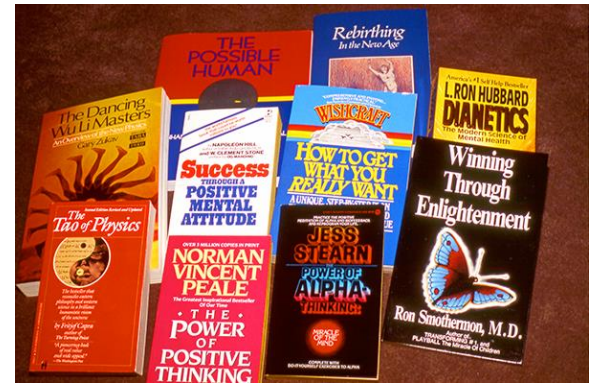


Many people do not realize that the roots of yoga are from Hinduism. In the slide presentation we used a member of our church in this yoga pose. She was nice enough to help us out, but of course she does not practice yoga or has any connection with it. She is a biblical Christian. Later in the digital age I wanted to make this photo a little more creative by giving it more of an abstract high-tech look. The worship of crystals is also practiced. Certain minerals that had crystalized were sold in these new age bookstores like fluorite, and all kinds of quartz crystals and the entire mineral family of quartz covers many colors and varieties. Some stones were even cut into the shape of a crystal and sold.



The entire slide presentation was directed by Mike Bee. I just photographed whatever he told me to photograph. We found a lot to photograph in the Uptown area in Minneapolis. At that time in an independent movie theater a movie was playing about Krishnamurti who was an Indian philosopher whose religion was Theosophy like Hinduism, a religion that believed in Karma and reincarnation. One

picture that says it all is a photo here I took with a variety of books that are of the new age religious thought. Notice that self-help philosophy books are also part of New Age thought. New Age has a very large tent. Jesus in the scriptures says we are to deny ourselves if we want to follow Him (Matthew 16:24-26). Since this was a slide presentation, I used my Nikkormat FTN with Kodak 35mm Ektachrome slide film and a variety of lenses. The slides were put into my slide tray and one Sunday we did the presentation.



Jesus Slide Presentation



Another slide presentation I did at that time for our church was a presentation of the life of Jesus the Christ. A couple from our church who had a coffee table book on various paintings of Jesus in various periods of his ministry contacted me to photograph the paintings in the book. We decided to share those pictures in a slide presentation to the church. I knew the Edina library had a photocopy stand that we could use. I also used their Nikon F3 camera with a macro lens. I

brought in an 18% gray card to properly meter the paintings in the book. We only had to take one meter reading through the camera lens of the gray card to ensure every other exposure would be perfect. Since the copy lights were tungsten, I used Kodak 35mm Ektachrome tungsten film. We showed the slides to the church.

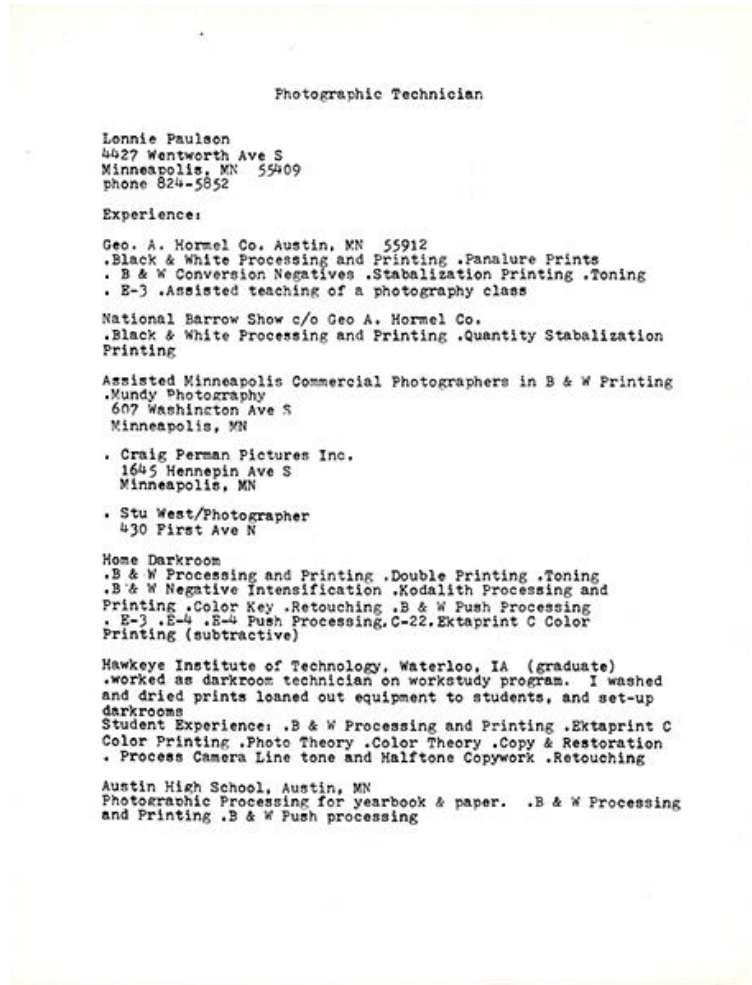


My Favorite Freelance Photographic Assignment

All through the 1980s besides doing temporary employment I would freelance as a photographic assistant. I would contract myself out for \$50 a day. I put together a resume and portfolio and made cold calls to commercial photographers. I would show my portfolio to various photographers and drop off a resume. One of my favorite assignments lasted for a week. I have had experience as a photographic technician and was hired to make photographic prints for Mundy, a model portfolio photographer in Minneapolis. Mundy told me his regular darkroom technician was on vacation and he was busy photographing the book for the Eleanor Moore Model & Talent agency. A lot of these models would buy prints for their portfolio.

During this time in history modeling agencies used only black-and-white photography. They felt that color would detract from the character of the model. Mundy told me he was looking for a

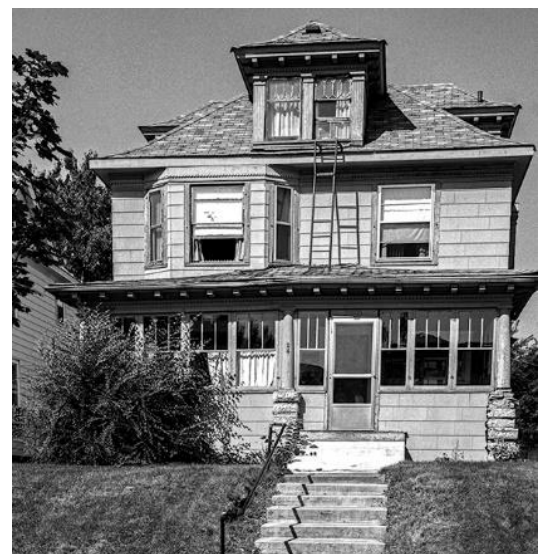
certain ivory white flesh tone in his prints. He showed me samples. He told me his clients pay quite a bit of money for the quality of his work, so he gives them the best print he can for the money. He preferred to develop the negatives himself. I made the contact print sheets and photographic prints. He would indicate on the contact sheet what he wanted printed. In his darkroom he used all Ilford black-and-white papers. I noticed many commercial photographers at that time used Ilford paper. I liked it too. It had good solid blacks and it seemed more contrasty than many Kodak papers. I printed 11x14, 8x10, and 5x7" prints. He would use soft lighting and I printed everything hard with a lot of contrast. He said he liked the way I printed, so I was glad to hear that. Most of the clients that came in were young women in their early twenties. We also had children who were models, middle aged, and senior citizens too. Mundy would introduce me to some of these girls. Some of the models knew him well and were there before. It was a fun assignment.



Harvest House Ministries

In 1984 our church decided to buy a large old house. They got a good deal on it. The house was around the turn of the twentieth century or older. It had a former coal bin in the basement and gas pipes were in every room; these pipes were all capped, so they no longer worked. There was a separate staircase for the help. The house had three floors. It was said that a wealthy family was the original owner of the property. The house had many bedrooms. There was a large dining room and a large living room. It also had a good-sized kitchen which had a back staircase for the help. The location of this house was 3420 Portland Avenue in Minneapolis. In 1984 this location was not the best in south Minneapolis. High crime existed in this area.

The senior pastor visited me and Mike Bee at our 2400 Harriet apartment. He told us they were going to start a new ministry and





they were going to use the house they bought for a discipleship ministry. He was looking for singles who were dedicated to the study of the Bible. These people who would be accepted in this ministry would have an active ministry to others and the study of the Bible. He asked us if we would be interested. We both agreed. Everyone would pay rent, but only for the cost of living in a room. We would have full access to the living areas and the kitchen. The senior pastor's son came up with a name for the ministry. It was to be called *Harvest House Ministries*. The name of the ministry was taken from the Bible in Luke 10:2. *"Then He said to them, 'The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest'"* NKJV. The senior pastor appointed his assistant pastor Lew Howard, as director for Harvest House Ministries. A bank account was opened

for the ministry and 501C tax status was filed. Stationery and business cards were printed, and the ministry was established. Several singles moved in to start something new. I was also a photographer for Harvest House and our church which was called New Creation Bible Church.

Nude Photography

I was debating whether to put this in here. I thought it would be a good idea to present the Bible's view on nudity. While living at Harvest House a lady I knew from our church who was an artist came to me and asked me if I had any nude photos. She knew that at one time I did nude photography. I showed her some small 8x8" prints that I had dry mounted on 12x12" black mounting board. She said she wanted to practice drawing the human form. I still had nude photography in my files. I should have probably discarded those photos when I became a Christian.

The Bible mentions not to be involved with sexual immorality. The purpose for any photograph is to display the image so many people can see it. Nude photography is practiced for the same reason. Displaying the nude human form for others to admire can cause sins of lust which can be manufactured in the mind of the viewer. Look how large the pornography industry is. Not all nude photography is erotic. The nudes that my friend requested were nude figure studies which show a nude figure as an object not as a person. Figure studies are usually photographed in high contrast lighting with no fill light causing deep black shadows, like "Film Noir." With this type of lighting, it is easy to hide what you do not want to show. In erotic photography the lighting is usually soft so you can see the person with very little shadow. Also, in erotic photography the main point is to show as much detail as possible. Even if the photograph does not have an erotic allure, the mind of the viewer can conjure up erotic fantasies of the image. Let me close this paragraph with what Jesus said in His sermon on the mount. *"But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart"* (Matthew 5:28 NKJV).

My senior pastor stopped over to visit this lady and her husband. He saw these nude photographs laying out on her drawing table. He asked her where she got those photos. She told him from

Lonnie. He said, “You mean, our Lonnie?” The pastor came over to visit me at Harvest House and told the other pastor who was the director of Harvest House Ministries about why he was there. They talked to me about destroying any nude photos I had. There was a part of me that wanted to hang on to these photos. It cost me quite a bit of money to photograph and process these photographs. I had a 16x20” print case that housed some 16x20” nude prints that I printed personally and mounted which I had a lab apply a special pro-textured lacquer spray which gave it an antique look. This special lacquer spray was not cheap. Through the years I spent money on modeling fees, film, chemicals, and paper. All that went through my mind, plus this was something I created.

I had a decision to make. As a Christian if I decided to keep these nude photos, I would be sinning. I wanted to agree with what the Bible said about sin. I believe I held on to these photos too long. The erotic photos should have gone in the trash the day after I became a Christian. If I decided to keep the photos I would be under church discipline. I would have to leave Harvest House and the church.

The next day I destroyed all my prints, negatives, and 35mm slides of all my nudes. I had one photo I kept a 16x20” print I made in my own darkroom and mounted of an image of a leg. It was only a photo of a leg, but with the high contrast lighting. That same image I had a lab make 35mm slide dupes for my portfolio. I later scanned that slide, and it is now on my screen saver. The image is this high contrast lighting like “film noir.” In Photoshop I made other copies of this image and added more contrast to make the image completely black and white, with no grays. Then I inverted the image, so the highlight area is black, and the shadow and background are white. These images are on sale at Fine Art America. I no longer do nude and erotic photography.

Portrait & Wedding Photography

During 1985 Pastor Lew Howard who was director at Harvest House Ministries asked to talk to me. He told me that I should think seriously of getting back into photography professionally. I could do it part time. He said that I could start shooting weddings and portraits. I knew I wanted



to get back into doing commercial photography, but he said that this would start me into doing something right away and getting paid for it. He said that the people at church could be my first customers. To start a commercial photography business which I would prefer, I would have to be available during regular business hours. So, if I was going to do commercial work, I would need to have a full-time job during the second shift. I was already working a day job. I thought it over, and I told him I would start to prepare for a wedding and portrait photography business. I would practice this type of photography for the next four years.

I started to buy photography equipment for portrait and wedding photography. I decided I could use my Yashica Matt as a backup camera. I would use the Yashica in most of my photography where I needed a normal focal length lens. I bought a used

Mamiya C220 TLR with a Mamiya/Sekor 180mm f/4.5 lens. The unique thing about the Mamiya TLR cameras was that they were the only TLRs available at that time with interchangeable lenses.



The TLR or Twin Lens Reflex was a camera design that had a top lens for viewing the subject. The light would enter this top lens and would reflect off a mirror positioned 45° that would bounce the light on top of the camera hitting its ground glass viewfinder. The viewing lens was of the same focal length as the bottom taking lens. With the bottom lens the light went directly to the film plane. Like many medium format film cameras at that time each lens had its own leaf



type shutter which would synch with electronic flash at all speeds. I bought a Luna Pro flash meter, some more umbrellas, light stands, and I bought three Vivitar 283 speedlights which would be slaved optically. I started to put together a portfolio of people that I knew from my church. I photographed some weddings of the people at my church. I started to read books on portrait and wedding photography.

I started to assist a wedding photographer in Minneapolis to see how he did it. Every Saturday I would go out with him to learn how to photograph weddings. His camera was a Hasselblad and he used multiple backs. He also used a 200-watt second Norman flash. He had a unique way to pose large groups of people at weddings. I remember to this day two pieces of information he gave me. He told me, “Do not shoot weddings with a 35mm camera. Your customer uses a 35mm camera. You use a medium format camera.” A medium format camera gives you a larger negative which was easier to retouch, and the larger negative would give you better quality prints than a 35mm negative. A smaller negative like 35mm would show film grain when enlarged. With a medium format negative you would have to enlarge the print considerably before you noticed grain. Medium format cameras give you higher quality than 35mm. That is why medium format cameras cost a lot more than a 35mm camera. Many customers would want a sizable print on their wall. If you used a 35mm camera with puny negatives the print would not look as good.

Another thing he told me. “Expose color negatives one stop over, you will get a better and richer negative.” When he said that I remembered years ago when I did a food shot, which I did on the 4x5” format. I sent the film into a professional lab to process and contact print. When I got the negatives back, I picked out the negative that was correctly exposed; I had another negative that was a stop overexposed and another that was a stop underexposed. I sent the correctly exposed negative to the lab for a 16x20” print. The lab phoned me back, they must have remembered the job. They told me that I had a better negative for printing. I told them it was overexposed, but they said they could make a better print from that



negative because it was much richer. I guess scientifically it has to do with how light affects the shoulder or highlight part of the color negative. This will not work on color transparency film or black-and-white film or digital, only with color negatives.

To help me find more wedding contacts I contacted The Photographer's Guild in St Paul. They would send out freelance photographers to shoot weddings. I showed them my portfolio. They told me that I could photograph weddings for them, I just needed an 80mm lens for my Mamiya C220. They didn't like my Yashica Matt. They claimed for heavy use it does not stand up. But they liked my Mamiya C220. So, I was saving up for another lens. Around this time my car was giving me problems. I found out that I would need to re-build the engine. I needed about \$100 for the used 80mm f/2.8 Mamiya/Sekor lens. I found out I needed about \$1000 to rebuild my car engine. The service station said I could drive it, but not too far, it would not be reliable. The years of the 1980s were ending and 1990 was coming up. I decided to end my part time photography business since I did not have a reliable car or could not afford to replace it.



Moving Out of Harvest House

When Pastor Lew Howard was director of Harvest House Ministries everything seemed to run smooth. Everyone was involved in some type of ministry, and we also reached out to the church. Pastor Lew also did some preaching at the church. In the late 1980s he decided he wanted to leave the ministry and go back into the business world. He tried real estate for a while at the same time he was still director for Harvest House. He then decided he wanted to move back to Michigan where he used to live. He wanted to open a pizza business. So, Pastor Lew moved his family back to Michigan.

The new director for Harvest House was the senior pastor. He wanted to make a major change in the ministry. He was going to operate a halfway house. He kept the name of the organization the same. He said that those who are here could stay if they wanted. I decided to leave. I talked to a former tenant of Harvest House. He told me he was living in a room in a house in south Minneapolis and he would ask the landlord if I could get in. The landlord did have a room for rent. I would have full access to the house and my private room, and the rent was cheap, so I decided to move there. I moved in with my car that was bellowing black smoke. I decided that when I moved to the new place, I would sell the car or chunk it. My new address would be 4427 Wentworth Avenue S.

The End of Part 5 — A New Life